

Ref: PRAP/Correspondence/2021-22

Date: 15 July 2021



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Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member, Finance, Performance & Modernisation
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
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Dear Chris,

PRAP 14 July 2021: Annual Well-being Report 2020/21

On behalf of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee my thanks for standing in for the Leader to facilitate pre-decision scrutiny of the Annual Well-Being Report 2020-21. Please also pass on our thanks to the Chief Executive, Paul Orders, Gareth Newell and Dylan Owen for the very useful overview of the performance position and presentation of the context within which the performance framework is set. We offer the following comments and observations for your consideration. You will find our recommendations at the end of the letter.

Telling the performance story

Members note that you consider the Annual Well-being Report 2020-21 a balanced representation of performance however the Committee's general observation is that often the narrative refers to intended action rather than the current position, particularly where performance has been poor. We consider stronger linking of data to narrative would more effectively evidence the overall assessment, providing greater assurance that the report tells the complete story. If, for example, a service faces issues such as high sickness absence/workforce planning needs /cultural issues in the year reported then the Annual Well-being Report should reflect it in the narrative rather than focussing solely on positives and referring to all shortcomings and underperformance as 'challenges' without spelling out any detail.

Waste Management – key challenge

The Committee considers that Waste Management is both a prime Council service and a key performance problem facing the Council. Recycling targets have not been achieved this year and collections are being missed in large numbers on a weekly

basis leading to costly overtime and collection service delays. Sickness absence levels are also much higher than the Council norm. As such, Members focussed on the Waste Management and Street Scene service as a prime example of a 'performance story' not fully described or explained in this report. Some Members were concerned that a more fundamental overhaul of the portfolio than is currently underway may be necessary. We note the Chief Executive's view that the recent scale of service change is causing some 'rebalancing issues' and he considers that the new management team is 'on the right track'. However the narrative in the report fails to reflect the strains being felt on the ground.

Members are keen to join with the Environmental Scrutiny Committee for joint scrutiny of Waste Management. Members consider there is an opportunity for scrutiny to explore and hear residents' experiences of the service. We will therefore add it to our consideration for work programming and liaise with the Chair of Environmental Scrutiny, Councillor Patel. Members reported differing ward experiences of the service changes and acknowledge that it may be opportune to hold the in-depth joint scrutiny in the autumn.

Scrutiny's role in the Council's self-assessment.

The Scrutiny function recognises the importance of the process of organisational self-assessment. Members consider that there may be untapped areas of political and non-political stakeholder views that could give further assurance to self-assessment. In accepting the potential for a wider role for Scrutiny in performance assessment there are opportunities to define this involvement beyond the Performance Panel format, particularly as the new performance framework is rolled out in the autumn. We trust that the suggested offer to attend the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Forum to pursue options for further timely and effective engagement will be taken up.

Clearly the Annual Well-being Report is a reference point for scrutiny work programming. We concur that deeper scrutiny of the challenges highlighted in the report should be a feature of scrutiny work throughout the year.

Managing the workforce

During the meeting several issues emerged related to managing the workforce. Firstly **recruitment**, as we enter a new phase of labour market recovery we note that

many Council services are affected by a labour shortages, from school counsellors to drivers, tradespeople and, as has been the case for some time, social workers.

The Committee is firmly of the view that the outturn **sickness absence** result should have been considerably lower than 8.6% given the numbers of employees working from home. We are therefore considering deeper scrutiny of sickness absence. You agreed that both policy and practice are worthy of a refresh and that this would be a suitable year to undertake such a review. We note the Chief Executive welcomed scrutiny interest in this issue which he is already strongly taking forward.

COVID-19

The Committee urges you to prepare for the possibility of further lockdowns in the battle against COVID-19. It is likely that numbers will increase with the relaxing of restrictions. We note you are in close discussion with Welsh Government and we feel the Council will need to prepare clear messages to support the business community particularly.

Benchmarking

The Committee considers an important part of self-assessment will be performance and cost comparisons with other authorities. Core cities have often been considered a reference point but cities in England of a similar size to Cardiff could have greater relevance. We note that the Council has previously commissioned the data unit at WLGA to research natural benchmarking comparators with Cardiff. We recommend that this work should be expedited and widened as suggested above.

Recommendations to be monitored following this scrutiny:

- That Cabinet ensures full officer and political support for a joint scrutiny of recent challenges and performance shortcomings within Waste management, to be held in autumn 2021.
- That Cabinet commences a high level and urgent review of sickness absence levels, reviewing policy and practice throughout the Council.
- The Council commissions the WLGA data unit to broaden previous research into providing a range of comparator authorities against which Cardiff can measure its progress and performance.

- In addition to established engagement with the Performance Panel, to define clearly Scrutiny's wider role in performance assessment in the new performance framework to be rolled out in autumn 2021, commencing with attending the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Forum to explore possibilities in September 2021.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended PRAP Scrutiny Committee to assist us in consideration of the Annual Well-Being Report 2020-21. I would be grateful for a response to the recommendations proposed.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Huw Thomas, Leader
Cabinet Observers, Leaders of opposition groups
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Chris Lee, Corporate Director Resources
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities
Gareth Newell, Head of Partnerships and Performance
Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
Andrea Redmond, Committee Support Officer