

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

2 October 2019

Chairperson: Councillor M.Harvey

Councillors: S. ap Dafydd, S.E.Freeguard, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance: S.Phillips, K.Jones, H.Jenkins, A.Evans, C.Griffiths, N.Pearce, C.Furlow-Harris, T.Davies and C.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors D.Jones, R.G.Jones, E.V.Latham, P.A.Rees and A.Wingrave

1. **PROGRESS REPORT ON PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT CONTAINED WITHIN WALES AUDIT OFFICE - ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2017-2018**

The Committee was updated on the progress made to date, to address the proposals for improvement contained within the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report 2017-2018.

Members discussed the importance of widening the scope of scrutiny, including the public having more involvement and participation, by way of tweeting questions into meetings, for example. Public speaking was already a recognised form of public engagement in meetings of the Planning Committee.

In response, officers advised that the Democratic Services Committee had been commissioned by Council to take forward a project regarding webcasting, as well as public participation in the democratic process. Results would be fed back to all Council in 2020.

Training and development of Members was discussed. A yearly questionnaire is circulated to Members, asking for topics they would like training on. Additionally, training topics were identified through performance development reviews, officer input, committee discussions and external regulators. The topics for training were then prioritised at the Democratic Services Committee. A set of measures for evaluating the effectiveness of the training programme had also been identified.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

2. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet items:

Quarter 1 Key Performance Indicators

Members queried the increase in abandoned telephone calls in English to the contact centre, and noted that a number of strategies had recently been put in place to prevent this happening going forward. This included the employment of 6 new modern apprentices in the last 12 months, with transferrable skills across the contact centre and one stop shops.

Members sought assurances that suitable measures had been put in place to ensure flexibility, with reference to CP/101 – CS/002a (customer services – average time (seconds) to answer telephone calls in Welsh). It was noted that it had taken several attempts to recruit suitable Welsh speakers, in order to replace those lost through natural wastage. In addition there was now 50% less staff within the service than in previous years.

It was anticipated that the new voice and telephony service linked to the main council phone number would automate a percentage of call responses, and this would help to reduce the average time taken to answer calls, and also reduce the number of contact centre staff needed to route calls. Additional council services were going online, which would release employees' time to speak with callers with more complex queries.

Members were interested in receiving further information about regular queries which came into the contact centre and the one stop shops – for example, bus passes and disabled blue badges.

CP/015 (the percentage of schools that have adopted suitable programmes to address violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence) was discussed, in light of the 'red' (Red/Amber/Green – RAG) performance status. Officers from the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning (ELLL) directorate were working with schools and the youth service to put support mechanisms in place. The Director of ELLL would be engaging with LLAN (Primary Head Teacher Group) and NASH (National Association of Secondary Headteachers) in order for schools to be able to highlight where there was an issue.

Members discussed whether reference/incident numbers were given to callers in order to be able to track a query from start to finish. Officers advised Members to feed back any specific examples of callers' queries which they felt had not been followed through to an acceptable conclusion.

Members were pleased to note there had been a reduction in the number of working days lost to sickness absence per employee, when compared to the same quarter last year.

Despite trying to make online services easier for members of the public to use, the importance of face to face interaction was still important. An example of the need for face to face engagement was the number of older and disabled people unable to reapply for their bus passes online – an initiative by Transport for Wales.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Corporate Plan 2018-22 Annual Report

Members queried the meaning of the term 'affordable housing' and noted that this referred to the Welsh Government's definition, as detailed within a Welsh Government Technical Advice Note. There was no scope for the Council to change this definition, which would be circulated to Members by the scrutiny officer following the meeting.

The following areas were also discussed:

- Strengthening Welsh education,
- The wait for a social care package following an admission to hospital.

The Welsh Government's postcode allocation for Flying Start areas was discussed. Officers highlighted a new joint project between Neath Port Talbot and Swansea, called the Pathfinder programme, which would look at how preschool provision could be provided in a more agile and responsive way.

It was confirmed that the performance monitoring information relating to education would be presented to the Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis.

The take up of sport by young people in Neath Port Talbot was discussed, and Members were pleased to note that this was above the national average. The large number of free parks (including skate parks) within Neath Port Talbot was noted, as well as facilities within schools being used by the local community, outside of school hours.

The national data on support for carers would be presented to Committee as soon as it was available.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Chargeable Fees for Legal Work

Members noted that the report did not refer to requests from members of the public, but rather utility companies who may need to close or divert a public footpath for a period of time, in order to progress important works. The current policy and processes for special event notices would not be altered.

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

3. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme for 2019/20.

CHAIRPERSON