



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 9TH NOVEMBER 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Kirby – Chair

Councillors:

Councillors: M. A. Adams, Mrs E. M. Aldworth, C. Cuss, Miss E. Forehead, L. Harding, G. Johnston, C. P. Mann, S. Morgan, and L. G. Whittle.

Cabinet Members: Councillor C. Gordon (Corporate Services) and Councillor Mrs E. Stenner (Performance, Economy and Enterprise).

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director - Head of Children's Services), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), C. Adams (Highway Engineering Group Manager), D. Roberts (Interim Finance Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairperson reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click here to view.](#)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C. Forehead, B. Miles (Vice Chair), R. Saralis, Mrs M. E. Sargent, G. Simmonds, and J. Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 28TH SEPTEMBER 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 28th September 2021 (minute nos. 1 – 11) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report which outlined the reports planned for the period November 2021 to February 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th September 2021. Members were also reminded of the Joint Scrutiny meeting for all Scrutiny Committees, which had been planned for 24th January 2022. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

A Member noted the lateness of the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting in January 2022, in relation to the budget reports. Members were advised that the settlement from Welsh Government would not be received until 21st December 2021, with proposals being finalised for Cabinet on 19th January 2022.

A Member also noted the small font size of the appendices to the report and members were advised that this would be referred to Committee Services. Members were also advised that documents could be enlarged on their screens for better viewing.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website

6. CABINET REPORTS

There had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. TEAM CAERPHILLY – BETTER TOGETHER TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY 6-MONTH UPDATE.

The Cabinet Member for Performance, Economy and Enterprise introduced the report to update members on the progress under the Team Caerphilly – Better Together Transformation Strategy. Members were advised that a six-monthly Members seminar had also been arranged for 13th December 2021.

Members were advised that the report provides an update on actions to deliver the strategy to date. It includes a summary of progress against the strategic actions, including the well-being and place-shaping framework. Members were referred to the recommendation in the report, for members to note the content of the report and make any comment on the progress against the strategy prior to the update being provided to Cabinet.

The Corporate Policy Manager provided a presentation to Members and referred to the 10 ongoing corporate reviews. These included walk-in services, remote contact, frontline services, support services, information insight and intelligence, flexible working, sustainable financial planning, workforce development, volunteering/partnerships and decision making.

A Member referred to the review of buildings and suggested that there should be a return to use of offices such as Ty Penallta and acknowledged that we must live with covid, he expressed concerns that the public will not support this approach. Members expressed concerns for new members of staff in relation to receiving support and training, without the benefit of working closely with more experienced officers. He was informed that Welsh Government advice is still to work from home if you can; officers are still working as normal albeit remotely. There are risk assessments in place regarding numbers and working arrangements. Recently, in response to representations from staff wishing to return to Ty Penallta, the permitted numbers have been increased from 100 to 200. However, there has been no increase in those attending the office, and it was suggested this reluctance may be because of increasing numbers of covid cases in the area. Reference was made to the staff survey which will be shared with Members at the forthcoming Members Seminar. Members were also advised that the reception at Ty Penallta is open on an appointment basis, but numbers are very low. A Member queried whether the reason for low uptake maybe that publicity may not have been picked up by the very people who may want to attend in person, because they do not access information online and are not aware. The Scrutiny Committee were assured that if people wish to attend in person, they can, but by appointment and in line with the risk assessment.

Reference was made to the walk-in services review and the use of libraries as part of the future proposals, these are key public buildings and maximising their use and securing their future is very important. Members would like to see libraries used to full effect and perhaps as agile working areas for officers and for staff meetings, this would be of benefit for staff, who may not be familiar with the county borough, giving them the opportunity to visit local areas. The Scrutiny Committee was assured that libraries were the starting point for the review, they have looked at pre-covid footfall and how buildings could be used to maximum effect. Members were advised that the libraries team are looking to access grant funding to deliver and expand on provision available at libraries. Discussion continued on the changes to footfall since they re-opened, Members were advised that there has been an increase in use of digital books and drop off services, which has attracted new users of the service, libraries are looking to encourage the public to return but in accordance with the risk assessments.

Members highlighted public concerns regarding paused services such as permits for amenity sites and wondered when they will be re-introduced. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that some services were paused to allow resources to be diverted into other service areas. This is being looked at and consideration on when they can be re-introduced is something that the Corporate Director for Communities is looking at.

Members highlighted some difficulties contacting people working remotely by telephone and whether the technology is sufficient. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that this is the reason for the remote contact review and includes a review of the telephony system. Some of the issues can hopefully be resolved through new technology but some of these issues are related to how some people are working and will need to be addressed through training to make them aware of the need to respond to telephone calls and ensure diverts are maintained.

The Scrutiny Committee commented that they were pleased to see the return on investments highlighted under sustainable financial planning and were assured that advice is sought from Arlingclose and that ethical investments are at the forefront of what is being done.

Members commented on the review of Internal Invoicing and were assured that the aim is to reduce and streamline the process, the Committee were advised that the internal invoicing is an historical legacy of CCT where services needed to evidence financial returns for services they provided internally.

The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to see that someone has taken up responsibility for the DEWIS programme and recognised the good news on income tax maximisation.

It was suggested that some Members may need to receive a reminder on how to access the Community Empowerment Fund and assistance in following the process.

The Scrutiny Committee was particularly concerned about the capacity of staff to deliver on the reviews, particularly when there are recruitment issues in some service areas and wondered whether the Workforce Development review should include retention and recruitment. Members were assured that one of the actions is being looked at by Heads of Service's looking at options such as bringing in young people, 'growing our own', workforce planning and how we can adapt to challenges in recruitment. It was acknowledged there are challenges in some areas which isn't only affecting Caerphilly. The Council is looking at its recruitment and selection process and seek to avoid competing with other local authorities and is a real challenge. The timescales for all the reviews are very complex with many interdependencies, therefore Members asked if in view of the capacity issues what the anticipated delivery times are. The Committee was advised that some Officers have made good progress, but others will take longer. It was suggested that the priority should be to concentrate on the corporate reviews and place shaping as a priority. Members stated that they would prefer to see 10 reviews done well than 20 half finished.

Members commented on the projects highlighted in the place shaping programme, and particular concerns that the remedial works required at the Sue Noake leisure centre playing fields, to allow the extension to Trinity Fields school, will not be resolved by Welsh Water and NRW. Comments were made that the likelihood of severe weather events increasing going forward is something that may have an impact on the sewerage system in this area and others. Members noted that this project is currently on pause whilst the issues are investigated by Dwr Cymru.

Overall, the Scrutiny Committee agreed that the projects in the report are something to be celebrated as good news.

Following consideration of the report, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the contents and made comments on the progress against the Strategy prior to the update being provided to Cabinet.

8. CORPORATE SERVICES AND MISCELLANEOUS FINANCE 2021/22 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (PERIOD 5).

The Cabinet Member for Customer, Performance and Property Services introduced the report to inform Members of projected revenue expenditure for the Directorate of Corporate Services and Miscellaneous Finance for the 2021/22 financial year. Members were advised that the recommendation was to note the contents of the report.

A Member sought clarification on current job vacancies and recruitment issues. Members were advised that several staff have moved to other neighbouring authorities, which could include financial gain for the employee or the provision of agile working. Members were also advised that all staff who leave the authority are given an option of completing an 'exit questionnaire' or interview/discussion, with an aim to find out the reason for staff leaving the authority. Members were assured that successful recruitment of staff was ongoing and not all areas of the authority were affected.

The Chair wished to note the Members concerns regarding recruitment and referred Members to the Officer's comments in relation to this.

Following consideration of the report, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

The Chair thanked all Members and Officers for their contribution to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.23 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2022, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR