

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2022

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET,
BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2022 AT 10:00**

Present

Councillor A Williams – Chairperson

H T Bennett	F D Bletsoe	P Davies	RM Granville
S J Griffiths	M L Hughes	M Jones	RL Penhale- Thomas
T Thomas	G Walter	AJ Williams	

Officers:

Lucy Beard	Scrutiny Officer
Claire Hamm	Conservation and Design Team Leader
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Jessica Mclellan	Scrutiny Officer
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager
Helen Rodgers	Revenues Manager
Eilish Thomas	Finance Manager - Financial Control & Closing
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
Delyth Webb	Group Manager - Strategic Regeneration

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Heidi Bennett, Paul Davies and Graham Walter gave their apologies that they would need to leave the meeting early.

Invitees:

Councillor Jane Gebbie, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help and Councillor Neelo Farr, Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Councillor Jon-Paul Blundell, Cabinet Member for Education gave his apologies that he would need to leave the meeting early.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

33. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of a meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 30 June 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.

34. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022-23

Chief Executive's Directorate

The Chief Executive presented an overview of the performance of his Directorate, highlighting challenges in workforce, recruitment and retention, uncertainty around budgets, increased costs and inflation.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive and Members discussed the following:

- When performance data subject to benchmarking would be made available and trend data relating to the previous year performance rather than the set annual targets.
- The corporate-wide risk of workforce and, in relation to recruitment, vacancies being advertised on the Council's website and in some specialist journals and magazines, with some advertisements being for multiple roles.
- Whether there was an indication from Welsh Government (WG) regarding the final budget settlement and whether the revised budget proposals and full financial ledger would be available for the next meeting of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP).
- Working with landlords and the role of planning in the Council's policy of bringing empty properties back into use.
- The issue of sickness absence due to non-work-related stress and the wellbeing support available for staff.
- The targets and missing data regarding Disabled Facilities Grants and e-learning.
- The in-depth Digital Strategy review following work regarding hybrid working and digital aspirations and priorities.
- The discrepancy between the green status attributed to commitment WBO2.2.3 relating to preventing homelessness and the shortage of suitable accommodation in the County Borough.

Communities Directorate

The Corporate Director – Communities presented an overview of the performance of her Directorate, highlighting the underspend driven by a large number of vacancies, steps being taken with regard to recruitment, the possibility of the cessation of some services due to lack of resources, challenges with Member Referrals and providing context around some of the Performance Indicators graded as red.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director – Communities and Members discussed the following:

- The responsiveness to Member Referrals and the safety and reliability of temporary fixes to boilers in estate services.
- The number of Community Asset Transfers completed in year.
- Sources of capital receipts and the reuse shops at Pyle and Maesteg.
- Measures to address sickness absence attributed to Musculoskeletal disorders across all Directorates and the impact of sickness on ability to provide services.
- Which services may need to cease due to financial pressures, which areas in the Directorate were not meeting performance targets and whether any other in year savings had been identified.
- The Caerau Heat Scheme, funding and viability.
- Changes to the agreement and disposal fees for residual waste at the Materials Recovery & Energy Centre

Education and Family Support Directorate

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support presented an overview of the performance of his Directorate, highlighting that there were no schools in any Estyn category of concern, the significant improvements in the Bridgend Youth Justice Service, that the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) had been approved by WG, context regarding areas where performance exceeded targets, staffing challenges (particularly in catering) and that current underspend was likely to be exhausted by home to school transport pressures.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support and Members discussed the following:

- The number of and challenges associated with permanent exclusions, the contributory factors and support available.
- Additional, specialist staff and best practice associated with safeguarding referrals and escalating behaviours.
- The downward trend in Welsh speakers in the recent Census, Welsh language provision to improve targets and the ambitious WESP for schools and families.
- Sufficiency of school facilities and time for provision of free school meals, the lack of appeal of limited hour school catering contracts, the prospect of pilot schemes for the Universal Primary Free School Meals roll-out with emphasis on equity for all pupils and an update on the upgrading of kitchen facilities.

Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing presented an overview of the performance of her Directorate highlighting the increasing need and demand for services and statutory support, workforce pressures, particularly in children's social care (CSC) and adult home care, the improvement check by Care Inspectorate Wales in CSC, the key areas of pressure, particularly in the provision of statutory care and support plans and the excellent outcome and focus on prevention and wellbeing services.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing and Members discussed the following:

- The targets regarding the percentage of care leavers who completed at least 3 consecutive months of employment, education or training and the WG Basic Income Pilot Scheme.
- Measures and support to alleviate sickness and workforce pressures.
- Recruitment plans to lower the vacancy threshold in Bridgend to bring it more in line with other local authorities and reduce reliance on agency staff.
- The number of reablement packages completed, mitigating need for support and the prospect of a change to national indicators to demonstrate the positive performance in a more meaningful way.

The Chairperson advised that there were no further questions for the Invitees, thanked Invitees for their attendance and, advised that if they were not required for the next Item, they may leave the meeting.

RESOLVED: Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee made the following Recommendations:

1. To ensure the time of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) is used to maximum benefit, that the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees should scrutinise in detail matters in the remit of those respective Committees.
2. That the Task and Finish Group considering fixed and permanent exclusions look at and identify best practice in terms of management of pupil behaviour.

and the Committee requested:

Communities

3. How many Community Asset Transfers have been completed between April and September 2022.
4. With reference to the Performance Indicator DCO16.9 CP WBO3 on page 48 of the agenda reports pack, to what does the £275,000 remaining capital receipts relate.
5. The budget breakdown of the remaining £9,000,000 not committed to contracts.

Education and Family Support

6. An update on the number of and themes surrounding fixed and permanent exclusions.
7. An update following the Cabinet Member for Education's meeting with the Welsh Government Minister to discuss the unattractive limited hours offered in school catering contracts and whether a person seeking to fill the position would have their benefits affected or lost.

35. **COST OF LIVING PAYMENT SCHEME ROLLOUT**

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented the report the purpose of which was to inform the Committee of the processes undertaken and lessons learned from implementing the Welsh Government funded Cost of Living and Discretionary Cost of Living Schemes.

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change and Members discussed the following:

- What support is available to vulnerable individuals in receipt of payments from the Scheme.
- The limitations of systems and software which led to difficulties in implementation of the Scheme and steps taken to ensure they are fit for purpose for high-level service in the future.
- The delays and discrepancies between different local authorities in the efficiency of payments from the Scheme.

- The fitness of purpose of the system for future schemes, its use in existing processes such as administering Council Tax and Winter Fuel payments and lessons learned from each scheme.
- The level of Member Referrals due to difficulty with payments, the invalid web link in written correspondence to residents and the lack of support for staff of libraries and other community hubs to assist people with queries.
- That Bridgend was not the best or the worst in its administration of the Scheme and that 98% of the allocation had been paid.
- The timescale for the Digital Strategy review and input from communities and the importance of clear, simple and accessible communications with the public.
- The extent of the work undertaken and schemes administered by a relatively small team during the pandemic.
- That Members should have received a detailed briefing regarding the difficulties experienced with the Scheme to allow them to assist and manage the public's expectations.

The Chairperson advised that there were no further questions for the Invitees, thanked Invitees for their attendance and, advised that if they were not required for the next Item, they may leave the meeting.

RESOLVED: Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee requested:

8. An update on the likely commencement of the Digital Strategy review and that it be placed on the Forward Work Programme for COSC as a pre-decision item.
9. That when there are difficulties in rolling out schemes such as the Cost of Living Payment Scheme, that Members be briefed so that they may cascade information to the public and help manage their expectations.

36. **RE-DEVELOPMENT OF MAESTEG TOWN HALL**

The Corporate Director – Communities presented the report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with an overview of the progress of the Maesteg Town Hall project to date.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director – Communities for the presentation and invitation to Members of a site visit and reminded Members that, as the project was ongoing, they were prohibited from discussing any commercially sensitive or confidential aspects.

Members discussed the following:

- Concerns regarding the process including, the timeline leading up to the upper limit of the contract being reached, the process of Delegated Powers in the release of additional funds and the role of Scrutiny Chairs.
- That there should be lessons learned from the Maesteg Town Hall project and in the information sharing regarding the use of Delegated Powers to all Members, particularly Scrutiny Chairs.
- The reasons why the decision was not called-in and why the matter was explored at today's meeting.

- The restrictions like for like replacements at the site and the costs associated with them.
- The sufficiency of funds invested into the pre-commencement surveys, the extent of the surveys and whether the problems identified were on the risk register.
- That it was not known that the upper end of the contract value was being reached until the costing was received and that further compensation (unforeseen from when the works were specified) events were less likely to re-occur as most of the deconstructive and repair work had been completed.
- The merits and disadvantages of front-loading labour and resources to complete the project as soon as possible.
- The extensive working with Mace, Knox and Wells and Cadw.
- The extent to which the project had been monitored by Cabinet and the involvement of the relevant Cabinet Members.

The Chairperson advised that there were no further questions for the Invitees, thanked Invitees for their attendance and advised that they may leave the meeting.

RESOLVED: Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee requested:

10. A written response regarding a recovery programme to include:

- a. whether the project can be frontloaded with additional workers to complete the project in a shorter timescale; and
- b. if so, how much it would cost; or
- c. whether it would be better to keep costs to a minimum; and
- d. the time of delivery/delays against costs for frontloading.

11. Assurance that there will be no further delays or expenditures incurred for the project.

Following completion of the project, that a lessons learned report be placed on the Forward Work Programme for COSC.

37. **INTERIM BUDGET RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PANEL REPORT**

The Chairperson of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP) presented the report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with an update from BREP's deliberations, findings and recommendations to date.

There were no questions from Members.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approved the recommendations made by BREP and their submission to Cabinet and Senior Officers to inform the development of the draft budget proposals for 2023-24 following receipt of the Welsh Government provisional local government settlement.

38. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Committee with the Forward Work Programme (FWP) in 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 FWP having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.3 and presented the FWPs for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees 1, 2 and 3 as Appendices B, C and D for coordination and oversight of the overall FWP.

She also advised that the Recommendations Monitoring Action Sheet was attached as Appendix E to track responses to the Committee's recommendations made at previous meetings and the Recommendations Monitoring Action Sheets for each Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee were also attached as Appendices F, G and H.

The Head of Democratic Services reference the large number of reports scheduled for the following meeting on 31 January 2023 but highlighted that all provided Members with context for the setting of this year's budget and that for future years.

The Committee expressed concerns regarding the length of the Committee meetings and discussed the number of statutory reports to be considered and that meetings would sometimes, inevitably, be longer to accommodate these.

Having considered the Forward Work Programme Update, the Committee requested the Digital Strategy be added to the FWP.

The Committee discussed the forthcoming report on Disabled Facilities Grants and requested that representatives of Bridgend Care and Repair and some of the contractors be invited to attend for the scrutiny of the report.

There were no further items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.3, and this could be revisited at the next meeting.

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

RESOLVED:

That the Committee considered and approved its Forward Work Programme in Appendix A, subject to the above additions and requests, noted the Forward Work Programmes for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees following consideration in their latest respective Committee Meetings in Appendix B, C and D, and noted the Recommendations Monitoring Action Sheets to track responses to the Committees' recommendations made at previous meetings in Appendices E, F, G and H.

39. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.