

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms 1/2 - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present: **18 February 2016**

Chairperson: **Councillor D.W.Davies**

Vice Chairperson: **Councillor A.Jenkins**

Councillors: A.Carter, Ms.C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey,
Mrs.L.H.James, Mrs.D.Jones and
Mrs.K.Pearson

Officers In Attendance Mrs.K.Jones, D.Rees, Mrs.S.Rees, Burgess,
Mrs A. Hinder, Mrs D.Hopkins and S. Curran

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees

1. **MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 JANUARY 2016**

The Committee were informed by the Chairperson that he had written to the National Procurement Service (NPS) as per the recommendation from the last meeting of the Committee to invite them to a future meeting. A suitable date will be arranged via Democratic Services.

The minutes were then noted by the Committee.

2. **HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION REPORT CARDS 2015/2016 - HUMAN RESOURCES, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND JOINT RESILIENCE UNIT**

Members considered information in relation to the Human Resources, Health and Safety and Joint Resilience Teams as contained within the circulated reports and received presentations which accompanied the information.

Human Resources Team

Members heard about the team's roles and responsibilities, their performance against key priorities for 2015/16 and information about the team overall including sickness absence figures.

Members asked for further information in relation to the two HR Officers who had been seconded into the Adult Social Services Team to provide dedicated support. They noted that when a similar secondment had taken place in Children's Services there had been a demonstrable improvement and they wondered if the same success was being seen in Adult Services. Officers commented that good work was in progress since the commencement of the secondments in August 2015. The staff are responsible for embedding processes and procedures to assist managers as well as advising on tackling sickness absence and safe recruitment practices. Officers were confident that with the implementation of a new management structure and new lines of reporting, improvements should soon become apparent.

The Committee asked for further information in relation to the percentage figures included in the report. Generally, Members requested that when data is presented to them in percentages that relevant numbers are also included in order for a full understanding of what is being presented.

Members queried the rise in days lost to sickness absence in the team compared to the same quarter last year. Officers explained that there had been three significant long term sickness absence cases within the team which accounted for this figure. Members were pleased to note that two of these cases have been resolved and the staff involved had returned to work. With the third case, the illness was so severe that the employee will not be returning to work within the Council.

Further information was sought regarding the principles behind the Long Term Sickness Taskforce. Officers explained the procedure which included a focus on early intervention and communication with the employee. Informal return to work plan meetings are held to identify the timescales and communication methods and rigorous case management is in place to prompt managers at each step of the policy. Members were pleased to note that the 'How To' guides on managing absence and the Occupational Health Referral hotline appear to be showing positive results.

Members asked for clarification in relation to sickness absence where the case is particularly serious or in some cases terminal. Officers confirmed that context is always taken into account and serious conditions are always treated as such.

Members asked for an update in relation to the case law referred to in the report which requires employers to include regular payments in addition to basic salary in holiday pay. The Committee were informed that the Council position on this is being presented to the next meeting of the Personnel Committee. If approved, the Council will be the first in Wales to address this case law and Officers explained that this was in no small part to the successful partnership working with the trade unions.

Members made reference to the key actions for 15/16 with the status 'ongoing' and asked if there was an end date assigned to these actions. The Committee were informed that these actions are a journey and would continue to be ongoing.

The Committee were pleased to note that 100% of staff had received a PDR in the last 12 months.

Members queried the training that schools receive in relation to disciplinary meetings and Officers stated they would consider this further.

Health and Safety Team

Members heard about the team's roles and responsibilities, their performance against key priorities for 2015/16 and information about the team overall including sickness absence figures.

Officers explained that since 2009, the staffing in the team has been reduced by approximately a third and that they had received excellent support from the ICT division who have provided innovative software solutions such as online accident reporting to alleviate service pressures.

Thorough completion of incident/accident investigations have resulted in a decrease in the total number of accidents to Authority employees and the number of lost time accidents.

Members were pleased to note the positive culture in the workforce of reporting near miss accidents and asked if further information on

numbers of accidents per numbers of employees could be presented to the Committee

The Committee asked for further information in relation to the percentage figures included in the report. They were informed that the team budget is £428,000 with all revenue expenditure staying within this budget. The savings solutions required from the team was £10,000 and this has been delivered.

The 90% completion figure in relation to service priority HR20- Delivery of incident/accident investigation process in support of sickness absence and accident reduction and HR21- Delivery of health and safety operational risk management activities were ongoing but Officers were confident of their completion within the 15/16 timeframe.

In relation to the 40% completion of HR22-Delivery of COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) legislative changes, Members were informed of the enormity of this task which includes conducting a risk assessment on every chemical in use throughout the Council. Officers explained that the most high risk substances assessments have been completed with the aim of completing all by February 2017.

Members queried the significant rise in days lost to sickness absence in the team compared to the same quarter last year. They were informed that three professional staff had been off with flu and stomach upsets which had influenced the figures and the Sickness Absence Policy had been adhered to. Officers were confident that no particular sickness trends had emerged and they were comfortable with these particular sickness absence occurrences.

The Committee were pleased to note that 100% of staff had received a PDR in the last 12 months. They drew reference to the HR Team Report Card whereby (subject to Member approval) a revised Performance Appraisal Policy is due to be operational by April 2016 and inquired if the next round of PDRs would be overtaken by the appraisal process.

Officers confirmed that from April 2016 the Performance Appraisal Policy will be implemented in the place of PDR's. The appraisals will be two tiered; one full appraisal and one simplified version as feedback from piloted versions highlighted that not all roles

necessitate the full appraisal style. Members were pleased to note the opportunity in the appraisals to discuss employee development.

Joint Resilience Team

Members heard about the team's roles and responsibilities, their performance against key priorities for 2015/16 and information about the team overall including sickness absence figures.

Officers explained that the staffing in the team will be reduced through employees taking ER/VR opportunities and that excellent support from the ICT division have provided innovative software solutions to alleviate service pressures.

The Committee queried the 50% completion noted against the Delivery of City and County of Swansea's City Evacuation. Officers raised the recent £500,000,000 investment announcement for Swansea and Members agreed it is difficult to plan within an ever changing landscape.

The Committee asked for further information in relation to the savings percentage figures included in the report and were informed that £13,000 had been achieved.

Members asked why there were no sickness absence figures against the team and were informed that the staff are under the employment of Swansea Council so data isn't available.

Members asked for further information about how accountable Neath Port Talbot are for Swansea delivering against their actions. Officers confirmed that although there is joint working and a shared manager's post Neath Port Talbot has no influence and all actions attributable to this Council are in good order.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

3. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING REPORT

Members considered information in relation to sickness absence across the Council as contained within the circulated report. Members noted this was the quarterly monitoring report focusing on Quarter 3 2015/16 for the period April to December 2015 which the Committee

will receive on an ongoing basis to inform scrutiny of sickness absence across the Council.

Members attention was drawn to the fact that 'reasons for absence' were now included in the data. This had highlighted that for the period covered, cancer related absences had more than doubled, bereavement and grief reaction had increased and stress, back pain and post operation absences were still the highest reasons for absence. Members were interested to note that arthritis related absences had appeared for the first time which could be an indication of an aging workforce. Officers explained that understanding these reasons for absence was informative as it allows for targeted initiatives i.e. bereavement counselling.

Officers went on to explain that the ratios for long and short term sickness absence had remained the same and that the larger the service area the higher the levels of sickness absence tend to be. Members had specifically asked for a head count of members of staff per department and were pleased to note the inclusion of this in the report. Members asked if a breakdown of what each Head of Service is responsible for across the Council could be circulated to the Committee.

Members' attention was drawn to the particular reduction in average number of working days lost per FTE in the 'Transformation' sector which in particular related to Catering and Cleaning staff due to the advanced work and engagement with managers that had been carried out.

Members noted with sadness that there had been five deaths in service in 15/16 to date and stated that it was important to note that some members of staff who the figures relate to are very sick indeed and that the support of these staff would always remain a priority.

Members raised the particularly high level of sickness absence in schools and were informed that the Director of Education is looking at a strategy specifically for tackling sickness absence of school staff. In liaison with LLAN and NAASH (the groups of primary and secondary head teachers in Neath Port Talbot) a pilot is being developed to focus on the top ten schools with the highest rates of sickness absence.

Members commented on some of the high areas of sickness absence and requested that the following service areas prepare an in-depth report for the relevant scrutiny committee:

Schools Sickness – Children Young People and Education
Street Care – Environment and Highways

Members noted the high levels of sickness absence in relation to stress and asked if these figures could be broken down into work related and non work-related absences.

Members asked for further information in relation to long term sickness absence. Officers explained that if appropriate, a return to work plan is put in place or a Formal Stage 1 Meeting is held where their options are discussed.

Members were pleased to see the level of detail presented in the report which allowed them to fully understand the data and the information in relation to sickness absence across the Council and welcomed the ongoing quarterly reporting of data to the Committee.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

4. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16**

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

(i) **Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2015-2016**

The Committee received information on the Treasury Management actions and information as contained within the circulated report.

Members' noted the revised Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy which was agreed by Council on 3rd February 2016. This will allow for a different method to be adopted for

the repayment of Council debt which will allow for a £2.9m contribution to be put into the voluntary redundancy reserves.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

- (ii) Urgency Action No 0901- Welsh Government Consultation Proposed Response- Multi Agency Collaboration in respect of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

The Committee received details of the Urgency Action that had been taken by the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services as contained within the circulated report.

Members questioned generally the title of the consultation and queried why there was no mention of 'violence against men' in the title. The Committee discussed gender based violence and Officers confirmed that the local response to the consultation would include both men and women.

Members considered the role of this Committee as the designated Scrutiny Committee of the Community Safety Partnership and agreed it would be worthwhile to consider the ongoing work with partners in this area as part of their Forward Work Programme.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

- (iii) Quarterly Performance Management Data 2015/16- Quarter 3 Report -1 April 2015-31 December 2015.

The Committee received the quarterly performance management data 2015-16 for Quarter 3 performance as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted their overall role in discharging the performance management function but the specific services within their remit are Chief Executives and Finance and Corporate Services Directorates.

Members noted improvements in performance in relation to the Customer Services section. Officers explained a particular service improvement whereby Blue Badge holders who have no change in their circumstance no longer have to be interviewed by Customer Services Staff. Members were pleased to note how this has seen a reduction in some 500 appointments, freeing up resource and capacity in the section.

Members asked if there had been an increase in uptake of online services following the Council's adoption of the Digital by Choice Strategy. Officers explained that with the introduction of the strategy, calls to the Contact Centre have reduced by some 30,000 releasing significant capacity in the section. Embracing this strategy continues to be the Council's strategic way forward and will significantly change the way services are accessed and how the Council communicates with service users. Members agreed that it is important that digital services are embraced internally also to engender an online and digital culture among staff.

Members noted a dip in performance in the rate of Delayed Transfers of Care for social care reasons as well as reduced performance in some areas of Environmental Health and Trading Standards due to several particularly complex cases. The Committee recommended that the relevant scrutiny committee consider this when they scrutinise performance for areas under their remit; in this instance Social Care Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Members also noted the drop in performance in relation to the percentage of final statements of special education need issued within 26 weeks which continues to be an ongoing concern. The Committee recommended that the relevant scrutiny committee consider this when they scrutinise performance for areas under their remit; in this instance Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee praised the overall picture of performance which they felt was very good in relation to the amount of change in staffing and resources that the Council has faced. In relation to the reduction in the workforce, Members asked for a breakdown of staff per Directorate.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

CHAIRPERSON