



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 8TH NOVEMBER 2022 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs. E.M. Aldworth, C. Cuss, G. Enright, D. Ingram-Jones, C. P. Mann, A. McConnell, J. Reed, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, L. G. Whittle, and C. Wright.

Cabinet Member:

Councillor Mrs. E. Stenner.

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), S. Richards (Head of Transformation), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), I. Evans (Procurement and Information Manager), R. Roberts (Business Improvement Manager), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), G. Jenkins (Head of Children's Services), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer), and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillors C. Andrews, and J. Pritchard, and B. Roberts (Audit Wales).

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 Councillor D. Preece.

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 – 27TH SEPTEMBER 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2022 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 27th September 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 November 2022 to March 2023 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 27th September 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 13 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's 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. PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY HUBS.

Cabinet Member, Councillor Mrs. E. Stenner introduced the report which sets a proposal for the development of Community Hubs in localities across the county borough. The proposal has been developed as part of the corporate review process. It centres on suggestions for an

improved provision of services in communities, with shared use of the Council's assets with communities and other partners.

Members were advised that the Council has several front-facing locations in which customers can access specific council services. Co-located Customer Services and Library provision has been in place at key locations for a number of years. The proposal builds on and develops the historic model to suggest a more holistic service offer and at the same time proposes opening up spaces in Council run buildings for community use and for use by partners.

Members were also informed that the way in which services are delivered, has altered with more services meeting customers in the community. Digital provision of services has increased but this is not appropriate for all customers and that digital assistance in a face-to-face environment is required on occasion. The pandemic has accelerated agile working and the climate emergency has refocused the concentration of the whole public sector on the most efficient use of building assets. Members were advised that the proposal considers the future configuration and use of the Council's front-facing asset base and were referred to the recommendations included in the report, to develop the Community Hub model of future service delivery.

A Member queried if the availability and cost of building and design services would have an impact on the delivery of the Rhymney Library project. The Member also enquired why the proposal concentrated initially on six Tier One sites when it might be quicker and cheaper to explore less ambitious Tier Two and Tier Three sites first. In response to the first question the Head of Transformation advised that an additional funding bid had been submitted to Welsh Government as the initial project costs had increased due to supply chain challenges. Members heard how official confirmation was yet to be received but that the Welsh Government had been positive about the outcome, and it was hoped that the project would be completed by the end of March 2023. On the second question the Head of Children's Services, as Chair of the Corporate Review into the proposal, highlighted that the proposal for Tier Three sites enhanced existing services and would not have grant funding such as that identified for the Rhymney Library Hub. The Member wanted to know if it was the plan to develop all the Tier One sites before moving on to the smaller locations. The Head of Transformation outlined how the libraries identified under Tier One were key strategic sites and as such offered larger premises in which to host services. The Corporate Policy Manager added that Tier One sites provided the best option for providing the planned holistic customer presence before progressing to the other sites.

A Member observed that the report concentrated on Tier One sites and that there was a lack of information on timescales within the proposal. The Head of Children's Services advised that his review recommended concentrating on Tier One sites as the demand for services at the other sites was yet to be determined. It was also outlined how the vast majority of Customer Services interaction was via telephone and email. The Member highlighted that older residents in villages might prefer not to travel into the town centres to access services. The Head of Children's Services highlighted that the key drivers for the Corporate Review were asset rationalisation, modernising services and considering efficiencies and savings going forward. It was also reiterated that residents were changing the way they engaged with the Council.

A Member raised partnership working and queried if the proposed hubs would be able to accommodate the needs of voluntary sector organisations. It was suggested that dealing with housing enquiries at Community Hubs might alleviate telephone demand. The Head of Children's Services advised that there would be bookable space for voluntary organisations and statutory partners within the Community Hubs. On the issue of dealing with issues such as housing enquiries at the Hubs it was highlighted to Members that this was already happening. The Corporate Policy Manager advised that the intention was to extend this offer to other services in the future. The Head of Transformation highlighted that libraries were already widely used by community groups.

A Member queried the provision of frontline services for rural areas under the proposal discussed. It was outlined by the Corporate Policy Manager that the Corporate Review of Community Hubs focussed on existing buildings that could host services for residents. The Member raised the lack of Council buildings in some rural communities. The Head of Transformation highlighted the Sustainable Communities for Learning initiative under the 21st Century Schools programme. Members heard how in order to maximise the use of school buildings the Council could work with Headteachers and governing bodies to allow access for services outside of school hours.

A Member queried whether a full business case had been conducted for the Community Hubs proposal outlining such issues as costs and risks. The Head of Children's Services highlighted a raft of information that had been considered prior to the Corporate Review's recommendations. It was decided not to share all this information in one report due to the scale of the data which relates to every building reviewed. Members heard how the review found that usage for buildings was generally low. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services outlined future consultation with communities on the design of services and also highlighted the view that developing Community Hubs would have a positive impact on footfall. The Member still felt a business case should have been carried out as part of the proposal. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services suggested that the external funding bid that supported the Rhymney Library project should be shared with Committee Members.

A Member welcomed the proposal but sought assurances that it would not have a detrimental effect on the funding of other services in the same area. The Member also sought clarification on the One-Stop Shop approach at the Community Hubs. The Head of Children's Services stressed the importance of community engagement which would need to be specifically tailored for each locality. Members were also given assurances that the Hubs were based on a One-Stop Shop approach where residents could speak to Housing Officers and be supported to make digital payments, for example.

A Member asked if new buildings such as the Centre for Vulnerable Learners in Pontllanfraith and new schools in a neighbouring ward could also be considered as hosts for additional services. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services confirmed that this approach would be considered.

A Member enquired if partners such as Citizens Advice would offer services on a peripatetic basis at Tier Two and Tier Three sites. It was the Member's view that this would be beneficial even if it was once weekly or fortnightly. The Head of Children's Services provided assurances that it was planned to co-produce services at Community Hubs and flexible approaches would also be considered. But he also highlighted that citizen engagement had changed significantly and the Council had to respond positively to that trend. It was also outlined that all partners faced challenging budgetary pressures.

A Member raised the issue of staffing at the Community Hubs and whilst agreeing with the principle of the proposal he had concerns that staff would be redistributed from a current service area to work at a Community Hub. The Member believed that such an approach would dilute the initial service. The Head of Children's Services advised that a definitive answer could not be given at this stage and highlighted that Library and Customer Services staff would have to work in partnership to develop the skills needed to deal effectively with enquiries. It was also outlined that the proposal would be kept under constant review and that the next phase would be looking at managing staff in the best possible way and that this stage would involve further consultation.

The Chair outlined how the proposal would attract more people into our town centres and also increase the opportunity for face-to-face interaction, which was the favoured approach for many residents.

Having considered the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be recommended to Cabinet. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

1. Consider and provide comment on the proposal.
2. Support the proposal to implement the Tier 1 Community Hub model incrementally.
3. Make any additional recommendations for taking the proposal forward.
4. Agree that co-production with communities is the best most sustainable method for developing Community Hubs, and that engagement with communities and organised groups in the locations should be a key.
5. Agree that discussions should begin with staff working from the locations to gain their feedback and understanding of the proposal.
6. Agree that the concept of 'one public sector estate' and a shared commitment to carbon reduction principles, allowing shared use of spaces with our main public sector partners should underpin the proposal.

8. UPDATE ON THE PROCUREMENT REFORM AGENDA AND TO EXTEND THE COUNCIL'S PROGRAMME FOR PROCUREMENT (STRATEGY) FOR A PERIOD OF UP TO EIGHTEEN (18) MONTHS.

Cabinet Member, Councillor N. George introduced the report and informed Members that on 7th June 2022 the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill ('SPPP Bill') was introduced before the Senedd Cymru. Members were advised that the aim of the SPPP Bill is to establish a statutory Social Partnership Council, create new social partnership duties on specified public bodies in Wales such as the Council, and promotes fair work and creates a duty for socially responsible public procurement. Also, to improve the economic, environmental, social, and cultural well-being of Wales (including by improving public services) by embedding the principle of social partnership in the operation of public bodies in Wales.

Members were also advised that the Council's Programme for Procurement ('Strategy') 2018-2023 was endorsed and implemented following a Cabinet meeting on 16th May 2018. The Council has been committed to ensuring that we achieve value for money from our third-party procurement expenditure. Having recognised the value of using procurement to support our wider cultural, social economic and environmental objectives in a way that offers real long-term benefits to the Community we serve and the people of Wales whilst balancing the issues of Value for Money.

A Member raised the introduction of a central list of debarred suppliers and broader rights to exclude suppliers for prior poor performance. The Member queried whether there was anything in the existing Procurement Policy which mirrored this aspect and whether or not a supplier fined for falsifying records by another agency would be placed on the barred list for example. The Procurement and Information Manager advised Members that there was the ability to debar suppliers under the existing strategy and he also outlined how such contractors were obliged to prove that they could meet contractual regulations before bidding for any future work. Members also heard how the Council worked in a collaborative way with other organisations across Wales as part of a procurement network. The Member thanked the

officer and observed that he might have a private conversation with him outside of the meeting.

Having considered the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be recommended to Cabinet. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting, there were 12 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

3.1 That Scrutiny Members note the current status of The Procurement Bill and the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill.

3.2 That Scrutiny Members support the recommendation to Cabinet to extend the Council's existing Procurement Strategy for a period of up to eighteen (18) months.

9. AUDIT WALES REPORT, SPRINGING FORWARD – ASSETS JULY 2022.

Cabinet Member, Councillor Mrs. E. Stenner introduced the report and informed Members that Audit Wales had conducted a national review of how authorities were strategically using their experience post covid, to manage or transform their Assets. Members were referred to the full report which was included as Appendix A.

Members were advised that specifically Audit Wales wanted to review how councils were strengthening their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities. Members were informed that the overall finding was that 'In driving forward its intended significant changes to assets, informed by its experiences of the pandemic, the Council requires a longer-term approach'.

B. Roberts from Audit Wales presented the report, which was written by Audit Wales following their review of how CCBC manage their assets. Members were advised that these assets were mainly office accommodation and buildings that are used by the Council to provide services in the community. Members were referred to the report which identified three recommendations by Audit Wales to support the suggested improvements identified. The report also shows the Councils response and intended actions in response to the recommendations.

Members were advised that although the Council has an asset management strategy which is now some 3-4 years old, it is planning to make significant changes to services and office accommodation, and does not therefore have a fully integrated longer-term asset strategy, and the Councils understanding of longer-term trends and involvement of residents in shaping its strategic agenda is currently underdeveloped. Members were also advised that the Councils arrangements support active consideration of its statutory duties, however, insufficient staff capacity may constrain the delivery of its intended changes, and to reflect its increasing ambition the Council can strengthen its use of data to inform its understanding of performance. Members were referred to the updated Management response details included in the report as Appendix B.

A Member sought clarification on an asset transfer currently ongoing in the Ynysddu ward and queried whether a CCBC officer would be assigned to this particular case, to work within the community regarding the asset transfer. Members were advised that asset transfers usually include sports clubs, pavilions and pitches, and support would normally be given through Sport and Leisure, and Parks Services. Assets transfers could also include community centres, and Members were advised that one specific Officer would not deal with all different

types of premises. Asset transfers could include issues regarding land ownership and covenants, which can cause a considerable delay to the transfer process. Members were advised however, that relevant groups of officers were available to assist community groups with asset transfers. Members were also referred to the Asset Transfer Policy and Guidance. The Member was advised to contact the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment, outside of the meeting, to discuss the specific case referred to.

A Member sought clarification on recommendation 3 in the report, 'to evaluate the benefits of partnership working' and noted that Officers had only partially accepted this. The member queried what more could be done by the Council to implement the recommendation. Members were advised that the former Head of Property, who has since retired, was tasked with leading an asset management group across the Public Service Board, looking at the public sector estate. This had proved to be a very difficult task as the commitment from other public sector partners to attend meetings, etc was weak and holding meetings was attempted on numerous occasions, but no progress was made. Members were also advised that this recommendation by Audit Wales had been included in other Local Authority reports, and not just Caerphilly, advising them to explore future opportunities within their authority.

A Member wished to note his own experience involved in an asset transfer for a sport facility and found the Officers in Sports and Leisure extremely helpful, knowledgeable and supportive throughout the whole process.

The Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Appendix A and discussed, challenged and scrutinised the information contained within.

The meeting closed at 6.56 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR