

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, 7th October, 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	P Griffiths	(Mrs) S Jones
(Mrs) C Leyshon	(Mrs) S Rees	G Smith
R W Smith	(Mrs) J S Ward	P Wasley
E Webster	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

(Ms) J Cook – Director of Regeneration & Planning

Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement

Ms S Dennis – Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment & Training
Coordinator

Mr D James – Youth Engagement & Participation Service Manager

Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

22. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor C Williams.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

24 MINUTES

RESOLVED – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on the 16th September 2015 subject to noting that County Borough Councillor Paul Wasley had tendered his apology for non attendance.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION & PLANNING

25. PROGRESS ON THE DELIVERY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FUNDING PROGRAMMES IN WALES 2014-2020

The Director of Regeneration and Planning began by introducing Ms Syd Dennis and Mr Derek James to the Committee who both had a key role in youth engagement and had an in depth knowledge of the European Social Fund Programme.

The Director reported that protracted negotiations between the European Commission and the Wales European Funding Office (WEFO) had delayed the approval of the new Welsh programmes which will operate between January 2014 and December 2020 (for approval of projects) and to the end of 2023 (for the delivery). She explained that the new projects would be governed by a number of key guiding principles but that these new principles will mean that there will be fewer opportunities for local government to lead on the delivery of projects. She reported on the two principle funding programmes available to the West Wales and Valleys are which are the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund programmes. She explained that the European Rural Development Fund is also available in Wales but that only three wards in the County Borough are eligible ie Maerdy, Rhigos and Ynysybwl and the money available does not allow for any significant works.

The Director reported on the projects being undertaken sitting within each funding stream and in particular reported on the ESF Inspire to Work Programme involving local authorities in the valleys areas aimed at supporting young people who are not in education, employment or training. She also informed Members that the type of town centre regeneration project supported by the last ERDF programme will not now be eligible nor will road infrastructure in town centres. She explained that there will still be some opportunities for targeted urban regeneration including town centre key building and site development through the Welsh government project now called Building for the Future. However, these projects have to be based on regional prioritisation which in SE Wales is being carried out by SEWDER (South East Wales Directors of Environment and Regeneration). This has resulted in twelve projects being forwarded to the Welsh Government for consideration, five of these proposals being submitted by Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Following consideration of the report officers responded to Members' questions.

A Member referred to the recent call by the TUC to support job creation within the valleys and asked whether resources could be targeted to areas of greatest need.

The Director explained that the Communities for Work programme was targeted at the Communities First areas and was an example of support for

such areas whilst the Welsh Government's ERDF programme was about economic benefit across the region.

Several Members expressed their concern in relation to the co-ordination of projects in the past and it was commented that in some areas there was far too much duplication and overlapping of community programmes.

The Director of Regeneration & Planning agreed with these sentiments and explained that one of the challenges they face in planning future projects was unpicking what initiatives were already in place. She added that WEFO was aware of this issue.

Members also voiced concern that the town centre enhancement schemes possible under the old programme would no longer be available. A Member questioned whether the Local Development Plan would be affected.

The Director of Regeneration & Planning explained that there would be some opportunities through the Building for the Future programme but that these projects had to be considered on a regional basis. She explained that the LDP was still an important document in delivering regeneration for Rhondda Cynon Taf even though it might not tie into WEFOs brief.

A Member questioned whether it was still the intention of the Welsh Government to proceed with the improvements to the Rhondda Cynon Taf section of the A4065 Heads of the Valleys road at some stage.

The Director of Regeneration & Planning reported that as far as she was aware the intention was still there to proceed but could not give an indication on timescales. She noted that the project would not be dependent on the availability of European Funding.

A Member pointed to the importance of supporting Small and Medium Business Enterprises (SMEs) and questioned whether support was provided through the Council or the Welsh Government.

The Director explained that through the last round of projects the Council had undertaken a significant role but not so this time and support would mainly be through Business Wales delivering support through their website rather than the 'face to face' support which was provided by the Council.

A Member questioned the reasoning behind the decision not to participate in the Bridges into Work 2 project.

Ms Dennis and Mr James explained to the Committee that whilst Bridges into Work 2 might be a worthwhile programme for some areas, their analysis highlighted that there was already a range of community programmes in place within Rhondda Cynon Taf to support training and employment opportunities and that being the case it was felt that the resources that would be needed to provide match funding could be better used elsewhere in ways that would add value and provide a clear pathway for young people.

The Director noted that in these times of limited resources, it is important when considering funding opportunities, that it is the outcomes which are key. Chasing funding for the sake of funding is not appropriate, and the value for money for Rhondda Cynon Taf residents, must be the priority. In some circumstances this may mean that the Council does not participate in particular externally funded projects which do not accord with the Council's priorities, or duplicate existing provision.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be asked to write to the Welsh Government expressing the concerns of the Committee, namely that the guiding principles of the new programme of European Funding provides fewer opportunities for local government to lead on the delivery of projects.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

26. COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 1 (30TH JUNE 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 June 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 performance exceptions pointing out whether these had been aligned within the themed scrutiny work programmes or not.

The Chairman asked for the views of the Committee with regard to the presentation of the information and Members commented that whilst they were happy with the content of the slides, they felt that it might be helpful to have highlighted the scrutiny committee with responsibility for each issue.

In relation to the reporting on the cleanliness of streets and highways, a Member asked who undertook these inspections, i.e. Council employees or an independent body.

The Service Director explained that inspections were carried out by Council Officers throughout the year and in addition independent inspections were also carried out by Keep Wales Tidy, the results of which were publicly reported at year end within the Council's 'Keeping Rhondda Cynon Taf Clean and Green' priority action plan.

A Member asked that more information be provided to the Committee in relation to the worsening response times of the Contact Centre pointing out that people would base their perception of the Council on their experiences in dealing with the Contact Centre.

The Service Director explained that in autumn 2014 Cabinet agreed a service change within the Council's Contact Centre to amend the service standard for call answering to an average of 90 seconds. Since this time the service has implemented the service change and has also experienced temporary staffing

vacancies that resulted in average call answering performance, during quarter 1, being worse than the standard of 90 seconds. The Service Director added that the service is making arrangements for the staffing vacancies to be recruited to, to support an improvement in call answering performance, and an up date will be reported within the Council's quarter 2 performance report.

The Member also asked whether he could be provided with more information in relation to the South Wales Metro feasibility study.

The Service Director reported that he would liaise with the appropriate officer and respond directly.

A Member referred to the sickness absence across the Council and expressed her concern hoping that quarter 2 would see a reduction.

The Service Director informed the Committee that changes had recently been made to the Council's Sickness Absence policy. He suggested that the changes would need time to bed in and may not have an effect on Quarter 2 sickness absence results. He also pointed to the difficult and challenging roles carried out, for example, by the Community & Children's Services Group, which had the highest levels of sickness absence, and indicated that all Council service areas would need to keep the area of sickness absence under close review.

The Chairman of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee informed the Committee of the intentions of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in working toward addressing the below target performance in some areas of the 'Supporting Vulnerable Adults and Older People to Live Independently' priority action plan.

The Chairman of the Public Services Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Committee questioned whether there would be real ownership of issues under the new scrutiny performance arrangements.

In response, the Chairman pointed out that all the scrutiny committees were working toward a common good and whilst they had all developed full work programmes there was an element of flexibility to allow issues to be referred from the Finance & Performance Committee.

A Member voiced his concern around the level of Capital spend at the end of the first quarter. He also pointed out that the issue of Delayed Transfers of Care was not solely down to the Council but was also dependent on health care packages being in place.

The Service Director explained that the capital expenditure position reported was not unusual at quarter 1 and assured Members that this area was closely monitored internally by officers and up dates would continue to be reported publicly on a quarterly basis as part of the Council's Performance Reports.

The Chairman of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee agreed with the Member's second comment, in respect of delayed transfers of care, explaining that it was the intention of his Committee to consider all the factors in due course.

In closing, the Director of Legal & Democratic Services directed Members to pages 62 and 63 of the agenda pack which set out some of the performance exceptions that align to scrutiny work programmes and some that do not.

Following consideration it was **RESOLVED** to refer the following key performance exceptions not currently picked up by work programmes to the relevant scrutiny committees for review in more detail (taking into account the up dated quarter 2 performance positions which are scheduled to be reported to Cabinet in November 2015):

- Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
 - Estyn school inspection results; and
 - Initial assessments where child seen by a social worker.
- Health and Well Being Scrutiny committee
 - Homelessness – the average no. of days homeless households spent in B&B accommodation.
- Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee
 - The no. of local business submitted bid / tenders for Council contracts.

27. PROPOSED SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Legal & Democratic Services referred Members to the draft work programme set out at Appendix 1 for approval.

The Performance Co-ordinator referred to the challenges facing Education and Community & Children's Services in particular, in improving performance and hoped that the Committee's work in relation to target setting would support improvement.

Following consideration it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to approve the work programme for the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16 as set out at appendix 1 to the report;
- (ii) that the work programme be amended as necessary during the year to reflect the demands of the work.

28. REVIEW OF TARGET SETTING ARRANGEMENTS

Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Committee held on 16th September 2015, it was agreed that a review of performance indicator targets be undertaken. As a result Members were provided with baseline information

of performance indicator targets set by Council services for the 2015/16 financial year.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement reported on the information provided and asked Members to consider the draft scope set out at 3.2 of the report and also give consideration to the best approach in relation to selecting the performance indicators to examine in more detail and also whether the Committee wished to undertake the work as a whole or form a smaller working group or groups.

The Chairman asked the Committee to consider how they wished to go about this work and following discussion it was **RESOLVED:**

- (i) to undertake a review of Target Setting Arrangements, the scope being:
 - to review the extent of the Council's ambition in driving improved performance through the setting of stretching targets; and
 - to establish the extent to which the Council explains the reason(s) for the targeted levels of performance it aims to meet.
- (ii) that a Working Group be formed to consist of a minimum of one representative from each of the themed scrutiny committees;
- (iii) the selection of the range of indicators for review to be undertaken by the Chair and Vice Chair in consultation with the Service Director, Performance & Improvement and the Scrutiny Support Officer.

M A Norris
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm.

