

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - MONDAY, 31 JULY 2017

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31
4WB ON MONDAY, 31 JULY 2017 AT 2.00 PM**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
RMI Shaw
A Williams

N Clarke
JC Spanswick

J Gebbie
T Thomas

M Jones
KJ Watts

Apologies for Absence

RL Penhale-Thomas and B Sedgebeer

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Sarah Daniel	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gail Jewell	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Andrew Jolley	Corporate Director Operational & Partnership Services
Gary Jones	Head of Democratic Services
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Sarah Kingsbury	Head of Human Resources, Organisation and Development and Customer Services
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies from absence were received from the following Members:
Councillor B Sedgebeer
Councillor R Penhale-Thoams

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED: That Members noted the minutes of the following meetings of previous meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

- Community, Environment and Leisure – 26 January 2017
- Partnerships and Governance – 6 February 2017
- Adult Social Care - 14 March 2017

4. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Councillor CA Green was elected as Chairperson of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5. COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST ITS COMMITMENTS AND A SUMMARY OF ITS FINANCIAL POSITION AT YEAR END FOR 2016-17

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to members which related directly to the Council's Corporate Plan 2016-20 which set out the Council's Improvement priorities and identified actions to realise those priorities and to its Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-17 to 2019-20

The Chairperson welcomed the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing, Head of Finance and the Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help to the meeting.

Members asked for clarification on the figures in paragraph 3.2 of the report in relation to the Capital Programme. The Head of Finance stated that he would check the annual allocations that the Authority has every year and clarify this with members.

A Member thanked the Officers for the report and commented on the large amount of detail and data within it and asked if it would be possible in future, to have a brief report that highlighted the areas of concern so Members were better able to provide advice and add value in areas that matter the most. Members agreed that this would also make the report easier to read for the public and to better understand the functions of the Council and the challenges that we face as a local authority.

The Head of Finance stated that if Members prefer this option they could do this in the future. The document Members had in front of them was an executive summary of a report that is produced for Cabinet. He added Officers were trying to strike a balance between not providing Members with enough information they need to effectively scrutinise the report and providing sufficient information.

Members queried if the Authority had any data to compare with other Local Authorities in Wales to see how BCBC compared nationally in our sickness rates as the data alone for this authority was difficult to analyse in isolation and it would be useful to know how we compared on an all Wales average.

Members also questioned how the Authority was helping staff to return to work and overcome mental health issues.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that the Directorate held performance information around sickness and they have a performance management process in place. She stated that sickness levels of staff who work in personal care are generally higher due to the nature of their work. She added that as a comparison the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate were fairly even at the moment and they were currently showing a slight improvement in the 3rd and 4th quarter and were focussing on maintaining this. She added that the Directorate works closely with HR and together they ensure there is a plan for every long term sickness and had recently improved their return to work procedure.

A Member asked how the Directorate were supporting staff that were off sick, or had returned to work with stress, anxiety and depression.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that the Authority as a whole were promoting wellbeing amongst staff and if they were concerned about any member of staff they would refer them to wellbeing support that was available to all staff and, if required, they would also be referred to occupational health. She added that the Directorate were also promoting flexible working schemes and staff have return to work interviews, with trained managers to give the opportunity for managers to talk to staff about their wellbeing and feedback to HR so they had qualitative information to report on.

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services added that they were in the process of compiling a report to CMB about the support mechanisms that were in place for staff, which included external support such as walking clubs, exercise clubs and advice on third sector walk in centres for those suffering from mental health issues.

A Member asked how sickness impacted on the budget where staff had to be replaced by agency staff.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that the Authority do need to replace a lot of home care staff if they are off sick as their visits still need to be carried out, however they would not necessarily cover administrative and managerial posts and they ensure that managers were taking an objective view to this and only use agency workers to cover where absolutely necessary. She added that the costs were factored into the overall budget.

A Member asked how managers were engaging with staff that had been made redundant or at risk of redundancy due to budget pressures.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that whilst undergoing transformation there had been engagement with all staff, HR and trade unions at an early stage. She advised Members that all staff were offered redeployment opportunities and due to the information and sharing of plans there had been no significant concerns reported. During the redesign of home care, managers had consulted monthly with staff, as well as families and children affected by the redesign before any changes were made. She added that staff were aware that the Authority could not progress or modernise without looking at new ways of working which could potentially have an impact on staff in the Directorate.

A Member was concerned that stress was high across the Authority and asked if the reasons behind the high volume of staff on leave with stress were known and if there was a trend.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that whilst there were staff on leave with elements of stress there were other reasons that contributed to the high volumes of sickness in the Directorate due to the very nature of work they undertake in relation to providing personal care. She stated that if a member of staff was off work with Diarrhea and vomiting they could not attend work for at least three days after they were free of symptoms to stop the risk of spreading the illness to service users.

She added that her Directorate had high levels of hands on staff that are in direct care, compared with office based staff and were currently unable to work flexi time unlike their office based counterparts. She stated that they were introducing a flexi time scheme for care workers, but work was being carried out to ensure it did not impact service users.

A Member queried the £1.17m overspend in relation to Looked After Children and asked how the project plans were progressing in relation to residential Childrens services.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that demand was still high in Childrens Social Services and they had to deliver this service on an ever decreasing budget. She added that they were beginning to see numbers of trending Looked After Children decrease. The Directorate were also looking to create more in house foster placements as these cost much less than external foster places. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing added that the Authority were also driving forward a campaign for foster placements locally, especially mother and child foster placements. She explained that there was a long and complex process to go through to be approved as a foster carer and the cost of the process was also high. Foster families in Bridgend now also have specialist support and training in place to be able to cope with difficult behavior's so more children are able to have placements in County. The high costs of the placements were also attributed to foster families who were able to respond in an emergency, and high secure placements which could cost over £5,000 a week.

A Member asked if the Authority pay the Welsh Government rates to foster carers in Bridgend and asked how many children from BCBC were placed in out of County placements.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that they do pay the rates set by Welsh Government. She added that she did not have the figures with her at the meeting to share with members how many children had been sent out of County but would collate and anonymise and send this on to members.

The Chairperson thanked the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help for their attendance and assistance in answering Members queries at the meeting.

The Chairperson welcomed the Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support, the Head of Education and Family Support and the Cabinet Member Education and Regeneration to the meeting

A Member commented that the Directorate were achieving a consistent improvement in relation to the attainment gap with children eligible for free school meals and asked how they planned to keep improving. The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support stated that they were looking at ways to support the development of these learners with the pupil deprivation grant and also funding from Welsh Government. He advised that it was ultimately the decision for the individual schools to determine how they spend the funding but they had to publish the information and Estyn would monitor it regionally as schools employed different strategies. More schools use money more widely for all learners, but Welsh Government were focusing on a drive to target learners who were eligible for free school meals.

A Member asked about the pupil deprivation grant and stated that one method from other Local Authorities is that they use part of the fund for family link officers and asked if BCBC also use this tool.

The Head of Education and Family Support advised that the Authority does use this approach and it is currently embedded in the early help offer but that their preferred approach was a broader offer of support such as school based counselling based on hub models that is easily accessible for schools.

A Member commented that historically BCBC are a low statementing Authority with regards to children with special educational needs and asked if this was still the case.

The Head of Education and Family Support advised Members that the data was no longer published so we don't know and they would need to wait for the new ALN bill to see if this would change.

A Member commented on the high level of sickness in the directorate, particularly in relation to stress and anxiety, he noted that it was way above any other directorate at 33% and asked officers for an explanation for this – stress and anxiety.

The Head of Education and Family Support stated that a lot of work and research had been undertaken in relation to understanding sickness in directorate. As most of their services were frontline it could be a very stressful job. She added that a number of staff surveys had been undertaken, and the results show that people feel supported and generally the response overall was positive, which she agreed did not add to understanding the levels of sickness. She advised that they work closely with managers to be supportive of approach but also firm around the sickness policy that was in place. The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support added that practical measures were in place and they were currently looking at more pastoral support in team meetings and procedures around lone working and operational matters regarding returning to work. He added that the number of sick days per FTE was coming down slowly and reassured Members that a consistent approach was being taken.

A Member asked how the return to work interviews were monitored in schools and asked if all schools complete them.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support stated that schools were not always completing these and we as an Authority cannot enforce the matter with them. He added that when he meets with head teachers he was making a clear message that they must make every effort to complete them and they are chased to ensure they are completed but ultimately it was managed and led by the individual school.

The Chairperson thanked the Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support, the Head of Education and Family Support and also the Cabinet Member Education and Regeneration for their attendance at the meeting and for their assistance in answering their queries.

The Chairperson welcomed The Corporate Director Communities, the Head of Street scene and the Cabinet Member Communities to the meeting.

A Member questioned the reasons for absence in relation to stress, anxiety and depression which was at 26% of overall sickness for the Directorate and was concerned at how high it was. He asked the officers if they had any reasons they could attribute to the sickness and how they were managing it.

The Corporate Director Communities stated that it was a trend across the whole Council but had been decreasing gradually over a number of years. He stated that the whole council was going through a transformational change programme and looking at a reduction in staff whilst seeking to limit effect on public by trying to be more efficient would impact on staff wellbeing. He added that the Authority were striving to deliver the same service with fewer people and so this has seen an increase in reporting of this type of illness. He advised Members that once someone has been off work for a number of weeks occupational health then manage their absence and work with the member of staff to look at how they can make their return to work easier, such as phased returns. He added that the Authority were looking to address issues corporately around wellbeing and they recognised that they need to do more around wellbeing to support own staff, as they were the most valuable resource that the Authority has.

The Cabinet Member Communities stated that the Communities directorate had been disproportionately cut in comparison to other directorates in the Authority. He stated that a desire to maintain service but with a dramatically reduced workforce will increase staff sickness and, with more budget reductions the public needed to realise that we may not be able to offer some services we have previously had in the past.

A Member asked for an update on the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process and if the process was working yet. Members were concerned at the complexity of the process and the scrutiny of business plans submitted by small businesses such as sports clubs and that this was putting a barrier up and stopping CATs from progressing.

The Corporate Director Communities explained that they had received a lot of expressions of interest on potential transfers but for various reasons they had not been progressed further. He added that the Directorate had submitted a report to Cabinet last week to amend the CAT process to make it easier for a CAT to take place. He added that there was a need to strike the right balance in terms of support. Business and finance do review the business plans to ensure the asset is financially sustainable for the future, as they do not want to undertake a CAT for it to fail and have to close just a few weeks/months down the line.

A Member commented on the number of vacant premises in town centres as a consequence of the current economic climate. He noted that Porthcawl and Maesteg were doing well and asked why Bridgend wasn't doing so well. He asked what parameters were covered by the Town Centre and if we had the data on the footfall.

The Cabinet Member Education and Economic Development advised that footfall is measured and reported to quarterly. Porthcawl has a very small retail area and lots living in the immediate surrounding area and also have the benefit of a wave of new customers every week from those that are holidaying in the nearby caravan parks. Maesteg also has a compact retail centre. He stated that Bridgend has a large and spread out retail space and with austerity measures there was a lack of spending power and society was changing where people preferred to shop online and at out of town shopping centres. He advised there was an empty properties group that meets regularly and they were looking into a living in the town centre strategy with coastal housing to create living space on upper floors and retail downstairs.

The Corporate Director Communities advised that some Local Authorities have budget in their Capital Programme to purchase these properties but this would be at the expense of something else within the budget.

The Chairperson thanked The Corporate Director Communities, the Head of Street scene and the Cabinet Member Communities for their attendance at the meeting and their assistance in answering Members queries.

A Member noted the PIs for benchmarking finance, legal and HR and asked why they did not have comparative data between other welsh Local Authorities as Bridgend were a member of APSE who could provide this data.

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services advised that we do have the data and this could be shared with members. He added that most of the PIs were national PIs. The Head of Human resources and organisational Development stated that the Authority report on sickness and the WLGA report on it annually so the figures would be available around September time.

A Member commented that sickness levels for Finance attributed to stress were higher than any other Directorate and asked why this may be.

The Head of Finance stated that whilst they were the highest they were also a substantially smaller service. He advised that a small number of individuals that were off work for an extended period of time with stress and anxiety were non-work related issues and therefore out of their control to a degree.

A Member asked when the Authority were planning to go live with Baseware Solutions. The Head of Finance stated that he wasn't sure and would provide this information to members outside of the meeting.

A Member asked for some explanation and comments around the sickness levels in relation to stress and anxiety in the Operational and Partnership Services Directorate.

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services explained that they work with staff on methods of recognising stress and also monitor the workload of staff to make sure it is manageable. He advised that they have also developed joint working with other authorities so there is always someone to work with and no staff are never alone working. He advised that some of the long term sicknesses in his directorate were attributed to individuals that had muscular problems, and that these were often longer periods of sickness as staff were unable to get timely appointments for scans to determine a diagnosis and then treatment options. He added that they work with staff to enable them to return to work and look at procedures such as them working from home, flexi time or part time working, however some were unable to return at all until they had a diagnosis. He added that there were also a number of support mechanisms in place for staff in relation to diet, lifestyle, wellbeing and exercise. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development added that they had also recently joined with Care First to provide staff and their families with telephone and face to face counselling.

A Member asked how Scrutiny members can strategically support these directorates for example help with budget allocating and help with recognising contributing factors towards the stress and anxiety that staff are suffering from, for example it could be linked to staff morale.

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services informed members that the Authority goes through a process every year with staff not knowing if they will have a job the following year or not. He added that the Local Government career is not what it once was and it was very difficult to recruit now. The Head of HR and Organisational Development added that sickness was worse 10 years ago with an average 14 days per FTE now reduced to 9 days. She added that HR were developing systems to so they could better understand where the sickness issues were and the developing trends. She advised that they were also improving their E Learning and return to work procedures to improve sickness levels. She reminded Members that staff were entitled to 6 months full pay and 6 months half pay if they were off sick but they do everything they can to support staff in coming back to work. She advised Members that collaborative work had been undertaken with the WLGA in 2015 to understand if there was a common issue/theme in regards to sickness issues in the workplace but this had unfortunately not provided any clear or easy answers.

A Member asked what the average salary was for a full time employee in the Authority and suggested that the Authority look at a fast track referral system for those members of staff who were off sick because they were waiting for scans or tests. They would then potentially have a quicker diagnosis which in turn could enable them to return to work more quickly.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that she could not advise on the average salary for BCBC but they do not have a fast track system in place for referrals for scans. She advised Members that the Princess of Wales Hospital does have a fast track Physiotherapy department where members of the public that live in Bridgend could walk in and self-refer. She added that the Authority were currently exploring the option of an employee health benefit scheme to see if that was a possibility and they also promoted charitable based organisations as another layer to of support to the NHS.

In response to a question from members the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that the line manager normally refers a member of staff to occupational health if they deemed appropriate to, however individual staff members could self-refer if they felt necessary. She further added that work related stress would automatically be referred to care first.

Conclusions

Following the Committee's consideration and discussions they determined to make the following comments and requests for further information:

Sickness Absence

The Committee expressed concern regarding the sickness absence figures across the Authority. Members commented that the figures relating to stress/Anxiety/Depression/Mental Health provide a worrying figure and questioned whether there was a direct correlation between the budget reductions and asking staff to take on more work and the sickness absence figure increasing and similarly whether there was a correlation between sickness absence and budget overspend.

The Committee requested that they receive the following information in relation to sickness absence:

- a) comparative information with other Local Authorities to determine where we are ranked in relation to Wales on sickness absence and if possible to receive these comparisons at a Directorate level;
- b) any possible costings associated with sickness absence;
- c) Information on how many agency staff have been employed over the past 6-12 months and at what cost?
- d) How many staff out of the FTE figure have never been off sick and how many staff relate to recent sickness figures; in order to give a more accurate picture;
- e) A response as to whether Members could receive Apse data to assist them in considering comparisons with other LAs as the Authority are a member of APSE and its involves public sector benchmarking data for over 200 LAs.

In response to the issue of staff remaining off on sick due to waiting for scans and tests on the NHS, the Committee recommended that some form of FastTrack system to provide financial assistance for tests be explored as the cost of this could be far less than the cost of the sickness and therefore would benefit both the individual involved and the Authority.

The Committee reiterated the views of the previous CRI Overview and Scrutiny Committee in that there was a need for a strategic stance to be taken with sickness absence to determine if there were common issues across the Authority and whether there were pockets of concern so that focus can be provided specifically in these areas. Whilst recognising that the WLGA has carried out a piece of work in this field the

Committee commented that things have changed since then and further budget cuts have occurred. They therefore recommended that an overview was required where consultation was carried out with staff and the Trade Unions to determine if there were any correlations. The Committee also once again recommended that the Chief Executive incorporate a specific percentage reduction target for sickness absence in his appraisal so that there is a strategic focus from the top.

Social Services and Wellbeing

The Committee requested that they receive breakdown information on the Looked After Children Population including how many are in Out of County Foster Care.

Communities

The Committee requested that they receive the Town Centre Footprint for Bridgend.

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) – the Committee expressed concern over the CAT process and recommended that a decision needed to be made over the policy and whether to introduce definitive timelines as to when the Council will no longer support the Assets and thus an end date for communities and organisations to put in bids to take them on. It is hoped this would encourage interest as without a deadline there is no urgency for organisations.

Members expressed concern over the delays with the Extra Care Scheme in relation to the Authority signing off on the project with Linc and also slippage mentioned in terms of the selling of a school. Members queried whether there was a common theme or issue causing such delays.

Finance

Members requested that they receive information on when the Authority expects to go live with Baseware Solutions.

The Committee requested that clarification be provided in future reports in relation to paragraph 3.2 of the cover report and the Capital programme figure.

General Comments

The Committee agreed that work needed to be done on a different way to report Performance information to the Committee as it was currently too much information with not enough time to consider it. Members agreed that a small workshop be undertaken to consider the best method for reporting the Authority's performance and budget position to the Scrutiny Committee.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18

The Scrutiny Officer presented Members with the Overview and Scrutiny Draft Forward Work Programme for 2017-18 for their consideration and approval.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme was approved as set out in the report with the following change discussed and agreed by Members for the next meeting.

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- 2017-18 Quarter 1: Budget Monitoring and Financial Performance. This will be an information report to Members. Members will instead receive a report on Procurement.

The Committee agreed the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme as follows:

Date	Committee	Topic
13 September 2017	SOSC 3	Developing Bridgend as a place to work, live and visit
14 September 2017	SOSC 1	ALN Reform
18 September 2017	SOSC 2	Early Help and Safeguarding
9 October 2017	SOSC 2	CAMHS
25 October 2017	SOSC 3	Waste
6 November 2017	SOSC 1	Residential Remodelling – Childrens Services
15 November 2017	Corporate	Digital Transformation Programme

It was agreed that the following items were important and needed to be prioritised for later in the forward work programme:

- Schools Strategic Review
- School Standards Report 17-18
- Prevention and Wellbeing and Local Community Coordination
- Residential Remodelling – Extra Care Housing Schemes
- Safeguarding
- Dementia Care

Finally, the Committee determined that the following items be taken up as briefing sessions either independently or as part of the pre-Council briefing schedule:

- Overview of Direct Payments
- Social Services Commissioning Strategy
- Western Bay Regional Working – Update going forward

7. CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION REPORT

RESOLVED: Councillor J Gebbie was nominated as its Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee at meetings of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee

8. NOMINATION TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

RESOLVED: The following Members were nominated to sit on the Public Service Board Overview and Scrutiny Panel:

Councillor K Watts
Councillor JC Spanswick
Councillor T Thomas

9. URGENT ITEMS

None