

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3 - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31
4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
M Jones

N Clarke
RL Penhale-
Thomas

J Gebbie
B Sedgebeer

T Giffard
RMI Shaw

CA Webster

Apologies for Absence

JC Spanswick

Officers:

Julie Ellams
Rachel Keepins

Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny

Invitees:

Darren Mepham
Martin Morgans
Philip O'Brien
Cllr HM Williams

Chief Executive
Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Project Officer - Digital Transformation
Deputy Leader

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

24. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees of 6 September and 5 October 2017 be approved as a true and accurate record.

25. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme for 2017-18 for approval. She provided details on the items due to be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held on 14 December 2017 and sought confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 25 January 2018. The Scrutiny Officer also submitted the list of responses to comments, recommendations and requests for additional information from the previous meeting. The report also contained a list of potential Forward Work Programme items for formal prioritisation and allocation to each of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that the 2017-2018 Half Year Financial Performance and Half Year Corporate Plan Performance Report due to be considered on 14 December 2017 would probably not be ready for that meeting and might need to go to a later meeting because of the way the data was recorded and when it would be available. The City Deal due to be considered 21 February 2018 would be ready for the January meeting so could be brought forward.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that she had received requests from the Corporate Director- Social Services and Wellbeing for two pre decision reports to be considered, "Remodelling Older Persons Accommodation" and "Children's Social Care University Fees". These would replace "Empty Homes" on 8th January 2018 and "The Economic Prosperity of Bridgend County Borough" on 7th February 2018. Members requested further information regarding each request to see if they could be taken following the items already in the work programme. They were reluctant to delay consideration of "Empty Homes" in particular because of the amount of interest in this particular item.

A Member raised the item "Corporate Plan" due to be considered in January 2018 and suggested that a review of the delivery of the plan in 2016-17 including outcomes be included in the report so that Members could see how effective it had been and the impact on the following year.

A Member raised the Community Safety Partnership item to be considered in March 2018 and suggested that this should be an opportunity to look at Safeguarding. Bridgend had the fourth highest number of LAC in Wales and two Child Practice Reviews and he raised concerns about how these issues were being picked up. Concerns were raised about the exploitation of vulnerable adults also as part of the Community Safety Partnership. The Scrutiny Officer explained that the authority had not had a Community Safety Partnership Officer in place for the last 12 to 18 months. Other scrutiny committees were also looking at this area and it was important not to duplicate work. A Member suggested that this should be included in the risk register.

RECOMMENDED:

The Committee confirmed the items for their own FWP for the next couple of meetings and agreed to only have the finance report for the 14 December as the Committee had not yet had their workshop on scrutiny of performance reports. The Committee also requested that the Chief Executive be invited to attend for the Corporate Plan item. On their item on Community Safety Partnership, Members requested that they focus on safeguarding, particularly of vulnerable adults in communities.

In relation to the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee's FWP, the Committee confirmed the items for December to February and discussed the proposed amendments that had been put forward by the Corporate Director – Social Services via the Scrutiny Officer. The Committee requested that they receive further information as to the purpose of both these reports and where Scrutiny could add value as there was no real justification put forward at this time as to why these items would be more of a priority than those already scheduled.

26. **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME**

The Head of Performance and Partnerships presented his report updating Overview & Scrutiny on key developments with regards the progress for the delivery of the Digital Transformation Programme. He explained the background including internet usage in Bridgend, the one star rating from SOCITM, the procurement process in April 2016 and the review in April 2017. He outlined the Digital Strategy and Business Process Reengineering, potential benefits of "ITrent" for HR and the importance of the web site redesign. He anticipated that they would be in a ready state by 31st January 2018 but there would only be one opportunity to get it right so it was anticipated that "My Account" would be available to the general public from Spring.

Members thanked the Head of Performance and Partnerships for his presentation and asked if the group had looked at websites that other authorities had, in particular those

with a high SOCITM rating. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that the group had looked at other successful sites, both English and Welsh. Following the release of the new website there would be an accessibility review and if the website was made more complex the authority could fail. Any problems with planning could be because of the portal and he agreed to look into the matter.

A Member suggested using photographs on the website with a menu on the side. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that this style could result in accessibility issues particularly from a smartphone.

A Member commented that when it came to testing the website, valuable feedback would be gained from officers and external users. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that there was a Digital Board, staff from S8080 and a selection of citizens with whom there was continuous engagement, feedback and change. The development of "My Account" resulting in the upskilling of Customer Contact Officers would enable basic Council Tax and Housing Benefit questions to be answered at the first point of contact. The Council would provide a better service for citizens for both Face to Face and Telephony alongside the Digital channel. This would allow senior officers time to deal with the more complex issues.

A Member stressed the importance of continuing to have face to face services for those not digitally included. He also raised concerns that there were significant cuts in the provision of IT training courses preventing citizens from training to engage in the new technology. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that because of concerns relating to digital exclusion there was a need to maintain other channels. It was important to maintain training schemes going forward and libraries were well equipped. This was outside the project but needed to be addressed. The Deputy Leader stated that education was a priority from cradle to grave and it was important to have the right offer fit for purpose. Going forward it was a priority to increase the ability for residents to engage digitally.

The Chief Executive confirmed that this programme was not about switching off channels of communication but about meeting demand. Residents had a choice when it came to most services and it was important not to cut off residents and to make communicating with the authority as easy as possible.

A member referred to banks offering training to allow their customers to communicate with them digitally such as the Barclays Digital Eagles. The Chief Executive confirmed that some work had been carried out with the banks and credit unions.

A Member asked for clarification as to how savings identified in the report had been calculated. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that they had looked at the average cost of multiple roles and structures and this had been used as an indicative approach to where they would make savings by avoiding duplication.

A Member asked how long the temporary team would be in post and if savings were still being made. She was advised that alternative savings had been found because of the lateness of the programme. No team had been attached to the project with staff from other areas covering the work. The next consideration was how it would be staffed and how it would look with a structure to support the strategy moving forward.

A member referred to the duplication of work when it came to data collection and Welsh language legislation. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that language preference would be identified at the point of registration. There were no plans to "sell" data. How we interfaced with third parties was a piece of work that would be undertaken in future.

The Chief Executive explained that they had looked at other councils and made a conscious decision to follow this route. It was an organisational transformation and not just IT and additional help was only brought in when required. This was a developing organisation supported by new disciplines such as a new website. A similar journey was being taken with data as the authority became more data rich and worked out how to use the data to grow. There were challenges around customer service and communications with staff needing new disciplines to fit changing roles.

A Member asked if there had been any high profile failures. She was advised that Liverpool City Council, Somerset County Council and BT had all experienced failure for different reasons including the failure to make changes internally, outsourcing all transactions at the same time as personnel and political changes and not keeping staff on board with changes.

A Member asked if the savings identified in the table would be made when the targets were hit eg Council Tax payments made on line. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that there would be challenges around e-billing, the requirement for council tax reference number and joint accounts but savings could be made, dependent on uptake taking into consideration that 70% of Council Tax subscribers were on Direct Debit. When a customer contacted the authority help should be offered to help them sign up and activate their accounts. School admissions on line would be a huge win but there was no integration available currently however all services needed to be rolled out cautiously and promoted effectively.

A Member asked if there would be a big launch or a more gentle release. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that as soon as they were in a ready state they would start engaging with stakeholders to “peek” out any issues before going to the next level. The initial launch would be to internal stakeholders and then for general release in Spring.

A Member raised concerns regarding residents to the north of the county and issues with broadband making it difficult to engage digitally.

A Member raised concerns about residents with no IT capability and a decision made by a local social landlord only to deal with queries from residents via the web. There was no flexibility and this caused considerable distress and upset to one resident. The Deputy Leader agreed with this point and added that it was important to engage staff and listen to their comments. It was a real issue meeting demographic pressures with Bridgend having the highest growing population in Wales outside Cardiff. This would continue for the next fifteen years and it was for staff to manage the pressure going forward.

A Member commented that technology could help vulnerable people eg using skype for interviews and it was important to empower staff to consider and use alternatives. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that a review was taking place capturing “day in the life” activities which highlighted the pressure points and stresses for residents which would steer improvements to be made.

The Chief Executive commented that this was a bottom up, top down approach which encouraged challenge. Skype and iPads could be used to tackle isolation and Amazon and Alexa could help with social care. There was massive potential for technology.

A member asked if “Workwise data” previously gathered had been used. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that the data had to be married with the digital platform but it did have value and would be used to inform the process.

A member asked who would be providing E Forms for the authority. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that Agilisys platform based on Goss Technologies was being used. 89 forms had been identified on the current website and around 40 were currently being looked at. They were trying to avoid the user having to print and complete the form and return in the post. E forms were valuable in business process reengineering and developing a prescriptive process.

Members asked if when it came to ITrent enhancements, consideration could be given to collaboration to share the costs.

Members asked how confident the Head of Performance and Partnerships was in meeting the launch date of late spring. He explained that they had already completed two rounds of testing on the platform and fixes should be complete by the end of November. There would be another round of testing in mid-January with another month for dealing with any issues. Officers were working hard and focussing on meeting the deadlines.

The Chief Executive added that it was not all about digitalisation, there were other pressures such as the implications of Universal Credit which were outside the gift of the authority to control. A further risk was the Welsh language site where they were dependant on technical staff and it was not ready to launch. A decision might have to be made on whether to delay the launch of the welsh site, or delay the launch of both sites. The fine for breaching welsh language requirements would be £5000.

A Member asked if the language preference was known for a resident, would they still be sent information in both languages or only their language of choice. The Head of Performance and Partnerships confirmed this issue would be mitigated as part of the process.

A Member asked if the site would be registered for the Crystal Mark. She was advised that this could create more icons on the website leading to confusion so they would attempt to achieve the aims of the Crystal Mark without the registration.

Members asked if residents would be asked for feedback on the website. They were advised that there would be a dropdown menu asking for feedback.

A Member asked if in time it would be possible to pay for children's school meals via the system. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that a more holistic approach would be taken next time they went out for tender with any new solutions interfaced into "My Account".

The Committee praised the presentation and expressed confidence in the current officers who are taking forward the Digital Transformation project.

Recommendations

1. The Committee recommend that any promotion or communication to the public of any changes relating to digitalisation needs to include reassurance to those who don't have access to IT that there will be other, non-digital, options remaining and assistance provided to them.
2. The Committee recommend that joint services with other LAs be explored as part of the Digital Transformation such as jointly buying in, and sharing information through, web-based software such as itrent.

3. The Committee recommend that work be undertaken in the near future to incorporate schools as part of Digital Transformation considering aspects such as online school admissions and also expanding the current cashless catering system to optimise the available functionality to incorporate any and all payments collected by schools such as those for school trips.
4. The Committee supported the involvement of partner organisations in the Transformation Programme however recommended that this be a phased approach and the Authority focus first on launching the system first before looking to include partners.
5. The Committee recommend that the Authority ensure that education of the new online services be a priority with focus on support being provided within Communities.
6. The Committee requested that some form of contingency plan be put in place for any future resourcing issues, with particular emphasis on lead officers in order to ensure the project deadlines and success are achieved.
7. The Committee acknowledged that in order for the project to succeed it required organisational change across the whole of the Local Authority. Members therefore recommend that Digital Transformation be considered a priority by all Corporate Directors and Cabinet Members to ensure that support is cascaded down and across all Directorates, departments and service areas.

The Committee requested that the item of Digital Transformation be revisited on the FWP approximately 3 months after its initial launch to enable some evidence to be provided to the Committee in relation to uptake and feedback.

27. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 11:57