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## **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

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

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor M.R. Wilson (Chair), Councillor. P. Drake (Vice), Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, G.A. Cox, V.P. Driscoll, G. John, Dr. I.J. Johnson and S. Sivagnanam.

Also Present: Councillors L. Burnett (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration) and N. Moore (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources).

### 1039 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

### 1040 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors R. Crowley and J.W. Thomas.

### 1041 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2022 be approved as a correct record.

### 1042 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

### 1043 UNACCEPTABLE ACTIONS BY CITIZENS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> April was presented, firstly, by the Operational Manager for Customer Relations, who outlined to the Committee the following:

- The Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens recognised that opportunities for interaction with the Council and its officers had multiplied

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with the increase in popularity of social media platforms. Communication was quick and easy, it provided opportunities to increase transparency and to improve services but could, for a small minority of interactions, become intrusive and difficult to manage on both professional and private profiles. Subsequently this could impact the Council's ability to deliver services and it could adversely affect other citizens because the Council was not able to deliver those services effectively. In extreme cases, it could also affect the wellbeing of both staff and Councillors.

- This new Policy replaced the previous Unreasonable Complainants Policy which the Council had operated for a number of years, and which had been effective in managing the impact on staff and services when complainants became unreasonably persistent, aggressive, or demanding in their approach. It also being noted that under the old policy, this had only been applied to a very small number (less than 5) individuals when either the frequency of their contact or the nature of their contacts had hindered the handling of other complaints or impacted unacceptably on an Officer's or Councillor's time. Similarly, the new Policy, even though it had had its remit expanded to include all types of interactions rather than just complaints, was also anticipated to be applied only very infrequently going forward.
- The new Policy set out how the Council would ensure a fair and consistent approach to applying this Policy, as well as clearly defining what 'unacceptable' actions and behaviours were i.e. aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands and / or where the citizen was unreasonably persistent in their approach.
- Any application to apply the Policy would be considered by an independent panel of a minimum of three Chief Officers appointed by the Chief Executive to ensure an objective review of that application. Also, those citizens to whom the Policy may be applied would be given an opportunity to provide information to the panel before a final decision was made. The panel had a range of different options that could be considered depending on the individual situation and what was most appropriate and a procedure note was also included for colleagues, which clearly set out when and how the Policy should be applied for consistency of approach.
- In summary, the Policy provided a fair, consistent and robust process to protect services, colleagues, but citizens as well from the adverse impacts that on very rare occasions resulted from unacceptable behaviour from a very small number of citizens.

The Communications Manager followed on with the key points from the related Social Media Policy:

- The Social Media Policy set out how the Council used social media to keep people informed about services and events as well as promoting the work of the Council and how it engaged with people online.
- The Policy would formalise the way the Council had been working in these areas for the last few years, thereby ensuring there was transparency with this approach and would share with residents exactly how the Council operated these accounts.
- Once it had been agreed, the Policy would then be linked from all of the Council's corporate accounts via their biographies.

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- The Policy would set out what citizens could expect from the Council via social media and online interactions, i.e. to be helpful and transparent when engaging with customers via social media and aim to provide a clear, concise answer to queries where possible, and then what the Council would expect from citizens as part of these types of engagement too.
- The social media accounts were operated by the Council's Communications Team and the Policy outlined where they could respond to things immediately from within the team, they would, or where they needed to go and seek a response from other departments, they would seek out that information and relay it back to residents.
- As with the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy, the Social Media Policy acknowledged that there were a very small number of citizens whose actions the Council considered to be unacceptable. The approach described in the Policy was to manage these actions based on their nature and extent and the action that may be taken.
- The Policy would help to create a public forum online which would be managed in order for it to be a 'safe space' for people to engage with the Council. Therefore, the Council would remove any replies or comments that were abusive or misleading and promoted third party services or sought to publish the personal details of any Council staff, etc.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor John stated that both Policies would be extremely beneficial and would not stop the public being able to ask questions of the Council, etc. However, the Policies would help to address those instances where a very small number of residents were abusive and extremely disrespectful to elected Members and Council staff and who would not accept an answer or decision provided by them.
- Councillor Carroll, whilst echoing the points raised around the need for courtesy or respect to be shown to those people in public facing roles and the challenges around vexatious complaints, also warned against a potential 'mission creep' for these policies i.e. the risk of these being used to not engage and to 'park' difficult and persistent, but genuine, complaints or queries made by residents. In order to prevent this, the policies needed to be monitored very carefully and to be applied only in very limited circumstances, with all other options exhausted. He asked if there were safeguards in place for such circumstances, to which the Operational Manager for Customer Relations replied that the Council would only consider applying the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy in the most serious of circumstances and only after the application had gone to the Chief Executive who would appoint an independent panel to look at the reasons why application of the Policy was being proposed. Also, any application of the Policy would result in it being recorded centrally so that it could be very quickly and easily seen if there was an escalation of the number of times the Policy was being applied or not.
- The Chair recommended that a monitoring report or update on the Policies and any related actions or complaints be provided annually to the Committee and Cabinet; the Head of Policy & Business Transformation

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suggested that this could be combined with the Complaints and Compliments report which, under recent legislation, was required to go to the Governance and Audit Committee and would give an holistic picture of complaints, compliments and unacceptable actions in one place and allow both Committees to scrutinise these.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy and Social Media Policy be endorsed.
- (2) T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee receive an annual update on the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and Social Media Policies, as part of the annual Complaints and Compliments report.

Reasons for recommendations.

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) That the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee are kept up to date on these policies and on any related actions / complaints.

1044 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY (REF) -

The reference from Cabinet of 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 was presented by the Communications Manager in order for the Committee to consider the report and to make any comments prior to its final endorsement by Cabinet.

This was the updated version of the Public Participation Strategy, following the public consultation and the publication of draft Welsh Government guidance. The intention was for the Strategy to be published and, as the statutory requirement set out, for this to be done as soon as practicable after the Local Government Elections this year.

The Communications Manager highlighted the key points and amendments to the Strategy, following consultation, such as:

- A greater emphasis on the importance of communicating how and when people could influence decisions particularly regarding Council meetings.
- A clear affirmation that there would always be non-digital routes for people to participate in decision making.
- A clear recognition that a wide-ranging promotional campaign was needed to promote the various mechanisms that already existed within the Council.

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- An additional action to bring all of the Council's consultation, engagement and participation activities together into a single, easily accessible online hub and a reference to the long-term objective of developing a portal that joined together all pathways for participation in the Vale of Glamorgan, such as linking in with the Third Sector.
- Added recognition in the updated draft that not all of the Council's participation activities were currently fully accessible to all groups with protected characteristics and that the Council was seeking to address that.
- The need to develop better guidance to Council officers on how to produce documents that were accessible to those with protected characteristics and more broadly, easier for citizens and stakeholders to understand.
- The need to develop a communication plan template for reports that were going to Cabinet and Scrutiny committees in order to make it easier for the Council to put in front of residents the key information that was going through the formal decision making and structures.
- An additional action to develop better methods to brief and engage Councillors at the start of their participation activities, in order to help support Councillors to work as better advocates for both residents and the Council itself.
- The recognition that in order to achieve the potential of what was set out in the Public Participation Strategy, the Council must work effectively with a wider range of community groups as well as to map those groups and their community links and networks in order to then develop a plan to support them.

The Welsh Government in March released for consultation a draft of their guidance on producing public participation strategies, albeit it was not expected that the guidance would be finalised until later in the year and that meant that once the guidance was finalised, the Council would need to look at the final version of that and make any required amendments to its strategy. If there were further amendments required, another report would go back to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. The Council would also separately submit a response to the Welsh Government consultation which was currently being compiled by the Council's Policy Team.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the Public Participation Strategy be endorsed.

Reason for recommendation.

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

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1045 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021:  
STANDARDS OF CONDUCT STATUTORY GUIDANCE (CX) –

The purpose of the report was to apprise the Committee in respect of Welsh Government's consultation relating to guidance on duties set out under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. These duties included:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct
- Co-operation with the Council's Standards Committee
- Providing advice and training
- Making an Annual Report.

The provisions of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (Section 62) provided a new duty on the Leaders of political groups to take steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of their members.

The duty recognised that those in positions of leadership and influence within a Principal Council should have responsibility for combating bullying and harassment amongst elected Members and Council staff and must act as a positive role model.

The consultation was launched on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2022 and was scheduled to end on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2022.

Paragraph 2.2 of the report detailed the questions within the consultation and the suggested responses to the questions by the Monitoring Officer.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the suggested response to the consultation relating to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021: Standards of Conduct Statutory Guidance be noted.

(2) T H A T the suggested response to the consultation relating to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021: Standards of Conduct Statutory Guidance be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration and thereafter to Welsh Government as part of the consultation process prior to 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2022.

Reasons for recommendations.

(1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(2) To apprise Cabinet for its consideration and to respond to the Welsh Government consultation by 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2022.

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1046 GLAMORGAN VOLUNTARY SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21  
(GVS) –

The Committee welcomed Rachel Connor, a representative from Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS), who outlined the following to Members concerning the work and achievements of GVS, in partnership with the Council, over 2020/21:

- The COVID-19 pandemic had forced the GVS and its partners, including the Council, to adapt quickly to these unprecedented changes from March 2020.
- As part of the above, GVS looked at how it could respond to some of the needs and requirements of the local community and helped to set up and be involved with the Vale Heroes website. The services were provided to individuals who required shopping and medical prescription pick up, etc and were fielded by the Council.
- Those citizens over-65 went via Age Connect and those under 65 coming through to GVS to find local individuals and volunteers to help with whatever their requirements were, which had proven successful.
- GVS provided directories of information of what services were still available within the community, Local Authority and voluntary sector throughout the pandemic. These were updated on a daily basis and uploaded onto the website that was hosted by the Local Authority. In terms of services, such as those provided jointly by partners in the Local Authority and the Third Sector, which included making sure that those community groups that ran community halls and centres were supported, advised and provided with the right information so that they could make sure that if they were opening, they were abiding by Welsh government regulations throughout the COVID-19 period and that worked extraordinarily well for the majority of those groups.
- GVS was able to coordinate and bring into the Vale a variety of grant schemes, including from the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Welsh Government, Comic Relief, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Cardiff and Vale Health Charity and NHS Charities Together totalling £291,000. This meant that funding could be got out to local grassroots organisations that were providing vital support on the ground to individuals quickly and efficiently.
- Volunteering numbers jumped dramatically during this period, with over 1,000 people volunteering during the initial period of the Pandemic and who were then deployed with various local groups in order to deliver services. Although such numbers of volunteers had not been reached subsequently, the numbers of volunteers still remained high, with the Pandemic acting as a catalyst in bringing communities together and boosting volunteering.
- GVS continued to deliver on governance issues i.e., supporting local groups who set up remotely (i.e. using Zoom, Teams and Facebook) with the drafting of a 'handbook' in order to bring together the relevant policies and procedures for them operate during the Pandemic and to protect their volunteers and clients when delivering services to their communities.
- GVS also continued to offer practical services to the Third Sector such as the hiring of display and other equipment and printing out pamphlets although this had been impacted due to COVID-19.

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- GVS also continued to ensure that volunteer groups, etc. could access and share key information and to increase this volume during the Pandemic via the online weekly news bulletins, additional bulletins concerning COVID-19 and through its newsletter 'Vista' in order that voluntary and community organisations were kept up to the date on what was happening during the Pandemic.
- GVS also continued to be involved with partnership, consultation and joint working in terms of the Third Sector and statutory bodies, as well as delivering training services to volunteer and other groups, adapted to be held online (via Teams, Zoom, etc.) which had been positively received.
- GVS had taken over and refurbished the former Llantwit Major Youth Centre, now called 'CF61', which would serve the local communities as a community space. For example, during COVID-19 GVS were able to provide PPE via this location and it was used by doctor surgeries from both Llantwit Major and Cowbridge as an immunisation centre.
- GVS had also obtained another building, now known as Illtyd House, which Age Connect were now based within and delivering their services from there, as well as reopening the nursery previously sited at this location. The office space was being let to individual organisations and businesses together with coworking space so that local people could book desks to use on an hourly, daily, or weekly basis. The building also had a community room that could be booked by different groups, such as the Disabled Support Group, a foster carers group and Action for Children.
- Finally, GVS had taken on the running of the new Community Centre at the former St. Paul's Church in Penarth. This would be open and fully operational just after Easter and would be run along the same lines as CF61, with local groups and individuals to run activities from there. Also, GVS were undertaking a feasibility study on the possible development of the ground floor of the old Castle Hotel in Barry into a community facility.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor John wished to praise the work done by GVS and the volunteer groups in converting the CF61 and other buildings referred to into community facilities, which were extremely positive developments for their communities and money well spent as a result.
- Councillor Sivagnanam echoed Councillor John's points, as well as asking about the St. Paul's community development and how this would be used, i.e., to have semi-permanent community groups and activities located there or for it to be used on a more ad hoc, temporary basis. It was explained that St. Paul's would be run as a community centre, with the local community having already engaged with this. There had already been bookings for yoga classes, children's activities, etc. at the location. Another ambition for the centre was to have a 'Fair Share' or 'Food Share' scheme run there which involved picking up items that were close to their sell by date and items that were donated by supermarkets. GVS welcomed the input of the local community and Councillors on what services they would like to see provided.

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- Councillor Dr Johnson asked about the future for the GVS main office in Gibbonsdown, Barry and about the proposed community centre at the Castle Hotel, which was also raised by the Vice Chair who felt this type of community centre was sorely needed locally. Regarding the Gibbonsdown Office, although the main office had been transferred to CF61 at Llantwit Major, space at the Enterprise Centre at Gibbonsdown would be retained. In terms of the Castle Hotel development, this was still in the feasibility study stage and a partner was also being sought to run part of the building as a café.
- Councillor Cox stated that despite the additional work and challenges undertaken by GVS due to COVID-19, training still remained a key focus for GVS to provide to local organisations with 100% of attendees rating the training as either good or excellent.
- The Chair asked if there would be any potential conflicts with taking over the running of these various community centres in terms of helping out and facilitating other community centres as well and whether GVS also kept the money generated at these local community centres at this local level or was it distributed more widely. It was explained that considerable amounts of money, from various funding streams, were invested into the community centre buildings. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on the use of the community centres, GVS was using financial reserves also to help run these. GVS were however, still able to share advice on running community activities at designated buildings to local volunteer groups during the Pandemic, as well as enabling PPE equipment to be given to Third Sector workers / volunteers to protect them when going into people's houses and running 'frontline' services. The report showed that GVS had been able to deliver on support, etc. to various local groups and had an adaptable team who had worked 24/7 to support their local communities. The Chair also asked that Council Officers shared an electronic copy of the GVS newsletter ('Vista') with all Councillors once received from GVS.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee receive this report on an annual basis.
- (2) T H A T Council Officers ensure GVS' Vista magazine and supplements are circulated to all elected Members by email.

#### Reasons for recommendations.

- (1) In order for the Committee to be updated on Glamorgan Voluntary Services annually.
- (2) In order for elected Members to be kept updated on Glamorgan Voluntary Services on a quarterly basis.