

## POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 DECEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor Walker(Chairperson)  
Councillors Ahmed, Berman, Cowan, Henshaw, Lister, Mackie  
and Williams

### 46 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Berman had advised that he would join the meeting from his phone for part of the meeting, but due to a work commitment would not be able to attend for the full meeting.

Cllr Lister advised that he would be late joining the meeting due to work commitments.

### 47 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Mackie declared a personal interest as a family member is Head of Integrated Care.

Cllr Henshaw declared a personal interest as 2 family members work for Cardiff Council.

### 48 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

### 49 : SICKNESS ABSENCE UPDATE

Members were advised that the context for this scrutiny is that central to the Committee's Terms of Reference is the scrutiny and review of the effectiveness of the Council's use of human resources policies and procedures. As the organisational recovery progresses the Committee is seeking to monitor more closely issues that have been a continued interest and are listed as ongoing challenges for the Council in performance assessments. The Committee had an opportunity to monitor the Council's progress in tackling sickness absence, including interventions that had been put in place and future planned developments. Acknowledging there are particular challenges in some frontline services, the Committee looked more closely at sickness absence in Waste Management.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance, with portfolio responsibility for human resources; Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment, with portfolio responsibility for Waste Management; Paul Orders, Chief Executive; Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources; Neil Hanratty, Director of Economic Development; Tracey Thomas, Chief Human Resources Officer; Graham Harries, Head of Recycling & Neighbourhood Services and Donna Jones, Assistant Director County Estates.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member and Chief Executive to make statements, after which Members received a presentation and were invited to make comments, observations and ask questions.

Members welcomed all the plans in place to tackle sickness absence but considered there was a need to look more closely at non-work related stress, noting the crossover to work related stress. Members were advised that the categories are set by the Welsh Government but agreed that these areas needed more focus. Members reiterated the importance of Stress Risk Assessments, that could be anonymous. Officers advised Members that there would be new Mental Health guidance coming forward in the new year.

Members wished to thank staff for all their efforts over the past 18 months which had been extremely challenging.

Members considered there could be more focus on preventative work in relation to sickness absence. Officers explained that there had been an increase in the Wellbeing offer for Staff and there had been an enhanced counselling service introduced for staff in Children's Services.

Members welcomed all that was underway but considered there was nothing new and wondered whether there was more to be done. Officers explained that all the plans needed to be embedded, however their focus was on tackling long term absences and what could be offered, such as phased returns, homeworking, revised roles etc.

Members asked if benchmarking and comparisons were still being undertaken with other Authorities, such as Merthyr. Officers made reference to the APSE review that had been conducted a few years ago. Officers considered that Merthyr was a very different Authority to Cardiff, but they could explore looking at private sector organisations for comparisons/best practice. Members were advised however that there needed to be a sustained managerial effort on tackling long term absences. Members made reference to Shared Regulatory Services and their low sickness absence rates and suggested an internal benchmarking exercise with the Service could be useful.

Members noted that the non-covid related sickness absences were high in Waste Management, Officers referred to the number of long-term absences and ill health retirement cases in the service. A discussion took place around the impact of shielding at the beginning of the pandemic.

Members discussed the importance of understanding Mental Health and were pleased to hear that officers were being upskilled in this area. Members understood that this was a difficult area to identify genuine cases but also that it was a sensitive subject for the Service Area. Members congratulated the Service Area on their Mental Health Initiatives and considered that quarterly reports on sickness absence with more details, separating out agency staff, would be welcomed as sickness absence is still problematic in the Service.

Members discussed the potential increase in Covid cases with the Omicron variant and Officers assured Members that they would be kept informed if any changes were needed to the service due to the number of staff absences.

Members referred to Muscular Skeletal accidents/issues and asked about incident investigation. Officers assured Members that all accidents were investigated, there was a rota in place for staff to move around roles, there was a bespoke in-house training team in place and an in-house physiotherapist in place. There are also very regular meetings between supervisors and management teams.

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

## 50 : CORPORATE PROPERTY STRATEGY 2021/26

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee has responsibility for scrutiny of the Council's property estate. The Corporate Property Strategy is central to how the Council's estate is managed. As Committee heard last month the Council has updated its Corporate Property Strategy for the next 5 years and is now in a position to take the draft strategy to Cabinet on Thursday this week. Therefore, the Committee had an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny of the Strategy.

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to the confidential papers. Appendices 3 & 4 which form part of this report contain exempt information of the kind described in paragraph 14 of Part 4 and paragraph 21 of Part 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. If Members wished to refer to these Appendices specifically, then Committee would need to go into closed session.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Russell Goodway, Cabinet Member, Investment & Development; Neil Hanratty, Director of Economic Development; Donna Jones, Assistant Director County Estates; Matthew Seymour, Asset Management Officer and Chris Barnet, Project Manager for this item.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement after which Members were asked for any comments, observations or questions.

Members asked when the business case would be available and were advised that this was likely to be in the next administration as there was a need to understand the full impact of the pandemic. It was noted that whilst homeworking had been welcomed by many, there would be a need to provide office space for those who wish to/need to work in an office space, therefore an outline case setting out options would be developed but the decision would be taken by the next administration.

Discussing homeworking and Carbon Emissions, Members asked where the Carbon Emission benefits were coming from as people were now needing to heat their homes, use more electricity etc. Officers explained that the main benefits came from commuting as Council buildings still needed to be heated and ventilated during the pandemic.

Members asked where the Strategy fits with the Indoor Arena plans. Officers advised that the Indoor Arena was at a masterplan, conceptual stage but it does identify an

opportunity as a leisure destination with travel options. It was noted however that the Indoor Arena business case was not dependant on County Hall Plans.

Members asked when they would receive an update on the Red Dragon Centre and were advised that a position paper was expected in January.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask question on the confidential appendices and they were reminded that Committee are required to consider these in a closed session to discuss information deemed exempt, in accordance with paragraphs 14 of Part 4 and paragraph 21 of Part 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

RESOLVED: to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting.

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

## 51 : MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE 2021/22

Members were advised of the following:

- The Committee's Performance Panel has an important remit in light of the new arrangements to address the Local Government (Elections) Wales Act. Members had been invited to participate in the Panel alongside the Chairs of all 5 scrutiny committees in scrutiny of the Mid-year Performance on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021.
- The Performance Panel was first convened in 2018 as it was recognised that there was considerable merit in considering the Council's overall performance, and collectively discussing corporate policy priorities going forward.
- The Panel is now part of the Performance landscape and has strengthened the Council's governance arrangements.
- On Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December the Panel considered the Council's Mid-Year Assessment of Performance, with the recommendations, observations and suggestions formally shared with the Leader of the Council and Cllr Weaver, as Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance.
- The Panel made 31 comments in total, with 6 direct recommendations and 15 observations with suggested actions.
- All 6 recommendations and all 15 observations with suggested actions were accepted.
- A total of 11 amendments were made to the Mid-Year Performance Assessment itself.
- The recommendations of the Performance Panel, and Cabinet's response, were included as appendices to the formal report being considered by Cabinet on Thursday.

- Colleagues were circulated a copy of the table which outlined how the Panel's recommendations and observations have been addressed.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

52 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Members were advised that the Committee's Forward Work Programme for Jan-March 2022 was attached to their papers for approval, prior to publication on the Website.

RESOLVED: To agree the Forward Work Programme for Jan to March 2022, and for publication on the Council's website.

53 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received

54 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 18/01/22

The meeting terminated at 7.00 pm