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07 October 2019

Councillor Michael Michael,
Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment,
County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Michael,

Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 1st October 2019

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you and the officers for attending the Committee meeting on Tuesday 1st October 2019 to discuss the item on 'Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate – Quarter 3 & Outturn Performance Reports 2018/19' and 'Cardiff's District Heat Network'. The comments and observations made by Members on the areas relevant to your portfolio of responsibility are set out in this letter.

Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate – Quarter 3 & Outturn Performance Reports 2018/19

- **Welsh Government Recycling Target** - The Committee is concerned that Cardiff will not achieve the Welsh Government recycling target of 64% during 2019/20. The 2018/19 outturn result for the recycling indicator was 59.3%, which means that the city has to achieve a 4.7% increase in one year. Members felt that achieving such a large increase would require a significant change to Cardiff's waste collection approach, and that currently no such proposals exist. Swansea City Council, a comparable Welsh local authority, achieved 63% recycling during 2018/19 – this means that it only has to achieve a 1% improvement in 2019/20. Members felt that the Council should look at how Swansea has achieved 63% recycling, and then analyse the reasons for the 3.7% difference. Understanding the differences between the results of the two comparable local authorities might provide Cardiff with some of the answers that it needs.

- **High Sickness Rates** - The Committee is concerned by the very high sickness rates in the Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate. At the end of Quarter 3 the Directorate was anticipating 17.6 FTE sick days per employee for 2018/19; this represents yet another year on year increase. Officers explained that they are committed to reducing the current sickness levels, but that they have to work within the existing Council sickness policy. Members accept this, however, feel that something has to change as sickness appears to be having an impact on budgets and service delivery. With this in mind I would be grateful if you could respond to the following:
 - **Return to Work Interviews** – The Directorate is completing return to work interviews in 98% of reported sickness cases. This is a very high figure and suggests that managers are working hard to follow the Council’s sickness policy. Unfortunately sickness rates have continued to rise, suggesting that the policy may not be working effectively in parts of the Council. I would be grateful if you could let me know if there are any plans in place to review the effectiveness of this policy, or to change its format.
 - **Overspend Costs** – The Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate was overspent by £1.265 million in 2018/19. The biggest contributor to this deficit was the Recycling & Waste Management Service with an overspend of £2.947 million. Could you please confirm how much of this overspend can be directly attributed to high sickness rates, for example, the ‘back filling’ of posts due to sickness.
 - **Increasing Sickness Rates** – Sickness rates have continually increased for a number of years; this is having an impact on budgets and service delivery. Reversing this change requires strategic planning and leadership from the Council’s Senior Management Team. Given that the situation needs to change, I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with a summary of the proposals that the Head of Paid Service and the Senior Management Team have put forward to

stem this increase and ultimately reduce sickness levels in the Directorate and across the wider Council.

- **Sickness: Thinking Outside the Box** – A Member commented that the Council should think closely about using the resources that it has to thank staff for the work that they do, and potentially provide rewards for good attendance. For example, the Council could offer free tickets to staff as a reward for good work or attendance. Many employers successfully use work related ‘perks’ to reward staff and build loyalty. Staff tend to respond well to such rewards as they make them feel valued.
- **Glass Recycling Pilot** – Members have been told that the Council’s glass recycling pilot has been a success as it improves the quality of glass collected and increases the income received for recycled glass. Given that the pilot has been a success the Committee would like to know:
 - Why the scheme has yet to be rolled out across Cardiff;
 - If there are any plans to roll the glass recycling pilot across Cardiff, and if so when is this likely to happen?
- **New Household Waste Recycling Centre** – A Member asked about plans for a new Household Waste Recycling Centre in the north of Cardiff, and was told that at present the Council had been unable to identify a suitable site. I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with a list of potential sites that have been identified, and the reasons why these have been deemed unsuitable. The Committee would also like assurance that you will continue to search for a new site and keep them updated on any new developments.
- **Fly Tipping Data** – At the meeting you explained that there was no evidence to suggest that fly tipping had increased as a result of the closure of Wedal Road. This was challenged by a Member who provided details of a freedom of information case (FOI12627) which identified that 3,662 cases had been reported between 1st April 2018 and 31st October 2018.

The same FOI stated that 1,535 cases were reported in 2017-18, meaning that to that point in the year there had been an increase of 2,127 cases. I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with the information that you and officers have assessed to conclude that fly tipping incidents have not increased in Cardiff since the closure of Wedal Road.

Cardiff's District Heat Network

- Members view this as a very positive scheme for the Council that will make a significant contribution in reducing Cardiff's carbon footprint. The Committee would like to thank to you and the officers for all of the hard work that has taken place, and hope that the remainder of the delivery phase of the project runs smoothly.

- During the meeting a Member asked for clarification of the potential financial risks facing the Council from the District Heat Network. He was told that there was potential for the costs of the scheme to change (for example, through additional tunnelling costs), however, detailed work had been undertaken at the pre procurement phase to mitigate against as many development risks as possible. The Committee welcomes this approach, and ask that you:
 - Provide them with a summary of the potential financial risks and associated costs for the District heat Network;

 - Confirm if there is a point at which the cost of the scheme becomes financially unviable for the Council, along with details of the financial monitoring process.

The comments made in the letter about 'High Sickness Rates' are also relevant to the Strategic Planning & Transport Portfolio; therefore, the Committee is happy to receive a joint response on any matters relating to sickness. They would also ask that you provide a response to any of the points raised about Recycling & Waste Management before the informal briefing that is due to take place on the 5th November.

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and provide a response to the content of this letter.

Regards,

Handwritten signature of Ramesh Patel in black ink.

Councillor Ramesh Patel

Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee

Cc:

- Andrew Gregory - Director of Planning, Transport & Environment
- Matt Wakelam – Assistant Director, Street Scene
- Gareth Harcombe - Operational Manager - Energy & Sustainability
- Paul Orders – Chief Executive
- Sarah McGill – Corporate Director, People & Communities
- Davina Fiore - Director of Governance & Legal Services
- Members of Cardiff's Environmental Scrutiny Committee