

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

30 July 2020

Chairperson: Councillor M.Harvey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: S.E.Freeguard, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, J.D.Morgan, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance: A.Evans, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins, K.Jones, S.Phillips, C.Davies, C.Griffiths, C.Furlow-Harris, T.Davies, S.Curran, R.Headon, A.James, C.Plowman, D.Griffiths and S.Blewett

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors C.Clement-Williams, D.Jones, L.Jones, R.G.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees and A.Wingrave

Observers: H.Neary

1. **Declarations of Interests**

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

Councillor S.Reynolds Re NPT Safe and Well – Humanitarian Assistance Provided by the Council in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic (Cabinet papers), as she is the voluntary acting manager and trustee of Canolfan Maerdy

2. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The committee scrutinised the following cabinet items:

Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2019-2020

The Committee welcomed the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report for 2019-2020.

Members were pleased to learn, from looking at the stats, that the number of staff who signed up for Welsh learning had increased.

It was asked whether the effects of COVID 19, in particular the redeployment of staff, would have an overall impact on the work that the Welsh Language Officer Group had planned for next year.

Officers confirmed that the pandemic did have an effect on the work of the Group; meetings of the Group were cancelled and some of the Officers involved were redeployed. However, it was noted that some Officers had started to return to their substantive posts and plans were in place for a meeting in September in which the Group would be discussing the outcomes from the review of the mystery shopper exercise, the evaluations of the training that accountable managers received in March 2020 and the re-prioritised programme of work for the rest of the year.

Detailed in the circulated report it stated that the outbreak of COVID 19, meant that considerable changes were made to the way in which the council operated and due to the limited internal linguistic skills, the council's ability to provide communications in Welsh and English was impacted for a period of time. It was highlighted that progress had since been made and the council were now simultaneously publishing English and Welsh versions of press releases and had resumed English and Welsh social media accounts; when a post would be shared from a third party, which was only available in English, staff would be adding appropriate comments in Welsh on the Welsh social media accounts. Officers also mentioned that the NPT Buy Local Welcome Back to Pontardawe video included both English and Welsh shop owners and provided subtitles for both languages. It was also confirmed that the Welsh language accounts were being monitored for messages and where a response was required, it would be provided in Welsh. Members were informed that the next key piece of work would be looking at the COVID 19 pages on the council's website, in which an audit had already started to remove information that was not relevant; following this translation of the information that needs to remain on the website would begin.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

NPT Safe and Well – Humanitarian Assistance Provided by the Council in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

A discussion took place in relation to those who were eligible for support from the Safe and Well Service, following Members concern that the eligibility list did not include mental health patients, in particular the patents who did not receive a shielding letter from the NHS. It was noted that as individuals were being transitioned who currently received support from the Safe and Well Service and whom staff had concerns, social services were involved to ensure appropriate support was in place. Members were asked to refer any individuals they were concerned about, to their community leads. Officers added that in the autumn, and the prospect of there being a need for further support to be provided, staff would be looking at their contingency planning; therefore, if Members thought that groups of people had been missed off the criteria, Officers would be happy to take their feedback on board and fit it into the contingency planning.

Members asked if Officers could expand on matter of recruiting a volunteer coordinator. It was stated that the volunteer coordinator is not intend to replace the community leads, instead the volunteer coordinator will relieve the youth service manager from the support that he had been providing to the volunteers recruited over recent months. Members were informed that there were 200 active volunteers working within the service and there was a need for someone to continue the role of volunteer coordinator in October when the youth service manager returned to their normal duties as the role would ensure that the volunteers still received support. Officers highlighted that between now and October, they would be looking to develop proposals on the ongoing role of volunteers within the Council and that Members would receive these proposals in due course for consideration. In relation to the community leads, it was mentioned that some had returned to their substantive posts, but staff had been trying to maintain the cover in the communities while the transition was taking place. It was confirmed that Officers would be spending time to discuss the options around the replacement of the community leads and would be putting a plan in place in which Members would be consulted on, as Officers had taken on board the feedback that was obtained from the Member survey in relation to the welcoming of coordination at community level. It was added that the Member Panel Coronavirus Recovery Phase had set up a workshop in September with the hopes to establish clear recommendations.

The reported highlighted that the food delivery service that was being paused on 16 August 2020, to which Members asked if it would be resumed and was the Council planning for this to happen. It was confirmed that the Chief Medical Officer had stated that the infection rates at the moment were low enough to give him confidence that some of the restrictions, that shielding individuals had been asked to comply with, could be eased in August; however, in certain areas in England there had been rises in infection which meant that certain individuals who were previously shielding were asked to reintroduce some of the restrictions. It was mentioned that Welsh Government had used the word 'paused' instead of 'stop' as we were still in the middle of the pandemic and infection rates could potentially rise again. In terms of the food service, it was noted that the Government had no current plans to re-introduce the free national food delivery service, therefore there was a need for the Council to make concrete local plans to support people who may be asked to put themselves under further restrictions, if there was a small or large outbreak going into the autumn. Officers confirmed that they had already started considering this and had hopes to have contingency plans of different scenarios in place at the end of August; it was added that local shops were now in a different position, since the beginning of the pandemic in March, to provide support.

Members referred to Appendix 4, the lessons learned table, contained within the circulated report and asked whether the removal of the command and control approach was going to be actioned, as the removal of this, due to the pandemic, had empowered staff and encouraged more creative thinking. It was noted that Officers would be providing a more detailed action plan against all of the elements contained within the lessons learned table and that they were still obtaining feedback which would be built into the forward planning for the autumn. It was added that the elements fell into two broad categories:

1. Actions that would need to be completed immediately due to the need to inform plans for the autumn and the prospect that there could be a rise in infections.
2. Longer term changes to take forward, in particular how the culture of the Council would be developed

Officers were asked if a decision had been made, based on the lessons learned, in relation to how the Local Area Coordinators (LACS) were going to be deployed. It was highlighted that feedback

had been received from most Members that having the coordination at the local area level had been really important; there had been brief discussions on the role of the LACS in the Member Panel Coronavirus Recovery Phase and Officers had met to identify what the proposals may look like going forward. Officers added that further discussion was planned in the Member Panel and the Member Workshop, to look at the role of the LACS and where the wider Councils effort would be around community development, taking into consideration the feedback from lessons learned from the Safe and Well Service and what Members had expressed.

Compliments were given to the area coordinators for their hard work, the effectiveness of the Safe and Well Service, the work of RADAR and how well Age Cymru West Glamorgan and Age Connect worked together prior to the Safe and Well Service being set up and during that time.

The Committee briefly discussed the phone calls that were carried out to those who were shielding and had not made contact through the Safe and Well Service, to which it was noted that the majority of the individuals who were contacted confirmed they had support in place which meant there was only a small number of individuals who were referred as a result of the phone calls. Officers highlighted that it was evident how welcomed the calls were and staff had mentioned that it took a long time to work through the call list due to the length of time that they were on the phone; this was something that would need to be considered, potentially how communities would be able to support people in this position.

Following scrutiny, the committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by cabinet

Recovery Strategy

Members expressed their appreciation to the work that went into preparing the Recovery Strategy and the hard work, commitment and flexibility of the Councils workforce.

Future working was discussed, in particular the need to achieve balance between remote working and attending council offices, being mindful of economic and environmental factors, the importance of communities and value of local government. Officers stated that in terms of process, the Member Panel was established to provide this type of advice to Cabinet, as the Council worked out the longer term recovery plans and the Panel could be used to start ways of thinking

in relation to the broader discussions. It was noted that the circulated report captured the stabilisation period, where Council services were being re-started and ensuring that the Test, Trace and Protect arrangements locally and regional were fit for purpose. Members were informed that the report provides a picture of what had happened so far and the current position of the Council and that further recovery planning will need to take place moving forward.

It was noted that there was not enough emphasis within the report on the work of the community champions, originations, community councils and other partners and that going forward these groups will be crucial. Officers stated that the report didn't seek to evaluate the community response as this was a piece of work that the Member Panel had agreed to undertake; an external researcher had been commissioned to learn from the community and how they felt the response had been mobilised. It was highlighted that the Council was interested to understand how this could be encourage to continue.

Following scrutiny, the committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by cabinet.

CHAIRPERSON