



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 23RD FEBRUARY 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. A. Adams, Mrs E. M. Aldworth, L. Harding, G. Johnston, C. P. Mann, B. Miles, Mrs D. Price, R. Saralis, Mrs M. E. Sargent, G. Simmonds, and L. G. Whittle.

Cabinet Members:

Cllr. C. Gordon (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services) and Cllr. Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Customer Service).

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy), R. Williams (Assistant Accountant), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairperson reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click here to view.](#)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 12TH JANUARY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12th January 2021 (minute numbers 1 - 10) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MINUTES – 21ST JANUARY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the special meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 21st January 2021 (minute numbers 1 - 3) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

6. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report which outlined the reports planned for the period February 2021 to May 2021 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 12th January 2021. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

7. 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.

8. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SIX MONTH UPDATE 2020

Cllr. Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Customer Service) introduced the report which presented the Scrutiny Committee with the new Corporate Services Directorate Performance Assessment (DPA), which is part of the Council's new Performance Framework. S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy) informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Council started reviewing its Performance Management Framework two years ago with a view to making better use of the wide range of information and intelligence that it holds and to future proof any new processes in line with the new Performance legislation. Members were advised that the framework was piloted in 2019 and endorsed by Cabinet in February 2020. Part of the framework was to develop a reporting dashboard at directorate level. It was highlighted that the Directorate Performance Assessment is for the first six months from April 2020 to September 2020. R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and

Corporate Service) shared key information, primarily in relation to the Director's Summary, and provided the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the reporting dashboard at directorate level and how it fits into the overall framework, and expressed thanks to the staff across Corporate Services for their dedication during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Points of clarification were requested on various aspects of the report and Officers responded to the points raised. In response to a query regarding the RAG status for the air quality situation at Hafodyrynys, it was highlighted that the Directorate Performance Assessment dashboard provides information and analysis for the period April 2020 to September 2020. Members were advised that in terms of the air quality situation at Hafodyrynys, Legal Services has suggested work has started with reasonable progress achieved, classified in terms of the first six months of the financial year.

A Member sought clarification on what is being done to reduce the number of data breaches. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that due to the overnight change in working practices arising from Covid-19 there was inevitably an issue in the early stages, but a large amount of work has been undertaken to ensure that the number of data breaches is reduced, including learning and awareness raising with staff and online training. In response to a query regarding the Office 365 rollout, Members were advised that everybody who has requested an Office licence has received one. Members were further advised that the 2021/22 Budget Proposals Report due to be considered by Council on the 24th February 2021 includes proposed additional funding to support the rollout of the additional features within Office 365. It was highlighted that there has been huge progress within this area.

Further discussion took place regarding sickness absence and the Scrutiny Committee was informed that sickness absence has been increasing over the recent months due to Covid related sickness absence as well as other sickness absences. It was clarified that in terms of Covid related sickness absence, it is across the board and not just frontline services. It was noted that in terms of some office-based staff, sickness absence has reduced because people are able to work from home.

Members discussed, challenged and scrutinised the information contained within the report.

9. TREASURY MANAGEMENT & CAPITAL FINANCING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS QUARTER 3 MONITORING REPORT (1ST APRIL 2020 - 31ST DECEMBER 2020)

Councillor Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Customer Services) 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 2020 to 31st December 2020. Members were informed that the authority is obliged to approve and publish a number of indicators relevant to Capital Finance and Treasury Management. It was highlighted that the summary of the report shows the requirement of the authority in reporting this information. Members were asked to note the contents of the report to comply with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services.

A discussion took place regarding the borrowing activity. In response to a Members query, S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer) confirmed that no external borrowing has taken place and that internal funds are being used in the short to medium-term. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that LOBO loans will be kept under review and that the authority acknowledges there is an element of refinancing risk even though in the current interest rate environment lenders are unlikely to exercise their options. R. Williams (Assistant Accountant) provided a summary of recent work that has been undertaken in relation to longer-term investments and reference was made to a Members' Seminar with Arlingclose on 28th April 2021, where Members will be provided with a detailed economic outlook and updated on the current investment options.

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

10. WHOLE-AUTHORITY REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (PERIOD 9)

Councillor Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Customer Service) introduced the report to provide details of projected whole-authority revenue budget expenditure for the 2020/21 financial year, including an update on the funding received from the Welsh Government (WG) in respect of the financial implications of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

A discussion took place regarding additional costs incurred and income lost as a direct consequence of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In response to a Members query, the Scrutiny Committee was advised that there is a robust process in place around claiming the additional costs and income losses related to Covid and the excellent relationship between local authorities and the Welsh Government throughout this process was highlighted to Members. In respect of the expenditure that has been disallowed at this stage, the authority is continuing to send additional information to Welsh Government where things are pending, but certain elements of expenditure have been disallowed. Members were advised that the disallowed expenditure relating to the Housing Revenue Account will need to be absorbed within that account because it is ringfenced. In respect of the General Fund areas where additional costs have not been funded, Members were asked to recall that at its meeting on the 10th September 2020, Council approved a recommendation to transfer £2.713m into a earmarked reserve to meet potential unfunded additional costs arising from Covid-19. As part of the year-end process for the 2020/21 financial year any disallowed Covid-19 additional costs and income losses will be funded from this earmarked reserve.

During the course of debate concerns were expressed regarding Council Tax recovery. S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer) confirmed that support has been received from Welsh Government due to collection rates being adversely affected by the impact of the pandemic and the Scrutiny Committee was reminded of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which is available to support households who have difficulty with their Council Tax payments due to their financial circumstances. Members were advised that the Council will continue to recover arrears moving forward.

Having noted the contents of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Supported the proposed use of reserves totalling £648k as detailed in section 5.3 of the report, prior to Cabinet consideration.

The meeting closed at 6.28 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 6th April 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR