



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 3RD JUNE 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David - Chair
Councillor S. Morgan - Vice Chair

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

G. Hardacre (Head of Workforce and Organisation Development), E. Lucas (Head of Procurement), P. Davy (Head of Programmes), P. Lewis (Development Manager), G. North (Public Sector Housing Manager), S. Cousins (Principal Housing Officer), D.A. Thomas (Senior Policy Officer - Equalities and Welsh Language), F. Wilkins (Principal Private Sector Housing Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

Also present:

Ms. A. Lewis (Chair – Caerphilly Homes Task Group), Mrs S. Jones (Caerphilly Homes Task Group)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.M. Gray and Mrs J. Summers, together with Nicole Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer).

The Chair welcomed new Cabinet Member Mrs B. Jones to her first meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. A belated welcome was also extended to Councillor D.M. Gray, who had recently joined the Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 15TH APRIL 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15th April 2014 (minute nos. 1 - 12, on page nos. 1 - 6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following being noted:-

1. Minute No. 10
Members wished it noted that they had commented on the need for follow-up action with regard to the outcomes of the Single Integrated Plan.
2. Minute No. 11.
Councillor R. Saralis requested a report in relation to reducing the costs of production and delivery of "Newslines".

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 B. Jones, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, presented her report to the Committee, and informed those present of the Council's recent performance in the National Survey For Wales. This is a face-to-face survey of thousands of people across Wales who are asked for their opinions on a wide range of issues. Caerphilly came top in two key areas within the survey section regarding local authority services. Councillor Jones thanked staff at all levels across the Authority for their support in regards to this achievement.

Councillor Jones had also recently undertaken visits to the Council's Contact Centre and to view the Council's new Customer First Mobile Bus. She was very impressed with both and intended to visit other areas within her new Cabinet portfolio over the next few months. The Cabinet Member confirmed that that she was enjoying the new challenge and Members passed on their best wishes.

Councillor C. Forehead, Cabinet Member for HR and Governance/Business Manager, updated Members on the current position with regards to the annual pay review. Trade Unions recently informed the Authority that they had triggered a formal dispute regarding the 1% pay rise offer and were currently balloting members as to whether they would be prepared to take part in strike action. It was anticipated that the outcome of the ballot would be known after 23rd June 2013 and in the event of the ballot being in favour of industrial action, a strike was expected to be held on 10th July 2014. Teaching Unions were currently in dispute with the Secretary of State in regards to pay, pension and workload and have also indicated they could take industrial action on 10th July 2014.

Members queried the Authority's contingency plans in the event of industrial action and it was confirmed that some essential services within the Authority were exempt from such action and would operate under bank-holiday type arrangements. The financial impact of industrial action was queried and Officers confirmed that they were waiting on the outcome of the ballot before assessing this in detail.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S RETIREMENT AND SEVERANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Gareth Hardacre, Head of Workforce and Organisational Development, presented the report, which sought the views of Members on the proposed introduction of an early retirement scheme. On 30th April 2014, Cabinet gave permission to consult on detailed proposals for the implementation of a range of workforce planning tools to assist with managing the Medium Term Financial Plan. Draft arrangements for the introduction of an early retirement scheme were subsequently proposed and are appended to the report.

It was explained that exploring additional flexibilities in Workforce Strategies would be of value to the Council and facilitate the means to allow individuals to access early retirement. The consultation process had been complex to date, involving management, employees, Trade Unions and Torfaen Pensions. A number of items within the draft scheme were highlighted and Members were advised that some decisions in regards to early retirement would be delegated to the Pension/Compensation Committee.

Discussion of the report followed and Officers responded to queries regarding Added Year Benefits and the costs of the proposed early retirement scheme to the Authority. A query arose regarding paragraph 19 of the draft scheme in relation to the final decision in the event of dispute being made by senior HR staff, rather than the Pension/Compensation Committee. As there was a possibility of personnel processes being initiated in the event of a dispute, it was confirmed by Officers that it was more appropriate for the decision to rest with HR staff.

The Chair queried whether the HR team had sufficient resources to deal with an influx of requests, should there be a large number of staff wishing to access the scheme. It was confirmed that whilst an increase in applications was anticipated, the situation would be closely monitored and any significant increase to workloads would be discussed with the Acting Director of Corporate Services.

Members noted that the Unison response to the Draft Retirement Scheme had been withdrawn and concerns were raised that there appeared to be contradictory paragraphs in the Draft Retirement Scheme, namely paragraphs 8 and 13. Mr Hardacre confirmed that further detail would be added to the draft scheme to clarify the matter.

Members were also advised that a report entitled 'Local Government Pension Scheme 2014 – Employer Discretions' was being presented to Council on 10th June 2014, which advised on the main changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) regulations for 2014.

The Chair thanked Mr Hardacre for his detailed responses to Members' queries and added that he was satisfied that the Draft Early Retirement Scheme had been fully scrutinised by the Committee.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that subject to the views of Members being noted as part of the consultation process, the recommendation contained therein be adopted. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED that subject to the inclusion of Members' views as part of the consultation process, the Draft Early Retirement Scheme be endorsed and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

8. CORPORATE WEBSITE RE-DESIGN

Paul Lewis, Development Manager, presented the report, which informed Members of the background, plan and estimated costs related to the redesign of the Authority's corporate website and the progress made to date. This report was prepared following a Member request for such information at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4th March 2014.

The existing corporate website has been in place since September 2008, and since that time, technologies available and the expectations of users have become more sophisticated. A redesign of the facility was deemed to be required and a project initiated to deliver an enhanced solution during 2014.

During the early phases of this process, staff working on the Empowering Individuals and Communities (EIC) initiative identified the need for enhanced on-line facilities, and it was subsequently agreed by the Corporate Management Team to combine the two projects into a joint Empowering Communities / Council Website Redesign project to save money, maximise staff resources, consolidate information sources and eliminate duplication.

The report detailed information relating to the redesign and to the current website, content and content management, current performance and benchmarking, information relating to the redesign project, benefit realisation, budget and estimated costs, and the on-going plan and progress made to date.

Particular reference was made to the number of visitors accessing the current website with over 60,000 unique visits per month. With 47.8% of visitors accessing the site via a mobile device, ease of use for mobile viewing was subsequently identified as a major factor when considering the redesign of the website.

The estimated total expenditure for the initial redesign and development was estimated to total £81,000 across 2 years, and expenditure occurred to date in 2013/14 was approximately £52,500, made up of ICT and Citizen Engagement and Social Services. It was predicted that the remaining budget of £28,500 would be sufficient to deliver the redesigned website project during 2014/15. From 2017/18, it was anticipated that there would be an annual charge of £1000 relating to support and maintenance charges for the content management system. Additional expenditure would be determined via business cases.

Discussion of the report followed and Members queried the £81,000 costs to date. It was confirmed that this was due to investment and implementation of the new website infrastructure and costs relating to the content management system. Costs for the Empowering Individuals and Communities initiative had been estimated at £80,000 alone, and by bringing this together with the website redesign project, significant savings had been made.

The availability of staff resources was queried by Members and it was confirmed that this would include a substitution of normal duties. It was advised that each department within CCBC would also be reviewing their own webpages in order to deliver the necessary improvements.

Members were pleased to note the high volume of user statistics, with the Authority's website scored well in national comparisons against other local authorities. A high rate of customer satisfaction with the website was also evidenced and it was confirmed that the website would be used to complement Citizen Engagement.

The Committee were informed that a user-friendly approach was at the forefront of the new website design, including a 'big button' interface and the development of a more comprehensive search facility. It was also confirmed that Members would have the opportunity to view the website before it went live and that a consultation process would be maintained throughout the summer.

Officers were asked to take the comments of the Committee on board in regards to the website redesign to date, and Members noted the contents of the report.

9. SPECIAL INSPECTION RECOMMENDATIONS - PROCUREMENT

Liz Lucas, Head of Procurement, presented the report, which summarised the work to date by the Corporate Procurement Team in addressing the findings of the Wales Audit Office Special Inspection Report, and made recommendations on the team's future work and monitoring processes.

Members were advised that the Wales Audit Office Special Inspection Report contained the following recommendation relevant to Procurement:

- *'Emphasises the importance of following appropriate procurement procedures and ensures that relevant key performance indicators are set for the procurement function'*

A high level action plan arising from this recommendation detailed seven action points for Procurement to address, which included ensuring understanding of strategic enablement, building on the recommendations of the WAO report, training of staff, making all appropriate regulations available for public view, amending Standing Orders for contracts, reviewing and consolidating the service structure in respect of Housing Services, and reviewing benchmarking and performance indicators.

Members referenced strategic enabling within Action 1 of the report and queried how Officers intended to strategically examine the service to support SME (small and medium enterprise) engagement. It was confirmed that various Procurement processes were currently being addressed to support SME engagement and learn from WHQS experience such as small lots. Staff training was queried and it was confirmed that all key Procurement Officers held the appropriate qualifications relevant to their role.

Reference was made to the volume of paperwork to be completed by tender bidders, with Members commenting that this could be seen as a barrier by potential SME contractors. The Head of Procurement confirmed that a review of the application process was currently underway, and added that the service were also reviewing the schedule of payments to contractors with a view to streamlining the process to include subcontracting.

Members discussed Action Point 6 of the report in regards to the transfer of the relevant Officers from Housing to the Corporate Procurement Team and it was confirmed that the details of the service level agreement from the Housing Revenue Account were currently being finalised.

Members queried the situation if financial checks were relaxed, and Officers confirmed that in the event of contractors and suppliers being unable to fulfil their obligations, contingency plans were in place to transfer contracts across to a substitute supplier within 24 hours, in line with standing orders.

Following discussion of the report, Members noted the content of the report and the progress to date in addressing the recommendation of the WAO Special Inspection Report. It was noted that at the date of the report, all actions had been completed.

10. ROWAN PLACE, RHYMNEY

Phil Davy, Head of Programmes (WHQS) presented the report, which updated Members on the extent of repairs and improvement works required to homes at Rowan Place, Rhymney. Anna Lewis and Sandra Jones of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group also joined the table for this item, together with Graham North, Public Sector Housing Manager.

Mr Davy explained that surveys of the properties at Rowan Place had identified severe damp and extensive defects to the external fabric of the buildings, and significant additional works would be required to bring the stock up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

The report had previously been considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 22nd May 2014 and the Task Group had fully endorsed recommendations 9.1.1, 9.1.3, 9.1.4, 9.1.5, 9.1.6 and 9.1.7. However, they were unable to reach agreement on a preferred course of action regarding recommendation 9.1.2 on whether to pursue limited selective demolition and the determination of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee was sought in this regard.

Ms Lewis and Mrs Jones clarified the reasons for the Task Group being unable to reach agreement on Recommendation 9.1.2, and the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee then discussed the report's recommendations in detail, with a number of concerns raised regarding limited selective demolition.

The number of vacant properties currently in Rowan Place was discussed, including the reasons for and duration of the voids. Officers confirmed that the number of void properties generally fluctuated, with a few properties empty for an extended period of time. This was mainly related to welfare reform issues, with a lack of people meeting the relevant criteria for these properties, or eligible applicants choosing to take up the offer of an alternative property.

Members queried as to whether the empty properties could be used to address instances of homelessness and Officers clarified that it would be counterproductive to do so in that it could remove homeless people from their support network located elsewhere in the county borough.

Discussion took place in relation to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and appropriate consultation processes should a demolition programme be pursued. Members also commented on antisocial behaviour issues and the impact that demolition would have on the area.

Clarification was sought in relation to the recommendation for the WHQS Project Board to be given delegated authority to determine appropriate contractual arrangements to expedite the works. It was explained that as the external WHQS works were scheduled for 2016/17, external contractors had yet to be appointed. If the external works were brought forward then a possibility would be for the in-house workforce to take on responsibility for both internal and external works as the main contractor supported where necessary by sub contractors with works tendered from the DLO sub contract framework.

Queries were made in relation to the Council's allocations policy. Officers confirmed that this was currently under review, including local lettings schemes, with regards to specific types of properties.

Members highlighted the difference between the original cost plan estimate and revised refurbishment costs following new surveys, and expressed concern with the original stock condition survey of 2008. It was clarified that the stock condition was a 15% sample survey and that some significant variations had not been unexpected. The Head of Programmes referenced recent periods of very wet weather as being a contributing factor towards property defects, together with some repair works going undetected as there were no recent records of repair requests from tenants.

Having fully considered the report and the deliberations of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee unanimously endorsed the following recommendations to Cabinet: -

1. A revised approach to Rowan Place by bringing forward the external works to be undertaken in parallel with the internal works in view of the extent of the damp problems. The works to be reprogrammed to commence during 2014/15;
2. To accept the estimated additional costs of £3.615m to be funded within the Business Plan flexibilities;
3. Properties suffering severe damp where damage is extensive to undergo a full internal refurbishment and tenants offered the opportunity to relocate to a newly refurbished property (voids) in Rowan Place. The extent of internal refurbishment to other properties to be determined by their condition at the time of the works;
4. That the WHQS Project Board be given delegated authority to determine the most appropriate contractual arrangements between the in-house team and contractors to expedite the works to meeting the new timeline;
5. Other previous commitments to establish a multi-agency task group to tackle the social problems and to create a show flat and welfare facilities are reaffirmed;
6. The tenants are kept informed about the programming of the repairs and improvement works.

With regard to the recommendation on whether to pursue selective demolition (as listed in 1.6.1 of the report to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee) Members of that Committee unanimously agreed the REMOVAL of this recommendation: -

1. Whether to pursue limited selective demolition to reduce the overall number of 2 bedroom flats given the large concentration in Rowan Place. However, if this option is followed, consultation with residents in Rowan Place should take place at the earliest possible opportunity, including discussion on the after use of the cleared site.

11. END OF YEAR UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 6 (2013/14) – IMPROVE THE AVAILABILITY OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR HOUSING TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS WHO MAY BECOME HOMELESS

Fiona Wilkins, Principal Private Sector Housing Officer, presented the end of year progress report against the Improvement Objective relating to improving the availability of public and private sector housing to reduce the number of residents who may become homeless.

Members were informed that good progress was made throughout the year against the actions contained within the Improvement Objectives. Nine risks were identified and assessed, with eight risks closed and one remaining open. Of the twenty actions identified, nineteen have been successfully completed. Eight performance indicators were identified in total, with 6 performing above expectation, one below, and data for the remaining indicator not yet available, and full details were appended to the report.

A list of successfully completed actions were detailed within the report, which included the reconfiguration of the housing advice section to enhance the focus on homelessness prevention, together with introducing a revised procedure for minor works of adaptation and the development of a dedicated website to provide additional advice and support to private landlords. An officer had been recruited to improve access to emergency accommodation, advice and assistance was being provided to people affected by welfare reform, and a new

short-term family hostel had been opened in Caerphilly, together with the reopening of Ty Croeso hostel in Newbridge.

It was advised that homelessness would continue to remain a priority for the Council for the foreseeable future and accordingly Improvement Objective 6 would be carried forward to 2014/15, with a revised set of risks, actions and performance indicators.

Discussion ensued regarding the report and the extent to which some of the targets within the Improvement Objective were exceeded. It was agreed that all targets would be reviewed and, where appropriate, increased to reflect the outturns in 2013/14. In regards to Members queries relating to instances of people sleeping rough in town centres, Officers confirmed that legislation relating to this issue would change in April 2015 which would impact on the way the issue was dealt with.

Following discussion of the report, Members noted the progress being made against the Improvement Objective and were in agreement on its success to date.

12. EQUALITIES AND WELSH LANGUAGE ANNUAL REPORTS

David A. Thomas, Senior Policy Officer - Equalities and Welsh Language, presented the report, which informed Members of the progress made during the financial year 2013/2014 against targets in the Council's current Strategic Equality Plan and Welsh Language Scheme. This report would then be presented to Cabinet for approval for submission to the relevant Commissions and publication online, before the deadline date of 30th June 2014.

Members were informed that the Council has a statutory duty to produce annual monitoring reports on Equalities and Welsh Language issues under current legislation. These reports are very detailed in order to ensure that the regulatory bodies involved are provided with full evidence of the Council's compliance and commitment to these statutory duties.

Full details of the progress made in Equalities and Welsh Language were appended to the report, and particular reference was made to Equalities Awareness Training, with Caerphilly CBC recently organised and hosted 3 Same Sex Marriage awareness and training days for Registration staff across 16 authorities in West, South and South East Wales. This was seen as a positive asset for both the Council's training programme and Registration Services. Reference was also made to the work of the Translation Team, with translation work also being undertaken for external consortiums and subsequently providing a source of income for the department.

Officers responded to questions relating to funding, and Members referred to the report data that analysed the linguistic profile of the CCBC workforce. It was confirmed the accuracy of data was dependant on information provided by employees and therefore the true extent of employees' Welsh language ability could vary from the information detailed in the report.

Members queried the costs of producing bi-lingual documents and it was confirmed that this was difficult to clarify, as the Equalities and Welsh Language team are only responsible for the translation aspect, with printing costs the responsibility of individual department budgets. It was also confirmed that whilst the Council has a duty to produce certain documents bilingually, the Equalities and Welsh Language team were looking at producing some documents in an electronic format in order to reduce printing costs. This issue would be addressed in more detail at the forthcoming special scrutiny meeting relating to the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Following discussion of the report, the Equalities and Welsh Language Annual Reports were noted, and it was moved and seconded that the recommendation contained therein be adopted. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED that Cabinet approve the submission of the annual monitoring and improvements reports to the relevant Commissions and publication online before 30th June 2014.

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

The following requests were received:-

- (i) Councillor S Morgan requested a report on the housing stock identified with damp issues since the original Savills survey for the WHQS and a comparison with complaints of damp on order to identify correlation and differences.
- (ii) Councillor C. Mann requested that the above report also examine how damp complaints forwarded on from tenants via councillors are handled.
- (iii) Councillor R. Saralis requested a report in relation to reducing the costs of production and delivery of "Newline", and that this request be placed on the Forward Work Programme. Officers advised that this information had been included in a report that was due to be presented at a special meeting Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 17th June 2014 in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan.

14. 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) Replacement of Microsoft XP and Office 2003;
- (2) Insurance Renewal 2014-15;
- (3) Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Budgets 2014/15;
- (4) Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Grants 2014/15;
- (5) Corporate Health and Safety Committee Minutes – 17th February 2014;
- (6) Caerphilly Homes Task Group Minutes – 13th March 2014;
- (7) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 8.19 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 5th August 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR