



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY,
28TH SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. A. Adams, C. Cuss, L. Harding, G. Johnston, C. P. Mann, S. Morgan, R. Saralis, Mrs M. E. Sargent, J. Taylor and L. G. Whittle.

Cabinet Members: Councillor C. Gordon (Corporate Services).

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor K. Etheridge.

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 E. M. Aldworth, Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead and G. Simmonds.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 25TH MAY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 25th May 2021 (minute nos. 1 – 9) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. SPECIAL MINUTES – 23RD JUNE 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the special meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd June 2021 (minute nos. 1 – 4) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In relation to Item 4 a Member referred to a question raised at the meeting regarding the Community Empowerment Fund, which was noted by the Scrutiny Committee.

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

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined the reports planned for the period September 2021 to February 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 25th May 2021. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

In response to a Members query, the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate services provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Commercial and Investment Strategy report.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms 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. NOTICE OF MOTION – REVIEW OF COUNCIL CONSITUTION AND MEMBER PROTOCOL

Consideration was given to the Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor K. Etheridge and supported by Councillors D. Cushing, N. Dix, A. Farina-Childs, C. Mann, B. Owen, G.

Simmonds, T. Parry, J. Taylor and L. Whittle. The Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider the Notice of Motion as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report and make an appropriate recommendation to Council.

Councillor K. Etheridge presented the Notice of Motion, to ask Caerphilly County Borough Council to review the Councils Constitution and Members Protocol with an emphasis on the procedure of delegated powers within the authority on major decisions made, which may have implications for all elected members during their term of office, with the remit looking at engagement and consultation with respective ward members prior to implementation. He called for the establishment of an all-party working group to be set up and report recommendations with implementation taking place prior to the May 2022 elections on changes which are required.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the establishment of an all-party working group. It was considered that further scrutiny offers no further democracy to residents, it would slow down the decision-making process and add a further layer of bureaucracy. However, it was argued that as the all-party working group would be making suggestions to Council it would not be adding any further layers of bureaucracy.

A Member highlighted that the Constitution has been in place since 2002 and has worked in everybody's interest. It was felt that the proposals put forward by Councillor K. Etheridge will not improve the way the Council operates. In response, it was pointed out that the Constitution is an evolving document which does get amended periodically. It was argued that from time to time is necessary to review the Constitution, in light of circumstances as they evolve, to see if there are better ways of working.

During the course of debate a Member sought advice from the Monitoring Officer as to whether a working group is an appropriate way to amend the Constitution. The Member referred to Article 14 which covers the review and revision of the Constitution, which places the key role in recommending amendments in the hands of the Monitoring Officer. In response the Monitoring Officer provided his views on the Notice of Motion and addressed a number of issues raised by Councillor K. Etheridge. Members were advised that the Monitoring Officers in Wales are currently in the process of putting together a draft Constitution to be adopted by the 22 Councils in Wales and that it would be brought to their attention when it is available. It was noted that it is a role of the Monitoring Officer to keep the constitution under review, however it was highlighted that ultimately it is a matter for Council. In conclusion, Members were reminded that a series of Corporate reviews are being undertaken, one of which is on Decision Making, and some of the points that are raised within the Notice of Motion are covered in the Corporate Review. In response to the comments made by the Monitoring Officer a concern was raised in that there was no timescale provided for the draft Constitution and it was suggested that an all-party working group would add value and improve it.

A concern was also raised regarding the timescale for the establishment of an all-party working group, to be set up and report recommendations with implementation taking place prior to the May 2022 elections.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the Notice of Motion as outlined in paragraph 5.1 of the report. The Notice of Motion was moved and seconded, by way of Microsoft Forms voting (and in noting that there were 4 votes For, 8 votes Against and 0 Abstentions) the motion was not supported.

RECOMMENDED to Council:

- (i) That the notice of motion not be supported.

9. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2021-24.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report to consult with Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Workforce Development Strategy 2021-24. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that the Council's *Team Caerphilly – Better Together* Transformation Strategy was adopted by Cabinet in June 2019. As part of this Strategy, ten corporate reviews are being undertaken to transform how the Council works and Workforce Development is one of them. It was highlighted that one of the actions of this review is to produce a Workforce Development Strategy to develop employees to maximise their capabilities, effectiveness and resilience to support the re-purposing and re-shaping of services in response to the many challenges the Council faces, moving forward.

A Member sought clarification and further details as to when staff would be returning back to the office, particularly in relation to new employees and career development. The Head of People Services advised the Scrutiny Committee that the current advice from Welsh Government is to work from home where possible. In terms of career development, Members were informed that conferences and training are still taking place, including face-to-face training. It was explained that through My Time conversations managers can identify and support training needs. In terms of new employees, it was highlighted that there is a process in place for new starters which does include attending the workplace, with risk assessments in place so that they can be mentored safely.

Reference was made to the gender by salary range in the Workforce Development Strategy and it was highlighted that for the majority of salary ranges the proportion of females to males is high, however for the higher salary ranges there is a noticeable reverse. The Head of People Services explained that the gender pay gap is reported on every year and the information it provides is that there are more female staff in part-time posts, which is a good reflection on the Council in that it offers flexibility for staff. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that there are a number of female staff in Senior Officer posts and that there is a fair recruitment process in order to appoint the best candidate. In response to a query regarding the number of employees and percentage of the workforce with a disability, the Scrutiny Committee was advised that employees do not have to notify or record that they have a disability.

During the course of debate the Head of People Services addressed a number concerns raised by Members in relation to staff workload, mental health, and the well-being of staff who are working from home. The results of the Staff Survey were outlined and the Scrutiny Committee was made aware of the very positive responses in relation to agile working and flexibility. It was commented that a Members Seminar will be held to consider the results of the Staff Survey, which will include agile working. The Head of People Services also responded to concerns raised regarding resilience and outlined the Workforce Planning Framework and Manager Toolkit. In response to a Members query, clarification and further information were provided in relation to the development of a workforce data dashboard. A further discussion took place surrounding abuse of the system and monitoring computer usage and screen time. The Scrutiny Committee was made aware of the importance of good working relationships and communication between managers and staff, to ensure work is being completed and staff are supported.

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

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the contents of the report.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

- (i) That the Workforce Development Strategy 2021-24 be approved.

10. EMPLOYEE WELLBEING STRATEGY 2021-24.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report consult with Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Employee Wellbeing Strategy 2021-24. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that the Council's *Team Caerphilly – Better Together* Transformation Strategy was adopted by Cabinet in June 2019. As part of this Strategy, ten corporate reviews are being undertaken to transform how the Council works and Workforce Development is one of them. It was highlighted that one of the actions of this review is to produce a Wellbeing Strategy, detailing how we will work together to fully support employees' health and wellbeing.

A Member referred to the staff survey summary and raised a concern in relation to the results on whether the Council is changing how employees work for the better. The Head of People Services provided the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how the information on the staff survey was collated and highlighted that there was an opportunity for staff to also provide comments in relation to some of the questions, which are currently being reviewed.

Members referred to the sickness absence summary and clarification and further information were sought, particularly in relation to non work-related stress. The Head of People Services provided an overview on the reasons for sickness absence and highlighted the importance of analysing the data to identify patterns, trends and areas of concern. In response to the query regarding non work-related stress Members were advised that, in terms of what is reported, the information is provided by the employee. It was highlighted that measures and processes are put in place to support staff with work-related stress and also to support non work-related stress.

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

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the contents of the report.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

- (ii) That the Employee Wellbeing Strategy 2021-24 be approved.

11. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT YEAR END REPORT 2020/21.

The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services introduced the report to present the Scrutiny Committee with the year-end Corporate Services Performance Assessment which is part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. Members were advised the Directorate Performance Assessment (DPA) is the Directorate's self-assessment and forms part of the Council's overall self-assessment activity. It provides information and analysis for the year ending 2020/21. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services highlighted the importance when exploring the performance information set out within the DPA for Corporate Services that the updates are assessed against the continued difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Member sought clarification and further information on the level of underspend against Corporate Finance. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services advised Members that regular budget monitoring reports, which provide detailed analysis of any underspends, are regularly presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that an explanation would be sought from the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer, subsequent to the meeting, and communicated to Members. In response to a Members query the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services provided an explanation on the level of risk in relation to WHQS funding and the RAG status.

A discussion took place regarding the level of risk in relation to sickness absence and it was highlighted that sickness absence across the Authority remains above the Wales average, leading to reduced productivity and a negative image of the Authority. In response, the Director for Education and Corporate Services provided the Scrutiny Committee with an explanation of what actions are being undertaken to address the risks and an update on the progress. The variation on the way this information is reported nationally was also highlighted to Members.

Members reviewed the Corporate Services Directorate Performance Assessment 2020/21 End of Year Update and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within.

The meeting closed at 7.21 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 9th November 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR