

Date: 22 January 2020

Councillor Huw Thomas,
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Dear Huw,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 15 January 2020

Thank you for attending the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee last week to brief us on current corporate planning arrangements. I would be grateful if you would also pass on my thanks to the Chief Executive, Gareth Newell and Dylan Owen who have assisted in bringing the matter to scrutiny.

Planning and Performance Framework

The Committee notes that, at the mid-point in your administration, you are reviewing and refreshing your policy commitments within the Capital Ambition statement and you are in the process of translating that refresh into a new Corporate Plan for 2020/23. We look forward to pre-decision scrutiny of the Plan alongside the budget at our next meeting on 19th February 2020 and trust that the comments about the Corporate Plan expressed at the committee and summarised in this letter will be used in making these important changes.

During your presentation you mentioned that Cardiff is the only Public Service Board in Wales where partners subscribe to the same Well-being Objectives. This will doubtless assist the PSB to monitor progress and scrutinise outcomes.

We were interested to hear that you propose to introduce a new corporate planning and performance framework based on forthcoming legislative requirements. Fewer, more meaningful reports and the aspiration to introduce mechanisms that will shorten the time between the collection and reporting of data will be innovative, and be evaluated by the committee in due course.

Scrutiny points of influence

We welcome your commitment to strengthening the points of influence for Scrutiny in the corporate planning and performance process, also your continued offer of an informal detailed discussion with the Performance Panel to review Steps, Performance Indicators and Targets within the Plan. Both should add value to the process and content of the Corporate Plan. That you are offering such early engagement with scrutiny on future performance frameworks is a positive step forward. We also acknowledge that an end-of-year performance reporting discussion is an additional opportunity for scrutiny influence. We are happy to continue the conversation to develop this committee's role in engaging with performance reporting.

Openness in the presentation of progress.

The Quarter 2 2019/20 Performance Report to cabinet on 21 November 2019 included an overview of Corporate Performance. This overview contained seven paragraphs all of which indicated positivity. This committee is aware of numerous key areas of the Council's business where underperformance is evident and in Waste Management we know that some longstanding performance and risk issues remain unimproved and unresolved. The following paragraph in that report summarising Areas of Challenge fails to cover most of the endemic and known shortcomings in the Council's performance. Most organisations cite successes and failures, and reporting them openly gives such organisations credibility, particularly when there are action plans to show where improvements are being worked on. At committee, the Chief Executive stated that he accepted these points as a positive challenge and we trust that you agree and are also supportive.

The Chief Executive further suggested that the Council's end of year performance assessment would benefit from a level of agreement across the Council's committees, panels and boards on performance shortcomings. That suggestion is welcomed.

More openness about successes and failures will enable our scrutiny in testing the robustness and accuracy of the corporate planning and performance management

process to take a more strategic focus. Our aim will always be to facilitate continuous improvement of Council's policies and its performance.

Q2 2019/20 - Performance challenges

We note agreement from your team that Economic Development shows promise in creating an environment for promoting growth. Ongoing challenges include social worker recruitment, future under achievement of recycling targets and a failure to bring down high levels of sickness absence. We were surprised not to see included the major challenge of reducing or eliminating out of county placements for children who are looked after.

In writing this letter I was reminded that at last year's Performance Panel on the Corporate Plan we raised the point that improvements in educational standards remain difficult to assess since comparisons are limited to Wales. There are cities of similar size and demography in other parts of the UK where comparisons could be more valid and revealing. At last year's meeting I recall that this wider benchmarking point was considered a valid one.

We note the Chief Executive's acknowledgement that financial resilience and savings delivery are also improvement priorities and that delivering the Corporate Landlord programme is an ongoing challenge despite significant progress with Health and Safety measures.

We urge that, in these times of fiscal austerity, the Council's performance review systems, including the Personal Development Review framework, enables clear accountability for the delivery of targeted savings and that the overspending of any part of a directorate's budget is a matter of red risk focus and accountability. To be clear, we consider the management and prevention of overspends remains an issue that both senior management and the cabinet need to raise to a much higher level of importance ensuring that there are consequences for missed targets.

A committee member asked if you would check and confirm the accuracy of the Performance Indicator '*The percentage of reported fly-tipping incidents which lead to enforcement activity*'. (p32/35 of Q2 performance report).

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, my thanks for attending the PRAP Scrutiny Committee to engage with us on Corporate Planning progress. I look forward to the informal target setting discussion on 12 February 2020, and a response to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'David Walker'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'David' and last name 'Walker' clearly distinguishable.

COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships
Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office
Debbie Said, Cabinet Support Officer
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager