

## POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillor Walker(Chairperson)  
Councillors Berman, Henshaw, Lister, Mackie and McKerlich

### 48 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Bowen-Thomson.

It was noted that there was a vacancy on the Committee.

### 49 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

### 50 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

### 51 : SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance, with portfolio responsibility for human resources; Tracey Thomas, Acting Senior HR People Partner, HR People Services; Anita Batten, HR People Partner, HR People Services; Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities and Matt Wakelam, Assistant Director Street Scene to the meeting.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee is responsible for monitoring progress on tackling sickness absence. The Committee aims to do this on a 6 monthly basis. However, following Committee's last sickness report, and an informal briefing from the Waste Management service it was felt it would be useful to look more closely at those services facing the greatest challenges in bringing down rates of sickness absence. The Chairperson advised that he had therefore asked that, in addition to monitoring corporate sickness absence levels at quarter 2 2019/20, the Cabinet Member, Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment Cllr Michael Michael and his officers with responsibility for the Street Scene service be invited, to facilitate a closer scrutiny of the management of sickness within the service area.

The Chairperson advised that the scrutiny would start with the overall corporate picture, and he would take questions on this before moving on to the case study.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation & Performance, Cllr Chris Weaver to make a statement, in which he said that it was valuable to look at service area specific challenges as well as the corporate picture with regards to Sickness Absence.

The HR senior team updated Members on the corporate position in respect of sickness absence at Q2, after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

Members noted that the number of staff taking sick leave was up by 20%. The Cabinet Member stated that it was the increase in long-term sickness that was driving the overall increase upwards.

Members referred to the number of days lost due to sickness from 2013 onwards and asked why there had been an increase from 2013 to 2019. Officers explained that they were putting all their efforts into preventing sickness, however it was important to note that during this time there have been changes in the organisation, a reduction in staff numbers due to austerity, and also non work related stress has increased; but no further analysis was available.

Members asked if Cardiff would be expected to be different to other local authorities. Officers advised that compared to other authorities in Wales and Core Cities, Cardiff sits in the middle of the core cities data. Members noted that Core City comparative data would have been helpful in the presentation but noted that Cardiff was 4<sup>th</sup> compared to other Welsh Local Authorities; PRAP had recommended a year ago that an exercise was undertaken to look at Local Authorities with an average of under 10 sickness days lost per year, and to look at how they are achieving it. The Cabinet Member stated that they had looked at Merthyr but their figures were now similar to Cardiff and Glasgow had risen to over 12 days. He added that no Local Authority has the answer, there are a lot of complicated reasons behind sickness absence and, whilst they want the figure to come down, Cardiff is likely to have a higher sickness rate than smaller Local Authorities. Good practice would always be sought as it is an ongoing process. Members noted the willingness but that outcomes are the issue, stating that Merthyr currently has 8.7 days lost and the Vale of Glamorgan has reduced its level from 10 to 9.

Members commended the work being done but noted that it was difficult to differentiate between work related and non-work related stress, and that stress can often cause physical conditions too. Members asked what the Council is doing with regards to an organisation stress risk assessment and managing stress. Officers stated that currently a stress risk assessment is done on an individual basis and they are working with Health and Safety to develop a corporate stress risk assessment. Members noted that despite best efforts the rate is increasing yet the national average is 4 days and decreasing; Members considered that there needed to be higher levels of intervention with regards to stress, less stressful jobs and early retirement options.

Members welcomed the initiatives that have been put in place and asked that the Council goes beyond these and looks at what private companies offer. The Cabinet Member stated that there was a growing focus on wellbeing and that it was an interesting area to explore.

Members noted that there had been new initiatives put in place since this item was last presented to committee and asked how success could be measured, whether this was in fact too early to assess or if there had been any impact seen as yet. It was noted that there had been no impact on the figures as yet and some turnaround

would have been expected. Officers explained that it was the timing of the report, which ran until the end of September. Most initiatives were introduced in August and so a change would be expected in the future. It was also noted that it takes time to see an impact with regards to illnesses such as Mental Health and Multi Skeletal; there should be a review in 12 months' time to assess the impact.

Members asked if more was needed in terms of Long Term Sickness interventions. Officers explained that they need to try and deal with Long Term Sickness at different stages, noting that the longer a person is off work the harder it is to return. Attendance Officers are trying to help people back to work after 3 months, with phased returns and medical redeployment, changes to working patterns and arrangements all being considered.

Members noted the figures in relation to non-work related stress and considered that Cardiff would be impacted more than other cities and asked if there was any data to suggest that something was happening more widely; if not it could be that work is impacting on peoples non-work life. Officers agreed that it was difficult to separate the two; they explained that they do comparisons at the end of the year and will then ask for data/overall figures and break these down in terms of Wales and Core Cities. The Chairperson advised that the scrutiny would now move on to the case study and Matt Wakelam provided Members with a presentation, after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members noted that APSE said a year ago that some sickness absence was not genuine, and asked if this was an issue in this service area. Officers stated that it was difficult to make that analysis but they didn't think it was a significant issue, however they do see people return before the half pay stage. Officers added that they considered the majority of sickness was legitimate and there was maybe a 90/10 split.

Members noted that the figures overall and for this service area both peak in school holidays and asked for officers comments on this. Officers stated that it was important when looking at figures that they look at as much data and patterns as possible as this helps to build a picture and manage the issue. It was also important to look at a combination of actual activity; any areas of activity that are problematic and how individuals react differently. Experience in other areas of the directorate show that an element of control over work and talking about what's happening helps. Information is key to make the right interventions.

Members discussed the comparison between overall sickness and service area sickness in relation to Liver/Kidney/Eye/Ear problems. Officers explained that it is higher in this service area so they have looked at how waste matter is handled and have provided gloves and a laundry.

Members considered that more control over work does help people but asked how this was done in practice. Officers explained that they would give time to understand why we do things and its importance, take on ideas for changes and build into the work we do.

Members referred to previous evidence to Committee and noted that 1 Local Authority reduced the half pay period and subsequently reduced its sickness figures.

Another Local Authority with an arm's length waste management company had an average of 3 days sickness and they don't accept longer absences, they also develop their staff and have good staff training opportunities, which has led to a good work culture and loyal staff.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED that the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Members on behalf of the Committee to convey their comments and observations.

## 52 : LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS (WALES) BILL

The Chairperson welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor Huw Thomas; Paul Orders Chief Executive; Gareth Newell Head of Performance and Partnerships, and Dylan Owen Head of the Cabinet Office to the meeting.

The Chairperson advised Members that this year a significant piece of legislation for Local Government is making its way through the Assembly, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. It is the culmination of many reviews, White papers and consultations dating back as far as 2013. It contains proposals that the Committee needs to be aware of, specifically a new system for improving Local Authority performance and governance based on self-assessment and peer review, which falls within the Committee's Terms of Reference.

The Chairperson invited the Leader, Cllr Thomas to make a statement in which he said that this was a significant and long awaited piece of legislation, it deals with a range of issues which the Council has responded to during previous consultations. Cardiff is engaged with the Minister and commends the frank and open way that she has engaged, and also with the WLGA.

Gareth Newell provided Members with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members noted that there are 19 Governance and Scrutiny committees in Cardiff alone; the additional expectations to webcast all meetings will cost significantly. Members asked if there had been any discussions around financing. The Leader said there hadn't; he added that the Monitoring Officer sits on a Welsh Government panel and had outlined the capacity issues it would create but there had been no indication of additional funding. It was noted that viewing figures only increase if there is an item of particular interest. Members considered that there may be some overestimating of public enthusiasm with regards to webcasting.

Members discussed remote attendance and could see it being useful in rural areas but suggested there was a limited need in Cardiff. The Leader explained that it could work in terms of sickness, maternity, and paternity leave, but that further reflection is required with regards to voting especially.

Members asked of the Council has responded to the Bill as it was not listed as a respondent on the Welsh Assembly website. Officers advised that they hadn't responded to the Bill directly but they had responded to all the separate consultations. The Leader added that there had been some concerns, but they were committed to the Minister and addressed points through the WLGA. The Chief Executive stated that there would be a development of detailed guidance as next steps. Members asked if the Council was broadly comfortable at the moment and the

Leader stated that there were 2 concerns; the principle of mandating and the voting structure (1 Local Authority 1 Vote). Members agreed that these were not representative decisions and hoped the Council were highlighting this. Members also considered it was a shame the Council hadn't responded to the consultation and hoped they were doing so through other methods.

Members referred to promoting innovation and raising funds and asked if there were any examples of this in England. Officers didn't have any examples but explained that the proposal was for Local Authorities (LA's) to have more freedom. The Chief Executive also explained that there was an added level of legal comfort if a LA was involved in projects that were not traditionally LA projects; in reality a commercial scheme would have the general power of competence which underpins plus the legal comfort.

Members referred to Part 6 – Performance and Governance of Principal Councils and asked how officers see this happening in Cardiff. The Chief Executive stated they anticipate the new administration after the next election would conduct a peer review; there would be national guidance on the rigour of a peer review process; effective peer review challenge would not necessarily be confined to the Welsh Pool. The WLGA would have a role to play hopefully with a reasonable pool of peer advisors. The Peer Review conducted in Cardiff in 2012 was reasonably robust with a good balance of expertise. He added that you can't just go into the process and take the lowest common denominator approach. Members considered it was difficult not to put a good face on reports when people want to be re-elected so this should be looked at.

With regards to evaluating the effectiveness of scrutiny, Members considered that more data for scrutiny committees to self-assess would be needed as well as information on what directorates have done with Scrutiny reports and recommendations and what they have led to. The Leader explained that there was a difficult balance in self-assessment and there was merit in strengthening the maturity of the self-assessment process.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED that the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Members on behalf of the Committee to convey their comments and observations.

## 53 : CORPORATE PLANNING 2020/23 & MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The Chairperson welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor Huw Thomas; Paul Orders Chief Executive; Gareth Newell Head of Performance and Partnerships, and Dylan Owen Head of the Cabinet Office to the meeting.

The Chairperson advised Members that at this point in the year the Committee looks to undertake policy development scrutiny of the Corporate Plan. This year Committee are advised that the Capital Ambition policy statement has been renewed, with implications for the 2020/23 Corporate Plan. The Leader, Chief Executive and policy team are in attendance to explain the corporate planning position. Members were advised that included in their papers is the mid-year (Q2) monitoring report on corporate performance for 2019/20. These results are reported against well-being objectives of the Corporate Plan and the Chairperson had asked for these to be

included in the papers to remind Committee of the Steps, KPI's and targets in place. It was not intended to go into detail on Performance Q2, but important that Members understand how monitoring reports support the Corporate Plan as Committee considers the new Corporate Planning arrangements.

Members were advised that they would have an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny of the draft Corporate Plan at Committee on 19 February 2020, when they would be able to test the Budget Proposals against the Cabinet's priorities as laid out in a refreshed Capital Ambition.

The Chairperson invited the Leader, Cllr Thomas to make a statement, in which he said that the Council are currently in the process of refreshing the policy commitments set out in Capital Ambition. Since its approval by Cabinet in 2017, a number of major policy commitments set out have either been achieved or significantly progressed. For example, 2 new high schools and 6 new primary schools have opened, driven up education performance and launched a new vision for learning in the city. The Council has taken major decisions in the development of the new Arena, developed a new economic strategy and launched a transformative vision for transport in the city; as well as some radical reforms to the way we deliver children's services, shifting the emphasis to prevention and early intervention through the new Family Support Services.

There have also been significant developments in the external environment in which the Council and its partners operate to which the Council must respond, including managing the impact of the UK leaving the European Union, responding to the declaration of a Climate Emergency and leading a local response to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill.

He added that there are areas of challenge, which he has been open about; Challenges such as financial resilience, driving up recycling rates and responding to the increasing number of children entering care, many of which are common to cities. The Administration has therefore chosen, at the mid-point of the municipal term, to review and refresh its policy agenda.

The refreshed version of Capital Ambition would be considered by Cabinet on the 23 January 2020 and would then be translated into the organisation's planning and delivery framework. This meant that Capital Ambition would shape the Corporate Plan, budget proposals and our performance monitoring framework so that there is clarity on how our agenda will be delivered. Once Capital Ambition is approved by Cabinet it will be transplanted into a draft of the Corporate Plan which, and once again this year, an early draft will be shared with Scrutiny to ensure that Scrutiny is involved at the policy decision stage. The performance panel will engage with scrutiny on the finer points of detail in the Corporate Plan and invite comments on the steps, key performance indicators and targets.

The Leader stated that he believes this approach strengthens the points of influence of the scrutiny committees and positions the Council well to respond to the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Bill. The Leader welcomed the pre-decision scrutiny of the budget and corporate plan in February, ahead of formal consideration by Cabinet and Council.

The Leader concluded saying that today, he would like to set out in greater detail how we will take our agenda forward, responding to the requirements of legislation and, hopefully, strengthen the role of scrutiny.

Officers outlined a presentation for Members after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members supported fewer and more meaningful reports on these topics and asked how the Council was doing on what's going well and not so well. Officers explained that from a performance perspective the improvement in Education was quite striking and a notable area of improvement. There were challenges such as pressures on Children's Services and there were differences between last years and this Corporate Plan in terms of the quality of information and indicators in relation to Children's Services. The Leader added that there would be self-assessment in July; Looked After Children would be an area of focus as well as the challenges faced in Waste Management and Sickness Absences; the Leader noted the improvements in Education and the way the City's economy is performing; achievements will be set out in the refreshed Capital Ambition.

The Chief Executive added in relation to self-assessment of strengths and challenges, the importance of financial resilience and tightening budgets, adding that the new S151 officer is looking at the issue of savings delivery and this is a priority for SMT. He has been clear with SMT that proposals for savings have to have a detailed business case. He added that in relation to the Corporate Landlord they have identified a key issue in self-assessment due to the inherent risks associated with the area but there has been significant progress with regards the Health and Safety in buildings and the position was much better than 4/5 years ago.

Members noted that PRAP had raised the issue of savings delivery previously and considered that there are shortcomings in performance management and KPI's which are important. The Leader stated that he empathises with the point, but it was important to recognise and differentiate that there will be times when you can't identify demand such as Social Services and the National trend in Children's Services. He added that the Council has responded to austerity by being innovative in continuing to deliver services in communities and make savings although not all in this financial year.

Members considered that the improvement in information to the public was notable. The Chief Executive responded saying that as a large public sector organisation that is data rich the analysis has been poor so it was important to strengthen staff at the centre to improve analytical areas; use data to improve policy development with savings, so there was lots of scope. The Leader added that it was imperative that information to the public was clear and gave the example of recycling where it was important to bring the public on board.

Members asked if there was enough openness about where performance weaknesses are, and considered that where there are issues, they are not highlighted or published. Members added that to improve and to aid culture change there needed to be greater openness about problems and action plans to address them. The Leader agreed with the points in relation to openness and that there are challenges and stated that Scrutiny and SMT are aware of these. Members noted

that these are not stated in the Corporate Plan, and the Leader requested that scrutiny comments would be reflected upon and incorporated into the draft Corporate Plan.

The Chief Executive stated that the end of year Performance Assessment should be a level of agreement on the challenges the organisation is facing; there was a move away from quarterly reports and the performance treadmill to a more strategic view with scrutiny and he was happy for PRAP to test the robustness of this at the year end.

Members considered it would be useful to have an update to PRAP on Facilities Management, CTS and Self-Assessment.

Members requested that the figures in relation to fly tipping and enforcement are clarified.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED that the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Members on behalf of the Committee to convey their comments and observations.

#### 54 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Principal Scrutiny Officer outlined the Forward Work Programme; Members considered Budget Proposals in February, and were advised that there will be an All Member training session on budget papers should they wish to attend.

The Principal Scrutiny Officer invited Members to contact her if they wanted more bespoke training on budget scrutiny.

#### 55 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

#### 56 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 10.30AM, 19 FEBRUARY 2020

Committee agreed to change the time of the next meeting; therefore the next meeting of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee would be held at 1.00pm on 19 February 2020, in Committee Room 4, County Hall.

The Chairperson advised that there would also be a meeting of the Committee's Performance Panel with the Leader and Chief Executive, to discuss targets within the new Corporate Plan on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at 10am.

The meeting terminated at 7.15 pm