

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE RESOURCES & IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON TUESDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor M Reeves – Chairperson

G Davies
RC Jones
G Thomas

GW Davies MBE
DRW Lewis

CA Green
CL Reeves

EM Hughes
JC Spanswick

Officers:

Rachel Keepins
Andrew Rees

Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

187. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor E Dodd
Councillor J R McCarthy
Councillor C E Smith – Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development

188. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor G Davies declared a prejudicial interest in part of agenda item 5 – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-17 to 2019-20 which dealt with the Cultural Trust as his daughter works for the Trust. He withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the Cultural Trust.

189. 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 22 March 2016 and the invitees due to attend. She requested the Committee consider items for inclusion on the Committee's Forward Work Programme and email the Scrutiny Team with potential items.

Conclusions:

(1) Noted the topics to be considered at its meeting on 23 March 2016 and the invitees to attend to attend the meeting;
That the list of future potential items for the Forward Work Programme be revisited and considered.

190. CORPORATE PLAN 2016-2020

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the draft Corporate Plan 2016-20 for the Committee's consideration.

The Chief Executive provided the Committee with an outline of the draft Corporate Plan which had been developed to deliver the revised corporate priorities with programmes and priorities identified to deliver the Corporate Plan. He stated that the Corporate Plan has a strong link to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) with the Council's overall revenue and capital budgets forming an integral part of it. The draft Corporate Plan will be in line with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and will be presented for approval to Council along with the MTFS on 10 March 2016. He informed the Committee the Corporate Plan had been developed taking into account that the Council will be a shrinking organisation in terms of its budget and resources. The Corporate Plan had been guided by a One Council approach with the following priorities developed:

- Supporting a successful economy
- Helping people to be more self-reliant
- Smarter use of resources

In response to a question from the Committee, the Corporate Director Communities undertook to provide the Committee with information on where this Council sits overall in Wales on the percentage of children living in households where no one is working.

The Committee asked whether the local heating generation project could be considered as a project to be developed with other local authorities as part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal. The Committee congratulated officers on the Council's involvement in such an innovative project to establish local heating projects. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the Council is involved in two schemes putting the Council at the forefront of energy developing projects. He informed the Committee that it was too early at present to determine the nature of the projects that would be part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal.

The Committee questioned the percentage of respondents who had responded to the consultation process on the draft Corporate Plan expressed as a percentage of the population of the County Borough. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that the consultation had been responded to by 1,800 – 1,900 citizens representing approximately 1.8% of the population, which had improved significantly on the previous year and demonstrated that consultation was more effective than in the previous year.

The Committee questioned the progress being made with the Youth Guarantee whereby young people who reach the age of 16 are in further education, training or employment until at least the age of 24. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that under the Youth Guarantee the Council aims to provide 16 – 24 year olds with a package of learning / training with the overall ambition to have no NEETS. She stated that the current rate of NEETS is 3.6% but the numbers are reducing. The Council in 2013 had the worst rate of NEETS in Wales but was now performing in the top quartile for providing 16 – 24 year olds with a package of learning / training. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that she would provide a briefing on the Youth Guarantee. The Committee commented that the Council needed to develop the use of apprenticeships in all its disciplines.

The Committee expressed concern at the target increasing in 2015-16 and then decreasing in 2016-17 for pupils achieving the level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A* - C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics. The Corporate Director

Education and Transformation informed the Committee that the actual performance for Level 2 is 59.2%. She stated that there is a need to raise ambition and improve performance; however the target is an accurate reflection of the performance of the current cohort. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that the results by pupils in the County Borough in the level 2 threshold is the best achieved and amongst the best in Wales. He stated that there is a need to improve outcomes year on year.

The Committee commented that the target for the average external qualifications point score for 16 year old Looked After Children should be more ambitious. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that the actual performance for 2015-16 is 217 which is a very small cohort, with the cohort for this year being a similar size. It was hoped that the point score would be higher in future years. The

Corporate Director Education and Transformation also informed the Committee that there was a disconnect with the figures reported due to them being reported on the basis of financial years and not academic years. She stated that there would be a footnote to clarify this in the final version of the Corporate Plan. She informed the Committee that the targets contained in the Education Service Plan were more stretching.

The Committee requested that the data on Actual and targets be expressed more consistently as percentage symbols have been missed off some Measures.

The Committee requested clarification of the percentage and numbers of year 11 leavers from schools identified as not being in education, employment or training. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that the target for 2015-16 is 3.5% and the target for 2016/17 is 3.4%, which represented a small number of Looked After Children. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that the authority is performing in the top quartile in Wales and it aimed to be the best performing authority in Wales for providing employment or training for year 11 leavers.

The Committee questioned how the Council would respond to the 3 priorities in the Corporate Plan with shrinking resources. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council will have fewer resources at its disposal and that it would have to make better use of those resources by building better economic communities.

The Committee questioned the reasons for the target for the number of vacant premises in Town Centres being static. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee the target is a recognition of the current economic climate and that the target remained challenging due to a lack of resources. He was hopeful the Vibrant and Viable Places programme would act as a catalyst for reducing the number of vacant properties. The Committee questioned how the number of vacant properties would contribute to a successful economy. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that there had been a considerable amount of work had been undertaken on the Vibrant and viable Places scheme and that the Council has a role to play with partners in developing the Business Improvement District. He stated that the targets set are realistic and that officers were doing all they can with the traders to ensure the vibrancy of town centres. In response to a question from the Committee, the Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that tourist industry modelling was used to identify the numbers of tourists visiting town centres.

The Committee questioned the safeguards in place to ensure that there are a fixed set of standards in place to ensure the assets transferred are managed with integrity and to the same levels as they were managed by the Council. The Committee also questioned how the Council encouraged take up of the Community Asset Transfer process of playing fields and pavilions as take up had not been great so far. The Corporate

Director Communities informed the Committee that the process of Community Asset Transfer was still in its infancy and that a strategy is being developed for asset transfer to deliver savings to the Council. He stated that there was a need to present a timeline to clubs interested in pursuing an asset transfer and informed the Committee that the CAT Officer is in contact with clubs on a daily basis. He also informed the Committee that the CAT process needs to be robust with due diligence being carried out and condition surveys would be undertaken. There is a four stage process involved in the transfer of an asset and a number of organisations are at the various stages of that process. He anticipated that there would be more community asset transfers taking place. The Committee questioned what would happen to facilities should clubs not pursue community asset transfer of the facilities they currently use. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that clubs should take the opportunity to work with the Council on the asset transfer process in order to safeguard the future of the facilities they use, which would inevitably be cut should the asset be not transferred.

The Committee referred to the aim of supporting carers and questioned the support for young carers. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation informed the Committee that the aim also referred to support being given to young carers. She stated that young carers are supported by a member of staff who works with the carers and the schools they attend. All young carers receive an assessment to ensure their needs are met. The Cabinet Member Childrens Social Services and Equalities informed the Committee that all young carers are reached and support given to ensure educational attainment and so that they receive the correct support at home. A card has been developed which young carers can show to teachers to enable them to receive additional support at school.

In response to a comment from the Committee that the Community Asset Transfer element of the draft Corporate Plan appeared light on compliance with the Future Generations Act and Social Services and Wellbeing Act and Green and Open Spaces, the Corporate Director Communities undertook to take this point on board. The Chief Executive commented on the difficulties in squaring legislation with shrinking resources.

The Committee referred to the reduction in the percentage of final duty homelessness acceptances as a proportion of all homelessness presentation and questioned whether the Council was assisting more citizens or is the process harder for registering as homeless. The Chief Executive informed the Committee that the approach undertaken is one of prevention and early intervention and that the downward trajectory is to be welcomed. He stated that the figures are going down as the Council is being more successful in its intervention work in preventing homelessness. The Cabinet Member Adult Social Care and health and Wellbeing confirmed that homelessness has reduced due to intervention work and through a more professional approach being undertaken and people being more receptive to those approaches although homelessness remained as some citizens did not want to be housed.

The Committee requested that the abbreviation MASH be written in full in the Corporate Plan to aid clarity.

The Committee questioned the reason for the target being higher than the actual for Looked After Children with 3 or more placements during the year and that the target for 2016-17 is lower than in 2015-16. The Cabinet Member Childrens Social Services and Equalities informed the Committee that a great deal of work was being undertaken in the Wellbeing Directorate with getting children previously fostered through independent agencies back in house foster care. There had also been an increase in the number of foster carers in house with short term and long term foster carers. Children are often placed with foster carers in house on a short term basis whilst a decision is made on the

best type of placement in the longer term. There was a need to get the matching process right so that children receive the most appropriate placement.

The Committee questioned the reason for the number of people supported through a Disabled Facilities Grant reducing and the reason why the target for 2016-17 is to be confirmed. The Chief Executive informed the Committee that applicants have up to 12 months to implement the work and it was during this time the Council was not in control of the DFG. He stated that the thrust is how the Council is helping people to become independent by taking some relatively straight forward adaptations out of the DFG process which explains the reduction. In some cases work has been given to Registered Social Landlords for them to carry out the adaptation which would not show as a DFG. He informed the Committee that work was being undertaken to measure how many people are being supported through DFGs and non-DFGs but no conclusions had been arrived at yet. The Chief Executive informed the Committee DFGs for adults and children are looked at differently and that officers are looking at the business processes behind DFGs and how many people are being helped. The Committee considered that a measure should be developed for the time when the Council is in control of DFGs.

The Committee requested an explanation of the new procurement opportunities and practices being pursued. The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services informed the Committee that a great deal of use had been made through Framework Agreements in procuring services and increasingly through the use of the National Procurement Service who are developing a framework in the use of Barristers and Solicitors. In addition there are also Framework Agreements for all kinds of services and by entering into Framework Agreements it guarantees having greater buying power and being able to buy at the right price and at the same time saving on administrative costs. In response to a question from the Committee on the procurement of stationery on all Wales basis the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services confirmed that Framework Agreements exist for all types of services which the Council procures.

The Committee questioned which assets the Council will retain apart from schools. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that the Council assets are held for a variety of purposes. She stated that the disposals programme looks at the potential for disposing of assets and to secure best value either by renting or selling assets. The schools programme is linked to the 21st century schools modernisation programme. The Council previously had rationalised its assets going from 21 operational assets which have since been reduced to 11 operational assets. The Council is seeking to lease out Raven's Court to generate running costs savings which will contribute to the maximising best use of resources programme. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that whilst the Council's estate is rationalised the Council continues with its schools modernisation programme with the use of a framework agreement for the construction of schools procured through SEWSCAP. He stated that the Council's had to match fund the schools modernisation programme by generating capital receipts of £23m.

The Committee questioned the income generation initiatives which are being pursued. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that a programme is being established to expand the commercial portfolio. She stated that the Built Environment Team is looking at opportunities to sell its services to other partners in the public sector. The Built Environment Team had also taken forward construction projects and the design of schools. A review of charges by local authorities across Wales had been undertaken and the Council will be reviewing its charges against that exercise. The Council has introduced charges for the collection of garden waste, mooring fees and pre-application fees for planning applications.

The Committee questioned how the reduction in carbon emissions had been calculated and questioned the reason for the target not being achieved and also not being stretching. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that this relates to the Council's buildings and through the rationalisation of assets the Council was securing efficiencies on its carbon footprint. She stated that once the outturn had been received the target would be stretching.

The Committee questioned the progress being made in streamlining internal and public facing systems and business processes and the number of services to be made available online so that services could be accessed outside normal business hours. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that having more services available online is a priority with Council Tax and Housing Benefit being a target in the MTFS for online transactions. She stated that there is a focus on developing services online which would have the most impact quickly.

The Committee questioned the plans for reducing the number of days lost due to sickness absence. The Corporate Director Resources informed the Committee that the target for 2015-16 was unlikely to be met due to a number of sickness problems in Directorates. The WLGA and Neath Port Talbot Council had undertaken a project on sickness absence which would be looked at. She stated that the work was being undertaken to manage and support long term sickness cases in the Wellbeing Directorate by HR more proactively and through the training of staff.

The Committee thanked the invites for their contributions.

Conclusions

Members made the following recommendations and conclusions in relation to the Corporate Plan 2016-20:

- The Committee recommend that Officers explore the viability of including Electricity Regeneration as part of the Energy Technologies Institute Programme as well as looking at local heating projects. Furthermore, the Committee recommend that Officers explore any possible collaborations on the same subject with other local authorities involved in City Deal.
- The Committee commented that whilst mentioned, there needs to be more recognition in the Corporate Plan of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015, the work that sits under it such as Open Spaces, Community Assets etc and how the Authority is going to comply with this.
- The Committee recommend that the role of Apprenticeships needs to be incorporated into the Corporate Plan with the Authority as a main employer taking the lead by increasing its own numbers of apprenticeships.
- The Committee requested that detail be included in the Corporate Plan to clarify how the consultation figures presented in the report relate to the wider context of the County Borough, in terms of the percentage of respondents against the whole population.
- The Committee queried some of the targets set for 2016-17 in that it was not clear in some cases whether they were percentages or numbers. Members also commented on the fact that some figures were either remaining stagnant, or in some cases, were targeting lower than the previous year. Members stated that the Authority should be looking to improve year on year.

The Committee therefore recommend that as well as tidying up some of the figures; for example where actuals for last year are known they should be included and clarification provided of where they are percentages or numbers; Officers should also look to be aspirational and whilst targets should not be unattainable, the Authority should seek to improve year on year. The Committee also commented that where actuals were not known for last year, this should not prevent targets being set for the following year.

- The Committee wished to progress the proposal that further information be provided in the Corporate Plan as to the context or rationale behind each target and recommend that this indicate how the target has been determined for example how we compare to other Local Authorities.

Further Comments

- Members expressed concerns over the proposals for income generation in relation to the 3 initiatives being proposed for this year. Members expressed concern over the mention of the Authority becoming a commercial property owner to rent out at a time when the Authority was trying to reduce its portfolio of properties. Members also raised concerns over the available resources within the Authority for the other 2 initiatives and therefore questioned the achievability of the targets.

Referral to the Community, Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- The Committee expressed concerns over the proposals for Community Asset Transfer and questioned whether there was a document or Framework already developed for Asset Transfer for the whole of the County Borough which was currently being presented or available to all voluntary and community organisations, or whether the transfers were occurring on an ad hoc basis with those who have shown an interest. Members stated that it would be useful to know where this is in order to point their constituents in the right direction.

The Committee requested that this subject be followed up by the Community, Environment and Leisure Scrutiny Committee under their forward work programme. The Committee asked that the following be considered:

1. Assurance that organisations looking to take on Community Assets have got the correct procedures in place such as those for vulnerable people, and DBS Checks etc.
2. Whether organisations have the experience to take on Community Assets. Members stressed the need to ensure that any transfer made was robust in that it was with the right people, with the right business plan in place and that the right support was provided to them to help them take on the asset.
3. What would happen if organisations and communities did not want to take up the offer of the asset transfer?

Additional Information

- The Committee requested that further information be provided as to how Bridgend compares to others in Local Authorities in Wales in relation to the percentage of children living in households where no one is working.

The Scrutiny Officer reported on the findings of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP) and the responses from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in relation to the draft budget proposals. She stated that the Standing BREP had met on a number of occasions and examined by means of semi-structured interviews with Directors and officers the Budget Strategy for the Council as a whole, as well as individual draft budget proposals for each Directorate. In addition, the BREP had met the Chief Executive and the Leader to discuss the budget proposals.

The Committee was requested to consider the findings of the BREP and determine whether the recommendations should be forwarded to Cabinet along with the consolidated responses from each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of the budget consultation process.

The Committee questioned the cumulative impact of the budget reduction proposals has been taken into account in the Equality Impact Assessment year on year. The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services confirmed that an EIA is done at each budget round and on each proposal and is taken into account for future years from the current situation.

The Committee questioned the progress made in moving the pay date to the middle of the month and also questioned the robustness of the argument against moving the pay date. The Head of Finance and ICT informed the Committee that two options had been considered in relation to pay day harmonisation with negotiations to moving the pay date to the end of the month with the Trade Unions not being successful. He stated that the option to move the pay date forward to the middle of the month would lead to an increase in administrative costs which would mitigate against any savings to be made. The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services informed the Committee that as no collective agreement could be sought with the Trade Unions moving the pay date to the end of the month could be progressed. The Head of Finance and ICT informed the Committee that moving the pay date forward to the middle of the month would incur additional administrative costs of recovering overpayments. The Cabinet Member Resources that as the Council, has in place a collective agreement with the Trade Unions the proposal to move the pay date to the end of the month could not be achieved as one of the Trade Unions were not in favour of the change following a ballot of its members.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Head of Finance and ICT informed that the Teckal approach refers to an arm's length company. The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Regulatory Services informed the Committee that a Teckal gives an exemption from EU rules and state aid.

The Committee expressed concern at the disparity between Directorates regarding actual savings and budget pressures with there being elements of growth in the Wellbeing Directorate to account for demographic pressures. The Head of Finance and ICT informed the Committee that officers seek to provide information behind the budget reductions and there is a desire for continued efficiencies and linkages with the Corporate Plan, if this approach was not adopted the Council would be in a position of 'salami' slicing budgets. The Committee expressed concern at the impact of budget reductions in the Communities Directorate and its effect on visible services with a deterioration in the appearance of the County Borough which hampered efforts to attract visitors and businesses to Bridgend. The Committee considered that these services are of value to the public as they contribute to the majority of Member referrals such as the frequency of weed spraying and grass cutting being reduced which seemed to be a short term solution which did not justify the long term cost and risk. The Assistant Chief

Executive Legal and Regulatory Services informed the Committee he was concerned with the wording of paragraph 2.5 of the report in relation to the balancing of savings as the equalisation of budget reductions moves the process away from the Corporate Plan. He stated that it was right and proper that the comments of the Community Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to paragraph 1.9 be conveyed to Cabinet. The Committee considered that there had been a disparity in budget reductions between the Directorates with all Directorates apart from the Wellbeing Directorate having to make budget reductions of 15% whereas the Wellbeing Directorate had made budget reductions of 3% over the same period.

The Committee commented on the effectiveness of the BREP process in examining the budget proposals which had been chaired effectively and served well by the Scrutiny Officers. The Cabinet Member Resources commented on the effectiveness of the BREP and that Cabinet takes cognisance of its views.

The Committee thanked the invites for their contributions.

Conclusions

The Committee accepted the recommendations and comments from both the BREP and the five Scrutiny Committees and agreed to submit them to Cabinet subject to the following amendments and incorporations:

BREP recommendations:

1. That a further recommendation be added to the section on City Deal to state the following:

Furthermore that the Authority embrace the need for collaboration in City Deal particularly on the subject of Electricity Regeneration in order that Bridgend does not miss out on any potential opportunities and benefits.

2. That the recommendation on Balancing of Savings be reworded to state the following:

Members raised concerns that visible services valued by the public are at risk due to continued cuts and that the previous level of cuts is not sustainable for future without significant impact. The Committee therefore recommend that this is seriously taken into consideration when decisions are made regarding budget cuts for future years.

3. That the BREP comment at 2.17 regarding the public consultation be amended to highlight that there is a limited view in the consultation process from young people and that future consultation needs to work closely with the Youth Council and Schools to improve this.
4. The Committee asked that the point made in the BREP report that year on year opportunities to identify budget reductions are becoming fewer and less sustainable be reinforced in the final report to Cabinet.
5. The Committee upheld the recommendation in relation to Pay Day Harmonisation and the proposal to move the pay day for all staff to the middle of the month.
6. That Committee noted the positive comments from the Cabinet Members Resources regarding BREP and its continued value.

The Committee commented that all Equality Impact Assessments take into account the accumulative impact of budget cuts on specific services, groups and individuals.

192. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 4.58 pm