

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, 15th October 2014 at 5 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor R K Turner – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

H Boggis	G R Davies	(Mrs) M E Davies
P Griffiths	(Mrs) C Leyshon	R Smith
G Stacey	G Thomas	C Willis

Officers in Attendance:

Mr P J Lucas – Director of Legal & Democratic Services
P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance and Improvement
Mr I Evans – Consultation Coordinator
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

In attendance:

Mr N Jones – Service Director, Operational Finance
Mr T Buckle – Wales Audit Office

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Bradwick, (Mrs) J Cass, P Jarman, (Mrs) S Rees, P Wasley and C J Williams.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, the following declarations of personal and non prejudicial interests were received:

County Borough Councillor H Boggis – Agenda Item 5 – “My organisation is in receipt of Communities First funding”.

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) M E Davies – Agenda Item 5 – “Member of Communities First Board, Mid Rhondda”.

County Borough Councillor G R Davies – Agenda Item 5 – “Member of Upper Rhondda Fawr Communities First; Landlord ; provides substance misuse service.

14. MINUTES

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 16th July 2014.

15. CWM TAF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HUB

The Chairman introduced Mr Idris Evans, Consultation Coordinator and welcomed him to the meeting. With the aid of PowerPoint presentation slides, the Consultation Co-ordinator provided Members with an update in relation to the Cwm Taf Community Engagement Hub which had now been operational for 12 months.

The Consultation Co-ordinator reported that the Hub had been launched on the 1st October 2013 and in that time 54 consultations/engagements exercises had been publicised. Whilst most of these exercises had involved either Merthyr Tydfil or Rhondda Cynon Taf Councils, accounting for 75-80% of the use, the Hub had been used by all of the Cwm Taf partners, ie Cwm Taf University Health Board, South Wales Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Interlink and Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil.

The Consultation Co-ordinator explained that the Hub was part of an ESF funded project which was due to end on 30th December 2014. However, it was hoped that the partners would be able to commit to supporting the cost of maintaining the licence for the Hub.

To date the project had delivered on the development of the Hub which was now complete; and through the Hub ensured that the LSB partners provided feedback to citizens and provided a platform for partners to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. The development of a joint consultative toolkit was almost complete. An annual 'Viewpoint Young Person's' survey had been introduced and this year's survey was currently running. This survey provided a good youth perspective on issues such as transportation which could be used to shape services. The Committee was also informed that a survey would be sent out shortly to those attending Merthyr Tydfil's new tertiary college to provide information on the transition process between school and college.

The Consultation Co-ordinator informed Members that since the introduction of the joint Citizens' Panel numbers had continued to grow and of the original 1000 who were enlisted only 30 had dropped out which was very positive as the average dropout rate for such panels is around 33%. In addition to the Panel the consultation team had close links with other established groups such as sports clubs, scouts, the Older Persons Advisory Group and the Over 50 Forum as well as the Communities First clusters. He reported that the Citizens' Panel had been used across RCT and Merthyr Tydfil for activities such as budget/efficiency savings, scrutiny, an over 65 survey and a housing survey.

The Consultation Co-ordinator reported that since the introduction of the Hub, improvements had been made to make it more functional and Members were provided with a brief overview of the Cwm Taf Community Engagement Hub website.

Following the presentation, the Consultation Co-ordinator responded to Members' questions.

A Member asked whether a practical example could be given of the Hub 'making a difference'.

In response to Members asking if there was a practical example of the Hub making a difference, the Consultation Co-ordinator reported that the Hub had been used extensively by Merthyr Tydfil Council as part of their budget consultation exercise for 2013/14 which had enabled more informed decisions to be taken. It has also been used as part of the consultation around service change proposals and a proposal to de-register a care home did not go ahead due to the strength of feeling shown through the consultation feedback. In addition, a plan to withdraw post 16 transport was also withdrawn due to a lack of support highlighted by the response to the consultation. The Consultation Co-ordinator reported that whilst he was more familiar with the work undertaken by Merthyr Tydfil Council he would liaise with his colleagues to obtain examples which related to Rhondda Cynon Taf and provide these to the Scrutiny Support Officer for circulation.

The Committee questioned whether the Hub had been used as part of the consultation undertaken by the Health Board in respect of the South Wales Programme. The Consultation Co-ordinator explained that some areas of the work were co-ordinated by the Corporate Policy and Information Manager such as organising some of the focus groups, informing the questions used on the Hub and circulation of information to the Citizens' Panel.

Members asked whether the Hub now undertook the consultation work for all service areas within the Council and were informed that whilst some services continued to undertake their own surveys the consultation team were often able to help with their activities and whatever they did was placed on the Hub.

Members questioned the promotion of the Hub to the general public and the Consultation Co-ordinator explained that opportunities were taken whenever possible to promote the Hub, such as the use of Twitter, open days and public events. In addition, part of the ESF funding had been used to provide promotional material. The Consultation Co-ordinator explained that as the consultation team was relatively small i.e. three members of staff, a great deal of their work was undertaken electronically.

The Consultation Co-ordinator was asked whether members of the Citizens' Panel could have prejudicial interests and he explained that there was no way of establishing a person's reason for volunteering to be part of the Panel. When recruiting for the Panel the team aimed to ensure that each area of the County Borough was fairly represented based on Census data. Those

subscribing were asked set questions such as address and age to enable the targeting of specific groups depending on the nature of the consultation.

In conclusion, the Chairman commented on his support for the Community Engagement Hub as a vehicle for good public engagement and thanked Mr Evans for his attendance.

RESOLVED: to note the information provided.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

16. **EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 1)**

The Committee was presented with the Performance Exception Reports for Quarter 1 which had been considered by each of the individual service scrutiny committees and the feedback on the discussion points raised at these scrutiny meetings was circulated.

The Chairman referred to the feedback provided and asked Members whether they had anything further to add.

The Chairman of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee re-iterated the concerns of his Committee with regard to the failure to hit recycling targets and the potential financial risk this posed to the Council. He also voiced his concern in relation to the failure to meet the target set for completed treatments in respect of substance misuse and reported that he had requested a breakdown of the figures.

The Chairman of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee reported that her Committee had agreed to form a working group to compare the 'out of county' provision of residential accommodation for children and young people with in-house provision. She also reported on the concern her Members had voiced in relation to the rise in sickness absence rates.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement drew Members' attention to the quarter 1 performance in relation to Medium Term Service Planning action plan and invited Members' questions. He pointed out that Members had recently scrutinised the 2013/14 performance evaluation for this priority area prior to the production of the Council's Annual Delivery report.

A Member referred to the missed target in relation to taking forward a report produced by a graduate officer in respect of strengthening performance management arrangements in partnerships. The Service Director, Performance and Improvement reported that whilst the graduate officer had now left to work for another organisation, the work was being taken forward by the Public Services Partnerships Manager and an update would be provided the Operational Steering Group in due course.

The Chairman asked whether Members could be updated with regard to the hydro-electricity scheme at the Dare Valley Country Park. The Service Director, Performance and Improvement reported that he would request this information from the Director of Corporate Estates.

With reference to the Council Wide Health Check, Members voiced concern with regard to the large number of performance indicators which failed to hit target but recognised that for some areas of work the quarter 1 figures may not be an accurate reflection of performance due to it being early in the year. The Service Director, Performance and Improvement agreed that sometimes this was the case but also pointed out that this year officers had been encouraged to stretch their performance targets taking into account the resources that were available. He referred to the debate which had taken place at the meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee whereupon the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning had spoken of his commitment to set ambitious targets rather than targets which could be easily met but did nothing to heighten the aspirations of schools. Members agreed with this approach but questioned whether this approach was taken across the Authority or was dependent on individual Directors. Attention was also drawn to the comments made by the Wales Audit Office within their Annual Improvement Report which suggested that the Council's improvement ambitions were not articulated clearly enough and questioned the quality and accuracy of some of its performance measures.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement reported on the consistent processes in place with regard to setting and challenging the targets within the 7 priority improvement plans. The Service Director also noted that this year, in response to the recommendations from the Wales Audit Office, Scrutiny Working Groups had become an integral part of the process of reviewing and challenging the draft priority plans prior to their reporting to full Council in June 2014.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES

17. ANNUAL DELIVERY REPORT 2013-14 – SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP FEEDBACK

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement presented the Committee with his report which provided the feedback from the meetings of the scrutiny working groups held in September to review and challenge the draft performance evaluations of the Council's 2013/14 priorities.

The Service Director drew Members' attention to Table 1 within the report which highlighted the main revisions to the evaluations as a result of each Scrutiny Working Group's challenge.

With reference to the performance evaluation for the Physical Regeneration Action Plan, a Member questioned the level of investment which had been

needed to help create and / or support jobs as a result of the various investment schemes. The Member explained that this information could be used as a 'value for money' indicator and the Service Director indicated that he would make enquiries with the service area to obtain this information.

The Chairman of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee referred to the evaluation for the Social Regeneration Action Plan and raised his concern regarding the reference to the high numbers of people presenting as homeless and reported that he intended to add this issue to the work programme of his Committee.

The Chairman remarked that he was pleased to see that the comments of the scrutiny working groups had been acted upon. He referred to the earlier presentation in relation to community engagement which he considered to be an important issue and suggested that this be included in the Medium Term Service Planning action plan for 2014/15. The Service Director, Performance and Improvement agreed to take this forward.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement sought Members' feedback on what they considered to be positive and the not so positive aspects of the recently undertaken scrutiny working group process (around each performance evaluation). Members fed back the following points:

Positives

- Useful to inform scrutiny work programme
- Provided Members with the opportunity to consider the information
- Information could confirm your impression of a service

Negatives

- Timescales
- Too late to inform future priorities
- Need to align priorities with service changes

Action

- Member training
- Cross cutting working groups

Changes

- The need for headline issues - to be clearer to the public
- Keep it simple

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the information provided and confirm that based on the scrutiny working group findings that the eight draft performance evaluations are fair and balanced assessments of performance for 2013/14.
- (ii) to endorse the use of the performance evaluations to compile the Council's Annual Delivery Report for presentation to Council on 29th October 2014.
- (iii) that the views of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with regard to the operation of the scrutiny working group arrangements be fed back to officers to help improve and strengthen the process in the future.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

18. WALES AUDIT OFFICE ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT FOR RHONDDA CYNON TAF

In accordance with the resolution made by Council at the meeting held on 23rd July 2014 (minute 52 refers), the Committee considered the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Annual Improvement Report for Rhondda Cynon Taf (issued July 2014 and not July 2013 as indicated on the report cover), in relation to the areas highlighted for improvement.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services drew Members' attention to the report's summary which provided an overview of the Auditor General's findings and drew attention to areas identified for improvement, namely:

- The need to build professional capacity and improve the timeliness of assessments in Children's Services;
- The need to improve recycling performance to meet national targets;
- The need to better evaluate the progress the Council is making towards achieving its improvement priorities;
- The need for improved communication and engagement with citizens around the scale of the Council's improvement ambitions and the impact of services changes on its priority areas.

The Director explained that he would welcome the views of the Committee in relation to how these issues should be addressed and the mechanism with which to report back to Cabinet and Council.

In relation to waste recycling, a Member sought clarification with regard to the timescales covered by the report and the Service Director, Performance and Improvement explained that the report was based on observations at a point in time. He further explained that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee needed to determine whether the scrutiny arrangements for overseeing performance was considered fit for purpose or whether it was felt that further measures were needed.

A Member referred to paragraph 47 of the WAO report which questioned the Council's target setting process and suggested that there was a real need to consider this issue. He drew attention to the report's reference to an Internal Audit of 28 performance indicators (used by the Council to support its Annual Delivery Report 2012-13) in September 2013. Internal Audit reported that it found no systemic quality assurance processes in place and, of the 28 local performance indicators reviewed 23 (82%) were not clearly defined as to their source data and/or method of calculation; 8 (29%) had no accurate evidence to support the reported figures; and 11 (39%) had no 'target' setting out the level of performance planned to be achieved. The Member commented that it was important that targets were both ambitious and measurable.

The Chairman asked the Committee to consider whether they were confident that the scrutiny infrastructure was able to support the issues identified and reminded Members that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was taking forward the matter of public engagement as demonstrated by the earlier presentation regarding the Community Engagement Hub.

RESOLVED;

- (i) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the current scrutiny infrastructure is able to support improvement in relation to the issues identified through robust scrutiny. However, the Committee will continue to seek improvements in scrutiny through review and refinement of practices.
- (ii) That the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be reported back to Council.

19. URGENT ITEM

With the agreement of the Chairman, the under mentioned item was brought to the Committee's attention.

20. REJECTION OF CALL-IN

County Borough Councillor G R Davies thanked the Chairman for allowing him to raise the issue on behalf of County Borough Councillor P Jarman.

The Councillor referred to the recent rejection of a request to call-in a decision made by Cabinet on 24th September 2014 in relation to the Review of the Council's Management Structure. The reason given for the call-in referred to the fact that the present management structure presented to and considered by Cabinet was a different version to the present management structure published in Part 7 of the Council's Constitution.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services spoke of his reasons for rejecting the call-in explaining that whilst he accepted that the published version of the management structure within the Constitution had not been updated and this was a matter which needed to be rectified, he pointed out that the information which had been placed before Cabinet at the time of their decision was correct. He reported that he would be available for further discussion with both Councillor Davies and Councillor Jarman to explain the reasoning in more detail as deemed necessary.

RESOLVED to note the position with regard to the rejected call-in.

R K Turner
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm.