

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Thursday, 11th September 2014 at 4.00 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor G Stacey – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

H Boggis	S Carter	(Mrs) J Cass
J David	(Mrs) M E Davies	P Griffiths
S Lloyd	M A Norris	(Mrs) J S Ward
P Wasley	E Webster	D W Weeks
C Willis	R Yeo	

Officers:

Mr C B Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mr N Jones – Service Director, Operational Finance
Ms S Davies – Head of Financial Reporting
Ms Ann Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

7. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Rees-Owen and (Mrs) M Tegg.

8. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced officers.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of personal interest in relation to the agenda.

10. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee held on 8th July 2014 be approved as a correct record subject to noting that: the list of apologies should not have included County Borough Councillor H Boggis who was in attendance.

11. CHANGE TO AGENDA

With the approval of the Chairman, agenda item 7 was brought forward.

REPORTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES

12. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Service Director, Operational Finance provided Members with a review of the first 18 months of operation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) which provides financial support to council tax payers to help meet their council tax bill.

The Service Director provided Members with the background to and the development of the new scheme which is a single national framework scheme intended to provide a consistent level of Council Tax support across Wales. However, as local authorities receive fixed funding for the CTRS scheme from the Welsh Government as opposed to the former Council Tax Benefit system which was funded via the DWP and was demand-led, the new scheme posed a key financial risk to the Council. He explained that the level of funding had not increased from the 2012/13 level and as nearly 30% of the households in the County Borough receive CTRS the financial impact on the Council was growing year on year.

The Service Director reported that following a Task and Finish Working Group review initiated by the Welsh Government in August 2013, Welsh Government ministers had decided to continue with the existing CTRS design which provides for low income households continuing to receive full entitlement maintained through a national framework scheme for the next two years (until 2016/17).

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the Service Director for his informative report.

RESOLVED: to note the content of the report.

13. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2013/14 REVIEW

The Head of Financial Reporting updated Members on the Council's Treasury Management activity during 2013/14 and the actual Prudential and Treasury indicators for 2013/14. The report summarised the treasury activity during 2013/14 providing information in relation to the appointment of new Treasury Management advisors, the economic background, the borrowing strategy, borrowing activity and results, the estimated and actual treasury position and prudential indicators, investment strategy and investment activity and results. She also informed Members that the £1m indemnity held with Lloyds bank in respect of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme had been fully utilised. In conclusion it was reported whilst the last financial year was extremely challenging, the Treasury Management activities had operated effectively and within budgetary and prudential limits.

Following presentation of the report the Head of Financial Reporting responded to Members' questions. She explained that the figures at para. 7.5 related to borrowing over the years to support the Capital Programme. She

also provided an explanation of the difference between Fixed Rate debt and Market debt. She explained that whilst PWLB interest rates were low at the moment the situation was being closely watched and added that the department would be meeting with the Treasury Management advisors in the near future to discuss the potential timing of any borrowing.

RESOLVED: to note the content of the report.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

14. MALADMINISTRATION COMPLAINTS 2013-14

The Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services presented Members with a report, which provided comparative information in respect of complaints of maladministration made to the Public Service Ombudsman during 20013/14.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services drew Members' attention to the annual letter from the Ombudsman which provided an individual annual summary of complaints received in relation to the Council, which was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Service Director reported that in general it was a positive report with the number of complaints again being less than the average across Wales when adjusting for population albeit that the Ombudsman continued to have concerns in relation to the length of time taken by local authorities to respond to his requests for information.

Following questioning on the report the Service Director assured Members that should there be any increase in the volume of complaints or patterns emerging this would be identified through internal monitoring.

RESOLVED: to note the content of the report.

15. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PRE-MEETINGS

The Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services reported on the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Working Group set up to consider the findings and recommendations of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) report "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!" and reported on the working group's initial recommendations in relation to scrutiny pre-meetings.

Following discussion there was general consensus that committee pre-meetings can be useful for committee preparation subject to a flexible approach being taken ie:

- That the subject matter on the agenda warrants such a meeting;
- That the length of time of such pre-meetings should again to depend on the agenda items.
- The above decisions to be taken by the Chair (or vice chair in his absence), in consultation with the scrutiny support officer.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the information provided;
- (ii) to agreed to the introduction of full committee member pre-meetings as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report subject to a flexible approach being taken as set out above.

16. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Arising from the report considered by the Committee at the meeting held on 8th July 2014, (Minute 6 refers), Members were asked to confirm the work programme as attached to the agenda, subject to noting that work programmes are required to be flexible.

Members were informed that the November meeting of the Committee would take place on 5th November 2014 at 4 pm.

RESOLVED: to confirm the work programme as attached to the agenda.+

G Stacey
Chairman

The meeting closed at 4.55 pm.