



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 27TH SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, G. Enright, D. Ingram-Jones, C. P. Mann, A. McConnell, D. Preece, J. Reed, C. Thomas, L. G. Whittle, and C. Wright.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor Mrs. E. Stenner and Councillor N. George.

Together with:

Officers: C. HARRY (Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), L. Dallimore (Unison Branch Secretary), S. Pugh (Head of Communications), S. Ford (Communications Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer), and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillors S. Morgan and J. Pritchard.

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](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillors Mrs. E.M. Aldworth, C. Cuss, J. Taylor, and A. Whitcombe.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Scrutiny Committee noted that Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services, would not be present during agenda item no. 6 'Workforce Capacity and Associated Challenges' as the subject of the report had a potential impact on the Corporate Directors. No further declarations were received.

3. MINUTES – 12TH JULY 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2022 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 12th July 2022 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

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined the reports planned for the period September 2022 to March 2023 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 12th July 2022. 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 Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES.

The Scrutiny Committee noted that Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services, would not be present during agenda item no. 6 'Workforce Capacity and Associated Challenges' as the subject of the report had a potential impact on the Corporate Directors.

The Chief Executive presented the report to Members which provided an update of some of the major issues and challenges currently impacting on workforce capacity and included some initial proposals to provide additional resources into key areas.

Members were advised that since the beginning of the pandemic, the Council, its staff and elected members have been attempting to manage a pandemic response, to maintain service

delivery, to oversee the introduction of new services such as Caerphilly Cares, and to recover from the pandemic, whilst also seeking to transform the whole organisation and the communities it serves.

Members were informed of the proposed options available to the Council in order to manage the challenges detailed within the report. This included the development of an internal recruitment team, the creation of additional posts of Deputy Chief Executive and Deputy Section 151 Officer, and to endorse the recent appointment of a Cost-of-Living Co-ordinator.

The UNISON Branch Secretary offered her comments for Committee consideration. The union representative highlighted the reduction in staff numbers at Caerphilly County Borough Council over the 17 years that she had worked for the council. Members heard about the pressures faced by a significant number of employees as some vacancies were not filled due to austerity and vacancy management. It was outlined how an internal recruitment team was fully supported as it was necessary to attract the best candidates for new roles and the union requested regular progress reports on this matter. The branch secretary also welcomed how the proposals in the report were to be funded through the use of existing budgets.

A Member requested a breakdown of the leavers table contained in 5.13 of the report. The Member also asked about the emerging themes of the exit survey process and for details on the current structure of the Council's recruitment team. The Head of People Services advised Members that a breakdown of leavers would be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting, and analysis of the exit survey would need to be collated and then provided when the process had been in place for 3-6 months and that currently there was no specific dedicated recruitment team within Human Resources.

A Member queried the creation of new posts at the higher end of the salary scale whilst cutting front-line services. The Member also sought clarification on not filling the 3 vacant Head of Service posts. The Chief Executive recognised the sensitivities outlined and advised Members that the priorities and pace for implementation set by Councillors and communities demanded greater capacity within the leadership structure. It was also highlighted that within the Corporate Management Team there were three statutory officers and that currently there was only a deputy for one of those positions.

A Member queried the need to create two new posts to deputise for statutory officers at the Corporate Management level. The Member also sought more information on the specific responsibilities associated with the new positions. The Chief Executive advised that there was not sufficient capacity within the Financial Team to designate Deputy Section 151 Officer responsibilities. It was also outlined that if one of the three Corporate Directors were designated with Deputy Chief Executive duties there would not be enough capacity at a leadership level to deliver the priorities at the pace demanded. Members were also given comparative details on the Corporate Management structure of other Local Authorities which were higher than the current leadership team at Caerphilly County Borough Council. The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer advised Members that the role and responsibilities of his proposed Deputy were set out in sections 5.35 – 5.39 of the report. Members heard how he needed support to deliver the Council's agenda at a time of significant financial challenges, he also outlined how having a Deputy would allow him to concentrate on the Council's strategic focus.

A Member asked if figures were available so that a comparison could be made between the model of using an external recruitment agency and having an internal recruitment team. The Head of People Services outlined how a recruitment agency had been used to fill one post and that the associated costs of using them would be circulated to Members. Members heard how suitable candidates for other posts within the Council would be missed if a recruitment

agency was used on a post-by-post basis. The Member queried the use of only one recruitment agency. The Head of People Services outlined how a procurement process had been undertaken before engaging a recruitment agency and the procedure had been deemed too costly which then prompted the plans to develop an internal recruitment team.

A Member asked about the links to local colleges as part of the workforce development strategy. The Head of People Services outlined how there were current links with external providers and that this had proved very beneficial when implementing the apprenticeship scheme. Members heard how the proposed recruitment team would build on these existing links. The Member then asked about offering students work placements, the Head of People Services outlined how this was already happening and would be developed further in the future.

A Member queried why a moratorium could not be paid to officers to act-up and meet the statutory requirements of Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer on a temporary basis as required. The Member claimed that the Council had a shortage of staff at lower salary levels, and he could not support the proposed creation of the two new senior posts. The Chief Executive outlined how it was in her professional opinion that additional capacity at a senior level was needed in order to deliver priorities such as positive intervention on the cost-of-living challenges and climate change at the pace demanded by Members. It was outlined how the organisation had not progressed during the leadership of an Acting Chief Executive as the Corporate Director given the temporary responsibility also had to run two large directorates. The Chief Executive advised that this was a choice for Members but outlined how it was her professional opinion that the Council was at risk of not meeting statutory requirements if this additional capacity was not put in place.

A Member thought that the report lacked a reshaped management model so that Committee Members could make a more informed opinion and queried how the associated services would be run in the future if the three vacant Head of Service posts were not filled as their budget had been redirected to fund the proposals under consideration. The Chief Executive gave Members an overview of the current responsibilities of the Corporate Management Team and outlined how priorities would be redistributed in the future if Members were minded to approve the proposed changes.

A Member advised that he could not recall the vacant Heads of Service posts being expressed as saving in previous budget reports but welcomed the use of associated funding to the creation of the proposed new positions.

A Member sought clarification relating to sickness/absence in the report. The Member requested a fuller breakdown including comparisons with other local authorities and also claimed that the data contained in the sickness/absence chart did not add-up. The Member also requested a breakdown of the oncosts highlighted in the salary range in section 5.34. The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer advised that oncosts of 36% were paid on salary ranges. Members heard how the figure in the report was £137,000 for the post in question and that all proposals were subject to agreement at Full Council. The Head of People Services advised that the figures in the sickness/absence chart were not calculated in a way that allowed them to add-up to the totals given and that more information would be provided on these calculations outside of the meeting.

A Member sought further information on the proposed recruitment team in regard to how the total number of 7 posts was reached and also the grading structure for these new positions. The Head of People Services advised that the number of team members was based on the potential workload of the Recruitment Team and that the grading structure reflected the duties and responsibilities for each post and would be set out in the specific job descriptions.

A Member commented on the impact of managing sickness better on delivering services and also queried the potential role of a Deputy Chief Executive. The Chief Executive outlined how additional capacity was needed to lead on the cost-of-living crisis, the climate change agenda, the Corporate Plan priorities and also helping to oversee the Place Shaping programme. Members also heard how Audit Wales had played a monitoring role and had recognised the risks currently carried and believed that for an organisation the size of Caerphilly County Borough Council, additional resilience was needed within the management structure.

Having noted the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 6 for, 3 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

3.1 (iii) Introduce additional staffing resource as detailed in 5.18 – 5.40 of the report, consisting of:

- The development of an internal recruitment team.
- The proposal to create an additional post and designate as a Deputy Chief Executive.
- Proposal to create an additional post and designate as Deputy Section 151 officer.

3.2 Endorse the recent appointment of a Cost-of-Living Co-ordinator as detailed at paragraph 5.50.

3.3 Members are asked to endorse the financial implications as detailed in paragraphs 8.1 – 8.3 and specifically note that the proposals will not result in any additional financial resources being required as they will be fully funded through the virement of existing budgets.

7. UPDATE ON AGILE WORKING.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Property introduced the report that updated Members on the progress of embedding Agile Working principles across the organisation and outlined the steps necessary to formalise these practices.

Members were advised that during the pandemic, staff who were requested to work from home, were still able to deliver key services to the public even when the communities were 'locked down'. The democratic process was initially suspended at the very beginning of the pandemic, however through Microsoft Teams, the Council were able to reinstate its decision-making process, with elected members able to fully participate in the decision-making from their homes.

Members were informed of this working practice that has continued over the last 24 months and the introduction of legislation that now makes hybrid meeting capabilities, a requirement of Council business across the Council.

Members were advised of the current benefits of the new ways of working which included, a reduction in unproductive time spent travelling to and from work and to meetings across the borough, reducing CO2 emissions, employees finding a better work/life balance that includes caring responsibilities, increasing service resilience in relation to snow days and red weather warnings, and reducing the number of administrative buildings in operation.

Members were informed of the results of recent staff surveys which demonstrated that approximately 80% of staff either preferred to mostly work from home or split their working

days equally between work and home. Members were also advised that a future capacity planning exercise had been carried out during the Spring of 2022 for Heads of Service to establish staff working patterns and capacity requirements for buildings against the needs of the citizens.

Members were informed that the report gave them a position statement on the Councils' current approach to agile working, setting out some of the potential benefits in formalising agile working and the work of the Agile Corporate Review Team on the development of an agile hub at Ty Penallta. Members were referred to paragraph 5.15 of the report which provided Members with information on workstreams, projects and estimated completion dates.

The UNISON Branch Secretary offered her comments for Committee consideration. The union representative outlined that UNISON was supportive of agile working but had concerns over the outcome of pieces of work referred to in the report which had not been shared with the trade unions. Members heard that these were a future capacity planning exercise, a categorisation exercise, scoping work on initial designs to reconfigure Penallta House and the assumed cost savings associated with the release of surplus buildings and facilities. The Branch Secretary advised that she would like the outcomes shared with trade unions and Scrutiny Members.

A Member queried what would happen to surplus office furniture in Council buildings. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that a flexible working space was planned for floor one at Penallta House and this would involve recycling furniture to create this new working environment. The Member also raised the issue of costs associated with working from home such as the use of additional heating and asked if there would be any compensation for staff. The Head of People Services advised Members that discussions at a national level were taking place on issues such as a Home Working Allowance, and that Members would be advised of the outcome.

A Member asked about the impact of the proposals on the carbon footprint and queried why sickness levels were still high after two years of agile working. The Member also asked if the proposed Hubs could also be used by outside organisations as a way of attracting additional revenue. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services outlined the reduction in commuting miles which was having a positive impact on the carbon footprint, highlighted factors outside the Council's control such as Covid-19 which had an impact on sickness levels and welcomed the opportunity to attract additional revenue which would be kept under review.

A Member highlighted the frustration of not being able to speak to an officer when their landline had been diverted due to working from home. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that back-office telephony was a challenge that was being addressed by an ongoing project referred to in the report.

A Member highlighted the social benefits of working in an office and interacting with colleagues as opposed to working alone from home and expressed his concerns. The Head of People Services advised that management arrangements were the same whether an employee worked in the office or at home. Members heard about "My Time" one-to-one conversations between managers and staff, how workplace working was still an option and also how staff surveys showed satisfaction with the support they received. The Chair asked the UNISON Branch Secretary for her opinion. The Branch Secretary advised that Member Surveys had shown that the vast majority welcomed the flexibility of working from home. However, a significant number preferred a hybrid system of both working from home on some days and the workplace on others.

A Member highlighted the importance of ensuring that the workplace environment was attractive for those members of staff who preferred to work in the office. The Member believed it was important for such people to have their own desk as opposed to a shared alternative.

The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services advised that zones would be established for existing teams. These zones would have a mixture of both fixed and hot desks.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report, as per the recommendations. It was also noted that no negative comments were received on the intention to develop Ty Penallta as an Agile Working Hub.

8. SHAPING THE POLICY ON CASH COLLECTION.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report, which provided Members with an update on the payment methods currently utilised by residents and Members were requested to consider the recommendations to Cabinet in respect of the future policy on cash payments.

Members were advised that the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on income levels for the Council, which had been due to the temporary closure of income generating services, the closure of Customer Services Offices, and the economic impact of the pandemic on residents and businesses.

Members were advised that the Welsh Government had funded much of the income lost as a consequence of the pandemic through the Covid-19 Hardship Fund, with funding totalling £6.087m received for the 2020/21 financial year, and £2.237m for 2021/22. The Hardship Fund ceased on 31st March 2022 with Local Authorities now having to manage any ongoing income losses through their own revenue budgets.

Members were also advised that the footfall at the Customer Services Offices was currently being kept under review and that if there is an increase in demand, the opening hours will be subject to further review. Staff are currently travelling to the offices to call handle or deal with online requests as it is these channels where demand is being experienced.

The UNISON Branch Secretary offered her comments for Committee consideration and acknowledged that cash payments fell during the pandemic but advised Members that people earning less than £10,000 per annum were fourteen times more likely to be dependent on cash than those who earn more than £30,000 per year, primarily for budgeting reasons. Also, according to the Financial Inclusion Commission in 2015 circa 2M adults in the UK did not have a bank account. The Branch Secretary advised that as the Council considered developing alternative payment mechanisms the Integrated Impact Assessment should adequately reflect the implications on those with lower incomes. UNISON was broadly supportive of the report but highlighted that it would not support the removal of the ability to pay in cash in its entirety.

The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer highlighted to Members that cash payments can still be made in different ways at no cost to the payee. Post Office Payment Cards were offered as an example and Members heard how payments by this method was up 44.27% on pre-pandemic transaction levels, and Members were advised that there are currently 4,146 active users of the Post Office Payment Cards.

A Member queried how cash payments could be made in in Schools, Tourism Venues, Leisure Centres, Libraries and Social Services establishments; and yet not in Customer Services Offices as it should be a personal choice for individuals. The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services reiterated that cash payments could still be made at post offices and also highlighted the additional costs involved with accepting such payments in Customer Services Offices, which was included in the report.

The Chair suggested to Members that the future free school meals policy for Primary Schools would also have an impact on cash collections in schools.

Having considered the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

3.1.1 That Cabinet agrees that due to the move to alternative payment methods experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, cash payments will not be re-introduced in Customer Services Offices.

3.1.2 That Cabinet notes that cash payments will continue to be accepted in Schools, Tourism Venues, Leisure Centres, Libraries and Social Services establishments, and that opportunities to move to alternative payment mechanisms will be fully explored wherever possible.

The meeting closed at 7.43 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2022, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR