

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 3 February 2016

PRESENT: Councillor D.W.H. Richards (Chair)

Councillors:

D.J.R. Bartlett, D.M. Cundy (In place of A.W. Jones), G. Davies, J.S. Edmunds, W.J.W. Evans, W.T. Evans (In place of A. Lenny), J.K. Howell, A.G. Morgan, D. Price, E.G. Thomas (In place of T. Bowen) and D.E. Williams

The following Officers were in attendance:

A. Aitken, Procurement Manager
G. Ayres, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager
S. Bennett, ICT Manager
C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services
A. Parnell, Treasury & Pensions Investments Manager
J. Roberts, Joint Head of ICT
P. Sexton, Head of Audit, Risk and Procurement
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen - **10.00** - 11.23 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T. Bowen, A.W. Jones, A. Lenny and R. Thomas

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 (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions were received

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items for consideration at its next scheduled meeting to be held on the 16th March 2016.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items be noted

6. COMPLYING WITH THE NEW WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

The Committee considered a report detailing the progress being achieved by the Council in implementing, and complying with, the 170 new Welsh Language Standards received from the Welsh Language Commissioner on the 15th

September by the designated timescales of either 30th March 2016 or, the 30th September, 2016.

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

- Reference was made to the Council's intention to appeal against the imposition of standard numbers 27CH, 28 and 73 and to seek their replacement with standards 27D, 29 and 74 respectively to allow for the provision of simultaneous translation when the Council met with individuals who wished to speak Welsh. Support was expressed for the appeal on the basis it was considered important people were afforded the opportunity of using the language of their choice at meetings with the Council, and the provision of simultaneous translation assisted in that regard.

The Committee was advised that as some of the Council's final standards received from the Commissioner allowed for the use of simultaneous translation, the appeal merely sought to ensure consistency across their application. If the appeal were to be granted, the revised standards would enable the Council to communicate a consistent message to both its staff and service users on its expectations when meetings were being arranged.

- Reference was made to the fact each of the 22 unitary local authorities in Wales had received different sets of standards from the Commissioner. Whilst it was accepted that each authority had different skill levels, a view was expressed that the standards should be applied uniformly across Wales.

The Committee was advised that whilst each authority had received differing sets of standards, compliance therewith was a legal requirement and their implementation would prove challenging for all the authorities. It was therefore important the Council had the support of its staff and public to drive the proposals forward, which were achievable over time. It was noted that the Commissioner also intended for all public bodies in Wales to operate to the same set of standards over time. In that regard, Unitary Authorities had formed the first tranche of public bodies to be subject to the standards, subsequent tranches would involve other public bodies including the health authorities and emergency services etc.

- Whilst the new standards were to be welcomed, and the provision of simultaneous translation was important thereto, the Committee was reminded that there were cost implications associated with their implementation. For Carmarthenshire, that represented the inclusion of a £200k growth bid within the 2016/17 revenue budget to fund the cost of additional translators. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the Executive Board, at its meeting held on the 1st February, 2016 had endorsed the provision of the extra funding. The cost would be met from the Council's revenue budget settlement from the Welsh Government, the reduction to which had been less than originally anticipated.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. ICT STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report detailing the progress being achieved in implementing the Council's ICT Strategy 2015-18, as approved by the Executive Board at its meeting held on the 15th December, 2014 in relation to the following five themes:

Theme 1 – Giving Citizens better access to Council Services,

Theme 2 – Promoting Digital Inclusion,
Theme 3 – Supporting Business Efficiency,
Theme 4 - Sharing Information and Joining up services
Theme 5 – Supporting Schools and Education.

The Committee noted that since September 2015, a Joint Head of ICT had been in place between Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire County Councils, replacing the former arrangement with the Dyfed Powys Police, and that as a consequence of the new arrangement the current ICT Strategy may need to be reviewed.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:

- In response to a question relating to the use of Microsoft Skype for business and to whether that could be applied to council meetings vis-à-vis video conferencing with members participating in meetings from home, the Joint Head of ICT advised that whilst that was probably technologically feasible, there would be legislative and other requirements associated therewith which would require investigation prior to any introduction.

With regard to the above, a question was asked on how simultaneous translation could be provided at meetings where participants were situated in different locations. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager advised that whilst the Councils' current simultaneous translation system was fully bilingual, its extension to incorporate the type of meetings suggested would require detailed consideration on the type of technology that may be available and its cost. One example currently being trialled in that regard by the Welsh Government involved the use of Microsoft mechanical translation to translate the written word from one language to another.

- In response to a question regarding the increasing use of modern mobile technology e.g mobile phones / tablets to access services, the Joint Head of ICT advised that the Council was examining how it could holistically enable the public to access the Council's services in a way that suited both them, and the Council. One issue requiring further attention in that regard related to citizen authorisation and ensuring any information accessed by individuals was secure. If introduced, it would enable a wider range of Council services to be accessed by the public.
- Reference was made to the possibility of the Council's ICT Strategy having to be reviewed in light of the collaboration with Pembrokeshire County Council. Clarification was sought on whether, or when, that review was likely to take place.

The Joint Head of ICT advised that currently a review was being undertaken to ascertain whether there would be any benefits in pursuing a formal Joint ICT provision agreement with Pembrokeshire in terms of efficiencies and cost savings. In the interim, the Council would be proceeding with the implementation of its current strategy.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received

8. PROCUREMENT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered a report reviewing the progress being achieved in developing the Council's Procurement Function. It also noted that a new Procurement Strategy was being developed via a cross party member focus group (comprising nominated representatives from the Policy and Resources Scrutiny

Committee) the timing of which dovetailed into a number of key milestones that included:

- The National Procurement Service
- Welsh Government Fitness Check
- Welsh Government Procurement Policy Statement
- Future Direction of the Procurement Service
- Current and Future Workplans.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:

- Reference was made to page 26 of the report and to the disappointing level of savings achieved to date from the Council's membership of the National Procurement Service. That concern was heightened in relation to the fuel contract negotiated by the NPS which could cost the Council an additional £35k at a time when fuel prices were falling.

The Head of Audit, Risk and Procurement in response stated that whilst the level of returns were less than anticipated, a factor compounding that disappointment was the 0.45% levy applied to NPS contracts. He advised that the Council had entered into a five year agreement with the NPS, which was currently in its third year, and that at the end of the five years local authorities would be better placed to challenge its performance. Additionally, the Wales Audit Office was currently undertaking a review of the service examining areas that included what the NPS had produced, was it paying for itself and was it providing benefit to its members.

- Reference was made to the disappointing savings accrued to date by the Council as a member of the NPS and to whether the Council could opt out of various contracts.

The Head of Audit, Risk and Procurement advised that whilst that option was available, it would have to be sanctioned by the NPS Board, approval of which he felt would be limited. He also advised that whilst the Council was a member of the NPS there had been occasions when it had decided to not opt in to various contracts e.g. the provision of stationary and the Construction Consultancy Framework.

- Reference was made to the £25k cashable savings claimed to have been earned by the Council from being a member of the NPS, and a view expressed that the Council should, when considering entering into national contracts, have regard to their potential impact on the local economy and local Small to Medium Enterprises.

The Head of Audit Risk and Procurement in response advised that whilst the Council was in the 3rd year of the 5 five year contract it would need to examine any future benefits to be accrued from continued membership. That could include the impact on the local economy, a factor taken into account when the Council had decided to pursue its Regional Contractors Framework and not participate in the NPS Contract.

- Reference was made to the £74k savings generated by the Council from having negotiated its own milk contract rather than use the NPS contract, and the committee's attention was drawn to the fact that the level of saving achieved on that one contract exceeded the whole of the claimed £56k savings achieved on its NPS contracts during 2014/15.

The Head of Audit, Risk and Procurement advised that whilst £74k of savings had been realised on the milk contract the Council's proportion thereof amounted to £26k, the remaining £48k was grant aided and would represent a reduction in the

grant claim to the Welsh Government. In response to a question relating to the sourcing of the milk he stated that whilst it would be desirable for the Council to stipulate it should be locally sourced, that was not legal. He also advised that under the former Welsh Purchasing Consortium, under which the milk contract had been procured, opportunities had been provided to local firms to tender for the contract, which would not have occurred under the nationally tendered NPS contract. Wherever possible, however, representations were made to the NPS to award contracts on a "lot basis" as opposed to an all Wales service thereby enabling local suppliers to tender for contracts.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received

9. QUARTERLY TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR REPORT - 1ST APRIL TO 31ST DECEMBER 2015

The Committee considered the Quarterly Treasury Management and Prudential Indicator report for the period 1st April – 31st December 2015 to ensure that the activities undertaken were consistent with the requirements of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2015-2016 adopted by Council on the 24th February, 2015.

The Director of Corporate Services advised the Committee that over the 9 month monitoring period the Council's investments had out-performed the "7 day LIBID rate", being the benchmark return for the London Money Market by earning interest of £0.220m, being £80k more than would have been earned under the LIBID rate.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the monitoring report be noted

10. TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2016-17

The Committee considered the proposed Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2016/17 and was reminded that, as part of the requirements of the revised CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the Council was required to maintain a Treasury Management Policy detailing the policies and objectives of its treasury management activities, and to approve a Treasury Management Strategy annually prior to the commencement of the financial year to which it related. Additionally, under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council was required to approve its Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for the coming year.

The Director of Corporate Services informed the Committee that the Executive Board, at its meeting held on the 1st February, 2016 in considering the 2016/17 Treasury Management Policy and Strategy had made reference to the recent changes in the membership of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and had suggested that members of the Committee receive an update/refresher training on the Treasury Management Function. In accordance with that suggestion, arrangements were being made for the provision of training, which would also be attended by the Council's treasury management advisors.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2016/17 and associated appendices be endorsed

11. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received the Non- Submission report and noted that the TIC Third Sector review had been rescheduled for consideration at its meeting to be held on the 24th April, 2016.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

12. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 6TH JANUARY 2016

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 6th January, 2016 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE