

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes** of the meeting of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2015 at 5 pm.

**Present:**

County Borough Councillor M A Norris – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors**

(Mrs) J Bonetto	S Bradwick	G R Davies
S Evans	(Mrs) S Jones	(Mrs) S Rees
R W Smith	(Mrs) J S Ward	P Wasley
E Webster	C J Williams	C J Willis
R A Yeo		

**In Attendance**

Mr R Hull – Chair of the Audit Committee

**Officers in Attendance**

Mr P.J Lucas – Director, Legal & Democratic Services  
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement  
Mr D Powell – Head of Corporate Design & Maintenance  
Ms A Richards – Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools  
Mr N Owen – Schools Facilities Manager  
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**29. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor P Griffiths.

**30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

**31 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

In relation to the work programme, the Chairman of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee referred to the Committee's decision to request his Committee to extend their planned work in relation to mobile libraries to include the financial element of the service

change to the library service. He expressed his concern that the Cabinet had announced a further proposed service change without involving scrutiny.

The Chairman (Finance & Performance) pointed out that there was the intention to have an eight week consultation period and the Chairman of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee commented that when he had concerns in respect of an issue he and his vice chair had attended the meeting of the Cabinet to speak of their concerns.

**32. THE MEALS ON WHEELS SERVICE – PRESENTATION ON THE IMPACT OF SERVICE CHANGE**

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and the Schools Facilities Manager provided Members with a presentation to inform the Committee's assessment of the impact of the service change which had been introduced from November 2014.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that the service was not an assessed service and anyone over the age 60 could receive the Meals on Wheels service. The service was also available to under 60 year olds if they were deemed vulnerable such as having medical needs, perhaps undergoing rehabilitation from hospital or receiving a Home Care package. Clients could refer themselves for the service or a referral could come via the hospital discharge process or be part of a support package of care. She explained that the Welsh Government had introduced a scheme whereby those who had been in hospital for 4 weeks can receive a free meals on wheels service for 6 weeks on discharge if required as part of a care package. Rhondda Cynon Taf currently offers this non-statutory service, however, many local authorities do not offer this 6 weeks service.

A Member queried why the service sat within the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate rather than within the Community and Children's Services Group.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate had a comprehensive Catering Service for the provision of school meals and was therefore able to apply its expertise and economies of scale to the Meals on Wheels Service. The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools added that the service also works closely with Social Services and Health colleagues.

Following the recent health advice in the media in relation to processed foods and meats, a Member asked whether this would have any impact on the service.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that the service was waiting for a statement from the Welsh Government or Local Health Board to provide clarity in relation to this issue.

A Member asked what quality assurance systems were in place to ensure that the views of the most vulnerable were gathered and what feedback had been received in relation to the introduction of chilled meals on weekends.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools reported that they obtained a great deal of direct feedback from the drivers who have face to face contact with clients. She explained that quite often the elderly did not like to complain either because they feared that the service would be taken away or they thought that they would get the driver into trouble. She also pointed out that there is a thorough quality assurance process in place before the meals are despatched and food safety is paramount.

A Member welcomed the fact that the service valued the role played by the delivery drivers and asked whether they were made aware of this.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools reported that this was the case and informed Members that last month they had made a point of going around all the locations and meeting everyone.

The Schools Facilities Manager reported that it was the intention to improve their engagement with customers and would welcome the views of the Committee in respect of this challenging area. He explained the difficulty in balancing a nutritious healthy meal with individual customer preferences.

A Member referred to the customer complaints which had occurred when soup had been removed from the menu and he was pleased that it had been re-introduced.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools agreed that the service needs to engage further with clients on menu choices.

Members were informed that Rhondda Cynon Taf continue to provide prime cooked meals for vulnerable clients which many neighbouring authorities had moved away from. The cost of the 2 course meal is £3.30 whereas the majority of neighbouring authorities charges vary between £3.50 and £4.50.

Continuing with the presentation, the Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools reported to Members on the options which had been considered by Cabinet when planning service change. She explained that the decision had been taken to reduce the number of production kitchens from 6 to 3 and provide prime cooked chilled meals for the weekend, delivered on a Friday, with the service continuing to provide hot prime cooked meals on weekdays. The predicted savings were £300k each year for the first 5 years and £371k thereafter following repayment of the initial investment. There had been significant changes to working practices and the current staffing number is 74 compared to 109 prior to the service change, and the number of delivery vehicles has been reduced from 22 to 19.

It was reported that the service change had realised £100K during 2014/15 and £200K so far during 2015/16 and so was on track to make the predicted full year saving.

A Member asked whether the food trays were easy to open.

The Schools Facilities Manager reported that the trays were easy to open but the containers are currently being reviewed to ensure they meet the requirements of the customers and the council in terms of food safety and recycling. However, it was a challenging issue as some foods needed to be hot and retain their heat whilst others chilled and refrigerated. The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools added that the recycling aspect of the product is also a key factor.

Members asked how those who are blind or partially sighted manage at the weekends.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that this would depend on each individual's circumstances. There may be a package of care in place to assist. In other cases, clients have their own system for arranging the food in their fridges and the drivers know where to place the meals.

Members discussed the impact of the service change on staff.

It was reported that as a result of the changes the number of staff in some kitchens had needed to be increased. In other cases, some staff had been re-deployed and some had chosen to take voluntary redundancy / retirement.

Members referred to the data provided in the presentation and commented on the reduction in number of meals provided especially at weekends.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that the National Picture showed a downward trend for people receiving meals. In part this was due to there being more choices available to people, for example, supermarkets provide free transport and there are usually canteen facilities there, supermarkets will deliver groceries and there are a number of companies specialising in providing 'ready meals' delivered to the door.

The Schools Facilities Manager also explained that numbers did fluctuate for a variety of reasons, for example, people being admitted into hospital or respite care, or choosing to have meals only on specific days. The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that the change to weekend deliveries did result in a decrease in demand but since the introduction of the 'blast chilling' process the numbers were beginning to pick up. Numbers were also weather dependent and the figures presented were for the generally quieter months of the year.

Members questioned whether there were any plans to further reduce the number of vans, were they being used to full capacity and how many meals a delivery van could hold.

With the aid of the presentation slides the Schools Facilities Manager outlined the layout of the vans. He reported that they were constantly monitoring the situation and explained that some vans might hold fewer meals but delivered over a greater distance whilst others may be full but cover a smaller distribution area. The Schools Facilities Manager indicated that he would obtain specific information around the capacity of delivery vans and provide this detail to Members.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools added that routes were also being analysed.

A Member pointed out that the take-up figures did not make good reading and asked whether the clients cancelling the meals had given feedback on why they no longer required the service.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools informed Members that “exit interviews” will be undertaken to receive valuable feedback.

In closing, the Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools reported that staff morale did dip with the introduction of the changed weekend service as staff feel very passionate about the service they provide to clients. She also explained that there are still a number of challenges ahead with which Member input would be welcome and invited Members to visit a kitchen to see the operation. Members agreed for the following actions to be progressed:

- Improved engagement and consultation with clients;
- Improved information for clients e.g. through the Council’s website;
- Explore the creation of a customer service contact at Ty Elai which will improve the handling of telephone queries;
- Review menus following consultation;
- Monitor uptake especially at weekends;
- Explore opportunities to improve meal quality; and;
- Explore options to provide a reward system for regular users.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools also explained that some carers had asked if they could pay for the service on-line which they cannot do at the moment.

A Member asked what the life expectancy was of the new equipment brought in to facilitate the service change.

The Service Director for Performance and Improvement explained that the condition of the equipment would be regularly maintained and monitored, and any further investment would be built into the Council’s service planning arrangements.

A Member asked whether vegetables were served individually to facilitate client preference or mixed. The Schools Facilities Manager explained that they were served together as it would be too labour intensive to do otherwise.

The Chairman of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee suggested that some of the information would be useful to his Committee in relation to their work in supporting people at home and asked if progress reports could also feed into his committee.

A Member suggested that when considering their consultation process that advice be sought from Social Services with regard to using advocacy services to capture the views of those people with dementia or other hard to reach groups.

A Member suggested that perhaps a rebranding of the name of the Meals on Wheels service would encourage take-up.

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools explained that staff referred to the service as Community Meals; however, clients were used to it being called Meals on Wheels but she agreed that this was something that could be investigated.

A Member pointed out that whilst some clients were able to use a microwave, others couldn't and therefore having a service which delivered a meal which they could eat straight away was important.

The Committee thanked the officers for their informative presentation and for providing the detailed presentation slides in advance.

In considering and assessing the impact of the service change the Committee **RESOLVED:**

- (i) that there are a number of issues for the Service to consider going forward:
  - Improved engagement and consultation with clients;
  - Improved information for clients e.g. through the Council's website;
  - Explore the creation of a customer service contact at Ty Elai to help improve the handling of telephone queries;
  - Review menus following consultation;
  - Monitor uptake especially at weekends;
  - Explore opportunities to improve meal quality; and
  - Explore options to provide a reward system for regular users.
- (ii) that updated progress reports be presented to the Committee in 3 months and 6 months time, and this to include an update on client numbers on an area basis;
- (ii) that these progress reports also be made available to the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to inform its work in relation to Supporting People at Home.

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE ESTATES**

### **33. THE COUNCIL'S OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY**

The Head of Corporate Design and Maintenance provided the Committee with a report which set out key information in relation to the management of the Council's accommodation to help inform Members' review of this area.

Members were informed that the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan had been approved by Cabinet in June 2013. Under the strategy set out within this document the Council has been actively seeking to reduce the size of its property portfolio. In addition to this, in December 2013, the Cabinet approved a mechanism under which community based organisations are able to apply for the use of premises, once the Council services withdraw. Members were provided with a summary of the outcome of this work to date.

Members were also provided with details of the current accommodation portfolio split into two areas i.e. strategic and non strategic buildings with an analysis of capacity and utilisation, and also details of office accommodation rationalised since April 2010.

The Head of Corporate Design and Maintenance provided the Committee with an overview of the work being carried out in respect of energy management and carbon emissions. He also reported on the work being undertaken in partnership with other public sector organisations and the common information system which is populated with the details of premises owned by public sector organisations across the Cwm Taf area.

Following presentation of the report the Head of Corporate Design and Maintenance responded to Members' questions.

The Committee discussed the sale of Council land and suggested that it would make financial sense to obtain outline planning permission for a site first thereby increasing the value of the land. It was suggested that this could create a 'conflict of interest' situation. However, the Director of Legal & Democratic Services pointed out that this was not such an issue now that a small Development Control Committee had been established rather than the Committee consisting of all 75 Members of the Council.

In response to questioning, the Head of Corporate Design and Maintenance explained that in some cases it was still economically advantageous to vacate a building even if tied into a long lease because of the associated running costs.

A Member pointed out the difficulties being experienced by those community groups who have expressed an interest in taking over Council premises and suggested that it would be helpful to develop a checklist which would assist these community groups in following the correct processes.

The Chairman asked whether there was a legal representative on the RCT Together project group and the Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that there was.

Following discussion, the Chairman reminded Members that the Committee had previously agreed to undertake a detailed review of the Council's Accommodation and proposed that the best way forward would be by way of a working group. He also reminded the Committee that it had been agreed to set up a working group in relation to performance target setting and asked that Members interested in being part of this work should inform the Scrutiny Support Officer.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that a scrutiny working group be formed to review in more detail the use of Council Accommodation;
- (ii) initial information required by the Working Group to include a full list of properties, including schools, by post code area; details of whether leasehold or freehold and whether the buildings are Listed.

M A Norris  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm.