

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 2 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor A.G. Morgan (Chair);

Councillors:

S.M. Allen, K.V. Broom, D.M. Cundy, W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, G.H. John, J.K. Howell, C. Jones, K. Madge, D.E. Williams and J.S. Edmunds;

Also in attendance:

Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Executive Board Member for Resources;
C.A. Campbell, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs;
P. Hughes-Griffiths, Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism;

The following Officers were in attendance:

N. Daniel, Head of I.C.T. and Corporate Policy;
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance);
A Clarke, Lead Business Partner (HR);
H. Font, Employee Wellbeing Manager;
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager;
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer;
L. Jenkins, Executive Board Support Officer;
M. Jones, Welsh Language Policy Officer;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer;
J. Laimann, Assistant Democratic Services Officer;
J. Corner, Technical Officer;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting: 2.00 pm - 4.40 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
K. Madge	4 - Corporate Strategy 2018/23 - Update April 2021; 8 - Sickness Absence Monitoring Report;	Daughter works in Social Services.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY 2018/23 - UPDATE APRIL 2021

The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs presented an update on the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2018-23, as at April 2021. The

report detailed the progress being achieved against the Council's Well Being objectives adopted in June 2018, as amended to reflect developing priorities and the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Brexit and climate change. It was considered good practice to ensure the Corporate Strategy was up to date in order that resources were allocated to priorities. The Improvement Objectives also had to be published annually in accordance with both the Local Government (Wales Measure 2009) and The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Supporting presentations were also made by Executive Board Members Councillors D. Jenkins (Resources) and P. Hughes Griffiths (Culture Sport and Tourism) in relation to their specific portfolios.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- Arising from a reference to the recent death of a child in Pembrokeshire as a result of assault and neglect officers agreed to ascertain what safeguarding arrangements were in place in Carmarthenshire with regard to home-educated children;
- Members were assured that all the actions included in the Strategy were embedded in the proposed budget for 2021/22 due to be considered at Council;
- In response to a comment the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs stated that whilst the Council's ambition was to achieve all the objectives within the Strategy there would have to be a certain amount of flexibility in moving forward with priorities possibly changed due to the uncertainties presented by the current pandemic;
- Reference was made to the need to improve public transport in rural areas as the current situation exacerbated poverty and impacted on employment opportunities in those areas and necessitated reliance on private transport;
- In response to a comment the Committee was advised of the continuing efforts being made to improve broadband connection throughout Carmarthenshire which included the current voucher schemes funded by UK Government. The Head of ICT and Corporate Policy agreed to circulate details of those areas of Carmarthenshire which currently had no broadband connectivity.
- Reference was made to the need to ensure that the former Amman Valley rail line to Llanelli was preserved to ensure that the Ammanford area could benefit in terms of tourism and the developments taking place in Llanelli and Swansea Bay. The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs responded that it was the Executive Board's ambition to seek funding, possibly from Welsh Government, to reopen the railway line as it would also benefit the Council's climate change agenda. The Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism concurred with the view that the reopening of the line would be a major boost to tourism in the area;
- Disappointment was expressed over the fact that the 2011 Census showed that the number of Welsh speakers in Carmarthenshire had reduced to 43.9% compared to 50.1% in 2001. The Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism referred to the Council's support for the promotion of the Welsh language at all levels as indicated in the Welsh Language Annual Report [Minute 7 below refers].

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Corporate Strategy 2018/23 Update April 2021 report be received.

5. CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs presented the new Carmarthenshire County Council Corporate Complaints Policy which the Council was required to adopt in line with a model and guidance issued by the Complaints Standards Agency under powers contained within Section 36 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Carmarthenshire County Council Corporate Complaints Policy be received.

6. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20 AND ACTION PLAN 2020-24

The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs presented the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2019-20, which detailed how the Council had implemented its Strategic Equality Plan and fulfilled its duties under the Equality Act 2010, together with the Action Plan for 2020-24.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- In response to a question the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs commented that the forthcoming report arising from the BAME Task and Finish Group was likely to include recommendations relating to the issue of raising awareness in schools of hate crime, tolerism, discrimination and racism;
- the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs agreed with a comment that no child should be disadvantaged through lack of IT equipment at home, particularly at the current time, and added that he had received an assurance from the Director of Education that the issue was being addressed.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

The Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism presented the Annual Report in relation to the Welsh language and compliance with the Welsh Language Standards during 2019-20. The Report had been produced in compliance with the Welsh Language Commissioner's monitoring arrangements.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- It was commented that there was a need to ensure that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic [BAME] groups were not discouraged from applying for jobs with the Council due to their inability to speak welsh and that it was unclear whether this was addressed in the Annual Report. The Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism responded that this was an issue that could be considered as part of the BAME report currently being formulated under the leadership of the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs;
- The design and printing of Flash cards for community staff working in the care sector was commended.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Annual report on the Welsh Language

2019-20 be received.

8. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING REPORT

The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs presented the Sickness Absence Monitoring Report which provided absence data for the cumulative period Q2 2020/21 financial year plus a summary of actions. It was noted that during this period sickness absence figures had reduced significantly compared to the same period the previous year. As an update to the report the Assistant Chief Executive commented that for Q3 2020/21 the Average Number of days lost per FTE was 5.67 compared with 7.67 the previous year. Based on these figures it was considered likely that the Average Number of days lost per FTE at the end of the year 2020/21 would be less than 8 compared with the figure of 10.78 reported at the end of 2019/20. He added that whilst it was likely that the increase in home-working during the current pandemic had contributed to the decrease in the levels of short-term sickness absence the level of referrals to the well-being support service had increased. In this regard the report detailed the initiatives developed by the Authority to support staff during the pandemic.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- It was acknowledged that managers should be able to ensure the well-being of their teams remotely, loneliness being a key issue, whilst at the same time looking after their own well-being. In this regard the Authority had developed in the region of 180 well-being champions to assist staff. The Committee concurred with a suggestion that it would be useful to have a Members Development Session which focussed on the covid 'live feed' staff sickness absence monitoring system which was updated every 20 minutes;
- In terms of the effect of the pandemic on staff and members training the committee was informed that over 50% of the training sessions arranged had been held on-line with positive feedback and this was likely to be developed further though the nature of some sessions involving physical interaction meant that this was not possible e.g. manual handling;
- The use of agency staff had reduced during the pandemic and the TIC team had been asked to look into the repetitive spend on agency staff;
- In response to a query regarding the effect on staff who had been redeployed to other roles during the pandemic e.g. office staff transferred temporarily to residential care homes, the Assistant Chief Executive commented that feedback from the staff themselves had been positive in terms of job satisfaction from the experience and the sense of pride in being able to help out during a crisis. The feedback would be referenced in the 'new ways of working' framework currently being developed which would also take account of social isolation issues and staff well-being.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

8.1 that the report be received;

8.2 that a Members Development Session be arranged focussing on the covid 'live feed' staff sickness absence monitoring system.

9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received the Non-Submission report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on the 29th March 2021 be received subject to the addition of a report on sickness absence.

11. MINUTES - 3RD FEBRUARY 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd February 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE