

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 6 December 2017

PRESENT: Councillor A.G. Morgan (Chair)

Councillors:

S.M. Allen, T.A.J. Davies, H.L. Davies, G.H. John, C. Jones, J.G. Prosser, D.E. Williams and D. Thomas (In place of D. Nicholas)

Also in attendance:

Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Executive Board Member for Resources
L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council

The following Officers were in attendance:

C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services
L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance)
N. Daniel, Head of I.C.T.
J. Fearn, Head of Property
H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager
G. Ayres, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager
A. Clarke, Lead Business Partner (HR)
A. Parnell, Treasury & Pensions Investments Manager
H. Font, Employee Wellbeing Manager
L. Evans, Policy & Partnership Officer
J. Williams, Applications Development Manager
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer

In attendance as an observer:

Ms. Alison Lewis, Wales Audit Office

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen - 10.00 am - 12.45 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors F. Akhtar, D.C. Evans, K. Howell and D. Nicholas.

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.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

5. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2017/18

The Committee considered the Authority's Corporate Budget Monitoring Report and the Chief Executive's and Corporate Services departmental reports as at 31st August 2017 in respect of the 2017/18 financial year.

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

- In response to a concern with regard to the possibility of having to draw on reserves if there was a particularly hard winter the Director of Corporate Services responded that departments will have already factored into their budgets issues which could arise from inclement weather;
- It was noted that inter-departmental discussions were on-going with regard to the unfunded Safeguarding & Counter-Terrorism post;
- the Director of Corporate Services agreed to circulate further details with regard to the additional statementing costs of £280k in the Special Educational Needs Division;
- the Director of Corporate Services, in response to a query, stated that the proposals for new schools in Ammanford were still included in the capital programme for future years.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to receive the report.

6. MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR REPORT 1ST APRIL 2017 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017

The Committee considered the Mid-Year Treasury Management and Prudential Indicator report for the period 1st April 2017 – 30th September 2017 to ensure that the activities undertaken were consistent with the requirements of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2017-2018 adopted by Council on the 22nd February, 2017.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the monitoring report be noted.

7. CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN AND OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY UPDATE

Further to minute 6 of the meeting held on the 30th November 2016 the Committee received an update on progress in relation to the actions contained within the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2016-2019 and Office Accommodation Strategy. The report also provided an outline of the outcomes envisaged via agile working which would become a significant feature of the Office Accommodation Strategy in future years.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the Plan:

- The Committee was assured by the Head of Property that the promotion of agile working, linked with the Office Accommodation Strategy, would not result in job losses but a change in office location for some staff. It was considered that the proposals could make a positive contribution towards staff absence management and work/life balance by affording employees the opportunity to reduce home to work travel time amongst other benefits. He added that the agile working strategy had been developed as a result of staff feedback and consultation. Discussions had also been held with representatives of the unions;
- The Head of Property, in response to a query, advised that negotiations were taking place regarding the future use of Ty Nant, Trostre;
- Concern was expressed over the £8m proposed for the Towy Valley Cycle path and it was suggested that the Environment and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee would be the appropriate committee to scrutinise this expenditure. The Director of Corporate Services commented that there was no proposal to allocate any more funding for the cycle path in the capital programme and money would be drawn down from Welsh Government;

- In response to a concern over the perceived slow progress in securing shared accommodation with partner organisations the Head of Property advised that discussions were taking place through the Public Services Board but it was often a case of different organisations having their own priorities. There had, however, been savings in the social care and health sector with accommodation now being shared in Llanelli, Carmarthen and Ammanford;
- Reference was made to the need to protect old railway routes in and to rural areas for future strategic projects as the poor access to services was considered to be a major contributor to the economic deficit in these areas;
- The Committee was informed that good progress was being made in regard to Community Asset Transfers. In terms of Park Howard, Llanelli, which was not on the asset transfer list the Head of Property stated that discussions were ongoing and he was due to meet with the Town Council the following day.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

7.1 that the report be noted;

7.2 that the Environment and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee be requested to scrutinise expenditure on the proposed Towy Valley Cycle path.

8. ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17 ON THE WELSH LANGUAGE

With reference to minute 7 of the meeting held on the 5th October 2016 the Committee considered the Annual Report in relation to the Welsh language and the introduction of the Standards during 2016-17. The Report had been produced in order to comply with the Welsh Language Commissioner's monitoring arrangements.

In response to a comment it was stated that Welsh language training could potentially be provided for Councillors and a link to an online course would be sent to all members. Town and community councils were, however, responsible for their own arrangements in respect of the Welsh language. It was noted also that the standards did not apply to school governing bodies. The issue of the Welsh Government's plans to scrap the role of Welsh Language Commissioner and create a Welsh language commission instead was raised but it was noted that the impact on current requirements for the Council in relation to compliance with the Welsh Language Standards was unlikely to change whatever the regulatory arrangements

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the Annual report in relation to the Welsh language and the introduction of the Standards during 2016-17.

9. DRAFT CARMARTHENSHIRE WELL-BEING PLAN: THE CARMARTHENSHIRE WE WANT

The Committee considered the 'Draft Carmarthenshire Well-being Plan: The Carmarthenshire We Want' which had been developed by the Public Services Board [PSB] with a view to being published by May 2018, following public consultation, in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The objectives and actions identified as part of the Plan focussed on areas

of collective action that the PSB could influence by working together and did not therefore replicate what was considered to be the core business of the individual member bodies of the PSB unless there was added value to be gained by the PSB working together.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the Plan:

- It was commented that the Plan should give greater emphasis to culture and the Welsh language along the lines referred to in the letter from the Future Generations Commissioner also circulated which provided advice on the steps to be taken in drafting well-being objectives;
- In response to a comment the committee was advised that one of the focuses of the Plan would be enabling young people to remain in their community in terms of work etc.;
- The Chair reminded members that the Policy and Resources Committee would be scrutinizing the delivery of the Plan and work of the PSB as part of its remit but expressed concern with the varying number of well-being objectives of each of the 4 PSB statutory members as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Draft Plan – in particular he questioned why the Hywel Dda University Health Board had only 4 compared to the 14 listed by Carmarthenshire County Council. In response it was commented that it was for each individual public body to determine their own number of well-being objectives and each organisations was on a learning curve with the introduction and implementation of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. It was likely that each of the PSB partners would be reviewing their individual objectives annually. A workshop with PSB partners was due to be held with a view to developing a suite of activities which would be brought back to committee in due course.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the objectives and actions identified by Carmarthenshire Public Services Board for action as part of its first Well-being Plan for Carmarthenshire be noted.

10. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

With reference to minute 9 of the meeting held on the 25th November 2015 the Committee considered the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2016-17 which detailed how the Council had implemented its Strategic Equality Plan and fulfilled its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Specific Duties for Wales.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive Board that the report be approved.

11. CARMARTHENSHERE PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD (PSB) MINUTES - SEPTEMBER 2017

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting of the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board held on the 14th September 2017. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 required that a designated local government scrutiny committee was appointed to scrutinise the work of the PSB. In Carmarthenshire, the Council's Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee had been designated as the relevant scrutiny committee.

The Chair commented that the Authority's Corporate Policy & Partnership Manager appeared to be responsible for many of the actions arising from the minutes compared to officers from partner organisations. The Corporate Policy & Partnership Manager advised that the Authority provided the secretariat for the PSB and whilst the 'actions' fell within the remit of her policy and partnership role

she might not be directly responsible for undertaking the work necessary. She added as a note of caution that without more resources from the PSB partners there would be a limit on what could be achieved. The Committee was informed that at its November meeting the PSB had agreed to extend an invitation for members of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to attend a future PSB meeting.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

11.1 that the minutes of the PSB meeting held on the 14th September 2017 be received;

11.2 that the Executive Board be requested to ask the PSB partners to make a greater financial contribution towards the work of the PSB;

11.3 that the PSB's invitation to attend a future meeting be accepted.

12. REFERRAL FROM COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE- STAFF SICKNESS LEVELS

The Committee was advised that the Community Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 5th October 2017, had, following consideration of the Draft Carmarthenshire County Council's Annual Report for 2016/17, resolved that "the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be requested to give consideration to the increase in staff sickness levels within the Authority, possibly, by revisiting the work of its previous task and finish group thereon."

Members were reminded that the same concerns had been raised at the last meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on the 11th October 2017 [Minute 8 thereof refers] during its consideration of the '2017/18 Well-Being Objectives and Governance & Resources - Departmental Performance Monitoring Report'. It had subsequently resolved that 'a report on sickness absence be submitted to the next meeting'. The report is referred to in minute 13 below.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Community Scrutiny Committee be advised that the Policy and Resources Committee has considered a report on attendance management incorporating sickness management.

13. ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2017 TO SEPTEMBER 2017

Further to minute 8 [resolution 8.2] of the last meeting the Committee considered a report on Attendance Management Performance for the period April 2017 to September 2017 which detailed sickness absence figures for the Departments for quarter 2 (April to September) along with benchmarking and performance ranking tables. The report also included a breakdown of the key causes for absence to enable the Committee to scrutinise the council's performance in relation to managing attendance. The Committee was advised that departments were presented with the data on a regular basis and challenged to address any issues of concern.

The Chair thanked officers for arranging the recent informal visit by the committee members to the occupational health unit following which there had been excellent feedback.

The following issues / observations were raised on the report:

- It was noted that improvements in sickness absence figures were being seen in most departments and these were likely to be reflected in the data for quarter 3. An important factor in reducing days lost through sickness was ensuring that appropriate interventions were made in a timely manner. Increased flexible working was also viewed as a contributory factor in reducing staff absence levels. The recently relaunched Employee Wellbeing Service was able to offer a range of therapies to support employees;
- It was noted that all new staff were apprised of the sickness policy, which took a supportive stance, as part of their induction and all managers had responsibility for monitoring absence. The Authority also liaised with colleagues from Hywel Dda University Health Board with regard to the provision of flu vaccination for employees who were carers or worked in the care sector;
- Members were informed that a recent half day session had been held with headteachers focussing on sickness absence following which there had been a number of queries regarding stress and it was considered that the openness of such approaches was to be welcomed so that the relevant support and intervention could be offered;
- Whilst the report was welcomed it was considered that more in depth data would enable the Committee to better scrutinise sickness absence and, for instance, ascertain non-financial implications such as the effect the employment of a supply teacher due to staff sickness might have on a child's education. Members were advised that more detailed data was available which could be provided;
- Schools had been provided with benchmarking information and a quarterly hr newsletter was also despatched. A schools staff absence scheme had also been launched.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

13.1 that the report be received;

13.2 that arrangements be made for a development session for members of the Policy and Resources Committee focussing on the issues raised above with a view to enabling members to gain a greater understanding of sickness management within the authority and schools and agreeing the type of data it wishes to see in future reports.

14. 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.

15. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on the 12th January 2018 be noted.

16. MINUTES - 11TH OCTOBER 2017

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th October 2017 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE