

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE 2021 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor KL Rowlands – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
JC Spanswick

J Gebbie
T Thomas

DG Howells
A Williams

RMI Shaw
AJ Williams

Apologies for Absence

M Jones and RL Penhale-Thomas

Officers:

Meryl Lawrence	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Councillor Nicole Burnett	Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help
Councillor Huw David	Leader

15. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

RESOLVED: That Councillor KL Rowlands be elected as Chairperson of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

17. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Combined meeting of all Overview and Scrutiny Committees dated 20, 21 and 25 January 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record.

18. CROSS-PARTY RECOVERY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS AND CABINET PROGRESS RESPONSE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny presented the Committee with the Cabinet progress response to the Cross-Party Recovery Panel's Recommendations attached, in Appendix A, and the Cross-Party Recovery Panel's latest Recommendations, attached in Appendix B.

Members of the Committee asked the following:

A Member made a general point in relation to the recommendations and asked how the Committee would ensure that the recommendations which had been accepted by Cabinet and closed, or were still ongoing, were tracked going forward. How would the

Committee measure success going forward and the deliverability against the panel's recommendations.

The Chief Executive felt that this was a helpful question and provided brief context of the purpose of the panel. He felt that moving forward those issues raised by the panel should become part of business as usual, and those of further relevance picked up as part of normal scrutiny activity e.g., housing and homelessness, principles of a co-operative council, etc. As part of the councils recovery, there were new things and potentially more important things, to now focus and spend time on such as health and equalities, anti-poverty, digital, the new operating model for the council, mental health and the 2030 agenda, which had emerged out of the pandemic that should be prioritised, rather than perhaps inevitably one or two of the things that were very pertinent at the time. It was for Members to be selective and pick out both the existing recommendations but also perhaps some new ones where those recovery elements deserved more focus and could be picked up as part of the normal scrutiny agenda for each of the committees.

A Member asked, in relation to recommendation 1, whether there would be any re-proportion of budgets to allow the Communities Directorate to re-green or re-vamp other spaces other than Halo, Awen and the parks and playing fields.

The Chief Executive explained that this had to be a holistic response, and certainly part of the response was about leisure centres, culture and sports facilities for schools but, the intention was also to try and create additional green spaces, where possible, within town centres. There was recognition that the value of culture, leisure and green spaces had been key in the pandemic and that footpaths had also been incredibly valuable. In terms of the budget, this was in Members' hands and a matter for Council, when budgets were set, however the Recovery Panel's recommendations would inform budget processes moving forward. Historically something that might have been regarded as less important, may become things to invest in and re-focus on, particularly with significant changes in the way people lead their lives. The investment in culture, leisure and green spaces was certainly recognised already, and that would continue, but other parts may become more important as well. The LDP consultation had just started and there was an anticipation that a number of the responses would be to do with green space and the support for keeping green space as well.

The Leader suggested in response to the questions on recommendations, that if any of the ongoing actions could be incorporated into the routine scrutiny quarterly performance review arrangements, then he would look to do that. In relation to green spaces, the Member asked a pertinent question which had been reflected in discussions with local members, including the feedback around plans for Salt Lake in Porthcawl and the need to ensure that green spaces were integral to regeneration, noting there were plans to extend Griffin Park. It was very clear that people valued even the smallest green spaces, particularly in urban environments, so the Authority would look to do more of that as further plans were considered, right across the borough, making sure that green space was of the highest quality and the ecological value of any green space was considered. There was a duty to promote bio-diversity, which was also a feature of planning going forward.

A Member noted the increase in rights of way referrals, and asked if there were sufficient staff in place to deal with them. In addition, she raised concern that Awen had recently handed Litchard Park back to the Council and asked what was being done to ensure that they were continuing with green spaces and wouldn't hand them back.

The Chief Executive noted, on the specific issue of Litchard Park, that this was is a legacy issue in respect of the previous MTFS saving on Awen before the pandemic.

Money had been taken off Awen and therefore they had reviewed what they could manage in terms of their management fee. He did not think they had any wider ambition to hand green space back and were a valued partner, working with the Council very effectively. In terms of rights of way, there were two separate issues. Member referrals had nearly doubled, possibly as a consequence of the way everyone was now working. There was an ongoing review, about the whole member referral system, although this had taken a little bit longer than anticipated because of the pandemic. Part of that solution would be more self-help for members in terms of links and being able to find out information by accessing links on the website. In the meantime, resources had been increased in rights of way, as recognition of the increased demand, but this was a finite resource. He felt that some of the priorities moving forward could change, as a result of the pandemic. Rights of way and green space may deserve a higher priority going forward, but that came with a choice about what would not be invested in. He felt that Members wanted a greater focus on investment on these kind of things, and that was something that could be fed through the budget process and indeed through BREP, as part of informing the process.

A Member echoed the previous Members' comments and said his understanding previously was that it was a staffing issue, which was causing the main backlog. Now a Search Officer had been recruited, could the Chief Executive confirm that there was adequate staffing and resource levels to tackle the backlog of problems with rights of way.

The Chief Executive advised said that it came back to years of disinvestment in things like rights of way with the total size of the team reducing quite significantly, perhaps rightly or wrongly, when things like rights of way were deemed as less important. There was wider recognition, post pandemic, in the value of things like rights of way, and therefore it was not just about responding to the current position but trying to mitigate years of disinvestment. He couldn't guarantee that the Council had absolutely the amount of resource for everything that Members would want but unfortunately, that was the position for a lot of the organisation. The pressures had been recognised and resources increased, and that position would be reviewed. If it became apparent that this was insufficient moving forward, then as part of the budget process, there would be a decision to make whether Members wished to make further investment in that area.

A Member asked if, in relation to Recommendation 2, the training would be extended to coincide with the end of furlough, noting that social distancing was potentially going to last until at least until the end of the calendar year.

The Chief Executive explained that the Economic Development Unit had said that they would liaise with not just businesses, but the third sector and charities as well and determine, what was now the priority for training. There was certainly a commitment to provide the necessary training, but it could be there were other things those organisations now felt were more valuable. The commitment to continue to work with them and provide adequate training was absolutely there and therefore he felt there would be a programme of work that would emerge from that liaison.

A Member referred to Recommendation 3 and noted there was a huge concern in respect of PPE when the pandemic first arose, Although procedures were now in place, she asked for reassurance that there would be no future shortage.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that having adequate PPE had been a very valid concern at the outset of the pandemic. Welsh Government (WG) had subsequently co-ordinated and funded this very well. There was now a central store with all providers, not just council providers, having access to PPE by making an order through that store. To

the best of his knowledge this had worked very successfully since last autumn and so was reasonable comfortable that the current system worked well.

The Leader confirmed that there was a large stockpile, even if regular supplies were to stop. Both the UK and Welsh Governments had worked closely with industry to ensure there were suppliers in this country that were able to manufacture and produce the PPE, because one of the challenges previously faced, was that a lot of the suppliers were overseas. In addition PPE had been provided free of charge to care-providers in Wales, which had been of particular help to the third sector and independent providers in social care.

A Member noted that Recommendation 6 was closed but requested a little more expansion on what material impact the plans had on the Local Authority.

The Chief Executive confirmed there were ongoing meetings, on a weekly basis, with the Chief Executive and Chair of the Health Board and Senior Members of staff about recovery plans for waiting lists and elective surgery, for example, and how this would be addressed moving forward. There was a holistic conversation going on about how Health would recover from the pandemic, recognising that there could still be a third wave, but clearly there was a greater emphasis and more resource being included in what would happen over the next 2 or 3 years, to get back on an even keel. There was a bigger piece of work moving forward, which he anticipated would be ongoing for a number of years.

The Leader noted that WG had announced an extra £30m for Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTM-UHB) to help tackle some of the backlog that resulted from the pandemic. This was funding for both mental and physical health, which he welcomed because clearly this was a huge priority. The Council would be working with the CTM-UHB and supporting them on delivering that agenda, because it was a whole system approach, as there had been significant increased pressures on social services because lots of people who were discharged from hospital required care packages. In addition funding had been provided through the WG's hardship fund, providing support directly to provided and commissioned services in social care, but the anticipation was that those pressures would only grow.

A Member confirmed that he had been reassured with the answers provided to his questions, but hoped for increased dialogue in terms of access to primary healthcare in the Valleys Gateways area, in light of the quite substantial housing development.

The Chief Executive advised that he didn't have an answer specifically to the Valleys Gateway primary care issue, but would be happy to raise it at the meeting the following week.

The Leader added that major investment could be seen, with probably the biggest single investment in primary health care, in the new Sunnyside development, which would serve much of Bridgend Town, in addition to the new health care facility in Porthcawl, but more was needed. There was certainly reference in the LDP for the need for greater capacity in the Valley's Gateway area and proposals around addressing that. Further discussions would take place with the Health Board because it was one of the most important public issues and for elected representatives, that when considering major developments primary health care was planned for as much as any other infrastructure.

A Member asked in relation to Recommendation 8, whether it was anticipated, there would be a rise in homelessness after furlough ended, noting that as the rules on evictions changed a lot of people would find themselves in a difficult situation.

The Chief Executive advised that he understood that the Cross-Party Recovery Panel had looked at housing and homelessness separately. For the time being WG financial support continued to support local authorities with homelessness, but he was concerned moving forward that if that additional support ended, there was an expectation now to be able to deal effectively with all homeless people in the area. If that significantly increased demand occurred then the Authority would be looking to WG to resource this and fund this properly if there was going to be an additional burden on the Local Authority. He felt that homelessness and how the Authority copes was probably an example of a matter that would need to be considered moving forward, because there were still unknowns and the potential for increased demand.

A Member asked in relation to Recommendation 16, becoming a cooperative council, why the Council had not joined.

The Chief Executive noted that this had been discussed at length at Cabinet CMB and it came down to a discussion about the added value of going through the formal process, when there were already, certainly post pandemic, a plethora of existing programmes that the Council were committed to delivering. He felt it would be a sensible and proportionate move, recognising that a lot of the principles of a co-operative council were also aligned with things like the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, and Socio-economic Duty and things like the involvement of local people, to observe how that went over the next year. If it was deemed a political priority post-election, whoever the ruling administration was at that point could make it so, as part of their priorities moving forward.

The Leader noted that there was often a financial contribution required and what had been considered to be the more important action was that the Council act as a co-operative council, rather than simply signing up to being one, because it was about how you act and the values. The Council had a reasonable track record in terms of working with Halo, in terms of the development of Awen and working with Town and Community Councils, so he felt those values were there. What would be done was to think about whether there was more action that could be taken, rather than simply signing up to being a co-operative council.

A Member, in relation to Recommendation 15, the disposal of surplus Council land, accepted the comments and the response but still had some concerns, partly because the response had been provided from a financial position. He felt there was legislation, which could be used to release land for social housing without having to consider only the financial cost.

The Chief Executive advised that he understood where Members were coming from and certainly, in previous conversations, it had been explained that there was a requirement for the Authority to achieve best value or best consideration in terms of land disposal, but he took the point, about how best value or consideration could be demonstrated.

When the Authority owned valuable pieces of land, careful consideration was needed about giving that away free, because that might not be prudent. There were, however, also various smaller pieces of land, particularly in the Valleys area, where there would not be a significant financial value and in those cases, a different way forward could be considered whether for social housing, green space or other community benefit. The bigger challenge again was resourcing within Corporate Landlord to do all of that, often for small pieces of land throughout the County Borough, when they also had significant priority programmes for very large regeneration schemes. He agreed with Members and did not think that every piece of disposal land had to seek a financial value, but there had to be a social value or some value demonstrated to the Community in exchange for giving it away free.

A Member thanked the Chief Executive for acknowledging the issues in the Valleys area, and felt there was a balance needed sometimes with the greatest financial return on large schemes and paying some attention to Valleys, by disposing of some of the smaller plots that the Council held.

The Leader agreed about the importance of best value in its wider sense, not just financial value and the importance of regenerating the Valleys. The Cabinet had made it clear, that one of the priorities was that there was further development of sites, particular small and large brownfield sites that could enable new homes to be developed. This wasn't just about the purchase price and value of the land, which could be secondary consideration in many Valley Communities and often the biggest cost would be construction and site remediation. However, it was about securing a developer and getting a developer on board to bring some of these sites forward.

The Member stated that often the key was finding a developer who was interested. He suggested that some of the very small sites, which the Council owned, could be made available for small builders and self-build. It wasn't always about finding a developer before a site was released and not all were brownfield sites and there were alternative routes, should these small parcels of land be made available.

The Chief Executive concluded by saying that there had been some very valid points made, although all of these things came back to the priorities of the Council. He noted that he had heard demand for additional resource in rights of way, in homelessness and in corporate landlord. He felt all of the arguments on all those 3 areas were valid, but the overall challenge was ultimately how to afford all of the things within a finite budget. It was always a challenge to try and find the resource to do everything.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Cabinet progress response to the Cross-Party Recovery Panel's Recommendations attached in Appendix A and endorsed the Findings and Recommendations attached in Appendix B, to be submitted to Cabinet on the 22nd June 2021.

19. **CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION REPORT**

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR & Regulatory Services submitted a report, the purpose of which was to request the Committee to nominate one Member as its Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee as an invitee to meetings of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting.

The Chairperson invited nominations , following which it was

RESOLVED: That Councillor T Thomas be nominated to represent the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee as an Invitee to meetings of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting.

20. **NOMINATION TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD SCRUTINY PANEL**

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR & Regulatory Services submitted a report, the purpose of which was to request the Committee to nominate three Members to sit on the Public Service Board Scrutiny Panel.

The Chairperson invited nominations, following which it was

RESOLVED: That the following Members were nominated to sit on the Public Service Board Scrutiny Panel:

Councillor KL Rowlands
Councillor RMI Shaw
Councillor JC Spanswick

21. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny presented the Committee with the proposed draft outline Forward Work Programme (Appendix A) for discussion and consideration; requested any specific information the Committee identified to be included in the items for the next two meetings, including invitees they wished to attend; requested the Committee to identify any further items for consideration on the Forward Work Programme having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.6; and asked the Committee to note that the proposed draft Forward Work Programmes for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be reported to the next meeting of COSC, with the comments from each respective Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following consideration in their June Committee meetings.

Recommendations:

Having considered the Forward Work Programme, the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. That the Corporate Template for Reports to Scrutiny be amended to include commentary on ethical procurement and the decarbonisation agenda, and show due consideration to the workforce partnership act.
2. That the Corporate Template for reports to Scrutiny be amended to include a section for an executive summary for each report.

There were no further items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.6, and this could be revisited at the next meeting.

There were no requests to include specific information in the item for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and agreed the proposed draft outline Forward Work Programme in Appendix A and noted that the proposed draft Forward Work Programmes for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee, following the June cycle of Committee meetings.

22. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 12:00