

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**Members Present:**

**19 November 2015**

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

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor A.Jenkins

**Councillors:** M.Harvey, Mrs.L.H.James, A.Llewelyn,  
A.R.Lockyer, Mrs.K.Pearson, L.M.Purcell,  
J.Warman, I.D.Williams and Mrs.D.Jones

**Officers In Attendance** Mrs.K.Jones, D.Rees, Mrs.S.Rees,  
Mrs A. Hinder, K Davies, N.Evans and  
Mrs.K.Holt

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors P.A.Rees and A.N.Woolcock

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### **1. COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING BENEFIT REPORT CARDS**

Members received a presentation on the report cards for Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit.

Members asked what parts of the service would not be maintained within in Council Tax due to budget cuts. Officers confirmed that the visits to check properties to engage with customers to try and negotiate payment would not be maintained.

Members asked whether there were any ongoing issues with sickness absence in the unit and Officers stated that there was one individual who was on long term sick and another was due back at work shortly following an accident while undertaking a visit.

In relation to staff Personal Development Reviews Members were informed that the unit had not undertaken them as yet this year.

Members asked how much housing benefit overpayments were still outstanding. Officers confirmed that it was approximately £2,500,000

but this had been accrued over 15 years. A repayment plan was in place for many of the debts.

Members were advised that the service supported the digital by design programme. Members were concerned that this would be detrimental to some people who may have access issues. It was confirmed that it would not be a one size fits all and the face to face channel would remain open.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16.**

Members noted the forward work programme.

3. **PRE SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

3.1 Governance Group – 6 Month Progress Report and Corporate Assessment Action Plan

Members considered the report and were informed of the progress being made against specific actions. Members were advised that the action in relation to City Region Scrutiny was red because work to strengthen scrutiny of Local Service Board collaborative activity, the work of the Western Bay Social Services and health collaborative and ERW had been prioritised in the first instance. The action plan was acknowledging that scrutiny of City Region activities was a matter that still required consideration.

Members asked for more specific detail on the type of legal challenges that the Council could face. Officers stated that training had been delivered over the summer period by the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Democratic Services to officers emphasising the importance of including all relevant information in reports, in particular the need for robust Equality Impact Assessments and appropriate consultation. Guidance had been issued to all officers' and a standard report template had been introduced to promote greater consistency across the Council. During the training, examples of judicial review

challenges had been used to illustrate some of the key learning points.

Members requested that they are reminded what they should be considering when decisions are before them to mitigate against any potential further judicial reviews.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

### 3.2 Quarterly Performance Management Data 2015/2016 – Quarter Two Performance

Members considered the Performance Management Report for the second quarter of 2015/2016. Members raised their concerns in relation to the performance in relation to Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 assessments. The Chair of the Children, Young People and Educations Scrutiny Committee confirmed that his Committee had already raised their concerns in this area and had received an assurance from officers that results were due to inconsistencies across Wales in the quality of teacher assessments. Members noted that at GCSE level Neath Port Talbot performed very well. The Committee requested that the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor this issue.

Members enquired whether the Council had done all it could to ensure that people can visit local authority sport and leisure centres as the Council was currently last in Wales. It was recommended that the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee request further information on this area at a future meeting. Members noted that it was important that Members were reminded of the respective responsibilities of Celtic Leisure and the Council.

Members also noted their concerns in relation to the number of library materials issued during a year. It was recommended that the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee investigate this area.

Following Scrutiny the report was noted.

### 3.3 Sickness Absence Monitoring Report

Members considered the report on sickness absence that contained information on sickness absence figures across the Council.

Members welcomed the content of the report and stated that it was easy to understand and well written.

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
Community Care	– Social Care Health and Housing

Members requested that at the special meeting to be held in December that financial information was provided to demonstrate the costs of sickness absence.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

## **CHAIRPERSON**