



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY 2020 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Members:

C. Gordon (Corporate Services), Mrs E. Stenner (Finance, Performance and Planning)

Together with:

S. Harris (Interim Head of Business Improvement Services and Acting S151 Officer), Lynne Donovan (Head of People Services), Kathryn Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), Anwen Cullinane (Senior Policy Officer – Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation), Nadeem Akhtar (Group Accountant), Lisa Downey (Acting HR Service Manager), Juan-Antonio Garcia (Unison Branch Chair), Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), Sharon Hughes (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, L. Harding, G. Johnston and J. Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 14TH JANUARY 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 14th January 2020 (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

Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period February 2020 to April 2020, and included all reports that were identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14th January 2020.

It was noted that a workshop to consider and agree the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the year ahead had taken place immediately prior to the main meeting, and that Members had provisionally agreed items for inclusion.

It was unanimously agreed that the draft version of the Forward Work Programme for the coming year will be presented at the next Policy and Resources Scrutiny meeting for approval, prior to publication on the Councils' website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. TREASURY MANAGEMENT & CAPITAL FINANCING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS QUARTER 3 MONITORING REPORT (1ST APRIL 2019 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2019)

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Planning introduced the report to present Members with details of Treasury Management activities and Capital Financing, together with the related Prudential Indicators for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st December 2019. The report also reviewed the Treasury Management Strategy for 2019/20 as set out in the Annual Investment Strategy and Capital Financing Prudential Indicators Report. The Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the content of the report.

Members were advised that the Code of Practice on Treasury Management in the Public Services 2009, which was adopted by the Council on 12th October 2010, sets out a framework of operating procedures, which is encompassed in the Treasury Management Practices (TMPs). TMP6 (Reporting Requirements and Management Information Arrangements) provides for the submission of monitoring reports to the appropriate Committee on a quarterly basis.

A discussion took place regarding the total investments held as at 31st December 2019 and a Member queried the potential in terms of raising revenue and whether there is any money invested with the Debt Management Office. Officers confirmed that no money is invested in the Debt Management Office and advised Members that the total investments held as at 31st December 2019 had an average rate of return equating to 0.92% which is a significant improvement over placing deposits with the Debt Management Office who continue to pay a

rate of 0.50%. Assurances were given that important steps have been made in the last twelve months to diversify some of our investments and that the Treasury Management Team continues to work hard to improve returns wherever possible. Members drew particular attention to the report which detailed the portfolio of types of investments and Officers responded to queries in relation to banks and building societies. Members were advised that there will be further opportunity to receive more information from Arlingclose Ltd, the Council's Treasury Advisors, at the next Members Treasury Management Seminar which is scheduled to be held in May 2020.

Members sought clarification and further details on new Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments, published by the Welsh Government in November 2019, to be effective from the 2020/21 financial year. Officers advised that it will be looked at as part of the Commercial Strategy and dealt with in relation to the Treasury Management function.

Members referred to the figures in Appendix 1 and were advised that the current policy of internal borrowing is not sustainable in the long-term, but where prudent the policy of internal borrowing will be utilised.

Having fully considered the report, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the contents.

8. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS 2020-2024

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Planning presented the report to seek the views of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, to inform a version to be presented to Cabinet and Council for its approval for adoption as Council policy.

Members were advised that the Public Sector Equality Duty in Wales came into force on 6th April 2011 and included a requirement for public authorities to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan every four years. The Council has had a Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) in place since 2016, and must now update this for the next 4-year cycle.

Members sought clarification on Objective 2 of the Corporate Plan 2018-2023, enabling employment, which was also reflected as part of Equality Objective 2. Information was requested on an action plan for the north of the County Borough to increase employment and the number of people accessing services and commercial opportunities in town centres. Officers advised that the issues raised related more to regeneration policies rather than the Equality Plan, and highlighted the Draft Heads of the Valleys Masterplan which utilises the Cardiff Capital Region Investment Fund to support the region's economic growth.

A discussion took place surrounding the Equality Objectives included in the Strategic Equality Plan. With regard to Equality Objective 3, Community Cohesion – promote and facilitate inclusive and cohesive communities, a Member asked about the support available to Elected Members and the Voluntary Sector so that they can galvanise and facilitate community cohesion. Officers advised that training sessions with Regional Community Cohesion Officers could be arranged and different forms of current public engagement were highlighted. A discussion ensued on the need to explore better and new ways of engaging and galvanising communities in order to make them more inclusive and cohesive. Members suggested that public seminars be established with the support of Regional Community Cohesion Officers in order to improve public engagement. A discussion also ensued on the implications of possible future funding cuts to the Voluntary Sector. Members were advised that future funding was currently being considered, as Service Level Agreements with the Voluntary Sector had not been reviewed since 2008.

Members raised the issue of deprivation as a key factor that can lead to examples of inequality. Officers advised Members about partnership working that had taken place in order to combat

challenges caused by deprivation. The regeneration of the Lansbury Park Housing Estate in Caerphilly was given as an example.

Members sought clarification with regard to Equality Objective 7, Reducing the Gender Pay Gap. A Member questioned why part-time posts, which are mostly held by females, attracted salaries in the lower quartiles, according to data contained in the Strategic Equality Plan. Officers advised that the data indicated that part-time posts attracted salaries in the lower quartiles, regardless of gender. However, because of societal reasons the responsibility of childcare still falls disproportionately upon women and that therefore females tended to favour part-time employment in order to accommodate this commitment. One Member queried the suggested action of reviewing and updating HR policies regularly to include matters such as flexible working, part-time or job-share options and shared parental leave. It was commented that there is a need to understand why these working patterns are chosen in order to make bolder decisions. Officers advised that a review would help the Council to understand the size and causes of any pay gaps and identify any issues that need to be addressed. It was outlined how a future action plan would help tackle any causes identified. Discussion ensued on further measures such as the possibility of developing childcare facilities within Council buildings. Officers advised that a report on the Gender Pay Gap will be presented to Cabinet next month. Members were also advised that the Council was confident that any gender pay gap did not stem from paying male and female employees differently for the same or equivalent work. The gender pay gap is the result of roles in which male and females currently work and the salaries that these roles attract.

A discussion took place surrounding Equality Objective 5, Welsh Language – to ensure the Welsh speaking public can access services that comply with the statutory requirements. Members were advised internal working practices continue to evolve to ensure that the principle of language equality is respected in every aspect of service provision. To assist the Council in meeting the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards and to meet the needs of the Welsh speaking population of the county borough, partnership working with organisations such as; Menter Iaith Caerfilli, Fforwm Iaith, Welsh medium schools etc. is undertaken.

The Chair summarised the views expressed by Members during the meeting. It was outlined that the Strategic Equality Plan should include:

- (i) The establishment of public seminars in communities to increase greater Community Cohesion. Regional Community Cohesion Officers to be asked to explore new ways of promoting and increasing public engagement.
- (ii) Exploration of new ways of eliminating the Gender Pay Gap, the reduction of which was identified as an Equality Objective in the draft Strategic Equality Plan.

Following consideration of the report and having noted its contents it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) The views outlined in 1.7 are given full consideration.
- (ii) The Strategic Equality Plan, Objectives and Actions 2020-2024 be presented to Council for its approval for adoption as Council policy.

9. SAFTER RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE AND DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SERVICE (DBS) POLICIES

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report to consult with the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Safer Recruitment Procedure and

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Policies prior to consideration by Cabinet. Members were advised that Caerphilly County Borough Council's current Recruitment and Selection Procedure was last reviewed in 2004. Approval is now being sought from Cabinet to introduce a revised procedure that is reflective of current safe recruitment practice and equal opportunity.

The Scrutiny Committee was advised that the focus of the proposed Safer Recruitment Procedure is on that which is static, i.e. equal opportunities and safer recruitment practice, both of which are non-negotiable requirements in recruitment practice. In this format, it provides a set of guidelines which ensure a fair and objective process is followed in recruitment, which takes account of employment and equalities legislation together with Safeguarding best practice when recruiting to a post and/or engaging agency staff / volunteers to work across the Council. This Committee heard how the proposed procedure reflects the Council's current safe operational practice and the statutory guidance and best practice principles of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWCSB); the Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB) and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) where awareness and good practice is promoted.

Members were informed that the DBS issued guidance in Autumn 2018 entitled 'A Guide to School Governors and Elected Councillor Roles in Wales'. This guidance now gives the Council the opportunity to review its current operational practice to ensure that it is consistently robust and safe. In response to this guidance, Committee Services, HR, Education and Social Services colleagues responsible for safeguarding seek to extend the operational DBS checking process to include Elected Members and School Governors as outlined in the DBS Policy and Procedure documents attached at Appendices 2 and 3.

Juan- Antonia Garcia (Unison Branch Chair) addressed the Scrutiny Committee and stated that he welcomed the policy review, but Unison did have concerns about the current safeguarding training and access to professional development opportunities or supervision for agency workers. Mr Garcia agreed to share and explain his concerns regarding agency practices with HR outside of the meeting. He reiterated that Unison welcomed the policy review.

One Member asked for clarification with regard to the cost of enhanced level DBS checks for Elected Members who serve as School Governors. Officers advised that there was no cost to the School Governor as the role met the DBS definition of an unpaid volunteer, but there would be an administrative charge of £2.50, which is the current fee for processing DBS Checks via E-Bulk in each case, which would be met by the Council.

Following consideration of the report and having noted its contents it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) The Safer Recruitment Procedure attached at Appendix 1 be approved. This will replace the current 2004 Recruitment and Selection Procedure.
- (ii) The DBS Policy attached at Appendix 2 be approved. This Policy will be published on the Council's website.
- (iii) The DBS Policy relating to School Governors attached at Appendix 3 be approved. This Policy will then be circulated to Schools for recommended adoption.

The meeting closed at 18.53 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 29th September 2020, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR