

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Members Present:

29 June 2016

Chairperson: Councillor D.W.Davies

Vice Chairperson: Councillor A.Jenkins

Councillors: Mrs P.Bebell, A.Carter, Ms.C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, Mrs.L.H.James, Mrs.D.Jones, A.R.Lockyer, Mrs.K.Pearson, L.M.Purcell and J.Warman

Officers In Attendance H.Jenkins, Mrs.K.Jones, S.John, Mrs.S.Rees, Mrs.J.Banfield, J. Chapman, Davies, Mrs.K.Holt, Ms.A.Hutchings, I.John, Ms.S.Porter-Thomas, Ms.M.Treharne, Ms.K.Thomas and Ms.C.Gadd

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.H.Thomas, P.A.Rees and A.N.Woolcock

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr K. Pearson	Report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services re: Miscellaneous Grants and Welsh Church Act Fund Applications, as Saron Welsh Independent Chapel is in her Ward. Report of the Head of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services re: Quarterly Performance Management Data 2015-2016 – Quarterly Performance, as she is a partner in Heddfan Properties who rent properties through Housing Options.
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Cllr M.Harvey Report of the Head of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services re: Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) – Update, as he is employed by South Wales Police.

2. **MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 MAY**

The Minutes were noted by the Committee.

3. **SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee received the monitoring report on sickness absence across the Council, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that tables 10, 11 and 12 in the report were inaccurate and they were provided with updated versions. Members commented that the benchmarked data demonstrated that Neath Port Talbot were sixth best in Wales and suggested that the strategies being put in place must be having an impact. Officers explained that benchmarking information was useful but it was not the end of the story. It was noted that the 2015/16 all Wales benchmarking was not yet available. Officers highlighted that there were difficulties in comparing year on year figures, as there had been organisational structure changes over the past 12 months and that included the movement of services between heads of service.

It was highlighted that there had been a significant increase in sickness with school support staff. Officers explained that a sickness project had commenced in schools and was being monitored by the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board.

Officers noted that there had been a big increase in sickness absence in Adult Services. Part of the reason for this was the sickness absence management processes had previously not been set up or maintained properly. Officers had now set up the correct reporting mechanisms and this had resulted in more sickness absences being reported and increased figures. Members asked if the recent changes to Homecare Services had had an impact on sickness absence. Officers informed them that this could be the case

and one of the main reasons given for sickness absence had been stress related.

It was highlighted that the ratio between the proportion of long term and short term sickness absence had remained consistent. In some areas there had been higher rates of long term sickness and officers were looking at why this was the case with some departments over others. It was explained that some cases absences had been effectively managed through the early intervention methodology. It was noted that cancer related absence had more than doubled compared with last year and this would continue to be monitored carefully during 2016/17.

Members were informed that the greatest number of days lost to sickness absence was stress related and this had increased by 12% in 2015/16. The Service wanted to undertake more work on this issue and officers highlighted that a large amount of these cases were not due to work related stress. It was explained that stress risk assessments were undertaken with individuals who had been absent due to stress, however, it could only address issues regarding work related stress. It was noted that the Occupational Health team now had a qualified bereavement councillor and someone qualified to undertake still birth and miscarriage counselling. Members requested a breakdown of the number of work related and non-work related stress related absences in future reports.

Members asked if the Council was rigorous enough in dismissing people for poor sickness absence records. It was noted that the Council took a measured approach to dismissing people because they were unable to attend work on a regular basis. It was highlighted that there had been more warnings issued this year and most staff took the warnings seriously.

Members were informed that sadly there had been eight members of staff who had died in service this year. Some cases were due to long illnesses and others were more sudden. Members queried how such cases were managed. Officers explained that where possible a consistent approach was undertaken, however, it depended on individual circumstances and all cases would be sensitively handled where serious illness was concerned. In such circumstances the conversations were not centred around return to work but more about how the individual wished to communicate with officers and the support that they required, for example on pensions and contacts for their families.

Members were informed that sickness absence cost the Council was £4.4mil in 2015/16 and this did not take into account the cost of cover. It was queried how much cover for sickness cost the Council. Officers explained that in some cases staff sickness would not be covered and this added pressure to the rest of the team. During 2015/16 agency workers had cost around £1.5mil, however this was not just to cover sickness. It was agreed that a breakdown of this information would be included in the next report. In addition, Members requested that they also had sickness absence information excluding teachers in future reports.

Members thanked officers for an in depth analysis on sickness absence. The different tiers for ill health retirement, outlined in Table 18, were explained to Members: Tier one was in relation to those that could not work again, tier two was in relation those not able to work for at least five years and tier three was in relation to those with a temporary condition that could be reassessed in the future.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

4. LONG TERM SICKNESS TASKFORCE UPDATE

The Committee received an update report and presentation on the Long Term Sickness Taskforce and the early intervention methodology pilot, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that in September 2014 Members had endorsed the establishment of the Sickness Taskforce to undertake an examination of long term absence and understand what actions were needed with the aim of reducing costs of absence. The Taskforce had progressed this work and a more consistent approach had been implemented across the Council. Managers were provided with prompts to assist them in managing absences more effectively. In addition, communication with staff had improved that had resulted in them having a better knowledge of what was expected from them. Overall, during 2015/16 there was a reduction of 5.8% days lost to long term sickness absence compared with 2014/15.

In regards to stress related sickness absence a new methodology had been introduced, as mentioned during the previous item. It was noted that some directorates had higher level of stress sickness absence than others. Early intervention processes were being utilised to encourage manager to contact the individual earlier to ensure the

right support could be put in place. In some cases this could result in the individual returning to work sooner. In relation to the Early Intervention Strategy Members queried what the timescales were. It was clarified that there would be an initial meeting with the individual if the sickness absence was likely to be more than 28 days and managers would be prompted after 14 days. It was noted that this could be earlier if the cause was stress related.

There was evidence of good practice and some areas had seen a significant reduction in sickness absence. However, in some areas there had been an increase due to some cases of serious illness, this particularly has an impact on small teams. Members were presented with information about the work that had been undertaken in different service areas and examples of good practice.

It was highlighted that overall there had been a net reduction in sick pay costs of around £47k. It was noted that the funding for the additional resources based in the Human Resources team to implement the Early Intervention Strategy ceases on 31st December 2016. It was queried if the savings justified the resources put into the project. Several Members commented that it took time to change culture and perception and most felt it was a worthwhile project. It was also noted that the savings were more than those shown on paper as there were other considerations, such as covering posts and staff feeling valued, and concerns were raised about the funding of the project ending. Officers explained that no decision had been taken by Members on the future of the project and a report would be brought to a future meeting with a cost benefit analysis.

Members queried if there was any issues with medical opinion conflicting with Occupational Health advice, particularly in relation to matters of stress. Officers explained that this was not generally an issue.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

5. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17**

Noted by the Committee.

6. PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the follow matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

6.1 Public Services Board – Terms of Reference

The Committee received the report on the terms of reference for the Public Service Board (PSB), as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 came into effect on the 1st April 2016. The Act made it a statutory duty to establish a PSB, which superseded the Local Service Board. The PSB met for the first time on the 23rd May 2016 and at that meeting the terms of reference were agreed. It was highlighted that the terms of reference were quite prescriptive under the Act. It was noted that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee had responsibility for scrutinising the work of the PSB.

It was highlighted that there were four statutory partners required to be members of the PSB and they had agreed the terms of reference and to meet on a quarterly basis commencing with its first proper meeting in September 2016. During the summer the partners would also be undertaking a development session. It was noted that under the Act the PSB was required to invite partner organisations to participate in the activity of the Board. Members were provided with a list of the organisations that had been agreed to be invited to participate.

Members raised concerns that some organisations did not place enough value in scrutiny and queried if the members of the PSB would be open to the scrutiny process. Officers highlighted that these arrangements were different to what had been implemented before, as scrutiny had not been empowered to effectively scrutinise other public bodies. However, specific powers had been given under the Act to the relevant scrutiny committee to scrutinise the work of the PSB and it was stated in the terms of reference. Council officers would be working with partners to fully explain the role of scrutiny so they fully understood the process.

Members noted that the creation of such boards could cause confusion over the responsibilities of different organisations and the responsibilities of the PSB had to be clear to the public. Officers took these comments on board and highlighted that there would be a Members Seminar in the autumn that would also provide Members with the opportunity to discuss the Local Authority Well-being Plan.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

6.2 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) – Update

(Cllr.M.Harvey reaffirmed his interest and withdrew from the meeting for this item).

The Committee received the update report on the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that in January 2016 the Policy and Resources Cabinet Board agreed several recommendations in relation to the CCTV service and this report provided an update against those recommendations. Members were also asked to consider the updated CCTV Scheme.

Officers highlighted that the decommissioning of the cameras, in order to be compliant with the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's guiding principles, was progressing and by the end of August 2016 all decommissioned cameras would be taken down. The Office of the Surveillance Camera Commissioner had re-affirmed that it was not permissible to leave a camera in place which was not active.

It was noted that it was not yet possible to measure any impact on crime in the areas where cameras had been removed. However, Members were informed that so far there was no anecdotal evidence to show any marked change in crime and disorder following the removal of cameras. Officers would continue their discussions with South Wales Police regarding the collation of data on crime statistics for the areas where the cameras had been placed, so that a more accurate picture of the impact of their removal could be developed. Members asked how confident officers were that the data would be provided and it would contain the information that was

required. It was noted that there was excellent partnership working between the Community Safety Partnership and if there was an issue then they would not wait for the production of data to respond. An example was given of when there was a spate of burglaries in the area and the Partnership had been proactive in responding to this. It was highlighted that the data provided officers with more strategic picture.

Members asked that where cameras had been decommissioned and then a need emerged would the cameras be re-commissioned. Officers explained that this would be the case and if there was a cost implication then a proposal would have to be brought to Members for consideration.

In regards to sustaining the service and developing a business case for establishing a joint service with the City and County of Swansea, officers had been advised that two key management personnel were leaving Swansea Council. In view of this recent change it was felt advisable to request permission to consider the potential of an out of hours service delivery in collaboration with Bridgend County Council whilst continuing to explore the potential of a joint service with Swansea.

Members queried if the establishment of a joint service would result in CCTV being monitored 24 hours a day. Officers highlighted that the discussions were regarding having a 24 hour service and they should have a better idea of timescales and what would be viable in the autumn. Members noted that some businesses were under the impression that there was no point in reporting theft if the CCTV service was not being monitored. Officers would ask the Community Safety team to look into this.

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

6.3 Quarterly Performance Management Data 2015-16 – Quarterly Performance (10 April 2015 – 31 March 2016)

The Committee received the Quarter Four Performance Management Data 2015-16 (1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016), as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were provided with an update against the Council's six improvement priorities and the highlights from the report. It was noted that in relation to Customer Services that customer waiting times continued to improve and there had been fewer customer walk offs. Officers outlined that there had been a lot of changes across the Council in 2015/16 with money being taken out of services and it was commendable that performance remained very good. There would be further information regarding this in the Annual Report. It was noted that there had been a drop in performance for two indicators in Adult Social Services and there had been a lot of changes in this area in the last year. It was expected that performance would improve over the 2016/17 financial year. Members asked how many performance indicators there were for Adult Services and were informed that there were 11.

In regards to Performance Indicators EDU/003 and EDU/004 Members highlighted that Neath Port Talbot continued to remain near the bottom of the table in regards to Key Stage 2 and 3. Members were aware that it was due to the standardisation and moderation of teacher assessments and asked how this was being addressed across Wales to bring the standards of assessments into line. It was explained that there was work being undertaken across the area to address this and it was noted that Neath Port Talbot did perform at Key Stage 4, which was positive. It was agreed that this issue would be referred to the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee for further investigation.

Members were pleased to see that in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants there had been an improvement in performance, especially with the move towards independent living. It queried why it took so long for work to be undertaken. It was explained that performance was based on the availability of money to undertake the work.

Members noted that there was still room for improvement in recycling and officers explained that the recycle plus programme was progressing. A lot of literature had been given to residents and gradually there would be a limitation on bins and black bags.

Members highlighted that library figures may not be accurate as they were aware that the electronic counters in some libraries

were not working. Officers explained that the figures would be worked out on the average number of visitors throughout the year and other performance information. Members were informed that the counters were being repaired or replaced where they were known not to be working.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

6.4 ICT and Procurement Business Plan 2016-2017

The Committee received the ICT and Procurement Business Plan for 2016/17, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the Business Plan had been constructed on the basis of reduced budget allocations for 2016/17, which was agreed as part of the budget setting process. It was noted that the Service was responsible for the provision and support of all ICT functions across the Council including schools. They were also responsible for all Corporate Procurement activity within the Council. It was noted that the Service performs well and was adaptable and flexible in delivering services. The Service had been within budget and they had met all their Forward Financial Plan savings that they had been allocated.

It was noted that a large number of the priorities from last year had continued through to this year as there were ongoing projects. It was explained that there would continue to be additional work in schools as the digital competency agenda moved forwards. It was highlighted that the IT infrastructure in Neath Port Talbot schools was very good and this would assist with further developments.

It was noted that the iProc procurement system was very good and was achieving savings across directorates. The Service would continue to monitor the National Procurement Service in line with the information this Committee had requested.

Members were informed that a new system had been developed for Workways Plus and the Service was supporting other Councils in using it. The Service was also working closely with ABMU Health Board and Swansea Council in assisting with flexible working for employees. Members asked if the

Department charged for the services delivered to other organisations. Officers confirmed that they did and continued to look at ways to increase income.

One of the Council's priorities was Digital by Choice and the Service had been instrumental in progressing this. One of the current priorities of the Inclusion Strategy was the development of public accessible WiFi in public spaces within Council buildings. It was noted that this was progressing well and once the necessary safeguards were in place to protect the Council's systems and information then it would be released to the public. This was aimed to be completed by the end of July. Members asked if this would be extended to libraries and it was explained that there was a different type of service required in libraries. In Council buildings the aim was for members of the public to be able to access the Council services online whilst in the building.

The Service was also working on developing a new system to modernise the way the Council interacts and not just in regards to phone lines, but to include other multimedia facilities, for example the development of SKYPE for businesses.

It was noted that the Service had had several modern apprentices and officers had commented that it was very pleasing to see those young people develop and were looking at extending the scheme. Members were pleased to hear about this.

Members commented that the Service was doing well and the Business Plan was well presented and clear. Members noted that there had been an event in the Gwyn Hall that had demonstrated how well ICT was being used in school and this would not have been possible without the department's hard work.

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

7. **URGENT ITEMS**

Because of the need to deal now with the matters contained in Minutes No. 8 below, the Chairman agreed that these could be raised

at today's meeting as urgent items pursuant to Statutory Instrument 2001 No. 2290 (as amended).

Reason: Due to the time element.

8. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT MANAGEMENT MONITORING -
DOWNGRADING OF UK SOVEREIGN RATING**

The Committee received the update report regarding movements to the United Kingdom's Sovereign rating following the vote to leave the European Union with reference to the Council's Treasury Management Policy, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that following the referendum decision to leave the European Union the three main credit rating agencies had taken the decisions to downgrade the credit rating of the UK. The Council utilised credit rating information provided by the Fitch credit rating agency who, on 28th June 2016, had downgraded the UK sovereign rating from AA+ to AA. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy stipulates that if the UK sovereignty rating reduced the Council would immediately review its investments and a report would be forwarded to Members for consideration. In line with this strategy the Council would continue to invest in UK institutions as long as they meet the credit criteria for the relevant investment organisation. Officers would continue to monitor the situation and it was highlighted that a lot of investments were with Local Authorities.

Members queried if there was a contingency plan in place as the Council set its budget for the year based on certain assumptions. Officers explained that there were some contingencies in place and the concern would not be with this year's budget but in future years, which was not yet known.

It was confirmed that the Council no longer had any investments in Iceland.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON