

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held at Rhondda Cynon Taf Headquarters, Clydach Vale on Monday 7th April, 2014, at 5.00 p.m.

**Present**

County Borough Councillor G R Davies – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors**

(Mrs) J Bonetto  
(Mrs) A Roberts

S Bradwick  
G Smith

J Elliott  
(Mrs) M Tegg

P Howe  
M Weaver

(Mrs) S Pickering

**Other Councillors in Attendance:-**

C Davies  
E Webster

**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 & Improvement  
Ms A Griffiths – Head of Management Accounting  
Mr D Batten – Head of Leisure, Parks & Countryside  
Ms S Davies – Head of Cultural Services  
Mr A Wilkins – Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor

**58. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) L De Vet, G Holmes, L Langford, S Powderhill, R K Turner and (Mrs) T Williams.

**59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct there were no declarations of personal interest pertaining to the agenda.

**60 ANNOUNCEMENT.**

The Vice Chairman of the Committee took the opportunity to acknowledge the honour bestowed upon Ms Jeanette Howells, an officer within the Environmental Services department, who had been given the privilege of

representing the County Borough within the Queen's Baton Relay Team, on the 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2014. Members **RESOLVED** that a letter be sent from the Committee, congratulating Ms Howells.

**61 DWYR CYMRU (WELSH WATER).**

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman welcomed the Dwr Cymru representatives to the meeting and thanked them for attending the meeting on the Committee's request. The representatives introduced themselves as Mr D Keen- Sewerage Manager (Swansea & the Valleys) and Mr Ian Parry-Catchment Manager (Cardiff & the Valleys).

Through the use of a PowerPoint presentation the Dwr Cymru officers provided the Committee with a brief history of water legislation, the history behind Dwr Cymru and working with other stakeholders. Members were advised that the company was unique due it being 'not for profit', with all financial surpluses being used for the benefit of its customers.

Members were also advised of the positive work undertaken with stakeholders, including the successful trial of 'Let's Stop the Block' campaign in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area and the officers advised that this campaign was being rolled out nationally. The officers took the opportunity to thank all the people involved in making the trial such a success. Projects such as 'Welsh Water Assist', with the recognition of social tariffs for water bills designed for those with financial constraints was also highlighted as well as the awareness raising schemes ran throughout education centres, working with the next generation of customers. Following this information Members took the opportunity to ask the officers questions in relation to the means testing used for customers experiencing financial constraints, universal metering and rateable value costs and how these could be appealed. The Officers advised that a means test was carried out for customers in financial hardship and this was considered on a case by case position. Officers advised that they were unaware of their company's position in respect of universal metering and advised that they would feedback to members where the initial drive for the scheme originated from and their business position.

To conclude the presentation, Officers provided an overview of the flooding incident that occurred within the County Borough in December last year. Members were provided with an account of events that led to the flooding of a number of homes on High Street, Treorchy, due to failure in systems at the local pumping station, as a result of human error. The Committee were advised of the responses of Dwr Cymru on the night of the flooding and the aftermath to assist those homes affected. The Officers also advised of the actions taken since to prevent any reoccurrence and the lessons learnt. Members of the Committee spoke of the positive response that was received that evening from all involved, and officers were questioned further in relation to project resilience, a review of all storm pumping stations which have a history of flooding or pollutions. Officers advised the committee that the houses affected were now on a trigger system, allowing a quick response to any calls raised from the properties in future. One member of the Committee

questioned the position for flood victims in respect of insurance premiums. The officers advised that insurance claims were dealt with by the company's insurance department, and provided a brief overview of the process. The officers also spoke of the possibility that insurance premiums could increase following the incident but advised that this would be addressed within the settlement. The officers made reference to a letter of explanation that the company were circulating to the customers affected and the surrounding area, which provided a declaration that the fault of the flooding was due to human error by Dwr Cymru.

The Chairman commented on the positive responses to the incident and thanked the officers for attending the meeting and providing the detailed presentation for member's information.

The committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the presentation for information.

## **62. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 as an accurate record.

## **REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES.**

### **63 OUTCOME AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE WELSH GOVERNMENT AND RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL 2013/14 TO 2015/16**

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided Members of the Committee with an overview of the report, which advised of the Outcome Agreement between the Welsh Government and the Council for the period 2013/14 to 2015/16 as agreed by Cabinet on the 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided some background to the report, explaining that the maximum funding available to the Council through the Welsh Government's Outcome Agreement revenue grant was £2.5m per year, although this funding was based on performance results. It was also advised that this year, to assist local authorities in completing their Outcome Agreements, the Welsh Government had produced a guidance document, which the Authority had utilised when producing the draft plan.

The Committee were advised that to ensure the outcome agreement performance was effectively managed, updates would be incorporated into the existing performance reporting arrangements and be subject to review and challenge by the Council's scrutiny committees to help improve outcomes in the five strategic themes selected. Members were advised of the five outcome themes identified by the Council, two of which would be aligned to

the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee for review, namely Welsh Homes Supporting People and Safer Communities for All.

Following consideration of the report the Committee **RESOLVED** to:-

- a) Note the content of the report
- b) Endorse the proposed allocation of outcome agreement strategic themes to the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee for the period of the agreement
- c) Scrutinise the content of the Outcome Agreement strategic themes allocated to the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee and consider any feedback it wishes to provide to the Leader / deputy Leader of the Council, and as deemed necessary, Cabinet, prior to submission to the Welsh Government.

#### **64 PROPOSED SCRUTINY PROCESS OF THE CORPORATE PLAN 2014/15.**

The Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor referred members to the report before them, which outlined the proposed scrutiny arrangements for the production of the Council's 2014/15 Corporate Plan.

Members were advised of the duties placed on local authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the requirements to publish their improvement objectives annually, in the form of 'Wales Programme for Improvement action plans'. The Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor advised Members that the WPI action plans would be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan, which would be published in June and the Annual Delivery Report, assessing progress against improvement objectives would be published in October of each year. The Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor took the opportunity to advise of the Council's previous development of the WPI action plans, which involved mainly officer input.

The Committee were advised that to further strengthen scrutiny arrangements, it was proposed that scrutiny working groups be established to scrutinise each of the WPI action plans. The Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor went on to indicate that the findings from each working group would be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, before the Corporate Plan is considered at the Council meeting in June, prior to the statutory deadline of the 30<sup>th</sup> June. The officer also advised of the proposal that the appropriate Cabinet member would be in attendance at each of the working group meetings.

The Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor referred the committee to the timetable, highlighting the proposal that a working group of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee be created to consider two WPI action plans: 'Streetcare Services' and 'Public Health and Protection'. The Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor also highlighted the intention for the working

groups to be reconvened at year end for members to assess the 'difference made' by WPI action plans as part of the Council's Annual Delivery Report.

Following consideration of the report the Committee **RESOLVED** to:-

- a) Approve the proposed process and timescales, as set out in the report
- b) Establish a working group of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the WPI Action Plans in relation to StreetCare Services and Public Health & Protection.
- c) That an email seeking nominations to the working group be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

**65 EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT- 31<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2013 (QUARTER 3).**

The Head of Management Accounting 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 31<sup>ST</sup> December 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 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

The Service Director, StreetCare was asked for an update with regards to the tendering position of the nappy collection vehicles, and the Service Director advised that the vehicles had been ordered and advised of the position in relation to delivery of the vehicles and the problems experienced by the manufacturer with production, due to the unique requirements needed on the vehicle specification. The Service Director commented that service would be able to trial the first vehicle in May.

The Service Director, Streetcare was also queried on the difference between the 2496 warning letters issued and the small number of fixed penalty notices issued in comparison. The Service Director, Streetcare advised that Fixed Penalty Notices were only issued as a last resort, commenting that the service attempts to address the problem through education awareness rather than fines.

The Head of Cultural Services was questioned in respect of the further overspend within the area, with a Member querying whether the overspend was attributable to the spend on technical resources, and when the service would start to recognise the investment back in revenue. The Head of Cultural Services confirmed that the investment with technical resources did contribute to the overspend in quarter three and would also contribute in quarter four and advised of the proactive meetings held with finance officers when looking at the budget going forward for the next financial year, to ensure that this was not witnessed in the future.

The highlighted positive performance in respect of trading standards inspections was noted by Members, with the Committee questioning whether

this performance was attributable to the collaborative working with Merthyr Tydfil Council. The Service Director, Public Health & Protection advised the Committee that the information before them was in respect of Rhondda Cynon Taf performance only and advised that in respect of the collaborative performance both Authorities were above target in performance, illustrating a high standard of work across both County Boroughs.

The Service Director, Public Health & Protection was questioned further in respect of the effects witnessed on service delivery due to resourcing issues. The Service Director advised that a recruitment exercise had been undertaken and a new Environmental Officer would be commencing in May. One Member referred to the recent announcement by the Welsh Government, advising of a 40% reduction in Trading Standards across Authorities, and questioned how true this was for RCT. The Service Director, Public Health & Protection advised the Committee that the service in RCT had made efficiency savings, as had all Council services, but the service was adequately resourced and sustainable.

One Committee Member questioned whether the increase in theatre visits highlighted within quarter three was attributable to the pantomime season, or due to the investment in technical resources within the venues. The Head of Cultural Services advised that the increase was due to a culmination of both reasons and commented further that the noted increase was also dependant on programme choice at the theatre venues. The Head of Cultural Services commented on the popularity with the pantomime choice of Peter Pan which was delivered, which exceeded previous year's audience figures. The Member of the Committee continued to question the intentions for the pantomime in future years, if the proposed phase 2 service cuts within the cultural services area were taken forward. The Head of Cultural Services advised that the service would need to look into the viability of the pantomime and the options available if three venues were no longer available.

The Service Director, Public Health & Protection was queried in respect of the WPI for protecting people from harm, and how the service ensured that those individuals utilising the substance misuse programmes refrained from substance misuse during their treatments. The Service Director advised that periodic tests for substance misuse were undertaken within the treatments where appropriate but also commented that the prohibition of substances during the programmes depended on the programmes themselves.

Following a query the Service Director, Public Health & Protection provided the Committee with details of the Energy savings programmes being delivered by the Council and its various partners. Members continued to query the engagement in the area with private sector landlords to take energy efficiency forward. The Service Director spoke of the funding available for different client groups for energy efficiency projects but advised that less funding was available for private sector landlords, which made engagement difficult to take forward. Members took the opportunity to speak of their concerns with some companies taking forward the energy efficiency agenda and the Service Director advised Members of a leaflet produced by Trading Standards,

providing information and advice on how to deal with the complexity of energy efficient measures and also advised of the companies that the Council was working with to assist the citizens of the County Borough.

The Service Director, Public Health & Protection was also queried in respect of the strategic review to the existing housing stock. The Service Director advised the Committee of the need for the review, which was to help inform housing providers of the nature of the housing stock needed, and the identification of the current imbalance in the stock available. Recommendations had been highlighted which were being addressed such as the reconfiguration of stock, such as reclassification of the 'Box Bedroom', following the welfare reform changes.

Members of the Committee sought clarity from the Service Director, Public Health & Protection on the voluntary perpetrator programme, following which the officer was questioned whether a new co-ordinator was now in place to take the project forward. The Service Director advised that a new co-ordinator had not been appointed and advised of negotiations with a private provider to take the project forward.

One Member of the Committee questioned whether any positive outcomes had been noted following the completion of the GP signposting actions and the Committee were advised that not as much action had been realised as hoped and spoke of the preference for a referral pathway to have been created. The Committee were also advised of project IRIS and the identification of referral schemes in primary care, which would help to close the gap within the area. Members queried whether this was addressed within A&E and the Service Director spoke positively of the proactive work taken forward in this area with referrals.

One Member of the Committee referred officers to the WPI action plan in relation to street Care services and commented that as RCT's performance for recycling was still below the Welsh average, even though changes across the Authority had been successfully implemented with refuse and recycling collections, the member queried how the Council could ever hit the Wales Average in the future. The Service Director, Streetcare advised the Committee that this PI reflected a false picture of the Authorities performance. The Service Director explained to the Committee that in respect of dry recycling the Authority were in the top 5 quartile in Wales, however the food and green waste recycling was poor in comparison, therefore reducing the Authority's performance. The Service Director commented that the Authority was limited with respect of its green waste due to the nature of some houses within the County Borough having little to no gardens, therefore limiting the amount of garden waste to be collected. The officer spoke of potential options in the with limiting the amount of black bags to be collected, as introduced in other Authorities. Members queried why the food waste recycling was poor in comparison to the dry recycling and the Service Director advised that that it was down to the residents not wanting to take part.

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

## **66 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES .**

The Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic Projects provided the Committee with a PowerPoint presentation in respect of Flood Risk Management, including the roles and responsibilities of the Council and its partners. The Service Director also referred Members to the report before them, providing further details on the subject area.

Through his PowerPoint presentation the Service Director provided the Committee with the background to the area and referred Members attention to the 3 main pieces of legislation in place which influence the management of flood risk, namely the Flood Risk Regulations 2009, The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the Land Drainage Act 1991. The Committee were advised that under the regulations Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC is identified as a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), with Natural Resources Wales being responsible for flooding from main rivers and seas.

The Committee were advised of the completion of the 'Preliminary flood risk assessment' for Rhondda Cynon Taf in June 2011, which was based on indicative flood risk areas provided by the Environment Agency, as required for a LLFA. The Committee were advised that LLFA's were also responsible for producing flood risk management plans for indicative flood risk areas that were identified within the preliminary flood risk assessments.

The Service Director also advised of the requirements of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 which requires LLFA's to "develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for local flood risk management" within their area. Members were advised that the Rhondda Cynon Taf strategy was consistent with the four objectives of the Welsh Government's National Strategy and had developed four core objectives for the management of flood risk.

The PowerPoint presentation continued by providing Members with an oversight into enforcement actions taken by the Authority, Flood risk management and mapping in action and recent flood alleviation schemes in place within the County Borough.

Following some brief questions and answers regarding blocking of culverts and insurance policies the Chairman thanked the Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic projects for the presentation and the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and PowerPoint presentation.

Cllr G Davies  
**Chairman**

The meeting closed at 19:00pm.