

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**Members Present:**

**1 November 2017**

**Chairperson:** Councillor A.N.Woolcock

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor S.Rahaman

**Councillors:** J.D.Morgan, C.Edwards, M.Harvey, S.K.Hunt, H.N.James, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, J.Warman and S.Paddison

**Officers In Attendance** Mrs.K.Jones, D.Rees, N.Headon and Miss.C.Davies

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors R.G.Jones, C.Clement-Williams and D.Jones

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### **1. MEMBER'S DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the undermentioned matters:-

Councillor Mike Harvey - The report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services, re: Strategic Equality Plan – Annual Report 2016-2017 as he is an employee for South Wales Police.

In addition, the report of the Head of the Financial Services, re: Community Councils Minor Projects Scheme Application – Coedffranc Community Council as he is a member of Coedffranc Community Council.

- Councillor Doreen Jones - The private report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, re: Urgency Action 0371 as she is a Member of the Blaenhonddan Community Council.
- Councillor Saifur Rahaman - The report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services, re: Strategic Equality Plan – Annual Report 2016-2017 on Cabinet Board Papers as he is the secretary of NPT BME Association.

2. **MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2017**

That the Minutes be noted.

3. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

4. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

**Cabinet Board Proposals**

4.1 **Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2016-2017**

Members received information on the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report for 2016-2017.

Members queried whether Trade Unions had the opportunity to contribute to the Plan and the work. Officers confirmed that there is a sister document which reports on equality in employment and that report would normally be received by the Council's Personnel Committee.

Members queried how the Council would deal with the links between the Council's Well-being objectives and the Council's

equality objectives. Officers explained that the forward plan for the Group that oversee's the Plan would focus on establishing how well embedded equalities has become in day to day service operations, rather than there being a focus on new initiatives. This would assist in ensuring that the Well-being Objectives and associated actions embraces the equalities duties. Members were interested in this approach and asked that the output of the series of audits that had been proposed could be fed back to the relevant scrutiny committees and cabinet boards.

In terms of the detail of the report, Members drew attention to a number of apparent anomalies/errors in the report. On page 51 it says (Insert Link). Officers confirmed that this was an error and undertook to provide updated version for committee members.

In relation to the Welsh Language, officers confirmed that a response had been submitted to the Welsh Government, based on the advice provided by scrutiny members at their last meeting. Further updates would be provided to the Committee as the Welsh Government releases details of how its proposals would progress.

Members were pleased to note that the BME development officer had been recruited and had began work to develop links with BME communities. Officers advised that one of the first elements of work that had been undertaken by the development officer concerned the production of a language card. This was in response to feedback received from community members that they were no always able to converse in English and as a result access to services was impaired. In the event that a customer/resident were to identify they were unable to conduct their enquiry through the medium of English, it was noted that the Council subscribes to Language Line - a system that provides access to translation in many different languages. Members requested that arrangements be made for Mr. A. Cameron who had taken up the role of development officer at CVS to attend a meeting outside of the formal process to report on the progress of his work.

Members queried whether the traffic light system in the report accurately reflected the performance results. The members used number 44 reference EQ7.8 as an example, it was

highlighted that the number of permanent exclusions during the academic year in secondary school had decreased from the previous year. The direction of improvement was showing it had decreased, however it was colour coded red which gives the impression that it was not an improvement. Officers noted this and confirmed that they would correct this.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

#### 4.2 Half Year Progress Report – Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2017/18 – Period 01.04.17 to 30.09.17.

Members received a half year update on progress made on the Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2017/18. Members noted the action plan which reflects the governance issues identified in the Council's Governance Statement for 2016/17.

Member's asked that when they receive data they are never made aware where the data has been generated from. Officers highlighted that a heading could be introduced in the report template highlighting to officers the origin of the data to be included for all reports.

Members raised concern about the comments that were raised from the WAO in Council in regards to Corporate Risk Management. Members asked whether officers had taken on board what the auditor had advised. Officers highlighted that the strategic risks would be completed by the week ending 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2017. It was noted that when the strategic risks are completed it would be easier to keep the document up to date.

Member's asked if officers were confident that the work would address the issues raised by auditors. Officers highlighted that the work will be completed, however, it is likely that as the Council embraces further change, further work could be required in the future.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

#### 4.3 Community Councils Minor Projects Scheme Application – Coedffranc Community Council

(Cllr. M. Harvey re-affirmed his interest in the item and withdrew from the meeting for this item only)

Members had a brief overview of the grant to Coedffranc Community Council under the Council's Minor Projects Scheme.

Members' asked for the details of the administration of the scheme and were advised the Director of Finance and Corporate Services received and reported on applications under the current criteria which are submitted to members for consideration. This scheme had been in place for a number of years and there was no current proposal to amend the scheme.

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

#### 4.4 Local Government Association Subscription

The Leader gave members an overview in regard to re-joining the Local Government Association and ask them to consider paying the annual subscription via the Welsh Government Association.

Members requested if approval was made by Cabinet Board to re-join the Local Government Association then the costings be monitored on a bi-annual basis by the Scrutiny Committee.

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

#### 4.5 Treasury Management Monitoring 2017/2018

Members received a brief overview of the treasury management actions and information.

It was highlighted that there had not been much change since the previous report on Treasury Management. However, it was noted that the bank rates may rise in the near future and if there is any change the details will appear in the next report.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

5. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

**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 12 & 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

6. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

4.1 Council Tax Write Offs

Members asked that in light of the financial constraints facing the authority, for details of the criteria by which write offs were requested. The officers advised members that in certain circumstances, such as for example due to the age of the debt, debts were irrecoverable and as such were requested for write off.

Members were reminded that the authority was the 3<sup>rd</sup> best in wales for Council Tax collection. Members were also informed that a new Debtors system is being developed in-house that will further enhance the efficiency of the debt collection process. A report would be brought back to members in due course in relation to the new system and its implementation.

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

**CHAIRPERSON**