



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 17TH APRIL 2012 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

P.C.W. Bailie, L. Binding, D. Bolter, L. Hughes, G. Jones, D.V. Poole, K.V. Reynolds

Also Present:

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

Together with:

N. Barnett (Deputy Chief Executive), G. Hardacre (Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development), C. Jones (Head of Performance and Property), D. Perkins (Head of Legal and Governance), P.S. Evans (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), D. Griffiths (Insurance and Risk Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer), R.J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.A. Andrews, J.B. Criddle, D.T. Davies, Mrs V. Jenkins, D. Rees, Mrs M.A. Tucker.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman thanked officers and Members for their support and contributions to the Scrutiny Committee during the last four years.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 6th March 2012 (minute nos. 1 - 10, on page nos. 1 - 5) 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

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

ICT – the ongoing collaboration to host services for Newport City Council is making good progress.

Procurement – The co-operation with Merthyr Council is making good progress.

Corporate Finance – The department has collected 96.1% of council tax, as of last week. This equals the highest percentage ever collected. Congratulations were given to the section for their hard work.

Retirement – A tribute was made to Mr Dayton Griffiths who was attending his last scrutiny committee before his retirement. Thanks were given to Mr Griffiths for running a highly successful team who had ensured an efficient insurance function for the Authority.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member for his presentation.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The report and accompanying presentation informed Members of the findings of the Youth Unemployment Task and Finish Group and sought recommendations to Cabinet.

Members were reminded that in February 2011, Council agreed to establish a task and finish group to consider youth unemployment that would report to both Policy and Resources and Regeneration Scrutiny Committees. The officer highlighted the terms of reference, action taken and main findings of the review group. The group had received comprehensive statistical data on youth unemployment and the different support groups/schemes that were available to them.

Significantly, the group learned that Caerphilly county borough has a higher claimant count for unemployment benefits when compared to Wales as a whole. For June 2011 the claimant count for residents in Caerphilly aged 16–64 years was 4.8% in comparison with 3.8% for Wales. However the claimant count for 16-24 year olds in Caerphilly equalled 9.2%, almost double.

With assistance from third party organisations, such as the Youth Hub, National Training Federation Wales, Associated Community Training and ITEC Training, the Task and Finish Group were able to consider the barriers for youths to access public sector employment and what could be done to overcome skills gaps and reduce/remove those barriers to employment.

Members discussed the report and officers responded to general questions. Consideration was then given to the number of recommendations generated from the group's investigations. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group asked if there were officers who could be responsible for taking the recommendations forward. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that officers fully endorsed the recommendations and he advised that an officer working group, led by the Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development, was being established. The group would link with the WG, available funding streams and establish a coherent way to get youths and unemployed involved.

The Scrutiny Committee also made reference to the need for the Authority to change its image and become more attractive to younger people. A Member requested that apprenticeship/trainee positions be advertised at local job centres and if it were possible to publicise the opportunities available within the Council, using local newspapers. Another Member asked that the Council avoid any changes to the job application form for non-technical positions to a competency based format and sought clarification on the potential for progression through the different tiers of the Council's Apprenticeship and Trainee Scheme.

In closing, the Scrutiny Committee thanked everyone who was involved in the Task and Finish Group for the important work that had been undertaken and the resulting excellent report.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report and recommended to Cabinet that, for the reasons contained therein:-

- (1) the Council should look at ways to boost employment, skills and training for young people both directly and indirectly;
- (2) the Council investigate inserting clauses into commissioning contracts for third party providers to encourage companies to provide trainee placements;
- (3) the Local Service Board should include 'addressing youth unemployment' as a priority in its single plan. The Councils approach to apprenticeships and trainee placements be adopted across the LSB. In addition the LSB look at inserting clauses into its third party contracts requiring companies to provide trainee places;
- (4) the Council improve its collaboration with further education colleges for the provision of work placements for students. In view of the variable success across the council in the past, People Management and Development should have an overview and intervene when there are difficulties;
- (5) as part of its improvement process the Council should strengthen its succession planning arrangements in order to ensure that it has trained and experienced staff available if a significant proportion of its 50+ workforce retires over a short period of time;
- (6) the Council should review its job application form and develop a simpler version to include apprenticeship applications;
- (7) the Council should improve its communication with young people in order to develop a broader understanding of the range of jobs available in the authority. This should include a post placement review of all apprenticeship and trainee placements;

- (8) the Council should seek to develop further proposals to take advantage of the full range of grant and income generation opportunities that may be available to support youth employment;
- (9) the Scrutiny Committee receive a monitoring report on the progress of the recommendations 6 months following their acceptance.

7. INSURANCE RENEWALS 2012-2013

The report advised the Committee of the arrangements made to provide insurance cover in 2012-2013. An additional paper was circulated at the meeting detailing claim numbers per year back to the year 2000 and highlighting the future challenges facing the department.

Members were asked to note that this is the final year in the long term agreement of a five year period, and the sixth year that the base premiums had not been increased. The resultant premiums are within the framework set when the budget was originally prepared, and in such a difficult financial environment, this was very welcome. This is not the case at other Councils and reflects the commitment and hard work by officers to manage risks within the Authority.

In closing his presentation, the Insurance and Risk Manager advised Members of the future challenges to be faced by the Authority, but he stated that CCBC was in a better position than many other authorities due to its claims history and successful defence of false claims.

Members discussed the report and officers responded to general questions. In particular, the officer highlighted that £27.5m had been saved and redirected back to other departments, including front line services.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the information contained within the report and gave their thanks to Mr Griffiths for his hard work to reduce the Authority's exposure to claims and robustly defend spurious and fraudulent claims. Member and officers wished him a long and healthy retirement.

8. MEMBERS' REMUNERATION 2012/13

The report advised Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel) for Wales' determinations for 2012/2013, and sought Members views on certain aspects of the travel allowance, prior to consideration by Council.

Since January 2008 the Panel have determined the scope and maximum level of allowances payable to councillors in Wales. However the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 recently gave the Panel additional powers to prescribe the vast majority of Members allowances and expenses.

Members were asked to note the key change for the future is the Panel's decision to replace the term 'allowance' with 'salary'. A Basic Salary replaces the Basic Allowance and a Senior Salary replaces the Special Responsibility Allowance. Further changes were highlighted.

The Panel have also introduced an additional definition of 'official business' to allow for the reimbursement of travel allowances for Members undertaking constituency business. It is a matter for each Council to decide whether it wishes to implement this change, and Members were asked for their views on this proposal.

Members discussed the report and gave a view that due to the sufficient salary levels and general size of each ward within the Caerphilly county borough, there was not a need for travel costs to be reimbursed.

A Member sought clarification as to whether a Cabinet Member could receive a salary (allowance) from alternative employment and/or role, than those listed as exclusions within the report. The Head of Legal and Governance advised he would confirm this and let the Member know.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report and recommended to Council that:-

- (1) Members note the changes to the remuneration scheme outlined within the report.
- (2) reimbursement of travel allowances for Members undertaking constituency business be rejected.

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

There were no requests for any reports to be prepared for consideration at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

10. INFORMATION ITEMS

The following reports were received and noted without discussion:

- (1) Discretionary Rate Relief Applications;
- (2) Quarterly Workforce Report;
- (3) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme;
- (4) Minutes of the Caerphilly Local Service Board held on 21st September 2011;
- (5) Minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee held on 27th February 2012;
- (6) Minutes of the Pensions/Compensation Committee held on 17th April 2012.

The meeting closed at 6.00 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 June 2012, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN