

POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present: Councillor Walker(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Berman, Bowen-Thomson, Henshaw, Lister,
Mackie and McKerlich

74 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

75 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of personal interest were received from Cllr Mackie as her sister is Head of integrated Care, Cllr Henshaw as her daughter works in Waste Services and Cllr Berman as his husband is a BT supplier.

76 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 February 2020 and 11 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record subject to the amendment of a typographical error under Declarations of Interest in the 11 March 2020 minutes.

77 : FINANCIAL STRATEGY - TO FOLLOW

The Chairperson advised that this agenda item would be considered in two parts, the first part is to consider the Month 4 budget monitoring report. The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance, Chris Lee, Corporate Director of Resources; and Ian Allwood, Head of Finance.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Weaver to make a statement in which he said that this was the position at month 4; the report covers lots of Covid issues and details the significant expenditure and loss of income due to the pandemic with more expected throughout the year. There have been lots of successful reclaims from Welsh Government, although supplier support to Cardiff Bus was a disallowed claim; however there are other avenues for reclaiming this. The report outlined that some savings targets would be unachievable and there is a predicted overspend of £1.9million. This means trying to control budgets in-year to get to a balanced position. This would be a challenge but not insurmountable.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members asked how the position as at next March was anticipated. The Cabinet Member replied that they are trying to highlight overspend and in year discipline; there may be potential savings later in the year but that would depend on how businesses respond to Covid and the reopening challenges. Officers added that they have tried to show a split between Covid and Non-Covid in the report; it was important to keep track of month 4, mitigate and maintain the month 4 position as below £2million.

Members asked about the percentage of money reimbursed by Welsh Government and were advised that claims had been submitted for £23.3million and £19.594million had been reimbursed to date.

Members asked what governance was in place to prevent shortfalls and what reasons were given for rejected claims. Officers explained that they had a 2 week turnaround initially for claims and that in the last few months, entitlement had changed; from the start, the panel in Welsh Government were keen for local authorities to have consistency across Wales but there were different views and claims were presented differently. Cardiff has performed quite well with its percentage success. There had been rejections for claims with regard to Cardiff Bus, but officers were looking to secure this from another source. There are 5/6 accountants who are ensuring that claims are appropriately clear and worded correctly to rule out inappropriate claims as they have to be specifically Covid related.

Members asked if the Council had disagreed with any of the rejected claims and if there was an appeal process. Officers explained that they disagreed in 2 areas, 1 point of order with regard to GLL and International Pool and another in regard to Legionella testing in vacant buildings.

Members discussed efficiency savings and the Cabinet Member explained that some are showing as potentially unachieved and the report details why this is; some savings are saying will achieve in part or will achieve next year. These savings are important for this year and next year, there needs to be a continual focus and a review next year if needed. Officers added that some areas have delivered new savings such as filling posts and structure costs and there have also been some savings in catering and with furlough; some proposals have been halted due to consultation not being able to take place with staff.

The Chairperson advised that Committee would now consider the second part of this item - the Council's Budget Strategy for 2021/22 and the Updated Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Weaver to make a statement in which he said that it was difficult to set the Medium Term Financial Strategy in the current climate. Very similar assumptions were made as per previous years such as 4% increase in Council Tax being assumed. The timetable would follow the path of last year with the provisional settlement in December and the final settlement in March.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members discussed the acquisition of the Red Dragon Centre for the indoor arena and asked if the Council was still receiving rental from the tenants during the pandemic. Officers explained that they have been in discussion with tenants, some rents have been deferred to allow them to get back on their feet; there had been no free rents allocated.

Members asked if the consideration of the conference centre has changed due to the pandemic and if not, that the costs would not exceed £60million. Officers stated that it was still going ahead, colleagues are looking at the financial affordability and return on investments. Members asked if the business plan had been reassessed due to

Covid and were advised that once the procurement process is completed, there will be reports to Cabinet to look at the business case.

Members asked if a change in the monitoring schedule had been considered due to the pandemic. Officers explained that they report monthly to Directors but there is immense pressure on resources in Accountancy at present. Monthly reports are selective and targeted to report high risk to Directors. Covid claims have to be submitted monthly and this allows a review of costs which can be reported and risks identified. The Cabinet Member added that if unexpected things happen, these can be made explicitly clear to Committee, Cabinet and Council.

Members noted the genuine efficiencies from home working and asked how this will impact the development of future working. It was noted that there were advantages and disadvantages to homeworking but it had provided an opportunity to rethink transportation/office space etc. Before Covid there was an 18month plan for smart working but it had had to be implemented in 2 weeks.

Members discussed School Efficiency savings and were advised that schools have a 1% efficiency target and that an earmarked reserves review will continue.

Members asked if the percentage savings directorates have been asked to find have been adjusted to take into account mental health and well-being. Officers advised that targets have not been set as yet; they consider there will be unavoidable financial pressures but Directors have to be as innovative as possible.

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

78 : ANNUAL WELLBEING REPORT 2019-20 - TO FOLLOW

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Chris Weaver, Cllr Huw Thomas, Leader, Paul Orders, Chief Executive, Sarah McGill, Corporate Director – People & Communities, Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships and Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Thomas to make a statement in which he said that this was an important document which allows tracking the delivery of political ambitions and key statutory requirements; it reports against performance and also outlines regional, National and local assessments.

The report offers a balanced and robust assessment of where the Council is currently and it's continually improving journey, including the creation of 152 apprenticeships, the Council House building programme, reducing the number of rough sleepers and being top of the league in citizen satisfaction. There have been significant improvements in areas of children's services with improved outcomes for vulnerable children.

With reference to sickness absence, there are interventions in place and it is hoped that improvements would be seen going forward. The report also provides information on work around Covid 19 and how this relates to risks and challenges

and also how the Council is involved with TTP, vaccinations, food delivery, continuing to deliver vital services, implementing improvements etc.

The Chairperson invited the Chief Executive to make a statement in which he said that the report demonstrates how the Council is self-aware and has a good grasp of issues. There are five key issues in the report Sickness Absence/Waste/Children's Services/Corporate Landlord and Covid-19 and there was opportunity to work with scrutiny on all of these issues going forward.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members asked how the homeworking and core office proposals were being reconciled in strategic thinking. The Leader stated that there was a blending of capability and mind set. There had been a huge change in working from home and there was a need to look at future core requirements. There would be a report to Cabinet in October which will include the lease commitments at Wilcox House, maintenance and office estate across the City that is fit for purpose and reflects duties with regard to social distancing; the issues are being considered. The Core Office Strategy was for fewer better buildings and this was still sound; it was important that people have the flexibility to work from home and when in the office, they are safe.

Members considered that inequalities in health across the City have not gone away and recent events have highlighted even more deprivation as a National issue; there had also been an impact on the BAME community. Members asked what was being done this year to address this. The Leader stated that not all of this was in the Council's control, there were issues related to DWP and benefits and COVID and public health, which are not delivered by the Council. Beyond that, the Council will look at wider determinates of deprivation such as Housing, Regeneration, bringing in employment and the Economic Strategy for the East of Cardiff. The Council would look to Welsh Government and UK Government to equip local authorities to deliver schemes that make a difference. Members considered that there was a need for more intervention in healthy lifestyle changes. The Leader stated that if public health sat with local government it would allow for such opportunities. Schemes already in place through the PSB are Eat Well Move More and Safe Cycle Routes.

Members noted that the vacancy levels for social workers in Children's Services had increased, Members were concerned by the management changes and asked what was being done to address this. The Leader stated this was an area he was keen to address. There is a new recruitment strategy, a market supplement introduced in April 2020 and they were beginning to see a positive result. There was a recruitment campaign from May to November and dedicated website; internal promotion of internals; a lead OM for recruitment in that area; newly qualified social workers with an assigned mentor among other approaches. These are seeing results and vacancy levels should reduce to 28% by the end of the month. There was more work to do but everyone has the opportunity and responsibility to promote Cardiff as a desirable place for aspiring social workers to make a difference. One of the challenges had been the salary offer and the market supplement should address this. The CEX added that the labour market issues had been significant, it was important to take on non-qualified social workers and offer degree opportunities and also stay close to universities to fill vacancies in the long-term.

Members referred to the Youth Offending service (YOS) and asked if there was an update on the improvements. The Leader stated that a strategy had been launched in June and positive feedback had been received on the Council's response to the report. YOS had been transferred to Adolescent Services and the Youth Prevention Service had been established. This was an improvement journey including full engagement of the wider Children's Services; it was a 2 year strategy and was progressing well so far; there will be a follow up visit in December.

Members asked what impact people working from home during the pandemic has had on sickness levels. The Leader said it has had an impact although there had been other issues such as shielding, quarantine and infection. The CEX added that there was a piece of work in place to look at long term absences, of which there were 140 and each case has been looked at individually; the breakdown was 87% long term and 13% short term sickness absence.

Members noted that self—assessment only shows 2 out of the 7 objectives making good progress and that Waste Management has ongoing issues. The Leader explained that work was being done and long standing issues reflected the challenges faced. The CEX stated that Waste Management had been through a very difficult period. Health and Safety has now improved demonstrably, industrial relations have improved, there has been a very significant restructure in the area at middle management and the wider workforce and it was anticipated that there would be significant improvements in the area in 4/5 months' time; this was not to downplay the issues. Officers added that there had been an extraordinary amount of work undertaken including management controls, budgetary controls, KPI's and more. There was also work with Welsh Government on actions such as recycling targets being the right actions. There was a new OM leadership in the area and it was important to recognise the impact they have made. Members noted the shift between directorates for Waste Management and the CEX stated it needed to be done and it was the right decision.

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

79 : EQUALITIES PLAN - TO FOLLOW

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Chris Weaver, Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships and Sian Sanders, Operational Manager, Community Safety, Cohesion & Engagement.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Weaver to make a statement in which he said that this was a fantastic piece of work and prior to lockdown there had been consultation with stakeholders and staff. It deepens and strengthens the work the Council does as a Local Authority on equalities and will help influence policy going forward. There are 4 objectives in the 4 year strategy and it will need scrutiny throughout the 4 years.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members noted that the 2016-2020 plan doesn't seem to be referenced in this plan and asked if the goals of the previous plan had been achieved and monitored and how the current plan would be monitored. Officers advised that it was a requirement

to produce an annual report against objectives; a report goes to Cabinet each September for review and the Corporate Plan and quarterly report would have a section that provides relevant details. Officers added that currently there was an 18 month lag on the Annual Report, but they have tried to bring it in line as much as possible. The integration with the Corporate Plan ensures that areas within defined groups has good reporting data.

Members asked how the plan would feed into the Race Equality Task Force. Officers advised it was indicated as a key deliverable in the strategy; the Task Force has its first meeting in October, there would be a report to Cabinet and references in the report against the Plan.

Members asked about engagement with the groups that the strategy reaches out to. Officers advised that appended to the strategy is the consultation report which details the 6 month consultation, there had been a wide reach in delivering consultation online, on paper, with researchers on the ground in underrepresented wards, focus groups and staff groups. There had been a good response from the Southern Arc of the City; key priority actions had been identified and objectives revisited in a staff engagement event held in January, attended by 70 people.

Members asked how organisational buy-in could be ensured, how it would be monitored and how non-compliance would be tackled. Officers stated that there had already been agreement from relevant area; there was a new reporting mechanism which provides enhanced opportunity for constructive challenge and reporting to Cabinet. It was important to make it part of core business.

Members noted the length of the papers and wondered if an Executive Summary would be better.

Members asked if there would be training for staff and Officers explained that they relaunched the equalities training packages earlier in the year. There was also equality impact assessment monitoring and feedback on the staff views on training.

Members asked what would be considered as success. Officers explained they would look at relevant data, where we are now and look at progress; it was about closing the gap and if it wasn't having the desired impact, they would look at how to do things differently. It was important to raise the profile and there were plans for an annual staff event. The Cabinet Members added that there would also be an annual report to Cabinet and the opportunity for this to be scrutinised so that committee can see the progress being made.

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

80 : SENIOR MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS - TO FOLLOW

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Chris Weaver - Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance, Paul Orders - Chief Executive and Anita Batten – Operational Manager – People Partner, Human Resources

The Chairperson invited Cllr Weaver to make a statement in which he said that with the outgoing Director of Social Services leaving to take up a promotion, there was an

opportunity to reshape the senior management tier. The report outlined a change in statutory responsibility for social services.

The Chairperson invited the Chief Executive to make a statement in which he said that a Corporate Director post was created 3 years ago to strengthen corporate capacity in social services and also so that social services had support from Community Services. There has been a good degree of success in areas such as Preventative Services and Independent Living Services etc. which reflects the ability of the Corporate Director post to cut across services and professional silos. Now, the suggestion is to go one step further so that the statutory responsibility for social services sits with the Corporate Director, and addressing the managers that report to that Director; this will allow for further integration between Community Services and Social Services. The Corporate Director did hold responsibility for Waste on an interim basis and this would not be sustainable going forward, the recommendation is that responsibility for Waste moves to Economic Development and PTE can focus on Planning, Highways and Transport Issues.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members noted that Waste Management had fallen under three different directorates in the last 18 months, there had been a change in Directors and a churn at top management level. The CEX advised that when he returned to the Authority there were Directors of Adult and Children Services but they were in different directorates, the decision to integrate them was the right one. Now there was more integration needed between Housing and Communities and Social Services, and Housing and Communities have some of the best performance practices. With regard to Waste Management, there have been some significant steps taken, the Operational Manager team is very different to 18 months ago and the CEX was confident that it was much more stable than it was. He added that his assessment was that Waste Management would fit into the Economic Development directorate. He stated that you can't have an organisational structure that is cast in stone, it needs to be able to adapt and reflect any major changes.

Members asked if areas were being moved into the Housing and Communities directorate due to its performance record. The CEX stated that there are significant strengths in the Housing and Communities area and with the allocation of statutory designation to the Corporate Director, Waste Management needed to move.

Members asked if the Director of Social Services would have to have the criteria of social work experience. The CEX advised that it doesn't have to and many don't; there needs to be a confidence that the individual is competent for the role of statutory designation and he has that confidence.

Members asked what areas would be looked at next and the CEX advised that in due course, there would be a comprehensive reshaping of SMT, this has not been done for a while and it is good practice to do this early on in an administration.

Members were pleased to see the reflection of social work in SMT and considered it would be useful to see how this is realised at a future committee meeting. The CEX agreed and added that social work is integral in SMT and Social Work SMT would be qualified social workers.

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

81 : ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

RESOLVED: to approve the report.

82 : WORK PROGRAMMING 2020/21

RESOLVED: to approve the report.

83 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

84 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - TBC

The meeting terminated at 4.45 pm