



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY, 29TH OCTOBER 2009 AT 5.00 PM**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chairman

Councillors

H.A. Andrews, Mrs. A. Blackman, D. Bolter, J.B. Criddle, D.T. Davies, J.E. Fussell, Ms. L. Hughes, S. Jenkins, Mrs. V. Jenkins, G. Jones, D.V. Poole, K.V. Reynolds, A.S. Williams, J.M. Wilson

Also present:

Cabinet Members Councillors C. Hobbs and C.P. Mann

Together with:

C. Jones (Head of Performance and Policy), P. Evans (Head of Information, Communications, Technology and Property Services), L. Lucas (Head of Procurement), D. Perkins (Head of Legal Services), N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance), J. Jones (Scrutiny and Members Services Manager), R. Roberts (Performance Manager), J. Pearce (Performance Management Officer), L. Rogers (Organisational Development Manager), H. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Binding, K. Etheridge, K. Lloyd, Mrs. M.E. Sargent and T.J. Williams

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. PERFORMANCE REPORTS FOR CORPORATE SERVICES, POLICY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the directorates performance using the Performance Information Measurement System (PIMS). Mr. C. Jones reported that the Council has a duty to improve its services as part of the statutory requirements of the Wales Programme for Improvement 2006. The performance information contained in the report,

represents a fair cross-section (balanced view) of business and service activities for each of the services reported on, using both locally created performance indicators and indicators as prescribed in the National Performance Indicator Guidance for Wales for 2008/09.

Performance information has been reported from the service 'scorecards' as of the 30th September 2009. Members noted that the report is detailed in two parts, namely, a performance summary and a performance table outlining how services have performed against targets and previous years performance where known. Where performance indicators in scorecards are national measures, there are comparisons published every year against the other 21 Local Authorities and this is known as the 'All Wales Average'. They are included where available.

The reporting set comprises of a report for Corporate Services (Procurement, Human Resources, Corporate Finance, ICT and Property, Legal Services and Performance Management Unit) and for Policy and Democratic Services (Performance Management Unit, Scrutiny and Member Services, Committee Services and Registrars). The relevant manager/updater update the scorecards on a regular basis. Indicators have been selected in consultation with Heads of Services and the Performance Management Unit.

Prior to considering each of the service areas in detail reference was made to the reporting of sickness absence figures and the data contained within the report. Members noted that the % sickness absence for Corporate Services stood at 5.23% at the end of the first quarter (higher than last year's annual performance of 4.52% and also above the target of 4%) and for Policy and Democratic Services at 0.47% at the end of the first quarter and queried the actions being taken to address these levels. Each Manager detailed the reasons for their sickness absence figures and the action being taken to reduce them.

It was noted that a report proposing revisions to the managing sickness absence procedure is under consultation with the recognised trade unions and equalities groups. The new procedure is very different from the procedure currently in place and the revision has taken into account recent changes in legislation, operational practices and the need to manage both short term and long-term sickness absence in a more robust way.

It was accepted that one of the most crucial issues in introducing the procedure would be the requirement that a consistent approach is adopted and noted that the revised procedure has been simplified in comparison to the procedure currently in place and training and notes of guidance for Officers will be provided. The regular monitoring and review of the long term and short term absences will continue to be a core responsibility with Managers to reduce absence levels in their service areas.

In noting that each service has its own tracking system, new trigger points (which will be reviewed on an annual basis) relating to the number of spells or a set number of days within a prescribed period or particular patterns of absence have been introduced, which, subject to a future software update next year, may be tracked through the Trent system.

Reference as also made to the recording of sickness absence figures and it was felt that it was unrepresentative of specific sections who only have a few members of staff and presented misleading information for the areas it portrays. As such it was requested that for ease of reference and to ensure there is sufficient information to analyse the details of the data, in future reports should also detail the number of staff employed within the specific service area. It was also requested that detail of short term and long terms sickness be recorded.

Consideration was then given to the specific service areas. In each case the relevant Manager outlined their scorecard, detailed what is being done well, what needs to be improved and responded to questions raised by Members on the performance data recorded.

Procurement - it was noted that at a Welsh Assembly Government conference held in Swansea the county borough had been held as an exemplar for both its E Procurement and the SME initiative. The Head of Procurement gave details of the initiatives, particularly in respect of local suppliers. She reported on what is being done well (savings on procurement spend, increase in the number of local suppliers invited to tender for contracts, award of those contracts) and what needs to be improved to meet the requirement of change products/specifications as a result of environmental alternatives being made available.

Specific reference was made to invitations to tender and details of the criteria, process and protocol followed within the Wales Purchasing Consortium area, through European directives and via the DSO's was explained.

Human Resources and Organisational Development - the Organisational Development Manager detailed what is being done well (number of employees aged over 50, number of employees with a disability, % of women currently in a leadership, no HSE Enforcement Notices in the 2nd quarter) and what needs to be improved (sickness/absence, increase of number of employees from minority groups and reduction in the number of major injury accidents).

A query was raised in relation to the sickness absence figures and as to whether school based staff figures are included. This would be clarified to Members as would a query raised in relation to the employment of disabled people and as to whether the statutory target of 3% as outlined in the report is correct. Reference was also made to the data shown on the women in leadership posts and it was requested that when next produced it differentiate between schools and non-school staff.

Corporate Finance - the Head of Corporate Finance detailed what is being done well (undisputed invoices paid, Statement of Accounts presented) and what needs to be improved (sickness/absence figures, time taken to process change events and new claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefits). With regards to the latter details of the DWP process was explained and it was noted that claims are increasing due to changes in legislation

ICT and Property - the Head of Information, Communications, Technology and Property Services detailed what is being done well (media appearances, Right to Buy valuations, IT availability, IT Customer Support, reduction in abandonment rate, response time in Call Centres and Customer First Centres) and what needs to be improved (sickness absence, value of design jobs, responses to Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection Act/Subject Access Requests).

Specific reference was made to the Call Centre and it was noted that the average speed of answer is now 23 seconds, the Team responded to 91.11% of calls within the agreed timescale. It was explained that with the introduction of the new recycling/refuse collection arrangements the Call Centre had experienced a high level of calls and that this would be reflected in the next set data which is made available.

An example was then given whereby a Member who had used the general switchboard was transferred to the Call Centre and kept on hold for a period of time before being transferred to the Officer he had requested. It was suggested that a manual directory be made available to Members in order that they can contact the Officer directly rather than having to go through this process or whether a dedicated line for Members could be established. This would be considered to determine if it would be feasible.

It was confirmed that whilst it was possible to detail calls received and responses given within a timescale it was not possible to measure the quality of the response and as to whether the caller has received the information they actually required. It was explained however that calls are recorded and the tapes can be reviewed and used as part of the training programme.

Legal Services - the Head of Legal Services detailed what is being done well (sickness absence, fee income from local land charges) and what needs to be improved (file audits, completion of land charges searches within eight days).

It was explained that the audit of files requiring corrective action is a new indicator for 2009/10 and that whilst performance in the first quarter rose to 82%, this is still below the target of 95%. This is being addressed. With regards to local land charges searches, it was noted that the section had been downsized and an increase in the number of searches received has made it difficult to comply with the previously agreed timescale.

Performance Management Unit - the Head of Performance and Policy detailed what is being done well (sickness/absence, recording of National Strategic Indicators - for which there are no targets for these indicators) and was pleased to announce that for the third year running, no National Indicators were disqualified by the External Audit Office. What needs to be improved included Service Improvement Plans (whereby performance has declined) and quarterly support meetings.

With regards to the latter it was noted that this is being currently pursued to ensure that such meetings are held on a regular basis to ensure that the process can be informed. A query was raised as to whether SIPs were reported to scrutiny committees and it was noted that in certain circumstances they are presented.

Scrutiny and Members Services - the Scrutiny and Members Services Manager detailed what is being done well (Cabinet accepted 100% of the recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee) and what needs to be improved (Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme, timescales for reports requested and received by Members)

A query was raised in relation to the right of a Member to request a report and it was noted that this is included as a standard item on each scrutiny committee agenda albeit that it may not be possible to report the information required to the next available meeting.

Committee Services - it was confirmed that at the end of quarter 1, 97% of reports promised for Cabinet in each eight-week period included in the forward work programme were received. This is a slight improvement on the 2008/09 figure of 95.75%.

Registrars - it was noted that all customers requesting a British Citizenship ceremony received a ceremony date within six weeks.

Officers were thanked for their presentations and for responding to the questions and issues raised by Members during the course of the debate.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2010 they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN