



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON WEDNESDAY, 10TH DECEMBER 2014 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor K.V. Reynolds - Leader

Councillors:

Mrs C. Forehead (HR and Governance/Business Manager), D.T. Hardacre (Performance and Asset Management), Mrs B. Jones (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services), K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), Mrs R. Passmore (Education and Lifelong Learning), D.V. Poole (Community and Leisure Services), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering), R. Woodyatt (Social Services).

Together with:

C. Burns (Interim Chief Executive), Mrs S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services).

Also in Attendance:

S. J. Byrne (Wales Audit Office), C. Jones (Head of Performance and Property), S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), C. Edwards (Environmental Health Manager), D. Jones (Health and Safety Manager), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

WELCOME

The Leader welcomed everyone and advised that following the Cabinet meeting representatives of the Youth Forum would be attending to outline their priorities for the year ahead.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor G. Jones (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CABINET

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2014 (minute nos. 1 - 9) be approved and signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ON WHICH EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WERE REQUIRED

4. LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN

Sara-Jayne Byrne, WAO and Mr D. Street, Corporate Director Social Services, highlighted the key issues that had arisen from the review that WAO had undertaken of Caerphilly CBC's governance and management arrangements to support the safeguarding of children. The study examined what the Council has done to seek assurance that its arrangements to support safeguarding are effective by reviewing how the Council is discharging its safeguarding responsibilities at all levels.

The main questions that the review sought to answer were: Are there clear governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children? Is the Council monitoring and evaluating appropriate information, which provides assurance that it is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children? Are assurance systems operating effectively?

The report concludes that the governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children have some weaknesses, which the Council is addressing. The Council's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its safeguarding responsibilities to children have some weaknesses which the Council must address. The Council's approach to identifying and acting on improvements in its safeguarding arrangements has some weaknesses, which the Council is addressing. It was emphasised that the report does not identify any weaknesses in the safeguarding of children, the recommendations relate to the governance of these arrangements.

The report makes five proposals for improvement, which are set out in paragraph 4.4. Officers are currently finalising the action plan that will ensure all five of the recommendations are acted upon and that the improvements required will be delivered upon.

Following consideration and discussion, during which Members requested that progress against the action plan be reported to Cabinet, in addition to the Audit Committee, on a quarterly basis, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons set out in the officer's report: -

1. The conclusions and recommendations contained in the WAO study be noted.
2. The five recommendations made in the study be accepted.
3. Progress against the action plan be monitored by Audit Committee and Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

5. YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

Sara-Jayne Byrne, WAO, presented the findings of the review undertaken by the Auditor General for Wales of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS), by means of a Powerpoint presentation. The review sought to consider the strategic approach taken by councils across Wales to reduce young people who are NEET. A total of 8 councils

were visited between May and July 2013. The review made 6 recommendations, which are set out in paragraph 2.2 of the officer's report.

The study examined whether there were lessons for local government to learn from efforts to secure better outcomes for young people who are, or are at risk of becoming NEET. It concluded that NEETs reduction is a priority for the Council and the Council has put in place a more coordinated approach, which focuses on the specific outcomes for the individual and provides tailored and intensive support to facilitate this. The Council has not articulated the financial consequences of having a high NEETs population but is very aware of the knock-on effect on services and the need to target resources appropriately. It uses social media and technology to engage with young people and is refining its tracking system. A key aspect of the Council's approach is about having a Single Responsible Adult and providing intensive support to those young people who need it.

At the time of the National study the Directorate was in the early stages of implementing new processes and procedures in relation to those young people at risk of becoming and those who are classed as NEET. These new processes have lead to improved links with all key stakeholders and a more focussed approach to tracking the progress and destinations of young people.

Mrs S. Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive/Corporate Director Education & Lifelong Learning, advised that further progress has been made since the report had been prepared and whilst it was acknowledged that there was still much work to be undertaken, officers were confident that there would be a further reduction in the numbers. The Regulator's proposals have been both acknowledged and incorporated into the Council's plans to reduce the number of young people who are at risk of, or who are NEET and the Council's next priority will be to map and review expenditure on this group of vulnerable people.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons set out in the officer's report, the content of the report be noted.

6. DISPOSAL OF LAND OFF WOODBINE ROAD, BLACKWOOD

The report sought approval for the disposal of land off Woodbine Road, Blackwood to the Seren Group for the development of affordable housing.

The land edged blue on the plan (the former Blackwood Youth Centre) has been declared surplus to operational requirements and is currently held by Property Services pending disposal. The adjoining land edged red is currently used for garage plots. The site is under-utilised and currently only two plots are leased to a local resident, one has a garage erected on it and the other is a hard standing. Under the terms of the standard garage lease the Council is able to terminate an agreement by serving one month's written notice on the tenant.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report: -

1. The land off Woodbine Road, Blackwood be sold to the Seren Group for the development of affordable housing, on terms to be negotiated.
2. Approval of the detailed terms of the disposal be delegated to the Head of Performance and Property Services for the purposes identified in the report.

7. CWMCARN HIGH SCHOOL

The report updated Members on the key issues arising from the work carried out at Cwmcarn High School including the progress of the works, the HSE position, final costs and action to mitigate against a similar situation occurring in the future.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 4.2, which set out the Health and Safety Executive Assessment of Asbestos Risk and paragraph 4.3, which provided details of the final costs and actions taken to mitigate against a similar situation arising in future. It was noted that should any school within the County Borough decide in future not to take up a Health and Safety service level agreement with the Council, arrangements would be put in place to undertake a two yearly site inspection and audit of systems and procedures at such schools. Findings would be reported to the Headteacher, Chair of Governors and the Director of Education with any recommendations for improvement and progress duly monitored.

Following consideration and discussion, during which it was confirmed that good progress had been made in terms of asbestos management within schools in the County Borough, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report, the content of the report with regard to the completion of the works, HSE position and the mitigation measures proposed to limit the potential of a reoccurrence of a similar problem, be noted.

8. THE NATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT 1948, AS AMENDED - REMOVAL OF PERSONS IN CARE. DESIGNATION OF PROPER OFFICER

The report sought approval to agree Proper Officer arrangements to provide expert support to the Local Authority in discharging its responsibilities under Section 47 of the National Assistance Act 1948, as amended.

It was noted that when the Local Authority considers it necessary to use available powers to seek the removal of a person living in insanitary conditions through reasons of physical incapacity, infirmity or illness, a Proper Officer is required to carry out a medical assessment and issue a certificate. The previously appointed Proper Officers are no longer in relevant posts and therefore approval was sought to appoint replacements.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report, Dr Liam Taylor be designated the Proper Officer in carrying out the Council's statutory responsibility under the National Assistance Act 1948 as amended and that Dr Sharan Ramakrishna be designated alternative Proper Officer.

9. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2015-2016

The report provides details of the Council Tax base for 2015/16 for tax setting purposes and the collection percentage to be applied.

The Council Tax base for discounted chargeable dwellings expressed as Band D equivalents has been calculated at 61,152.72 for 2015/16, which is an increase of 0.52% on 2014/15. For 2014/15 a collection rate of 97% was assumed. The collection rates for Council Tax have steadily increased over recent years. The in-year collection rate for Council Tax in 2013/14 matched the 2012/13 rate, which was the best ever performance for Caerphilly CBC.

In November 2013 Welsh Government brought forward regulations placing a duty on local authorities to introduce Council Tax Reduction Schemes for 2014/15. This has been extended for 2015/16 and requires all Welsh Authorities to maintain full entitlements for all eligible claimants and retains the national framework scheme, which was introduced in 2013/14. Since 2014/15 funding for the CTRS has been included within the Revenue Support Grant at 2013/14 levels. This means that Local Authorities must take account of any additional CTRS costs arising from their decisions about Council Tax levels for 2015/16.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report: -

1. The Council Tax collection rate of 97% remain unchanged for 2015/16.
2. CTRS funding be increased by the same percentage as the Council Tax for 2015/2016. This will be funded by setting aside funding from anticipated Council Tax income as outlined in paragraph 4.5 of the report.
3. The Council Tax Base for the year 2015/16 be 59,318.14 with the Council Tax Base for each community council area as outlined in paragraph 4.7.

10. WRITE OFF OF DEBTS OVER £20,000 - NNDR ARREARS FOR LTD COMPANIES

Approval was sought to write-off 5 national non-domestic rate (NNDR) debts where, in each case, the individual debt is greater than £20,000. Details of the individual cases are set out in the report.

There are no financial implications to the Authority as it collects NNDR on behalf of Welsh Government.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report, the debts detailed in paragraph 4.3 of the report be written off on the grounds that they are irrecoverable.

EXEMPT ITEM

Members considered the public interest test and concluded that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and it was: -

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 12 and 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

11. WRITE OFF OF DEBTS OVER £20,000 - NNDR ARREARS

Approval was sought to write-off a national non-domestic rate (NNDR) debt, also known as business rate, where the debt is greater than £20,000.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report, the recommendation contained in paragraph 9.1 of the report be approved.

The meeting closed at 3.03 pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 21st January 2015.

CHAIR