



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 7TH JUNE 2011 AT 5.15 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chairman

Councillors:

H.A. Andrews, P.C.W. Bailie, L. Binding, D. Bolter, D.T. Davies, L. Hughes, G. Jones, D.V. Poole, D. Rees, K.V. Reynolds, A.S. Williams

Also Present:

Councillor C.P. Mann, Cabinet Member Corporate Finance, Procurement and Sustainability

Together with:

N. Barnett (Deputy Chief Executive), L. Donovan (HR Service Manager, Customer Services), G. Hardacre (Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development), C. Jones (Head of Performance and Property Services), D. Perkins (Head of Legal Services and Governance), A. Rees (Equalities Training and Promotion Officer), N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance), D.A. Thomas (Senior Policy Officer, Equalities and Welsh Language), J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), R. Thomas (Committee Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J.B. Criddle, Mrs V. Jenkins, Mrs. M.E. Sargent, Mrs M.A. Tucker and Cabinet Member J.E. Fussell

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Councillor P.C.W. Bailie to his first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the meeting.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 19th April 2011 (minute nos. 1 - 10, on page nos. 1 - 3) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

4. CABINET REPORTS

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

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE FINANCE, PROCUREMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Councillor C.P. Mann, Cabinet Member for Corporate Finance, Procurement and Sustainability, gave a verbal report to Members and made reference to the following:

Corporate Finance - Best performance to date in relation to meeting late payment targets. Payment of undisputed invoices to small to medium enterprises are also above target. Initiatives on direct debit payment uptake, including the opportunity to set-up payments over the phone, has resulted in an increase from 57.8% to 60.3%

ICT - CCBC has been recognised by the Welsh Government as the leading Welsh council on print strategy and is one of only two councils that will be trialling a new system of printing which could result in a saving of around 30% in toner usage costs.

Data Centre - The Tredomen data centre is now hosting certain services for Newport City Council, the old and new Ystrad Mynach hospitals and GP surgeries for Aneurin Bevan Health Board, the Ambulance Service and Ystrad Mynach College. This is also bringing income into the Authority.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member for his presentation.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. DRAFT CAREER BREAK SCHEME

The report sought Members' views on the Draft Career Break Scheme and asked for the Scrutiny Committee's endorsement of the Scheme to Cabinet.

The Scheme has undergone the Council's consultation process and the views of recognised trade unions and the Equalities Group have been considered. Officers highlighted that the Scheme will provide flexibility to employees to undertake additional activities outside of the workplace, provide the Council with possible benefits from these activities, help retain good employees who need to take a time out of the workplace and contribute towards the savings required as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Members welcomed the progressive document and sought clarification on a number of points, in particular as to whether employees undertaking a career break could undertake paid work elsewhere. The need to support the remaining workforce and to monitor the outcome of application requests to ensure consistency across the Council's Directorates was also raised. Following discussion on the report, Members asked that the first sentence in reference 4.8 of the covering report be revised to remove the word "guaranteed".

The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendation contained in the report and recommended to Cabinet that it approve the Draft Career Break Scheme subject to the following amendment:

- that the Scheme be revised to show a maximum allowance of 5 breaks allowed, which could not exceed 9 years in total.

7. THE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL WELSH LANGUAGE MONITORING AND IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2010/11

The report informed Members of the progress made during 2010-2011 against targets in the Council's current Welsh Language Scheme, prior to presenting the report to Cabinet for approval for submission to the Welsh Language Board by the deadline date of 30th June 2011.

The importance and amendments to the document to bring it in line with legislative changes were highlighted. In addition, officers advised that the intranet site had been updated to include an English to Welsh glossary of common and simple words. Feedback received from users had been positive.

A Member questioned the number of Welsh language communications within the Authority. Officers advised the numbers were increasing and additional information would be sent to the Member to demonstrate this.

Members considered the report and raised a concern that the complexity of the Procurement Services Equality Questionnaire would discourage Small to Medium Enterprises (SME's). Officers explained that the document had to cover a number of purposes and conform to legal requirements. However officers agreed to review the questionnaire to see if it could be simplified.

Further discussions took place in which Members questioned the provision of Welsh language in youth clubs and whether Menter Iaith Sir Caerffili allows for Welsh speakers and learners. Officers agreed to bring forward a report to both the Policy and Resources and Education for Life Scrutiny Committee regarding the latter. A Member also raised concerns regarding the sources and sustainability of the Children's Young People Plan and questioned what other projects were ongoing using Cymorth funding.

The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendations contained in the report and recommended to Cabinet that it endorse the submission of the Welsh Language Scheme Annual Monitoring and Improvement Report 2010–2011 to the Welsh Language Board by the national deadline of 30th June 2011.

8. SICKNESS ABSENCE WITHIN THE COUNCIL

The report provided Members with an update on the position with regard to sickness absence within the Council and gave an overview of long-term sickness absence levels (cases where staff have been absent from work for twenty consecutive days or more) and short-term absences within each Directorate.

Members were asked to note that the report omitted details of financial implications where replacement labour is required to cover lost time by absent employees. It was hoped this information will be available shortly.

Members requested that a breakdown of the reasons given for each sickness be highlighted in future reports in order to identify any trends or underlying causes. Officers advised this information is presented to the Corporate Health and Safety Committee. Any further

breakdown could be subjective, due to the nature of the diagnosis of the illness. For the Scrutiny Committee's purposes, officers advised it would be more beneficial to detail typical causes of illness. In addition, Members were signposted to an information item (Workforce Information Report) where there was a further breakdown of the Authority's sickness levels contained within. In closing Members were also asked to note that over 4000 employees took no sickness leave.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made in terms of the management of sickness absence across the Authority and the plans to improve this for the future.

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

While there were no requests for any reports to be prepared for consideration at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, a Member did raise a concern regarding the time taken for a report to be brought before the Committee. Officers agreed to write to the Member to detail the reason for the delay.

10. INFORMATION ITEMS

The following reports were received and noted:

- (1) Corporate Services Improvement Plan Priorities 2010/11;
- (2) Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance – Budget 2011/2012;
- (3) Workforce Information Report;
- (4) Summary of Members' Attendance – Quarter 4 – 1st February 2011 to 11th May 2011;
- (5) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme;
- (6) Minutes of the Pensions/Compensation Committee held on 20th April 2011.

The meeting closed at 6.30 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 19th July 2011, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN