

POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 DECEMBER 2018

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

41 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Boyle and Lister.

42 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mackie declared a personal interest in Item 5 as her sister is Head of Integrated Care.

43 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

44 : CUSTOMER LEADERSHIP

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver (Cabinet Member – Finance, Modernisation & Governance), Isabelle Bignall (Chief Digital Officer) and Rachel Bishop (Assistant Director Customer Services) to the meeting.

The Chairperson stated that Members would recall that a task group of the Committee undertook a review into Customer Leadership, which was published earlier this year. Protocol requires that the Cabinet formally responds to a Scrutiny Committee's inquiry recommendations. The Customer Services team were therefore attending to inform Committee of the Cabinet's response to the recommendations, and how they planned to take them forward.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which he said that he welcomed the report and was pleased that six of the recommendations had been accepted and one partially accepted. He added that Officers would talk through how the recommendations translate into actions going forward.

Isabelle Bignall advised Members that a new role had been created specifically for Customer Services and Rachel Bishop had been successful in obtaining that position and would be attending future scrutiny committees.

Rachel Bishop outlined a presentation for Members, including information on the Customer Charter; Customer Service Standards, Measuring Success, Accreditation Options; Delivering Customer Service Excellence and Key Challenges.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members noted that data gathering could be a challenge and it could be difficult to know which service areas are particularly good or bad in customer service, asking

how this is assessed and diagnosed to see what action is needed. Officers explained that there will be a strategic suite of documents, they will also be including customer service in the new Personal Review process. It was noted that data could be difficult to uncover, and early in the new year there would be a quick customer service survey with five questions to undertake a 'where we are at' position. Members considered that Councillors should be involved in this too as they are in contact with many different Council departments. Members also noted the use of text message satisfaction surveys and would like to see the use of this increased.

With reference to internal/external customers, Members asked how there could be an increased focus on Internal customers. Officers explained that this was part of the Employee and Customer Charters both of which were completely interlinked; this would be included in the level 1 training course and the online course which will be launched at the beginning of the Personal Reviews, there would also be a focus on Senior Managers who should be role modelling behaviours.

Members considered it was a positive report and it was good to see the plan and the steps made already, including the involvement of Admiral and British Gas. With regards to metrics Members considered a consistent approach was needed across all different services to enable comparisons year on year. Officers agreed that metrics consistency was important to unify what was being done, adding that discussion would take place with the central performance team to see what is being done and where is best to benchmark from.

With regard to the Customer Charter, Members considered this was a good thing but noted that there are some services where there is no interaction with the customer at all, but the customer could be kept informed and asked how the service performed. Officers advised that this would be looked at as part of the Connected Citizen agenda, and that self-service and customer effort were key.

Members discussed training and asked if C2C had adequate resources for this. Officers assured Members that C2C have robust training but currently they haven't been able to release people to provide training to others. There would be a programme of training the trainers and talks with the Academy were underway whereby staff would now be released to deliver training modules 1-3 in the first year in addition to the online training module.

Members sought reassurance that the Level 1 training would be mandatory for all staff and were advised that the online module would be mandatory for new starters, and over time it would be mandatory for all frontline staff. Members discussed senior management training, and how all customer training would be reviewed and monitored. They considered it could be brought back to Committee to monitor in the future.

Members referred to Recommendation 6 that was partially accepted and sought reassurance that the Council would progress with a considered option as the principal of linking to a professional body was important. The Cabinet Member agreed that it was an important principle and it was important to choose the right organisation and look at the budget with support provided. The intention and value was clear and understood, there would be a practical evaluation first and feedback would be provided to Committee.

With regards to training, Members considered that case studies could be useful when talking to managers as they could carry more weight. Officers agreed it was important to uncover pockets of best practice and find champions, share stories and motivate the workforce.

Members discussed accreditation and wondered how it would work if some departments were ready while others were not. Officers explained that this was unclear at the moment, the Institute of Customer Service for example would provide a Client Director for 6/8 weeks and look at performance and where accreditation could start, this would be considered going forward. Members noted that some departments have mostly internal customers, such as HR and that there would be an opportunity to look these and speak to their customers.

Members discussed Children's Services and the fact that Children as service users touch many different services. They considered that there may be an opportunity to undertake some focussed work here. Officers agreed that some bespoke work could be done if required but it should be consistent in culture across the Council, but it would be a good perspective to look at in the future.

Members requested that regular progress updates are brought back to Committee.

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

45 : BUDGET PROPOSALS 2019/20 - FOR CONSULTATION

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver (Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance), Christine Salter (Corporate Director Resources), Ian Allwood (Head of Financial Services) and Gareth Newell (Policy, Partnerships and Citizen Focus Manager) to the meeting.

The Chairperson reminded Members that as a Committee it is within the Terms of Reference to take oversight of the Council's financial strategy. Therefore, in advance of scrutiny of the Budget in February, this was an opportunity for the Committee, as a stakeholder in the Council's financial strategy, to take a strategic overview of the proposals the Council is currently consulting on to address the Budget Reduction Requirement for 2019/20, and to consider the budget consultation Changes for Cardiff.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which he said that the consultation was underway up until 2 January 2019; the final settlement from Welsh Government was due imminently and there may be further changes needed to the proposals.

Ian Allwood outlined a presentation to Members including key information on the Overview of the Provisional Settlement; 2019/20 Budget Gap; 2019/20 Budget Strategy; Consultation and Engagement.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members noted in respect of the FRM, that there have been issues in Social Services and Waste Management and these risks need to be mitigated against. They asked what safeguards have been implemented to make them feel more comfortable in using the FRM. The Cabinet Member stated that he was not comfortable using the FRM, it was put in place when it was money that was unplanned for; the FRM had been used previously for one-off projects such as road repairs or lines and signs. A judgement has been made this year due to the level of savings and provisional funding, to use the FRM as a safeguard, to not put forward a further £4m of savings. He considered it would mitigate some service cuts but if it can't be re-established then it would be gone forever so it was not a comfortable decision to make. He added that he was glad that the contingency remains.

Members asked if the final settlement was more than expected, whether the FRM would be restored. The Cabinet Member stated that they would consider all options to give security should next year's budget be difficult as it is a valuable mechanism to deal with one-off issues and provide protection for the budget. The Corporate Director Resources added that the Teachers' Pensions funding amount had not yet been confirmed. If it was funded from elsewhere then there would be an additional £3.4m; Officers expected good news on this but nothing had been confirmed as yet, this amount was currently in the estimate of the budget gap.

Members asked if there was a preference over using the FRM or Reserves. The Cabinet Member stated that they would always seek S151 Officer advice on which to use and it would depend on elements of the final settlement. It would also depend on pressures and grant funding etc. which were undecided at the moment. Officers added that they were looking to reduce reliance on reserves.

Members noted that there had been a change in regime at the Welsh Government and wondered if this may change the final settlement. Members asked if £35m was the highest the Council had had to find. Officers explained that they had had to find £42.3m in 2013/14. Of the £35m, there were £19.4m of savings to be found, which was of course on top of all previous savings in recent years.

Members asked what the situation was with regard to Council Tax and whether there was an upper limit on the increase. Officers explained that there was a new First Minister and he may have views on this but other Local Authorities have gone above the previous 5% cap; there hasn't been a direction to cap and there needed to be a balance of reducing the effect on the reserve but increasing the effect on the Council.

Members discussed Grants and noted the lack of clarity on this in previous years, asking if the position on Grants was clear this year. The Cabinet Member advised that the large figures in the report are All Wales, they are smaller for Cardiff, adding that the gap doesn't reflect what may be obtained in Grants but it was important to be prudent. Officers added that the grant funding is for activities and items that haven't been budgeted for in the settlement.

Gareth Newell outlined a presentation to Members on the Budget 2019/20 – Engagement Principles, after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members considered that some parts of the consultation were difficult to understand, such as the Cap on Schools Growth, Lamby Way Solar Farm etc. Members noted that some questions did not relate to the budget such as those on Foster Care and Events, and that there was a lack of supporting information for these questions. Officers stated that the Cap on Schools Growth was a complex issue to summarise into a paragraph but they would take note of this for the future. With regard to Fostering, Officers explained that the questions were there to seek intelligence and highlight the pressures. With regard to Lamby Way, Officers explained that it was an Invest to Save scheme which would recoup the costs of the investment but Officers accepted that it was not clear in the consultation document.

Members considered that the consultation could be tested before it is sent out, such as with the Citizens Panel or Youth Council, or possibly come to scrutiny earlier for views. Members were advised that this was difficult as the budget proposals are not known earlier in the year, the Welsh Government provisional settlement does not come out until October so consultation goes out after this. The Chairperson considered it could be delayed a little and brought to Scrutiny/Councillors for comments.

Members discussed the layout of the consultation document and considered it could have supporting/additional information in the front and back and the questionnaire could be pulled out from the middle to be returned, enabling the information sections to be retained by the consultee.

With reference to Fostering, Members were not comfortable with the term 'career' and the reference to the financial aspect being second on the list, also noting that there was no room for additional comments to be written. The Cabinet Member advised that lots of work goes into the consultation document for ease of language etc. He added that the question on Fostering would be looked at with the service area, it was important to know what incentivises people and why people use fostering agencies etc. The Cabinet Member stated that he would take all comments on board, adding he was pleased that there was a separate young person's consultation however the results of this were not known as yet.

Members noted that focus groups can bring different results to questionnaires as there is an opportunity to explain questions and options and people are more informed. Members also noted that geographically there would be pockets in all areas of the City that have low response rates where people are harder to engage and asked what was being done to address language barriers where English is not the first language. Officers agreed that focus groups were useful and stated that more and more consultation work was going down that route. Language barriers were being looked at with friends and neighbour groups and the consultation would be taken out to spatial areas.

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

46 : INVESTMENT ESTATE UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Helen Thomas (Strategic Estates Manager) and Eirian Jones (Principal Surveyor, Strategic Estates) to the meeting.

RESOLVED: to move into closed session. The reason for this was that Members have information as part of their papers that are exempt from publication. Appendices 2, 3 and 5 of Appendix A of the papers are exempt as they contain exempt information as described in paragraph 14 of Part 4 and paragraph 21 of Part 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. There were no Members of the Press or Public present.

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

47 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Principal Scrutiny Officer advised Members that the Forward Work Programme would be published quarterly on the Council's website.

Members were advised that there would be an additional item to be added on the Review of the Bilingual Strategy, which would be scheduled for April 2019.

AGREED: to publish the Forward Work Programme for January 2019 to April 2019, with the addition of items brought to the PSO's attention since publication of the committees papers.

48 : WAY FORWARD

Members discussed the information received and identified a number of issues which the Chairman agreed would be included in the letters that would be sent, on behalf of the Committee, to the relevant Cabinet Members and Officers.

49 : URGENT ITEMS

None received.

50 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 16 JANUARY 2018 AT 4:30PM

The meeting terminated at 6.55 pm