



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 15TH APRIL 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David - Chair

Councillors:

L. Binding, D.G. Carter, C.J. Cuss, Miss E. Forehead, J.E. Fussell, C. Hawker, Ms J.G. Jones, G. Kirby, A. Lewis, S. Morgan, D. Rees, R. Saralis, J. Taylor

Cabinet Members:

Mrs C. Forehead (Cabinet Member for HR and Governance/Business Manager), G. Jones (Housing), K.V. Reynolds (Corporate Services).

Together with:

N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer), G. Hardacre (Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development), S. Pugh (Communications Manager), H. Rees (Programme Manager, Partnership Development and Collaboration Improvement), K. Williams (Private Sector Housing Manager), F. Wilkins (Principal Private Sector Housing Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.P. Mann and Mrs J. Summers.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 4TH MARCH 2014

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor R. Saralis in the list of apologies, and Councillor E. Forehead's title amended to 'Miss' for future reference, it was

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting 4th March 2014 (minute nos. 1 - 12, on page nos. 1 - 6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

5. CABINET REPORTS

There had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

6. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

Councillor C. Forehead, Cabinet Member for HR and Governance/Business Manager, presented her report to the Committee, making reference to the Council's revised No Smoking Policy, which was due to be presented to Members for consideration at this meeting.

Members were updated on developments in regards to the National Pay Award, with a revised offer of 1% made on all points above SCP 11, and a varying increase above 1% for SCP 5-10. The offer was currently under consultation with union members who would decide whether to accept the offer or pursue industrial action. Members were also advised that the new Local Government Pension Scheme was implemented on 1st April 2014, which introduced a new career-average pension arrangement in place of the former final salary arrangement. This included a number of additional provisions to encourage lower-paid workers to begin saving for their retirement.

Members queried the changes to the new pension scheme, with Officers confirming that these changes had been implemented due to rising life expectancy rates, and that lower-paid staff would pay a reduced contribution to the scheme.

Councillor K. Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, updated Members with the positive news that the Council's insurance renewal for 2014/15 had led to a saving of £400,000. The Committee expressed their gratitude to all staff involved in this efficiency saving.

Members were informed of the latest developments regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2015/16 and 2016/17, with further estimated savings of £13.4m required through a review of discretionary services and the delivery of further efficiency savings. An initial list of discretionary services was presented to Council on 26th February 2014 and an updated list will be presented to Council on 22nd April 2014 together with details of a series of special scrutiny committees. Prior to the start of the series of special scrutiny committees, a seminar in respect of the MTFP will be held for all Members on 19th May 2014. A meeting of the Viewpoint Panel would also be held on 30th April 2014 in regards to the MTFP consultation.

Reference was made to the MTFP and the Cabinet Member reiterated the difficult financial situation faced by the Authority. He advised that there would be some difficult decisions to be made in the near future regarding efficiency savings and also confirmed that the consultation process regarding the MTFP would be discussed at Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member then advised that he and the Leader of the Council had recently visited Ty Dyffryn to view the new Customer First Mobile Bus. It was hoped that the bus would become operational at the end of June 2014 and that it would be of significant benefits for local communities. Members were informed of achievements in Information Technology, with the Council's IT department installing £1.25m of Wi-Fi in schools via the Learning in Digital Wales Grant. A programme of work was also underway to replace over 200 computers in the Authority's Libraries.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. NO SMOKING POLICY

Gareth Hardacre, Head of People Management and Development, presented the report, which sought comments from the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the Council's revised No Smoking Policy, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were advised that the Council has had a No Smoking Policy for a number of years, and that it was proposed to amend the current Policy to take account of the introduction, and usage, of electronic cigarettes in the UK. Members were advised that there was an urgent need to amend the current policy because of a number of incidents regarding employees who wished to use electronic cigarettes within Council premises.

In view of the lead established by Welsh Government and Aneurin Bevan Health Board and in line with the stance taken by other local authorities, it was proposed that electronic cigarettes are treated in the same way as conventional cigarettes and that their use be prohibited on Council premises and in Council vehicles. This Policy would apply to all Council employees.

In addition a new Smoke Free Premises Policy would be developed as a matter of urgency by colleagues from within Public Protection, in conjunction with all other relevant interested parties. This new Policy would apply to the general public whilst on Council premises, including Members.

Discussion of the report followed and it was clarified that Council employees found to be in breach of the No Smoking Policy would face disciplinary action. It was confirmed that the revised No Smoking Policy would be reviewed in 2015, in line with the anticipated introduction of national legislation regarding e-cigarettes.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation contained therein be adopted. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the revised No Smoking Policy be adopted.

8. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL STRATEGY

Kenyon Williams, Private Sector Housing Manager, and Fiona Wilkins, Principal Private Sector Housing Officer, presented the report. At the Cabinet meeting held on 16th October 2013, Members took the decision to introduce a moratorium on selective Home Improvement Grants whilst Officers undertook a review of the Authority's Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy. The detailed report outlined the findings of the review and sought Members' consideration in respect of a number of options that proposed amendments to the existing policy.

Members were reminded that the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy had been implemented by CCBC in June 2003 as a statutory obligation by local authorities, and whilst amendments had been made to policy tools in the interim, the 6 Key Priorities identified within the Policy had remained relevant and unchanged in principle to date.

The review indicated that whilst Key Priority 6 "*The creation of a safe, well managed private rented sector*" remained of paramount importance, it was felt that this was now an unrealistic ambition for the Authority in light of the current economic climate, and suggested that Key Priority 6 be re-titled "*Improving standards within the private rental sector*". The review also indicated that consideration needed to be given to revising certain forms of assistance currently afforded in pursuit of the Key Priorities.

The Private Sector Housing Manager detailed the current forms of assistance that were available to homeowners and private sector landlords with a repairing obligation, and explained how each of these would be affected by amendments to the Policy. Whilst the majority of the assistance currently on offer would continue, albeit with some revisions, the review proposed that some of the grants currently available within the Policy be permanently withdrawn. Alternative assistance would be introduced via a recyclable, interest-free repayment loan awarded in line with the repair and refurbishment principles of the Renewal Policy.

Officers advised the Committee that there was a typing error in Options 3 and 4 of paragraph 5.30 of the report, and that they should state “*para 5.29 above*”, not “*para 5.30 above*”.

Detailed consideration of the report followed, and concerns were raised regarding the proposed withdrawal of Home Improvement Grants. It was clarified that the proposed Home Improvement Repayment Loans would act as a replacement source of assistance and could potentially be accessed by those previously deemed ineligible for Home Improvement Grants. Members also discussed the level of grants awarded to homeowners and landlords, and Officers clarified specifics relating to eligibility criteria for such grants.

During discussion of the report, Members proposed two amendments to the options under consideration.

An amendment was moved and seconded that the proposal listed within Section 5.29 of the report, entitled “To continue to provide assistance via Conversion Grants”, be amended to state “To continue to provide assistance via Conversion Loans”.

By a show of hands and a majority vote, the amendment was declared lost.

An further amendment was moved that the proposal listed within Section 5.29 of the report, entitled “To permanently withdraw assistance via Home Improvement Grants” be amended to state “That Home Improvement Grants be retained for homeowners only”.

This amendment was not seconded and therefore did not proceed to a Members vote.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained therein be adopted. By a show of hands, this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that Option 3 of the report be approved, in that a revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy be implemented that reflects all the amendments mentioned within paragraph 5.29 [referred to as 5.30 in the report] of the report, namely:

- (i) To continue to provide assistance via Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants;
- (ii) To continue to provide assistance via Relocation Grants;
- (iii) To continue to provide assistance via re branded Minor Works Grants;
- (iv) To permanently withdraw assistance via Home Improvement Grants;
- (v) To introduce a new form of assistance via Home Improvement Repayment Loans;
- (vi) To continue to provide assistance via Conversion Grants;
- (vii) To withdraw assistance via HMO grants and replace it with assistance via an HMO Repayment Loan;
- (viii) To continue to provide assistance via Group and Block Repair and to introduce a Renewal Area grant;
- (ix) To withdraw assistance via Property Appreciation Loans;
- (x) To further amend the means test for discretionary grant aid.

9. 'ONE VOICE' CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Steve Pugh, Corporate Communications Manager, presented the report, which sought Members' views on the proposed draft 'One Voice' Corporate Communications Strategy, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were reminded of the importance of effective communication and the need to adopt a strategic approach with clear objectives, defined audiences, detailed planning and measurable outcomes. The new Communications Strategy had subsequently been developed to set out the Council's approach to delivering its communication activity and to outline the principles which will underpin this work.

The range of key services delivered by the corporate Communications Unit were outlined to Members, including media management, citizen engagement, corporate events management, advertising, graphic design, print services, brand management, twinning and internal communications. The strategic aims and priority activities for each of these services were detailed further in the draft Communications Strategy appended to the report.

Consideration and discussion of the report followed and the Communications Manager responded to general queries from Members, including social media procedures and the processes relating to the key communications channels detailed within the Strategy.

Reference was made to the Council's Newsline publication and it was confirmed that the Communications Unit were mindful of the need to be representative of all areas within the county borough when publishing articles. Members enquired as to the feasibility of publishing separate English and Welsh versions of Newsline and establishing a database of residents who wished to receive each version. Officers agreed to look into this and respond accordingly.

Following discussion on the content of the report, comments on additional content were noted for the final version of the Strategy, including items relating to webcasting, citizen engagement and crisis communication, and Members were pleased to endorse the draft One Voice Communications Strategy.

It was moved and seconded that subject to the above, the recommendation contained therein be adopted. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that subject to the inclusion of Members' comments regarding additional content relating to webcasting, citizen engagement and crisis communication, the draft One Voice Communications Strategy be approved.

10. "CAERPHILLY DELIVERS" – THE CAERPHILLY LOCAL SERVICE BOARD SINGLE INTEGRATED PLAN

Howard Rees, Programme Manager for Partnership Development and Collaboration Improvement, gave a presentation to complement the details within the report, which updated Members on the development, implementation and progress of "Caerphilly Delivers" – the Caerphilly Local Service Board's Single Integrated Plan.

Members were reminded that during 2011 it was identified that there was a need and an opportunity to rationalise the Caerphilly Community Strategy Partnership landscape, reduce bureaucracy, re-prioritise and focus on enhancing Partnership delivery.

This work programme was complimented by the publication (19th June, 2012) by Welsh Government of "Shared Purpose - Shared Delivery: Guidance on integrating Partnerships and Plans". This document provided statutory guidance to and required Local Service Boards to rationalise their respective Partnership "landscapes" and produce a Single Integrated Plan to discharge statutory planning and delivery obligations. This led to the creation of the Single

Integrated Plan, which replaced a number of strategic partnerships and was subsequently approved by the Local Service Board and Council in April 2013.

The Programme Manager advised that 'Caerphilly Delivers' was developed based on the Caerphilly Local Service Board and partner organisations' commitment to improve the quality of life for the public, by tackling the impact of poverty, its many causes and symptoms, and by concentrating on the major issues and challenges facing local communities.

The presentation updated Members on the progress to date with the Single Integrated Plan, and detailed a number of methods used to assess the progress. Specific reference was made to the identification of outcomes and priorities, which had been identified as Prosperous Caerphilly, Safer Caerphilly, Learning Caerphilly, Healthier Caerphilly and Greener Caerphilly, and the presentation outlined the delivery structure and mechanism for each of those outcomes and priorities. The presentation also detailed the transition process to the new partnership strategy. It was confirmed that having identified these priorities, future reports would focus on the outcomes of the Single Integrated Plan.

Following discussion on the content of the report, Members were pleased to note the development, implementation and progress of the Single Integrated Plan and were in agreement on its success to date.

11. REQUESTS FOR REPORTS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

There were no requests received for future agenda items.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. There were no items brought forward for review.

- (1) Information Governance;
- (2) Welsh Government Report: Local Authority Services Performance 2012-13;
- (3) Write-Off of Debts 2013/14;
- (4) Discretionary Rate Relief Applications;
- (5) National Non-Domestic Rate Consultation Meeting Minutes – 5th February 2014;
- (6) Pensions/Compensation Committee Minutes – 26th February 2014.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd June 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR