

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at The Council Headquarters, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Monday 7th October 2013, at 5.00 p.m.

Present

County Borough Councillor G R Davies – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

J Bonetto
(Mrs) A Roberts
T Williams

S Bradwick
G Smith

G Holmes
(Mrs) M Tegg

P Howe
R K Turner

S Powderhill
J Watts

Other Councillors in attendance

R Bevan
A Morgan

Officers

Mr G Jones – Group Director, Environmental Services
Mr N Wheeler - Service Director, Streetcare
Mr P Mee – Service Director, Public Health & Protection
Mr N Brinn – Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic Projects
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director, Performance & Resources
Mr D Batten – Head of Leisure, Parks & Countryside
Ms A Griffiths – Head of Management Accounting
Mr P Lucas – Director, Legal & Democratic Services

Others in attendance:-

Mr T Buckle – Wales Audit Office
Ms K May – Democratic Services Manager
Mr A Wilkins – Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor

17. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all Members to the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee and on behalf of the Committee the Chairman welcomed Mr T Buckle, Wales Audit Office and both Cabinet Members, Councillors R Bevan and A Morgan.

The Vice Chairman, also took the opportunity to advise the Committee of the recent event he attended at Dare Valley Country Park and thanked all officers involved for making the event such a success.

18. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) L De Vet, (Mrs) S Pickering, and S Rees-Owen.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct there were no personal interests pertaining to the agenda, declared at the meeting.

20. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 9th September, 2013 as an accurate record.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

21 WALES PROGRAMME FOR IMPROVEMENT:- THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT ANNUAL DELIVERY REPORT 2012/13.

The Service Director, Performance & Resources presented a report which set out the draft 2012/13 improvement priority assessments for the two priorities allocated to the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee, namely 'Enforcement and Regulation' and 'Street Care Services and the Natural Environment'.

Members were provided with a brief background to the assessments where it was advised that the draft Annual Delivery Report for 2012/13 was being prepared in line with the requirements set out in section 15(2) of the Measure indicating how the Council had contributed to the Community Strategy, 'Promoting Achievement, Tackling Disadvantage' for the County Borough with the over-riding aim of supporting improved outcomes for the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Service Director, Performance & Resources, continued by advising Members of their important role in challenging the content of the draft assessments in relation to the two priorities 'Enforcement and Regulation' and 'Street Care Services and the Natural Environment'. The Service Director added that following this challenge process, each assessment would form part of the Council's Annual Delivery Report for 2012/13 and would be reported to Council on the 30th October 2013.

To assist Members of the Committee the lead officers for each of the priorities provided the Committee with brief PowerPoint presentations which set out a reflective look at the work conducted in the areas during 2012/13.

RESOLVED that the views of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee be passed on to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in consideration of the Council's Draft Annual Delivery Report for 2012/13, as follows:

A. Priority: Enforcement & Regulation.

The Chairman questioned whether the service had updated statistics to illustrate whether there had been improvements in the services being provided? The Service Director, Public Health & Protection advised the Committee of the number of issues presented within the service during 2012/13 and the ongoing work with the Single Integrated Plan, to which a number of the services had been aligned. The Committee were advised that part of the process with the alignment of the Single Integrated Plan involved the undertaking of comprehensive needs assessments, which involved the production of statistics and figures. The Service Director, Public Health & Protection advised that there had been notable improvement in the services highlighted with evidence to illustrate positive outcomes, however; there was a need for the services highlighted to remain as priorities, due to the demands in the areas. The Service Director, Public Health and Protection also commented that the needs assessments outlining such statistics could be provided if needed.

One Committee Member referred to the positive statistics highlighted within the report in respect of supporting victims of ASB and commended officers on the service, however the support provided to those victims that were still vulnerable or repeat victims was queried. The Committee were advised of the specific support provided for the most vulnerable victims, and the work centred around safety for all victims. It was commented that continued support would be provided until a preferred outcome situation was delivered for victims of ASB. The officer was further queried on the reporting timescales to the general public following reports of ASB. The Service Director advised that all persons reporting incidents of ASB reported should receive feedback.

Members referred the Service Director, Public Health & Protection to the report in respect of Empty properties and it was queried how the properties brought back into use by the Council linked with demand for affordable housing and the percentage of occupancy for the properties referred to. The Members were advised that all 86 properties brought back into use were occupied and details of how the properties were improved were provided. With regards to the linkage with demand for affordable housing the Service Director, Public Health and Protection advised that this was a little more complex and referred to the Local Housing Market Assessment which highlighted a short fall in affordable housing within the County Borough and the problems associated with demand and supply. It was highlighted that some empty properties were brought back into use through our Homestep plus scheme which is a Low Cost Home Ownership scheme and therefore the homes were affordable. The Service Director was questioned further as to the criteria used to identify empty properties to renovate and the Committee were advised of the range of different factors considered, which was often dependant on the scheme or initiative being used to bring the property back into use. The Chairman commented on the positive schemes and questioned whether these could be expanded further. The Service Director commented that although the service had been successful in accessing a range of

external funding sources, the extent and cost of renovation work to bring empty properties back into use meant that 'need' significantly outweighs funding available.

One Member of the Committee commented on the energy conservation schemes in place and although these were having a positive effect it was commented that they were also having adverse effects in properties due to issues such as condensation. The Service Director commented that such adverse effects were down to two issues in particular, rogue traders and property management. The Committee were advised of the work of trading standards with regards to rogue traders and the advice being provided to residents through the Community Housing Service in relation to energy efficiency measures and general education surrounding property management.

One Member of the Committee referred to the work surrounding Domestic Abuse, which he had scrutinised previously on the LSB scrutiny working group and spoke of the positive outcomes already noted in the area. The Service Director, Public Health and Protection was however queried on the support provided to those individuals that were not deemed high risk and the role and intended benefits of the joint Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence forum. The Service Director advised that due to demand the IDVA service was only able to respond to high risk cases at first point of contact, but that the service still tried to meet the needs of all individuals accessing the service, and since April 2012 the Council commissioned additional services from Gwalia which are dealing with some of the unmet load.. The Service Director also advised that the service worked closely with 'Women's Aid RCT' and spoke of 'positive opportunities' now that this has become a single organisation. The Service Director, Public Health & Protection proceeded to answer the question in respect of the forum and it was explained to the Committee that previously there were two separate forums within both Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf leading to duplication, and the formation of one forum has lead to an improved collaborative approach, which allowed the forum to broaden out its agenda within the Cwm Taf area.

The Service Director, Public Health and Protection was referred to the Performance Indicators (PIs) highlighted within his report and it was queried why a number of the PIs were populated with 'Non Applicable'. The Service Director explained that some of the measures did not lend themselves to targets and commented that outcomes were more important than process measures and agreed that some of the PIs did not enrich the report and could be taken out. A further question on the energy efficiency PI target was also highlighted and the officer explained that the funding arrangements ended in December 2012 and measuring performance against a lower target than previously achieved allowed the new provider to embed and allow the new arrangements to become established.

B. Priority: Streetcare Services & the Natural

The Service Director, Streetcare was questioned by Members of the Committee on the key factors resulting in lower than anticipated levels of recycling over 2012 / 13 and it was questioned whether there were any key issues that needed to be addressed. The Service Director, Streetcare advised Members that in respect of dry recycling RCT were in the top quartile in Wales, though with green recycling they were in fact last. The Service Director commented on the potential reasons for this position, indicating that the County Borough did not produce a lot of green waste due to households having small or even no gardens. Members were advised that the service was therefore focusing primarily on improving its figures in relation to food waste, although it was noted that this was difficult due to there being no mandatory powers in place to make people recycle. The Service Director, Streetcare provided the Committee with statistics illustrating an early indication of improvement with green recycling rates following the introduction of the new fortnightly collection arrangements. The Service Director was further queried whether any arrangements were in place with Housing Associations within the County Borough with regards to grass collections and the Service Director confirmed that recent communication had been made with the Chief Executive of RCT Homes in respect of the matter, although he added that not all contractors actually collect grass cuttings due to the cost involved. The Group Director, Environmental Services also added that the Council do not always collect grass cuttings which would be something that may need to be looked into.

One member commented on the issuing of fixed penalty notices and commented that such action was welcomed within his ward by the residents. The Service Director, Streetcare agreed that this opinion was mirrored across the County Borough.

Members of the Committee commented on the fortnightly refuse collection and Members expressed their thanks to the teams involved for their hard work and efforts, and spoke of the 'positives' witnessed with the early indications of increased recycling. One Member further questioned whether there had been increased fly tipping due to the recent changes and the Service Director, Streetcare commented that there had in fact been a minor decrease noted in the reported levels of flytipping. A query was further raised in relation to the charge for 'collection of bulky items' and the officer advised that the charge was more of a 'booking fee'.

Members of the Committee commented on the positive work in respect of 'Re-uniform' and it was queried how customer feedback was gauged. The Service Director, Streetcare advised that feedback on the initiative was very positive with parents keen to utilise the initiative. The Service Director added that feedback was generally verbal and he welcomed Members suggestion of a 'suggestion box' being made available within the shop to collect customer comments. Another Member commented on positive work of the scheme but also commented that every child deserves at least one new uniform advising

of the extra costs on uniforms due to the requirements of school badges on the uniforms. The Service Director, Streetcare advised that he was unable to comment due to the decision of school uniforms resting with individual schools. The Member further commented on the school uniform allowance provided to each school and added that she hoped this was being passed on to children in need of uniforms rather than for generic school purposes.

The Service Director, Streetcare was queried on the impact dog fouling had on the service's performance and the officer agreed that dog fouling was and continues to be an issue. The Service Director advised Members of the schemes in place to assist performance with targeted awareness and patrolling of hotspot areas. Following a further question the Service Director, Streetcare confirmed that due to a change in legislation CCTV was not available to use as a form of evidence gathering, although this form of intelligence could still be used for flytipping.

One Member of the Committee queried the rationale behind the PI targets set in relation to graffiti and the Committee were advised that although recent performance had been 100% the future target was set at 90% which was a more realistic target of achievement.

The future investment into roads was highlighted by Members and the Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic projects commented that continued investment would be provided where needed. The Chairman drew officer's attention to the results of the B roads within the report, which was worse than the all Wales average and the Service Director advised that this was a direct result of the way the survey was undertaken ie every two years and commented that we would expect to see an improvement in the future..

Following the specific comments on each of the assessments the Service Director, Performance & Resources asked the following questions:-

To what extent do the assessments correlate with performance up dates the scrutiny committee received during 2012/13?

Members agreed that the draft assessments correlated with the information provided to Committee during the Municipal Year. Members commented on the usefulness of meaningful data to allow the Committee to consider trends in performance and to scrutinise the Authority's performance 'like for like' against other local authorities.

To what extent do the assessments set out the difference the improvement priority areas have made / helped to make in 2012/13?

Members agreed that the assessments provided a good reflection of the improvements witnessed in the priority areas.

To what extent do the new 2013/14 improvement priority action plans address areas that require further improvement, as highlighted by the draft 2012/13 assessments?

Members were of the opinion that the action plans addressed the areas for further improvement.

The Chairman thanked the officers involved for the detailed presentations and commented that in future it may be more beneficial for the Committee to consider the information in smaller lots due to the amount of detail involved.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

22 EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT- 30TH JUNE 2013 (QUARTER 1).

The Head of Management Accounting, Environmental Services presented to Members the Exception Report agreed at the meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny, which outlined the financial and performance management information for Environmental Services for the period to 30TH June 2013. Members were asked to consider key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 23rd September 2013.

Members raised their concerns over the decrease in numbers attending the 3 theatre venues across the County Borough in comparison to the previous year figures, and a break down of the figures was requested. The Group Director, Environmental Services advised the Committee that the 3 theatre venues provided a varied programme of entertainment for varied audiences and spoke of the delays in the introduction with digital cinematography which may have affected the numbers attending. Members commented on the good reports that they had heard in respect of digital cinematography now within the venues.

Members of the Committee also commented upon their concerns with sickness absence trends. The Chairman commented that it maybe useful to receive sickness trends in comparison to other authorities in Wales.

The figures highlighting the percentage of municipal waste sent to landfill was commented upon by one Member, and it was further commented that the reduction in landfill tax should be further highlighted as another benefit for recycling.

The final comment in relation to the quarterly exception report was in relation to the Health checks and the Chairman queried whether comparison figures on the year previous could also be reported to make the information more meaningful.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the reports.

REPORTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.

23 REVIEW OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR COMMENCING SEPTEMBER 2013.

The Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic projects provided Members with both a report and PowerPoint presentation updating the Committee on the provision of school transport for the start of the new academic year.

Members heard how the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) delivered an effective transport service for the start of the academic year, which was attributable to the level of advanced planning and communications strategies put in place. The Committee were advised that prior to the commencement of term the ITU orchestrated a large reallocation exercise due to the growth in demand for transport at some schools and decline in the number of eligible pupils in others, which meant undertaking a major routing and scheduling exercise. The Service Director confirmed that the reallocation was successful, eliminating the risk of overcrowding in some areas. Members were also advised of the service receiving 34 late applications for SEN transport following a change in the SEN pupil statementing process.

The Committee were also advised of the noticeable increase in the number of students attending college and the new initiatives that have been taken forward by the ITU. The Service Director also briefly advised members of the future challenges for the service in particular reference was made to the new seatbelt legislation.

Members of the Committee raised queries in respect of college transport for SEN students and potential increased costs in respect of introduction of seatbelt legislation. The Service Director, Highways, Transportation and Strategic projects advised that the service were working closely with colleges in respect of suitable transport arrangements although it was added that transport packages for the specific scenario advised would be for social services to arrange. In respect of seatbelts the Committee were advised that there would be no increased costs, due to long term contracts already being set up to that will incorporate the change in legislation.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

24 **RECENT REFUSE COLLECTION & RECYCLING CHANGES ACROSS THE COUNTY BOROUGH.**

The Service Director, StreetCare provided Members with a brief overview and reminded Members of his update given during the draft annual delivery report, earlier in the meeting. The Service Director confirmed that overall the current position with refuse collection and recycling had improved dramatically. The Committee were also advised that there was a slow increase in respect of food waste and commented that the service needed to continue with its awareness raising.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the verbal update.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

25 **EXECUTIVE REPONSE**

The Director, Legal and Democratic Services referred Members to his report which provided the Committee with the response received from the Executive following a recommendation submitted by the Committee during its July meeting, regarding communal waste collection areas being provided within future developments of flats and communal housing.

Details of the positive response were provided to Members and the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the response received.

Cllr G Davies
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7pm.