

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, 9th December, 2015 at 5 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor M A Norris – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

(Mrs) J Bonetto	G R Davies	S Evans
P Griffiths	(Mrs) S J Jones	G Smith
(Mrs) J S Ward	P Wasley	E Webster
C Willis	R Yeo	

In Attendance

Mr R Hull – Chair of the Audit Committee

County Borough Councillor J Watts – Vice Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Officers in Attendance

Mr C Bradshaw – Chief Executive

Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement

Mr A Wilkins – Head of Legal, Corporate & Democratic Services

Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Bradwick, (Mrs) S Rees and R W Smith. An apology was also received from County Borough Councillor M Adams, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

38. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Alison Lewis of the Wales Audit Office to the meeting.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on the 4th November 2015, subject to noting that Councillor G Davies and P Wasley were waiting

feedback to local issues raised during the discussion in respect of the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy (Minute 33).

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

41. THE WAY AHEAD: THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2016-2020 FOR CONSULTATION

The Head of Legal, Corporate & Democratic Services introduced the report explaining that Cabinet had agreed to the request of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that the preparation of the Corporate Plan should be subject to pre-scrutiny. As a result, the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee was being asked for its comments in relation to the draft Corporate Plan, prior to Cabinet proceeding to the public consultation phase.

The Chief Executive reported that on taking up his position he had met with his management team and Cabinet members to set out what the 'vision' for the authority should be. He explained that despite the economic challenges the Council is and will continue to be a significant business with many opportunities to further improve services and not just focus on managing decline as a result of reducing budgets. The Chief Executive provided context to the preparation of the draft plan and explained that he welcomed the assistance of scrutiny in challenging the principles that the plan is based upon and this feedback would be included in an up dated report to Cabinet on the Corporate Plan. In particular, he would value the views of the Committee in relation to the proposed vision and purpose of the Plan; the proposed principles, proposed priorities and the proposed measures to monitor the progress of these priorities.

The Chief Executive asked Members to form a view on the extent to which the proposed Vision and Purpose of the Plan is consistent with the proposed priorities and measures set.

A Member welcomed the positivity of the Chief Executive in his address. He also asked how the Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) fitted with the vision of the Corporate Plan.

The Chief Executive reported that the LDP is a land use document which will be due for a 'light touch' review shortly. He explained that this would provide an opportunity to challenge the land use in this document to determine whether changes are required to better reflect current needs such as housing and also the priorities in the Corporate Plan. The Chief Executive added that the introduction of the City Deal will also provide an opportunity to open up other sites for development.

A Member agreed that it was right for the plan to be ambitious but suggested that the message being conveyed was ambition for the Authority rather than the community; the ambition had to be for the community to prosper. He

suggested that the purpose of the plan needed to be about creating a more sustainable community and rather than sustain and regenerate the economy.

A Member commented that the Council needed to get the message across to its residents that whilst the Council was there to provide help and support they also had to do things for themselves.

Another Member added that there was a need to understand how the Council's services and the role of the local authority will change over a period of time. He commented that there will be a need to look at services and offer different solutions and that the Council's role will be to provide sustainable, effective and efficient services involving community groups more. He suggested that the Corporate Plan would assist this transition.

A Member questioned how the Corporate Plan would fit into the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) and also pointed out that the SIP acknowledged the North/South socio economic divides and felt that addressing this issue should be incorporated into the Corporate Plan.

The Chief Executive explained that the North/South divide was a factor in the determination of the Community Infrastructure Levy rather than the SIP. The Chief Executive indicated that the principles within the Corporate Plan should apply across the County Borough and what the Council does should be consistent and done well regardless of area. He also suggested that it would be difficult to decide where the separation line would be drawn and pointed out that there was already a significant number of funding streams aimed at targeting deprivation; the key issue being to ensure that this resource is used well.

The Member responded that he felt that the issue should be acknowledged in the plan.

A Member pointed to the decline in manufacturing jobs within the area with the local economy now depending more on the service industries. She suggested that more needed to be done to encourage manufacturing back to the area.

The Chief Executive reported that whilst it was unlikely that the high volume low skilled manufacturing jobs would return he explained that the area has become a centre of excellence for many highly skilled manufacturing businesses, a number of which were supported by apprenticeship schemes in conjunction with Coleg y Cymoedd. The Chief Executive added that a Baseline Economic Analysis report had been prepared and was scheduled to be reported to Cabinet on 15th December 2015.

A Member suggested that the Council is being hindered in its services to the public by too much regulation and bureaucracy.

The Chief Executive reported on the proposed principles of the draft Corporate Plan, namely:

- *“Provide essential services well”*
- *“Help people and communities to help themselves”*
- *“Building a sustainable County Borough”*
- *“Live within our means”*

He asked Members for their views on the extent to which these principles will help the Council deliver the proposed priorities set?

The Chairman suggested that the principles were such that no-one could really disagree with them.

A Member pointed out that the mindset of the public would need to change.

The Chief Executive also explained that the principles were in line with those of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

A Member commented that whilst he had no issue with most of them, he pointed out the ‘living within our means’ was a legal necessity rather than a moral choice. He felt that it gave the wrong impression pointing out that there was a place for long term borrowing for the right reasons.

A Member pointed out that some community groups operate very well and cited an example in his area which was making a substantial contribution to the local economy.

The Chief Executive reported on the proposed priorities: People, Place and the Economy, and commented that he would be happy to change the order of the priorities and place Economy first if Members preferred. He asked for Members’ views as to the extent to which the proposed priorities are informed by the Council’s current performance and challenges, and needs of local communities.

A Member suggested that changes needed to be made in Education so that young people understood that they needed to take more responsibility for themselves.

Another Member agreed with these sentiments and pointed to work she had undertaken involving her local school through her Tourist Ambassador role. She spoke of the benefits of this for everyone and pointed out that by involving children when they are young they are then able to take over and run these community groups when they are older.

Members agreed with these sentiments and the Chairman commented that Education is the cornerstone of everything.

The Chief Executive reported that a range of indicators are proposed to be used to measure progress against the priorities of the Corporate Plan and he set out his ambition for the next four years which in summary was where performance is currently better than the Welsh average, that this position be maintained or be top quartile through to 2020 and where performance is

currently worse than the Welsh average, to achieve Welsh average or better by 2020. The Chief Executive added that the aim is in four years time for services in priority areas to be delivering above Welsh average performance or be amongst the best in Wales.

Members were asked for their thoughts in relation to the extent to which the measures of success will provide a meaningful picture of the progress the Council is making against its proposed priorities and whether they were ambitious or not.

A Member referred to the performance measures sitting under Place – ‘Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work’ and pointed out that cycle tracks were not mentioned. He felt that they should be included especially as it linked to the health and wellbeing agenda.

The Chief Executive responded by explaining that he would need to investigate whether suitable information in relation to cycle tracks is collected and whilst important, the consultation would test whether it represented one of the highest priorities for the County Borough.

A Member pointed out that there are already a large number of performance indicators in use and questioned whether the Corporate Plan suite of indicators would sit on top of current indicators or whether there would be a rationalisation of indicators.

The Chief Executive explained that as part of the Council reviewing its performance management arrangements, the intention is to create a smaller and more meaningful suite of indicators, supplemented by other qualitative information. The Chief Executive added that the outcome of this work would aim to enable Members and stakeholders to more clearly understand and scrutinise the performance of Council services and gauge the extent of progress / impact being made.

A Member commented that throughout the report mention was given to the grass roots of the community and he asked whether the Chief Executive could foresee a position where community councils could be of more benefit to the Authority in areas such as local grounds maintenance.

The Chief Executive agreed that there could be some opportunities, for example, in relation to community centres, and the views of community councils as a consultee in the production of the Corporate Plan would be welcome.

Another Member pointed out that the level of precept of community councils was small and this restricted what they were able to do. A Member also pointed out that there were no community councils in the Rhondda area should a move to more community council involvement be pursued.

A Member also cautioned against placing too much of a burden on the voluntary sector.

In conclusion, Members were asked for their thoughts in relation to endorsing the draft plan; or endorsing in principle or in part subject to the comments made; or whether they did not support the draft plan and wished to make alternative recommendations.

A Member commented that the draft plan was rightly a positive document; however, he suggested that there needed to be an acknowledgement that life is going to get harder in view of the likely on-going reductions in funding. He pointed out that even if the Council does everything well, services will need to change and people's expectations of what the Council can provide will need to be managed.

The Chief Executive explained that this was linked to the principle of 'Living within our means' and whilst the report is a positive report it focuses on providing essential services well. The Chief Executive added that there is a need to emphasise that the Council cannot do everything.

A Member pointed out that the earlier suggestion of removing the 'Living within our means' principle in some ways worked against this message.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive reported that following the consultation period, it was his intention to report the draft Corporate Plan to Council alongside the 2016/17 budget proposals in March 2016 for consideration and if deemed appropriate, approval.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to agree the principles of the draft Plan subject to suggested amendments;
- (ii) that further pre-scrutiny is undertaken at the appropriate stage in relation to the detailed action plans for each priority.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE & FRONTLINE SERVICES

42. COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 2 (30TH SEPTEMBER 2015)

With the aid of PowerPoint presentation slides, the Service Director, Performance and Improvement provided Members with details of the Council's performance for the period 1 April 2015 – 30th September 2015 in relation to the Revenue and Capital Budgets, Treasury and Prudential Indicators, WPI Action Plans and Performance Indicator information. In particular he drew Members' attention to the projected full year revenue budget under spend of £2.352M and explained that this was in the main due to preventative strategies that are resulting in cost savings within Adult Locality Services and Short Term Intervention Services.

A Member questioned the over spend in relation to Special Educational Needs and asked whether there were plans in place to reduce this.

The Chief Executive explained that in part this over spend was attributable to the costs involved when parents take the Council to tribunal and it was not uncommon for a tribunal to find in favour of the parents in the majority of cases. The Chief Executive added that it is the Council's aim, as far as is reasonable, to work with parents to avoid such scenarios occurring.

A Member referred to the revenue budget under spend in relation to the Catering service and questioned how any loss or saving was apportioned between schools and the local authority.

The Chief Executive explained that there was a profit sharing scheme in place for secondary schools to, amongst other things, encourage buy-in to the service. With regard to primary schools he explained that no scheme is in place for this sector; profits or losses being the responsibility of the Council. Members considered operational performance in relation to the WPI Action Plans.

In relation to Public Health & Protection, a Member asked for further information to be provided in respect of the Homestep Plus scheme which was not on target.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement reported that he would request this information and provide it directly to the Councillor. He also informed Members that in relation to Estyn School Inspection results an up date would be reported to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee in the New Year.

A Member referred to the Council's poor performance in relation to Delayed Transfers of Care which was the worst in Wales for 2014/15. He noted that whilst the figures were still high there was some improvement.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement reported that this was an area of work being considered by the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee through their work in relation to Supporting People at Home.

Having discussed the WPI performance exceptions, the Chairman assured Members that areas of underperformance would either be monitored by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee or referred to one of the other designated Scrutiny Committees.

A Member referred to the Tackling Poverty Advisory Group and Strategy and hoped that a review of Community First would be carried out. The Chairman explained that whilst he accepted his concerns he pointed out that the funding for deprived areas was determined by Welsh Government criteria over which the Council had no control.

A Member referred to the performance pie charts and in particular the number of targets not being met within the remit of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

In relation to the Education & Lifelong Learning targets, the Chief Executive explained that targets could be set to represent a lower level of ambition with the likelihood that these then be categorised as 'green' within the pie chart. The Chief Executive added that it was important to set ambitious targets to drive improvement and support services to achieve them, but to also have regard to the overall direction of travel of performance to accurately gauge the extent of progress Council services are making.

The Chairman also pointed out that the Committee would be reviewing target setting as part of its work in the New Year.

With regard to the Library Service, the Chief Executive explained that there is a need to reconsider some of the performance indicators following service changes to ensure a meaningful and full picture of performance is reported. The Chief Executive provided examples in terms of the Library Service: 'the % of library material requests supplied with 7 and 15 days' where due to the mobile library service being resourced to deliver a 2 weekly rota to local communities, requests made by users via this means will not hit the aforementioned targets. The Chief Executive added that within this context it was more important the Council continues to provide a valuable service to local communities particularly where residents cannot or cannot always visit a static library.

A Member referred to the rise in the number of fixed term school exclusions.

The Chief Executive informed Members that officers are supporting schools to improve the current levels of performance and as part of this adopt a more restorative approach. The Chief Executive added that the ultimate decision rests with the Headteacher of each school and highlighted that periods of exclusion were usually quite short but nonetheless there were too many.

A Member referred to the Contact Centre Service and the average queue time which was still below target. He appreciated that there were staff shortages but hoped that the situation would have improved.

The Service Director for Performance & Improvement suggested that the Committee should pay particular attention to this at quarter 3.

With regard to Children's Services, a Member referred to the performance indicators in relation to those children looked after who were not allocated to a social worker. The Member added that he was aware of some of the issues as to why this indicator was not being met in certain cases and suggested that if this indicator is not meaningful to manage service delivery then the Council should review whether or not it should remain part of the suite of performance indicators collected and reported.

The Committee was informed that a report in relation to this area was being prepared for the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee for more in depth consideration.

Having considered all the information the Chairman asked whether the Committee wished to take any areas forward for further scrutiny.

Following discussion it was agreed that a referral be made to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the issues in relation to the increase in fixed term exclusions.

The Chief Executive agreed that it would be prudent to look at this work and informed Members that the Welsh Government had recently published exclusion data.

In conclusion the Service Director, Performance & Improvement reminded Members of the key performance exceptions that had been highlighted as part of the quarter 1 reporting process and confirmed that the outcomes of the referrals to the themed scrutiny committees will be reported back to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to refer the rise in fixed term school exclusions to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee for review; and
- (ii) that the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee be provided with progress in relation to those issues referred to other scrutiny committees as a result of the quarterly reporting process.

M A Norris
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm.

