

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES/ CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)**

**Members Present:**

**6 December 2017**

**Chairman:** Councillor **A.N.Woolcock**

**Vice Chairman:** Councillor **S.Rahaman**

**Councillors:** C.Edwards, S.E.Freeguard, M.Harvey,  
S.K.Hunt, H.N.James, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller,  
J.D.Morgan, S.M.Penry, L.M.Purcell,  
A.L.Thomas and J.Warman

**Officers In Attendance** S.Phillips, D.Griffiths, Mrs.K.Jones and  
A.Manchipp

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors R.G.Jones, A.J.Taylor, C.Clement-  
Williams, D.W.Davies, D.Jones, E.V.Latham,  
P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards and A.Wingrave

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### **1. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Members made declarations of Interest at the commencement of the meeting:-

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| Councillor A Llewelyn | Re the Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services on the Annual Report as it related to the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme as he is a Governor and parent at an affected school and confirmed his dispensation to speak only. |
| Councillor S.Rahaman  | Re the Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services on the Annual Report as it related to development opportunities at the  |

Aberavon Seafront as his family has a business on the Seafront.

## 2. **ANNUAL REPORT**

Members received the comprehensive report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services on the first part of the Annual report for 2017/18. The report covered the work of the Authority in achieving the improvement objectives set out in the Corporate Plan developed by the pre-decessor Council, and covered the period 1 April to 30 September 2017. Following the presentation of the report Members raised the following:-

- Whilst the lack of progress in some areas as a result of the current austerity measures was acknowledged, Members noted that the improvements to Neath Town Centre had not progressed for some time. This was due to the lack of development monies available. Members felt that better communication with the public would convey the issues and noted that a report in relation to Neath Town Centre would be discussed at the meeting of the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board on 8 December, 2017, in private session.
- The work of the Valley's Task and Finish Group needed to evidence what was being proposed for the areas. The Chief Executive advised Members that investment had been made in certain valley areas, however discussions were ongoing with Welsh Government to identify further proposals.
- In relation to the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), Members asked that it be noted that this had not yet been approved as, at the request of Welsh Government, it had been strengthened and re issued for a further period of consultation. The Committee was advised that this Authority was investing proportionately more (25%) in Welsh medium education than other local authorities in the sum of £34m.
- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme recognised the work being carried out in relation to the provision of Welsh medium education on the South Campus, however the poor condition of the buildings together with the lack of good sporting facilities at the North Campus would need to be addressed. Members were advised that this Authority had achieved the second highest spend in Band A of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.

- In relation to the new School in Briton Ferry, it was noted that this would be called Ysgol Newydd Briton Ferry.
- Members also asked when the new schools would be built at Coed D'Arcy, as part of the 106 Agreement, and whether they would be Welsh medium and were advised that the number of new houses built had not yet triggered the implementation of the 106 Agreement and that it had not yet been decided whether the schools would be English or Welsh medium schools. Officers advised that in order for the schools to be designated Welsh medium there would have to be sufficient unmet need.
- Members were pleased with the open and transparent way in which the issues around the Key Stage 4 results and the challenges around behaviour in schools were presented. It was noted that the issue around Key Stage 4 results was based on teacher assessment and was an all Wales issue. As a result teacher assessments had been stopped across Wales. The number of exclusions at schools were falling however the number remained high. Attendance was also an issue. Officers advised that the new Corporate Plan addressed the 3 Wellbeing objectives and the way forward regarding such things as the effect of poverty on educational outcomes.
- With regard to Digital By Choice, Members asked for the percentage increase in the accessing of Council services to be added to the report.
- Committee noted that the schools' Foundation Phase was the Authority's weakest cohort and that this was possibly due to Socio/Economic reasons. This Authority was now the most deprived in the UK and, with the introduction of Universal Credit, this would probably get worse.
- In relation to Social Services, Members were pleased with the reduction in the use of agency workers and urged Cabinet to maintain the high standard of service. Members were advised that there was a lot of strain on the service.
- The reduction in the number of Looked After Children was noted, and Members asked whether this decrease would continue? Officers advised that the aim was to safely reduce the numbers of Looked After Children, however a continued reduction could not be assured. Such things as the worsening Socio/Economic position as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit could result in an increase in the number of children at risk.
- The flexibility around Direct Payments was discussed wherein it was noted that the number of service users using the scheme

had risen to 387. Members asked what percentage this was of the overall number of service users within the County Borough – this would be provided outside of the meeting and added to the report. Members were advised that the take up of Direct Payments was now being promoted, where appropriate, by social workers, care workers and through the Authority's website. The introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 promoted the wellbeing of service users and as such the focus of service delivery had changed. The Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee had commissioned a Task and Finish Working Group to look into the use of Direct Payments.

- In relation to the Welsh Language Standards – Members noted that the Welsh version of the Authority's website had received a substantially lower number of 'hits' than the English version. Did this justify the additional expense in complying with the Standards?
- Concern was expressed at the degeneration of the bus services in the County Borough and particularly in the Valley areas. Officers advised that the current operator had new management and that there would be a review of the routes. In addition it was noted that Transport for Wales would also be looking at the provision throughout Wales.
- Members referred to the literacy and numeracy of children entitled to free school meals and their correlation with Looked After Children? Officers advised that the literacy and numeracy of those children entitled to free school meals was improving.
- Members welcomed the development of the Homeless Strategy and noted the £285k in the budget to address homelessness, and asked for an update on the position on anti- social behaviour within the County Borough. Members were advised that proposals were being considered for the provision of a homeless hostel within the County Borough and the provision of an outreach worker. The numbers of homeless people within the area were however quite low. Members asked what arrangements were in place to assist the homeless over the winter period? This would be sent to all Members outside the meeting.
- The Leader of Council advised the meeting that Officers were drawing up business cases for the future use of some of the Authority's decommissioned/empty buildings, with a view to hopefully generating income whilst keeping the property in a good state of repair.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet, subject to the report linking the work carried out to date with the future progress to be contained in the second report in early 2018, and to the addition of the points outlined above.

3. **COUNCIL'S REPRESENTATION ON JOINT COMMITTEES**

The Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by Cabinet.

**CHAIRMAN**