

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

23 July 2020

Chairperson: Councillor M.Harvey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: 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 and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, K.Jones, H.Jenkins, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, I.Vaugh, D.Hopkins, N.Thomas, A.Harding, S.Curran, T.Davies, A.Manchipp, C.Plowman and C.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees

The Committee held a minute's silence in respect for the recent passing of Councillor Steffan Ap Dafydd.

1. Recovery Strategy

Members were presented with a draft strategy on stabilisation, the period between response and recovery, following the COVID 19 outbreak. The strategy set out a general framework that would support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as the Council moved towards recovery. It was noted that the draft strategy was being presented to all Scrutiny Committees for comments before presentation to Cabinet on 30th July 2020 for approval.

Officers gave a brief overview of the content of the strategy, explaining that it was split into three sections which consisted of looking back at what the Council did during the response phase of the crisis, looking forward as the UK moved out of the response phase and a road map of actions.

It was noted that the third part of the strategy was presented as a road map of actions which was framed on the basis of a traffic light system, which set out how to move from a position of total lockdown, through the traffic light system, to a position where services are back up and running.

It was highlighted that the main reason for this report was to provide a context for where the directorates are currently and what they had been doing during the pandemic which were detailed in the presentations from the directorates.

There was concern raised around the overlap between the membership of the cabinet scrutiny arrangements and the membership of the Recovery Panel. Officers undertook to explore this in more detail and to provide advice as might be necessary.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services gave an update on the financials following the recent outbreak of Covid-19. It was noted that a further budget report would be brought to Cabinet in September detailing the projected financials for the rest of 2020-2021 and clarity on further funding opportunities.

Discussions took place on ensuring correct communication was taking place with the public. It was noted that public involvement was imperative and therefore the main points within report relating to communication would be made clear before being put before Cabinet in July.

It was noted that Cabinet Scrutiny Committee may wish to include the Public Services Board in their Forward Work Programme, to scrutinise further and view the impacts Covid-19 has had on areas such as economic and equalities.

Members looked forward to being kept updated with the monitoring of the strategy in future sessions.

2. **Finance and Corporate Services Current Service Delivery and Recovery Plans**

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services gave a brief overview of the work undertaken by the directorate during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Members are regularly updated in scrutiny committees on the annual budget cycle. They were provided with information on the impact and service demand in the following services due to the recent Covid-19 Pandemic.

- Legal Services
- Human Resources and
- Finance Services.

Legal Services were commended for continually keeping up to date with legislation changes during these unprecedented times, to ensure the Council is working efficiently.

It was noted that the Council had continued to pay all staff during this pandemic and provided relief to businesses with their business rates.

The Chair of Planning and Licensing Committees commended staff for their standard of work and providing support in enabling the committee's to run as usual remotely.

The Committee noted the update.

3. **Policy, Democratic and Digital Services- Current Service Delivery and Recovery Plans (to follow)**

Members received a presentation on the current service delivery and recovery plans for the Policy, Democratic and Digital Services which was circulated before the meeting.

It was noted that services such as the Communications Team had to increase their working week hours and days to keep up with demand.

It was highlighted that the Covid-19 Pandemic had provided services with lots of innovations to move forward with such as, the Communications Team had posting videos online, provided physical signage in the County Borough and kept in contact with the public through telephone calls as well as their usual press releases.

The Digital Service Department also had high demand in ensuring the workforce could work remotely from home. They provided online services to meet demand such as the by local website, the Chat Bot, Chat Live and Council tax assistance online.

Members were updated on the work the Democratic Services Department had achieved in ensuring Committees could be held remotely. They continually updated members with regular advice and guidance changes through their welfare calls, urgency actions and Q and A website. Praise was provided for enabling remote meetings to proceed when legislation was amended, it was noted that Neath Port Talbot were the first Authority to run a remote Council meeting.

The collaborative working amongst different departments was emphasised and encouraged for the future.

It was noted that due to the impact of Covid-19 on the workforce the Welsh language duties were relaxed, however, officers are working to resume bilingual services in the near future.

Discussions took place in how prioritise will differ moving forward due to the effect of Covid-19. It was noted that it is within the scrutiny committee's gift to prioritise what they feel is important to consider in their Forward Work Programme such as the Public Services Board.

Members were pleased to note the updates from the Directorates and agreed that a Forward Work Programme session would be arranged for the autumn to focus on the main topics that have been raised in the presentations to help with the recovery phase.

CHAIRPERSON