

CORPORATE RESOURCES & IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2016

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE RESOURCES & IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor M Reeves – Chairperson

G Davies  
D Patel

CA Green  
JC Spanswick

EM Hughes  
G Thomas

JR McCarthy

Apologies for Absence

E Dodd and DRW Lewis

Officers:

Julie Ellams

Democratic Services Officer - Committees

216. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

G Jewell (Scrutiny Support Officer) declared an interest as the Scrutiny Support Officer and left the meeting whilst the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017-18 - 2020-21 was being discussed.

217. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Chairperson confirmed that the items requiring further action were still being dealt with.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Corporate Resources & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 21 September 2016, be approved as a true and accurate record.

218. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, the purpose of which was to present the items due to be considered at the Committee's meeting on 17 January 2017, and seeking confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 8 February 2017, and finally, present a list of further potential items for prioritisation by the Committee.

RESOLVED That Committee:

- (i) Noted the topics due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee for 17 January 2017 and confirmed that it did not require any additional specific information to be provided by the invitees listed or the Overview & Scrutiny Unit;
- (ii) Determined the invitees to be invited to attend, any specific information it would like the invitees to provide as well as any

research that it would like the Overview & Scrutiny Unit to undertake in relation to its following meeting scheduled for 08 February 2017;

- (iii) Revisited and considered the list of future potential items for the Committee's Forward Work Programme and reprioritise as the Committees deemed appropriate.

**219. COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AGAINST ITS COMMITMENTS AND A SUMMARY OF ITS FINANCIAL POSITION AT QUARTER 2 OF 2016-17**

The Committee considered a report on the Council's performance in 2016-17, as of quarter 2. It compared this performance with the commitments to delivering the improvement priorities in the Corporate Plan 2016-20. The report also provided an update on the financial position as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

The Chairperson welcomed S Cooper, Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing and Councillor P White, Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help, to the meeting.

The Committee referred to P2.1.1 and asked if the 3 local community co-ordinators provided resilience for the service. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing explained that the new scheme was progressing but it was early days in terms of planning. She agreed to send details of the restructure, the development plan and the Western Bay newsletter to the Member requesting further information.

The Committee referred to the new indicator measuring the number of assessments of need for support for carers undertaken during the year and those that lead to a support plan. Members asked how the authority was performing in this area. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing explained that discussions were still underway with WG and other authorities re the definition and the way the information was captured. The assessment of carers needs in the majority of cases could be identified in the support plan for the cared for person. By end of year they should have a better understanding of what was required.

Members referred to PM26, another new indicator where the target was set before WG guidance was finalised. This indicator was open to different interpretation and unlikely to be met but should be clarified further during the year.

The Committee requested further information on the percentage of looked after children on 31 March who have had three or more placements during the year. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing explained that this related to 51 children, of which 31 were under 1 or over 13 years old and agreed to provide further information for committee members.

The Committee referred to a recent Corporate Parenting Workshop where it appeared that good work was being done but the figures in PM34a did not support this. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing agreed that the film didn't accurately reflect the position but there was a reason in each case such as being a young parent, young carer, or a job seeker.

The CM for Social Services and Early Help explained that there were a number of new indicators and as such it was difficult to set targets and that an additional 12 months of historical data would help in future.

The Committee asked what corrective action had been taken in relation to SSWB 9. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing explained that this was a compliance issue which was missed but this would not happen again because back up cover had been arranged for future meetings.

The Committee asked why PM28 showed as amber not red for the average length of time on the Child Protection Register. They were advised that this was a new indicator and this area was being closely monitored by the Project Board. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer referred Members to the table showing that where performance was worse than target by 10% or more, the indicator would be red.

Members asked why data was not available for target SSWB 2 DWB4.2.3.3. They were advised that all domiciliary care contracts were reviewed and that The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing would look into why this information was not in the report.

The Committee requested an explanation on the number of working days per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence. One table showed a reduction in sickness across services and in another part of the report, the target was red. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that this was a saving that could not be made and should have been deleted from the report.

Members queried the savings made from supporting people in their own homes through domiciliary care. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing explained that this was part to do with delaying when people went into care, now where possible they came in at the end of their life rather than for several years. The whole system was blending but at the moment the budgets were still separate.

The committee raised concerns about the projected overspend of £612,000 on LAC. Numbers remained steady and because the savings required last year were not met, the sum was taken out of the budget at the start of the year. Reserves were in place but the intention was for the service to make the savings. A recovery plan was in place but there were still considerable savings to be made.

Members referred to the overspend on fostering. The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing explained that there was a complete review underway of foster care costs. A realignment of budgets would give a clearer picture and she would provide more information on the £100,000. Members asked when the remodelling would start to pay off. They were advised that in the past there had been no strategic planning capacity for new ways of working but it was anticipated that by 2017/18 there should be a difference in social care.

Members queried why the sickness levels in adult social care were so high compared to other departments. They were advised that there were a number of issues such as the majority of staff being female and over 55, there were high levels of personal care and staff were open to infection. It was difficult for staff to work flexibly, to manage stress levels and there were high levels of long term sick as a result.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

The Chairperson welcomed N Echanis, Head of Education and Family Support and Cllr H David, Leader, to the meeting.

Members requested information regarding school admissions and why it had become red now that it was part of the Digital Transformation Project. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that the Council had taken on a larger digital programme which offered a smarter solution but it would not be delivered in the same time span and therefore was now red.

Members requested more information on P3.1.1, three new income generation initiatives. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that there had been plans such as selling a standardised design of school to other authorities but this had been overtaken by WG pulling back on what it would and wouldn't fund. Authorities had no extra money to invest and were looking at paired back solutions. Professional opinion had been sought to ensure the section was as efficient as it could be but they were not looking for that area to generate income at the moment.

The Committee were advised that EDU015a consisted of two performance indicators that had been grouped together and one part of this depended on information from other agencies so was not within the gift of the authority. Performance had improved from a low position and continued to improve. The Head of Education and Family Support confirmed that any delay was caused by a shortage of officers writing the statements and not because of a shortage of psychologists. The Leader reported that this PI would become redundant with the Additional Learning Needs Bill which would get rid of statementing and replace with assessments of children with learning needs. Members stated that historically Bridgend was the lowest for statements in Wales and asked if this was still the same. The Head of Education and Family Support agreed to check the figures and report back.

The Committee asked what action had been taken to improve indicator SCC024, the percentage of children taken into care with a Personal Education Plan within 20 school days of entering care. Members were advised that discussions took place internally and this was prioritised in our schools but this did not work as effectively where children were in care outside the area. This was an area where we had no control and ideally it should be split into two separate indicators.

Members raised concerns about home to school transport, savings not achieved in previous years and the impact on education. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that four years ago they had very little knowledge about who was going where but following the retendering process, savings of a million had been achieved and more could be achieved with the implementation of policy changes. There were lots of challenges ahead including safe routes where the authority had to engage with pupils about what they thought of safe routes.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

The Chairperson welcomed M Shephard, Corporate Director- Communities and Councillor C Reeves, Cabinet Member - Communities to the meeting.

The Committee referred to £195,000 savings not realised in relation to Ravens Court. The Corporate Director – Communities explained that the information was at the end of quarter 2 when there was an expectation that a lease would be in place following interest from two different companies. Efforts were still being made to lease the building but consideration also had to be given to other issues such as agile working, the digital policy and alternatives such as renting to other bodies. The Innovation Centre was

another area of concern because the building was in need of investment to make it attractive for rent.

The Committee asked if the report should include a target for the number of council owned assets transferred to the community for running. The Cabinet Member for Communities explained that she was reviewing this area regularly, relatively few properties had so far been transferred but a large number of organisations had expressed an interest.

Members asked why there was no indicator to show the actual numbers of fly tipping incidents as opposed to the percentage of incidents cleared. The Corporate Director - Communities explained that the authority was only aware of fly tipping that had been reported but that he would provide this information for Members.

The Committee referred to the MREC saving of £300,000 for 2015-16 and asked why this had not been achieved. The Corporate Director – Communities explained that this related to an existing long term contract which was not working as favourably as anticipated and the position was currently being reviewed with a view to procuring a new operator for the site.

The MREC contract was expensive and work was being done to procure an alternative contract which would allow savings to be made. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that an equalisation fund would be suitable with regard to waste costs as they fluctuated with costs of procurement only occurring every 7/8 years and increases in contract cost potentially occurring as a result of any procurement. Members also asked for the total cost of procuring the new waste contract. This information was not available but would be emailed to Members following the meeting.

The Committee asked for information on car parking charges, how much each car park generated and what happened to the income. The Corporate Director – Communities explained that the information was available and that income collected was spent on car parks and related highway issues as required by the relevant legislation.

The Committee discussed sickness levels and asked why the level was so high. The Corporate Director Communities explained that the nature of the Directorate business meant there was a high number of manual workers working outside and long term sickness continued to be the main problem. Members questioned if adequate support was being provided for staff. They were advised that both support and flexibility were provided where possible.

The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer reported that there were ongoing concerns regarding the timing of the digital platform and savings could not be delivered this year because online accounts could not be launched until mid- March. Staff savings had mitigated the position and it was hoped that delivery would be as soon as possible in the new year.

Sickness levels were better than in the previous year following the robust implementation of policies.

The Committee asked for further information regarding the three new income generating initiatives. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that one fell within this area relating to card payments and different charges for credit and debit cards. Through procurement, costs had reduced from £20,000 to £1,000 and it was not worth implementing measures to mitigate the £1,000. Members commented that this was not income generation and the Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer agreed and said that if costs had not fallen then he would have introduced the initiative.

The Committee asked for further information on how much the authority was charged for card payments. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer agreed to look into the matter and report back to Committee.

The Committee asked why the same target of 9 days had been set for the average time taken to process housing benefit changes. Members were advised that there were significant changes in the last quarter of last year and the way information was supplied by DWP. He was not confident staff could manage the volume of information received and so did not reduce the target but would look to change in the future.

Members were concerned that only limited action had been taken to enable community groups and the third sector to have more voice and control over community assets. They were advised that adoption of the Town and Community Council charter related to this directorate but work was being done elsewhere on this indicator.

The Committee questioned why the indicator regarding rationalising the council's administrative estate including the leasing of Raven's Court, was green and not amber. Members were advised that the part of the project that fell within this portfolio was green but the project was not green overall.

The Committee questioned why only 4% of unoccupied dwellings had been returned to occupation. Members were advised that it was difficult persuading owners to release homes for occupation particularly without legislation and changes were required before any real progress could be made.

Members questioned the position with the average number of days to deliver a DFG for children and young people. They were advised that this had been a difficult area in the past with PI's calculated in different ways. Some applicants could wait up to 12 months before starting work where as others would start immediately. In future it would be calculated on when the authority had completed its work and on this basis performance should be better in future.

### **Conclusions**

The Committee requested that its disappointment that the Chief Executive was unable to attend this committee meeting to present his report be noted.

### **All Directorates**

- a) The Committee note that there were some Performance Indicators (PIs) that were annual indicators but when Directors were questioned, they were able to provide an update in relation to some of the lines. Therefore, Members ask all Directorates to go through their PIs to ensure they are truly annual or if updates could be provided quarterly to minimise requests for additional information.
- b) Members questioned sickness levels in Social Services and Communities and it was stated long term sickness was particularly problematic. It was mentioned that short term absences were generally being controlled well due to the robust implementation of Sickness Absence Policies and therefore members recommend that the Local Authority should focus their efforts on managing long term absences.

### **Finance**

Additional Information requested:

- When discussing card payments, Members queried how much the Council is for charged and asked if the Local Authority refuse any card providers due to high charges.

### **Adult and Children's Social Care**

- a) The Committee shared their concerns in relation to the PM26 - the percentage of looked after children returned home from care during the year and highlighted the risk associated with this PI.
- b) Members have recommended that when reporting on PI PM33 - The Percentage of looked after children on 31<sup>st</sup> March who have had three or more placements during the year in the future - that the number of babies born in hospital be removed and presented separately.
- c) Members queried how the PI showing the number of working days per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence is red on the RAG status, when it shows a budget reduction proposal of £50,000 in green under the Additional Financial Information – Budget Reduction Monitoring Variances 2015-16.

Additional Information requested:

- In relation to PI P2.1.1, the Committee asked for further information in relation to the funding options for the Local Community Co-ordinators (LCCs) and questioned when and how work undertaken by the LCCs is recorded and monitored to ensure resilience within their role.
- Members have requested a breakdown of the £100,000 overspend on fostering to show what costs are allocated to respite care, travelling costs and childcare.

### **Education and Family Support Services**

- a) With reference to PI SCC024 – Members recommend that this PI be presented separately to show percentage of children looked after during the year with a Personal Education Plan within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school in the borough and then another showing the percentage joining a new school outside the borough.
- b) When the Directorate reassess the safe route to schools, Members have asked Officers to take into consideration the age of the pupils.

Additional Information requested:

- The Committee asked for reassurance with reference to the quality of school teachers and requested to receive information relating to all training undertaken.
- Members stated that we were one of the lowest statementing authorities and asked how we currently rate.
- Members have requested a breakdown of the £100,000 overspend on fostering to show what costs are allocated to respite care, travelling costs and childcare.

### **Communities**

- a) The Committee recommend that in addition to PI STS006 - Percentage of reported fly tipping incidents cleared within 5 working days, that the statistics of the actual quantity of fly tipping be presented to Members.

Additional Information requested:

- With reference to Highways Services, Members have asked to be provided with the savings achieved in relation to overtime.
- Members have requested to receive the number of apprenticeships and traineeships arising from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools programme and other Bridgend County Borough Council projects.
- Members have asked to be provided with the total costs associated with the new waste collection contract, along with the figures collated from the kitchen waste collection contract which took place in 2008.
- Members have requested to be provided with a list of all car parks in the borough along with the allotted revenue accrued.

220. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2017-18 - 2020-21

Members considered a report on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017-18 to 2020-21, which set out the spending priorities of the Council, key investment objectives and budget areas targeted for necessary savings. The strategy included a financial forecast for 2017-21 and a detailed draft revenue budget for 2017-18.

Members asked for more information regarding digitising the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the fact that many people in receipt of benefits would not be able to manage this online. The Deputy Leader explained that a budget had been allocated to deal with this and everyone who was entitled to it would receive it. An online platform was being configured and instructions were being issued with Council Tax bills encouraging residents to complete transactions on line rather than by phone. Other services would continue to support residents unable to apply on line.

The Committee requested details of the proposed savings in Democratic Services. The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services explained that this did not specifically relate to scrutiny. There would be a different form of Local Government in future and a requirement to collaborate more. If scrutiny collaborated more, it was likely that it would cost less and savings could be made from this. The role of the Mayor was also being considered including the part the authority played in supporting the Mayors work. These were not finite proposals but issues to be considered in the future. It would be possible to make the savings required by looking at the way services were delivered including combining the scrutiny function. If Members protected this part of the budget then that could create a problem.

Members asked for clarification regarding not reducing the scrutiny function but changing the way the service was delivered. They were concerned about collaborating for education and social services and different priorities for each authority. Some Members were aware of joint scrutiny arrangements that had failed because others were not willing to participate. The Corporate Director - Operational and Partnership Services explained that there could be collaborative working but not collaborative scrutiny. This would not damage the scrutiny function and it was important to continue to look at different ways of working. More information would be available in January about the proposed merges and consideration could then be given to staffing proposals for the transitional period. This report was being presented to scrutiny when the authority was approaching a period of change. In terms of work now, the authority could think about a structure that could embrace collaboration in future.



Some Members suggested that monthly council meetings were unnecessary and this could be reviewed. The Corporate Director - Operational and Partnership Services explained that he was under the impression Members were happy with the current arrangements and added that web casting appeared to be becoming more popular.

Members raised the issue of the Community Action Fund, some wards being larger than others and multi member wards. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer confirmed that discussions had taken place in BREP and it was difficult to make it equitable for all members. He confirmed that funding could be pooled.

The Committee questioned why less staff were required for Direct payments however additional money was required. The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that there had been adjustments between the teams and he was happy to provide further information if required.

The Committee questioned how achievable savings were from reducing the number of staff in HR, OD and Communications and business support. Members were advised it was difficult when the only cuts that could be made involved people. This could have an impact on the service delivered and why collaboration was so important.

Concerns were raised about reducing visits to food establishments. The authority was broadly compliant but there would be concerns if there was a reduction. The Corporate Director - Operational and Partnership Services explained that the purpose was to maintain performance and there was currently a review underway.

### **Conclusions**

Additional Information requested:

- Members have requested further information in relation to the unavoidable 2017-18 service budget pressures against the Chief Executive & Finance Directorate, with reference to the increase in volume and complexity of administration for Direct Payments.

The Committee are concerned that collaborative scrutiny without extra resources could result in a poor level of scrutiny which would be damaging to the authority. The future picture is unclear and the authority should continue to value scrutiny as it played an important part in holding the executive to account and supporting the quality of decision making. The Committee recommend that resources be retained.

### 221. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 5.50 pm