

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**Members Present:**

**21 September 2016**

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

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor A.Jenkins

**Councillors:** A.Carter, Mrs.D.Jones, A.R.Lockyer,  
Mrs.K.Pearson, L.M.Purcell, I.D.Williams and  
Mrs.A.Wingrave

**Officers In Attendance** Mrs.K.Jones, D.Rees, D.Michael, S. Curran, S. Davies and N.Chapple

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

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

The following Members made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

A.R Lockyer Urgent Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services re: Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015- Call for Evidence as he is the Chair of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Forum.

K.Pearson Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services re: Quarterly Performance Management Data 2016-17 Quarter 1 Performance as she rents a property through Housing Options.

2. **MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 JULY 2016**

The Minutes were noted by the Committee.

3. **HOLDING PAPER IN RESPECT OF THE NATIONAL PROCUREMENT SERVICE UPDATE**

The Committee noted the report.

4. **PROSPERITY FOR ALL HIGHLIGHT REPORT**

Members received information relating to the Corporate Improvement Objective Prosperity for All in relation to Anti-Poverty for Quarter 1 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2016-30<sup>th</sup> June 2016) as contained within the circulated report.

The Committee noted that the people who have been affected by the reduction in the benefits cap have been identified and partners are working to ensure those individuals are aware of how their income will be affected and will target support as necessary. Members questioned who the partners were that are involved and were informed that they include the Credit Union and the Welfare Rights Unit. It was noted that whilst there is no unmet need identified currently, this may change as the UK Government implements its Welfare Benefits Reform Agenda.

Members noted that digital ways of working and delivering services are being continually considered and that the Council is working in partnership with local partners to explore how more people can be supported to get online.

Members queried the numbers referenced in the report of claimants receiving their benefit through Universal Credit. The report stated as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016 there are over 1,000 claimants in receipt of Universal Credit but that there are no accurate up to date figures for the Neath Port Talbot area. Officers committed to providing Members with updated figures for the area.

The Committee discussed the focus from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on disability related benefits. They noted that over 90% of cases which are supported through appeals processes by the Welfare Rights Unit have the decisions overruled and Members noted the stress to individuals involved and the cost of the

process. The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee will be undertaking a Task and Finish Review into the wider effects of Welfare Reform on the local community and the Committee expressed an interest in monitoring the outcomes from this work.

Members asked for information to be circulated to all members on the extension of the Blue Badge Scheme to people with a time- limited mobility impairment.

Members noted that no one has to date requested help to complete their Universal Credit claim form on line and discussed that the people completing the forms appear to have the digital competence needed although such support would be provided if required. This is likely to be due to the fact that single job seekers are the focus of Universal Credit activity at the present time. As more people with more complex needs are drawn into Universal Credit bigger challenges regarding digital literacy are anticipated

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

5. **COUNCIL TAX AND NON DOMESTIC RATES SERVICE REPORT CARD**

Members received information relating to the Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates Service Report Card as contained within the circulated report.

The Council Tax section is responsible for the billing and the collection of Council Tax in excess of £60m from over 65,500 domestic properties in the borough. The Council Tax collection rate for 2015/16 was 97.9% an increase of 0.4% on the previous year and Members were pleased to note that Neath Port Talbot has the third highest collection rate in Wales.

The section has 23 full time equivalent employees and had a slight overspend in 15/16 which is attributed to staffing costs.

The section had three cases of long term sickness in 15/16 which impacted on the working days lost but Members were assured that both instances were being managed in line with the Council's sickness absence policies.

Members were pleased to note that new online forms are available on the web pages for Council Tax with the aim of enabling members of staff to focus on debt recovery instead of manual input on forms.

The Committee were made aware that staff appraisals have not yet been rolled out in the section as yet but are currently being developed. Members asked if the staff have other ways of engaging and were informed that all staff get supervision and regular team meetings where issues can be fed in.

Members asked for information in relation to 14/15 sickness data which was not included on the report card. Officers committed to ensuring this information would be made available to Members following this Committee.

Members praised the collection rates and asked for information in relation to Bailiffs. Officers committed to providing further information on Bailiffs to Members following this Committee.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

## 6. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17**

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Committee will be a Special Budget Meeting to consider the Budget and Forward Financial Plan proposals under the remit of the Committee and will be held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016.

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

## 7. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

### Cabinet Board Proposals

#### 7.1 Annual Treasury Management Outturn Report 2015/16

Members received information in relation to the Annual Treasury Management Outturn as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted that during 15/16 the Council had complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements.

Members queried the estimates against the prudential indicators and the treasury management indicators. Officers explained that the prudential indicators for capital expenditure will always be more variable than the treasury management indicators.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

## 7.2 Treasury Management Monitoring 2016/17

Members received information in relation to Treasury Management Monitoring for 2016/17 as contained within the circulated report.

It was noted that the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee voted on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2016 to reduce the bank rate to 0.25%.

Members asked for further information in relation to loans which had been used to fund capital expenditure on assets including Ysgol Bae Baglan and officers explained that the funding of this project is shared between long term borrowing and Welsh Government funding.

## 7.3 Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Letter and Report 2015/16

Members received information in relation to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Letter and Report 2015/16 as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted that the number of service complaints received by the Ombudsman has decreased between the financial years of 2014/15 and 2015/16. As compared with a notional local authority average of 40 complaints (adjusted for population) there were 33 complaints against this Council. Members welcomed this although noted that the Council is no longer a direct provider of general housing- a function which generally attracts some complaints.

It was noted that the number of Code of Conduct complaints against Members of County and County Borough Councils fell

however there was a marked increase in the number of complaints against Community Councils.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

#### 7.4 Legal Services (Licensing) Business Plan 2016/17

Members received the Legal Services (Licensing) Business Plan for 2016/17 as contained within the circulated report.

It was explained that the Licensing Section was responsible for ensuring that the Council fulfils its statutory duty in respect of the administration and enforcement of licensing functions. The Committee discussed the priorities that the section delivered in 15/16 as well as the priorities to be delivered in 2016/17.

It was highlighted that the service was self-funded, but it was not allowed to make a profit from licensing fees.

A discussion was held on the priority to implement taxi driver training in relation to safeguarding issues including child sexual exploitation. Members agreed that taxi drivers are the eyes and ears of the community and that they will come into contact with many vulnerable people and without adequate training they may not recognise the signs that someone needs help; training taxi drivers to identify issues and report their concerns could uncover instances of CSE and other safeguarding issues. Members were concerned that obstacles had prevented the rollout of this important training.

Members asked if the planned review of 'Street Trading Policy' would include representatives on the street that try to gain custom for a product or service, for example accident claims. Officers explained that such representatives did not need a licence however, if they erect an A-board then permission was needed from the landowner. It was commented that by-laws could be introduced to tackle such issues. Members noted that the Head of Planning was looking at developing a policy document around such issues for town centres in Neath Port Talbot.

It was noted that Ice Cream Vans do not require a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) Check for street trading.

Members noted that contingency planning in the section is a concern with three members of staff approaching retirement age.

Members were pleased to note that 100% of staff appraisals had been completed.

Members requested that an update report on the training of taxi drivers in relation to safeguarding issues including child sexual exploitation be brought to a meeting of this Committee by the end of the year and that the Children Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee be updated on the same topic.

Following scrutiny, Members were supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet Board.

7.5 Quarterly Performance Management Data 2016-17- Quarter 1 Performance (1<sup>st</sup> April 2016-30<sup>th</sup> June 2016.)

Members received information in relation to the Quarterly Performance Management Data for Quarter 1 for Chief Executive's and Finance and Corporate Services as contained within the circulated report. To allow Members to discharge their functions in relation to performance management the Committee also received data for the same period for services that are within the remit of the other four main Scrutiny Committees. Members noted that a number of new measures have been introduced into the Council's full suite of performance indicators for 2016/17 including a new set of local Digital by Choice measures.

It was noted that the second phase/roll out of the Recycle + scheme was implemented during Quarter 1 thereby increasing customer awareness and expectations regarding recycling services in the Council.

Members were concerned to note that the number of working days lost to sickness absence had increased. A detailed report in relation to this will be presented to this Committee in early November to help Members understand what lies behind this statistic. However, Members were pleased to note that the All Wales Benchmarking figures have shown that for 15/16 the Council has improved its position by moving from joint 7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> in Wales.

Members raised the issue that some complaints to the Customer Services Section could be in relation to staff not getting back to members of the public and asked if there was any way to measure this. Officers explained that this would be difficult due to the vast amount of extensions and mobile phones in existence throughout the Council but what they would suggest is urging these members of the public to make a complaint via the Council's complaint process so that the situation can be monitored. It was also explained that when there is a significant change to service, information can be provided via the automated service to provide as much information as possible to the public.

Members asked if the data in relation to Permanent and Fixed Term Exclusions was included in the overall attendance data. Officers committed to providing this information to Members following the meeting.

Members commented that for those Members who sit on other Scrutiny Committees, they have already been made aware of reasons behind dips in performance i.e. the number of young people in contact with the Youth Service has decreased and asked if officers could consider including explanations that have been provided in previous Scrutiny Committees could be included in this overview report.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

#### 7.6 Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan- April- August Progress Report 2016/17

Members received information in relation to the Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan- April-August Progress Report 2016/17 as contained within the circulated report.

It was noted that the Corporate Governance Group continues to oversee the improvement work identified in the Corporate Governance Improvement Plan to ensure the Council's processes and procedures enable the Council to carry out its functions effectively. During the period of April- August 2016 good progress has been made on most of the improvement work contained within the action plan however there has been a



delay in taking some improvement actions forward due to pressures of other work which has needed to have priority.

Members were pleased to note that to date 45 Members have taken up the rollout of the revised ICT scheme for Members and are now accessing Committee documents electronically. Any feedback from Members participating in the scheme is welcomed to feed into the Induction Programme which is currently being planned for 2017.

It was noted that further work on Corporate Risk Management will be undertaken following an assurance exercise conducted by the Wales Audit Office. There is also work ongoing to ensure the respective roles of Audit Committee and the Cabinet/Cabinet Scrutiny Committee are clear to ensure that there is no duplication of work.

Members noted the delay in implementing a recommendation from the Information Commissioner's Audit Action Plan for a complete roll out of Data Protection training across the Council due to difficulties associated with the E-Learning training platform.

In relation to Equalities, the work to revise associated guidance to incorporate examples of good practice for data collection and data sources will commence in September

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

## 8. **URGENT ITEM**

Because of the need to deal now with the matter contained in Minute No 8 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 Welsh Government on their call for evidence in relation to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

The Welsh Government passed legislation in 2015 to improve outcomes for people affected by gender-based violence. The

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence(Wales) Act places a joint statutory duty upon councils and local health boards to prepare a local strategy for each local authority area. The Act provides for Welsh Ministers to issue guidance on a range of topics that the strategies would be expected to embrace.

It was noted with concern that there has been little new funding identified to accompany the implementation of the Act which is also a source of concern amongst the wider range of partners who will need to play a part in implementing the Act.

Members noted the expectation to deliver a National Training Framework but discussed the issues surrounding this due to there being no new identified resources to support this as well as delivering on a broader policy agenda which includes Counter Terrorism and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as well as a range of other expected training. Members agreed that it was unhelpful to receive confused messages about local and regional responses and that there a range of responses that need to be delivered locally by partners to deliver arrangements which are fit for purpose.

Members were keen to state that their concern about supporting any development which undermines the democratic mandate of existing mechanisms such as local Councillors and Ministers and reiterated their concern that there has been little feedback from consultation responses the Council has already submitted to draft guidance surrounding the Act.

The Committee commented that it is a cause for significant concern that whilst the Act seeks to bring about significant change for people affected by gender based violence, the funding that remains available is still time limited and not part of a core budget.

Members noted that there has been very limited communication with the National Advisor and welcomed opportunities to strengthen the links between the Council, its partnership arrangements and the National Advisor.

Members observed that the response included in the report provided another opportunity for the Council to re-state the key

messages that have previously been communicated in previous consultation exercises.

The Committee requested that the Cabinet Board consider sending a letter expressing the concerns raised to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, Welsh Government.

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

## **CHAIRPERSON**