

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 16th June, 2021.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available here.

Present: Councillor M.R. Wilson (Chairman); Councillor Mrs. P. Drake (Vice-Chairman); Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, G.A. Cox, R. Crowley, G. John and Ms. S. Sivagnanam.

Also present: Councillors L. Burnett (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration) and P.G. King (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport).

133 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Principal Democratic Services referred to a number of housekeeping issues including advising those present that the meeting would be livestreamed as well as recorded for uploading via the internet and archived for future viewing.

134 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors V.P.Driscoll, Dr.I.J.Johnson and J.W. Thomas.

135 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19th May, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

136 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

137 PROJECT ZERO – DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE PLAN (MD) –

The draft Climate Change Challenge Plan attached to the report set out the Council's response to the climate emergency and the work that would be undertaken as part of Project Zero. The draft Plan highlighted the challenges and the steps the Council proposed to take to meet the challenges and detailed some of the work already underway across the Council as part of work to adapt to and mitigate the impact of

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climate change. The report also detailed the consultation undertaken, resulting feedback and revisions to the Challenge Plan, as well as some of the ongoing engagement and the timetable for the Plan being approved. A PowerPoint overview presentation of the report and the Plan was provided by the Head of Policy and Business Transformation and the Strategy and Partnership Manager at the meeting.

During the consideration of the item a number of members, who had attended the Scrutiny Committee Environment and Regeneration the previous evening advised that as they had made comments at that meeting, they would not comment in detail at this meeting. Following a query from the Chair regarding the low response to the consultation the officer advised that the plan had been promoted widely through social media, the Council's partners, the 3rd Sector, Housing Associations, and businesses. Suggestions were also made that further consideration be given to ensuring future inclusivity with regard to public engagement and those that are hard to reach and that further awareness raising exercises be undertaken regarding the challenges of project zero e.g. wider biodiversity issues, the need for a growth in the bee community, other animals, types of materials that are being used for the making of school uniforms and recycling opportunities.

The Chair having regard to the Plan requested that Members receive detailed information in relation to the kilowatts generated for the 100 energy saving projects, information on ground source heat pumps, and the energy savings to LED street lights, the data on usage of electric docking stations and where situated, performance rating information for the housing retro fit programme, vehicle charging sites in schools, where are they positioned and in which schools.

In referring to street lighting the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport (NS and T) advised that the Council was continuing to replace the lights with LED lights. Having regard to the installation of docking stations the Cabinet member for NS and T referred to the need for Network Rail to provide cooperation in order for such a station to be installed at Cogan, for people to be able to travel to Llandough Hospital.

Members concurred that it was important for all agencies to work collaboratively in promoting the agenda. The Deputy Leader also commented on the importance of partnership working advising the Committee that further reports would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee on these matters in due course.

The Head of Policy and Business Transformation in conclusion stated that the Public Services Board had launched the Climate Change Charter and took the opportunity to assure the Committee of the collective buy in for the agenda. The officer also agreed to undertake a piece of work around the measurement of carbon emissions over short, medium, and longer terms.

Having considered the report, the Scrutiny Committee subsequently

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RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the revised draft Climate Change Challenge Plan attached at Appendix A to the report be noted and that the Committee's comments referred back to Cabinet.

(2) T H A T the feedback (Appendix B to the report) received through the recent consultation undertaken from 24th March to 12th May, 2021 be noted.

(3) T H A T the ongoing engagement being undertaken as part of the work around Project Zero be noted.

(4) T H A T the new Welsh Public Sector net zero reporting guide issued by Welsh Government on 24th May, 2021 as described in the body of the report be noted.

(5) T H A T the comments considered at the meeting as below, be referred to Cabinet and the information requested be provided to Members as appropriate :-

- Further consideration to be given to ensuring future inclusivity with regard to public engagement and those that are hard to reach,
- Further awareness raising exercises be undertaken regarding the challenges of project zero e.g. wider biodiversity issues, the need for a growth in the bee community, other animals, types of materials that are being used for the making of school uniforms and recycling opportunities,
- Detailed information be provided for Members in relation to :-
 - the kilowatts generated for the 100 energy saving projects, ground source heat pumps, and the conversion to LED street lights,
 - data on usage of docking stations and where situated,
 - performance rating information for the housing retro fit programme,
 - vehicle charging sites in schools, where are they positioned and in which schools.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) To enable the Committee to recommend to Cabinet any changes to the draft Plan (Appendix A to the report) prior to the Plan being considered by Council

(2-5) Having regard to the report and discussions at the meeting.

138 WELFARE REFORM – PROGRESS REPORT (MD) –

The report updated Members on the work undertaken by the Council in the implementation of the UK Government' Welfare Reform agenda and outlined the changes made during 2020/21 to support individuals and families requiring support.

The Section 151 Officer commenced by stating that more contextual information was presented in this update as a result of the pandemic and advised on the work staff within the Council had been involved in to support people. It being recognised that

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income levels in the Vale for a higher proportion of people had dropped in the last fourteen months or so, for example over 7,500 people had been furloughed in the Vale earlier in the year. The cost of living had also increased in that time. Therefore, for the first time the Council was seeing the number of people in employment seeking financial support.

The number of children receiving free school meals had also increased to latest figures up to 4,000. Education had undertaken work with schools and parents to promote the availability of and to encourage families to apply for free school meals and supporting families to do this. Welsh Government (WG) were also working with Local Authorities to streamline the application process to make it more straightforward and quicker for people and arrangements had been made for parents to receive the monies over the summer months into their bank accounts. There had also been a significant uplift in the number of people at the end of March 2021 just over 10,000 people were on Universal Credit, a significant increase from June 2019 where the figure was 3,000.

Housing Services were seeing an increase in rent arrears and recovery action in relation to non-payment was dealt with in 2020 in line with WG guidance. Housing were currently looking at ways to recover arrears and how they could assist people and to try to work with them as early as possible before they got into a debt position. The data currently showed that tenants on Universal Credit tended to have higher levels of arrears than those who were on the previous benefit system, but as families had the assistance they needed, the debt tended to plateau out. Discretionary Housing Payments could also be paid, and support was provided for tenants where applicable. Where people had needed more personal support staff had also been visiting homes to assist.

Councillor John asked if the Council was working with Citizens Advice closely and how the Council was looking to solve the arrears having regard to the implications for Council Tax. In response, the Section 151 Officer advised that monies were put aside for bad debts in the budget to assist the Council and the Council was also working with individuals to support them as appropriate.

Councillor Cox queried how swiftly the claims for EFSM could be improved. The officer advised that the finance and education departments had undertaken work to improve the take up and that she would obtain information as to the current timeline turnaround for Members.

The Deputy Leader, with permission to speak, took the opportunity to thank both departments for the considerable work that had been undertaken during the pandemic to support families with regard to the receipt of free school meals.

The Chair drew attention to the high PIP figure referred to in the report, querying what the Council could do to support people and whether there was an opportunity to provide further breakfast clubs for children.

With regard to PIP payments, the Head of Service advised that this was something the Council could speak to other agencies about, in particular consideration about what support could be provided to people when making applications.

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In response to the query regarding breakfast clubs, the Deputy Leader advised that this had been currently impacted by WG COVID restrictions.

The Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report be noted and that a further update be provided to the Committee at the end of the calendar year.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the report and discussions at the meeting and in order for the Committee to continue to monitor the impact of the Welfare Reform changes for residents on an annual basis.

139 Q4 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT 2020/2021 (REF) –

The report set out the sickness absence figures for the 12 month period 1st April, 2020 to 31st March, 2021 as part of the agreed performance management arrangements. Cabinet, on 7th June 2021 had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration, with any comments to be referred to Cabinet for further consideration. There had been a significant decrease in absence levels for the whole of 2020/21 compared with the same period for the previous financial year. The Operational Manager for Employee Services, in presenting the report, drew attention to the staff training that had been continued to be undertaken during the pandemic having regard to social distancing measures.

Councillor Cox queried the Council's approach as to the delays for staff in having hospital appointments and surgery if required. In response, the Operational Manager advised that GPs had been contacted to see whether anything could be done to speed up appointments. The Chair enquired as to whether the Council held any data regarding the take up of lateral flow tests and whether there were increased cases of the Delta variant. The Head of Human Resources stated that reports were received on take up of Lateral Flow tests in all sectors and the current trend showed the take up was falling. The Social Sector and Care Homes received twice weekly tests and once weekly PCR testing. Reports had shown increased transmission with regard to the Delta variant with relevant information having been forwarded to all Vale of Glamorgan schools. A few Members took the opportunity to commend the officers for a comprehensive report and were delighted with the reduction in sickness that was being reported.

Having considered the report, the Scrutiny Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report and the twelve month (April 2020 to March 2021) sickness absence figures provided in Appendix A be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the reference, report, appendix and the discussions at the meeting.

140 ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2020/21 (REF) –

The report advised that there was Corporate responsibility to ensure that there were effective arrangements in place for safeguarding children and adults who required specific Council services. The Annual Report 2020/21 provided an overview of the Corporate Safeguarding activities taking place across the Local Authority. Cabinet, on 7th June 2021 had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration in response to the request that the Scrutiny Committee be provided with a safeguarding update. In referring to the five breaches as reported within the document the Operational Manager advised that three of the breaches had been resolved one day after the staff had commenced employment, one had been completed on their start date and the last one three days after the start date. The Chair offered his congratulations to the officer with regard to the high percentages being reported as completed.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report be noted with it being accepted that six monthly updates would also be presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the reference, the report and discussions at the meeting.

141 VALE OF GLAMORGAN ANNUAL AUDIT SUMMARY 2020 AND PROGRESS AGAINST EXTERNAL REGULATORY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT (REF) –

The report presented the Audit Wales' report – Annual Audit Summary 2020, which outlined the work undertaken by Audit Wales during 2020. The Governance and Audit Committee, on 24th May 2021 had referred the report to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet with any recommendations / comments of the Governance and Audit Committee. Members considered that it was a very positive report. The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer drew Committee's attention to the report that had been presented at the April meeting regarding the progress made against the action plan associated with the Audit Wales review of the scrutiny function. These actions were now being embedded as business as usual within the service area. However the officer took the opportunity to ask those present to remind their fellow Councillors to complete the Members' Survey for 20/21 that had recently been forwarded to Members.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and report, subsequently

No.

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the contents of the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Audit Summary 2020 (Appendix A to the report) be noted.

(2) T H A T the progress made to date in addressing recommendations and improvement proposals made by the Council's external regulators (as in Appendix B to the report) be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report, the reference and discussions at the meeting.