

## **Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

**(Via Microsoft Teams)**

**Members Present:**

**21 March 2022**

**Chairperson:** Councillor S.Rahaman

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor S.E.Freeguard

**Councillors:** N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, C.James, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, S.H.Reynolds, R.L.Taylor and A.N.Woolcock

**Officers In Attendance:** K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, C.Furlow-Harris, C.Owen, M.Shaw, S.Brennan, J.Woodman-Ralph and A.Thomas

**Invitees:** Councillors C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, D.Jones, L.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards and S.Purse

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### **1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The following minutes of previous meetings were approved as an accurate record:

- 24 November 2021
- 15 December 2021
- 5 January 2022
- 12 January 2022
- 9 February 2022
- 28 February 2022

### **2. Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet item:

**Proposed Service Model for Civic Centre Customer Services and Cash Desks**

Members were provided with an overview of the Neath Port Talbot Council's proposed service model for Customer Services and the Cash Desks for when the buildings reopen to the public.

The Chief Digital Officer highlighted that the Civic Centres had been closed since the start of the pandemic, which came with a large shift to the way in which Council Services operated and were provided; the Council had more of an online presence, and received a large uptake of the services that were provided online. It was noted that Welsh Government restrictions had started to ease, and the Council was now in a position to start considering how the Civic Centres could be re-opened to the public.

The Committee was informed that the model set out the proposed operation of Customer Services going forward in terms of face-to-face enquiries, as well as plans to improve some of the digital services within the Customer Services areas; this will allow members of the public, who did not have the suitable technology at home, to access some of the Council's online services.

It was stated that there were plans to start re-opening Civic Centres to the public, in April 2022; this will be aligned to Welsh Government restrictions and guidelines, and the appropriate risk assessments will be undertaken.

Members raised concerns in relation to the closure of the cash desks, highlighting that it may discourage members of the public from visiting the Civic Centres, as well as potentially having an effect on the footfall of town centres. Members added that some face to face services were vital, and should remain as part of the service model. Officers explained that the cash desks had been closed for around two years, and the Council had put alternative methods of provision in place; for example, residents could use their local post offices in own centres and their local communities to pay their bills. It was noted that when re-opening the buildings, Officers had to be mindful of the fact that whilst there would be no restrictions in place, the buildings still needed to operate on a risk assessed basis.

The Committee was informed that there would be various phases to re-opening the buildings; this was the first phase of re-opening for the interim. It was mentioned that Officers could monitor the impact and demand for the cash desks in this phase; and if the demand was there, Officers would think about how they could be re-established.

Members put forward that it would be more beneficial to re-establish the cash desk service in the first phase of the re-opening of the buildings, as this would allow the Team to gather the information and data required to monitor the use and to inform future decisions.

In relation to general enquiries, the circulated report stated that customers will be sign posted to the contact channels available for the relevant service areas; and if a customer was unable to complete the transaction, then Customer Services will offer support. Members asked for a further explanation in relation to this statement, and asked Officers for assurances that staff would tactfully help those who could not or did not want to use the online services.

It was explained that 'unable to complete the transaction' referred to those who were unable to use the digital assist service that would be in place; the Customer Service Team would provide support to those who did not or could not use this service for any particular reason. Officers explained that Customer Services would directly respond to customers who had general enquiries and questions, as they usually would have prior to the pandemic. The Committee was informed that the digital assist service would help to improve the digital footprint in the Customer Service areas in the Civic Centres; and were in place for members of the public who were able to use these types of services online.

Members highlighted the importance of continually reviewing the service model, in order to ensure it was fit for purpose and was at the best interest of the public.

Therefore, the following formal amendment to the recommendation contained within the circulated report was proposed and seconded:

'It is recommended that the service model as detailed in the circulated report, be approved from April 2022 but be subject to a six month review'.

It was determined that the majority of the Committee were in support of the amendment to be considered by Cabinet.

### 3. **Access to Meetings**

**RESOLVED:** that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part

4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

4. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

The Committee scrutinised the following private Cabinet item:

UK Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round 2 - Budget to Appoint External Consultants to Support Neath Port Talbot Bids

Members were provided with a report regarding the UK LUF Round 2 and the budget to appoint external consultants to support Neath Port Talbot bids.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet.

**CHAIRPERSON**