



AGENDA ITEM 3

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017/2018

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18TH APRIL 2018

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR COUNCIL BUSINESS

Author: Dan Williams (Research & Project Officer). Tel: 01443 424179

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress made in advancing the portfolio responsibilities of the Cabinet Member.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members note and scrutinise the content of the report.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To challenge any arising matters or issues with the relevant Cabinet Member and to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On the 22nd January, 2018, the [Overview & Scrutiny Committee](#) considered a report regarding the engagement of the Executive at future Scrutiny Committees going forward.
- 4.2 At the meeting Members agreed to receive Cabinet Members at future Scrutiny meetings on a quarterly basis to present relevant information relating to their portfolio areas, alongside the relevant Director.
- 4.3 Such an approach will provide Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to further challenge the Executive, as the Cabinet Members can provide details (both verbal and written) relating to the potential challenges facing the services, as well as the opportunities and policy changes currently being

considered. This approach would allow each Cabinet Member the opportunity to update Scrutiny Members on the delivery of their respective areas of the Corporate Plan, reference Key Performance Indicators and important details of policies being considered for future decisions which are referenced for future business, or those which have been developed since the last publicised Work Programme.

5.0 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

There are currently no Performance Indicators falling under the remit of the portfolio.

It is proposed that the performance data section of future engagement reports will be enhanced to include further content, and context, around applicable performance information to support these sessions. This will, therefore, improve the involvement of all members in the performance monitoring of key services.

6.0 DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMITTEES

6.1 As a means of establishing best practice and improving the decision-making arrangements within the Authority, 1-1 Engagement sessions have recently been introduced for Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs/Vice-Chairs to meet on a quarterly basis. These sessions provide an opportunity for Members to discuss their respective work programmes and to assist in ironing out any issues that may have arisen. Further to this, it was agreed that Cabinet Members would attend the relevant Scrutiny Committee and deliver a report or presentation alongside the relevant Chief Officer for challenge and questioning. This practice has commenced and Members have reported that it has been a useful and positive development thus far.

6.2 Promoting the work of the Scrutiny Committees remains a priority for the Council, and steps have recently been taken to enhance the public facing aspect through the creation of a dedicated Scrutiny [webpage](#) and social media presence. These interfaces provide details of the various Committees and their work programmes, as well as details of upcoming meetings. A monthly Scrutiny Chair's blog is also being developed that will provide detailed updates on the work undertaken by each Committee.

6.3 In keeping with this drive to effectively utilise electronic media, the Council also remains committed to advancing its internal Digital Strategy ('Digital RCT – Our 2020 Digital Vision'), and Members will note that the Cabinet have already approved and successfully piloted a paperless approach to meetings. Building on this, a recent [report](#) was presented before the Democratic Services Committee, where it was agreed that a phased approach would be adopted to further this arrangement across all Council Committees.

6.4 Electoral Services

- 6.4.1 Statutory responsibility for managing the electoral registration process and the administration of elections falls to the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer (the Council's Monitoring Officer). The Cabinet Member for Council Business provides appropriate support to Mr. Jones in order for him to undertake these roles in accordance with his statutory responsibilities.
- 6.4.2 The Elections team, who recently relocated from offices at Maritime Industrial Estate to Courthouse Street, Pontypridd (co-locating with the Coroner Service), successfully delivered both the Council and Community Council Elections and a snap General Election, held shortly after those local elections, in 2017. This followed on from Welsh Assembly and Police Crime Commissioner elections in 2016, as well as the UK EU Membership Referendum.
- 6.4.3 Through the recent White Paper: *Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales*, the Welsh Government intends to legislate in this area as part of a wider set of Local Government reforms. The measures and reforms outlined in the consultation will have potentially significant implications for the delivery of Council elections, and the Cabinet Member will play an important role in ensuring that any reforms that are brought into force are successfully implemented by this Council.

7.0 CORONER

- 7.1 Coroners are independent Judicial Officers appointed and paid for by the relevant local authorities which make up a Coroner Area. Coroners are responsible for investigating violent deaths, unnatural deaths and deaths in custody which are reported to them.
- 7.2 The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is responsible for the law and policy governing Coroners and deals with the operation of the current Coroner system. The primary legislation governing Coroners can be found in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (CJA 2009).
- 7.3 The South Wales Coroner Area was established on 1st April 2016 as a result of the merger of two previous Coroner Areas namely (a) Powys, Bridgend & the Glamorgan Valleys and (b) Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan. The Local Authorities which constitute the South Wales Coroner Area, and fund it, are Bridgend CBC, the City of Cardiff Council, Merthyr CBC, Powys CC, the Vale of Glamorgan CBC and this Council. The South Wales Coroner Area covers both Dyfed Powys and South Wales Police jurisdictions.
- 7.4 This Council is the statutorily designated 'Relevant Authority' for the South Wales Coroner Area. Essentially this role is similar to a 'host' authority role

commonly seen in other collaborative arrangements but with specific responsibilities regarding finance and accommodation.

- 7.5 The Relevant Authority employs staff to support the functions of the Coroners. Both South Wales Police and Dyfed Powys Police also employ Coroner Officers who support the work of the Coroners for the area. The Relevant Authority and Police Authorities are expected to work together, with the Senior Coroner, to secure appropriate staffing levels for the Coroner Service.
- 7.6 The Coroner Service is funded by contributions from each of the constituent authorities, on a 'population basis' based on most recent Census data.
- 7.7 As the Relevant Authority for the South Wales Coroner Area, this Council must —
- (a) Secure the provision of whatever officers and other staff are needed by the Coroner to carry out their functions;
 - (b) Provide, or secure the provision of, accommodation that is appropriate to the needs of the Coroner in carrying out their functions;
 - (c) Maintain, or secure the maintenance of, accommodation provided under paragraph (b).
- 7.8 Under the CJA 2009 the Relevant Authority is obliged to provide, or secure the provision of, accommodation to enable Senior Coroners to carry out their functions and when discharging this obligation must take into account the views of the Senior Coroner.
- 7.9 The South Wales Coroner Area currently operates from two administrative offices. One based at Rock Grounds, Aberdare, which is a building owned by the Council. The second administrative office is located within Cardiff Central Police Station.
- 7.10 However, on the 20th April the Service will move to a single centralised location at the Council offices at Courthouse Street, Pontypridd. The Senior Coroner considers the co-location of the eight officers and support staff as an opportunity to create resilience and an efficiency which can serve only to improve the effectiveness of the Coroner Service. Furthermore, the ability to run two courts simultaneously will improve efficiency and timeliness in those cases where inquests are required. He considers the proposed centralised location to have superior facilities, including excellent transport links, in comparison to the existing locations and would provide a far higher quality of experience for those who have to have contact with the Service.
- 7.11 In 2017 651 inquests were held, 15 of which were jury inquests.

8.0 COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

8.1 Social Media

8.2 The Council currently has over 30,000 likes/followers on its corporate accounts, with a further 80,000 likes/followers on service specific accounts such as respective Leisure Centre Facebook Pages, Lido Ponty and The Welsh Mining Experience.

8.3 With such a significant reach, the Council's social media policy is currently being reviewed to reflect its increasing use in promoting services and engaging with residents and service users in a way that remains consistent with associated policies and standards, such as Customer Care and appropriate responses to vexatious and persistent complainers.

8.4 The effectiveness of the Council's use of social media was recently evidenced during the periods of inclement weather that threatened to disrupt the County in communicating important messages to residents regarding road closures and acting as a point of contact for allocating resources.

8.5 Events

8.6 Following a successful Festive events schedule in 2017, the Council will once again be supporting town centres with a programme of Christmas events. In order for the events to run as smoothly as possible, planning and preparation for the festive celebrations will shortly commence, and the Council will be liaising closely with both elected Members and local businesses. Members representing the town centres have recently been notified of the draft schedule for 2018 via an email sent from the Director of Cabinet and Public Relations.

8.7 This builds on the successful programme of events that is ongoing across the year, including annual attractions such Armed Forces Day, Big Welsh Bite and Aberdare Festival; and also special, one-off events such as the Man Engine, which has recently been to Pontypridd as a part of the Forging a Nation tour.

9.0 HUMAN RESOURCES

9.1 Staff resources continue to represent the largest single cost to the Council, constituting over 70% of the annual revenue budget. Despite austerity, the Authority has attempted to steer away from job losses where possible, and recognises the significant contribution that all of the Council's employees play in providing high-quality and much valued services to the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

9.2 Since 2010, Local Authority staff have experienced lower than inflation annual pay increases of 1%, although the recent offer made by the National

Employers for Local Government Services made a 2 year pay offer with consecutive increases of above 2% for lower pay grades and 2% for higher grades. If agreed, the cost for the 2018/19 financial year alone stands at £1.800m.

9.3 Sickness absence does, however, remain a concern for the Authority and an extra £130,000 has been identified to support the ongoing work to minimise the impact this has on service delivery. The additional resources will allow for continued focus to be targeted on areas where there are high levels of sickness, and also for the development of the competence of managers to establish improving levels of attendance.

9.4 The below table outlines the number of sick days and relative percentage per service area over the period of August 2017 to January 2018.

	August		September		October		November		December		January	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Chief Executive	57.5	2.73%	83	4.01%	67	3.13%	63	3.09%	58	2.75%	67	3.13%
Community & Children's Services	1801	9.40%	1644	8.87%	1931	10.10%	1449	7.83%	1613.5	8.44%	1770	9.22%
Corporate & Frontline Services	64	1.88%	69	2.09%	77.5	2.25%	63	1.91%	83	2.41%	99	2.83%
Education & Lifelong Learning	160.5	2.66%	240.5	4.11%	264	4.26%	208	3.48%	172	2.86%	131	3.23%

The table shows that Community and Children's services have a disproportionately high rate of sickness absence, whilst the other service areas remain fairly stable in the monthly fluctuations for the period covered.

9.5 In January 2018 alone 942 employees were on recognised sick leave out of a total 5,715. This is adjudged to have cost the Council £522,037 in lost productivity costs and an additional £262,295 in replacement costs.

10.0 APPRENTICES & GRADUATES

10.1 The Council has a proud record of providing a range of high quality employment opportunities to young people in the County Borough, through the nationally recognised apprenticeship and graduate schemes. Both programmes offer successful applicants with a paid, two-year position situated in one of the Council's departments, including I.C.T and 21st Century Schools.

- 10.2 Since 2004, RCT Council has created 51 graduate positions, with 16 of the total securing employment within the Council. A number of these graduates have progressed through the departments and now hold senior positions within the Local Authority.
- 10.3 The Council has also created a total of 163 apprenticeship positions since 2012, with 86 of the applicants successfully completing the two year programme. 100% of those apprentices have achieved the necessary qualifications, whilst 90% have successfully secured further employment. 73 apprentices are currently progressing through the two year programme, including the 2017 cohort of 34, and 17 of the 73 have already secured employment following the end of their respective programmes.
- 10.4 In 2017, the Council committed to furthering the apprentices and graduates scheme by creating at least 150 positions over the course of the next five years, with 45 posts already created.

11.0 EQUALITIES

- 11.1 RCT Council is committed to promoting equality and diversity within the organisation, and has worked hard to ensure that an inclusive and supportive environment exists for LGBT staff.
- 11.2 This work was recently highlighted after the Council secured a spot in Stonewall's Top 100 employers for the second consecutive year – meaning that the Council was the only Welsh Local Authority to be recognised as one of the best workplaces for LGBT staff in the UK.

This year, the Top 100 Index was subject to more stringent criteria, as employers were also looked at for the work they were doing to support transgender employees.

- 11.3 Support provided by the Council includes: staff awareness and training schemes; peer guidance and mentoring initiatives; and dedicated support networks such as Perthyn. The Council also took part in the recent celebrations for LGBT History Month by flying the LGBT flag and putting on events aimed at celebrating diversity within local communities, including the hosting of the Icons & Allies exhibition at the Welsh Mining Experience, Rhondda Heritage Park in early February, and the recent Proud Valleys, Proud Voices event held in Pontypridd.

12.0 ARMED FORCES

- 12.1 Through the adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council is committed to providing support to the local Armed Forces Community, both past and present, and their families. The Covenant outlines the mutual respect and support provided to one another by the Armed Forces Community

in RCT, the Council and its partners, and local communities. Through the Covenant, the Council has also awarded the Freedom of the County Borough to the Welsh Guards Regiment, and a proposal was recently agreed by Full Council to bestow the same privilege on the RAF St. Athan unit.

- 12.2 As part of this commitment, the Council has held a number of events, such as Armed Forces Day, the Festival of Remembrance and Raising the Flag, to promote awareness of the Armed Forces community and celebrate the role they play in keeping local communities safe.
- 12.3 Further initiatives are provided under the Covenant, including a blanket scheme of free swimming for all Veterans; whilst a host of other initiatives are provided on the basis of individual circumstances, including:
- Concessionary bus travel.
 - Council Tax reduction.
 - Advice and signposting to specialist organisations such as the Royal British Legion.
 - HR and leave policies for families of Personnel.

The Council also employs a dedicated Armed Forces Covenant Officer and has recently submitted a grant application for a Veterans Support role within the Customer Services team.

- 12.4 The level of support provided has recently led to the Authority becoming the first and only Council in Wales to receive the prestigious Gold Award from the Ministry of Defence, and one of only two Welsh Authorities to be formally recognised by the MOD since 2014.
- 12.5 Council Members recently approved plans to implement a 25% discount on the fees and charges applied to burials of Veterans, making Rhondda Cynon Taf the first Council in the UK to introduce such a measure. The scheme will run as a pilot for the 2018/19 financial year, after Scrutiny Members accepted concerns that it was not possible to sufficiently gauge the demand, or accurately ascertain the size of the local Armed Forces population. There is scope for this pilot to be increased over the 2019/20 financial year and beyond, should Members feel this necessary.

13.0 CONCLUSION

- 13.1 The Council is continuing to take steps to make effective use of social media and electronic channels to increase engagement, both internally and externally. The increased coverage of Scrutiny will improve the decision-making process, whilst also promoting the awareness of the work undertaken by the respective Committees through the establishment of the dedicated social media channel and monthly blog updates. This compliments the ongoing work to grow the Council's reach through the various corporate social

media accounts, which provide an invaluable platform for the Local Authority to disseminate messages to residents.

- 13.2 Whilst staff sickness rates continue to be an issue, the Council has allocated an additional £130,000 to support efforts to reduce rates across all departments by allowing resources to be focused on areas where the highest rates persist, and developing the ability of managers to establish improving attendance trends.
- 13.3 The Council continues to promote equality and diversity in supporting the LGBT community within the workforce, and was recently recognised as part of Stonewall's Top 100 employers for the second consecutive year. Through the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council is also providing a range of support services to the local Armed Forces Community, and was recently awarded the prestigious Gold Award from the Ministry of Defence in recognition of this. The pilot 25% discount on burial fees for veterans illustrates the pioneering approach taken by Rhondda Cynon Taf in supporting past and present servicemen and women, and their families.

