

My Ref: T: Scrutiny/PRAP/Comm Papers/Correspondence

Date: 19 May 2021

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Dear Huw,

### **PRAP: 18 May 2021 – Organisational Recovery and Renewal**

On behalf of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee a sincere thank you for sharing the organisation's plan for recovery and renewal for pre-decision scrutiny this week. Please also relay our thanks to the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads of Service who attended the online meeting in support of the scrutiny. This is clearly a pivotal opportunity for strategic re-alignment within the Council and Members agreed that I pass on the following observations to inform Cabinet discussion. You will find our recommendations for monitoring and requests for further information listed at the end of the letter.

#### **Adopting a Hybrid Working Model**

The Committee notes that introducing a hybrid working model is central to organisational service re-design, we do however **recommend** that your proposals for the assessment and categorisation of roles should also factor in an assessment of the employee's individual needs/choices when allocating the hybrid working category. We encourage you to build flexibility into the policy and **recommend** that you include wording to stress that, in negotiating arrangements with staff members, that individual circumstances and preferences will be taken into account.

We suggest there is an opportunity to broaden the narrow focus of the proposals on place of work to include a wider review of staff Terms and Conditions. The nature of these pending changes offers that option in a way that may not present itself in such a way again.

Members were keen to build a picture of recent staff performance, productivity and accountability whilst home-working, in light of their casework experience during the pandemic. Anecdotally managers consider that productivity has improved mainly because the lower absence levels enabled a higher than normal number of people actually at work. Other formal means of measuring productivity do not appear to feature in this assessment but will need to be clarified, agreed and monitored under the new arrangements.

We note that you are addressing the matter of new starters, and have initiatives in place to ensure their successful cultural integration in the early days of employment.

The Committee, Cabinet and Senior Management recognise that the responsibility for driving the cultural change required to successfully deliver hybrid working will be steered by the Senior Management Team. We note that experience of leading and managing the pandemic will assist in this. However, it will be important to acknowledge that team working remains key and a cultural shift will require continuous reinforcement and ongoing support. Senior and middle managers may not all possess the skills required to make a success of these aims. You do plan a sustained piece of work with managers to encourage positive behaviours but additional personal and organisational development initiatives are likely to be required.

It is our view that, having introduced new ways of working and a new cultural tone to the organisation, a longer term realignment of the organisational structure will be required together with a systematic review of individual roles and deliverables. Clear accountabilities for all employees will also need to be established within a renewed Performance Management Framework.

Members will also need to be briefed and involved in understanding these transformation aims. They will also need to know how and when they will be able to re-join the Council's routines, including its formal meetings.

## Convening and leading city-wide response to recovery and renewal

The report recognises that a key principal of recovery is *Partnership – a whole system response from the city’s public services*. We are keen to establish whether PSB partners are aligned in their commitment and recognition of the value of the relationships established during the pandemic and whether they are prepared to work on sustaining these new relationships and ways of working in tackling other shared challenges. We note that there was a deepening of health, council and police operational working and a positive shift to a community focus in response to the pandemic. We also note the Council’s wish to continue this deepening process but **recommend** that the commitment to match this enthusiasm is formally clarified with each partner organisation.

We are also keen to establish how partnership working could be improved. We note that you consider it is good at a strategic level, however the positive improvements achieved through collaboration have mainly been noted within the public health arena. We heard your suggestion that there are conversations to be had around how public health interventions are shaped in the future and whether the option of a public health partnership might be achievable. There will also be the need for clarification of Welsh Government expectations of the role of local government in public health and in other wider partnerships going forward.

We heard that there are many opportunities for PSB partners to physically share spaces, however we urge that, where closer joint operational working develops and multiagency teams are introduced, there may need to be some discussion on standardisation of terms and conditions.

We note your ambition to build stronger relationships with the FE and university sectors. We **recommend** that you explore the potential to formalise such relationships and consider suitable fora for dialogue and joint working.

We consider that as you capture the PSB success, consolidate partnership integration and produce a new Well-being Plan you will need to focus on the accountability of any new arrangements. We also **recommend** that you refresh the approach to capturing the deliverable outcomes from the partnership agenda.

## **Accelerating the Council's Digital Programme**

The report states that the Council was well-placed to respond to the shift in digital and online working necessitated by the pandemic due to a major programme of investment in the Council's ICT infrastructure. The Committee notes the further spending proposals within the 2021/22 budget and that there is Welsh Government support through the Covid Hardship fund. We also note the budget implications of the many digital opportunities that lie ahead within this programme that will need to be forecast and planned for.

The Committee endorses a digital first approach, however we remain concerned about those potentially left behind. We were therefore pleased that you acknowledge that face to face and telephone options will be required and that the hybrid approach will aim to reach all demographic groups.

## **A strengthened approach to performance management and data analysis**

Members were pleased to hear that there will be an action plan to deliver the Recovery and Renewal Programme, with a clear emphasis on outcomes that will assist with effective accountability. We note that the Chief Executive and Corporate Director Resources are developing a Recovery and Renewal Programme Plan that will include key tasks with clear timescales. You agreed to share the Plan with the Committee and we will programme it for consideration as appropriate.

We note the requirement for robust self and peer assessment within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, requiring the use of wider organisational intelligence in assessing performance. The report states that you will introduce a new Performance Management Framework alongside a new Data Strategy for the Council, including a fresh approach to enhancing the use of data in service management and service improvement. We request that you share the new framework with the Committee as it develops. I understand from officers the best timing for this is September 2021 and would be grateful for confirmation.

**Requests following this scrutiny:**

- That you brief all Members on your Recovery and Renewal aims.
- That you update all Members how and when they will be able to re-join the Council's routines, including its formal meetings.
- That you share the Recovery and Renewal Programme Plan that will include key tasks with clear timescales with the Committee, so that we can programme scrutiny as appropriate.
- That you share the new performance framework with the Committee as it develops, and confirm that the best timing for scrutiny engagement with this is September 2021.

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

- That Cabinet proposals factor in an assessment of the employee's individual needs/choices when allocating the hybrid working category to a role.
- That Cabinet builds flexibility into the hybrid working proposals and includes wording to stress that, in negotiating arrangements with staff members, individual circumstances and preferences will be taken into account.
- That Cabinet uses its convening power to explore the potential to build and formalise stronger relationships with the FE and university sectors, considering suitable fora for dialogue and joint working.
- That the Council formally clarifies with each partner organisation their commitment to continued deepening of operational working and a positive shift to a community focus.
- That the PSB refreshes the approach to capturing the deliverable outcomes from the partnership agenda.

Once again thank you for your ongoing commitment to the value of pre-decision scrutiny in strategic and operational planning. We look forward to hearing how the Recovery and Renewal Programme progresses over the coming year.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER**

**CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the PRAP Committee  
Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation and Performance  
Leaders of Opposition Groups  
Paul Orders, Chief Executive  
Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources  
Gareth Newell, Head of Performance and Partnerships  
Tracey Thomas, Head of Human Resources  
Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office  
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services  
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations  
Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs  
Debi Said, Cabinet Support Officer  
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager