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CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Committee POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date and Time
of Meeting** WEDNESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2020, 4.30 PM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting,
together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk

a Correspondence Following Committee Meeting (*Pages 3 - 16*)

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My Ref: T: Scrutiny/PRAP/Comm Papers/Correspondence

Date: 22 January 2020

Councillor Huw Thomas,
Leader,
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
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CF10 4UW



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Dear Huw,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 15 January 2020

Thank you for attending the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee last week to brief us on current corporate planning arrangements. I would be grateful if you would also pass on my thanks to the Chief Executive, Gareth Newell and Dylan Owen who have assisted in bringing the matter to scrutiny.

Planning and Performance Framework

The Committee notes that, at the mid-point in your administration, you are reviewing and refreshing your policy commitments within the Capital Ambition statement and you are in the process of translating that refresh into a new Corporate Plan for 2020/23. We look forward to pre-decision scrutiny of the Plan alongside the budget at our next meeting on 19th February 2020 and trust that the comments about the Corporate Plan expressed at the committee and summarised in this letter will be used in making these important changes.

During your presentation you mentioned that Cardiff is the only Public Service Board in Wales where partners subscribe to the same Well-being Objectives. This will doubtless assist the PSB to monitor progress and scrutinise outcomes.

We were interested to hear that you propose to introduce a new corporate planning and performance framework based on forthcoming legislative requirements. Fewer, more meaningful reports and the aspiration to introduce mechanisms that will shorten the time between the collection and reporting of data will be innovative, and be evaluated by the committee in due course.

Scrutiny points of influence

We welcome your commitment to strengthening the points of influence for Scrutiny in the corporate planning and performance process, also your continued offer of an informal detailed discussion with the Performance Panel to review Steps, Performance Indicators and Targets within the Plan. Both should add value to the process and content of the Corporate Plan. That you are offering such early engagement with scrutiny on future performance frameworks is a positive step forward. We also acknowledge that an end-of-year performance reporting discussion is an additional opportunity for scrutiny influence. We are happy to continue the conversation to develop this committee's role in engaging with performance reporting.

Openness in the presentation of progress.

The Quarter 2 2019/20 Performance Report to cabinet on 21 November 2019 included an overview of Corporate Performance. This overview contained seven paragraphs all of which indicated positivity. This committee is aware of numerous key areas of the Council's business where underperformance is evident and in Waste Management we know that some longstanding performance and risk issues remain unimproved and unresolved. The following paragraph in that report summarising Areas of Challenge fails to cover most of the endemic and known shortcomings in the Council's performance. Most organisations cite successes and failures, and reporting them openly gives such organisations credibility, particularly when there are action plans to show where improvements are being worked on. At committee, the Chief Executive stated that he accepted these points as a positive challenge and we trust that you agree and are also supportive.

The Chief Executive further suggested that the Council's end of year performance assessment would benefit from a level of agreement across the Council's committees, panels and boards on performance shortcomings. That suggestion is welcomed.

More openness about successes and failures will enable our scrutiny in testing the robustness and accuracy of the corporate planning and performance management

process to take a more strategic focus. Our aim will always be to facilitate continuous improvement of Council's policies and its performance.

Q2 2019/20 - Performance challenges

We note agreement from your team that Economic Development shows promise in creating an environment for promoting growth. Ongoing challenges include social worker recruitment, future under achievement of recycling targets and a failure to bring down high levels of sickness absence. We were surprised not to see included the major challenge of reducing or eliminating out of county placements for children who are looked after.

In writing this letter I was reminded that at last year's Performance Panel on the Corporate Plan we raised the point that improvements in educational standards remain difficult to assess since comparisons are limited to Wales. There are cities of similar size and demography in other parts of the UK where comparisons could be more valid and revealing. At last year's meeting I recall that this wider benchmarking point was considered a valid one.

We note the Chief Executive's acknowledgement that financial resilience and savings delivery are also improvement priorities and that delivering the Corporate Landlord programme is an ongoing challenge despite significant progress with Health and Safety measures.

We urge that, in these times of fiscal austerity, the Council's performance review systems, including the Personal Development Review framework, enables clear accountability for the delivery of targeted savings and that the overspending of any part of a directorate's budget is a matter of red risk focus and accountability. To be clear, we consider the management and prevention of overspends remains an issue that both senior management and the cabinet need to raise to a much higher level of importance ensuring that there are consequences for missed targets.

A committee member asked if you would check and confirm the accuracy of the Performance Indicator '*The percentage of reported fly-tipping incidents which lead to enforcement activity*'. (p32/35 of Q2 performance report).

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, my thanks for attending the PRAP Scrutiny Committee to engage with us on Corporate Planning progress. I look forward to the informal target setting discussion on 12 February 2020, and a response to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'David Walker' in a cursive style.

COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships
Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office
Debbie Said, Cabinet Support Officer
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager

Date: 23 January 2020



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Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Dear Councillor Weaver,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 15 January 2020

Please accept my thanks on behalf of the Committee for attending the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee last week with a mid-year Sickness Absence update. The opportunity to focus on Waste Management as a case study was much appreciated and I am copying this letter to Cllr Michael Michael, as Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Waste Management service. Please also pass our thanks to Sarah McGill, Tracey Thomas, Matt Wakelam and Anita Batten for facilitating the scrutiny.

Corporate sickness levels and initiatives.

Members noted the new initiatives that have been put in place to address sickness levels, particularly reviewing policies on annual and special leave with the aim of supporting the sickness absence policy. We note that staff can now take annual leave in hours as well as days, and there is improved flexibility around compassionate leave.

We heard about the many complimentary health services available and were advised of new services you have introduced to support mental health, such as the introduction of Mental Health and Group Well-being sessions, as well as a flu vaccination programme for social services and schools.

However, despite these new initiatives, a forecast corporate outturn of 11.09FTE days lost in 2019/20 against a 9.5FTE target is discouraging. Quarter 1 and 2 absence levels for the current year exceed levels for quarters 1 and 2 2018/19, this forecast may therefore be optimistic.

The forecast is even more discouraging given the 4 day UK national average for sickness absence and the fact that an increasing number of local authorities in Wales have improved their levels of sickness absence to levels below 10 days per employee a year. We note your view that it is too soon to assess the impact new services are having on sickness levels, but cannot see from the data presented how a further rise in the outturn by the end of the year can be prevented.

The Committee was, however, encouraged to hear that the number of staff taking no sick leave at all had improved significantly (62%). We note that long term sickness absence remains the primary cause of high sickness absence levels and recommend further efforts by attendance officers in targeting long term sickness cases.

Comparing Cardiff with others.

The Committee has monitored sickness absence routinely over many years, noting a fall in outturn from 2013, then a rise in recent years. We were interested to hear that officers consider factors in the recent rise included organisational changes, smaller staff numbers and an increase in non-work related stress. We consider that in reality it is difficult to distinguish between non-work and work-related stress. We would be reassured to learn how different types of stress can be distinguished and diagnosed. We would also be interested to see comparator data for stress from other organisations and will monitor your intention to break down and analyse data related to this area more deeply. We request that this data be made available to the committee when available.

We endorse your view that it is important to benchmark Cardiff's sickness levels against UK core cities as well as the 22 Welsh authorities. We recommend that you look closely at those Welsh authorities with sickness outcomes of less than 10 days and assess the measures taken which contrast with Cardiff's. There are UK cities of similar size to ours which would also be useful comparators. As there is a growing focus on well-being, members felt it would be worthwhile exploring well-being initiatives offered more widely within the private as well as the public sector.

Organisational stress risk assessment

Members heard that the Council considers that it has mechanisms in place to assist the individual employee to identify symptoms of stress, and is providing training and

facilities to staff and managers to improve staff resilience. However, we urge that you lift your vision on sickness from the individual level to an organisational, preventative picture. This requires you to perform an organisational stress risk assessment, as required under Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. In reality it is difficult to separate non work from work related stress and it may require a closer look at working conditions. We note you are working on a plan to address stress risk assessments and therefore offer some links and advice below that you might find useful:

- An organisational stress risk assessment should take the form of any other health and safety risk assessment, taking into account hazards, risks and controls, ideally following the HSE's 5 steps to Risk assessment. The regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), has produced guidance for organisations to assist in complying with the law and to reduce the 11 million work days lost in the UK because of stress. The guidance covers the risk assessment which is based on how the organisation meets the standards that HSE would expect of it in dealing with the 6 identified causes of stress in employees. The causes are *demands, control, support, relationships, role and change*. The assessment is undertaken to prevent symptoms of stress from their work affecting employees, not simply to treat them when it does.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/what-to-do.htm>.

- There is good evidence that such an approach changes the culture of organisations, reduces stress, reduces sickness absence, improves productivity, increases work satisfaction and helps retain staff.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/casestudies/index.htm>

- The HSE have produced excellent tools to enable organisations to tackle stress, available free, including examples of risk assessments, survey tools, a self assessment stress competency tool for managers and more.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/resources.htm>

Therefore, while noting the work the Council has already done and the services provided, the Committee considers that if we do not assess and control the risks to employees some will continue to suffer stress related issues, which can manifest

themselves in many ways. We repeat that present measures taken do not appear to have reduced absence and sickness levels.

Sickness absence in Waste Management

The Committee notes the exceptionally high levels of sickness absence in Waste Management and the efforts now being made to address this long standing problem. These high levels of absence impact severely on the Council's efforts to improve its overall work performance in this service area, which is a cause of concern. We heard a presentation on the many initiatives and preventative measures to tackle sickness absence levels being put in place within Waste Management. Long term sickness absence significantly outweighs short term sickness absence and many interventions are targeted at musculo-skeletal, stomach, stress and back issues, all of which are areas which cause higher levels of absence.

We note the Assistant Director Street Scene's view that levels of disingenuous sickness are present but not felt to be a huge issue, though evidence of returning to work prior to the onset of half pay at 6 months is notable. We heard in a previous scrutiny that a Welsh local authority reduced the 6 month stage and showed a substantial increase in those returning to work as fit earlier.

The case study provided evidence of a Council service that has recognised the benefit of linking Health and Safety to sickness levels. From the presentation, Waste Management has clearly taken a step change in looking at 'safety' alongside 'health', focussing on a targeted improvement plan for the MRF, based on a Health and Safety review. We commend the aspiration to improve sickness absence levels in this specific area by 20-30%. We also commend further planned work within the MRF facility on stomach liver and kidney outcomes to ensure interventions are making a difference. However the outcomes will be the best judge of how effective these efforts will be and we will ask to hear more in due course when we will hope and expect to hear encouraging results.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, my sincere thanks for attending the PRAP Scrutiny Committee to update us on Sickness Absence. We found the case study approach most useful and may request a closer look at Social Services targeted improvement plans for sickness in due course. I would be grateful if you would

consider our views and look forward to your response. I confirm we will maintain an interest in this important challenge.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Walker', with a stylized, cursive script.

COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member, Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities
Matt Wakelam, Assistant Director Street Scene
Tracey Thomas, Acting Senior HR People Partner
Anita Batten, HR People Partner
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
Heather Warren, Cabinet Support Officer
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager

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Date: 27 January 2020

Councillor Huw Thomas,
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Dear Huw,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 15 January 2020

Thank you for attending the above committee. On behalf of the Members, this letter captures the committee's agreed comments and observations following your briefing on the implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill.

Consultation response

We understand this Bill is the culmination of a number of White Papers as well as a Green Paper and we were assured that the Council has responded to all consultations. However we are unclear as to how the Council has fed into the Stage 1 consultation of the actual Bill. We note that the call for evidence closed on 3 January 2020 and the Council is not listed as a respondent. We therefore ask that you clarify how the Council has responded to the call for evidence. If it has not responded then we wish to understand how and why that decision was taken and by whom? What mechanisms do you plan to use to feed the Council's comments into consideration of the Bill as it progresses through the Assembly?

Corporate joint committees

During the scrutiny meeting you commended the engagement Local Authorities have had with Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government and indicated that you are committed to working constructively with the WLGA, particularly on the Bill's proposal to enable corporate joint committees. We concur with your concern regarding the voting structure within such a proposed body, one vote for one Council irrespective of its number of residents is not a representative or proportionate approach to decision making. We consider it important to ensure this Cardiff Council view is placed on record as the Bill is considered by various Assembly Committees.

Webcasting

We have concerns about the proposal to require webcasting of all Council meetings which are open to the public, given the potential cost implications for the Council and the paucity of viewers for some meetings. Our observation is that it is possible there has been an over estimation of public interest in the Council and in committee business. Similarly we suggest that remote attendance by councillors, whilst clearly a benefit for those Councils covering large geographical areas such as Powys, is less appropriate to Cardiff and will pose a particular challenge where a vote is expected on a matter under discussion.

Self-assessment & peer review

In respect of the Performance and Governance element of the Bill, which proposes taking self-assessment and peer review to another level, we note that this implies that the next Council Administration will take part in a peer review during its term. We concur that such a review will need to be rigorous and as such should not be confined to Welsh insight and expertise. We note that the WLGA will be a focus for advice and the sourcing of relevant expertise which is likely to extend beyond Welsh Local Authorities.

Focussing on the self-assessment requirements within the Bill, the Committee is itself currently developing a model to capture the impact of scrutiny on the delivery of Council services. We note your caution in confusing the implementation of recommendations with high quality scrutiny. The issue of substantiveness of recommendations features strongly in the model being drafted for the Committee, then Cabinet's consideration. I hope to make a number of proposals regarding self-assessment by scrutiny committees, and also within directorates in respect of the implementation of scrutiny recommendations that have been accepted.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended the PRAP Scrutiny Committee to brief us on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. I would be grateful if you would advise us how the Council will feed the committee's observations into the Council's own response to the ongoing consultation, and therefore look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
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