

POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 JANUARY 2018

Present: County Councillor Walker(Chairperson)
County Councillors Berman, Bowen-Thomson, Boyle, Cunnah,
Mackie and McKerlich

107 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology was received from Councillor Murphy.

108 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bowen-Thomson declared a personal interest in Item 5 - the Draft Corporate Plan as her husband is an employee of the Cardiff Council Youth Services. Councillor Bowen-Thomson remained at the meeting during consideration of this item.

109 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of this Committee 17 November and 6 December 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

110 : SICKNESS ABSENCE - SHORT SCRUTINY

The Committee proposed as part of its work programming session to undertake a short scrutiny on the Council's approach to tackling sickness absence levels.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance; the Chief Executive, Paul Orders and Chief Human Resources Officer, Philip Lenz who were attending from Cardiff Council; and Jonathan Lloyd, Head of Employment at Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Andy Mudd, Head of Solutions at the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) to present to the Committee and respond to questions.

The Cabinet Member assured the Committee that there was a sharp focus on improvements and the absence rate had, since 2015/16, risen above the target and was projected to increase in year. He advised that he had found the support of APSE valuable and that officers would, as part of the presentation, provide an update on action being taken to tackle sickness levels going forward.

The Chairperson was pleased that the Committee was going to hear from external witnesses who had been invited to provide information on how Cardiff performs against Local Government levels of sickness absence across Wales and wider. The Chairperson had met one of the witnesses as part of a previous Task and Finish Group investigation by this Committee into sickness during the 2008-12 administration.

The Chief Human Resources Officer outlined the Council's overall sickness absence levels; Full Time Equivalent (FTE) days lost; sickness levels comparator data quarter by quarter over the last 6 years; and the costs of sickness absence to the Council.

The final outturn for 2016/17 was 10.77FTE days lost per person at an opportunity cost of around £11m

The officer reported on an internal Action Plan that had been developed with 11 target actions, one of which was to engage with APSE on a review, and benchmarking to inform the plan going forward.

Jonathan Lloyd, Head of Employment at WLGA provided an overview of sickness absence within the Welsh context and benchmarking of key components such as policies; hotspots; trends; and feedback from the workforce. However it was important that each Council understood their own particular issues within their own workforce and the need to look at why and how these elements can be managed.

Andy Mudd presented the findings of the APSE review which provided data analysis that indicated that there had been a rise in average levels of absence from a low point in 2015/16, which was mainly due to an increase in long term absence rates. Absence rates seemed to be proportionately higher in operational occupations – social care and waste collections; and teaching assistants. Stress and muscular-skeletal issues were by far the biggest causes of long-term sickness; and absence rates were notably highest amongst some older but not the oldest age groups in the workforce. It was also noted that absences seemed to be higher within the Grades 6-8 work groups. Findings from the workshops held with Trade Unions; Service Managers; Head Teachers and HR Officers were positive about the policies being fit for purpose; some feedback on the need for clarity and consistency of approach; need to avoid ubiquity and over compliance; and on how policies can be amended to meet the needs of schools.

There were particular matters raised around capacity and the number of referrals to Occupational Health and whether they added value, and the importance of using the service and its resources where it would make a difference. Some of the headline conclusions of the review indicated that early intervention and support as well as access to initiatives, information and advice were good tools to promote wellbeing and good attendance.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for sharing their conclusions with the Committee and recognised that there was no one solution. The Committee noted that work and progress was being made on the action plan, details of which were included in the presentation slides, and wished to assure the Officers that consideration of the outcomes so far and any queries would be raised directly with the Chief Officer. The Committee planned to monitor the Action Plan six months into its implementation in July 2018.

Members had sought clarification in some areas, and asked questions of the witnesses from which a number of observations and concerns were raised that the Cabinet Member and officer may wish to reflect upon before the monitoring item at July Committee.

- The Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee (Dec 2017), during its scrutiny of Leisure Services post contracting-out services to GLL, heard that in the last 18 months GLL had successfully tackled sickness absence amongst staff, reducing long-term sickness levels and sickness overall by 50% in Leisure Services. This

Committee was interested in how this had been achieved given the increase in sickness absence in the Council generally during the same period.

- Similarly, the Chairperson and some Members recalled that during the scrutiny of Alternative Delivery Models in December 2014 the Committee heard from Cormac that they would typically expect to reduce sickness to around 3% where a service such as waste had been contracted out.
- Members were keen to encourage officers to engage with GLL, and with Cormac to explore whether there were lessons that could be shared and effectively applied to the in-house delivery of similar frontline services.
- Whilst the Committee appreciated the statement from Jonathan Lloyd that there was no silver bullet in tackling sickness absence, the Committee believed that an appropriate culture and strong leadership, prepared to take on the issues was critical to success. The Committee would look for evidence of this when scrutinising/ monitoring progress on the action plan to address APSE recommendations in July 2018.
- Members noted with interest information received that Merthyr Tydfil Council had successfully reduced sickness absence to 5.5 average working days for 2016/17, compared to Cardiff at 10.8. The Committee noted that this was linked to Merthyr's decision to limit long-term absence to 4 months before reviewing an individuals' sickness absence.
- The Committee indicated that it may wish to investigate this approach further, accepting that there is a significant difference in authority size, and that Cardiff's sickness at 10.8 is at the higher end of the spectrum when compared with all other Welsh authorities.
- The Committee raised concerns that the Council did not appear to have undertaken an organisation-wide employee stress risk assessment which they understood had to be done under Health and Safety law, but noted that this risk assessment is a part of Health and Safety policy planning and some parts of the organisation had in fact undertaken such assessment.
- The Committee sought assurance that a Cardiff Council wide stress risk assessment was in hand and look forward to clarification and to seeing the results of that work.
- The Committee noted the important role that the Occupational Health service provides to tackle sickness absence. It was noted that there was a capacity issue and log jams due to a change in the Council's policy that introduced as a default referral to occupational health, management, and that Managers were now expected to exercise greater judgement when referring staff. It was also noted that a triage approach was being used, which had reduced waiting times to 2-3 weeks.
- The Committee also heard that some managers had concerns about whether Occupational Health fulfils its role, and believe it is timely to undertake a full review of this service, involving its key management sponsors.
- The Committee notes that the sickness absence action plan has many implications for managers and is keen to ensure that, as a key group in tackling sickness absence, managers are fully supported, particularly in the early recognition of stress related issues.
- Members were pleased to note the new early intervention initiatives such as sports massage at Lamby Way, but consider the development of skills in managers getting to know their teams and spotting issues early was a prime skill to preventing an escalation in sickness absence, and needs to be prioritised.

- Managers need support in recognising early signs of stress in their workforce, and importantly they need to know they will be later supported when formal action is required.
- As well as strong support for managers in delivering the policy, the Committee was of the view that managers need freedom to be flexible, as well as tools with which to manage sickness. It was important for the organisation to develop a culture where managers get to know their staff well, and would not need DigiGov reminders to undertake a return to work interview.
- The Committee expressed a desire to hear whether there are any incentives for managers to analyse and identify when staff appear to be playing the system.
- The Committee considered it important that managers receive HR support in the process of addressing their concerns.
- The Committee noted that data published by the Office of ONS suggested that a large Welsh public sector organisation such as Cardiff Council may be more likely to show high rates of sickness absence. Whilst the Committee noted the WLGA's view that local government sickness is higher than that in the NHS, Members were aware and concerned about the under-reporting of sickness.
- The Committee was particularly interested in the reasons that make it more likely that teaching assistants take sick leave. We note teaching assistants are often part time, and may feel undervalued compared with teachers, We therefore consider further analysis of this particular work group may be required.
- The Committee, was keen that front line staff have were consulted as a part of the review process and more data is required for specific groups and the absence/sickness related culture at various levels within the organisation. The Committee noted APSE's view Grades 6-8 are contributing significantly to sickness absence levels and more information may be required about cultural effects at this level.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Committee discussed the evidence and responses received and recapped on the key areas for further investigation prior to or as part of the monitoring of the action plan in July 2018.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee on behalf of the Committee write to the Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation and Performance setting out the Committees comments and concerns and to advise that: -

1. the Committee will give consideration to the content of the sickness absence improvement action plan in the presentation slides provided to Committee and raise any queries it may have prior to July 2018 when the Committee will schedule the monitoring of progress on the actions.
2. Members' requested that the Council engages with GLL, and Cormac to explore whether there are lessons that can be shared and effectively applied to support the workforce as part of the in-house delivery of services.
3. the Committee requests the Council considers investigating further Merthyr Tydfil Council's success in reducing sickness absence to 5.5 average working days lost for 2016/17, compared Cardiff's 10.8 average working days lost.

4. the Committee would like clarification that an organisation wide stress risk assessment is in hand.
5. the Committee recommends that a focus group be held with frontline staff so that they have an input into the process.
6. consideration be given to the reasons that make it more likely that teaching assistants take sick leave.
7. more data be collected around the high levels of sickness absence within specific groups, and the culture at various levels within the organisation which may impact on this, particularly Grades 6-8.

111 : DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2018-2021

The Committee was provided an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny of an early version of the Corporate Plan 2018-2021, the proposed objectives and key performance indicators (KPI's). The final draft Plan would be considered alongside the 2018/2019 budget on 14 February 2018.

On 6 December 2017, Members received a briefing on the structure and planned approach for delivery of the Corporate Plan 2018-2021, and following that meeting the Committee's comments and observations were provided to the Leader in a Chairs letter.

By definition the draft Corporate Plan is not complete, however the document sets out the Ambitions; the Well-being objectives; the steps required to meet those ambitions and objectives and performance measures and targets. The Committee was invited to consider and comment on the Plan.

The Chairperson welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor Huw Thomas; the Chief Executive, Paul Orders; the Corporate Director Resources, Christine Salter; the Head of Performance and Partnerships, Joe Reay and Head of Cabinet Office, Dylan Owen to the meeting to present the draft Corporate Plan and respond to Members questions.

The Leader once again welcomed the engagement and input of this Scrutiny Committee in shaping the Plan in particular the work that would be completed through the Performance Panel which was due to meet on 31 January 2018.

The Committee was reassured that this was the overarching plan and would link with the Well-being Objectives of the Cardiff's Public Services Board; identify the key outputs and benchmark performance. The plan would have fewer KPI's but these would be more relevant to the Council and its citizens; with a wider basket of indicators within Directorate Plans.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from the Committee and the following matters were discussed:

- The Committee welcomed the opportunity to participate fully in the strategic planning processes of the Council and the opportunity for the Performance

Panel to engage with the setting of targets and outputs, which was a significant change to previous administrations.

- the Committee welcomed the revised format for the draft Corporate Plan 2018-2021 and felt that the format, style and content made it a useable document.
- Members acknowledged that the administration had sought to embed the Capital Ambition Delivery Programme within the Plan, and align with the Public Service Board's Well-being Plan.
- The Committee considered that the Plan underplays the role Economic Development should have in achieving the objective 'A Capital City that works for Wales'. Members felt that there are significant and visible projects and initiatives, such as those linked to the City Deal that should be listed as actions the Council will take to make progress.
- Similarly, performance measures (KPI's) for this objective are noticeably light compared with KPI's identified to measure other objectives. Members suggest that consideration be given to KPI's such as the number of new jobs generated, and the number of new businesses launched. The Committee did recognise that it can be difficult for the Council in its enabling role to develop KPI's for Economic Development over which it does not have complete control, but note that the Council's 'ambition' needs some quantification.

During the scrutiny, Members made specific references to the following steps/actions:

Cardiff is a great place to grow up

Page 3 - the line 'Strengthen the management of the existing education estate' would align more effectively under Page 20 – Assets and Property: modernising & integrating our Public Services.

Page 3 - the Council should be involved in activities to prevent young people reoffending. The Committee suggest that one useful performance measure under the support vulnerable young people section would be the percentage of youth re-offenders.

Cardiff is a great place to grow older

Page 5 - Members consider the actions for this objective focus on remaining and promoting independence; however, the performance measures reflect satisfaction with care and support, rather than adults feeling more able to live independently with the care and support they receive.

Cardiff has safe, confident and empowered communities

Page 9 -. Members consider this objective focuses on children and adults being protected from risk of harm and abuse, whilst the performance measures generally show outputs regarding training delivery, rather than measuring the desired impact resulting from the training. The Committee would like to see more measures that reflect the steps/actions closely in this section, particularly measures for the action 'effective citizen engagement activity, giving people a voice in shaping Council services'.

A Capital City that works for Wales

Page 13 - Develop a Live Music Strategy – The Committee would like to know how this would be measured.

Page 13 - The Committee considered that under this Well-being Objective there should be a reference to the quality of urban architectural design.

Cardiff's population growth is managed in a resilient way

Page 16 - The Committee is of the view that it would be sensible for the Plan to factor in known and predicted population growth in relation to the delivery of some key services, such as waste management. We are seeking clarity on the future of alternative delivery models in areas such as waste management.

Page 16 - Develop a City Food Strategy – Members sought clarification on this line to indicate that it relates to street food events and sustainable food initiatives, as explained at the meeting.

Page 18 - In the Waste Management performance measures there is no reference to improved productivity targets.

Modernising and integrating our Public Services

Page 20 - The Committee recommends the inclusion of improving the contribution from income earning streams, and measuring the outcomes from partnership working.

Page 20 - The Committee considers that under this objective the step to 'Get people and communities more involved in decisions' needs to be given clear performance measures.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Committee discussed the Corporate Plan and information and responses received as part of the session.

RESOLVED – That

1. the Chairperson of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee on behalf of the Committee write to the Leader of the Council setting out the Committees comments as detailed above.
2. this Committee's Performance Panel as part of the target setting process will take place on Wednesday 31 January at 11.30am in the Scrutiny Chairs Room 263c, County Hall.

112 : ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee had received correspondence in response to letters set following its meeting on 6 December. The Committee had no matters to raise in relation to these response.

The Chairperson confirmed the Performance Panel arrangements and that Scrutiny Chairs had been invited to participate in this informal session to support effective scrutiny of the Corporate Plan and target setting.

The next Committee was confirmed as the Budget Scrutiny meeting on Wednesday 14 February 2018 at 2.00pm. Prior to the budget scrutiny meeting two training and awareness sessions have been arranged on 5 & 6 February.

(The meeting closed at 19.25pm)

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg