

## SWYDDFA CYMORTH Y CABINET CABINET SUPPORT OFFICE

Fy Nghyf / My Ref: CM46133  
Eich cyf/Your Ref: PRAP/Correspondence/2021-22  
Dyddiad / Date: 16th September 2021



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Councillor David Walker  
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Cardiff Council  
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Annwyl/Dear David

### Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee - 14 July 2021 Annual Wellbeing Report 2020/21

Thank you for your letter of 15 July 2021, and the Committee's consideration of the Annual Well-being Report 2020/21.

#### Telling the Performance Story

I do not accept that the report refers only to "intended action rather than the current position, particularly where performance has been poor".

Each section of the report is deliberately structured under three headings: i) Key Successes ii) Challenges and Risks iii) Forward Look – Areas of Focus. This approach is designed to acknowledge areas of progress, explicitly recognise where performance has fallen short and clearly identify areas of organisational focus in the short and medium term.

For this reason, I disagree strongly with the assertion that the Annual Well-being Report focuses "solely on positives". Moreover, the report, and the covering Cabinet report, identifies all of the issues raised by the Committee, whether they related to recycling, street scene or sickness absence results in parts of the Council.

I would also draw your attention to the judgement of the Chair of the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee at the Performance Panel, held on 9 July 2021, that the Annual Well-being Report and other appendices to the Cabinet report are "*impressive documents both in terms of what is planned and in terms of the clarity of the information within*".

In relation to the specific issue that the Committee raised on waste and street scene, further detail has been provided in the narrative on the natures of the current performance issues in this area.

#### GWEITHIO DROS GAERDYDD, GWEITHIO DROSOCH CHI

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg, Saesneg neu'n ddwyieithog. Byddwn yn cyfathrebu â chi yn ôl eich dewis, dim ond i chi roi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

#### WORKING FOR CARDIFF, WORKING FOR YOU

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh, English or bilingually. We will ensure that we communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay.



The enhanced use of data has also been a notable feature of the strengthened approach, with Performance Panel members receiving detailed performance information in relation to key performance indicators, and also being actively involved in selecting corporate performance indicators and setting targets. This data is used throughout the document to substantiate the judgements made and is included in Appendix b of the papers shared with the committee, for completeness. Committee will also be aware of the enhanced approach recently adopted for presenting data, with the Council's performance over time, against target and, where available, relative to other local authorities, is shared.

In sum, the Cabinet and I would reassert our view that this report is a fair and balanced strategic assessment of performance, and the process undertaken to develop the report is robust. Performance reporting arrangements have been significantly strengthened in recent years, with the enhanced engagement with Scrutiny Committees, particularly the Performance Panel, being a notable development. This has allowed a broader cross-section of Scrutiny Committee members to engage, in much greater detail, with shaping corporate priorities and assessing corporate progress. As was also noted at the Committee, our assessment is consistent with the assessment of regulators to date, which provides a credible yardstick when determining the efficacy of our self-assessment process.

### **Waste Management – Key Challenge**

The report makes clear that the Council has fallen short of its recycling target, and that street cleanliness in certain wards has not achieved the ambitious target we set ourselves. Both assessments are substantiated with performance data. Recycling performance continues to represent an area of challenge, with financial risk related to the non-achievement of statutory recycling targets. Work is being undertaken, with Welsh Government, to develop a new Recycling Strategy and to achieve 70% of municipal waste being recycled by 2025. This is clearly articulated in the report.

The report also recognises that work is being undertaken to address a number of long-standing issues in relation to the Council's waste and collection service, that significant performance challenges remain and that this will remain a priority for improvement over the year ahead. Further detail has been included in both the Cabinet report and the body of the Annual Wellbeing Report.

In relation to the Recommendation made on this issue, I would remind the Committee that the Environmental Scrutiny Committee formally considered Waste at its meeting of 6 July 2021 and that the Environment Scrutiny Committee has the ongoing review of waste services identified within its work programme.

### **Scrutiny's Role in the Council's Self-Assessment**

As I mentioned at the meeting, the involvement of Scrutiny in the self-assessment process is welcomed and considerable work has been undertaken to actively strengthen engagement with Scrutiny over the past four years. The challenge and

expertise offered by scrutiny chairs and members have strengthened the Council's performance framework, and the quality of the self-assessments produced.

The development of a new Performance Management Framework, in response to the new performance requirements set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, represents a further opportunity to build on existing practices. I therefore welcome the offer for relevant officers to attend the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Forum to discuss opportunities for further timely and effective engagement.

I agree that the Annual Well-being Report must be a reference point for scrutiny work Programming. The challenges and areas of focus identified within the report provide a pointer to where Scrutiny may wish to undertake more detailed consideration of issues. This will help ensure that areas of corporate priority can benefit from consideration by our Scrutiny Committees throughout the year, so that performance discussions are not restricted to the strategic half yearly assessment of performance.

### **Managing the Workforce**

Workforce pressures are identified in the report as an area of challenge and labour shortages as a consequence of the pandemic and of other factors, including the impact of Brexit, are an area of concern. The UK is facing a national shortage of HGV drivers, with emerging pressures in other areas such as school counselling, tradespeople and, as has been the case for some time, social workers. Measures are being undertaken, potentially with further intervention required, to support recruitment and retention in these areas.

The Committee's view that the outturn sickness absence result should have been considerably lower given the numbers of employees working from home is noted. I would emphasise however, that during 2020/21, the Council achieved its sickness absence target, with a 27% reduction in overall sickness absence, based on FTE days lost. This included a 48% reduction in the number of FTE days lost to short-term sickness. In effect, short-term sickness nearly halved during this period. There was also a 17% reduction in long-term sickness and this information has been included in the final draft of the Well-being Report which was considered by Council. As the Wellbeing report states, performance across Council departments is not uniform, with sickness absence rates in some services remaining persistently above target.

By any measure, these represent a significant reduction. The challenge going forward will be to lock in some of the gains made during the pandemic, particularly as we design and develop our approach to hybrid working, and to continue to focus in the relatively small number of services where sickness absence – particularly long term sickness – remains a problem. I would also encourage the Committee to consider Cardiff's performance to Welsh Local Authorities and other UK Core Cities

### Sickness Absence Rates 20/21 – Welsh Local Authorities

	<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Average days lost per FTE</b>
1	Merthyr	5.41
2	Gwynedd	6.30
3	Denbighshire	6.50
4	Isle of Anglesey	6.68
5	Pembrokeshire	7.16
6	Carmarthenshire	7.70
7	Powys	7.73
8	Newport	7.80
9	Ceredigion	7.90
10	Conwy	7.94
11	Flintshire	8.08
12	Neath Port Talbot	8.13
13	Torfaen	8.41
14	Vale of Glamorgan	8.59
<b>15</b>	<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>8.60</b>
16	Monmouthshire	8.65
17	Wrexham	8.8
18	Bridgend	9.16
19	Swansea	9.16
20	Rhondda Cynon Taff	9.30
21	Caerphilly	10.00
22	Blaenau Gwent	11.67

### **Sickness Absence Rates 20/21 – Core Cities**

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Average days lost per FTE</b>
Bristol	7.80
<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>8.60</b>
Leeds	9.03
Nottingham	9.2
Sheffield	11.7

I do not accept, therefore, that a ‘high-level and urgent review of sickness absence levels, reviewing policy and practice throughout the Council’ is required at this moment. A cursory assessment of public services involved in the direct delivery of services points to significant workforce challenges at the present time, reflecting the long impact of an unprecedented public health emergency, in terms of massive demand pressures, growing sickness absence and serious difficulties recruiting staff. The administration’s focus is on addressing these issues in a way that supports staff, following the stresses and strains of the last year, and ensuring that local public services meet the challenges of a complex and difficult set of current pressures.

### **Covid-19**

The Council continues to work closely with Public Health Wales and other regional partners- through Cardiff and Vale Regional Test, Trace and Protect Arrangements- to manage the spread of the virus. Though we all hope that no further lockdowns will be necessary, the Council and our partners will be ready - as we have been throughout the crisis - to adapt and to respond to any reintroduction of restrictions.

Council service areas also keep their business continuity plans under constant review and arrangements are in place corporately to support services areas in moderating and adapting services to contain the spread of the virus, protecting the well-being of staff, service users and residents, and ensuring the continued delivery of essential services.

### **Benchmarking**

I welcome the opportunity to further develop benchmarking arrangements with the Committee and will ask officers to make arrangements for sharing the work undertaken with the Local Government Data Unit, Data Cymru, prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Yn gywir / Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Weaver', is centered on a light yellow rectangular background.

**Y Cynghorydd / Councillor Chris Weaver**  
**Aelod Cabnet dros Gyllid, Moderneiddio a Pherfformiad**  
**Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance**

**Recommendations to be monitored following this scrutiny:**

Recommendation	Status	Management Response	Lead Officer
<p>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.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The programme of reform within waste services was considered by the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 6 July 2021. Any further consideration is a matter for the Scrutiny Committees themselves. Cabinet Members and Officers will, as they have throughout the administration, continue to support the scrutiny process in full.</p>	<p>Matt Wakelam</p>
<p>That Cabinet commences a high level and urgent review of sickness absence levels, reviewing policy and practice throughout the Council.</p>	<p>Partially accepted.</p>	<p>For the reasons set out in the main body of the response letter, a high level and urgent review of sickness absence rates and policy is not considered appropriate. Despite the overall improvement in sickness absence the Council recognises there remains room for improvement within specific service areas. The programme of organisational reform focuses on making the gains made sustainable post-pandemic.</p> <p>Equally, a continued focus will be required on reducing long-term sickness absence through ongoing case management; managerial focus, particularly in areas of high sickness absence, and the provision of support for staff mental and physical health and well-being.</p>	<p>Tracey Thomas</p>

<p>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.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p>	<p>The finding of the commissioned benchmarking work, undertaken by Data Cymru will be shared with the Committee and proposals for further work in this area will be developed.</p>	<p>Dylan Owen</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Panel represent a key stakeholder in shaping the new Performance Framework and an agenda item will be requested at a forthcoming Scrutiny Chairs Meeting.</p>	<p>Gareth Newell</p>