

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 2 December 2020

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

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Councillor E. Dole, Leader of the Council;
Councillor C.A. Campbell, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs;
Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Executive Board Member for Resources;
Councillor L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council;

The following Officers were in attendance:

N. Daniel, Head of I.C.T. and Corporate Policy;
J. Fearn, Head of Property;
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;
L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law;
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance);
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager;
D. Hockenull, Marketing and Media Manager;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
J. Corner, Technical Officer;
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer;
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer;
R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting; 10.00 am - 1.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T.A.J. Davies, J.S. Edmunds, J.G. Prosser and H.E. Evans [Executive Board Member – Environment].

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

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
K. Madge	6 - Impact of covid19 on the People Management Service	Daughter works in Social Services.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON NON-HOUSING MAINTENANCE

The Committee received a report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Property Division from a Policy & Resources Scrutiny perspective i.e: Non Housing

Maintenance. Whilst assessing the impact of the pandemic on this service, the report also helped to inform on how they could be reset and further improve their future delivery.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:-

- In terms of lessons learnt over the last few months the use of ICT and systems to manage data within the division had increased along with opportunities to use real-time data to manage contractors and the in-house workforce to ensure effective and efficient delivery of work. Moving forward the Division was looking at how it could build on this to introduce more mobile working and further enhance homeworking along with developing multi-functions with the Environment Department;
- There would be a review of the Authority's property base to identify properties which were no longer required to deliver services so that the burden on the limited funding available for maintenance could be reduced;
- Reference was made to the fact that during the pandemic there had been much cross-departmental working and it was considered that such opportunities should be maintained where they had proved beneficial in terms of service delivery and this was currently the focus of a TIC review. It was also recognised that the Authority needed to ensure that all Council-owned plant and equipment was fully utilised.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. IMPACT OF COVID19 ON ICT & CORPORATE POLICY

The Committee received a report, presented by the Executive Board Member – Deputy Leader, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the ICT and Corporate Policy Division and the work that had taken place to support the Authority and the residents of Carmarthenshire.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:-

- Reference was made to the positive public feedback following the introduction of the on-line appointment system for visits to the household waste depots as a result of the pandemic. Due to its success it was possible that the system could be made permanent;
- Members were reminded of the Authority's 'Cloud First Approach' referred to in the Digital Transformation Strategy launched in 2017 which had enabled it to cope with the challenges presented by the covid pandemic. A significant number of the Authority's back-office IT systems were already 'cloud-hosted' which made them more sustainable and resilient moving forward. The Authority was keen to ensure that the public could access as many services and data on-line as was possible such as the appointment system for household waste referred to above;
- It was anticipated that the Bring-your-own-device policy would be extended to Members in due course;
- Reference was made to the 80 ipads provided to care homes at the start of the pandemic and members were informed that it was proposed to increase this number, improve wi-fi for residents where possible, and provide smart TVs. The Authority continued to work closely with Delta Wellbeing;
- It was reiterated that there remained a need to address those areas of Carmarthenshire where connectivity to the internet was poor. Reference was made to the Welsh Government initiative whereby rural residents and

businesses in Wales with broadband speeds of less than 30 Mbps could be eligible for additional funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband to their premises when part of a group project;

- Reference was made to the importance of the town centre Hubs, particularly for people who had no access to online services. The view was expressed that similar facilities should be extended to the rural areas;
- Members were advised to contact the ICT division if they were aware of any instances where schoolchildren did not have access to a computer for the purpose of working from home;
- It was anticipated that the significant increase in the number of people signing up to council services online via 'My Account' would lead to an evaluation of the efficiencies which could be achieved as a consequence along with working patterns;
- In response to a question it was not considered that the Council's partners such as the Health Board and Police had invested in IT infrastructure to the same degree and many of their staff had been unable to work from home during the pandemic;
- Members were advised that navigation of the Council's website was continually monitored with a view to improving the customer experience and the introduction of a 'Favourites' facility was being considered.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. IMPACT OF COVID19 ON THE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SERVICE

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member – Deputy Leader on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the People Management Service and the work that had taken place to support staff and the residents of Carmarthenshire. Whilst assessing the impact of the pandemic on this service, the report also helped to inform on how they could be reset and further improve their future delivery.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:-

- In response to a question it was clarified that the work of the TIC team had been suspended in order that the staff could be redeployed to assist in other areas such as the organisation of food parcels during the pandemic;
- As a result of changed work patterns due to the pandemic, including home working, the future office space requirements would be assessed taking into account also the agile working programme. Reference was made to the Welsh Government's expectation that at least 30% of the Council's administrative teams worked at or near their home and it was clear that the new ways of working brought about during the pandemic were expected to continue where possible taking into account also the 10 Towns initiative;
- With regard to the Hubs in the 3 main town it was pointed out that as part of the 10 towns initiative there were currently mobile hubs which generally followed the mobile library routes in the rural areas;
- In terms of sickness absence there had been a downturn in the level compared with the same time last year and a report would be submitted in due course. Along with the IT division a live covid feed had been developed which was continually updated with staff sickness details. This had the advantage of enabling staff to be mobilised to work in other areas where pressures may appear due to staff sickness;
- Members were assured that mechanisms and policies were in place,

- including the creation of well-being champions, to ensure every employee was supported in their role whether working from home or in an office;
- In response to a query the Assistant Chief Executive [People Management] once the reasons for the fluctuations in spend on agency workers and casual workers across the authority had been ascertained he would forward the information to members. He also agreed to submit to a future meeting a report he had recently completed which focussed on casual and agency workers;
 - In line with the new ways of working a new internal communications strategy was also being developed which it was hoped would be in place shortly;
 - It was noted that there were currently 91 staff on furlough, mainly in the leisure services;

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. COVID-19 SERVICE UPDATE ADMINISTRATION & LAW DIVISION

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member – Leader, legal services and land charges, and Executive Board Member – Deputy Leader, democratic services, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Administration and Law Division and the challenges faced. Whilst assessing the impact of the pandemic on this service, the report also helped to inform on how they could be reset and further improve their future delivery.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:-

- It was noted that the Authority would look to extend the use of drones once privacy issues had been resolved;
- The fact that the guidance issued by Welsh Government during the pandemic had not always followed the regulations, which in themselves were often published at short notice and with further amendments, had presented challenges in terms of interpretation by the legal section on behalf of the Authority;
- In terms of lessons learnt during the pandemic for future ways of working it was clear that the team had demonstrated that it was capable of delivering a service whilst staff worked from home although some issues necessitated working from an office;
- Whilst meetings had been cancelled at the outset of the pandemic Committees were now meeting regularly on a virtual basis and it was anticipated that in future it may be possible to convene hybrid meetings where members and officers could attend either in person or via the internet.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. IMPACT OF COVID19 ON MARKETING AND MEDIA

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member – Leader, marketing and media, and Executive Board Member – Resources, customer services, on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Marketing and Media Division and the work undertaken by the team to disseminate bilingual information to all Carmarthenshire residents and businesses. Whilst assessing the impact of the pandemic on this service, the report also helped to inform on how they could be reset and further improve their future delivery.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 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

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

The Executive Board Member – Resources presented the Authority's Corporate Budget Monitoring Report and the Chief Executive's and Corporate Services departmental reports as at 31st August 202 in respect of the 2020/21 financial year. The report also included an appendix detailing Savings Monitoring 2020-21.

Reference was made to an anomaly relating to the Community Department arising from two late virements which had not been carried through to the main variances. These related to a £100k movement between direct payments in older people's budgets and direct payments in physical disabilities budgets and a transfer of £59k from the welsh independent living grant into physical disabilities direct payments. Whilst this did not alter the forecasted expenditure an additional control would, as a consequence, be included in the monitoring template.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to receive the report.

10. CARMARTHENSHIRE PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD (PSB) MINUTES - JULY 2020

The Executive Board Member – Leader presented the minutes of the meeting of the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board [PSB] held on the 6th July 2020. 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 Corporate Policy and Partnership Officer agreed to ascertain representation on the All-Wales Partnership Council established by Welsh Government.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the PSB meetings held on the 6th July 2020 be received.

11. POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Committee considered the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for the 2019/20 municipal year which provided an overview of the work of the Committee including:-

- Overview of the Scrutiny Work Programmes
- Key issues considered
- Issues referred to or from Executive Board/Other Scrutiny Committees
- Member attendance at meetings

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the report.

12. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for the remainder of 2020/21 which had been prepared in accordance with the Council's Constitution which required Scrutiny Committees to develop and publish annual forward work programmes identifying issues and reports to be considered at meetings during the course of the municipal year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme for the remainder of 2020/21 be endorsed.

13. MINUTES - 27TH JANUARY 2020

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th January 2020 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE