

# **POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **24<sup>th</sup> JULY 2015**

**(NOTE: THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION BY THE COMMITTEE AT ITS NEXT MEETING)**

**Present: Councillor D.W.H. Richards (Chair)**

**Councillors:, D.M. Cundy, A. Davies, G. Davies (Vice-Chair), J.S. Edmunds, A.W. Jones, A. Lenny, D. Price, D.E. Williams, J. Williams.**

**Councillor S. Allen – Substitute for Councillor T. Bowen**

**Councillor E.G Thomas – Substitute for Councillor W.J.W. Evans**

**Also in attendance:**

**Councillor P.A. Palmer – Executive Board Member (Community Champion, Customer Focus & Policy, Anti-Poverty Champion)**

**Councillor L.M. Stephens – Executive Board Member (Human Resources, Efficiencies & Collaboration and Welsh Language Champion)**

**The following officers were in attendance:**

Mrs. L. Rees-Jones – Head of Administration & Law

Mr. P. Sexton – Head of Audit, Risk & Procurement

Mr. P.R. Thomas – Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) (People Management & Performance [PMP])

Mrs. G. Ayers – Corporate Policy & Partnership Manager

Mrs. S. Bennett – Joint IT Manager

M. N. Daniel – Performance & Information Manager

Mrs. H. Font – Fitness for Work Manager (for item 5)

Mr. A. Parnell – Treasury & Pension Investments Manager

Mrs. L. Evans – Policy & Partnership Officer (for item 4)

Ms. B. Dolan – Senior Consultant

**Venue: Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen (10:00am – 12:45pm)**

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T. Bowen, W.J.W. Evans and A.G. Morgan.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor L.D Evans, Executive Board Member (Equalities) and Mrs. W. Walters, Assistant Chief Executive (Customer Focus & Policy).

The Chair announced that he would be leaving the meeting at 12:00pm and that the Vice-Chair would take the chair at that point.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

There were no declarations of personal interest.

### **3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS**

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

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### **4. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15**

The Committee considered the 2014-15 annual report for the Strategic Equality Plan which was approved in March 2012. It was advised that the People Strategy Steering Group was now taking the lead on equalities and improving diversity. The Committee was also advised that the Council will need to prepare its second Strategic Equality Plan by 2 April 2016.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

Concerns were expressed that local members had not been consulted with over increasing car parking spaces for disabled people that had lessened the spaces available for the general public. The Policy & Partnership Officer agreed to request the evidence basis for the increase from the Head of Service.

The new corporate website was commended as being more accessible, particularly with the introduction of Browse Aloud for those visually impaired. The importance of not having bilingual information on either the English or Welsh websites was noted to allow this software to function correctly. The Policy & Partnership Officer agreed this was a challenge and also to circulate the numbers using Browse Aloud and downloading audio files.

It was noted that older people/disabled bus passes could also be used for the County Cars service. It was asked where this was publicised. The Policy & Partnership Officer agreed to obtain the information.

The number of young carers in the county was requested. The Policy & Partnership Officer agreed to circulate the information.

It was asked what risks were associated with completion of equalities impact assessments. The Policy & Partnership Officer advised that these were needed as policies and new projects were developed and had to give due consideration to protected characteristics and the Welsh language. Training workshops had been held with managers to ensure all were aware of their statutory responsibilities.

#### **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to:**

#### **4.1 Endorse the Strategic Equality Plan annual report 2014-15.**

### **5. END OF YEAR CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT – 1ST APRIL 2014 TO 31ST MARCH 2015**

The Committee considered the report, which provided an overview of how the Authority was performing. The report included information regarding: Improvement Plan Monitoring – Actions & Measures (Report A); Outcome Agreement Grant (OAG) Monitoring (Report B); Sickness Absence (Report C); and Compliments / Complaints (Report D). The Committee was advised that a meeting with Welsh Government to discuss the OAG was being arranged and the team were confident that the grant for 2014/15 would be given in full. Targets had been agreed for

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2015/16 which would be the last year of the OAG, as the funding would become part of the Revenue Support Grant going forward.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

The financial costs associated with sickness absence were requested. The ACE (PMP) advised that the notional savings associated with the improved out-turn position of 9.6 FTE days lost from last year's performance, were approximately £500k. His team had worked closely with services with high absence rates and significant improvements had been seen. Absence in schools continued to be an issue and meetings had been held with headteachers and Governing Bodies. Progress was being made although there were still some 30 schools that had not yet adopted a good sickness absence policy. There was also potential to save a considerable amount in terms of insurance for supply cover. The Fitness for Work Manager added that it was important that departments maintained their performance whilst the team worked closely with schools.

It was asked what the target for sickness absence was for the current year. The Fitness for Work Manager stated that it was 9.3 FTE days lost. This had been set bearing in mind the significant changes ahead and the potential impact on stress and mental health of staff.

A question was asked about the reduction in absence due to stress, mental health and fatigue. The Fitness for Work Manager advised that this had been 21% since last year and the new stress management policy, training for managers and the suite of available support had all contributed to this.

It was asked why not all schools had taken up the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with PMP. The ACE (PMP) stated that it had been revised to reflect the level of support given to schools. Whilst the cost had gone up, the implications of getting people management wrong were far higher in terms of the cost of investigations and tribunals.

It was noted that there was still some reasons for absence stated as unknown. The Fitness for Work Manager agreed that this was frustrating as the PMP team had to analyse individual cases. Further work was needed to prevent this type of recording.

The potential to ask managers to attend where sickness absence levels were high was noted. The ACE (PMP) agreed that this would be useful however it would also be beneficial to invite managers where sickness absence levels had improved.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the monitoring report be received.**

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### **6. END OF YEAR DEPARTMENTAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT – 1ST APRIL 2014 TO 31ST MARCH 2015**

The Committee considered the performance management report which provided an overview of how the Chief Executive's and Resources Departments had performed last year. The report included information relating to:

- Heads of Service Overview of Performance (Report A)
- Improvement Plan Monitoring – Combined Actions and Measures Report (Report B)

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

It was asked why the percentage of complaints responded to within 10 days had declined. The Performance & Information Manager advised that there had been a reduction in the number of staff dealing with complaints and they were increasingly complex. The team also redirected the issues raised where appropriate as many contacts did not want to make a formal complaint.

It was asked if the recommendations from Ombudsman's s16 report had been implemented. The Head of Administration & Law stated that they had and the Ombudsman had been written to accordingly.

A question was asked about the potential impact of the new Welsh language standards on the Translation Unit. The ACE (PMP) advised that the requirement to produce all reports bilingually would have a significant impact on the Unit's workload which had just lost a member of staff. The industry standard was 2,000 words translated in a day and a typical agenda could be more than 300,000 words. One option would be to limit the number of reports and words produced however it was likely that additional translators would be needed which would have a significant cost. The standards would also require development mechanisms for staff wishing to learn or improve their Welsh linguistic skills during the working day.

It was suggested that more could be done to raise awareness of the webcasts of Council meetings, given the decline in viewing numbers. The Head of Administration & Law agreed that more could be done as currently they were only promoted through the corporate website.

It was asked why there had been a large increase in the number of education appeals. The Head of Administration & Law advised that she would ask the Education & Children department to respond however there was a heavy administrative burden on the democratic team as a result.

The comments about the performance of the Dyfed Pension Fund were queried given there was a shortfall. The Treasury & Pension Investments Manager stated that it was currently 89% funded which placed in the top ten in the UK. The major impact was increasing longevity rather than contributions.

It was noted that there had been a significant decrease in IT staff over the last few years. It was asked if the new joint arrangement with Pembrokeshire would realise

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any savings. The Head of Audit, Risk & Procurement stated that the new Joint IT Manager would work with the new Joint Head of Service to identify systems which could be merged during the next 12 months. The Joint IT Manager added that back office, communications and IT networks would be under consideration. It was anticipated that £2m savings over the next 5 years could be made.

The comments about the National Procurement Service (NPS) were noted and its claim to have saved £6m on an all Wales basis. The Head of Audit, Risk & Procurement advised that none of the Authority's contracts were linked yet to the NPS. They were trying to work with the NPS to understand their work programme and the implications for our procurement and wider implications for local businesses. He agreed to send the NPS's published work programme to the Committee. It was important to try to influence the NPS in terms of regional lots to ensure local suppliers had a chance to bid. Whilst the NPS was claiming savings, they would charge 0.5% on turnover regardless of whether an authority made savings. There were concerns about existing regional frameworks which were working well, such as legal, would be subsumed and ending up costing more. Insurance was another area where the cost was likely to be higher.

Additional detail was requested in relation to difficult to let industrial units. The Performance & Information Manager stated that he would ask the Head of Corporate Property to respond to the query.

It was asked how much money was saved through the installing renewable energy technologies in the Authority's non-domestic buildings. The Head of Audit, Risk & Procurement advised that he would ask the Acting Head of Property Maintenance & Construction to respond to the query.

A question was asked about the numbers using food banks in the county. The Executive Board Member (Community Champion, Customer Focus & Policy, and Anti-Poverty Champion) stated that, whilst the Authority has no responsibility for the food banks, it kept contact with them on a regular basis. Across Wales there had been a 44% increase in use, with a high proportion being people in work. She agreed to try to get figures for the county. She noted there had been a 50% increase in use at one food bank last December. She reminded the Committee of the annual toy appeal and urged members to assist with the distribution this year.

Concerns were expressed about the format and length of report B. It was also felt that the information was out of date by the time the Committee considered it. The Performance & Information Manager advised that members had requested a move from exception based reporting to a balanced and comprehensive format several years ago. He would however accept changing the format back to exception based although this would need to be agreed by the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum following consultation with other committees. He reminded members that they had full access to the PIMS system at any time and could generate reports within it. The roll-out of tablets to members would also improve matters and he could review PIMS with IT services to see how the format of the report could be improved in the longer term.

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### **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:**

- 6.1 That the monitoring report be received.**
- 6.2 That other Scrutiny Committees are offered the opportunity to receive Performance Management Report B on an exception basis.**
- 6.3 That the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum review the format of Report B.**

*Councillor D.W.H. Richards (Chair) left the meeting during the above debate and Councillor G. Davies (Vice-Chair) took the chair.*

## **7. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2014/15**

The Committee considered the monitoring report that outlined the budgetary position for the 2014/15 financial year. The report included:

- Corporate Revenue Budget (Appendix A);
- The Chief Executive's and Resources Revenue budget (Appendix B);
- Corporate Capital Programme 2014/15 (Appendix C) and
- The Chief Executive's and Resources Capital Programme 2014/15 (Appendix D)

The Chair reminded the Committee that each Scrutiny Committee monitored the service budgets within their remits and that the corporate overview was presented to this Committee in light of its overarching role.

It was asked if the over spends within the People Management and Performance Division were likely to recur in the current year. The ACE (PMP) advised that the revised SLA with schools had resolved under-recovery of costs in previous years. The Departmental Management Team had resolved the over spend within Fitness for Work.

The basis for departmental reserves was requested. The Treasury & Pension Investments Manager stated that 50% of any departmental underspend was retained by the department and the remainder returned to the corporate pot.

The slippage of £1.411m on the capital programme was noted. It was asked how this was utilised. The Treasury & Pension Investments Manager advised that surplus cash was invested and kept available for the capital programme.

It was asked what the reason was for the reduced cost of the footfall counter scheme in Carmarthen market. The Treasury & Pension Investments Manager did not have the answer to hand and agreed to follow up the query after the meeting

### **RESOLVED to accept the report**

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### **8. ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR REPORT 2014-2015**

The Committee considered the Annual Report listing the treasury management activities which occurred during 2014-2015 in line with the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2014-2015 that was adopted by Council on the 19th February 2014.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

A question was asked about the changes in credit ratings of banks and how this risk was mitigated. The Treasury & Pension Investments Manager advised that a maximum of £10m was lent and the majority of funds were available on call. Also the majority of fixed terms were with major banks or building societies in the UK and other local authorities. In response to an additional question about counterparties, he stated that borrowing from other authorities was cheaper than going to the Public Works Loan Board.

The Committee commended the work of the team in such challenging times.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to:**

**8.1 Endorse the annual report**

**8.2 Pass the Committee's thanks to the Treasury & Pension Investments staff.**

### **9. QUARTERLY TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR REPORT – 1ST APRIL TO 30TH JUNE 2015**

The Committee considered the report which outlined the activities within the Treasury Management Function for the period 1st April 2015 to 30th June 2015, in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy approved by Full Council on the 24th February 2015.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.**

### **10. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT**

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the Carmarthenshire Ageing Well Plan.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the reason be noted.**

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### **11. POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS AND REFERRALS UPDATE**

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the report detailing progress in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous scrutiny meetings be noted.

### **12. FORTHCOMING ITEMS**

The Committee was provided with a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next scheduled meeting on Monday, 5th October 2015. It noted the length of the agenda. Dissatisfaction was expressed at the number of officers who were not present today and the number of queries left unanswered.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that:

**12.1 The agenda items for the forthcoming meeting be endorsed.**

**12.2 Agenda items are deferred if the relevant officers are not present at the meeting.**

### **13. TO SIGN AS CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 11<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2015**

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 11th June 2015, be signed as a correct record.

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Chair)

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_