

Date: 14 December 2023

Councillor Huw Thomas, Leader
Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member, Finance, Performance & Modernisation
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
Cardiff
CF10 4UW



County Hall
Cardiff,
CF10 4UW
Tel: (029) 2087 2087

Neuadd y Sir
Caerdydd,
CF10 4UW
Ffôn: (029) 2087 2088

Dear Huw & Chris,

PRAP 13 December 2023: Mid-year Performance 2023/24

On behalf of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee thank you for bringing the Mid-year Performance assessment 2023/24 forward for pre-decision scrutiny. Please also pass on our thanks to the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors, Head of Performance and Policy & Improvement Manager for the overview of performance and the challenges ahead.

The Committee welcomes your view that the constructive relationship between Scrutiny and Cabinet on performance assessment has resulted in a sharper Mid-Year Assessment report, and your recognition of the value of the Scrutiny Performance Panel in the process. We acknowledge that the Council's performance methodology has been in train for some time now, drawing on a wide range of performance information. We are pleased to hear that regulators have agreed with the Council's self-assessment at this point in the year, and we are particularly pleased that you have accepted 10 of the Panel's 11 recommendations. There were however a number of challenges that Members highlighted and are seeking reassurance.

Housing – We are concerned that Housing challenges have existed for some time and the Council is not necessarily in control of demand. You pointed to the increases in rough sleepers, interest rates and asylum seekers, and we note your conviction that early intervention is how the Council should tackle the Housing crisis.

Education – Members explored whether the continued improvement referenced in Cardiff's schools is a consequence of improved management practices that could be shared. We note that school improvement outcomes are now well above average,

and the Chief Executive considers that there is a greater corporate grip on schools, illustrated by just two Cardiff schools not meeting Estyn's expectations, compared with half of Cardiff schools 10 years ago. However, the Committee highlighted concerns about several issues in this service:

- the Education management team is presently going through change and gaps may well arise in expertise due to departing staff;
- the pandemic has impacted on mental health and behaviour in schools. Therefore, we consider greater innovation may be required and possibly a well-being strategy for education.
- school attendance and the impact of parents working from home. We note a corporate focus on persistent absenteeism.
- we would like assurance that the Education & Lifelong Learning directorate structure is suitable to effectively address existing and future demands and pressures.
- we commend the work of the Council's Inclusions Team;
- we commend the work of the Health and Safety Team in schools;

Staff – The Committee explored how well the Council understands the pressures staff are under, given declining numbers. We note there is some survey work undertaken with staff, but whilst good engagement with Cardiff managers is in place, there is room to strengthen the programme and improve the consistency of corporate and directorate staff engagement. The Chief Executive pointed to a good track record of staff engagement, however also an opportunity to re-engage and ensure both a qualitative and quantitative understanding. We are therefore **recommending** that you review staff engagement arrangements to ensure effective and optimum corporate service provision.

Financial resilience - Members are of the view that austerity may have forced the authority to become more efficient. We note that innovation has been key to retaining services sustainably, such as libraries, St Davids Hall and New Theatre. Whilst the MTFP is extremely challenging the transformation and digitalisation agendas have been critical. The Council has to address the challenges by planning as far ahead as possible to anticipate the challenges. Financial resilience is therefore reported to many internal forums and, once again, intervention at an early stage is critical.

Performance Assessment – Members are keen to confirm that the Council approaches its performance assessment through an EIA and Well-being of Future Generations Act lens. The Corporate Plan translates political priorities into objectives and incorporates equality via consultation with residents. We note the Auditor General is therefore content that we are using the Well -being of Future Generations Act principle of sustainability in setting Well-being Objectives.

Scrutiny of performance - The Committee is keen to ensure that the role of scrutiny committees in performance review extends to spotlighting where there is drift in Corporate Plan performance, as illustrated by poorly performing KPI's. As you consider this an entirely appropriate approach, I will convey to my Scrutiny Chair colleagues that spotlight reviews where there is space on an agenda is an approach the organisation endorses and can therefore be factored into their work programming.

To summarise, the Committee makes 2 formal recommendations as set out below. As part of the response to this letter I would be grateful if you could, for each recommendation, state whether the recommendation is accepted, partially accepted or not accepted and summarise the Cabinet's response. If the recommendation is accepted or partially accepted, I would also be grateful if you could identify the responsible officer and provide an action date. This will ensure that progress can be monitored as part of the approach agreed by Cabinet.

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Action Date
That you review staff engagement arrangements to ensure effective and optimum corporate service provision				
Provide assurance that the Education & Lifelong Learning directorate structure is suitable to effectively address existing and future demands and pressures.				

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended PRAP Scrutiny Committee to assist us in consideration of the Mid-year Performance 2023/24. I would be grateful for a response.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR JOEL WILLIAMS
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Leaders of Opposition Parties – John Lancaster, Rodney Berman & Andrea Gibson
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Chris Lee, Corporate Director Resources
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities
Gareth Newell, Head of Partnerships and Performance
Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office
Mr Gavin McArthur, Chair, Governance & Audit Committee
Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit;
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications
Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
Claire Deguara, Cabinet Business Manager
Debi Said, Cabinet Support Officer
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
Andrea Redmond, Committee Support Officer
Abbey King, Performance Lead.