

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Thursday, 25 February 2016 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor L.M.Adams - in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

J.Bonetto	P.Jarman	S.G.Powderhill
W.J.David	R.Lewis	G.Smith
S.M.Evans	B.Morgan	M.J.Watts
A.S.Fox	S.Pickering	R.A.Yeo

Non-Committee Members in Attendance

County Borough Councillor K.Montague – Deputy Leader of the Council
County Borough Councillors S.L.Carter and C.J.Willis

Officers in Attendance

Mr.C.B.Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mr.P.Mee – Service Director, Public Health & Protection
Mr.P.Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Ms.Syd Dennis – European Social Fund Manager
Mr.G.Evans – Youth Support Services Manager
Mrs.L.Davies – Head of Environmental Health, Trading Standards & Community Services

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S.J. Jones and S. Rees-Owen.

31 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of personal interests in matters pertaining to the agenda.

32 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as accurate records, the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18th November 2015 and 7th January 2016.

33 REGULATORS' REPORTS

In accordance with AIR 4 as contained in the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office Report - 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' and one of the actions within the Committee's Action Plan (as agreed at the meeting held on 18th November 2015), Members were asked to form a view on the adequacy of progress in respect of the recommendations arising from the following Regulators' reports after receiving updates from the appropriate Officers on progress to date:

(1) Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training

Members were reminded that the Wales Audit Office Review of Councils in Wales in July 2014 found Councils were clearly committed to further reducing the promotion of young people not in employment, education and training (NEET) especially those aged 16 to 18 but planning was variable and Councils had made less progress in understanding the costs and evaluation the effectiveness of interventions. As a result, the Council had been working to reduce the number of NEETs in the County Borough and the Chairman introduced Ms. Syd Dennis, the European Social Fund Manager to Members and invited her to provide an update of progress made to date in achieving this outcome.

Ms.Dennis reported that a comprehensive mapping exercise of NEET's services had been undertaken by the Council and its partners to identify the breadth and scope of services. As a result, a baseline map of education, employment and training provision mapped against the Careers Wales 5 Tier model had been produced and this had been shared with Welsh Government. The mapping exercise had also been used to inform the development of the ESF 'Inspire to Work' strand within the Priority 3 Youth Employment and Attainment Programme. Ms. Dennis stated that the next step would be to deliver a comprehensive pathway for 16-25 year olds under the ESF Regional Operation 'Inspire to Work' and this work was ongoing.

Members were informed that the RCT Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment and Training Strategy 2012-15 outlined the Council's priority to reduce the number of young people at risk of becoming, or were, NEET in the County Borough and this Strategy extends to young people up to the age of 25. Ms.Dennis stated that the Strategic Action Plan 2015 which delivered this Strategy included all key partners who were committed to the aim to reduce the number of NEETs in the County Borough. Specific targets were set for 2015-16 to increase the number of young people aged 18-25 engaging in employment pathways and this was the focus of the ESF 'Inspire to Work' programme. Members noted that 16-18 year old NEETs rate had decreased by 1.2% since 2011 and the 18-24 year old NEETs rate had decrease by 7.4% since 2012.

Ms.Dennis then outlined the work undertaken to date on 'Vulnerability Profiling' which provided a means of early identification of those children and

young people at risk of disengaging from learning as a result of socio-economic barriers they faced outside of the school environment.

With regard to developing objectives and targets for reducing the number of young people NEET so that they could be held to account and their work aligned with the Welsh Government's targets and objectives, Members were informed that the Council's Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment and Training Strategy (SEET) sets out its objectives. Progress was reported annually but not to the Youth Support Services Group as stated in the written update report circulated but to another Group. Annual targets were in place and would continue to be monitored and performance against targets reported to the SEET's Strategic Steering Group and Elected Members.

Ms. Dennis concluded by reporting that elected Members had become increasing aware of the Council's responsibilities for leading and co-ordinating youth services through Cabinet and Scrutiny reports and the 'Inspire to Work' programme demonstrated the Council's commitment to young people. As regards the effectiveness and relative value for money of the services and interventions intended to reduce NEETs, regular evaluation was ongoing as part of monitoring ESF and non ESF activity.

The Chairman then invited the Council's Deputy Leader and portfolio holder for the Youth Service in Rhondda Cynon Taf, County Borough Councillor K.Montague, to address Committee Members.

County Borough Councillor Montague informed Members that a great deal of work had been carried out over the years to focus the NEETs target. He highlighted the fact that all young people attending schools are now Vulnerability Profiled and where there might be barriers to further learning, there would be early intervention to prevent them becoming NEET. He stated that there was a robust understanding of the data available and the systems in place to drive things forward, moving them in the right direction to further improvements.

Members noted the positive outcome references throughout the report presented to them and were pleased that the NEET's rates had decreased since 2011/12 and there was commitment to continue this good work into the future.

Councillor Montague and Ms. Dennis responded to questions raised by Members including issues around Vulnerability Profiling and how it is undertaken, the 'Inspire to Work' programme which had not yet started, employment pathways and the availability of ESF funding in the future.

Following the discussion, the Committee Members were asked to form a view on the adequacy of progress to date and it was **RESOLVED** to accept the continued progress being to made to reduce the number of NEETs in the County Borough and to request Officers to provide actual figures, as opposed

to percentage rates, in respect of the reduction in the number of NEETS since 2011/12.

The Chairman then thanked Councillor Montague and Ms. Dennis for their attendance at the meeting and they left.

(2) Delivering with less (impact on Environmental Health Services)

The Council has a range of statutory environmental health duties it is required to deliver but because of reductions in UK Government funding for the Welsh Government and Council, it had less money to maintain these services and support delivery of national improvement priorities. In this regard, Mr. Paul Mee, Service Director, Public Health & Protection outlined to the Committee Members the action being taken to provide sustainable environmental health services which meet the Council's statutory duties in terms of public health.

In response to the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office Report, Members were informed that the Council was actively contributing to the development of the revised Practice Standards for Environmental Health in Wales. The Council had also taken action to improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny procedures supported by elected Member training and development programmes. In addition, a new Service Self Assessment had been introduced in 2015-16 which actively facilitated Cabinet Member challenge and review of the Environmental Health Service performance and this would inform the Delivery Plan for the Service going forward.

Mr. Mee reported that the service cuts made in Environmental Health in 2014-15 did not have a direct impact on frontline services and were not subject to formal consultation. Any further service changes or cuts to the service would be fully considered and be subject to resident engagement, where necessary.

Mr. Mee further reported that the Council completed a whole service review of its Environmental Health and Trading Standards Services in 2014 which clearly identified the statutory and non statutory services provided and the standard of service. The Cabinet took decisions to prioritise some service areas in response to local needs and priorities. Performance targets were set for 2015-16 to reflect the service changes decided by Cabinet and in some areas this meant the target was to maintain rather than improve on performance achieved in 2014-15. Charges were introduced for pest control services and other income generating opportunities continue to be explored.

As a statutory consultee for planning applications, a Member asked whether the range of expertise within the department was sustainable or whether outside expertise would have to be bought in order to fulfil the statutory consultee responsibilities in respect of planning applications. In response, Members were informed that in terms of planning and expertise, experts had been retained as part of the service cuts and investment had been made in training and contingency of staff to ensure that there was continued improvement to engaging in the planning process.

Members noted that the Licensing function did not experience any service cuts as it was largely self-financing from fee income, however, the service has been reviewed so robust systems were in place to ensure costs were recovered in terms of the licensing process.

A Member queried the impact of the introduction of pest control charges and was informed that the position has been monitored since charges were introduced along with the impact on enforcement activity. There had been approximately 68% reduction in demand but there had also been over 50% reduction in demand for services that were always chargeable. In terms of enforcement, Members were informed that although there was an increase in service requests initially it did not relay to enforcement notices being served.

Members were also informed of the improved use of digital technology to enable residents and service users to 'self serve' their needs. Since the introduction of Pest Control charges, over 70% of calls for the service and payment thereof were made through the Council's website. This facility was likely to be rolled out into other areas particularly for 'business to business' activities which would allow advice to be provided to businesses via the Council's website.

A Member questioned performance in relation to inspections of food premises in the County Borough and was informed that over the last four years performance had improved and at Quarter 3, performance was 92%. The aim was to improve on this figure.

In moving forward with managing further funding cuts, a Member considered the 'Budget Calculator' to be an excellent corporate tool and suggested that it be used to enhance public engagement at future road shows. He requested that this suggestion be brought to the attention of the Council's Corporate Policy & Consultation Manager.

Following the discussion, the Committee Members were asked to form a view on the adequacy of progress to date and it was **RESOLVED** to accept that appropriate action had been made to date in achieving the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office as contained in 'Delivering for Less – The impact on Environmental Health Services'.

34 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Cabinet Work Programme had now been published and if Members wished the Committee to pre-scrutinise any of the items listed, they should contact the appropriate Scrutiny Officer with details.

**L.M. ADAMS
CHAIRMAN**

The meeting terminated at 6.30 p.m.

