

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013 at 5 pm.

**Present:**

County Borough Councillor R K Turner – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors:**

S Bradwick	(Mrs) J Cass	G R Davies
P Griffiths	P Jarman	(Mrs) C Leyshon
(Mrs) S Rees	G Stacey	G Thomas
P Wasley	C J Williams	

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

County Borough Councillor M Forey – Partnerships & Adult Social Services  
County Borough Councillor (Mrs) M Webber – Council Business & Public Relations

**Officers in Attendance:**

Mr P J Lucas – Director of Legal & Democratic Service  
Ms J Cook – Director of Regeneration & Planning  
Mr C Lee – Director of Financial Services  
Mr N Elliott – Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing  
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement  
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors H Boggis, (Mrs) A Crimmings, (Mrs) M E Davies, G Hopkins and M Norris.

**9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**10. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

## **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **11. 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 assessments for the priorities which had been allocated to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for 2012/13, namely Regeneration of Our Communities both Physical Regeneration and Social Regeneration; and Medium Term Service Planning. 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 assessments that would be included in the 2012/13 delivery report and in addition he would welcome Members' feedback in relation to what extent the assessments correlated with performance updates the Committee had received during 2012/13 and to what extent the assessments set out the difference the improvement priority area had made or helped to make in 2012/13.

The Committee was circulated with the feedback from the four service scrutiny committees in relation to the improvement priority assessments within their remit and the Service Director, Performance and Resources pointed to the cross cutting role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee welcoming any additional feedback.

To assist Members in considering the above issues, , the respective Directors provided the Committee with presentations in relation to the information set out in the draft assessments for their service areas and the evidence in support of service performance for 2012/13 and at the conclusion of each presentation, Members questioned the relevant director in relation to the information provided.

#### **Regeneration of our Communities – Physical Regeneration – Director of Regeneration & Planning**

Members raised concerns regarding reports in the national press in relation to falls which had taken place in a section of Taff Street, Pontypridd. The Director of Regeneration & Planning explained that the Council was very aware of the issue and was working behind the scenes to access the precise situation and take remedial action if necessary. A Member referred to the range of advice received in relation to work carried out in Aberdare Town Centre and the Director of Regeneration & Planning assured Members that

the Council had consulted with a number of stakeholder groups in relation to the regeneration works in both towns.

A Member referred to the failure rate of businesses in Rhondda Cynon Taf and asked whether it was linked to high business rates and rental costs. The Director of Regeneration & Planning reported that in the retail sector particularly, businesses report that these issues are challenging. She went on to say that there were a high number of start ups but that if these could be sustained, they would make a very positive contribution to the economic base, She reported that the Council had been working with businesses and had in fact surveyed the businesses to better understand their needs. The Council had also been working with other agencies such as Business in Focus to particularly review business failures. She explained that there were a number of reasons for business failure and there was a need to tailor support to the specific needs of a business. She added that whilst retailers often cite rates and rental costs as a reason for failure she explained that businesses more frequently cite access finance and difficulty in developing sound business models as barriers. There was a need to establish a way of ensuring clear support is provided at the initial ideas stage of a project.

A Member commented on how much improved the Fountain area of Taff Street, Pontypridd now looked and asked whether there had been feedback from local businesses. The Director reported that traders were very supportive of the work and the improved look of the Town Centre now that the works were complete. She explained that due to the nature of the work it was inevitable that there had been some disruption. She reported that information from some traders is that trade has improved. She noted that the footfall trends in both towns show increase footfall. However, there was now a need to keep working with traders to help them in other ways to help them convert the footfall into trade.

With reference to page 27 of the assessment, a Member asked whether Mr Barnett was still employed with the contractor of the Aberdare project. The Director reported that she was pleased to confirm that he was.

A Member referred to the 414 new dwellings which had been built in the County Borough and asked whether there had been any community infrastructure improvements delivered and would it be necessary to increase public services or amenities such as schools as a result. The Director explained that the 414 dwellings had been built across a range of sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf. She explained that as part of the planning assessment the impact of any development is assessed and if considered significant this would have translated to a Section 106 contribution, either financial or 'in kind'. The range of contributions across all the sites ranged from very minor ecology provision to more significant agreements. She added that the purpose of the agreements is to mitigate the impacts of developments.

A Member asked whether in light of welfare reform were there signs that developers were moving toward building smaller properties; were they looking to convert larger buildings into flats. The Director confirmed that there was

now a definite trend to convert properties into smaller units and added that the Registered Social Landlords were also looking at how best they could provide smaller units.

The Member asked what the Council could do in response to some developers when they claim that they could not afford to meet their Section 106 commitments. The Director explained that the viability of a project would have been considered at the start and that the Council preferred to work with developers in an 'open book' way to ensure that what is proposed is realistic. She explained that developers often cited the need to provide affordable homes as a burden but she pointed out to Members that there were ways of surmounting these issues.

A Member asked whether the 'Grampian condition' could be used more whereby the Section 106 works have to be carried out prior to the start of the development. The Director explained that this condition was more frequently used with regard to any highway works which would be required as a result of the development. However, Section 106 agreements can be more varied. It was getting the right mechanism to deliver the necessary works.

With regard to the announcement from Persimmon Homes, the Director reported that the Council had met with the managing director and this had proved to be a useful meeting for both parties. In addition, she pointed out that there is an Officer Forum which meets regularly with developers who operate in this area which they find very useful and a recent Welsh Government inquiry into house building cited the idea of the Council's Forum as being useful.

A Member commented that the Local Development Plan made it clear that there was a need to encourage development in the Northern areas of the County Borough and pointed out that it was vital to the future prosperity of the area that there was a mix of different types of dwellings.

A Member referred to the funding of social enterprises and suggested that as a result of recent Council proposals there could be an increased interest in these as people strive to keep services within their communities. She asked whether funding would remain available for these types of projects. The Director explained that the funding from the South East Wales Community Economic Development Programme fund was already almost fully committed. However, she explained that there were other ways to support such enterprises and it was clear that these types of social enterprises were becoming increasingly significant and her service would look to provide support, advice and signposting. She explained that there will be a new round of European funding coming through but at present the detail of potential projects is not determined.

A Member pointed to the difficulties facing those attempting to start up small businesses in accessing support and advice. The Director reported that advice was available from a number of agencies, some funded by the Welsh Government and others provided by the voluntary sector. She explained that

her service was looking at its business support function to consider how any gaps in provision can be filled and signposting to services improved.

A Member commented that the fact that the Authority could bid for funding from the European Structural Fund each round showed that the fund was not working as it was intended to increase the GDP of the area. He commented that he would prefer to see more money invested in young people. The Director commented that the evaluation of projects under the previous round of funding is providing useful information about the most successful schemes and will help to inform projects in the new round. In addition there is a current focus on developing projects across the South East region and could provide regional impact going forward.

**Regeneration of Our Communities - Social Regeneration – Service**  
Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing

A Member thanked the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing for providing a range of updated statistics for Rhondda Cynon Taf through his presentation. She asked whether there would be any replacement programmes for the Genesis Project and Building the Future Together (BTFT). The Service Director reported that new ESF programme would provide an opportunity to build on some of the success already achieved. There would be a gap in provision for Lone Parents following the closure of Genesis by Welsh Government and this would be considered in developing projects for the new ESF programme. He explained that when the BTFT programme ended in September 2013 a number of staff employed by the programme, including Learning Coaches, Youth Coaches and Key Workers have now been directly employed by Schools instead, which has resulted in the valued support and engagement arrangements put in place through BTFT continuing. He explained that Fframwaith had used Families First funding to appoint three post 16 Transitional Support Workers as part of the “Your Future First” programme to support young people aged 16-24 to overcome the barriers young people face into Education, Employment and Training. By increasing skills and understanding through the provision of pre-engagement information, guidance and motivation, the over arching goal is to engage and empower young people in decision making for their future. The Council had also invested additional funding to pilot the development of a work placement scheme and as well continue the “Care to Work” for Looked after Children that was previously funded through the BTFT programme.

The Service Director also explained that work was being undertaken to explore the possible further extension of the Bridges into Work (BIW) European funded programme to December 2014 from March 2014 in order to dovetail BIW into the new ESF programme.

A Member commented on the availability of up to date figures and the Service Director reported that data was obtained from a variety of sources. He explained that often the Council was dependent on other agencies and informed Members that many of the statistics contained within his

presentation came from the DWP's Nomis site and whilst there was an issue with regard to timeliness this was improving. He added that the child poverty figure of 26.7% had been produced by the Welsh Government but had not been updated since its inception several years ago, probably due to the difficulty in calculating it.

The Service Director, Performance and Resources commented that the issue of the up to date figures was a valuable point and he would amend the assessment to reflect the new information.

A Member commented that whilst she was appreciative of the work carried out by the Credit Union, she noticed that there seemed to be a shift toward more business lending. She asked whether the Authority had any influence with regard to ensuring that the poorer areas of the county borough were not at a disadvantage if they did not have access to IT facilities. The Service Director agreed that this was an area of concern which had been identified as a result of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Working Group and he suggested that this concern could be picked up through the Group's final recommendations.

The Member referred to Page 43 of the report which related to the performance indicators for homeless families being placed in bed & breakfast accommodation. The Service Director explained that there were pressures as a result of the 'bedroom' tax and that the housing stock of the social housing providers was mostly 3 bedroom family type accommodation. He explained that the Council had a good working relationship with the social housing providers and work was underway to examine different models to take forward. In addition, work was on-going with the private sector landlords to investigate the availability of affordable accommodation in this area.

A Member queried the lack of interest shown in relation to the Supported Lodging Scheme. The Service Director explained that there had not been a lack of interest from the social housing providers; but from local families and individuals to become involved and provide accommodation and support within their own home. He explained that work was taking place with social housing providers to develop a range of accommodation and support for young people in order to meet an ever increasing demand need.

A Member referred to the number of eligible children taking up Free School Meals. The Service Director reported that a great deal of work had been carried out by the Housing Benefits section in identifying eligible pupils and work had also been undertaken with education and schools to make the meals a more attractive option. He explained that previous research had indicated a number of factors which affected take-up e.g. quality of the food, the environment, the availability of 'fast food' in the vicinity and stigma. He reported that most schools were moving to cashless systems in an attempt to remedy this issue.

In relation to the homelessness figures, a Member asked whether these figures related to residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Service Director explained that the figures were for those which the Authority had a

responsibility for and were either residents or former residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf. He reported that a significant issue for the service was the release of former residents from prison. However, he explained that the Council had no powers to stop people moving into the area and taking up available accommodation.

### **Medium Term Service Planning – Director of Financial Services**

A Member raised his concern in relation to a recent report brought to the Audit Committee in respect of what should be a 'low risk' area. The report had revealed a number of failings and he suggested that cost savings might be found through more rigorous inspection of potential high income areas. The Director of Financial Services reported that he could not comment on the detail of individual audit reports. However, he reported that ensuring we constantly look for more ways to deliver greater levels of efficiency across all services was a key priority.

A Member referred to the recently announced proposed cuts to services and suggested that there was no correlation between the information in the reports and the proposed actions. The Director of Financial Services reported that the draft assessment reports were looking back on 2012/13 and since then, the projection of cuts to local authority budgets had been significantly increased. He noted earlier this year, a letter had been received from the Welsh Government Minister informing local authorities that the indicative settlements provided alongside the 2012/13 settlement should be ignored and that local authorities should expect 'English style' settlements. The updated medium term projections require much greater budget reductions than previously calculated. The Council would continue to target any available resources toward the priority areas and try to support where possible all the Improvement Plan areas. He added that in terms of the current context, the key principles would be that services needed to be equitable and sustainable and that the Council would continue to provide a service that was at least as good as, or better if possible, than that being received across Wales. As an example he explained that whilst the proposal for Cabinet consideration next week for changes to the Meals on Wheels service was adjusting service levels in respect of daily deliveries, the service would still be at a level above that delivered by other authorities in Wales.

A Member asked what impact the energy efficiency measures had made. The Director of Financial Services reported that he did not have the actual details of cost savings but did have examples such as the move to LED lighting, awareness training and automatic meter readings to identify high usage. He reported that he would provide Members with the detail.

In conclusion, the Chairman asked Members to reflect on the information circulated in respect of the feedback from the four service scrutiny committees in relation to the assessment process and asked if there were any further queries.

A Member referred to the feedback from the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee and the provision of Blue Badges and asked whether there was any intention to introduce charging and queried if there were any associated costs to the Council such as GP assessments. The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that Welsh Government legislation prevented the Council from charging other than for lost or damaged replacement cards (£10 per card). He explained that he would check the detail but that it was his understanding that the Council did not fund any assessments by GPs in cases where they are needed.

The Service Director, Performance & Resources thanked Members for their input into the process and explained that where necessary the assessments would be amended to reflect feedback.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the draft assessments set out under Appendices B, D and F were in accord with the performance updates received by the Committee during 2012/13 and that the assessments reflected how the action plans had driven improvement and that the new 2013/14 improvement priority action plans addressed the areas for further improvement. Members were also content with the conclusions of the four service scrutiny committees.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the content of the report;
- (ii) That the views of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to the draft 2012/13 improvement priority assessments as set out above be taken into consideration when drafting the Annual Delivery Report for Council on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013;
- (iii) To endorse the comments of the four service scrutiny committees and that their feedback be taken into consideration when drafting the Annual Delivery Report for Council on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

**REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**12. FEEDBACK REPORT: SCRUTINY SERVICE EXCEPTION REPORTS – FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR THE 1<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER (30 JUNE 2013)**

The Director of Financial Services presented the Committee with the Performance Exception Reports for Quarter 1 considered by each of the individual Service Scrutiny Committees together with feedback on some of the discussion points raised at the meetings.

The Committee was provided with an overview of the Council's position as a whole and key figures relating to budget and performance across



the Council were highlighted for Members' consideration. Members were asked to consider the Council's Health Check included as a separate Appendix that provided a snapshot of the Authority's first quarter performance and also the Wales Programme for Improvement Action Plans in respect of Social Regeneration and Medium Term Service Planning which are specifically within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In relation to the 2012/13 Outcome Agreement, he explained that the Authority was waiting for final sign off from the Welsh Government before receipt of the grant. He explained that a new framework would be in place for 2013/14 and that dialogue was still on-going with the Welsh Government. It was hoped to report further on this in Quarter 2

The Chairman drew Members' attention to the feedback from the four service scrutiny committees and asked whether Members had any questions for officers in respect of the two Wales Programme for Improvement Action Plans within the Committee's remit. However, it was agreed that these service areas had been fully discussed under agenda item 3.

**RESOLVED:** to note the content of the report and the feedback from the four service scrutiny committees.

**13. DESIGNATED PERSON ORDER NUMBER 1 UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (WALES) MEASURE 2011 – CONSULTATION**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised Members of the consultation being undertaken by the Welsh Government in respect of the designation of individuals and organisations which will as a result of the Order be subject to scrutiny by local authority scrutiny committees. He referred Members to the consultation document attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the list of questions annexed upon which comments were being sought. He explained that the Democratic Services Scrutiny Committee had also considered the consultation document at its meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

Members considered the consultation document and agreed with the suggested bodies put forward by the Welsh Government for inclusion in the first Order, namely,

- Local Health Boards
- NHS Trusts
- Fire & Rescue Authorities
- National Park Authorities
- Registered Social Landlords
- Third Sector organisations that are delivering services to the public.

In addition, the Committee agreed that the following additional bodies should be included:

- that the NHS Trusts should include the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust;

- Natural Resources Wales
- Network Rail.

The Committee did not feel that it was necessary to designate Community Councils given the already good working relationships in existence.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the contents of the report.
- (ii) That the comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be provided to Council on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013, along with those of the Democratic Services Committee, to enable the Authority to respond to the Welsh Government by the deadline of 21<sup>st</sup> November 2013.

**14. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14**

The Committee considered the report and it was **RESOLVED** to agree the work programme for 2013/14 as set out at Appendix 1.

R K Turner  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm.