



## JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING - PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 5.00 PM

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#### PRESENT

Councillor G. Johnston – Chair  
Councillor B. Miles – Vice Chair

#### Councillors:

M. A. Adams, E. M. Aldworth, A. Angel, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, Mrs P. Cook, D. Cushing, C. J. Cuss, G. Ead, K. Etheridge, G. Enright, M. Evans, A Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, A. Gair, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, S. Kent, Mrs A. Leonard, C. P. Mann, A. McConnell, L. Phipps, M. Powell, D. W R. Preece, H. Pritchard, J. A. Pritchard, J. E. Roberts, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, L. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, K. Woodland.

#### Cabinet Members:

Councillors: C. Andrews (Education), S. Cook (Housing), E. Forehead (Social Care), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), J. Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change), P. Leonard (Panning & Public Protection) and Mrs E. Stenner (Finance and Performance).

#### Together with:

Officers: K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director - Head of Children's Services), C. Harray (Chief Executive), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Service), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager) S. Richards (Head of Education and Planning and Strategy), R. Roberts (Business Improvement Manger), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), M. S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), J. Williams (Assistant Director Adult Services), D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services & Housing), J. Pearce (Business Improvement Officer), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), A. Jones (Committee Services Officer/Complaints Officer), J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer), J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillors A. Angel, J. Sadler, R. Saralis. Co-opted Members: Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative) and Mrs P. Ireland (NEU).

## **1 RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS.**

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here to View](#).

## **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, D. T. Davies, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, C. Gordon, D. Harse, M. James, L. Jeremiah, B. Owen, T. Parry, D. Price, J. Rao, J. Reed, S. Skivens and C. Wright.

## **3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

No declarations were received.

## **4 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT END OF YEAR REPORT 2021/22.**

Following an introduction from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, Committee Members received a presentation from the Business Improvement Manager. Members were given an overview on the statutory requirement for the Council to carry out a process of self-assessment. This was undertaken via the Performance Management Framework and a key component was the Corporate Performance Assessment.

One Member requested a response to the increase in sickness days, breaches of data requests and asked if there were sufficient resources in areas receiving the most number of complaints such as refuse collection, recycling and highway maintenance. The Cabinet highlighted that the pandemic had an impact on staff absence due to sickness. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services also advised that a report had come before the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee outlining a series of measures designed to improve the situation regarding sickness rates. The Head of People Services outlined the national nature of increased sickness levels and provided assurances that it was being reviewed alongside other Local Authorities and external partners. On the issue of sufficient resources, the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment observed that some areas had adequate funding but others did not. Members also heard about problems with recruitment to certain positions.

A Member asked for more information on the effects of the Well-being Initiative, requested figures based on gender for those appointed to high positions within the Council, questioned if outside appointments were made for such roles and queried whether the Council was actually responsible for some of the achievements in the report or was just claiming credit for the work of others. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services advised that putting all the information contained within Directorate Performance Assessments into one report would produce too

lengthy a document for one meeting. Members heard how information on issues such as gender balance did form part of the Directorate Performance Assessment. The Director suggested that a Member Seminar be organised so that the full range of information could be assessed. The Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing provided assurances that the achievement raised by the Member related to additional income brought about due to the intervention of Council staff. On the issue of recruitment the Head of People Services assured Members that appointments were made on both an internal and external basis and that the process was based on the Council's Safer Recruitment procedure.

One Member welcomed the report but questioned the objectivity as it was a self-assessment. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services reiterated that the report was a snapshot and that a future Seminar would allow Members to drill down more deeply into all corporate priorities. The Business Improvement Manager also highlighted that an independent panel review fed into the assessment process.

A Committee Member asked if there were any comparisons with other Local Authorities. The Business Improvement Manager observed that making comparisons was challenging as the Welsh Government had suspended data reporting to maximise resources during the pandemic.

One Member praised the work carried out as part of the Sure Start programme. The Early Years Manager agreed that the work done was phenomenal and gave Members an update on the work undertaken.

A Member criticised the underspend of £37.8 M and suggested that virement of this money would allow resurfacing of poor roads for example. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer reminded Members that an outturn report outlining how the underspend was ring-fenced for a number of purposes and that this report had been agreed by Cabinet and Full Council. The Member also enquired why the sickness/absence rates and the number of staff aged over 55 did not feature in the risk register. He also queried calculations of Welsh language statistics in the report and the percentage figures for Freedom of Information compliance. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services outlined how sickness rates were for 2021/22 and the risk register relates to the previous financial year and therefore they would be reviewed under a future risk register. On the Welsh language statistics point the Corporate Policy Manager recognised that there was a discrepancy and highlighted that this was caused by staff having more than one role with the Authority and working across different Directorates. Regarding the Fol compliance figures query the Head of Customer and Digital Services observed that she would double-check the figures and contact the Member.

The Chief Executive thanked Members for the challenging comments made this evening. The Chief Executive praised the work of Council staff during very challenging times during the pandemic. Members heard how certain areas such as complaints and Fol compliance may have been negatively impacted during this time but it was because resources had been redirected to provide community support during the pandemic. The Chair also praised the role of staff delivering free school meals during the pandemic and concluded that the report had been discussed, challenged and scrutinised as per the recommendation.

**5 ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (INCLUDING WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES) 2021/22.**

Following an introduction from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, Committee Members received a presentation from the Corporate Policy Manager. Members were given an overview of the statutory requirements and key points from the Self-Assessment Report were also highlighted.

One Member asked why grant funding was underspent and also enquired if grant money received is now being spent on the intended uses or had it been returned. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer outlined that the underspend related to money received specifically during the pandemic such as the Covid-19 hardship fund which had now ceased. So, it was money which had been directed at addressing Covid-19 challenges rather than funding which had not been spent. Members heard how no grant money had been returned. The Member also sought clarification on a sentence under Equalities and Welsh Language and suggested the report is properly proof-read before publication. A further question on the low level of Welsh learners was also put to officers. The Head of Transformation outlined how the paragraph in question would be checked for clarity and the whole document would be test checked again. On the issue of Welsh learners, the officer advised that the training programme was relaunched following the pandemic and would offer courses ranging from beginner to advanced learner. The Corporate Policy Manager added that the Council also offered confidence building classes to encourage staff to use existing Welsh skills.

A Member highlighted the projected occupancy rate of less than 40% at Ty Penallta over the coming years and asked about future usage. He believed that some of the space could be used to help the homeless. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services highlighted a section of the report that referred to the opportunity to rationalise the Council's estate and therefore reduce associated expenditure such as rent, heating and lighting. Members heard how due to the Agile Working Policy it would be possible to increase occupancy at Ty Penallta above 45% as part of a review of what happens to outlying buildings.

One Member observed that the Voluntary Sector should be included as part of partnership working towards a single public estate. On the issue of equality, the Member highlighted that many elderly residents did not access online services, and this should be factored into future planning. The Member also queried the running of food cooperatives as depicted in the report as she felt the role of voluntary organisations had been overlooked. On the issue of working with the Voluntary Sector the Corporate Policy Manager advised that the current policy on the development of Community Hubs involved partnership working with this sector. The officer also stressed that the Council acknowledged that not everyone was digitally enabled and therefore face-to-face services would also be available in the Hubs. The Corporate Policy Manager also observed that she would check the wording of the food cooperatives section of the self-assessment. The Member also raised hospital discharge challenges due to a lack of adequate social care and suggested that this should be a priority for the Council. The Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing assured Members that this was a key priority for the Authority and outlined some of the achievements and challenges within domiciliary care for communities. Members heard how it was a challenging balancing act between prioritising people in the community and those ready to be discharged from hospital.

A Member questioned the principle of self-assessment and suggested that in terms of general well-being a freeze on Council Tax and rents would be welcome during a cost-of-living crisis. It was also suggested that national charities should be allowed to use

surplus capacity in Council buildings. The Chief Executive suggested that a lot of what had been outlined was not relevant to the report being discussed. Members were advised that there would be opportunity to discuss issues around the Council Tax when the budget was discussed at Full Council. In terms of the principle of self-assessment the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services reiterated a point made earlier in the meeting that the Council was subject to an independent review at least once a term and that this process checked for accuracy on performance data.

One Member suggested that surplus capacity in Council buildings should be addressed as a priority. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services reiterated points around the Agile Review that would consider opportunities to cut costs by rationalising the estate and maximising the workspace at Ty Penallta.

A Member raised the issue of the Street Lighting policy as decarbonisation was highlighted in the report. He suggested an adult conversation was needed for safety reasons over the issue of switching off 87% of lighting at midnight. The Member also suggested that the Reserve Strategy scheduled for March should be brought forward so that Members were better informed when discussing the budget. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer advised that work was already taking place on the approach to addressing the financial challenges and that robust scrutiny of the reserves held is part of this process. He advised Members that the Reserves Strategy would come before the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in January. The Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change advised that the street lighting policy had recently been considered by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee and that leaving lights on after midnight would increase carbon emissions.

One Member questioned why the views of residents were not included in the assessment. He suggested that a panel review every 5 years was not good enough in terms of monitoring the assessment process. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services advised that the What Matters survey for all residents was imminent and that the findings would feed into future self-assessments.

The Chair concluded that the report had been discussed, challenged and scrutinised as per the recommendation and brought the meeting to a close.

The meeting closed at 6:30 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023, they were signed by the Chair.