

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE RESOURCES & IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 11 JULY 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor M Reeves – Chairperson

G Davies
JR McCarthy

E Dodd
D Patel

CA Green
JC Spanswick

EM Hughes
RE Young

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Robin Davies	Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Randal Hemingway	Head of Finance & Section 151 Officer
Sarah Kingsbury	Head of Human Resources, Organisation and Development and Customer Services
Darren Mepham	Chief Executive
Yuan Shen	Corporate Improvement and Intergrated Partnerships Manager
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities
Ian Vaughan	Workforce Planning Officer

201. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members and Officers:-

Councillor GW Davies MBE
Councillor D Lewis
Councillor CE Smith
Councillor H Townsend
Councillor MEJ Nott
D McMillan
PA Jolley

202. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

203. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Resources & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 22 March 2016, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to it being noted that Councillor Green had given apologies for her non-attendance at the meeting.

204. SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Member Resources, The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Workforce Planning Officer.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised Members that there was a typographical error in paragraph 3.3 of the report, in that reference to the year should read '2015'. She further tabled for Members a replacement Appendix D, i.e. the latest quarterly Sickness Absence report for 2015/16 that was submitted to CMB, as the percentages included in Section 3.1 of Appendix D attached to the report had been incorrectly calculated.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development then introduced the report, the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with a position statement with regards to levels of sickness in the Authority for the year 2015/16 and the work/actions undertaken since the WLGA project was conducted in 2015.

The Chair questioned whether or not, if it was apparent early on that an employee off on sick would not be fit to return to work at all, the Trade Unions would show flexibility and perhaps support cases of early retirement or redundancy for the member of staff in question.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that the majority of cases of continued sickness absence by an employee would involve them being represented by a Trade Union representative (on the basis that they were in a Trade Union). All employees had a contractual entitlement, whereby they were paid in full for 6 months and receive half pay for the following 6 months, based on the fact that they had been in the Authority for sufficient time to receive this. The local authority were unable to disagree with this payment arrangement, as if it did, the employee would in all probability go to an Industrial Tribunal the result of which would be that as well as paying sickness entitlement to the employee, the Council would also have to pay added costs for going through this process.

A Member noted from the report that completion of Return to Work forms and interviews was particularly poor in schools, notwithstanding the fact that schools had been financially protected in the MTFs. He felt that Management should be making every attempt to ensure that steps are taken to improve this situation. He also questioned paragraph 4.10.4 of the report, where it stated that Line Managers had been instructed to have daily contact with employees who were absent from work due to short term sickness absence. He felt that this may not work in practice and could exacerbate a situation whereby the employee may be absent due to a stress related illness.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that when schools have been approached regarding Return to Work interviews, in the majority of cases, they confirmed that they were conducting these in accordance with sickness absence procedures and protocols. It was apparent however, that this was not always the case and she acknowledged that there was significant room for improvement in this area. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support however, routinely reminded schools that these interviews have to take place. Last autumn at a CPA meeting, Members and Officers were keen to ensure that Managers contact employees off work with short term sickness absence every other day, this had subsequently changed to every day. The employee in question was required to contact their Line Manager on their first day of sickness absence and similarly also on the fourth day. If they were absent for a period longer than 7 days, then they needed to submit a sickness absence note signed off by their GP after it was diagnosed what their illness was.

A Member added that contacting an employee every day to establish when they were going to return to work could be classed as harassment.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that part of the reasoning behind contacting the employee was in order for their Line Manager to find out what they were suffering from, and perhaps to tentatively ascertain the likely date of their return to work. Managers were trained in dealing with issues relating to staff sickness absence, as well as in observing signs when employees were becoming unwell in whatever capacity, and to take steps if and when appropriate, to afford them increased support due to this whilst in the workplace, or if they subsequently went absent with a particular health problem that may be work related. There were further mechanisms in place for employees she added, such as through Occupational Health support.

On a positive note, a Member referred to pages 19/20 of the report and noted that across the UK since 1993, there had been an overall downward trend in sickness absence rates. She further noted though, that sickness absence in the private sector was less than in the public sector and asked if Officers were aware of why this was the case.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that the majority of private companies did not have a Health Scheme such as public sector organisations did, and therefore, rather than staff in the public sector having a generous salary entitlement while off with sickness absence, in private companies employees may only be entitled to state sickness benefit as opposed to continuing to receive their salary. She also added that tolerance levels were generally less relaxed in terms of sickness absence in the private sector than they were in the public sector. An example of this was that staff formerly employed by the Authority that had now transferred to Halo, had realised that the companies stance on sickness absence was tighter than it had been when they had been employed with the local authority. Due to this, staff there were more reluctant to go off with sickness absence for fear of accumulating too many days of being absent, resulting in the fear that they may lose their job.

A Member referred to page 30 and the last sentence of paragraph 16.2, where it identified that Social Services was a sickness absence “hotspot”, particularly for residential and domiciliary care services. It was also noted that the two best performing Councils for sickness absence had outsourced the latter. He asked if this service was outsourced, did it skew the absence figures (by way of them being improved) as they could not be collated in this area of work by the local authority, as the service area was no longer the responsibility of the local authority.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that sickness absence in residential and domiciliary care was also high in BCBC, however, even though the Council had outsourced its Refuse Collection service, sickness absence was still high with staff working there. Other areas of the Communities Directorate involved staff working outdoors ie manually, which would possibly give rise to higher sickness absence statistics than white collar staff, though overall the Communities Directorate had the best record of sickness absence statistics throughout the Authority. She added that if the Authority outsourced Homecare then current sickness absence statistics in the Council would probably reduce as sickness absence in areas such as this and Wellbeing as a whole, were high.

A Member referred to page 39 of the report, and asked for the Invitees to expand upon the policy adopted by the Authority, whereby staff if they so wished, could buy additional leave over and above to that which they were entitled to.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, confirmed that the Council adopted a policy, whereby staff could buy a maximum of 10 days extra annual leave a year, or 5 days, but nothing other than these two amounts. The extra scope here could be beneficial for employees with young families who require perhaps extra days to look after their children, so this was more of a plus for the employee possibly rather than the employer. She added that it had proved quite successful to date though.

A Member asked for further information regarding BCBC claiming back sickness payments from a 3rd party if a Council employee has had to have a period of sickness absence, due to a sports injury or motor vehicle accident, etc, ie by getting involved in an activity with another party separate to the Council. Whilst he understood the rationale behind this, he asked how it could be applied in a consistent and fair manner across the board.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, confirmed that this was something that had always been in the Council's Sickness Absence Policy, as it was in all probability in other local authorities policies too. The reason this provision of payment was included in the Policy, was due to the fact that the Council in the face of ever increasing shrinking budgets were not able to pay people who were absent from work due to injuries they had incurred whilst being involved in activities run by a party or organisation that was independent of the Authority.

A Member referred to page 59 of the report, which reflected that the Communities and Resources Directorates were improving in terms of sickness absence rates, whilst other Directorates were getting worse. He was aware that the Communities Directorate had previously put considerable effort in taking steps through which to reduce sickness absence in that Directorate, including introducing their own Sickness Plan that included effective ways within which to manage illnesses, particularly those which were stress related.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that all Directorates were in regular contact with each other so as to achieve effective sickness absence management practices and policies, and this was a topic regularly reviewed at CMB and CPA meetings. There were higher cases of sickness absence in the Wellbeing Directorate, but this was understandable to a degree, given that there were a large number of care staff in the Directorate that were regularly involved in manual handling of service users, which often gave rise to lumber related injuries. Office based staff usually had less sickness absence than Care workers, however, due to staff redundancies associated with budget cuts, employees were more at risk of experiencing stress due to work related pressures, and cases such as this sometimes led to a period of sickness absence, which at times turned into a period of long term. She was unaware of anything differently being carried out in the Communities Directorate compared with others with regard to the management of staff absent through a stress related illness. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that it could be a case that Managers in this particular Directorate, be may managing sickness absence more effectively than Managers in certain other Directorates.

A Member referred to page 77 of the report and noted that last year, BCBC were the 17th best Authority in Wales when it came to levels of sickness absence. She asked if the current picture showed any improvement upon this.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that so far this year, the levels of sickness throughout the Authority were slightly worse than last year, however, this could change by end of year.

A Member referred to the data shown on page 79 of the report, which again reflected that the Communities Directorate had a low percentage of Return to Work forms not returned, and that schools had a fairly deplorable record here. There needed to be a more consistent approach Authority wide he felt in respect of these forms being completed.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development acknowledged this point. She added that the Authority were trying to adopt a more corporate approach, ensuring wherever possible overall that 90% of

Return to Work forms were completed and returned to the Human Resources Department following a period of sickness absence by an employee.

A Member referred to the BCBC Report on the Employee Assistance Programme quarterly report attached to the covering report, and asked what was the purpose of this.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that this was a document provided by Care First Employee Assistance Solutions, who provided a confidential Counselling Scheme for the Council and its employees. This service supported a range of different and problematic health problems, such as severe stress &/or depression and alcohol or drug dependency, amongst others.

A Member asked the Invitees how much sickness absence cost each Directorate and the Authority as a whole over a given period, for example per annum.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that she was unaware of this, as it was almost impossible to quantify and no data was held by the Authority in relation to this. There were different scenarios whereby a Section would usually absorb the work of an employee who was off work due to sickness absence, by splitting their duties amongst other staff who undertook similar duties, so this was an efficiency rather than a financial cost to the Authority. However, in order to eradicate risk etc, if, for example, a Home Care worker was absent, then a replacement member of staff needed to be recruited in their place to cover for them, which in effect resulted in the Authority paying two employees for the services of one. However, the Wellbeing Directorate would set aside a budget for this eventuality annually.

As this concluded debate on this item, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for attending and contributing to the meeting.

Committee Observations

1. The Committee expressed concern at the ongoing issues with sickness absence across the Authority in general, with particular reference to the Wellbeing Directorate. Members commented that Sickness absence management needed to be dealt with consistently across the Authority with increased efforts being made to share best practice. The Committee proposed for example that good practice in Communities be further explored, as they have continued to reduce their sickness absence rates despite significant budget cuts to service areas. The Committee agreed that the lowest performing areas needed particular attention provided from the Corporate Centre.

2. Whilst Members appreciated that costings for all sickness absence could not be produced as not all positions were replaced, the Committee requested that they receive the costed payroll information for those services that were replaced in order to provide a snapshot of how much sickness is costing the Authority.
3. The Committee requested that they receive the figures for sickness absence training by percentage instead of numbers in order that a better comparison between directorates can be made.
4. The Committee expressed concern over the figures for the return to work interviews forms not being returned, particularly in the Wellbeing and Education Directorates. The Committee recommended that this be a priority for sickness absence management for all managers within each Directorate.
5. The Committee requested that the table displayed on P119 of the report detailing the Short Term and Long Term Absence in Schools be sent to all School Governor Groups in order to encourage them to monitor sickness absence more closely.

Recommendation

The Committee recommended that the Chief Executive's appraisal contain a target to reduce sickness absence across the Authority by 10%.

205. COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST ITS COMMITMENTS AND A SUMMARY OF ITS FINANCIAL POSITION AT YEAR END FOR 2015-16

Chief Executives (including Resources Directorate)

The Chairperson invited the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance & S151 Officer to the meeting.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the report provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's performance in 2015-16, compared with its commitments to delivering the Improvement Priorities in the Corporate Plan for 2013-17. He added that the report also provided the Committee with an update on the financial position as at year end 31 March 2016.

Members questioned the Corporate Reserves of the Authority that included the Major Claims Reserve and the Change Fund.

The Head of Finance and S151 Officer referred Members to page 130/131 of the report and the table entitled Moment in Reserves 2015/16. This he stated, reflected a full breakdown of the total movement regarding earmarked reserves as at 31 March 2016. As the report suggested, he confirmed that the remaining under spend of £154k had been transferred to the Council Fund.

A Member also referred to the above table, and the Directorate Reserves for Looked After Children (LAC) which showed no Expenditure or Additions having occurred in 2015-16, therefore outlining a closing balance of £824k as at 31 March 2016. She asked if Officers could expand upon this information.

The Head of Finance and S151 Officer, explained that at the start of the last financial year £824k of Reserves had been allocated to this service area, as historically, this degree of budget allocation was required to support LAC. However, due to the Directorates overall performance in terms of savings it had to make under the MTFs, there had been no requirement to draw upon this allocated funding. Therefore, it was not considered that there was a necessity to add to this estimated earmarked reserve for the coming financial year.

A Member making reference to the same table, referred to the expenditure incurred for 2015/16 in respect of the Major Claims Reserve, ie £3,162m. He asked what this had been spent on.

The Head of Finance and S151 Officer confirmed that he would obtain this information and come back to the Member outside of the meeting.

A Member referred to page 138 of the report and the High Risks for 2015-16. He noted that the risk of Disposing of Waste was fairly low, and he thought that this should be a higher risk, given that the Authority were going out to tender for Waste Management next year.

The Chief Executive confirmed that there was a meeting of Senior Management team next week, where a review of the Council's Corporate Risks would be discussed on a Directorate by Directorate basis. He added that the risk that the Member was probably referring to, was MREC and the Residual Waste Contract. He added that these were existing risks and that risks such as these were covered corporately as they were the most important risks of the Authority. Due to this, they were specifically included as part of the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

A Member referred to page 143 of the report and the number of working days per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence (Resources), and noted that this was worse in the current year than it was last year, when BCBC were the 17th worst Authority out of the 21 in Wales for levels of sickness absence.

Communities Directorate

The Corporate Director Communities noted that most of the Directorates business objectives were met last year, however, he was concerned regarding the extent of reduction in resources the Directorate had faced the last few years, and would continue to face in the short/medium term future. This was due to the fact that these budget reductions were having a detrimental impact in terms of front line services that the Directorate had to provide. Due to the way the Communities budget was handled however, effective services were still being provided albeit in a different way than had previously been the case. He advised that the challenges the Directorate were facing were very much likely to continue for the next few years, and in all probability would become worse before they came better.

A Member referred to page 181 of the report and the underperforming indicator in terms of the percentage of total length of Rights of Way that were easy to access by members of the public. He was aware that there was a fairly high ratio of staff in this Section of the Directorate when compared to similar divisions in other neighbouring authorities, and considered that more Rights of Way above the 69% currently in operation should be accessible to the public and walking groups, such as the Rambler's Association.

The Corporate Director Communities confirmed that wherever possible he and his Management team looked to improve performance indicators affecting different service

areas of the Directorate, even in the face of continuing challenges. There had however been a reduction in staffing in the Rights of Way Section through employees retiring and/or leaving the Authority for jobs elsewhere, and due to cuts that had to be made, the staffing compliment had been reduced in this Section. The Sections work also involved interaction with the Council's legal department, and some of this support work was chargeable. He had considered that this particular Performance Indicator though important, was less important than certain other frontline services provided by Communities and, in view of the fact that he was now relying on a budget of 40% less than had previously been the case, he could not maintain an improvement in P.I.'s in all areas. He also needed to ensure P.I.'s were maintained and where possible improved upon in areas where members of the public were complaining. These often led to Councillors referrals being made. These service areas were primarily grass cutting, highway maintenance and street cleaning, etc, public facing services.

The Member whilst appreciating the above, reminded Invitees that there was also a statutory obligation to provide and maintain public Rights of Ways as footpaths available to the public. These provided scenic walks for the public and if the public were restricted from using these, then it could be seen as having a detrimental effect upon their health and wellbeing.

The Corporate Director Communities assured Members that the Directorate were being as proactive as they possibly could to maintain public footpaths in order that they could be accessed by the public. However, he added that as in most other services that were provided by the local authority, these could not be provided to the same level as they had been previously, as the Council's budget was dwindling year on year. Due to this, most services it provided were suffering to some degree or another, and maintenance of Rights of Way were no exception in this regard. He added also, that there was a considerable amount of "deskwork" involved with issues relating to Rights of Way including the serving of legal notices and the making of Orders, which as well as being time consuming also involved work being undertaken by the Legal Department in respect of the drafting of these legal documents.

A Member referred to page 185 of the report and a performance indicator (P.I.) that had dipped in terms of previous performance in this area of work, ie that the average number of calendar days to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant for children and young people was taking longer than previously was the case. He asked if this was due to ongoing problems being experienced with regard to OT Assessments.

The Corporate Director Communities advised that this area of work had transferred from his Directorate to the Operational and Partnership Services Directorate. The main problem associated with this P.I., was that there had been a backlog of work that had accumulated in this area due to staffing limitations, coupled with an increase in OT Assessments. Staff were working hard however to clear this, and he was hopeful that the P.I. would improve in the future.

The Chief Executive added that the P.I. was also measured in an unconventional way in that it commenced from the date when the work was applied for, but did not end until the grant was actually signed off. The P.I. was also hindered by the fact that different areas of this work was covered by different Directorates, which affected continuity of the work as well as complete ownership of the P.I. The P.I. would also be affected if individuals who had secured a grant did not subsequently undertake the work.

A Member asked why there had been an overspend in respect of the Bridgend bus station.

The Corporate Director Communities confirmed that he would find out the reason for this, and come back to the Member outside of the meeting.

Education and Family Support

The Group Manager Business, Strategy and Performance explained that in terms of performance the report reflected a very positive picture overall with various P.I.'s mostly being on track, and this had been the trend the last few years. The RAG status confirmed that 23 of the traffic light symbols were showing green with only 8 showing red (not currently on target). In respect of the Education Department, some very challenging targets had been set through the Central South Consortia, and though some of these were showing as red, this category of P.I.'s had improved from previous periods.

A Member referred to page 159 of the report and one P.I. that was showing red, ie to provide 14 – 19 year olds with the advice they need to ensure they engage in the right type of qualification for them. She noted that this P.I. had failed as the commitment to it had now been cancelled. She asked the Officer to expand upon the reasons for this.

The Group Manager Business, Strategy and Performance expanded upon the comment shown in the report next to the P.I., confirming that the commitment had been cancelled as WEST (Wales Essential Skills Toolkit) implementation was now being pursued at a local rather than national level, through the Minister's priorities for 2016-17. As a result of this change, the Directorate would now include appropriate activities in its 2016-17 Business Plan. Implementation of this activity had been provided locally/regionally with variable success across Wales, and this was one of the reasons why the implementation was now being taken forward at a national level.

The Deputy Leader advised that one of the difficulties secondary schools had faced in terms of giving career advice and guidance to pupils, was that they had previously relied on support from 'Careers Wales' a Welsh Government organisation who assisted them significantly by providing this added support. However, Careers Wales had been affected by budget cuts, and schools now had to provide this information to pupils themselves. Schools were therefore working with Careers Wales to train staff at schools to be better equipped to provide this specialist advice in the future.

A Member noted that levels of sickness absence in the Directorate were not very good, and that up to 63% of Return to Work Interviews for staff that came back to work after a period of absence were not completed. He added that this statistic was worse in schools.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that he would look into this further, though he added that sickness absence levels across all service areas in the Authority needed to be addressed with a view to improving current levels. He would raise this issue in schools through their Head teachers and School Governing bodies.

The Group Manager Business, Strategy and Performance confirmed that management in the Directorate worked proactively to look to improve both sickness absence levels and the completion of Return to Work interviews, and all Managers were being challenged to securing these improvements. This included putting effective support mechanisms in place to encourage staff to return to work after a period of sickness absence sooner rather than later, wherever this was possible. Managers were also looking at certain "hotspot" areas of the Directorate where sickness absence levels were higher than others. Managers were also adopting more consistency in terms of dealing effectively with absence than had previously been the case, in order to tackle the problem by adopting an approach that was consistent (and fair) across all Sections of

the Department. With regard to schools, the day to day responsibility in respect of sickness absence was primarily the responsibility of the Head teacher and the School's Governing Body. Schools were also governed by the Local Authority's Sickness Absence Policy, and they were required to ensure that the protocols and provisions of this Policy were complied with.

The Chief Executive added that the Council's CPA were examining ways within which Return to Work interviews were undertaken consistently across the whole of the Authority. There wasn't any protocol in place however, that could effectively measure the quality of Return to Work interviews by the Manager who was responsible for the employee who had been absent from work due to being unwell. He added that schools were autonomous to a degree, in that they operated externally to other service areas of the Council. Notwithstanding this though, he periodically contacted all schools to ensure that Return to Work interviews were carried out.

The Deputy Leader advised Committee that he would also link in with schools to ensure that they are once more reminded of their obligations in relation to sickness management, and also advise them that they need to put adequate procedures in place that will look to achieve an improvement in sickness absence statistics. He acknowledged that sickness absence in schools could be improved upon, but added that the percentage of absenteeism in the Wellbeing Directorate was currently worse than in schools.

A Member referred to page 165 of the report and the P.I. relating to the percentage of final statements of special education need issued within 26 weeks (EDU015a) which was showing red on the RAG status, ie target not having been reached, as the percentage was 81.7% actual with the target for 2015-16 having been set at 100%. She asked why this P.I. target had been set so high.

The Group Manager Business, Strategy and Performance confirmed that this P.I. target was very aspirational and never likely to be fully met. The reason for this, was that it included all cases processed including those where a valid exception to the 26 week timescale applied. A truer measure of the success of activities relating to this P.I. was given by EDU015b, a related P.I. also shown at page 165 of the report. The current 100% performance for this PI was identified as being a testament to the work of the Education and Family Support Directorate to ensure all statements without valid exceptions are delivered within 26 weeks.

A Member added that the welsh average for this P.I. last year was 64.5%, so therefore the Education Department were certainly not underperforming in terms of this P.I.

A Member noted from page 175 of the report that that there had been an overspend in the financial year 2015/16 regarding Coety/Parc Derwen Primary School, and she asked Invitees to explain the reason for this.

The Deputy Leader advised that he was not fully aware of the situation regarding this, in that it may be a case of a slippage and overspend or just a modest overspend. He was sure however, that there were no major issues in respect of this particular project. He assured Members that he would look into this issue however, and in turn come back to all Committee Members outside of the meeting. He was aware that the school itself was showing a deficit position, which was due to the fact that it was still growing in terms of its capacity due to its catchment area increasing in size. When the school had reached full capacity, the Deputy Leader stated that this will be reflected in the School's budget which will be more balanced and stable than perhaps now was the case.

Social Services and Wellbeing

A Member referred to page 195 of the report, and the last paragraph on that page, ie at year end Adult Social Care had showed an underspend of £648k, Children's Social Care an overspend of £433k and Sport Play and Active Wellbeing an overspend of £39k, leaving a total underspend of £186k for the Directorate. She asked the Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing if she could expand upon this any further.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing advised that at the end of the last financial year, the Directorate had an overall underspend of £186k. She confirmed that the major overspend of £433k was due to the fact that further placements had been required in respect of Looked After Children (LAC). Despite there also being a slight overspend in another area of the Directorate, this was off-set by the larger underspend also. The overall total of underspend of £186k however, did not remain within the Directorate but was instead committed to the Corporate budget held centrally.

A Member wished to point out to the Invitees, that the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate was the worst Directorate of the Council for managing staff sickness absence as reflected on page 59 of the report, with a target of 11.30 days per full time employee (FTE) in 2015/16, and an actual for this period of 18.63 days per FTE. He also added that the only Directorates in the Council showing an improvement in terms of sickness absence from last year were Communities and Resources. The Directorate also had the worst percentage of Return to Work forms not being completed, which was double the figure of some of the other Directorates. He suggested that an improvement was required in respect of both these work areas.

The Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing accepted that sickness absence was too high in her Directorate, and she was actively looking to improve this with assistance from her Heads of Service and Managers linking in with the Human Resources Department to look at ways to improve the current situation. Cases of long term sickness absence were being concentrated upon in particular she explained, with a view to also reducing the number of these cases. She added that the Directorate were improving with regard to adhering to the sickness absence policies and procedures of the Council, including regular Return to Work interviews now being carried out, with the quality of these also being monitored.

The Chief Executive advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee obviously wished, as part of its role, to look at outcomes and achievements and to that end, a clearer picture would emerge later this year when a benchmarking exercise would be undertaken, examining how BCBC compared with certain other local authorities in Wales in respect of levels of sickness absence.

He added that the report before Members in respect of the Council's performance against its commitments gave for positive reading overall though, as the assessment it had received from the Wales Audit Office in terms of its performance in 2015-16 had been very good. He stated that he would welcome any interest shown by Members in attending Directorates Performance Management meetings, in order to see how performance data was collated and established.

The Cabinet Member Resources closed the debate on this item, by acknowledging that the collation of information to form P.I.'s was obviously important, as if you did not look at methods of measuring performance then you would not become aware how you were comparing with other like organisations, resulting in there being a lack of information to gauge whether or not an organisation was improving (ie in comparison to others). He reminded Members that the Council's budget had decreased by £34m in the last 4

years, however, notwithstanding this, the Authority were still aspiring to not just setting but also improving its targets. External assessments such as those given by the Wales Audit Office, confirmed that practices and processes in the Authority were sound, and that its finances were also fit for purpose. Sickness absence was difficult to manage, particularly in large organisations such as local authorities. He was confident when the appropriate comparable data became available, that there would not be a great deal of difference between levels of sickness absence in local authorities across Wales.

Operational and Partnership Services

As there were no questions in respect of the report relating to the above Directorate, the Invitees were not summoned before the meeting.

As this concluded the debate on this item, the Chairperson thanked all the Invitees for attending in turn to speak on their section of the report.

Conclusions:

1. The Committee requested that they receive a copy of the Major Claims reserve assessment in order to understand what the money is being set aside for.
2. Members also asked for a breakdown of the expenditure in the Major Claims budget of £3.1m.

Communities

3. The Committee expressed concern over the Performance Indicator for the percentage of length of Rights of Way that are 'easy to use', as well as the comments regarding staffing issues in this section. The Committee requested further information on the current staffing numbers within Public Rights of Way against the number of Km of paths that they have responsibility for in the County Borough.
4. The Committee asked for the latest figures associated with grass cutting in the County Borough.
5. The Committee asked for further explanation of the £50,000 overspend reported for Bridgend Bus Station.
6. The Committee expressed concern over the apparent acceptance of issues associated with waste collection services when a contract was nearing its end. The Committee stressed that whilst the contract was still in place, the obligations of the contract should be maintained.

Education

7. In relation to the performance indicator EDU015a, the Committee commented on the target being unachievable. Whilst recognising the need to be aspirational, Members questioned the purpose of having an unreachable target. The Committee recommended that the target be revised to a more achievable, realistic, whilst still aspirational, target given that performance is never going to reach 100%.
8. The Committee requested further explanation of the £93,000 overspend that has been spent on Coety/Parc Derwen Primary School.

Social Services and Wellbeing

9. The Committee reiterated their concerns over the level of Sickness Absence within the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate, recommending specific focus to this service area with particular attention to how it is being managed and ensuring Return to Work forms are completed and returned.

206. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (FWP) 2016 - 17

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report, that presented the Committee with its draft Forward Work Programme for 2016-17 for consideration and approval.

The report confirmed that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee under the Council's Constitution, had to set-up and publish a Forward Work Programme (as far as it is known), with this operating from May 2016 – May 2017.

The report also outlined the various Research and Evaluation Panels that would be established for the above period, for example the Budget REP.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members of the planning workshops that had been held in April, to enable Overview and Scrutiny Committees to carry out a review and planning exercise, as well as to a degree setting or suggesting items that could form part of each of the Committees Forward Work Programmes.

Members proposed as part of the FWP for 2016 - 17, that a Collaborative Committee Pilot subject area could be the Local Authority's potential for creating an arm's length trading company (e.g. Teckal approach), with the aim of being able to provide a range of services across the Authority on a more cost effective basis.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That Committee considered the topics for inclusion on the Committee's Forward Work Programme 2016-17.
 - (2) Endorsed the 12 primary topics for inclusion on the Forward Work Programme as shown in the report's attachment at Appendix B to the report.
 - (3) Noted the draft list of items that have been produced for each Scrutiny Committee shown at Appendix A to the report.
 - (4) Agreed to consider the further item as detailed in the final paragraph above preceding the resolution.

207. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (FWP) UPDATE

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, that presented the suggested items due to be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held on 21 September 2016, as well as presenting a list of further potential items for prioritisation at subsequent meetings for 2016-17.

The Committee were in agreement with the items suggested for the Committee's agenda for the next two scheduled meetings, however, a Member proposed that scoping be carried out on the subject of how Legal Services cross-charge other Departments.

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that she would consider this request, and endeavour to place it as an item at a future meeting as part of the ongoing FWP.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the items that would be considered at its next two scheduled meetings, as well as the further two item agreed by Members.

208. CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION REPORT

RESOLVED: That having regard to the report of the Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services, Members agreed that Councillor E. Dodd represents the Committee as an Invitee on the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee for the ensuing year.

209. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm