

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 21 July 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, K. Madge, J.G. Prosser, D.E. Williams and J.S. Edmunds

Also in attendance:

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

The following Officers were in attendance:

C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services;
N. Daniel, Head of I.C.T. and Corporate Policy;
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration;
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities;
H. Pugh, Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance;
L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law;
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance);
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager;
A Clarke, Lead Business Partner (HR);
H. Font, Fitness for Work Manager;
L. Evans, Senior HR Advisor;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
L. Jenkins, Executive Board Support Officer;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting: 10.00 am - 1.05 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

4. CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020/21

The Deputy Leader presented the Council's draft Annual Report for 2020/21 together with the relevant Well-Being Objective [WBO] detailed reports falling within the remit of the committee namely:

- WBO5 - Tackling poverty;

- WBO14 - Promoting Welsh language and culture;
- WBO15 - Building a Better Council and Making Better Use of Resources.

It was noted that it was a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure the Authority must publish an Annual Report on past performance by the end of October each year.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

WBO5

- In response to a comment relating to the ban on evictions during the covid pandemic and the consequent expectation that the number of households threatened with homelessness might have been less than indicated in the report it was agreed that the Executive Board Member for Housing be requested to provide further information on this matter and also the Authority's future housebuilding plans;
- the Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs noted a concern that there were households which were unable to benefit from Welsh Government's Flying Start initiative as they were not in areas which qualified;
- the Council was thanked for its action in regard to the provision of food parcels and then payments in lieu of free school meals;
- In response to a query it was confirmed that the Pupil Development Grant was included in the budget for this year. There had been no indication about any future withdrawal of the grant, the impact of which would be significant, and it was considered that the only thing Welsh Government could, or might, do in the future would be to transfer the grant to the Revenue Support Grant;
- The Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism, in response to a comment, agreed to make enquiries as to whether Valleys Regional Park funding could be made more widely available for parks which currently did not qualify under the initiative;

WBO14

- It was noted that the Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism had already agreed to do all that was possible to ensure that businesses in Carmarthenshire were able to benefit from the visitors expected for the Urdd Eisteddfod 2023;

WBO15

- the Executive Board Member for Resources agreed to ascertain the amount of money spent on external contractors when work was above the capacity of the Council's own workforce.

A concern was expressed over the backlog of requests for the provision of pavements, in rural areas particularly, which impacted on the ability of people to keep fit and 'Age Well' within the context of the Annual Report and also in regard to safe walking routes to schools. It was noted that this did not fall within this Committee's remit and it was suggested the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider the issue of pavement provision.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive Board that the

draft Annual Report 2020/21 be endorsed.

5. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21 AND ACTION PLAN 2021-24

The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs presented the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2020-21, and the Action Plan for 2021-24, 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.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

- A concern was expressed that the Ward Profiles accessed through the Council's corporate website did not appear to have up-to-date information in areas such as the population characteristics, socio-economic position based on occupation and housing type and tenure and that such information was vital when trying to address inequality and support communities. The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs agreed to follow up the matter;
- In response to a query regarding the much larger percentage [81%] of female staff who had sought well-being advice and support via the Employee Well-being Advice and Support Centre compared with male staff it was suggested that men appeared to be less inclined to seek help but the Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance) agreed to raise the matter with his team;
- Reference was made to the excellent work undertaken by the Equality and Diversity Task & Finish Group (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) and in particular the decision to erect appropriate interpretation boards at the base of the monument to Sir Thomas Picton.

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

6. WELSH LANGUAGE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

With reference to minute 7 of the meeting held on the 5th October 2016 the Executive Board Member for Culture, Sports, Tourism presented the Annual Report in relation to the Welsh language and compliance with the Welsh Language Standards during 2020-21. The Report had been produced in order to comply with the Welsh Language Commissioner's monitoring arrangements.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

- In response to a comment regarding the changing of Welsh place-names to English the Executive Board Member for Culture, Sports, Tourism commented that the Council's concerns had been conveyed to Welsh Government which was considering the matter;
- The Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance) agreed to ascertain the language record figures for the 2460 school-based staff included in the language skills data;
- In response to a comment that St. David's Day should be a bank holiday the Executive Board Member for Culture, Sports, Tourism responded that many celebrations took place at schools which might not otherwise be the case if it was a bank holiday. The matter was being discussed by Welsh Government.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive Board that the Annual report on the Welsh Language 2020-21 be endorsed.

7. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY ANNUAL REPORT 2021

The Deputy Leader presented the Digital Transformation Strategy and Digital Technology Strategy Annual Report 2021 in accordance with commitments given within both the Digital Transformation Strategy 2017-2020, approved by the Executive Board in May 2017, and The Digital Technology Strategy 2018 – 2021 approved by the Executive Board in May 2018. A commitment had been given within both strategies to produce an annual report.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

- In terms of the transition to, and increased reliance on, Cloud services the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy gave an assurance that there was a very detailed Disaster Recovery plan for the Authority's infrastructure and tests were regularly undertaken;
- In response to a query the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy commented that, following the adoption of the Bring Your Own Device Policy, members could now have Outlook installed on their own devices to access features such as their council in box and diary;
- Members were assured that all Carmarthenshire's schools had excellent connectivity and funding had been made available to ensure they had the necessary IT devices and equipment;
- the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy outlined progress being made with regard to improving connectivity to all areas of the County which included initiatives within the Swansea Bay City Deal;
- the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy agreed to ascertain the reason why, in Wales between 2018 and 2020, there had been a decrease in the percentage of households which could access the internet from 89% to 88%;
- the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy agreed to follow up a concern regarding the backlog of funding applications awaiting approval by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to enable the provision of superfast broadband to communities where it was needed;
- In regard to access to services by people who had limited or no digital access members were advised that the Council's services could also be accessed at the Council's Town Centre Hwbs and via phone;
- The Deputy Leader, in response to a concern, advised that the Corporate Governance Group was already cognisant of the inequalities which might increase between those who had access to IT and those without;
- the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy agreed to circulate details of the voucher scheme to support rural communities where possible to increase digital connectivity;
- the Head of ICT & Corporate Policy, in response to a comment, advised that dialogue with the Health Board was ongoing in terms of the sharing of data which would particularly benefit integrated teams.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Digital Transformation Strategy Digital Technology Strategy Annual Report 2021 be endorsed.

8. HANDLING PERSONAL DATA POLICY

The Deputy Leader presented a proposed 'Handling Personal Data Policy' which would replace the existing 'Handling Personal Information Policy' and 'Procedure and Breach Reporting & Response Policy' both of which had exceeded their review dates and required updating to reflect changes in working practices, the use of new IT and decisions and guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

- It was noted that the policy would be supported by more user-friendly information on the Council's website and e-learning modules;
- The Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance advised that data breaches were reported to the Corporate Governance Group the minutes of which were submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive Board that the Handling Personal Data Policy be endorsed.

9. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING REPORT - END OF YEAR REPORT - 2020/21

[DURATION OF MEETING

At 1:00 p.m. during consideration of this item, the Committee's attention was drawn to Standing Order 9 'Duration of Meeting' and the fact that the meeting had been underway for 3 hours. It was therefore

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders to allow the remaining items on the agenda to be considered.]

The Deputy Leader presented a report which provided sickness absence data for the cumulative period ending 31st March 2021 and an overview of the employee wellbeing support provided.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

- Reference was made to the excellent role played by staff who had volunteered as wellbeing champions within departments to help promote wellbeing initiatives and signpost individual staff members seeking help;
- The Committee was apprised of various arrangements which had been put in place during the current pandemic with regard to support provided to new staff;
- In response to a comment the Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance) acknowledged that with the increase in home working, combined with the new ways of working initiatives, the Authority's learning and development packages needed to be reviewed so that managers had the ability to lead and manage staff on a 'remote' basis moving forward;
- The Employee Wellbeing Manager agreed to include the number of staff who do not turn up for appointments at the Occupational Health Centre in future reports.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

10. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received the Non-Submission report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

11. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting to be held on the 20th October 2021 be received.

12. 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.

13. MINUTES - 10TH JUNE 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 10th June 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE