

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE RESOURCES & IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2015 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor M Reeves – Chairperson

G Davies
DRW Lewis

CA Green
JR McCarthy

EM Hughes
JC Spanswick

RC Jones

Officers:

Rachel Keepins
Andrew Rees

Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

174. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor GW Davies – Family commitment

Councillor C Reeves – Caring responsibility

Councillor G Thomas – Jury service

Councillor CE Smith – Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development – Other Council Business

Councillor HJ Townsend – Cabinet Member Childrens Social Services and Equalities – Other Council Business.

175. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

176. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Corporate Resources & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 22 September 2015 be approved as a true and accurate record.

177. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which detailed the items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 19 January 2016 and sought confirmation of the information and invitees required for the subsequent meeting to be held on 5 February 2016. A request had been received from officers for the item on the Corporate Plan to be moved from meeting of 19 January 2016 to the meeting on 5 February 2016.

The Scrutiny Officer also reported that Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the responsibility of a local authority towards looked after children and young people and that all Members have a level of responsibility for the children and young people looked after by the authority. She requested that Members consider how the services within the remit of the Committee affect children in care and care leavers and how it can assist in these areas. The Scrutiny Officer stated that Scrutiny Champions can greatly support the Committee in this by advising of the ongoing work of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee any decisions or changes which they should be aware of as Corporate Parents.

Conclusions:

- (1) Noted the topics to be considered at its meeting on 19 January 2016 and the invitees to attend to attend the meeting;
- (2) Determined the invitees to be invited to attend the meeting on 5 February 2016 and that the item on the Corporate Plan be moved from meeting of 19 January 2016 to the meeting on 5 February 2016.

178. **Q2 BUDGET MONITORING AND COUNCIL PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORT**

The Scrutiny Officer introduced a report which gave an overview of the Council's performance in 2015-16 which compared performance with the commitments to delivering the improvement priorities in the Corporate Plan for 2013-17. The Committee was also provided with an update on the financial position as at 30 September 2015.

The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services informed the Committee that performance in the Directorate is on target with most indicators being Green in status. This was with the exception of performance indicator PPN008 relating to the percentage of new businesses identified during the year which were subject to an inspection or submitted a self-assessment questionnaire for Food Hygiene, which was attributed to the impact of the Public Protection collaboration having an impact on service delivery. He stated that sickness absence has been a cause for concern as a consequence of additional work undertaken as a result of staff losses. Those members of staff who had been off sick had now returned to work.

The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services also informed the Committee of recent concern is the viability of the County Borough Supplies service with a local authority having taken a decision to withdraw from the service and the prospect of another local authority likely to follow suit.

The Committee expressed concern that the performance indicator relating to the percentage of new businesses identified during the year which were subject to an inspection or submitted a self-assessment questionnaire for Food Hygiene which contrasted to an under spend in the staffing structure. The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services informed the Committee that the new structure in Regulatory Services has had an impact on new inspections but the premises are low risk and can assess themselves. Owners of premises were written to if they had not undertaken a self-assessment. He stated that it was not uncommon for performance to dip in quarter 2 and that once the new structure was in place fully the service would be strengthened.

The Committee questioned the reasons for the under spend of £1.346m on the Council's net revenue budget which comprised a £571k net under spend on directorates and under spend of £775k on corporate budgets. The Corporate Director Resources

informed the Committee that there would be changes to corporate budgets and that the main variances related to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which had an under spend of £385k as a result of lower than anticipated demand. The under spend of £390k in Corporate Budgets related to less demand from Directorates to meet in year pay pressures and lower than expected in year cost of auto enrolment for new entrants into the pension scheme. She stated that under spends are usually put into earmarked reserves and it was considered that reserves of £7m are an appropriate amount for the authority.

In response to a question from the Committee the Corporate Director Resources stated that she would provide the Committee with information on the number of staff employed by the authority but staff numbers are monitored quarterly.

The Committee requested a breakdown of the £236k drawn down by Directorates from their specific earmarked reserves and £1.793m from Corporate Reserves. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that Directorates are requested to provide a case to use earmarked reserves for specific projects and if it is not used the funding would go back into the General Fund at year end. The Committee requested the costs of redundancy. The Corporate Director Resources stated that redundancy costs are met corporately and that she would provide the Committee with a breakdown of redundancy costs for this year.

The Corporate Director Resources reported on the performance of the Resources Directorate in the first half of the year. Two of the Directorate's performance indicators were amber with the remaining 12 being green as of quarter 2. She stated that sickness absence continued to be a problem in the Directorate with a number of long term sickness cases and performance was expected to improve in the second half of the year. There was now a focus on addressing short term sickness, however given the performance in the first half of the year it was unlikely that the target of 9.4 days would be met.

The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that difficulties had been encountered in recruitment and retention in ICT which was impacting on the delivery of the work programme as a reduced team was focusing on maintaining a core service. Difficulties in recruitment and retention had been experienced in the Accountancy Team. She stated that the budget reductions had arisen due to an under spend as a result of vacant posts and staff restructures being implemented.

The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that delivery of the school modernisation programme including implementation of projects within the capital programme are amber in status however the school modernisation board is reviewing and monitoring the delivery of these projects. She also informed the Committee that progress on the Parc Afon Ewenny scheme is amber on status and that the Council had withdrawn from negotiations to acquire / lease new main depot premises due to drainage issues identified by Welsh Water.

The Committee questioned the downward trend in performance in the average time taken to process housing benefit and council tax benefit and whether the target is too easy. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that the target relates to performance this year.

The Committee questioned the reasons why the percentage of feeder invoices over all invoices processed was showing as red in status and how long the Council takes to pay suppliers. The Corporate Director Resources stated that the Council had reduced the time it takes to pay smaller suppliers. Work remained to be done on the payment of

invoices and performance had increased on the previous year. The Corporate Improvement and Integrated Partnerships Manager informed the Committee that the Council processes 90% of its invoices within 15 days. The Committee questioned whether the difficulties in retention and recruiting ICT staff had contributed to delays in the planned expansion of feeder invoices. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that a decision had been taken to hold a number of vacancies in ICT. There were at present 11 vacancies in ICT. She stated that this was a temporary problem. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that 60% of invoices are paid within 10 days.

The Committee questioned whether consideration had been given to a shared service for Audit and Banking on all Wales basis. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that there already existed a shared Internal Audit service with the Vale of Glamorgan and a request had been made to other local authorities if they wished to become part of the joint service.

In response to a question from the Committee the Corporate Director Communities undertook to confirm whether the value of planned budget reductions achieved is £625k or £857k.

The Committee requested an update on the delays in recruiting experienced Housing Solutions staff. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that problems had been experienced in recruiting experienced Housing Solutions staff as the posts are grant funded or short term in nature. The option of engaging agency staff was being looked at.

The Committee questioned the reasons for the delay in the times it takes to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the Council had changed the way in which Disabled Facilities Grants are processed. The Committee questioned the reason for the target for adult Disabled Facilities Grants being lower than children's Disabled Facilities Grants. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that in the case of children's Disabled Facilities Grants there was a need to engage at an earlier stage with utility companies and there was a fundamental need to review processes. The Corporate Director Communities undertook to establish the difference in targets of 411 children's Disabled Facilities Grants and 237 adult Disabled Facilities Grants. The Corporate Improvement and Integrated Partnerships Manager informed the Committee that the target had been based on past performance and for children's Disabled Facilities Grants there was a need to look at the composition of the family before work could commence. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that the method by which performance indicator on the calculation of Disabled Facilities Grants is to change and all local authorities will use the method of calculation. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the numbers of Disabled Facilities Grants for children and young people are quite low, the spend can be skewed quickly if families make a request to delay the commencement of the grant work.

In response to a question from the Committee on an update on MREC, the Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that a report would be presented to the next meeting of Cabinet which would set out the current position regarding the procurement process and options for this authority. The Committee questioned the budget reduction proposal of the public being able to purchase their own black bags to an appropriate specification as it could lead to bags being torn by birds and animals. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the purchase of black bags by the public had been explored with the contractor however its implementation

had been deferred as it could lead to claims from the contractor in having to pick up refuse on streets from bags which had been torn.

The Committee questioned the implications of implementing the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and the Welsh Community Care Information System. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that there are great demands on social work staff with the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act on 6 April 2016 and the Welsh Community Care Information System on 1 April 2016. All staff are working to implementing the Act and are clear on the direction of travel. Due to the significance of the project a project group has been established to implement the Welsh Community Care Information System working alongside the supplier, CareWorks and the National WCCIS Board. There was also a significant amount of training to be undertaken by staff.

The Committee requested an update on the percentage of statutory visits to Looked After Children. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that Looked After Children are being visited but visits had not been recorded as they should have been, however issues had been identified. A performance management framework had been set up across the service.

In response to a question from the Committee on the development of two new extra care schemes, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that both are on target and will meet the timescale for their delivery.

In response to a question from the Committee on the clarification of the percentage of telecare clients who said the service made it easier for them to manage in their own home, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that it was about how information is gathered as opposed to expected outcomes.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that she would provide the Committee with information on the reasons dog owners were not allowed to participate in the Love to Walk programme. She believed that there are gaps in capturing the number of walkers who participate in the programme.

The Committee questioned whether the authority could engage with children at school. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that this related to Looked After Children and there is a need to explore new ways of engaging and consulting with children some attention and that the status of this performance indicator would look differently next year. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that sessions had been held with older children in care who are difficult to engage with. He stated that engagement work was being undertaken through the Youth Council. The Corporate Improvement and Integrated Partnerships Manager informed the Committee that there had been positive feedback from the Welsh Government on the engagement work the Council is doing with young people and the Council's partners.

The Committee questioned the reason for the projected over spend of £216k on adoption following the establishment of the regional adoption service. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing informed the Committee that she had met with the regional service and there is a need to re-profile this expenditure. She stated that the authority contributed financially to the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service.

The Committee questioned the reasons for the majority of performance versus target not being on track. The Corporate Education and Transformation informed the Committee that 7 indicators are on track, with 5% being off track by more than 10%. She stated that

performance in this quarter was typical for quarter 2 and by quarter 3 performance will have improved.

The Committee questioned the effect of the adverse court decision on fixed penalties. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that the court decision related to English local authorities and that the legislation in Wales is different. Head teachers are allowed discretion to allow up to 10 days per pupil absence during term time for holidays subject to their attendance being satisfactory. She stated that 17 fixed penalty notices had been issued to parents without challenge. According to the latest data the authority's secondary schools were below the Welsh average for attendance. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that a briefing will be circulated on fixed penalties.

The Committee requested an explanation of the percentage of school days lost due to fixed-term exclusions. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that 46 primary school pupils had received fixed term exclusions in 2014-15 with the number of days lost being 289.5 days. She stated that a panel of Head teachers' meets monthly to case manage pupils who have received fixed term exclusions. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that 236 secondary school pupils had received fixed term exclusions in 2014-15 with the number of days lost accounting for 1214.5 days.

The Committee questioned the authority's performance in completing special education need statements within 26 weeks. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee the authority was previously ranked 22nd out of 22 local authorities in Wales but following a change in focus was the highest performing authority in Wales for completing statements. The authority was completing around 80% statements at present but it was anticipated would be performing at 100% at year end. The Corporate Improvement and Integrated Partnerships Manager informed the Committee that it was expected that performance would be lower at quarter 2.

The Committee questioned the reasons for the developing the Directorate risk register and a communication and consultation plan status showing as red. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that both the risk register and communication and consultation plan will be complete by quarter 3 and their status would both be green.

The Committee questioned the number of out of county placements coming back into the authority and how are risks being addressed. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation commented that a working group had been established to review out of county placements. Expenditure on out of county placements had been reduced by £200k in the MTFS in the last 2 years. She stated that it was not possible to bring some out of county placements back in house due to the complex needs of certain pupils. Surplus places in Heronsbridge School are sold to other local authorities. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that travel expenses were paid to out of county placements where the pupil had been statemented. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that 6 pupils who were formerly in out of county placements had been brought back in house.

The Committee questioned the reason for the music service being amber. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation stated that the service had been subsidised in the past and the music service team had been re-structured with peripatetic teachers being re-designated as instructors. She stated that proposals were being looked at to create a trust with 4 local authorities to purchase services from another body.

The Committee questioned whether schools which had budget surpluses had been subject to clawback. The Deputy Leader confirmed that schools with surpluses had their surpluses clawed back with the exception of schools that are planning new buildings and would need to use their surpluses to fund the purchase of equipment. Where there is no strong case for carrying reserves they would be subject to clawback. The Deputy Leader stated that 12 schools were in a budget deficit position.

Conclusions

Members expressed concern over the performance Indicator SCC025 in relation to reports that statutory visits to Looked After Children were taking place but not being recorded. The Committee were pleased to note that this was a priority and was being monitored closely by the Directorate and agreed to pay particular attention to the indicator in future performance reports.

Additional Information

Members requested the following additional information:

Information relating to how the Authority sets its own targets; what benchmarking is used to ensure our own Performance Indicators are comparable and meaningful. Also, why are some of our own targets set higher or lower than the Welsh average in that we are not aspiring to exceed the Welsh average?

Resources

- a) The Corporate Budget total figure for 2014-15.
- b) The number of staff reductions within the Local Authority over the last three years broken down by Directorate.
- c) The number of redundancies over the last three years and associated cost, broken down by Directorate.

Communities

- d) Information relating to the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grants for Children and Adults; specifically why are the targets set significantly higher for children compared with adults; how are these targets set and how do we as a LA compare with other LAs in Wales on the number of days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant?

Social Services

- e) Further information on the Love to Walk programme and if the take up had been affected by the scheme prohibiting dogs on the walks, thus reducing take up of many dog walkers who would wish to participate.

179. **BRIDGEND CHANGE PROGRAMME: WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE BEST USE OF RESOURCES**

The Scrutiny Officer introduced a report on the Bridgend Change Programme.

The Committee questioned the cost of the Maximising Space and Technology Programme compared to the original estimate and outturn. The Corporate Director Resources stated that the original cost was £700k however as the project this increased to £1m and as the project changed further enabling the relocation of an additional 400 staff to Civic Offices the cost increased to £1.4m. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation stated that the project had been subject to 'scope creep' as the police were due to re-locate to the Civic Offices but then did not re-locate. This allowed the opportunity for more staff to re-locate to Civic Offices.

The Committee questioned the number of staff which would be accommodated in Civic Offices. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that the Civic Offices will accommodate 831 staff based on 3 members of staff occupying 2 desk spaces on an agile working basis. The Corporate Director Resources also informed the Committee the authority employs 5.5k staff which includes school staff on a full time equivalent basis. The Committee questioned whether the views of staff had been taken into account. The Corporate Director Resources stated that a survey of staff had not been undertaken in relation to the relocation to Civic Offices but initial feedback had been positive. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation commented that a positive outcome of the re-location to one building is that staff from various sections were co-located making it easier for staff to work together.

The Committee referred to the Council's receiving 1 out of a possible 4 stars for its website and questioned where was the Council placed on an all Wales basis. The Corporate Director Resources stated that the Council did not have a ranking but is placed in the lower quartile. She also stated that there is a current focus on back office processes but there is a need to concentrate efforts on the front facing part of the website by digitising services to enable more transactions to be carried out online.

The Committee requested an update on the Parc Afon Ewenni programme. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that fleet services had re-located however there was uncertainty regarding the relocation of County Borough Supplies due to the possible withdrawal of one of the partners. Welsh Water had made the depot relocation project unaffordable due to its drainage requirements and as an interim solution it was proposed to proceed with a depot on the Waterton site but on a smaller footprint. There would be clarity on the site in a few months which would enable the release of the Parc Afon Ewenni site in line with the LDP.

The Committee questioned an update on the review of overtime arrangements. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that consultation with staff has commenced which is also tied in with a re-structure.

In response to a question from the Committee the Corporate Director Resources stated that she would provide the Committee with a list of assets to be disposed of.

Conclusions

The Committee expressed concern over the budget for Maximising Space and Technology Programme in that the budget for the Civic Offices refurbishment had almost doubled from what was initially set. Members requested that the closure report be presented to the Committee at some point in the near future.

Additional Information

Members requested the following additional information:

The Committee asked for further information relating to the make-up of assets that form part of the Disposal Programme that have been identified to achieve £21million in Capital receipts.

Members asked for clarification of the table at point 4.34 of the report as the cumulative total did not appear to add up correctly.

180. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 4.45 pm