

Date: 28 May 2015

Cllr Phil Bale
Leader
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW.

Dear Cllr Bale,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: Performance Qtr 4 2014/15

The Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to consider the Performance Quarter Four 2014/15 report on Tuesday 12 May 2015, and have asked that as Chair I thank you for representing Councillor Hinchey for this item. Members also request that you pass on their thanks to the officers for attending Committee.

The Committee were encouraged to hear that the Council is on target to secure the £3.3m Welsh Government Outcome Agreement Grant, that ESTYN consider there is evidence of improvement, and that the Corporate Plan 2015-17 has been signed off by the Wales Audit Office. They have, however, asked me to bring a number of concerns to your attention.

Members are concerned to hear that the Council has appointed an advisor within the Education and Lifelong Learning service area to address areas identified for improvement by Estyn. They would like clarification of the cost implications and selection process put in place for the appointment of the advisor. Members wish to point out that other service areas in the Council, such as Health and Social Care, are equally deserving of expert specialist assistance. The Committee therefore wish to express an interest in having sight of the recommendations the Council receives from such specialist advisors, and feel there is an opportunity for a value analysis / evaluation of the work they deliver. Members wish to reiterate that they feel it is important that service managers take full responsibility for delivering effective services, and where appropriate are paid by results.

Members note that sickness absence is still a significant concern for the Council. They accept that there is a great deal of work ongoing to hit sickness targets and that achieving the current level of performance has not been easily achieved, however Members consider that there are still several service areas with challenging levels of sickness absence. The Committee was pleased to hear of plans for those service areas to receive direct Human Resources intervention working alongside them in tackling attendance management. They acknowledge that this issue is very high on the agenda's of service area managers and that sickness absence is currently at its

lowest level within the Council. Members look forward to an opportunity for meaningful pre-decision scrutiny of the Attendance & Well-Being Review at the forthcoming 2 June Committee, at which it will seek to explore in more depth specific challenges faced by those services with notably high absence rates.

Members wish to draw your attention to Council performance in respect of the backlog of properties for let. Whilst they take on board your observation that the Council has had problems with contractors, and is now dealing with properties which by their nature are increasingly difficult to let, we shall be passing our concerns on this matter to the Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee for future reference in their scrutiny of Performance. Members will take on board your suggestion that it may be worthwhile inviting service specific representatives next time the Committee considers Performance.

Members are concerned that despite maintaining resources into schools the Council is still not making the progress it should in Education. They particularly wish to highlight that work is required to support school governors in their role, and welcome the creation of a Governor Panel.

Members welcome the Chief Executive's commitment to circulating the minutes of the Challenge Forum and look forward to this happening.

Members remain interested in agency spend, and would like to look in more detail at this. They are particularly interested in the rationale for using agency staff and whether there is an agency that is value for money.

Members feel there is scope to further upgrade the Council's website particularly around mobile communications and smartphone technology.

With regard to PPDRs, Members note that the Council's emphasis has now shifted from maximising the number of PPDR's carried out to ensuring the quality of the process. They concur that setting training objectives is an important part of the PPDR and recognise the challenge funding such training presents.

Members feel that in some areas progress is not good enough and that there is a need to revisit how we scrutinise the Council's Performance. The Committee feel it would be useful to factor the performance concerns raised by other scrutiny committees into their own consideration of Performance.

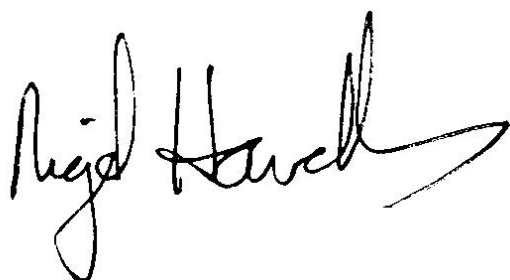
To recap, this letter requests several actions and pieces of information, as follows, and requires a response:

- Members are seeking clarification of arrangements around the cost implications and selection process put in place for the appointment of the advisor to the Education Service.

- Members wish to have sight of the recommendations such specialist advisors present to the Council.
- Members look forward to meaningful pre-decision scrutiny of the Attendance & Well-Being Review at the forthcoming 2 June Committee
- The Committee will be looking to invite service specific representatives to PRAP next time it scrutinises Performance
- Members look forward to receiving copies of the minutes of the Challenge Forum
- The Committee will be factoring the concerns, recommendations and requests of the four other scrutiny committees into its future consideration of Performance.

Once again, thank you for attending and facilitating the scrutiny of Performance Quarter 4 2014/15. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Howells', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**COUNCILLOR NIGEL HOWELLS
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Cc: Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member Corporate Resources & Performance
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Christine Salter, Corporate Director Resources
Martin Hamilton, Chief Officer, Change & Improvement
Cabinet Office