



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 2ND JUNE 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David - Chair
Councillor S. Morgan - Vice Chair

Councillors:

L. Binding, Mrs P. Cook, C.J. Cuss, C.J. Gordon, C. Hawker, Ms J.G. Jones, G. Kirby,
A. Lewis, C.P. Mann, D. Rees, R. Saralis, J. Taylor

Cabinet Members:

Mrs C. Forehead (HR and Governance/Business Manager), D.V. Poole (Housing)

Together with:

N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection), A. Main (Acting Benefits Manager), D.A. Thomas (Senior Policy Officer – Equalities and Welsh Language), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT – MEMBERSHIP CHANGE

The Chair referred to the recent retirement of Councillor Michael Gray and paid tribute to his years of service as a Member of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The Chair also announced that Councillor Mrs Jean Summers had decided to step down from the Scrutiny Committee and Members noted the support she had given the Chair during her tenure as a former Vice Chair of the Committee. It was requested that the Committee's appreciation of both Members for their valued contribution to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be placed on record.

New Scrutiny Committee Members Mrs P. Cook and C.J. Gordon were welcomed to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Miss E. Forehead, together with Cabinet Members D.T. Hardacre (Performance and Asset Management) and Mrs B. Jones (Corporate Services).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

4. MINUTES – 14TH APRIL 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14th April 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 15) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

6. REPORTS OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

There were no reports presented at the meeting.

Councillor Mrs C. Forehead, Cabinet Member for HR and Governance/Business Manager, advised the Committee that Gareth Hardacre, Head of Workforce and Organisation Development, had accepted a position with Cwm Taf Health Board and would therefore be leaving the Authority shortly. Members wished Mr Hardacre well for the future and asked that their appreciation for his contribution towards the management of the Caerphilly County Borough Council workforce be placed on record.

7. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY

Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, presented the report, which outlined the proposed Caerphilly County Borough Council Anti Poverty Strategy. The report sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee prior to its presentation to Cabinet and Council.

Members were informed that the Council delivers a significant programme of work that contributes to tackling poverty, such as Welsh Government-funded programmes (Communities First, Families First, Flying Start and Supporting People) as well as the Welsh Housing Quality Standard investment and a range of other services and activities. Caerphilly Council has a significant track record in regeneration and was the first in Wales to become a Living Wage employer. However, there are still individuals and households within the county borough living in poverty and an Anti Poverty Strategy has therefore been developed to set out the Council's position and bring together that activity at a high level.

The draft Strategy has been the subject of consultation, and a final draft version, together with consultation comments, was appended to the report for views and approval. The draft Anti Poverty Strategy sets out the Council's position and aims, actions and measures in relation to tackling poverty. It is intended that the Strategy will be reviewed annually and progress reported. It is also proposed that an Anti Poverty Board be established to provide oversight of the Strategy, which would include the new Member Anti Poverty Champion, Councillor Elaine Forehead.

Detailed discussion of the report ensued and Members raised a number of queries and concerns in relation to the proposed Strategy. A Member queried implementation and running costs associated with the Strategy and suggested that the inclusion of additional information detailing budget areas and funding streams for each of the Strategy proposals would be useful. Concerns were raised as to the impact and pressures that welfare cuts, together with Council budget cuts, could place on the Strategy. Officers explained that the Strategy would be regularly reviewed and that the programme of work would be subject to revisions in line with available budgets and funding sources. Officers suggested that an additional column could be incorporated into the Strategy setting out the associated budget for each area.

A Member highlighted the link between health and wellbeing and poverty and explained that they felt this was not sufficiently incorporated within the Strategy. Officers clarified that as the Anti Poverty Strategy was a Council Strategy and not a partnership document, it would not necessarily reflect the work of Local Health Boards or other associated agencies in regards to Health and Wellbeing activities.

A query was raised regarding the promotion of free school meals take-up and the relevance of its inclusion within the Anti Poverty Strategy. Officers explained that the Strategy promotes the benefits of free school meals take-up, including pupil access to healthy meals which are Welsh Government Appetite for Life-compliant, and allowing eligible schools to claim Pupil Deprivation Grants.

Reference was made to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) and the identification of two localities within the county borough as amongst the most deprived in Wales. The strategy to target these areas was outlined and discussion took place regarding the multi-agency groups working in these areas, together with the need for community engagement and involvement. There was discussion as to how the Strategy would complement the Single Integrated Plan and Officers also responded to queries regarding the involvement of the proposed Anti Poverty Board in overseeing the various agencies that contribute to the tackling of poverty.

Members queried how the success of the Strategy would be measured and suggested a need for improvement targets and performance indicators to be included within the plans. Officers explained that the Strategy would utilise existing departmental indicators wherever possible (such as those in use by Flying Start) to maximise the potential of available resources. Discussion and concerns also arose with regards to the minimum wage and the Living Wage and how these impact on poverty levels within the county borough. Officers clarified the current processes and pending actions being undertaken by the Authority in respect of this matter.

Having given due regard to the queries raised and the comments received from Members, the Chair summarised the four main points and comments arising from the discussion and expressed the need for these to be reported to Cabinet and Council:-

1. The Anti Poverty Strategy must operate within current austerity measures and therefore there is a need to be aware of the consequence of further cuts which may undermine the Strategy;

2. The Anti Poverty Strategy should incorporate a more specific focus on the link between health and wellbeing and poverty, and further consideration should be given to existing activities which contribute to this agenda;
3. There is a need to target those directly affected with a view to influencing the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and a need to be confident that areas can show improvement;
4. There is a need for greater clarity in relation to how successful implementation of the Strategy will be demonstrated.

The Head of Public Protection was thanked for his report and his detailed responses to Members' queries.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that subject to the inclusion of the additional information requested by Members, the following recommendation be referred to Cabinet for consideration (and thereafter Council for approval). By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that subject to the inclusion of the additional information requested by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, the Caerphilly County Borough Council Anti Poverty Strategy be endorsed.

9. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

Nicole Scammell, Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer, together with Amanda Main, Acting Benefits Manager, presented the report, which sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on a new Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

Members were informed that Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are additional short-term payments made towards rent. They are only paid to customers already receiving Housing Benefit who need more help with their housing costs over and above their benefit award. Officers explained that to help Local Authorities mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform, funding for DHPs has increased in recent years. However, it is important that the limited funding available is targeted at those most in need. With this in mind, the Discretionary Housing Payments has been drafted and was attached to the report as Appendix 1. The Policy complies with the Department for Work and Pensions Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual (April 2014) and the Pan-Wales Discretionary Housing Payment Policy Framework.

Officers reiterated that DHPs are principally short-term financial support towards long-term sustainable solutions and payments cannot be made indefinitely, and for this reason it should not be viewed as an additional welfare benefit.

Discussion of the proposed Discretionary Housing Payments Policy ensued and reference was made to the DWP funding considerations detailed within the report. Officers explained that the intention was to review the Policy every two years. However, in that the current welfare reform transition period is coming to an ending and that there is a probability of further changes to welfare legislation in the future, it is anticipated that the Policy will eventually be reviewed on an annual basis.

Discussion took place regarding the work being carried out by the Authority to assist in reducing the number of DHP applicants. Officers also responded to general queries on the contents of the Policy, including details of the decision process and guidance afforded to applicants.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy be endorsed.

10. EQUALITIES AND WELSH LANGUAGE ANNUAL REPORTS

David A. Thomas, Senior Policy Officer - Equalities and Welsh Language, presented the report, which informed Members of the progress made during the financial year 2014/2015 against targets in the Council's current Strategic Equality Plan and Welsh Language Scheme. Arising from its presentation at the Scrutiny Committee meeting, it was then due to be presented to Cabinet, where approval would be sought for the submission of the annual monitoring and improvement reports (attached to the Scrutiny Committee report as appendices) to the relevant Commissions (together with publication online) before the deadline date of 30th June 2015.

Members were informed that the Council has a statutory duty to produce annual monitoring reports on Equalities and Welsh Language issues under current legislation. These reports are very detailed in order to ensure that the regulatory bodies involved are provided with full evidence of the Council's compliance and commitment to these statutory duties.

Officers outlined the progress made during 2014/2015 against the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and Welsh Language Scheme. Members were asked to note achievements in respect of the number of impact assessments and consultation comments provided within Officer reports, together with details of disability audits undertaken across the Authority. Progress was also outlined in respect of Equalities and Welsh Language training courses, the treatment of Equalities complaints, the addition of Equalities data to staff payroll data, and translation requests dealt with by the Welsh Language Team. Detailed information in respect of these areas were included within the annual monitoring and improvement reports appended to the report.

Detailed discussion of the report ensued and a number of queries were raised in respect of the budget allocation and funding resources detailed within the annual monitoring and improvement reports. Officers outlined details of the core budget within the Equalities and Welsh Language Team, together with additional funding resources, and agreed that they would circulate a breakdown of the Equalities and Welsh Language department budget to Members following the meeting. Officers also explained that it was difficult to specify the costs in respect of statutory duties fulfilled on behalf of other departments (in that they have their own separate budget allocations).

Members raised concerns in regards to the monitoring and reporting of discriminatory bullying in schools. Officers explained that this information was regularly reported to the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee and that the number of reporting instances had increased, which indicated the effectiveness of training sessions relating to this matter. Officers agreed to circulate this information to Members following the meeting. Clarification was also provided in regards to the job titles of a number of consultees included in the Scrutiny Committee report.

Members referred to performance monitoring and commented on a need to include targets and expected outcomes against the list of achievements included in the report. Officers explained that a lack of benchmarking factors made it difficult to effectively measure progress in certain areas (such as the addressing of discrimination). A Member suggested that progress could be monitored against the number of expected attendees at training sessions and Officers confirmed that a training analysis and needs review would be taking place throughout Summer 2015. A query was received regarding the percentage of social and private landlords who had received training from the Equalities and Welsh Language Team

(arising from funding provided by the Tenancy Dispute Service). Officers agreed to circulate this information to Members following the meeting.

Discussion took place regarding the CCBC Payroll Data Summary listed within the Strategic Equality Plan, which included data relating to staff ethnicity, religion, and language ability. A Member suggested that it could be useful for increases against language ability to be reported on a year-by-year basis. A query was raised in respect of the low reporting of staff disabilities and Officers explained that as this data was self-reported, some relevant respondents did not feel a need to declare themselves as disabled or consider themselves as having a disability.

Following discussion of the report, the Equalities and Welsh Language Annual Reports were noted, and it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED that Cabinet approve the submission of the annual monitoring and improvements reports to the relevant Commissions and publication online before 30th June 2015.

11. REQUESTS FOR REPORTS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

The following requests for reports were received:-

1. Councillor C.P. Mann requested a report in relation to the occupation of industrial units in the county borough. He was asked to liaise with the Scrutiny Research Officer on the specifics of the request and advised that it could possibly cross over into the remit of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee.
2. Councillor L. Binding requested a report in respect of fibre-optic broadband availability within the county borough.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. There were no items brought forward for review.

- (1) Consultancy Costs;
- (2) Write-Off of Debts 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015;
- (3) Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Grants 2015-16;
- (4) Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Budgets 2015-16;
- (5) Caerphilly Homes Task Group Minutes - 2nd April 2015;
- (6) Pensions/Compensation Committee Minutes - 13th April 2015;
- (7) Summary of Members' Attendance – Quarter 4 – 1st January 2015 to 14th May 2015;
- (8) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 7.26 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2015, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR