

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Members Present:

4 September 2014

Chairman: Councillor D.W.Davies

Vice Chairman: Councillor A.Jenkins

Councillors: A.Carter, M.Harvey, Mrs.L.H.James, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer, Mrs.K.Pearson, Mrs.S.M.Penry, L.M.Purcell, A.J.Siddley, J.Warman and I.D.Williams

Officers In Attendance N.Evans, Mrs.K.Jones, H.Jenkins, G.Nutt and G.Jones

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

1. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

Cllr A. Llewellyn declared that he was a Committee Member of Ystalyfera Development Trust but had dispensation to speak.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 24TH JULY 2014.**

The committee noted the minutes.

3. **TO SCRUTINISE INFORMATION AND MONITORING ISSUES BEING REPORTED BY:**

(a) Update on the Modernisation of the Scrutiny Process and Work Programme Development

Members considered an update report in relation to the modernisation of the scrutiny process and work programme development. Members were advised

that the work programme presented to them was not set in stone and items could be added as the year progresses.

Members noted the progress made and agreed the work programme.

(b)Development of a Third Sector Grant Making Policy

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services advised Members that whilst the issue of a policy for Third Sector Grant Making was required proposals that were emerging for the budget process has resulted in the need defer this item if the Committee were in agreement.

Concern was raised that by agreeing to defer the item this would lead increased pressure when developing the policy due to the timings of setting the 15/16 budget. It was also suggested that there will need to be more dialogue with the third sector to establish what each organisation can do for each other.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services acknowledged the concerns and stated that a review of the policy would be undertaken with Members and any potential changes would be implemented from 2016/2017.

Members resolved to agree to a deferment on the understanding that an interim report is presented in due course highlighting the current situation.

4. PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY - SICKNESS ABSENCE

Members considered an update report in relation to the sickness absence figures for the Council. This had been highlighted as an area that required scrutiny.

Members were advised that considerable work had been done to address the short term sickness absence and this had seen a significant reduction in number of employees and number of days lost to sickness absence. The main issue was now in relation to long term sickness absence and the serious health conditions attributed to this level of absence.

Members were also advised that schools are not included at this moment in time as it is the responsibility of the governing bodies to address sickness absence in schools. It was stated that ESTYN and the WAO have been very critical on sickness management in schools.

Members were informed that work had been undertaken previously in relation to sickness absence and now a task force had been established to continue this work.

The aim of the task force is to better understand and systematically analyse the actual reasons for the number of long term absences and the length of such absences; and to also develop a package of measures which will address the issues arising from the work. The task force will introduce improvements in arrangements for managing sickness absence at an early stage and not wait until all the work is complete.

This work will keep running in parallel to the work being undertaken on other priorities that have emerged as part of the budget. The work will also be undertaken with less staff in HR than there has been previously.

Clarification was sought on what help the Council gives individuals and how quick this is provided. Members were advised that there is currently 1 occupational health advisor, 2 nurses and 2 secretaries and between them they arrange between 5000 and 6000 appointments per year which means there are waiting times for employees to see occupational health. It was suggested that perhaps the Council should invest in more occupational health nurses, it was stated that this would possibly be an outcome from the work of the taskforce and more information should be known by November.

Members asked for information in relation to the actual financial costs of sickness absence for the Council. Members were advised that in 2013/2014 it cost the Council £5,615,000 but this does not take into account the costs to managers who have to rearrange staffing when there is sickness absence if this was taken into account the actual financial costs would be circa £7-8m.

Whilst it was agreed that this was a Council wide problem the other scrutiny committees can request specific relevant data should they have any concerns on any service areas under their purview.

Members asked whether the Council utilised “light duties” to make it easier for some on long term sickness absence to return to work. It was stated that there are rehabilitation procedures available to assist people to return to work but it was often difficult in some service areas to place an individual on light duties due to the nature of the work.

It was accepted that there has been some good work undertaken in some areas and this is something that other areas can learn from.

In addition to noting the report the Members endorsed the approach that was to be adopted and requested that a further update report be presented to the scrutiny meeting to be held in November 2014.

5. **PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY - QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT DATA - 2014/15 (CONTAINED WITHIN THE CIRCULATED CABINET BOARD PAPERS)**

Members considered a report on the Quarterly Performance Management data for the period 1st April 2014 to 30th June 2014 for Chief Executive's and Finance and Corporate Services Directorate and, the performance management data for the same period for services that were within the remit of the other four main Scrutiny Committees (CYPE, SCHH, E & H and ECR). This will enable the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Members to discharge their functions in relation to performance management.

Members were advised that a report had been recently published that would enable the Council to undertake a comparison against other Councils in Wales on a wide range of indicators. The information highlighted that now the Council had 10 indicators in the top quartile and 8 in the bottom quartile which is the exact opposite of the previous year.

Members asked for clarity on whether the contact centre was still receiving calls for NPT Homes. It was stated that this previously was an issue a year ago with the contact receiving in excess of 2000 calls but through joint working this has now reduced to approximately 350. Due to the nature of the Council's business this will always be the case just like the Council receives calls for social security. Members welcomed the work of the contact centre but suggested that if a directory of staff for the whole Council was updated then this could reduce the calls made to the contact centre by elected Members.

A question was asked in relation to the recycled waste that is collected and what does the Council do with it? Is it sold on and if so is the money reinvested in the service. A brief explanation was provide that all recycled materials are delivered to the MREC and once it has been sold on this is taken off the running costs of the MREC. It was also agreed that this issue should be considered by the Environment and Highways Scrutiny Committee in due course.

Concern was raised in relation to the performance of the indicators relating to public protection and the Committee was advised that this area will be considered by the Social Care Health and Housing Scrutiny in due course and discussions would be fed back to Policy and Resources at a later date.

Clarity was requested on what other sources are being developed in relation to new business start-ups enquiries assisted through Business Services. The Vice Chair confirmed that this issue will be considered by the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

Resolved that the report be noted.

6. **TO SELECT APPROPRIATE ITEMS FROM THE CABINET BOARD AGENDA FOR PRE-SCRUTINY (CABINET BOARD REPORTS ENCLOSED FOR SCRUTINY MEMBERS).**

6.1 Monitoring Report on Existing FFP Savings

Members selected the above report for scrutiny and raised two points in particular. The first point was in relation to a saving from the financial services area and this was due to a delay from the Department of Work and Pensions the rationalisation of benefits work has only been piloted in North Wales so far.

The second area that was drawn to members attention was in relation to one stop shop and customer services and the de-clustering of posts. It had transpired that staff had been unhappy at the prospect of swapping job roles and becoming a generic role and this had resulted in a delay. However, the staff have now made representations that they no longer wanted to be inflexible and they have developed proposals for consideration by the Head of Service.

6.2 Miscellaneous Grant Applications

The Committee chose not to consider this item but were supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

6.3 Non-Domestic Rates – Enhanced Local Needs Scheme

The Committee chose not to consider this item but were supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

6.4 Treasury Management Monitoring

The Committee chose not to consider this item.

6.5 Corporate Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure Monitoring Report

The Committee chose not to consider this item.

7. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS TO RESOLVE TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FOR THE FOLLOWING ITEM PURSUANT TO SECTION 100A(4) & (5) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE RELEVANT EXEMPT PARAGRAPHS OF PART 4 OF SCHEDULE 12A TO THE ABOVE ACT.**

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

8. **TO SELECT APPROPRIATE PRIVATE ITEMS FROM THE CABINET BOARD AGENDA FOR PRE-SCRUTINY (ENCLOSED CABINET BOARD REPORTS FOR SCRUTINY MEMBERS)**

8.1 Housing Benefit Write Offs

The Committee chose not to select this item for scrutiny but was supportive of the recommendation for Cabinet Board.

CHAIRMAN