POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 4TH APRIL 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston – Chair

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Members:

Councillors N. George, and Mrs. E. Stenner.

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), K. Williams (Customer Services Digital Hub Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillor 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 B. Miles (Vice Chair) and C. Wright.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

3.   MINUTES – 21ST FEBRUARY 2023

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st February 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against, and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

> RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 21st February 2023 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 Manager presented the report which outlined the reports planned for the period April 2023 to April 2024 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 21st February 2023. 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 verbal communication, this was unanimously agreed.

> 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.   DIGITAL UPDATE – THE IMPACT OF AUTOMATION – PRESENTATION.

The Head of Customer and Digital Services introduced the presentation, which was given by the Customer Services Digital Hub Manager. Members were informed of the 'Robotic Process Automation in Caerphilly' and were given an in-depth view of the system which started in 2019, with Caerphilly being one of the first authorities in Wales to introduce this system.

Members were advised that the RPA software technology helps to automate repetitive tasks in business processes, and can operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Members were informed of the volume of repetitive work that could be undertaken, at various times of the year, which can assist residents of the borough by speeding up application processes, such as Free School Meals, College Transport, Grants and Blue Badge applications.

Members were also provided with information on cost avoidance by using the automated service instead of officers' time and were invited to make suggestions on any areas which could be used or improved with the use of the RPA.

Members noted thanks for the work being undertaken and the effect on residents' lives and circumstances.

A Member queried the costs of the RPA, future plans for numbers, and possible income generation. Members were advised that 5 'bots' cost approximately £80,000 per annum with additional yearly costs for support and training with the Davies Group.

A Member queried whether the RPA could devise a system or rota to include every drain cover within the Authority. Members were advised that this could be possible with 'sensors' to notify CCBC when bins are full and when drains need cleaning.

A Member queried whether automation was planned for all administrative areas of the Authority and whether traffic management could also be covered with rotas. Members were advised that where automation needed any human intervention, the automation is able to stop and start again when required. It was suggested to Members that the presentation could be referred to Heads of Service to incorporate this throughout the authority in the future. The Chair also suggested that the presentation could be held as a seminar for all Members to attend. Members were advised that this would be looked into, as a good proposal for all Members to be involved.

A Member sought clarification on the application process for Blue Badges. Members were advised that each Local Authority deals with their own residents' applications, which are then forwarded to a central office for the issue of the Blue Badges.

A Member queried the Union involvement in this process and Members were advised that the Union had been fully involved and fully supported the system. It was noted that the system supports staff to do their jobs but doesn't replace jobs or staff.

A Member sought clarification on what happens if the virtual working process goes wrong. Members were advised that notifications are received, and staff are always aware of the processes, which are then rectified as soon as possible.

The Chair sought clarification on whether the RPA would make decisions in the future, to mimic the human element. Members were advised that RPA is only currently used for mundane, repetitive tasks to 'free up' staff to complete other areas of their jobs. Members were also advised that the complaints system is currently being looked at with a view to develop a system that would cover the whole authority.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the presentation.

The meeting closed at 7.04 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2023, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR