

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

14 February 2024

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: T.Bowen, C.Galsworthy, J.Henton, J.Jones, R.G.Jones, S.Paddison, S.Pursey, S.H.Reynolds and A.J.Richards

Officers In Attendance K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, N.Daniel, S.Rees, J.Woodman-Ralph, B.Griffiths, D.Griffiths, K.Jones, L.McAndrew, A.Spooner-Cleverly and P.Chivers

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.Harris, S.K.Hunt, N.Jenkins, S.Jones, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn and C.Phillips

1. Chairs Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 8, and 12.

2. Declarations of Interests

Cllr. Rob Jones, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Trustee of Taibach Community Library, Personal Interest

Cllr. Sean Pursey, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Trustee of Taibach Community Library, Personal Interest

Cllr. Scott Jones, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 - Trustee of AVCL (connection with Cymer Swimming Pool), Personal Interest

Cllr. Simon Knoyle, Agenda Item 12 – Board Member of Glynneath Training Centre, Personal Interest

Cllr. Sian Harris, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Chair of Ffrindiau Creunant, Personal Interest

Cllr. Wyndham Griffiths, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – member of Bulldogs and Forces Champion, Personal Interest

Cllr. Tim Bowen, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Forces Champion, Personal Interest

Cllr. Sonia Reynolds, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Trustee of Canolfan Maerdy, Personal Interest

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on 28th November 2023 and 13th December were approved as true and accurate records.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Audit Wales – Springing Forward Strategic Workforce Management – Neath Port Talbot Council

Members referred to page 33, paragraph 24 of the Audit Wales report contained within the Cabinet Agenda pack. The report noted the councils current strategic risk rating does not adequately reflect the residual risk faced by delays in developing succession plans and identifying business critical roles. Members questioned whether the risk register has been updated to reflect this point, and what work has been carried out since the publication of the report to address the situation.

The Head of People and Organisational Development confirmed that the Strategic Risk Register is currently under review, and this process will include work on succession planning. The Head of Service summarised the actions that have been put in place to increase the number of services that have succession plans in place with identified

business critical positions. During the last calendar year, 72 Managers have attended Succession Planning Workshops and the workshop has been embedded as part of the Core Development Programme for Managers. Work is ongoing to review the toolkit used for succession planning with the aim of it being digitalised. An analysis has been undertaken of the succession plans that are currently in place. Accountable Managers have been reminded of the importance of ensuring that succession plans are in place.

Members expressed concern that a number of key senior managers have left the authority and the experience of these business critical officers has been lost. Members commented that the rate of recruitment was not matched with posts vacated.

The Head of People and Organisational Development acknowledged the importance of managers engaging with succession planning. It was noted that the council's successful appointment rate has increased over a period of two years from 82% to 93% and recruitment activity has increased by 40%, with a positive turnover rate. It was acknowledged that some posts remain hard to fill, particularly in specialist areas.

The Chief Executive gave assurance that this is an important area of work which will remain a priority going forward. The council is currently operating in a tight labour market. Workforce information is shared with Personnel Committee to enable members to track progress.

Members were pleased to hear of the rise in recruitment targets but expressed concern relating to staff retention and the financial cost of using market supplements in relation to hard to fill posts.

The Head of Service confirmed that market supplements are a tool that can be used when appropriate and the scheme is due for review. It was noted that pay is only one aspect of the employee remuneration package and other benefits made the council an attractive employer.

The Director of Social Services confirmed that the use of market supplements in Social Services has worked well and helped to retain experienced staff. There are financial benefits in applying market supplements rather than the alternative of backfilling vacant posts with agency staff. It was noted that the recruitment of social workers is difficult at present.

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive responses.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Local Bus Tendering

The Head of Engineering and Transport gave a brief overview of the report as contained within the Cabinet Board agenda pack.

Members thanked officers for their work on this matter and for the positive outcome. Members questioned if the whole budget had been utilised or whether there was any possibility of additional routes being re-instated.

The Head of Service confirmed that routes cut in October 2023 would be re-instated. Welsh Government have agreed that the £200k in-year underspend can be retained for future use. It is recognised that there are still shortcomings in the Networks, some of the elements of the services have not been registered. A report was taken to Cabinet recently which gave permission to award De Minimis Subsidy Award contracts, with a view to backfill any emerging gaps. Early discussions are ongoing regarding franchising the bus network.

In relation to staff requirements, Members asked if there was any certainty in relation to the framework as the project heads towards franchising. In relation to the £200k underspend on bus services, members asked for clarification regarding commercial services that haven't been registered and what impact that may have before any gaps are filled.

The Head of Service advised members that a Transport for Wales network review had identified areas where improvements to journey times are needed; it is hoped that the review data will lead to infrastructure improvements. A system of real time passenger information will be rolled out within Neath Port Talbot during the course of next year, this roll out is in advance of other parts of Wales. Work is underway regarding franchising and the network structure. Full details of the franchising areas have not been announced but there are likely to be nine areas within Wales with Neath Port Talbot falling under Mid/South Wales. It was confirmed that the internal team comprised of 1.2 staff who will have responsibility for 42 contracts, scheduling, timetabling and complaints in addition to their current duties. There is a need to expand the team via the management of

change process with potentially the creation of two new roles to ensure the team is sustainable and resilient. It was noted that the officer role is identified as business critical and a succession plan is in place.

Members commented that succession planning is difficult in smaller departments with a big discrepancy between grades within the teams.

Officers confirmed that the requirement for a new bus service between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Hospital has been identified, this was considered during the tender process but no action was taken due to funding uncertainty. Operators have registered services to the hospital at the detriment of the local network and there is a need to plug this gap in service.

Members asked for clarity in relation to any gaps in service post 1 April 2024.

Officers confirmed that a seamless transition depended on the Traffic Commissioner accepting the short term notice given by First Cymru. If the Traffic Commissioner did not accept the short term notice, there may be a break in service.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

5. **Committee Action Log**

The Committee Action Log was noted.

6. **Forward Work Programme 2023/24**

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

7. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items

8. **Access to Meetings**

Resolved: To exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

9. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

**Third Sector Grant Funding – Award of Grants for 2024-2025
(Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Cllr. P Rogers
CHAIRPERSON**