

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013 at 4.00 pm.

**Present:**

County Borough Councillor G Stacey – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors:**

H Boggis	(Mrs) J Cass	J Davies
(Mrs) M E Davies	P Griffiths	M A Norris
G Stacey	(Mrs) M Tegg	(Mrs) J S Ward
P Wasley	M Weaver	E Webster
D W Weeks	R A Yeo	

**Cabinet Members in attendance in relation to Agenda Item 3**

P Cannon – Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Community Safety

C Middle – Cabinet Member for Social Justice

C Willis – Cabinet Member for Human Resources and Service Improvement

**Officers:**

Mr P J Lucas – Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Ms J Cook – Director of Regeneration & Planning

Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance and Resources

Ms Stephanie Davies – Head of Financial Reporting

Ms Rosann Edwards – Head of Customer Care

Ms Ann Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**16. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor S Lloyd.

**17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**RESOLVED** to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct there were no declarations of personal interest in relation to the agenda.

**18 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013 be approved as a correct record.

**19. CHANGE TO AGENDA**

With the agreement of the Chairman, Agenda Item 5 was brought forward.

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES**

**20. TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2012/13 REVIEW**

The Head of Financial Reporting reported to Members on the Annual Treasury Management Review which had been presented to Council on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013 and was appended to the report for Members' consideration.

The Head of Financial Reporting highlighted a number of key points, namely

- That the Council has complied with all relevant Codes of Practice, regulations and guidance;
- Net Capital Charges for the year were within budget;
- Compliance has been achieved in terms of all Prudential and Treasury indicators;
- The Council continues to adopt a low risk strategy in terms of investing and borrowing;
- The Council continues to receive dividends in respect of the investment in Heritable Bank that defaulted during October 2008.

With reference to the last bullet point, the Head of Financial Reporting informed the Committee that since the production of the report to Council, the Authority had received its last dividend payment and the final position was that the Authority had received 94% (£2.82M) of the original investment and this was higher than originally expected. She confirmed that the Council had not incurred any 3<sup>rd</sup> party costs in relation to the administration process.

The Head of Financial Reporting updated Members in respect of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme reporting that as of the end of August 2013 there had been 43 loans supported which had utilised £546,000 of the £1m indemnity. She explained that the £1m placed with Lloyds is an indemnity necessary for the Lloyds scheme and was not a form of investment for purely "treasury" purposes. The £1m indemnity deposit is necessary to allow those taking part in the scheme to access 95% Loan to Value mortgages rather than the usual 75%.. The Head of Financial Reporting also explained that the scheme had been widely advertised when it was launched including the Council's website and Outlook. However, there was no on-going promotion of the scheme.

**RESOLVED** to note the content of the report;

## **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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

The Service Director, Performance and Resources introduced the report which set out the draft 2012/13 improvement priority assessment for the priority which had been allocated to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee for 2012/13, namely Better Customer Contact. He explained that the Council's draft Annual Delivery report would aim to set out what difference each improvement priority had made during 2012/13; areas for improvement in 2013/14; and the contribution made toward the Community Strategy.

The Service Director, Performance and Resources explained that as part of the process the Committee had a key role in reviewing and challenging the draft assessment that would be included in the 2012/13 delivery report and in addition he would welcome Members' feedback in relation to what extent the assessment correlated with performance updates the Committee had received during 2012/13 and to what extent the assessment set out the difference the improvement priority area had made or helped to make in 2012/13.

To assist Members in considering the above issues, the Head of Customer Care provided the Committee with a presentation in relation to the information set out in the draft assessment and the evidence in support of service performance for 2012/13.

Following the presentation Members thanked the Head of Customer Care for the information provided and she responded to Members' questions.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) to note the information received;
- (ii) that the views of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee be passed to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in consideration of the Council's Draft Annual Delivery Report as follows:

#### **Priority Area – Better Customer Contact**

The Head of Customer Care explained that it was intended to have a draft Digital Plan in place by quarter 4 of 2013/14 and that it would be aligned to the Digital Wales Plan which contained a number of themes. The Customer Contact actions would support the Transforming Public Services theme and key to this would be the continued drive to widen

access to public services on-line and having in place the infrastructure to support this.

A Member asked whether the service charged for the provision of blue badges and was informed that the Authority did not charge for this service but was aware that some local authorities did apply a £10 fee.

A Member commented that her visits to the Customer Contact Centre at Ty Elai were always pleasurable and enlightening. Whilst she appreciated that the average waiting times for daytime calls is under 53 seconds, she asked whether there were peak times when it was higher. The Head of Customer Care explained that the way in which the staff were organised meant that peaks and troughs were reduced by a single team of multi-skilled staff in order to meet demand. She pointed out that occasionally there could be a problem if for instance there was a high level of Council Tax enquiries perhaps as a result of the mailing of the annual bills and this coincided with an unforeseen event such as flooding. She reported that over 70% of calls were answered within 60 seconds.

The Member also asked whether a landlord owning multiple properties would need to make a call for each property if he or she wanted to pay their council tax or could it be done in one call. The Head of Customer Care explained that there was no reason why an advisor could not take several payments in one call subject to verifying that the caller was the account holder in each case.

A Member asked how the service complied with Welsh language requirements. The Head of Customer Care reported that 17% of the staff across the service are Welsh speaking and that the Call Centre and One4All services can respond in Welsh and can offer appointments with a Welsh speaker. The website 'publishing' workflow ensured that the content was translated by the Welsh Translation Unit prior to publication. She added that as far as she was aware the service had only ever received one complaint in relation to a Welsh language issue.

A Member welcomed the introduction of a text phone for the audibly impaired but queried why the take up was so low. The Head of Customer Care explained that it was a very specialist rather than a general need. She added that the text number had been passed to all Homecare staff so that they are able to pass this on to their clients. The service also worked closely with the Sensory Team in relation to accessibility standards including the text phone and website.

A Member commented that it was pleasing to note that the customer satisfaction level in respect of the Customer Contact Centre was high. However, he pointed out that in his role as a councillor he tended to only hear from those who informed him that they had waited for several minutes and then given up. He asked whether there was a way of

measuring how long people waited before abandoning their calls to obtain a better picture.

The Head of Customer Care explained that for wait times the systems could report on a range of parameters and she would follow through with performance colleagues to consider an extended suite of indicators e.g. % of calls answered in 60 and 90 seconds.

She reported that callers were informed of what position they were in the queue and this was positively received, therefore some callers chose to abandon and call back. Equally some customers abandoned as the messaging answered their enquiry e.g. 'no change to bin collection day' during a bank holiday week would be played and a customer would then abandon the call without the need for an advisor.

A Member noted that the Council now used Twitter and asked whether Council alerts could be sent to e-mail addresses for those who did not wish to register with Twitter. The Head of Customer Care reported that the service was currently investigating the use of e-mail alerts to inform the service plan for 2014-15

A Member commented that the report did not mention the dedicated Member enquiry service which he felt was excellent. However, he did have a concern in relation to the delay in re-locating the Emergency Duty Team. The Head of Customer Care reported that the delayed relocation has not impacted on the customer but that the relocation now offered opportunities for closer integration of the service with wider Out of Hours services at the same location e.g. Homecare / Lifeline. The EDT move was part of a wider restructure and consultation process led by the Group Director of Community & Childrens Services.

In conclusion, the Director of Performance and Resources drew Members' attention to the questions posed in paragraph 4.5 of the report and Members agreed that that the draft assessment set out under Appendix B was in accord with the performance updates received by the Committee during 2012/13 and that the assessment reflected how the action plan had driven improvement.

## **REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **22. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT – 30 JUNE 2012 (QUARTER 1)**

The Service Director, Performance and Resources presented Members with the Exception Report which provided financial and performance management information for the Corporate Services Group and the Chief Executive's Division. The report provided the position at the end of the first quarter in respect of revenue budgets, capital budgets and treasury management as well as outlining operational performance in relation to the Wales Programme for Improvement action plan for

Physical Regeneration of the our Communities which is a new priority for the Committee having previously come under the remit of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He also outlined the overall performance indicator results within the remit of the Committee. Members were asked to consider the key issues as presented in the exception report which had been taken from the main report that had been presented to the Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013.

The Service Director, Performance and Resources reported on the overall sickness absence trends for the Corporate Services Group and Chief Executive's Division and explained that whilst the first quarter figure was an improvement when compared with quarter 1 for 2012/13, it was still higher than the quarter 1 figure for 2011/12. He assured Members that managers were provided with support from Human Resources and complied with the policy put in place.

In considering the correlation between sickness absence levels and headcount a Member suggested that the level of sickness absence within Corporate Estates seemed high. The Service Director, Performance and Resources reported that he would discuss the matter with the Director of Corporate Estates and provide an up date at the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED** to note the information in the report.

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

### **23. THE COUNCIL'S REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN THE COUNTY BOROUGH**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported on the progress in relation to the Council's review of the community boundary and electoral arrangements within the County Borough and the outcome of the meeting of the Committee's Electoral Administration Scrutiny Working Group held on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013. He reported that the second phase of the consultation would commence on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013 and would last for 3 months and explained that the scrutiny working group would meet to consider the responses received. He also asked the Committee to endorse a proposed change to the membership of the scrutiny working group.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) to endorse the action proposed by the Electoral Administration Scrutiny Working Group as set out at paragraphs 4.4 & 4.5;
- (iii) that County Borough Councillor E Webster should replace County Borough Councillor M Weaver on the Electoral Administration Scrutiny Working Group.

**URGENT ITEM**

**24. GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

With the permission of the Chairman, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services took the opportunity to advise the Committee on a newly published document by the Westminster Government's Cabinet Office in relation to the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). He drew Members' attention to page 9 of the document which set out what actions could be taken to support the introduction of IER and explained that the Electoral Administration Scrutiny Working Group would be considering this as part of its remit. Members of the Committee were provided with a copy of the documentation and informed that it would be circulated to all Members.

**RESOLVED** to note the information provided.

G Stacey  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 5.20 pm.

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