

## **Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

**(Via Microsoft Teams)**

**Members Present:**

**17 November 2021**

**Chairperson:** Councillor S.Rahaman

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor S.E.Freeguard

**Councillors:** S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds, R.L.Taylor and A.N.Woolcock

**Officers In Attendance** K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, H.Jones, C.Furlow-Harris, R.Headon, S.Davies, T.Davies, C.Plowman, J.Woodman-Ralph, L.Beynon, J.Hodges and M.Roberts

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

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### **1. Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet items:

#### **2021/2022 Risk Register Monitoring**

Members were provided with an update on the Council's Strategic Risks.

The circulated report stated that there was currently a significant number of pressure points across the Council where there was an insufficient supply of workforce to meet Service Demands; Members queried what steps were being taken to reduce the pressure points. Officers explained that there was an All Member Seminar scheduled for 18 November 2021 in which Members would be briefed on the current Service Demands and the plans going forward.

Members made reference to the investment to support high risk victims of domestic abuse via the VAWDASV (Violence Against

Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) Leadership Group, and asked for further information on how this would be implemented. The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing agreed to circulate information regarding this matter to Members in due course.

One of the treatments associated with the financial resilience risk was to intensify citizen engagement with the budget challenges, securing citizen commitment to behaviours that will reduce or remove demand on Council services; it was asked how this was going to be achieved. It was noted that in terms of citizen engagement, the Council had recently concluded the 'Let's Talk' campaign which asked residents to identify what was important to them following the outbreak of the pandemic; there were over 1,700 respondents, 500 of which had stated they wished to be contacted in the next phase of the consultation exercise. The Council also had a Citizen's Panel which had around 500 members, and a Community of Practice; both groups will be contacted for future engagement. It was highlighted that the budget consultation and the service recovery consultation will both be promoted as much as possible; this will be done in many ways such as online, in libraries and through the Local Area Coordinators (LACs). Officers added that over the winter period, the Council will be running a three month campaign in order to engage with the public and ensure they were aware of how the Council impacts on their lives and, were aware of the work the Council had undertaken during the pandemic.

Officers confirmed that the following listed treatment associated with the financial resilience risks was related to Elected Members and all of the Councils stakeholders; to improve the quality of evidence adduced to exemplify the financial resilience challenges of the Council and ensure this was understood by those involved in the decisions on local government budgets.

The Committee raised concerns with the readability of the Strategic Risk Register and provided suggestions which would allow Members to interpret the document and gain a better understanding of the overall picture, which would therefore enable them to monitor it more effectively. Officers stated that in future they would include explanatory words into the report and provide as much clarity as possible based on the feedback provided by Members.

The circulated report highlighted the management of Landslips and Quarries on Council owned land; it was asked if Coal Tips should be included in this treatment. Officers mentioned that the comment

section of this treatment did indicate that the Council was carrying out inspections in relation to Coal Tips, and managing the assets carefully; this was one of the recommendations of the recent work that the Coal Authority had been undertaking nationally. It was noted that Neath Port Talbot Council was doing this in advance of the task force being set up by the Coal Authority; it was the good practice that had been in operation in this Council, which had led to some of the recommendations being formed from the task force. Officers were confident that the comments in the risk register was up to date, however in future would refer to the task force and replace 'Tips' with 'Coal Tips'.

Following on from the above, it was queried who monitored the medium risks that potentially could become high risk. Members were informed that all of the tips within the area had been classified from A-D, and those that were within the Councils ownership and control were being inspected on a regular basis in regard to their risk; those at the highest risk (class D) were inspected more frequently than those at the lowest risk (class A). It was confirmed that when inspecting the medium risks, Officers will determine if it had deteriorated or not; if so, it will be re-classified and the inspections would increase accordingly, or alternatively Officers would try to secure funding to implement mitigation measures.

Members asked for Officers to expand on the following point detailed in the circulated report; to review the potential for capacity/release or reduction in cost from internal, shared service or through external collaboration. Officers confirmed that they would collate more information on this and provide Members with a response outside of the meeting.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

#### Quarter 1 (1st April 2021 - 30th June 2021) Cabinet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The Committee received the Cabinet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Quarter 1 (1st April 2021 - 30th June 2021).

Reference was made to the performance indicator relating to the percentage of all planning applications determined in time; the performance in quarter 1 had slipped against the targets due to the current pressures in this service. The Chair of the Planning Committee asked if an email could be sent to all Elected Members to inform them of these pressures, and that planning applications were

likely to take longer than usual until the staffing levels were improved. Officers highlighted that colleagues in the Planning Service were struggling with the workload as there were a number of vacancies within the service and a large demand from developers; the Council was about to engage on a new recruitment process due to the issues in securing qualified and experienced staff. It was mentioned that this will help to improve the performance going forward; however, at the moment colleagues were trying to deal with issues on a priority basis. It was confirmed that the Director of Environment and Regeneration would send an email to all Members as mentioned above.

A discussion took place in relation to the average time (in seconds) to answer telephone calls in Welsh; Members were concerned with the detail contained within the circulated report against this particular performance indicator, and asked what was being done to lower the length of time to answer a call in Welsh. The Chief Executive explained that there was a general issue with contact into the Councils contact centre; the hybrid working system had proven to be problematic when staff at the switchboard were trying to transfer calls to an appropriate person. It was noted that there were lots of different reasons for this, in particular there were technical problems with the system; this was likely due to the quick turnaround of setting up the home working arrangements. Members were informed that the Chief Digital Officer was currently working through the various solutions; however, there was a wider piece of work to carry out over the next six months relating to the contact strategy. It was noted that the Council had more Welsh speakers in Customer Services than it had ever had before; however, the performance indicator highlighted that there was still more work to do around this.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

#### Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Annual Report 2020/2021

The Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Annual Report 2020-2021 was presented to the Committee.

Members highlighted the importance of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, and stated that it needed to be included in the Covid 19 recovery plans with other strategic services and objectives. It was suggested that a review of the Strategy take place, with partners, to identify where and how progress needed to be made.

The Chief Executive mentioned that the longer term recovery plan would be provided to Members in December; as part of this plan,

Officers were proposing that a new wellbeing objective be formed which will focus on the Council's work relating to local environment, heritage and culture. It was noted that these themes had come through very strongly from residents who took part in the Let's Talk campaign; this new wellbeing objective will enable Officers to prioritise these factors and give them a greater focus. It was confirmed that the Welsh language would be included within the overall wellbeing objective; Officers welcomed the suggestion of the review of the strategy with partners. Members were informed that one of the requirements of the Welsh language standards relating to the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, was to undertake an evaluation and review within the five year period of the Strategy; following the publication of the recovery plan, Officers will be working on the development of the new Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.

Members supported bringing the reporting period into line with other strategies, however raised that the Council was currently half way through the next reporting period. Officers stated that they had hoped to bring this report to Cabinet in September but unfortunately were unable to do so due to issues with gathering information from partners. Going forward, it was confirmed that Officers would aim to bring annual reports earlier in the year.

The circulated report detailed that one of the actions in the Strategy was to ensure that sports clubs were encouraged and supported to use Welsh in formal and informal club settings. Members asked what support was being provided to help the sports clubs to encourage this. Officers explained that this information was provided by one of the Council's partners and further detail would be sought and provided to Members accordingly.

Members raised the importance of using incidental Welsh, and asked to be informed of any types of schemes to promote the use of incidental Welsh; this will allow Members to provide the information to their constituents.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture assured Members that Welsh language and culture was being promoted continuously through both English and Welsh schools.

Reference was made to the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Task and Finish Group that was set up a few years ago to develop the Strategy; it was queried how this fitted in with the current work being undertaken and future work going forward. Officers explained that each time annual progress was reported, it was in light of the

work undertaken in the development of the Strategy by the Task and Finish Group. It was mentioned that the Task and Finish Group could be re-established for the development of the new Strategy, if Members were so minded.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

#### Local Biodiversity Duty Plan 2021

Members were informed of the updated Biodiversity Duty Plan (2020-2023).

It was queried that when the Council receives applications for developments, how much weighting would be put on the biodiversity aspect of it versus the job creation and the economy. The Director of Environment and Regeneration stated that planning and the decision making process had always been a balancing act; the Council undertakes consultations with statutory and non-statutory consultees, and frequently gain a difference in opinion. It was noted that the role of the Planning Officer would then be to balance those issues, and make an informed judgement based on policy and guidance both at national and local level. Members were informed that the climate change agenda was becoming more and more of a priority; and the emphasis on developing a sustainable environment was also a priority for Welsh Government and Local Authorities, whether that be in terms of residential provision, economy or the natural environment. Officers stated that the Council will continue to ensure that these elements would be taken into account as part of the decision making process, however it was also required to take account of the other interests as they were material determination of planning applications. It was added that the Council was taking its responsibility very carefully and was securing funding to initiate some of its own biodiversity schemes.

In terms of the Local Development Plan (LDP), it was noted that when Officers received candidate's sites for the new plan, they will be ensuring that biodiversity was taken into account when the master planning work was being undertaken. Members were informed that the Council had previously signed up to the Place Making Charter which was focused on creating communities; making sure there were houses and jobs, whilst also linking them up through green infrastructure. It was stated that Officers would be undertaking a green infrastructure assessment which will look at active travel and biodiversity; this will ensure that all elements were integrated.

The Committee commended the Local Biodiversity Duty Plan and thanked the Teams involved in the work of this project.

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

2. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

The Cabinet Scrutiny Forward Work Programme was noted.

**CHAIRPERSON**

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