

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on 27th November, 2019.

Present: Councillor M.R. Wilson (Chairman); Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, R. Crowley, V.P. Driscoll, G. John, Dr. I.J. Johnson, Ms. S. Sivagnanam and J.W. Thomas.

478 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor O. Griffiths (Vice-Chairman) and Councillor G.A. Cox.

479 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meetings held on 2nd October and 24th October, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

480 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

481 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2020-25 (REF) –

Cabinet had, on 21st October, 2019, referred the report and its appendices to all relevant Scrutiny Committees for their consideration in the November 2019 cycle of meetings as part of the consultation process. The Council's current Corporate Plan had been published in 2016 and at that time a new vision had been agreed for "Strong Communities with a Bright Future". Since 2016 this had been supported by four well-being outcomes and eight well-being objectives.

The current Corporate Plan was due to end in March 2020 and a new Corporate Plan would therefore need to be produced setting out the Council's priorities for the next five years. A draft Corporate Plan was attached at Appendix A and a draft Summary Plan at Appendix B to the report.

Since the publication of the current Corporate Plan, the Public Services Board (PSB) had also published its Well-being Plan. There was a need for the Council to ensure that the Corporate Plan reflected the current priorities, pressures and challenges so that the public, Councillors, staff and other key partners were aware of what the Council's key priorities were for the coming years.

The Plan needed to set out the Council's Well-being Objectives and reflect how the Council would contribute to the seven national well-being goals. The Corporate Plan must also show how the five ways of working as set out in the Well-being of Future

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Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (involvement, long-term, prevention, integration and collaboration) were embedded in the work of the Council.

In developing the draft Corporate Plan, the Council had undertaken extensive engagement and considered a range of information and data to inform the development of the Plan. This included:

- A Public Opinion Survey;
- Big Conversation with Staff;
- Performance data;
- Key Population data for the Vale;
- Consideration by Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Performance and Resources);
- Partnership activities and priorities;
- Stakeholder workshop;
- Discussions with the Vale 50+ Strategy Forum;
- Corporate Risks;
- Budget consultation;
- Discussions at Community Liaison Committee and Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee.

In developing the Corporate Plan and the Council's priorities for the next five years the following had also been considered:

- what our residents had told us;
- our knowledge and understanding of the local area and the local community;
- our statutory duties;
- the resources available to us;
- best practice and what we know works locally;
- the views of our partners;
- commitments we have made to deliver with our partners e.g. the Public Services Board Well-being Plan;
- our achievements in delivering the previous Corporate Plan;
- advice and support from the Future Generations, Welsh Language, Children's, Older People, and Equalities and Human Rights Commissioners;
- advice and recommendations from our regulators and inspectors.

The timetable for consideration of the draft Plan to publication of the new Corporate Plan in April 2020 was detailed at paragraph 2.23 of the report.

The Head of Service for Policy and Business Transformation, in presenting the report, stated that the draft Plan was deliberately ambitious with Members concurring with these sentiments recognising also the hard work that had gone into producing the draft Plan. Some Members considered that although they had no objection to the series of statements contained within the Plan, they felt that more detail was needed having particular regard to the impact the Plan would have for local constituents. Another Member commented that it was important that every department played their part in the production and delivery of the Corporate Plan.

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Another Member considered that in the main, Corporate Plans should be based on the leading Party's manifesto commitments and also suggested that any references to direct service delivery be made more prominent at the beginning of the Plan.

Members agreed that the Corporate Plan needed to be developed with a view that it was understandable to the public, Members and staff as well as providing detail on what had been delivered to date. The difficulty of putting all the information together in a concise document was acknowledged and the Head of Service was thanked for the comprehensive report which Members felt showed the Council going in the right direction.

The Head of Service confirmed that all Departments had been and were playing a part in the Corporate Plan and in the coming weeks his section would be looking to further develop work with Heads of Service and to develop the Service Plan alongside the Corporate Plan. It was also proposed to convene a meeting with Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, Chairman of the Audit Committee and Group Leaders to develop a new approach to the development of the performance management arrangements. Although thanking the Committee for the comments regarding the Head of Service's hard work, he stated that it was important to note that the Plan had been developed corporately and was a collaborative effort from a wide range of officers and he extended his thanks to the Policy and Business Transformation Team for their work.

In conclusion Committee was advised that following consultation, the Corporate Plan would be reported back in January to this Committee and then subsequently to Cabinet and on to Council.

Acknowledging that the Corporate Plan would be reported back to the Committee in January 2020 following the consultation process, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Committee's comments be considered by the Head of Service when finalising the document.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to comments made at the meeting and that the Committee would be considering a further report before finalising for Cabinet / Council approval.

482 Q2 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT 2019/2020 (REF) –

The report set out the sickness absence figures for the six month period 1st April to 30th September, 2019 as part of the agreed performance management arrangements. Cabinet had considered the report on 18th November, 2019 and had referred it to the Scrutiny Committee for its consideration.

There had been a significant increase in absence levels during the first half of 2019/2020 compared with the same period for the previous financial year. The absence rates were set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report and showed an increase from 3.71 days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) (April to September 2018) to 4.74

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days lost per FTE (April to September 2019). The target for Quarter 2 (April to September 2019) was set as 3.71 days lost per FTE.

An analysis of the figures in each Directorate was set out in paragraph reference 2.7 of the report to Cabinet with an analysis of the reasons for absence set out in paragraphs reference 2.13 to 2.25.

It was reported that the increase in absence levels was largely due to the increase in long term absence rates together with an increase in absences within Schools. With Schools having almost 50% of the workforce, any increase in this area was likely to cause an increase Council wide.

There continued to be scrutiny of absence cases which took place on a monthly basis between the HR Business Partnership and Occupational Health teams, particularly reviewing staff with absences over four weeks and those who had regular absences to provide early intervention and support. Absence was discussed at Directorate Management Teams as part of their service-based action plans. Committee was advised that the figures for comparison with the rest of the Welsh Authorities would not be available until later in the year, but these would be shared when available. The Vale of Glamorgan Council's current annual forecast for 2019/2020 was 11.66 days lost per FTE. This was a significant increase on absence levels for the Council over the past few years. For 2018/2019 the Council's absence figure was 9.12 days lost per FTE as a comparison. Paragraphs reference 2.27 to 2.29 of the report to Cabinet listed the number of initiatives the Council continued to support for staff.

The performance management approach to absence management was to continue throughout 2019/20 with further updates to be provided to Cabinet and Scrutiny as required.

It was noted that overall stress continued to be the most common reason for sickness absence and although this was common within the Public Sector and Local Government. Stress related absence in the Council had reduced from 29.2% in 2017/18 to 28.8% in 2018/19. In the recording of stress absence this was now split into non-work and work related stress and as the Council had 12 months of data, further analysis would take place during 2019/20 which would assist with understanding the reasons for the absence as well as looking at ways to assist the health and welfare of employees and inform Occupational Health and the Employee Counselling service to achieve this objective.

A table with the five most common absence reasons for each Directorate was set out at paragraph reference 2.20 of the report to Cabinet and data included the FTE days lost and percentage of absences in each of the reasons.

The report highlighted the Council's employee assistance programme which remained available to all employees. Work was continuing to develop positive health support in a number of areas as outlined below:

- Flu vaccinations had been offered to all employees during September to December 2018 and a total of 1,566 vaccinations had been administered to

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employees. The 2019 sessions had already commenced and data would be provided in the End of Year Sickness Report;

- A new Occupational Health (OH) Nurse was appointed in January 2019;
- The OH service was offering health screening to all employees every Thursday (subject to other work commitments). This included: height, weight, BMI, Blood Pressure, Cholesterol and Blood Sugar Tests. Appointments could be made via iDev and if employees did not have access to iDev their manager could book one on their behalf or they could contact OH direct to make the appointment for them;
- The Council had also chosen to install a further two Public Access Defibrillators at the Civic and Docks offices in January 2019. The Alps and Court Road depots both had defibrillators installed in March 2018. Over 80 employees had been trained in the use of the defibrillators, and although training was non-essential it was seen as good practice to offer the training.
- The Council had nearly 40 trained (via Time to Change Wales) mental health champions whose primary role involved:
 - Promoting health campaigns e.g. World Mental Health Day;
 - Encouraging colleagues to participate in the Council's wellbeing initiatives / challenges;
 - Involvement in events and collaborative working with other Champions across the Council and other organisations;
 - Role modelling and promoting a healthy culture within the workplace;
 - Organising activities e.g. lunch-time walks, Yoga sessions, book club, hobby group etc;
 - Signposting colleagues to relevant services.

A Member raised concerns in relation to the new Waste collection arrangements on staff as he had been aware, for example, that in his Ward four houses had placed 31 green bags for collection and his concern related to the weight and amount of refuse collectors would have to collect. The Member stated in his view there should be a limit as to the number of bags that residents could put out. The Operational Manager for Employee Services advised that further work was currently being undertaken in relation to musculoskeletal absence and following the changes in the blue print of the waste collection service, HR was tracking what was happening with a small working group looking in more detail at the issues.

In referring to Schools operating as their own Governing Body and the difficulty the Council had in managing Schools' absences, it was requested that in future reports sickness at Schools be separated from Corporate data in order that Members could see the whole picture for the employees it was directly accountable for.

Members welcomed the increased uptake in relation to flu jab appointments, with the Head of Service stating that the Council was now on its second batch of flu vaccinations and would possibly be looking to obtaining a third batch. Other mitigating initiatives had also been introduced with the establishment of a Wellbeing Group which was also looking at the targets that were currently set. The Chairman commented that more flexibility should also be considered with for example further agile working and a common-sense approach to home working being undertaken.

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Having regard to the Council's initiative of purchasing annual leave, it was also requested that a further breakdown be included in future reports of how many staff purchased leave and the departments they were in.

Having regard to cleanliness and hygiene issues, a Member also suggested that the toilet facilities be reviewed with a re-emphasis on personal hygiene being made.

In referring to the issue of stomach ailments, again Members sought any information that was available in this regard to be presented to Committee, with it subsequently being

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T further data capture information as outlined above be presented to future meetings of the Committee and the Committee's forward work programme be amended accordingly.
- (3) T H A T Cabinet be informed of the Committee's intention to seek further information and to report back once that information has been received.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the report.
- (2&3) Following consideration at the meeting and a view to receiving further data in order to make informed recommendations if required.

483 CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING SUMMARY REPORT – NOVEMBER 2019 (REF) –

Cabinet had, on 18th November, 2019, been updated on the work that had been undertaken in relation to corporate arrangements for Safeguarding across the Council and had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for its consideration. In February 2019 the Wales Audit Office (WAO) had undertaken a follow up review to their review of 2014 and had issued a final report in May 2019. The purpose of the review being to seek assurance that the Council had effective corporate arrangements in place and had addressed the findings and recommendations in their 2014 report.

The 2019 WAO review found that overall the Council had implemented most of the previous recommendations and proposals for improvement, however five areas for improvement to strengthen aspects of the Council's safeguarding arrangements had been identified.

The Head of Service commenced by advising that the areas for improvement were detailed within the Corporate Safeguarding Group's work plan and they had incorporated not just these recommendations but other areas of business.

No.

Having regard to compliance, Members noted that where 100% compliance had not been met, it was clearly addressed within the report and that in the main not achieving the target of 100% compliance was in relation to schools, although it was noted that it was not one particular school that was breaching the compliance. The digital DBS process that had been established was working well and results were being received. It was considered that further work with schools be undertaken to reach full compliance although it was recognised that there was a very good data base in terms of DBS checks and information from the EWC was also directly accessible by a number of HR staff.

In view of the contents within the report and the discussions at the meeting it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report.

484 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2019/20 (REF) –

The interim report provided an update on the Council's Treasury Management operations for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2019. All activities undertaken were in accordance with the Council's approved strategy on Treasury Management and total external borrowing as at 30th September, 2019 was £155.024m at an average rate of 4.67%. The report highlighted that the Council had commenced using a new investment tool, Treasury Bills, as proposed in the 2019/20 Investment strategy and was currently seeking advice with the Council's Legal Department with a view to commence investing in Money Market Funds during the financial year.

The report had been written in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management and paragraph 2.2 outlined the primary requirements of the Code.

Having regard to the purchase of Treasury Bills, the Section 151 Officer advised that the risk to the Council's money was negligible and they were providing a better return rate than other investments.

Following a query regarding the interest rates on Treasury Bills, the Section 151 Officer agreed to provide this information to Members via e-mail. Discussion then ensued regarding offset loans, with a question as to whether the Council paid off its debts early. The Section 151 Officer responded that the Council did not tend to do that although it did look at paying off its debts as soon as it could, but in some cases penalties would be incurred for early closure, which would not be in the Council's best interests.

Having regard to the terminology "LiBiD" referenced in the table of the cabinet report of 18th November, 2019 at paragraph 2.10, the Committee was informed that this was the rate at which banks were willing to borrow.

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The Section 151 Officer also advised the Committee of the rationale of Treasury Bills and the process for their operation, it being recognised that these were a sound investment and the Government would always pay the money back if necessary. Members were reassured to see that monitoring of all these investments would take place.

Following a query regarding the potential impact of Brexit on Local Authorities, Members were advised that the Council was working closely with its treasury management advisors and meetings would be taking place in December 2019. Committee noted that the Public Works Loan Board had recently put their rates up and it was also noted that in England a number of Councils had actually been undertaking far more riskier investments than before, in particular having regard to investing in commercial property.

Following a further query as to when the Council may trigger the commencement of an investment, the Head of Service advised that this was about managing the Council's cash flow.

The Chairman referred to other initiatives citing an example of Time Deposits, with the Section 151 Officer advising that the officers regularly met with treasury management advisors and had been prudent in the past, although discussions regarding the degree of risk were regularly taking place. All Members confirmed that the Council was right to consider other approaches having regard to CIPFA guidance that Council's should not borrow ahead of need.

Having regard to the report, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the fact that a further report would be presented to the Committee in due course.

485 WELFARE REFORM – PROGRESS REPORT (MD) –

The report was presented following the request from the Scrutiny Committee to be updated on the impact of the proposed changes to the Welfare Reform system following a Task and Finish Review in 2013. The report outlined the impact to date of the rollout of the Universal Credit (UC) reform across all services and detailed the work being undertaken to support those impacted by the Welfare Reform changes.

UC was initially implemented in the Vale of Glamorgan on 22nd February, 2016. The roll out however had been paused at the end of December 2017 and the Full Service Roll Out that was due to begin in June 2018 had been postponed until 10th October, 2018. Customers remained entitled to Council Tax reduction whilst on UC even if their Housing Benefit award had been stopped. There had been a number of exclusions where individuals would still need to claim Housing Benefit such as Pensioners, those

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in temporary or supported accommodation and anyone receiving a Severe Disability Premium in an existing benefit. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions had stated that the managed migration of existing Housing Benefit claimants to UC was intended to commence in July 2019 but only for a set area for a maximum of 10,000 people but aimed to be completed by March 2023.

At the end of June 2019 the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) advised that there were 3,040 UC claimants in the Vale of Glamorgan compared to 535 at the same time last year. The DWP roll-out of UC was to be supplemented by the locally delivered "Universal Support" to provide advice and support to UC claimants when completing a claim. This support was provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Council needed to continue to support those on existing Housing Benefit claims or those who were excluded from claiming UC until they were eventually transferred to UC. After that time the Council would still be responsible for Housing Benefits administration for those persons who were clients of the Pension Service and customers in supported, temporary accommodation or getting a Severe Disability Premium in an existing legacy benefit as these were presently outside the scope of UC.

Having particular regard to housing, it was noted that the Housing Services Income Team had continued to monitor income levels and support individuals had had experienced difficulties in paying their rent. The annual rent arrears figure in relation to all stock, as at 31st March, 2019, was noted as £258,844 which equated to 1.26% of rental income. The report outlined that this was a deterioration in performance compared to the figure reported in the previous year, but still compared favourable with almost other Registered Social Landlords and Councils in Wales.

A number of internal improvements continued to be made to improve the system used for monitoring rents which had resulted in further automation of the recovery process which saved time carrying out administrative tasks and allowed staff to increase personal contacts with tenants and to provide assistance to manage their rental account.

Over the last year three advisors had made 824 home visits to clients which had resulted in additional money to tenants of £228,433.84. It was further noted that demand for the service continued to grow as people found themselves in financial hardship.

In referring to potential rent possession proceedings, a Member raised the concern that individuals could fall into debt which was beyond their control and bring unnecessary human misery. Another Member commented that UC applications relied heavily on ICT services, with the request that the Council should consider making equipment more available to the public at for example community centres etc. to assist them.

Having regard to concerns in relation to the roll out of UC, Members

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Cabinet consider sending a letter to Welsh Government lobbying for an increase in the Discretionary Housing Payments Grant jointly in the names of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Building Services the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health.

(2) T H A T a further report on the progress of Welfare Reform be presented to the Committee in May 2020 and that the Committee's work programme be amended accordingly.

Reasons for recommendation

(1) In order to raise Members' concerns in relation the Discretionary Housing Payments Grant and for that to be voiced by the Cabinet to Welsh Government and the WLGA.

(2) In order that the impact of the Welfare Reforms can be further considered by the Committee and that it continues monitoring the impacts.

486 2ND QUARTER SCRUTINY DECISION TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND UPDATED WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2019/20 (MD) –

The report advised Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations and requested confirmation of the updated work programme schedule for 2019/20 which would subsequently be uploaded to the Council's website.

Appendix A to the report detailed progress in relation to the Committee's recommendations for July to September 2019. During consideration of the Appendix it was noted that development of the Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan recommendation from 24th July had been superseded by the development of the new Corporate Plan which had been discussed on the agenda earlier in the meeting. It was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T having regard to discussions during the meeting, the recommendations below be deemed as completed:

24 July 2019	
Min. No. 193 – Vale of Glamorgan Public Services Board Annual Report 2019 (MD) – Recommended That all those involved in the production of the Public Services Board's Annual Report and film be thanked for their hard work and that the amendments outlined above be included in future documents.	A further recommendation made at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 2 nd October, 2019 was added to the work programme as below: "Reports in respect of matters being considered by the Public Services Board be presented to the Scrutiny as appropriate" (Min. No. 347 refers)

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	Completed
Min. No. 194 – Development of the Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan 2020 -25 (MD) – Recommended (1) That the comments made at the meeting be considered when developing the Corporate Plan for 2020-25.	It was agreed that this recommendation had been superseded by the development of the new Corporate Plan which had been included on the agenda and discussed earlier in the meeting. It also being noted that the new Corporate Plan was out for consultation and would be presented to all Scrutiny Committees in January 2020. Completed
Min. No. 195 – End of Year 2018/29 Performance Report: Corporate Health (MD) – Recommended (2) That the concerns of the Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Contact Centre service be considered in more detail by Members in the near future.	Added to the work programme schedule. Completed

(2) T H A T the work programme outlined at Appendix B to the report be approved, subject to the additional reports as discussed at the meeting and outlined below being included in a revised work programme:

- Sickness Absence Report: to include data on staff purchasing additional annual leave; long terms sickness with details of stress and measures in place to assist staff and work / life balance initiatives and phased returns; and information on the issue of stomach ailments;
- Report on the progress of Welfare Reform be presented to the Committee in May 2020.

(3) T H A T the revised work programme as outlined above be uploaded to the Council's website as soon as possible.

Reasons for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to discussions at the meeting.

(3) For information.