

# **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**Members Present:**

**19 May 2016**

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

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor A.Jenkins

**Councillors:** A.Carter, M.Harvey, Mrs.L.H.James,  
Mrs.D.Jones, A.Llewelyn and Mrs.K.Pearson

**Officers In Attendance** Mrs.K.Jones, S.John, D.Rees, Mrs.S.Rees,  
Mrs.J.Banfield, Davies and S. Curran

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

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

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr K. Pearson Report of the Head of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services re: Comments, Compliments and Complaints (Annual Report) as she is a partner in Heddfan Properties who rent properties through Housing Options.

Cllr M.Harvey Report of the Head of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services re: Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Business Plan, in relation to CCTV as he is employed by South Wales Police

2. **MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 31ST MARCH 2016**

Members considered the minutes from the previous meeting. In relation to discussion held on Welsh Language Standard 84- if you offer an education course that is open to the public you must offer it in Welsh- the Committee had asked for further information which had been circulated by email following the meeting. Officers confirmed that while courses through the medium of Welsh could be offered it was not possible to do this all of the time. The Committee discussed the inflexibility of the standards and the importance of exploring alternative providers in relation to meeting some of the standards.

The minutes were noted by the Committee.

3. **AN EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF SERVICE REPORT CARDS AND THE USE OF SERVICE REPORT CARDS WITHIN THE SCRUTINY PROCESS**

The Committee received the findings of an evaluation undertaken on the quality of service report cards and the use of service report cards within the scrutiny process as contained within the circulated report.

The Committee were reminded that performance report cards were part of the Council's strengthened performance management framework and had been designed to strengthen accountability at Chief Officer/Head of Service/Accountable Manager level, embed performance management in services and strengthen the scrutiny of performance.

It was noted that Members have an important role to play in relation to performance monitoring as by requesting report cards on the scrutiny agendas they are enabling priority to be given to the completion of the work within service areas. Members agreed that it is vital that performance is continually reviewed and that they are kept informed of how well departments and services are performing, particularly in light of the current budget situation, whereby departments and services are being asked to do more with less resource.

Officers stated that whilst a great deal of progress had been made since the introduction of the requirement for the production of service report cards with 48% (43 out of 89) services presenting theirs to the relevant committees during 15/16, there was still further work to do.

Members queried who is responsible for ensuring the report cards are up to date from now on and commented that if the report cards are regularly completed and kept up to date within service areas it would be easier for an overall picture of performance to be maintained. It was stated that it is the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services who is responsible for the implementation of the performance management framework and her staff within the Corporate Strategy Team who will ensure the report cards are completed to requirements.

Members confirmed that they expect report cards to be completed by each service area and for them to be programmed into the agendas for scrutiny committees for the next Civic Year.

Further information was sought on 'golden threads' and a pictogram of the Council's Performance Management Framework was distributed. The "golden thread" of accountability was clarified which runs through the Council linking strategic activities to operational activities.

Members also asked if best practice is shared amongst managers when preparing report cards. Officers discussed that when report cards were first introduced, the initial request had been for guiding principles rather than strict guidelines but it seems that as the process progresses more solid guidance and examples are being requested, particularly of report cards that have been well received by scrutiny members. Detailed guidance and examples have since been developed to improve the quality and consistency of service report cards and additional targeted support will be made available to managers who require it.

Following a request by this Committee at its meeting on January 7<sup>th</sup>, the Wales Audit Office will be providing training to Members on the scrutiny of service report cards and the Chair emphasised the importance of this training and reminded the Members of the Committee to book on to attend one of the upcoming sessions.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

#### **4. RESPONSE FROM THE NATIONAL PROCUREMENT SERVICE**

The Committee received the response from the National Procurement Service to the questions they had submitted regarding the breakdown

and explanation of the savings that Neath Port Talbot Council had achieved to date as contained within the circulated report.

Members discussed the content of the response which raised some further questions. They asked for further information on the representatives on the delivery group and were disappointed that there are no elected member representatives. Officers explained that one representative is chosen by the Local Authority to express their views to the Board.

Members were dissatisfied at the level of jargon included in the report and asked for clarification on what 'pipeline' meant. Officers explained that this was in relation to the entire process from start to end.

Members asked who is responsible for auditing the National Procurement Service and Officers informed the Committee that it is the responsibility of the National Audit Office.

The Committee asked if the Local Authority makes a financial contribution to the National Procurement Service and were informed that the contribution is top sliced from the Local Government settlement but the aim is that the service is self-funded within two years.

Members acknowledged that the service had delivered some successes but it is now important that they become accountable for their promises.

Following scrutiny, the Committee agreed that the Chairperson would write back to the National Procurement Service in conjunction with the Head of ICT highlighting the promises for action that were included in the original letter and request that quarterly monitoring reports be provided on these actions. Similarly, the letter will express the Committee's dissatisfaction that there are no elected member representatives on the Local Delivery Group.

## 5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

### Cabinet Board Proposals

## 5.1 Digital Inclusion Charter

Members did not wish to scrutinise the implementation of a Digital Inclusion Charter as contained within the circulated report, but wished to indicate their strong support of the proposal to be considered by Cabinet Board.

## 5.2 Comments, Compliments and Complaints- Annual Report

The Committee received the overview of the comments, compliments and complaints received during the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 in accordance with the Council's two stage policy as contained within the circulated report.

Officers explained that this is an overview report and that detailed information on comments, compliments and complaints for service areas are now included in the service report cards that are routinely presented to scrutiny.

Overall, the Committee noted the reduction in complaints and were pleased at the inclusion of compliments that are received throughout Council departments. In particular they discussed the excellent service that had been received recently in relation to waste and recycling.

Members asked for further information in relation to partially held complaints attributed to the customer perception of staff attitude. Officers explained that sometimes members of staff have to have difficult conversations with members of the public and will have to refuse them a service or product in line with Council policy; this can quite often escalate if the result is not what the member of the public was expecting and can result in a complaint which is more often related to the result of the conversation rather than the attitude of the staff. Officers explained that all calls are recorded and monitored so if an issue is identified action is taken immediately.

Members queried why the detail on the number of complaints to the Environment Directorate did not include any figures or details and requested that in future the Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report is brought to Committee at the same time as the quarterly performance data for Quarter 4.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

### 5.3 Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Business Plan 2016/17

Members received the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Business Plan for 2016/17 as contained within the circulated report. The business plan has been developed with input from staff employed across the department and build on the priorities identified in previous years.

The Committee heard how the department is managing more work in relation to new legislation that has been enacted by the Welsh Government which has introduced new duties and responsibilities for Local Government. Members discussed the new duties particularly associated with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act 2015, the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014. For the most part, Members noted that the new duties have not been accompanied by additional resources and recognised the challenge in the department to accommodate the additional work associated with the new legislation within a reducing budget.

The Committee discussed particular priorities raised in the Business Plan. They discussed the Digital by Choice Strategy which involves the expansion of the range of services provided by the Council online and working with partners to tackle digital exclusion whilst also exploiting the benefits of digital technologies within the department. The Committee noted the large amount of budget savings allocated to the implementation of this strategy and asked for further information as to how the implementation of the strategy is progressing. Officers explained that digital literacy gaps within the workforce were being explored and partnership groups within the community were being developed.

The Committee asked if Members can get involved to progress this work further. Officers thanked the Members for their enthusiasm and welcomed further discussion outside of the meeting on how to progress ideas.

In relation to CCTV, Members noted the ongoing work to place CCTV on a sustainable footing. A combined service with Swansea is the preferred option with Members and a report will be brought back to the Committee in the Autumn progressing the proposed business case.

Members agreed it is important to support staff within the directorate and discussed the increased flexibility and resilience among the teams in events such as Elections and Mayor Making.

Members noted that the risk assessment scores associated with references CS36- insufficient numbers of staff to deliver the work and CS39- additional workloads are created which are not funded were particularly high. Officers concurred that the risk levels were unacceptable and whilst the management team had set priorities and processes to ensure the workload is manageable the challenge is how to ensure this remains the case in line with the additional work being presented to the department. Members were assured that this has been flagged up in relation to the 17/18 budget planning process and discussed how the uncertainty as to when the final budget settlement figures from Welsh Government are received makes it difficult to plan.

The Committee discussed the importance of meeting statutory duties but raised their frustration that the duties don't come with any additional financial resources. They raised concern that if certain duties are not met then fines and penalties can be attached such as failure to comply with Welsh Language Standards. Similarly further costs can be attributed to a service if they receive negative reports from the Wales Audit Office if they haven't met certain statutory duties and reputational damage can be done to the Council.

The Committee remained concerned that austerity measures are set to continue and difficult decisions will be faced over the coming years. Members expressed apprehension over the potential cut backs to the Police 101 telephone number service and the possible impact this could have on the Council's call centre.

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

#### 5.4 Human Resources Business Plan 2016/17

Members received the Human Resources Business Plan for 2016/17 as contained within the circulated report. It was explained the teams within the HR Unit include Human Resources; Health and Safety; Occupational Health; Learning Training and Development and the Joint Resilience Unit and that each team within the department provides a support service throughout the whole of the Council.

Members asked for an update in relation to E-Learning where performance last year was below expectation. Officers confirmed that progress by the external provider, All Wales Academy for Local Government had been slower than they would have hoped but the E-Learning site is now operational and is being made available to employees across the Council.

Further information was sought in relation to the workforce related Welsh Language Standards. Officers informed the Committee that if the Council is not successful with its challenge to the Welsh Language Commissioner there is the option of appeal and if the enforced standards simply cannot be met reports will be brought to Members with options of how to proceed.

Members asked for further information in relation to the sickness taskforce. The continued focus on early intervention was discussed along with activities such as Return to Work plan meetings, work related stress risk assessments and the effective communication strategy. There seems to have been a successful impact on individual cases of absence but this hasn't transferred to the top line sickness absence figures of the Council and Members shared the officer's frustration that this was not improving. Funding for the taskforce is in place until December 2016 and a report will be brought to the Committee in December on the overall work of the taskforce.

Members asked for further information in relation to compulsory redundancies and were informed that the headcount is 50 throughout the Council for 2015/16. The Committee were pleased to note that the Council has a successful redeployment programme in place that works well. The Committee noted that the aim is always to keep compulsory redundancies at a minimum.



Members asked for further information in relation to the struggle to recruit HR Officers. It was explained that as a result of the significant downsizing of the HR Team, the team now has a flatter structure, which whilst it has many benefits, has reduced the career progression for HR Officers. When qualified, Officers reach a certain level within the Council they tend to move on to continue their professional development. The expertise is then difficult to replace and recruit to. Members were pleased to note that the team are looking into a strategy to address these issues.

The Committee asked for clarification in relation to the Council's Risk Register and asked for an explanation on 'proximity'. Officers explained that the term means how soon something is going to happen and if a Risk is rated 1 for proximity the likelihood of the event occurring is immediate. For Members information a copy of the Council's Risk Matrix was circulated at the meeting.

Members praised the work of the HR Unit overall and its continued success as a service support function.

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

#### 5.5 Treasury Management Monitoring Report

Members received the Treasury Management action and information as contained within the circulated report. Members were asked to note the outturn position for 15/16 as well as the budget for 16/17.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

#### 5.6 Financial Services Business Plan 2016/17

Members received the Financial Services Business Plan for 2016/17 as contained within the circulated report.

As a support service to the Council, Officers explained that a set of key tasks continue to be the priorities of the Department as they have been in previous years and these include producing a balanced budget, maximise the collection of Council Tax and produce a Statement of Accounts. A further

focus of the team will be Income Generation in the light of the challenging budget situation that the Council's continues to find itself in.

The Committee praised the work of the department over the last year whose key achievements had included a collection rate of 97.9% of Council Tax (an increase on the previous year), and the embedding of an effective budget monitoring process and it was noted that sustaining this performance is important.

The Committee noted the performance target of maximising the number of transactional services available online and the importance of ensuring services are in line with the Digital by Choice agenda.

Members asked for further information in relation to the complaints received and were informed that these are external complaints. It was noted that compliments should be recorded wherever they have been submitted.

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

## 6. **URGENT ITEM**

Because of the need to deal now with the matter contained in Minute No 6 below the Chairman agreed that this could be raised at today's meeting as an Urgent Item pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Members noted the proposed response to the consultation being undertaken by the Auditor General on the way he might discharge new duties placed on him by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Members noted the additional duties proposed and the potential increase in audit fees which this could result in.

Officers drew attention to the statement in the response that the Council is not able to sustain a position where multiple requests for information are simultaneously requested some of which is already in the hands of national public bodies.

It was noted that the consultation response included a willingness from the Council to working with the Audit Office over the next 12 months to develop and test the audit approach.

Members asked for further information in relation to the options discussed in the report and Officers stated they would circulate the link to the Auditor General Report for Members' information.

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

## **CHAIRPERSON**