



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 31ST JULY 2012 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David - Chairman
Councillor Mrs J. Summers - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

L. Binding, D.G. Carter, C.J. Cuss, Mrs. D. Ellis, J.E. Fussell, C. Hawker, G. Kirby, A. Lewis,
C.P. Mann, S. Morgan, D. Rees

Also Present:

Cabinet Member: Councillor K. Reynolds (Corporate Services)

Together with:

N. Barnett (Deputy Chief Executive), L. Allen (Housing Group Accountant), S. Couzens (Head of Housing Services), G. Hardacre (Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development), C. Jones (Head of Performance and Property), E. Rogers (Human Resources Service Manager, Strategy and Operations), J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), R.J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms. J.G. Jones, R. Saralis, J. Taylor

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the following minutes be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman:

- (1) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 17th April 2012 (minute nos. 1 - 10, on page nos. 1 - 5);
- (2) Policy and Resources (Performance Management) Scrutiny Committee held on 19th June 2012 (minute nos. 1 - 4, on page nos. 1 - 4).

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 K. Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, gave a verbal report to Members and made reference to the Cabinet decision made earlier in the day to support the introduction of the Living Wage to tackle poverty and improve living standards for the Authority's lowest paid employees. The report also requested procurement services officers put in place arrangements so that all contractors who wish to work for the Council are contractually obliged to pay the Living Wage to their staff. (£7.20 per hour outside of London.)

Reference was also made to the progress made in regard to the Youth Unemployment Task and Finish Group, whose recommendations were fully supported by all Members. Support of the arrangements has now been gained with Local Service Board (LSB) partners who have all signed up to the initiative. In addition, a bid to the Welsh Government (WG) has been made on behalf of the LSB partners (and led by CCBC) to set up a "Caerphilly Passport Scheme" which would see up to 250 young people per annum have the opportunity to experience work in the county borough.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member for his presentation and a brief discussion followed in which further clarification was given in regard to the selection process of youths for the Caerphilly Passport Scheme and the proposed implementation of the Living Wage. In regard to the latter, Cabinet's recommendation was to be discussed at Council on 7th August 2012.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCEDURE

The report advised Members on the proposed amendments to the Managing Sickness Absence Procedure to ensure it more fully supported employees and managers, but also continued to work effectively for the Council in managing sickness absence. The Scrutiny Committee's feedbacks on the amendments were sought prior to Cabinet's consideration of the revised procedures.

Members discussed the report and officers responded to general questions. In particular, confirmation was received that the Trade Unions had been consulted and were happy with the amendments. Members recognised the majority of staff took little or no sickness absence and asked that this be formally acknowledged. Officers confirmed ways to recognise these members of staff were being investigated.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report and recommended to Cabinet that, for the reasons contained therein, the amendments to the Managing Sickness Absence Procedure be approved.

7. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S TIME OFF FOR RESERVISTS POLICY

The report sought to consult with Members on the review of the Council's Time Off For Reservists Policy, prior to consideration by Cabinet. The review was necessary following changes to legislation and the potential for an increase in the number of requests due to the reduction in full time armed forces personnel.

Following discussion on the content of the report, officers responded to general questions. Members questioned whether any leave granted under the scheme would have a detrimental affect on an employee's pension. The Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development advised that he believed pensions were now protected, but this would be verified. In addition, as the number of reservists employed within the Council was not currently known, the full impact of the revised policy was uncertain at this time.

The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the report, and recommended to Cabinet that the revised Time Off For Reservists Policy be approved.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET PROPOSALS 2012/2013

The report gave Members information on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2012/2013, prior to consideration by Cabinet. Officers reviewed the main financial data contained within the report and attached appendix. Members were reminded that the HRA is ring fenced, and as a result needs to generate income, which covers the expenditure costs needed to provide an effective and efficient housing service.

Members discussed the report and officers responded to general questions.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report prior to consideration by Cabinet.

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

Councillor L. Binding received an update relating to a report he had requested on the support given to providers and the strategic direction adopted by the Council for the roll out of broadband throughout the county borough (on a ward by ward basis).

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

10. INFORMATION ITEMS

The following reports were brought forward for discussion at the meeting:

Quarterly Workforce Report

The report provided Members with an update on the key employment statistics in connection with the workforce of Caerphilly County Borough Council.

Recognition was given to staff regarding the significant reduction in sickness absence levels. The Scrutiny Committee asked that this message be disseminated to staff via e-mail. In addition, Members sought general clarification on a number of points and officers responded accordingly.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

Write Off Debts - 2011

To report advised Members of the monies due to the Council that it has not been possible to collect during the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012. These had been written off in accordance with the Policy, as agreed by Cabinet.

Members raised concerns regarding the government's planned changes to Housing and Council Tax Benefits, and the impact this would have on claimants and the level of income received by the Authority. Officers advised that support and advice would be offered to those tenants identified as being affected by the benefit changes and that additional support would be available via Citizens Advance Bureau with whom the authority already had a good working relationship. A Project Team was being established to consider measures that could be introduced to mitigate against the potential implications and to develop a communications strategy to raise awareness.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

The following reports were received and noted without discussion:

- (1) Summary of Members' Attendance - Quarter 1 - 18th May 2012 to 30th June 2012;
- (2) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme;
- (3) Minutes of the Pensions/Compensation Committee held on 23rd April 2012;
- (4) Minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee held on 25th June 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 2nd October 2012, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN