

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Civic Centre, Port Talbot)

Members Present:

24th July, 2014

Chairman: Councillor D.W.Davies

Vice Chairman: Councillor A.Jenkins

Councillors: A.Carter, Ms.C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey,
S.K.Hunt, Mrs.L.H.James, A.R.Lockyer,
Mrs.K.Pearson, Mrs.S.M.Penry , L.M. Purcell,
J. Warman and I.D.Williams

Officers in Attendance: D.Rees, S.John, Mrs.R.Crowhurst, Mrs.A.Hinder,
R.Type, D.Shaw, Mrs.K.Jackson, Mrs.S.Edge and
Miss.G.Cirillo

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees, Mrs. S.Miller and
A.N.Woolcock

1. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor M. Harvey	-	Re: Report of the Head of ICT and Procurement - Item No.1 - 21 st Century Learning Programme for Schools as an employee employed by the Company (Aspire2Be) contracted to provide the Learning Programme, is known to Cllr. Harvey and therefore has a personal interest in this item.
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Councillor Mrs. K. Pearson

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Re: Private Report of the
Head of Financial Services
– Item No.2 - Council Tax
Write Offs as Cllr.Pearson
is a co-owner of a recently
purchased property which
is listed in the report and
therefore has a prejudicial
interest in this item.

2. **MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 19th JUNE, 2014**

Noted by the Committee.

3. **MONITORING REPORT**

(i) **Welsh Language Scheme: Annual Monitoring Report 2013/2014
and Corporate Action Plan 2013/2016.**

Members were reminded that the revised Welsh Language Scheme was approved by the Welsh Language Board on 27th July 2007, which amended and replaced the original Scheme which had been in place since 1997. Members also noted that with the imminent introduction of the Welsh Language Standards (scheduled for November 2014), it was anticipated that this would be the last monitoring report on the current Scheme.

The circulated report contained a summary of areas for improvement which included further development of opportunities for language awareness, improvement of the Council's website which Members were pleased to note remained a priority action in the 2013/2016 Action Plan as attached at Appendix 2 of the circulated report, and the consideration of linguistic skills as part of the "More than Just Words" Strategy/Action Plan.

Members thanked Officers for the extensive work on the Welsh Language Scheme and stated that given current financial restrictions across the Authority, it was felt that, on the whole, as an Authority, the requirements of the Welsh Language Scheme were being met.

Members acknowledged the concerns raised in the report regarding the potential financial and human resources impact of the implementation of the new Welsh Language Standard and suggested that funding should be provided by Welsh Government for this.

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

4. **PRE SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:-

Cabinet Board Proposals

(i) 21st Century Schools Learning Programme

Members received a report proposing to obtain approval to engage with and appoint an educational provider to design and deliver a 21st Century Learning Programme and to suspend the Council's Contract Procedure Rules ("CPRs") in respect of the requirements of competition.

Officers explained to Members that the Council recently benefitted from a Welsh Government Grant under their Learning in Digital Wales (LiDW) programme. The grant amounted to £950k and was directed at improving in-school networks; in particular wireless connectivity. This exercise had now been completed and all schools now have full wireless capability.

With regard to the 21st Century Schools Learning Programme, Officers explained that the programme aimed to engage with teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community with the aim of raising attendance levels and improving literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to this, there is an engagement with school based technology to support the delivery of the programme.

Members raised questions regarding support for attainment for those learners who may not have access to technologies in the home. In response to this Officers stated that there were good facilities within Libraries across the County Borough, and that schools offer opportunities outside school hours, however it was

recognised that there would be learners who would not be able to access IT in support of learning development and Officers confirmed that this could be resolved via initiatives for free I-Pads for schools, and sourcing all potential funding avenues.

Members commended the report and questioned the monitoring of the Programme. Officers stated that an update report would be brought back to Committee when appropriate but also a report would be submitted each term to EDIS (Education Development Inclusion Service) which would include updates on development and attainment. Officers also confirmed that school support staff would be trained in support of the Programme, and the Head of ICT and Procurement confirmed the current work ongoing within schools to update equipment in preparation.

Members queried why CPR's needed to be suspended, and officers explained that the specific programme was unique, and could not be obtained elsewhere. Officers further explained that it would be impractical to wait for other organisations to develop similar software after going out to tender.

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

(ii) Approval and Adoption of the ICT Strategy

Members received a report proposing the adoption of the ICT Strategy, as attached at Appendix A of the circulated report. Members noted that the recent publication of the Council's improvement objectives, and the challenging financial situation facing the Council, required that the Strategy be reviewed and aligned accordingly, covering the period 2014-2018.

The circulated report contained information of the ICT Infrastructure and Service Portfolio and budget forecasts for 2014/15 to 2017/18. Members questioned the availability of training in order to keep up-to-date with technology. In response to this, Officers confirmed that 1-1 training would be available and also any specific training could be arranged for Members. Other questions from Members included whether the website could be simplified. In response to this, Officers acknowledged that around 80% of the website was not accessed, however, an infrastructure was in place to develop changes to the website. Also, questions

were raised around the selling of data and Members were reassured by Officers that there was a data audit taking place to itemise data sources and that no information would go out without being “filtered”. With regard to e-mails and general data security, Members were also reassured by Officers that there was internal security in place along with working in partnership with the Department of Works and Pensions and the Police.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Officers for their commitment and work.

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

(iii) Finance and Corporate Services Business Plans

Members were presented with the business plans for the ICT and Procurement Sections as attached at Appendices B and C to the circulated report. The Business Plans outlined the key objectives of the divisions for 2014/15 along with how any risks to the achievement of these objectives would be mitigated. They also provided a detailed plan of individual actions designed to ensure that the objectives referred to were achieved.

With regard to the Procurement Section Business Plan, Members questioned the process of National Procurement and it was agreed that Members be updated on this process in the near future.

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

(iv) Council Tax and Business Rates – Representation at Magistrates Court Proceedings

Members received a report proposing to update the list of staff who were authorised to represent the Authority at Magistrates Courts proceedings.

The circulated report contained information regarding changes in the staffing of the Council Tax Section and there was now a need to update the list of staff listed in the circulated report, who were authorised to represent the Council at Magistrates Courts proceedings for the recovery of Council Tax.

The Committee chose not to scrutinise this item, but it was agreed that the report be noted.

(v) Bank Tender Evaluation

Members received a report proposing approval to award a contract for the provision of the Council's banking services. Members noted that tenders were received from both Barclays and Santander Banks, Santander being the Council's existing provider of banking services.

The tenders were evaluated on both costs and quality of service, with the final scoring mechanism taking both elements into account

In terms of the final evaluation, over the five year period of the contract, Santander's costs were lower than Barclays and they also scored marginally higher than Barclays in respect to the quality of service delivery. As a result the overall score combining both cost and quality was in favour of Santander.

Following discussions it was agreed that the recommendation to the Cabinet Board be slightly amended to include the following additional statement:

"Following the initial 5 (Five) year period, the contract may be extended annually for up to a maximum of a further 5 (Five) years."

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

(vi) Treasury Management Monitoring

The circulated report contained treasury management action and information for 2014/15. The Head of Financial Services updated Members on Rates of Interest, Borrowing, Investment Income and the position of Investments, along with information regarding the General Fund Treasury Management Budget.

The Committee chose not to scrutinise this item, but it was agreed that the report be noted.

5. **PRIVATE 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 Statutory Instrument 2001 No.2290 (as amended)

Reason

Due to the time element

6. **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 Paragraphs 12, 13 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

7. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following private matters:-

Private Cabinet Board Proposals

(i) Vacancy in the post of Senior Coroner for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Coroner Area

Members received a report advising them of a vacancy for the post of Senior Coroner as detailed in the private circulated report, due to a recent resignation.

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

(ii) Housing Benefit Write Offs

Members received an overview from the Head of Financial Services regarding the write offs, as detailed in the private circulated report.

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

(iii) Council Tax Write Offs

(Cllr. Pearson re-affirmed her interest in this item and withdrew from the meeting for this item only).

Members received a report giving details of accounts for write off, and were reminded of the variety of reasons for this, as outlined in the private circulated report.

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

8. Third Sector Review – Interplay Judicial Review

Members received an update from the Head of Legal Services of an action in Judicial Review taken against the Council as detailed in the private urgent circulated report.

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

CHAIRMAN