



CORPORATE AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston - Chair
Councillor A. McConnell - Vice Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, G. Enright, C. Forehead, A. Gair, D. Harse, L. Jeremiah, J. Jones, S. Kent, C. Mann, D. W. R. Preece, C. Thomas, L. Whittle, W. Williams, and C. Wright

Cabinet Members:

Councillor P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), Councillor N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways) and Councillor E. Stenner (Finance and Performance),

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), D. Beecham (Electoral Services Manager), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), A. Cullinane (Senior Policy Officer – Equalities and Welsh Language), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and s151 Officer), R. Williams (Group Accountant Treasury and Capital), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), and A. Jones (Committee Services Officer).

Also in Attendance:

Councillors S. Morgan (Leader of Council), J. Pritchard, Deputy Leader (Regeneration and Climate Change), K. Etheridge and J. Blair (Director of Electoral Reform Society Cymru) – Speaker on Agenda item 7.

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Fussell and M. Powell.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. CORPORATE AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 9TH JANUARY 2024

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2024 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting there were 15 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 9th January 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record.

4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

5. CORPORATE AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report, which outlined details of the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period February 2024 to March 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting there were 16 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions), this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers 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.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION – YES TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON SCRAPPING FIRST PAST THE POST

The Chair invited Councillor Etheridge to present the Notice of Motion to the Committee.

Councillor Etheridge confirmed that the Notice of Motion had been emailed to all Councillors and that he was hoping to get support from across all parties to introduce a fairer system regarding proportional representation to help democracy. Members were asked to support the Notice of Motion to allow it to go onto full Council to enable all

Members to have a view on it. Councillor Etheridge referred to a letter he had received from Mark Drakeford MS confirming that the Senedd was introducing a list system, for the next Senedd elections in 2026 and suggested that Caerphilly Council should consider following this example for the next County Borough Elections.

Councillor Etheridge stated he was disappointed with the report as he felt it did not give a balanced view and Officers could have contacted Gwynedd and Powys Councils as part of their research. Councillor Etheridge highlighted 5.7 of the report where it stated there is no provision for electronic counting, therefore counting a STV election would be a lengthy and complex process, with counts taking up to 3 days to complete. Cllr Etheridge disputed this and felt this report gave a negative view to Members.

The Chair invited the Director of Electoral Reform Society Cymru to speak to the Committee.

The Director of the Electoral Reform Society in Wales introduced herself and advised that they are a campaigning organisation that works to make a better democracy and they support the Notice of Motion to consult on a different way to do democracy at a local level in Wales. Members were given a presentation on the current Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral systems operating in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

A Member sought clarification on whether election staff, candidates and election agents would all be fully informed prior to any new system if introduced. Members were advised that counting would take longer without an electronic counting system, and that there was no finance available to purchase a system. The Electoral Services Manager clarified that the Senedd was looking to go to a list system that is different to the single transferrable vote. It was also confirmed that there was some evidence of an increase in spoils under an STV system.

A Member requested that an explanation of what 5.6 within the report means. The Electoral Services Manager advised that if the Council changed to a STV voting system it would require larger multi member wards to allow the voting mechanism to work. Legislation says that each ward would need to be between three (minimum) and six (maximum) members. To achieve those new wards then the Council would need to undergo a review of the Boundary Commission who are responsible for principal area wards.

A Member sought clarification on 8.1 and asked who would pay any costs. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that any costs for changing the voting system would fall to the Council to pay.

The Chair had received questions from a member that sought confirmation from the mover of the motion that asked if any investigation on additional costs of pursuing all the necessary consultation processes if this motion was adopted and where would the additional costs be found. It was confirmed that no investigation had been undertaken on additional costs.

Members fully discussed and debated the Notice of Motion and expressed their views on the matter.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the Notice of Motion, be supported. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting there were 4 for, 10 against and 0 abstention) this was rejected by the majority present. Therefore, the Motion fell.

RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion as outlined in paragraph 5.1 of the Officers report, not be supported.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN – OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS 2024-2028

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which sought the views of the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the Council's draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

The Committee were advised that the Public Sector Equality Duty in Wales came into force on the 6th April 2011 and included a requirement for public authorities to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan every four years. The Council has had a Strategic Equality Plan in place since 2012 and must now update this for the next 4-year cycle, 2024-2028.

Strategic Equality Plans since 2012 have ensured that the Council has a good foundation in place to continue to improve on our objectives and to assist us in meeting three of the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The recommendation sought the views of the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028, to inform a version to be presented to Cabinet and Council for approval and adoption as Council Policy.

A Member praised the report and noted the significant number of Welsh speakers in the county borough. It was suggested that a Welsh language centre or hub where people (particularly younger people) can meet and use the Welsh language would be of benefit, to encourage its use in social situations. It was suggested that contact with young people to ask what they would like would also be helpful.

The Scrutiny Committee was advised that there is a Welsh Language Forum co-ordinated by Menter Iaith Caerffili which the Council are a member of. This brings together Welsh language organisations including Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RHAG), Mudiad Meithrin, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, local schools, and colleges, etc. which works on different projects with several projects in the pipeline. Caerphilly officers visit schools to discuss the importance of the Welsh language and the benefits of the skills in the workplace. There is a visit planned next week to Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymini for example, with Year 10 students to discuss careers and Welsh language skills, with another visit to St Cenydd Comprehensive School the week after to deliver a Year 10 assembly on the same subject.

The Member made some suggestions regarding encouraging Welsh language singers or groups at Caerphilly events to promote it further.

A Member asked if it would be possible to hold short Welsh language sessions for Members to teach some simple words or phrases. It was suggested that this could be arranged prior to Council meetings as a drop-in session for any Member.

The Scrutiny Committee was informed that this was something that could be arranged and there was also a resource available called 'Incidental Welsh' developed by Welsh Government which has been shared with other organisations.

A Member commented on his visits to both Welsh medium schools and English medium schools where Welsh was used very effectively both in the classroom and encouraged in the playground.

Members praised the equality statement, with the LGBTQ content worth highlighting. The Member particularly mentioned the Pride event held in Caerphilly last year and planned again for this year. The Member thanked everyone involved in organising these events. It was clarified that the Pride event this year will be held in Caerphilly again and this was following the survey from last year when people stated they would like to come back to Caerphilly.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting there were 14 for, 0 against and 0 abstention) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED that the views of the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028, to be used to inform a version presented to Cabinet and Council for approval and adopted as Council policy.

9. RECRUITMENT UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways introduced the report which updated the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the work undertaken to address the recruitment and retention challenges the Council is experiencing.

Scrutiny Members were made aware from the report to Council on 24th November 2022 entitled 'Workforce Capacity and Associated Challenges' that the Council was facing recruitment and retention challenges across the whole organisation in many service areas and the services affected seem to be under increasing demand in accordance with the national picture. Members were also advised that this was not just a specific challenge to Caerphilly.

Members were advised that a Cabinet meeting held on 19th October 2022 agreed funding for the appointment of a specialist Internal Recruitment Team and that this report provided information of the work undertaken to date by this team and the wider People Services teams and their planned work for the future. Members were asked to note the content of the report.

A Member stated that they were disappointed with the report and felt that it lacked substance and requested for the next report that more information be provided, using 5.11 as an example more information is provided on natural wastage, retirement, those left due to sickness, those gone on disciplinarys to provide a fuller picture. In addition, there is nothing on graduate and sponsorship programs. The program Network 75 was mentioned as an example that works with colleges and universities whereby an organisation would be a sponsor for those individuals doing the course. The Member also asked in relation to 5.12.3 if the numbers of those that declined offers could be provided and if future reports could include how many took up the new appointments.

The Head of People Services confirmed that the numbers were not available but would be provided following the meeting. The committee were advised that the team members had only been in posts for five months and the wider people services team have been doing this function previously. The recruitment team has been working on the priorities within the council for Catering, Housing and Care with a lot of work carried out in the background. It was difficult to know how much detail to put in the report and officers were happy to have discussions with the Chair on the content for any future reports to the committee. In relation to the reasons employees leave, it was clarified that they are reported in the Directorate Performance Assessment reports that are reported regularly to members and the link can be provided to all members.

The Chair thanked the Head of People Services and asked members of the committee to send any information that they would like to see in the reports to him to discuss with the Head of People Services going forward.

The Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services accepted that a lot more detail could have been added to the report and stated that it was important to recognise achievements of the team and put his thanks on record to the team for a fantastic job they have done so far.

RESOLVED that following consideration of the report the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of this report.

10. CAPITAL STRATEGY REPORT 2024/2025

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which updated the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the report prior to its presentation to Council on the 27th February 2024, the Authority's Capital Strategy report for the 2024/25 financial year in accordance with the Prudential Code that was introduced by the Local Government act 2003.

The report cross references to the report by the Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services on Revenue and Capital Budgets ('the budget report') and the Treasury Management Annual Strategy, Capital Finance Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Report for 2024/2025.

The Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee were asked to note the content of the report prior to it being submitted to Council for approval.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against and 0 abstention) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the Annual Capital Strategy Report be approved.

11. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL STRATEGY CAPITAL FINANCE PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY FOR 2024/2025

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report to the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for consideration prior to its presentation to Council on the 27th February 2024, the Authority's Annual Strategy for Treasury Management.

For consideration prior to its presentation to Council a dataset of Prudential Indicators relevant to Treasury Management and Capital Finance. The report also cross-references to the report by the Deputy Chief Executive on Revenue and Capital Budgets (The Budget Report) also considered in this meeting.

For consideration prior to its presentation to Council the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy to be adopted by the Authority for 2024/2025.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

The Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Considered and commented on the report and Appendices and

RECOMMENDED to Council the following: -

1. The Strategy be reviewed quarterly within the Treasury Management monitoring reports presented to the Corporate and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and any changes recommended be referred to Cabinet in the first instance and to Council for a decision. The Authority will also prepare quarterly reports on Treasury Management activities.
2. The Prudential Indicators for Treasury Management be approved as per Appendix 5.
3. The Prudential Indicators for Capital Financing be approved as per Appendices 6 & 7.
4. The MRP policy as set out in Appendix 8 be adopted.
5. The 2023/24 investment strategy and the lending to financial institutions and Corporates in accordance with the minimum credit rating criteria disclosed within this report be continued.
6. The Authority continues to adopt the investment grade scale as a minimum credit rating criterion to assess the credit worthiness of suitable counterparties when placing investments.
7. The monetary and investment duration limits as set in Appendix 3 of the report be adopted.

The meeting closed at 18:53 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 14th May 2024.

CHAIR