



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 9TH JULY 2019 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard - Chair
Councillor G. Kirby - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, K. Etheridge, Miss E. Forehead, L. Harding, C.P. Mann, Mrs B. Miles, J. Ridgewell, R. Saralis, Mrs M.E. Sargent, J. Taylor, L. Whittle

Cabinet Members:

C. Gordon (Corporate Services), Mrs B. Jones (Finance, Performance and Governance)

Together with:

S. Harris (Interim Head of Business Improvement Services), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), M. Williams (Interim Head of Property Services), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C. Forehead and G. Johnston.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 28TH MAY 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 28th May 2019 (minute nos. 1 - 10) 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. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) presented the report, which outlined details of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period July 2019 to April 2020, and included all reports that were identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 28th May 2019.

Members considered the forward work programme and agreed that a report on a Commercial Strategy be scheduled for the meeting on 1st October 2019, and that a 6-month update on the Transformation Strategy be added to the meeting for 12th November 2019. The Committee also agreed that a report on Sickness Absence be added to the Forward Work Programme (with a date to be confirmed).

Subject to the foregoing amendments, it was unanimously agreed that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

7. YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR CORPORATE SERVICES 2018/19

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Governance introduced the report, which provided Members with a performance update for the Corporate Services Directorate during 2018/19. The report set out the performance of each team within Corporate Services over the last twelve months, as well as defining the challenges ahead, the key objectives and priorities for the next twelve months and the areas where performance could be improved.

Members were reminded that during 2018/19, Corporate Services was amalgamated with Education to form the Education and Corporate Services Directorate, and that it was important to consider the performance in the context of a period of significant transition. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to note the evidence of strong performance right across Corporate Services, much of which has been achieved through excellent team working and support from across the function. Members were asked to consider the content of the report and, where appropriate, question and challenge the levels of performance presented.

Heads of Service for the Corporate Services Directorate were in attendance and invited questions from Members regarding performance across their individual service areas.

Corporate Finance

Reference was made to future challenges facing the Corporate Finance team, particularly the reduction in the Benefits Administration grant, uncertainty around New Burdens funding and the effect on Universal Credit. Officers explained that many funding streams are only committed year on year and that there are implications around the wider aspect of the grant of Universal Credit.

A Member expressed concerns regarding the significant demands on finance staff arising from the ongoing austerity programme and the need to make continual savings. Officers explained that Heads of Service are continually reviewing and monitoring the situation but that

the situation is reflective of the cost-saving measures occurring across the Authority.

Corporate Policy

Reference was made to the Wellbeing Objectives in 6 key areas of work within the 5-year Corporate Plan. A Member suggested that it would be helpful to have greater information on these areas in future Annual Performance reports, together with details of the Scrutiny Committees that these have been reported to.

Clarification was sought on the new fixed-term Transformation Manager posts within the Corporate Policy Unit. Officers explained that details of these had been included in the Future Caerphilly Transformation Strategy report presented at the last meeting, which focused on the new **#TeamCaerphilly** model of working, and offered to forward the job descriptions to the Member following the meeting.

A Member referred to the deletion of a Policy Officer post from the structure and expressed concerns that this would place additional pressure on other staff. Officers explained that this deletion had been agreed by full Council as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan savings; however, Welsh Government has provided funding to backfill lost capacity by local authorities in relation to implications assessment planning around Brexit. This funding will allow for the creation of a fixed term post to focus on Brexit and share the workload of the Policy Team.

People Services

Clarification was sought on how performance against the Council's Communications and Engagement Strategy can be measured. It was confirmed that further information on the measurement tools used for the Council's digital communication channels would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Committee discussed authority-wide compulsory redundancies and the predominance in schools in 2018/19 (26 out of 31 cases) and clarification was sought on the reasons for this. Officers explained that the majority of these cases relate to the closure of Cwmcarn High School, but that these can also be due to budget pressures in schools, and that posts can reflect the numbers on roll. The Officer confirmed that he would discuss this matter further with the Director and respond to Members in due course.

Across Health and Safety, the Scrutiny Committee noted the drop in fire risk assessments over the last two years as a result of them taking longer to produce, and sought further information on the increase in processing time. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services explained that a presentation on this topic had recently been delivered to the Corporate Health and Safety Committee, but gave assurances that all due processes are being followed in regards to fire safety and that he would ask Officers to provide this detail to Members following the meeting.

A Member referred to the Council's communication in the event of situations such as road resurfacing works and suggested that it would be helpful for a greater period of notice when cascading this information to residents. Officers confirmed that they would highlight this issue with the relevant departments.

Property Services

Concerns were expressed regarding the significant number of overdue tasks associated with Fire Risk Assessments in schools. Officers explained that this issue is cyclical in nature in that older assessments will be closed out but then new ones arise, so it is likely that there will always be a number of overdue tasks. However, it is also the case that many tasks have been outstanding for some time and the Statutory Maintenance Board is focused on improving the situation. Relevant building managers have been reminded to promptly action housekeeping tasks and to instruct physical works where required. The situation is being closely monitored and an escalation procedure is in place where progress is unacceptable. Significant progress is expected in Autumn 2019.

Customer and Digital Services

The Committee discussed performance across Procurement Services and the increase in local Welsh Purchasing Consortium Supplier spend. Members sought clarification on future work for local WHQS contractors after the programme is concluded in 2020. Officers explained that upon completion of the contract in 2020, there will be opportunities for contractors to bid for ongoing work in other areas. A Member asked what percentage of contracts are awarded to SMEs (small to medium sized enterprises) and it was confirmed that further information would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. Members also discussed payment of the living wage, and Officers explained that the Council can only encourage such payments between its contractors and staff, as it is unable to legally enforce this matter.

In discussing the Contact Centre Service, Members expressed a need for service requests to be followed through to their conclusion with the relevant service area. Officers explained that they are looking to improve the recording element via the Abavus programme and that once the Council's Customer and Digital Strategy has been implemented, customers will be able to follow the progress of their request.

Legal and Democratic Services

The Committee discussed the continuing challenges faced by Legal Services arising from the increasing number of active child welfare cases. A Member queried what percentage of the budget is allocated to the Council's Child Care Solicitors, and Officers confirmed that they would circulate this information to Members following the meeting.

A Member referred to the charges levied for Community and Town Councils during elections/by-elections, and made particular reference to the charge for the provision of polling cards. Officers confirmed that they would make enquiries with the Electoral Services Manager regarding this matter and respond to the Member in due course.

Sickness Absence in 2018/19 for Corporate Services

The Committee discussed sickness absence across Corporate Services and suggested that it would be useful for the 2017/18 sickness levels to be provided for comparison. Officers confirmed that they would arrange for this information to be circulated to Members following the meeting. A Member congratulated Property Services on their successful drive to reduce levels of sickness absence (from 7.2% in 2016/17 to 2.6% in 2018/19) and suggested that these measures could be adopted as an example of good practice

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services emphasised to Members that sickness absence continues to be treated as a priority, and that sickness levels are beginning to decrease across the authority. He reminded the Scrutiny Committee that over 80% of the Council's workforce lose no time through sickness, and that there are long-term cases where the Council needs to offer its support to its employees. Overall, the situation is improving, and the Cabinet Member confirmed that he would ask the Head of People Services to circulate some more recent data to the Committee in this regard.

Having fully considered the report, the Scrutiny Committee noted its contents and the progress made against performance objectives within the Corporate Services Directorate for 2018/19.

The meeting closed at 6.25 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 1st October 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR