



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 21ST APRIL 2009 AT 5:15 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chairman
Councillor M.E. Sargent - Vice Chairman

Councillors

H.A. Andrews, L. Binding, A. Blackman, D.G. Carter, D.T. Davies, J E. Fussell, L. Hughes,
S. Jenkins, G. Jones, K. Lloyd, D.V. Poole, A.S. Williams, J.M. Wilson.

Also present:

Cabinet Members: Councillors C.P. Mann and A.J. Pritchard.

Councillor H.W. David in respect of agenda item 6(1), Grants Allocation 2009/10.

Together with:

N. Barnett (Director of Corporate Services), R. Betty (Contact Centre Project Manager),
P.G. Davy (Head of Economic Development and Tourism), P. Evans (Head of Information,
Communications, Technology and Property Services), C. Jones (Head of Performance and
Policy), H. Jones (IT Business Manager), S. Jones (Category Manager, Procurement
Services), L. Lucas (Head of Procurement), D. Perkins (Head of Legal Services), S. Rees
(Principal Procurement Officer), N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance), J. Jones (Scrutiny
Co-ordinator) and R. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Bolter, J.B. Criddle, K. Etheridge,
V. Jenkins, K.V. Reynolds.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received at the start and during the course of the meeting as follows – Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in agenda item 7(4) and Councillor D.V. Poole declared an interest in agenda item 6(2). Details are minuted with the respective item.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 3rd March 2009 (minute nos. 1 – 14, on page nos. 1 – 4) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

4. REPORT BY CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee received verbal reports from Councillor A.J. Pritchard, (Cabinet Member for Human Resources and Constitutional Affairs) and Councillor C.P. Mann, (Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Sustainability) on the following issues:

- **Job Evaluation** The outcome of the ballots were now widely known and the first run of the payroll had proceeded without incident. The process was now at the implementation stage and in the next 6-8 weeks, staff would receive a letter detailing their particulars. Any compensation payments would be made as soon as possible.
- **Pay Offer** of 0.5% had been sent to Unions. If this was not accepted by 29th June, the offer would be withdrawn and replaced with a nil award. The Union's initial response indicated the offer was derisory.
- **Teachers pay request** Teaching Unions have requested an increase in pay of 10% and an extra day for teacher training. This was seen as unrealistic in the current economic climate.
- **Excellence Wales** gave CCBC an award for its organisational development, developing people and financial management. This was in relation to the focus on procurement as a core activity for improving service delivery. A copy of Excellence Wales (March 2009) was circulated at the meeting, enclosing an article on the authority.
- **Xchangewales programme** - During March the authority went live with the next step in electronic procurement. The Xchangewales "hub" is a supplier portal for electronic trading that will help in the reduction of process and process costs. CCBC was the first local authority in Wales to implement this and is being seen as one of the most ready and advanced public sector organisations.
- **Budget Advisory Group** is to be set up, consisting of around 10 members from all parties. Party leaders had been asked for volunteers from their groups;
- **WAG funding** there is a possible reduction of funding from 2.8% (predicted) to 0% in the next few years;
- **Heritable Bank** (a British division of Landsbanki) announced local authorities could see the return of around 70-80% of their investments, following Icelandic banks being placed into receivership.

Members thanked the Cabinet Members for their reports and a brief discussion followed on the potential recoup of investments from Icelandic banks and the support mechanisms that were in place.

5. CABINET REPORTS

The Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had not been requested to be brought forward for review at the meeting.

SCRUTINY REPORTS

Consideration was given to the following Scrutiny reports:-

6. GRANTS ALLOCATION 2009/10

Members considered the report on grant-funded schemes detailed in the Local Government Settlement 2009/10, and noted those where there was an expectation that grant funding available in 2008/09 will continue for 2009/10.

The report covered grant funding notified to the Authority in the Settlement for 2009/10, along with grant funding relating to capital schemes and revenue related spend where the funding was available from other funding bodies, estimates had been made where appropriate. The report detailed the auditing arrangements of the grants and Officers highlighted the possible clawback of funds, should monies be used in contradiction to the grants' stipulations.

A Member questioned the recent use of Autistic Spectrum funding, and commented that the transfer took place without challenge. Members sought clarification as to their role in the auditing process and of the need for greater involvement. It was agreed that a report summarising the grants would be made available to the appropriate scrutiny committee and Members would have an opportunity to request greater detail(s) at that time. Members noted however that whilst grants could be scrutinised, due to the involvement of other organisations, not all the committees' recommendations could be taken forward. Members were reminded of the use of external auditors and the audit committee.

A Member requested a report on the Communities First and Cymorth schemes be brought before the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee. This was agreed.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the grant administration arrangements and thanked Councillor H.W. David for bringing the matter to their attention.

7. SCHOOL BUS CONTRACTS – PRESENTATION

Councillor D.V. Poole declared an interest (as a Director of Islwyn Borough Transport). Following Officer's advice Councillor D.V. Poole remained in the meeting.

The presentation advised the Scrutiny Committee of the action taken by the procurement team to review, analysis and amend the council's school bus contracts. Officers highlighted the environmental, financial, sustainable and safety shortcomings of the previous contracts and illustrated the revised specification, with transitional period, as agreed with service providers. Members noted that they would see younger, cleaner, safer, single-decker buses serving schools at a reduced price.

Members were advised that in addition to the changes to the vehicles, procurement services had also introduced an electronic trading and invoicing system to enhance the payment processes. A full review of SEN transport was now planned.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked Officers for their informative presentation and the hard work carried out to improve the service.

In closing Members raised the concern that a number of service providers used the council's lay-bys to park during the school day. Officers confirmed they would discuss this with providers at the earliest convenience.

8. DIRECTORATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT PROCUREMENT – UPDATE & FORWARD PLAN

This report is the fourth of four initial reports to be submitted from procurement on the forward work plan of the four Directorates. Reports have already been submitted for Social Services, Corporate Services and Education and Leisure.

A team of five procurement professionals have been employed working with the Directorate of the Environment to integrate procurement expertise and support into purchasing across each of the five service areas managed by that Directorate.

Although many of the contracts have been subject to competition, historically, within some service areas, there has been little consultation with the procurement team. The focus will therefore be to establish strong working relationships with key officers within the directorate to ensure that the best possible procurement options were considered and that the authority maximized use of collaboration and development of the supply chain.

The team will, where possible, evaluate options for collaborating with other contracting bodies such as the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), Value Wales Procurement and the Welsh Purchasing Consortium (WPC) with a view to achieving efficiency savings, both cash releasing and process improvement.

Members supported the work undertaken by officers and the improved results, but noted there were still areas of non-compliance within the directorate. Officers confirmed they were working hard to disseminate the procurement process to all employees and of the need to modernise current practices. In addition, performance management was to work closely with procurement services to discuss non-compliance concerns with the environment directorate.

In closing Members questioned the internal provision and sought assurances that in-house services were given every opportunity to bid for core business. Officers gave assurances that internal tenders were treated the same as external ones.

Members noted the current situation regarding contract arrangements within the Directorate of the Environment and progress to date and the financial implications associated with current committed contracts.

9. CUSTOMER SERVICES PEER REVIEW

During November 2008, a peer review was undertaken to review how this Council delivered customer services. The review was undertaken by the Improvement and Development Agency as one of a series of Customer Service Peer Reviews in South East Wales.

The peer review's aim was to assess how well the council met the needs of its customers, as well as the processes and procedures implemented to ensure consistent standards of customer service across the authority. The review looked at how the council delivered customer service across the authority, not just the Customer First service, and looked at all access channels. The Review team made their evaluation by using a standard framework that has been used across the UK.

The Peer Review report was generally positive. The Review Team reported there were no significant problems in which the authority was developing customer services but they made a number of recommendations that the authority may wish to consider.

A draft action plan had been developed to take forward the recommendations of the Peer Review. The Customer First Strategy Group had considered and accepted the work plan and asked for it to be considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. If approved, the committee would receive regular updates.

Members supported the action plan but questioned the absence of some remedial dates and raised concerns regarding the branding of the council. Officers confirmed at the time of printing the action plan, some dates were unavailable. An up-to-date list would be circulated to members outside the meeting. All were in agreement the name of the council should be prominent on any branding and easily recognisable, whilst still aligning with Customer First, NCC etc.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the outcome of the Service Peer Review workplan and approved the draft action plan proposals.

10. CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD FOR CORRESPONDENCE

As part of the Customer First Strategy, there was a commitment to produce corporate Customer Service Standards to support the improvement of the council's "Customer Focus". An overarching Customer Charter and standards for "Managing telephone calls to and from customers" and "Customers visiting council premises" have already been agreed. This will be the third Customer Service Standard and incorporated both the "correspondence" and "electronic correspondence" standards in the previously agreed list of standards. Two further standards will be developed in 2009 relating to "visiting customers at home" and "emergency and out-of-hours services".

Once this standard had been agreed, work will commence to raise awareness of the standard, as well as the two existing standards and Customer Charter. The charter and three standards will be supported by issuing guidance to officers, monitoring of customer services standards and the provision of customer service training and advice.

The committee supported the adoption of these standards.

11. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REGULATION REQUESTS

At its meeting on 13th February 2007 the committee requested regular updates on the Council's handling of requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI). The Authority continued to experience a significant increase in requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Impact Regulations Act 2004. Despite this increase in workload the Authority continued to maintain a similar level of compliance in dealing with the requests when compared to previous years.

A brief discussion ensued, following which the Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

12. HOME OFFICE AND PASSPORT SERVICE - FRONT OFFICE

As part of the implementation of the National Identity Scheme, the Home Office Identity and Passport Service (IPS) sought partners for the delivery of front office services and had issued a prospectus to determine the level of interest across all sectors. The IPS was specifically interested in delivering all or some of these services through existing or planned local government front offices or Registration service establishments. Any participation in the IPS scheme should be a matter for each local authority to determine their potential participation.

Members raised concerns that the authority's involvement in the scheme could potentially divert income revenues away from other local businesses.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee could not therefore support participation in the delivery of these services.

13. SELF-ASSESSMENT (C-DRIVER)

In October 2008 at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee's risk workshop. The following risk was considered,

"Monitoring the effectiveness of service self-assessment under the new flexible approach is a lot more difficult, but we need to look at new ways to make it happen. Service self assessment is not as robust as it should be".

From discussion of this risk, Members requested a report on the weakness of the self-assessment process. This confirmed the level of activity had reduced over the past five years and of the need for another model to engage with staff. The Corporate Management Team considered a report with alternatives on 2nd April 2009, however the need for self-assessment, in whatever format, was recognised.

Members noted that the whole principle of service self assessment will be re-evaluated by the PMU and, in particular, a focus of that re-evaluation will be whether or not it added value and a further report will be provided to this committee on the outcome.

14. INFORMATION ITEMS

Members received and noted the following information items:

- (1) Local Service Board - Minutes of meeting held on 24th March 2009;
- (2) Corporate Health and Safety - Minutes of meeting held on 11th February 2009;
- (3) Pensions /Compensations Committee meeting held on 30th March 2009;
- (4) Statistical Profile of the work of Caerphilly County Borough Citizens Advice Bureau; Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest (as a member of the CAB's Management Committee);
- (5) Quarterly Summary of Members Attendance Levels;
- (6) Customer First Strategy Update Report.

15. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

- 1) Jonathan Jones advised the committee's forward work programme had been updated and would shortly be distributed to Members. This was also to be placed on future agendas of the committee to enable discussion;
- 2) Councillor D.G. Carter requested a report on the definition of front line staff and the level of protection their jobs received;
- 3) Councillor D.T. Davies requested an annual report on the Job Evaluation Scheme (JES) and the employees who had suffered a financial detriment as a result of the scheme. Officers advised, in addition to the report requested, a full report on the JES would go to Council on 16th June 2009.

16. EXEMPT MATTERS

Members considered the public interest test certificate from the Proper Officer and concluded that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and it was:-

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

17. PENALLTA HOUSE

The report addressed a Member's request to provide an update in respect of defects previously reported to the Corporate Office Accommodation Committee relating to the Formpave car parks, and the foul and surface water drainage systems at Penallta House.

The Committee for the reasons contained in the Officer's report noted the action being taken by Officers to resolve defects.

The meeting closed at 7:20 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2009, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN