

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON WEDNESDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2018 AT 10:00**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
RL Penhale-
Thomas
CA Webster

N Clarke
RMI Shaw

T Giffard
JC Spanswick

M Jones
T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

J Gebbie

Officers:

Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Gail Jewell	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Sarah-Jane Byrne	Local Government Manager, Wales Audit Office
Greg Lane	Head of Democratic Services
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Ian Phillips	Performance Auditor, Wales Audit Office
Kelly Watson	Head of Legal & Regulatory Services
Councillor Hywel Williams	Deputy Leader

81. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Shaw declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5, Wales Audit Office – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future? He was a member of both the Public Service Board OVSP and the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor T Giffard declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5, Wales Audit Office – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future? He was previously a member of the Public Service Board.

82. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented the feedback from the previous meeting and asked Members to approve the responses/comments as detailed in the report.

A Member requested further information regarding the City Deal item and asked what businesses the Regional Business Forum and the Regional Economic Partnerships would be engaging with. She also asked what the Forum was and who engaged with it. The Member explained that it was essential to know exactly what was happening with City Deal when there was unrest due to cuts to subsidies and services closing down. Members asked for feedback from future City Deal scrutiny meetings.

A Member requested further clarification regarding the response to the Financial Performance 2017-18 item because budget reductions had not been individually costed.

A Member referred to Empty Properties and asked if an officer had been employed in that team and what progress had been made. The Scrutiny Officer explained it was on the forward work programme as a potential item to come back in the future.

A Member referred to the Financial Performance 2017-18 item and asked what support was given to schools to manage a deficit budget and what support was given to schools to help them access additional funding and to signpost opportunities.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that at the next meeting, Procurement and Contracts was listed for consideration. Members asked for the report to focus on ethical procurement and employment and the use of toolkits.

RESOLVED: The Committee:

- 1) Approved the feedback from the previous meeting and requested further information as detailed above.
- 2) Identified specific information the Committee wished to receive in relation to the Procurement and Contracts report due to be considered at the next meeting.

83. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

The Head of Performance and Partnerships gave a presentation updating the Committee on the progress made since the introduction of Phase 1 of the Digital Transformation Programme on 24th April 2018 plus the development of phase 2. The presentation outlined the key statistics from phase 1, progress with the website, Corporate Plan commitments, Discovery/Navigator plans and business process redesign plans for phase 2 and the challenges and opportunities for the programme.

A member asked if an analysis had been undertaken on council tax online applications to track the areas that were using the system and to look at ways of reducing the barriers in other areas and promoting use of the website. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that General Data Protection Regulations restricted the way data was handled and used however they were looking at ways of finding barriers and dealing with exclusion. From a Council Tax perspective, 70% of account holders were on direct debit and had very little contact with the authority so there was no incentive to sign up. Housing Benefits were working with partners to mitigate exclusion and he was confident that they could drive up the user base. The Committee recommend that analysis be undertaken on a postcode basis of areas that had not registered online for Council Tax. Members asked for this information to assist with providing a demographic understanding of areas to focus on advertising for My Account.

The Committee noted that out of the citizens who had registered their council tax account online, only 49.59% of them had subscribed to e-billing. A Member explained that she had signed up for paperless billing for her utility bills because a discount had been offered. This could be an option to increase the uptake although it was acknowledged that even a small discount could be challenging in the current financial climate. Members recommended that as a way of promoting paperless billing, the Council should consider offering a small discount as an incentive.

A Member referred to the member referral system which was “clunky” and

Awkward to use. He asked if Bridge Maps could be made available to Members and a training session offered. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that a working group had been set up to look at member referrals. In relation to the App called 'Bridgend Report It' which allowed citizens to report highways issues such as potholes and dog fouling, Members recommended that the App include the ability to report grass cutting issues and overflowing litter bins. The Head of Performance and Partnerships also agreed to look at Member training on Bridge Maps.

A Member asked if the Chatbot option would be the only option and replace staff. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that as in his presentation, they were not looking to close down channels but to add functionality. It might not be fit for purpose in all areas but they would not be losing access to a member of staff if that was required.

A Member thanked the officer for the report and presentation and for the progress made. He raised concerns about the impact on equalities and stressed that access to the website needed to be fully inclusive. The Member referred to the financial implications and the current underspend position. He asked if there was a resilient financial plan for next 3 to 5 years. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that there had been no exact science to the 1st phase and the key focus was procurement and to start leveraging opportunity. The keys to progress were business process redesign and user adoption. The Head of Performance and Partnerships agreed that when he next submitted a progress report, it would include a more detailed plan including any threats to the programme.

A Member referred to duplication of referrals and asked how this could be better managed to avoid wasting time and effort. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that if there were multiple reports for the same issue it would be tagged and other members would be able to see that it had already been reported. This would also give a representation of where the problems were around the borough and encourage officer activity in those areas.

A Member thanked the officer for the report and suggested that the team be congratulated on their achievements. He asked for information on what other authorities were doing and how they were taking this matter forward. The Member referred to the forecast that by 2020, over 85% of customer interactions would be handled without a human, and asked what impact this would have on staffing levels and jobs going forward. The Head of Performance and Partnerships explained that he regularly met other authorities to discuss progress. There appeared to be a piecemeal approach across Wales. Staff would be able to do far more functional work if the area was digitised and there could be real benefits in terms of how to make the process quicker from a back office perspective. The Deputy Leader added that in the early days he had advocated looking at others and not reinventing the wheel. The reality was that we delivered differently so had to build our own service and take staff with us. This allowed the authority to manage the growth in population and demand with the current workforce.

A member raised the possibility of extending cashless schools because it would promote healthy eating and avoid the stigma of free school meals. This would also be a way of managing food waste. He asked if there was any tolerance if parents forget to put money on their child's card. The Committee recommended that the system should also include cashless payments for schools trips and tickets for school events for example to alleviate administrative costs and to assist parents to make payments when convenient to them.

A Member asked if there were going to be any changes to the blue badge system. The Head of Performance and Partnerships reported that discussions were underway regarding blue badge applications and there were pilots starting in October. The intention was that the system would be fully accessible using basic language.

A Member suggested that a button be incorporated into the new website which would allow access to view council meetings. There should also be a link to tourism because BCBC was responsible for sporting events such as world class golfing tournaments and other revenue generating events. During deliberations of the new website, Members maintained that there had previously been very high profile events across the Borough that were not advertised adequately to effectively promote the event and therefore recommend that Tourism had its own webpage with its own button on the Bridgend Council's homepage. In addition, to encourage public engagement with the Council, Members recommended that a button be added to the homepage to allow residents to watch webcast Council meetings.

A Member commented on the poor sound quality of webcast meetings. The Head of Performance and Partnership agreed to refer the matter to the service area.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for their attendance.

Digital Transformation Programme

The Committee congratulated the Head of Performance and Partnership Services on what he had achieved digitally and Members praised the positive change in the local authorities culture.

Recommendations

- 1 The Committee recommend that analysis be undertaken on a postcode basis of areas that have not registered online for Council Tax. Members request to receive this information when compiled to assist with providing a demographic understanding of where in the Borough requires concentrated advertising for My Account.
- 2 The Committee note that out of the citizens who have registered their council tax account online, only 49.59% of them have subscribed to e-billing. Therefore Members recommend that in a way of promoting paperless billing, the Council offer a small discount as an incentive.
- 3 In relation to the App called 'Bridgend Report It' which allow citizens to report highways issues such as potholes and dog fouling, Members recommend that the App includes the ability of reporting the need for grass cutting and the emptying of overflowing litter bins.
- 4 Following discussions regarding cashless catering the Committee recommend that the system should also include cashless payments for schools trips and tickets for school events for example to alleviate administrative costs and to assist parents with the ability of making payments when it is convenient to them.
- 5 During deliberations of the new website, Members maintain that there had previously been very high profile events across the Borough that were not advertised adequately to effectively promote the event and therefore recommend

that Tourism have its own webpage with its own button on the Bridgend Council's homepage. In addition to this, to assist with increasing public engagement with the Council, Members recommend that a button be progressed on the homepage to enable citizens to watch webcast Council meetings effortlessly.

Additional information

- At a future meeting, Members have asked to be presented with a financial plan detailing the current spend to date, any underspend/overspends and projected spend for the duration of the programme. In addition to this Members request that a business plan be offered specifying targets for timeframes and registrations for My Account.
- The Committee request that the following question be referred to the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support:
In relation to cashless catering, the Committee queried whether there was any flexibility on a negative balance on a child's account and further questioned if the tolerance (if any) was the same for all schools.

Members request a training session on BridgeMAPS.

84. WALES AUDIT OFFICE - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - FIT FOR THE FUTURE?

The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services presented a report to the Committee on the completed Wales Audit Office report in respect of the Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future review. She explained that the review explored how fit for the future scrutiny functions were within the Authority.

The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services explained that the review concluded that Bridgend's overview and scrutiny function was well run but needed to adapt to meet future challenges and should consider opportunities to work differently. The review proposed 5 areas for improvement as detailed in the report. She added that the report, including the proposals for improvement and how they could be addressed, had been considered by Audit Committee on 6th September 2018.

A Member raised concerns that the proposals for improvement and the methods to improve scrutiny activity all had financial implications. She asked if there would be money from Welsh Government to support the activity and asked if Welsh Government were aware of the reductions to the number of staff in Scrutiny. The Deputy Leader stated that he made that case regularly and any extra funds would be gratefully received. The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services explained that that was the position and as such, the authority had to be more innovative and efficient with the resources it had. The Member accepted the explanation but if scrutiny were to hold its meetings outside of the Civic Offices, it would cost money for venue hire, translators etc. The Local Government – Performance Audit Manager, Wales Audit Office explained that they had been realistic about the resources within the authority and that the traditional way of scrutiny via committee already took a lot of resources. They had found that the impact from traditional scrutiny was limited across most authorities. If the authority thought about available resources and capacity across the organisation, it could reconsider the way it did scrutiny.

A Member raised the issue of scrutiny of Public Service Boards and that it had not been considered. He asked what the rationale was if it had not met since October 2017 and how could it be effective. The Committee voiced their own concerns due to the lack of meetings the Public Service Board Overview and Scrutiny Panel had undertaken in the

last year and recommended that the rationale for the Panel should be explored and queried why the Panel had made such little progress.

A Member highlighted the lack of synergy between Cabinet, Officers and Members and recommended that the quarterly meetings between Cabinet, Corporate Management Board and Scrutiny Chairs be further developed. The Committee also requested that the outcomes from these meetings be cascaded to all other Members. The Local Government – Performance Audit Manager, Wales Audit Office added that synergy had not been there in the past but now meetings were in place to facilitate this. The Deputy Leader explained that there were quarterly meetings with Scrutiny Chairs where they looked at the Forward Work Programme and they were keen to engage with the back benchers as much as possible.

A Member referred to the proposal that timelines for providing information to scrutiny committees should be improved to enable them to undertake their work more effectively and said that scrutiny support had reduced and it was not possible to scrutinise the way they had before. If engagement with the public had to be improved then it had to be resourced properly. He added that the process had changed following the last election and was due to be reviewed in April 2018. The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services stated that it would be helpful if information/report requests were more tailored eg the current Procurement and Contract report request consisted of 12 to 15 bullet points which could produce a 50 page document. If the request was tailored to reflect the issues raised by the committee, information could be provided in a timely manner.

A Member stated that effective scrutiny was required to bring the public on board. He believed scrutiny meetings should be taking place in other buildings at different times of the day. He had looked at the archive of webcast meetings and before 2 meetings in August/September, the last webcast meeting was in March 2018. He had been advised that there had been procurement issues but he believed that was unacceptable. The Member also noted that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Committee 1 had never been webcast. The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services explained that there was a contract in place and hours would be allocated to committees. She added that the viewing figures were quite low even when there was an item of interest. The contract had now been renewed and there would shortly be a report presented to Democratic Services Committee to decide which meetings would be webcast. The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services explained that there had been a change in personnel and there had been a delay renewing the contract. The number of hours and level of coverage remained the same but would be available for use over a shorter period. Members noted that a programme of scrutiny meetings for webcasting was being prepared and recommended that officers ensured the planned webcasts covered a wide range of topics and were allocated across all Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

A Member referred to Task and Finish Groups which had been effective in BCBC in the past. He acknowledged that there was a slimmed down scrutiny team and budget but asked if it was something they could realistically consider doing again. The Performance Officer – Wales Audit Office reported that some authorities had operated Task and Finish Groups and they often generated more impact and tangible benefits. The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services welcomed the WAO comments on what worked well elsewhere. A member commented that these groups could also provide an opportunity for authorities to work together looking at individual topics and share best practice. The Committee recommended that the introduction of a Scrutiny Chair Research Group be explored, to take the opportunity to research best practice on a topic prior to the item being brought into Committee for scrutiny. Members requested that the Research Group be added for further discussion at the next Scrutiny Chairs meeting and that the Chair of BREP, Group Leaders and the Leader be invited for that item

Wales Audit Office – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future?

Recommendations

- 1 While discussing the proposals for improvement provided by the Wales Audit Office the Committee highlighted the lack of synergy between Cabinet, Officers and Members and recommend that the quarterly meetings between Cabinet, Corporate Management Board and Scrutiny Chairs be further developed to be more attentive to timeliness. The Committee also request that the outcomes from these meetings are cascaded to all other Members.
- 2 Members note that the development of a programme of scrutiny meetings for webcasting had already been proposed for future review activity and recommend that officers ensure the planned webcasts cover a wide range of topics and are allocated across all Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 3 With reference to the Wales Audit Report questioning how the Council undertake scrutiny of the Public Service Board, the Committee voiced their own concerns due to the lack of meetings the Public Service Board Overview and Scrutiny Panel have undertaken in the last year and recommend that the rationale for the Panel is explored and query why the Panel has made such little progression.
- 4 The Committee recommend that the introduction of a Scrutiny Chair Research Group be explored, to take the opportunity to research best practice on a topic prior to the item being brought into Committee for Scrutinising. Members request that the Research Group be added for further discussion at the next Scrutiny Chairs meeting and that the Chair of BREP, Group Leaders and the Leader be invitees for the item.

85. FESTIVAL OF LEARNING 2018

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an information item reporting the activities that took place in the Festival of Learning 2018 during the week commencing 25 June 2018. A Member thanked the officers for a very comprehensive report and a very successful event. She thought it was pleasing to attend and meet teachers and children and a possible income generator for the future.

The Committee thanked the Director for the innovative approach undertaken and for level of passion expressed prior and during the event.

86. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 12:25