

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
14TH APRIL, 2022

REFERENCE FROM CABINET: 11TH APRIL, 2022

“C904. UNACCEPTABLE ACTIONS BY CITIZENS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES (EL/PR) (SCRUTINY – CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES) –

The Leader explained that the report sought Cabinet approval of the updated Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and Social Media Policies, prior to consideration by Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and final approval by Cabinet.

Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy

- The Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) set out the Council's approach to those whose actions or behaviour against staff and councillors were considered unacceptable.
- The term 'citizen' included any person who contacted the Council or acted on behalf of another individual in doing so, any complainant, and any person who requested Council information
- The policy built, expanded on and replaced the Council's Unreasonable Complainants Policy
- The policy recognised that opportunities for interaction with the Council and its officers had multiplied with increasing popularity of social media platforms. Communication was quick and easy but could quickly become intrusive and difficult to manage on both professional and private profiles.
- The policy defined the actions of individuals who were angry, demanding or persistent to the extent that they result in unreasonable demands on the Council or unacceptable behaviour towards Council staff.
- The policy set expectations and provided guidance on how to communicate with clients and options/remedies along with a defined process to progress actions/response where there were transgressions. The Policy set out the internal process for managing the Policy and reviewing its application, including guidance for Chief Officers.

Social Media Policy

- The Social Media Policy (attached at Appendix 2 to the report) set out how the Council used social media to help keep people informed about services and events that were important to them, as well as to share and promote the work of the organisation. Social media channels were also used to ask for views and feedback on certain topics, such as consultations.
- The policy set out what citizens could expect from the Council when interacting on social media and the way accounts were updated and monitored.

- The policy also set out what the Council expected from those interacting with the organisation via social media. This was consistent with the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy and provided a social-media specific interpretation of that Policy.

The proposed Policy sought to ensure that the Council dealt fairly, honestly, consistently, and appropriately with all citizens, including those whose actions were considered unreasonable. Services must be accessible to all citizens. However, where a citizen's actions were unacceptable, the Policy provided for the right to restrict or change citizen access to the Council, its services and its staff. It was anticipated this policy would not be used on a regular basis (under previous policies there had been only a very small number of such actions taken) but would be useful to have within the Council's 'toolkit' if needed.

Safeguards would also be in place for this Policy such as having a panel of three Council officers to consider if the Policy should be applied or not and a requirement for any action applied under the Policy to be reviewed at least every 6 months.

Both the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health stressed this Policy would not impact the vast majority of the public who interacted with the Council, who, although they may be critical or disagreed with decisions and policies made by the Council, did so in a reasonable way and who ultimately wanted to improve public services, as well as being part of democratic debate. It was also vital the public continued to be in touch with the Council about key issues and services such as social care, defective street lighting and potholes in order for the Council to respond in a timely manner. This Policy was rather to protect staff and councillors from the small minority of people who took up disproportionate and unacceptable amounts of Council resources with complaints and who were abusive.

This was a matter for Executive decision.

Cabinet, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of this report and the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy, Social Media Policy and associated Equalities Impact Assessment (attached at Appendix 3 to the report) be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy and Social Media Policy be approved subject to consideration by Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee via referral to that Committee.
- (3) T H A T, subject to Resolutions (1) and (2), Cabinet on 25th April, 2022 consider the comments of the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee of 14th April, 2022 and provide final approval for the contents of the report and the Policies at Appendix 1 and 2 of the report. Should Scrutiny Committee make

no further comments, the report and Policies at Appendix 1 and 2 be agreed and endorsed.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) To enable Cabinet to consider the policies and associated procedures.
- (2) To enable scrutiny of the policies and for Cabinet to receive the comments of the Committee.
- (3) To ensure a Policy is in place which reflected the capacity that citizens have to engage with the Council and staff in way that may be deemed to be unacceptable, a policy to be in place as to how the Council would operate and interact via social media in order that Council services and staff are protected from interactions that are aggressive, unreasonably persistent or where citizens were making unreasonable demands.”