



## JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2024 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston – Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, E.M. Aldworth, A. Angel, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, C.J. Cuss, N. Dix, G. Ead, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, A. Gair, C. Gordon, D. Harse, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, L. Jeremiah, S. Kent, A. Leonard, A. McConnell, B. Miles, B. Owen, M. Powell, D. Preece, H. Pritchard, J.A. Pritchard, J. Rao, J. Simmonds, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, K. Woodland and C. Wright.

Cabinet Members:

Cabinet Members in attendance: S. Morgan (Leader of Council), C. Andrews (Education and Communities), S. Cook (Housing), E. Forehead (Social Care), N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), and E. Stenner (Finance and Performance).

Together with:

Officers: D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), M. S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), S. Ellis (Lead for Inclusion and ALN), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), G. Jenkins (Interim Director of Social Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director Adult Services), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), B. Winstanley (Head of Land and Property), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), R. Roberts (Business Improvement Manager), J. Pearce (Business Improvement Officer), S. Pugh (Communications Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), A. Jones (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Co-opted Member M Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education).

### 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 D. Cushing, D. T Davies, E. Davies, C. Elsbury, G. Enright, C. Forehead, J. Fussell, T. Heron, M. James, J. Jones, C. Mann, T. Parry, L. Phipps, D. Price, J. Reed, J. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Scriven, S. Skivens, J. Taylor and L. Whittle

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

Consideration was given to the following report.

## **3. JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024.**

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies being noted for Mr M Western (Co-opted Member). By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 35 for, 0 against, and 1 abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 5) be approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies being noted for Mr M Western (Co-opted Member).

## **4. JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23<sup>RD</sup> JANUARY 2024.**

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies being noted for Mr M Western (Co-opted Member). By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 33 for, 0 against, and 1 abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies being noted for Mr M Western (Co-opted Member).

## **5. ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (INCLUDING WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES)2022/23.**

Councillor E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance) introduced the Annual Self-Assessment Report for 2022/23. The report also included an update on the Well-being Objectives for 2022/23.

The self-assessment report is a statutory requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It is an important part of the Council's performance framework. This is the second self-assessment report which replaced the former Annual Performance Report. The Council is required to assess its own performance and provide the public with a balanced picture of that performance. The Council must also report

progress against the six Well-being Objectives set out within the Corporate Plan 2018-2023. The report included an update on the fifth and final year of the outgoing Corporate Plan.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee were asked to review the Self-Assessment Report (including Well-being Objectives) 2022/23 (Appendix 1) and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within the report.

The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services explained the Self-Assessment was an assessment of our organisational effectiveness in two parts. Part-one looked at corporate governance functions over the last financial year and sets out key actions that are being put forward as a mechanism for continuing to improve those corporate functions. Aspects covered within part one were corporate planning, financial management, workforce arrangements, procurement and digital, asset management, risk management and performance management.

Part two looked at progress over the last 12 months against the Council's Well-being Objectives. Members were advised that this was the last year of the recently concluded Corporate Plan. The Corporate Director explained that this is a constantly evolving process, and it is intended to add more evaluative judgments for future reports. Every section would be summarised with a judgment that says good or in need of improvement, and how soon. The process would also look to develop an enhanced consultation process that allowed engagement on a broader platform than the current arrangements. Members were advised that external officers from other organisations would come and check that the Council assessed itself in accordance with legislation set out by the Welsh Government once during the legislative term.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director and teams for their presentations and invited Members questions.

A Member commented on the interaction between the Health Service and Social Services and referred to page 26 of the report regarding impact of the delays and backlogs within the health service that is impacting on our communities. The Member stated that this was a workflow situation and whilst progress has been made in recruiting, they questioned why the Council had not prioritised vulnerable patients who need home care and queried whether increasing pay would encourage more carers.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that some pressures within the NHS are caused by flow issues and discharging patients from hospital is a two way path, delays with GP surgeries and within A and E leads to a situation within the community where individuals are presenting themselves with far greater needs. Members also heard how it was not just a matter of paying the carers more, that it was a more complex picture than that and people are seen daily who would not need the level of intervention from local government or from social services if the NHS were in a better position. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council has prioritised these services and shown its commitment by the level of growth that has gone into the Social Services budget over the last three years.

The Assistant Director for Adult Services confirmed that 90% of the Council's work is in the community and 10% is in the hospital. Members were advised that the system needs to be looked at and ongoing conversations with the NHS continue around people being looked after at home rather than in hospital. Committee were further advised that the picture is improving, but the Council did not have carers in reserve and staff are working tirelessly every day and doing the best they can.

A Member suggested that the decision on whether or not to take a person into hospital would be made by the paramedics who attended following a call. Members were advised that there are a few initiatives starting imminently which would be an alternative pathway

for paramedics and other medical staff. These would look at admissions from care homes, the support that could be provided, and clinic appointments if appropriate. A review of the older persons services was also being looked at such as intravenous antibiotics being given at home instead of in hospitals. Committee were advised that there would be updates in the future on some of these projects.

A Member requested an explanation on why the actions on page 34 in relation to financial planning were not met. It was confirmed that the Council has a Reserve Strategy that was approved by Cabinet in 2016 and that this will be updated once an ongoing review of the Council's financial regulations has been completed. In terms of timescale, the updated financial regulations would be taken to the Governance and Audit Committee in April 2024 and then Council AGM in May 2024.

The Member queried the sickness absence data on page 38 and asked whether a team would be required to investigate the levels of absence due to sickness and identify the reasons for these rates. It was confirmed that sickness absences were a national issue and that a lot of the data relates to employees off work due to long term sickness. Investment in the Managing Attendance Team had been introduced to investigate and monitor sickness levels.

Clarification was sought on the list of risks on page 49 and a Member asked how they were rated as they are quite different in terms of their impact. Members were advised that in terms of significance and severity, the risks had been looked at from a broad perspective and not all those risks were equal, and officers explained that at the time of the report being written those were the ten risks identified.

The Chair requested clarity on what the Council's strategy was to get children back into schools. Members were advised that there was a strategy in place which was working well and involved pupils, teachers, headteachers, the learning support systems, governors, and the wider community. Committee heard how attendance levels had increased this year and compared to last year secondary schools' attendance was up by 1.7% and primary school attendance was up by 1.5%. Also, pupils in receipt of free school meals in secondary schools was up by 2.9% and the figure for primary schools was up by 2.6%. Officers outlined a new campaign called "Attend to Achieve" which had been introduced with banners given to schools to display on their gates to promote the campaign. Workshops had also been planned in conjunction with primary and secondary heads of schools to discuss further strategies around attendance.

The Strategic Lead for School Improvement placed his thanks on record to everyone who had invested in this campaign.

Clarification was sought on the uptake on free school meals. It was confirmed that the take up of free school meals averages about 65%. Members were advised that Caerphilly County Borough Council was one of the two authorities in Wales that were part of a project called Nesta which is funded by the Welsh Government and collaborates with schools to encourage take up of free school meals, and it was hoped that percentages would increase in the future.

A Member observed that during their work as a Council Attendance Champion they had seen how Officers work hard to improve both attendance and uptake of free school meals and he highlighted that some issues with free school meals was due to the portion size. Members were advised by officers that portion sizes are regulated by legislation from the Welsh Government, and that a review of the guidance and legislation as part of the "Appetite for Life" scheme included portion size differentials between infants and junior school children.

A Member referred to page 71 in relation to vulnerable pupils and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) learners and sought confirmation on how monitoring of the progress ensured that improvements would be undertaken to keep the high levels achieved. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to monitor the situation and strive to make improvements year on year. Members were advised that there was data called "Tier One Data" which does not always get reported and which centred on pupils that are identified as hard to reach. Committee heard how the Council had an excellent record in finding these pupils and from a safeguarding perspective it ensured that they were receiving the best support. It was outlined how, during the Covid 19 pandemic, challenges arose, but strategies had been adapted to engage with these pupils. Members were also advised that there is a project called "Inspire" which had twelve officers working across each of the secondary schools throughout the County Borough to target pupils at risk starting at Key Stage 3. The role of the Engagement Progression Coordinator was also highlighted, and Members heard how he works in partnership with other agencies like the Youth Service, Homelessness Prevention Team, and Education Welfare Service to ensure that support is provided to pupils at risk. The Member thanked the Officer and was glad to see that there is a multigroup approach going forward to try to improve things.

One Member requested clarity on the 1% increase in pupil attendance and specifically how many children that equated too and sought confirmation on what were the most common reasons given for persistent non-attendance. Members were advised that the specific figures were not available but would be provided following the meeting. In relation to reasons given for pupil absences, it was confirmed that post Covid reasons given included emotional based school avoidance amongst other things. Members were advised that there was a multi-agency approach involving the Education Welfare Service, the Healthy Schools Team, and the Educational Psychology Service. These agencies worked together to ensure schools are supported in their approach to learners with emotional based school avoidance, anxiety, or other issues around wellbeing and mental health.

Members thanked all Officers involved.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee considered the Self-Assessment Report (including Well-being Objectives) 2022/23 (Appendix 1) and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within.

RESOLVED that the Joint Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Self-Assessment Report (including Well-being Objectives) 2022/23 (Appendix 1) and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within.

The meeting closed at 17.50 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

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CHAIR