

Date: 20 January 2022

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Dear Chris,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 18 January 2022

Thank you for attending the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee for policy development scrutiny of the Council's Performance Management and Data Strategy. Would you also please pass Members' thanks to the Chief Executive, Paul Orders, Corporate Director Resources, Chris Lee, Head of Performance and Partnerships, Gareth Newell, Dylan Owen, Chris Lloyd and Kane Woodking who attended in support of this item.

Performance Management Framework

The Committee welcomed the new Planning and Performance Management Framework you have developed over the last 18 months, that has self-assessment at its core; we also welcome your recognition of the roles of Scrutiny and this Committee's Performance Panel in the new arrangements. Following discussion Members have asked that I relay some observations.

Robust performance dialogue

The Committee wishes to highlight the role of the PPDR process in the performance management framework and question whether it is sufficiently robust to support the new planning arrangements. You commented that the quality of conversations between managers and staff may need attention. There will be scope for directorates to encourage and expect such conversations on a more regular basis. We endorse the need for further guidance on regular informal but planned engagement with direct reports which could include both work output and well-being topics.

Members wish to reinforce the point that all managers will need to develop their performance evaluation and mentoring skills so that there is consistency in the quality and depth of conversations across the Council.

Tackling performance challenges

The Committee is keen to establish how Directorates will address performance challenges revealed by the quarterly snapshots, for example high absence levels, budget overspends or output delivery shortfalls. We note the top-down conversations that focus on the critical performance challenges represent a shift from the more bureaucratic quarterly performance reporting system. This will result in sharper conversations based on better performance reporting that clarifies the real issues. Exactly how this review process will operate within directorates will need to be clearly set out and explained so that it becomes the accepted norm.

External assessment

Members sought clarification as to the role and timing of the proposed Council-appointed external Performance Panel peer assessment. We note the assessment should take place at least once during an administration's tenure and will take the form of peer challenge to establish whether the Council has systems and processes in place that enable it to deliver its objectives and identify risks appropriately.

The Committee was informed that if a Council's performance is assessed to be of concern and there are increasing risk levels reported by the external Performance Panel, Welsh Government Ministers are able to apply sanctions or intervene directly.

The Council's own PRAP-led Performance Panel will continue to operate as it does presently, having different terms of reference to those of the external Panel referenced above.

Training for Members

Members highlighted the value of bespoke training to ensure Scrutiny Members are familiar with the performance reporting framework and how to drill down and access information to inform their lines of enquiry in preparation for scrutiny. We therefore urge that you factor this into the Members' induction programme planned for post-election.

Budget and Performance reporting alignment

This Committee has previously encouraged closer alignment of budget and performance reporting. We note there will continue to be separate monitoring reports. However, the Council has moved to ensure that review discussions, particularly with those responsible for substantial budgets, include discussion of the manager's financial goals and their achievement alongside other performance data. It is your intention to continue developing the further integration of financial and performance review and reporting.

We note that where Directorates are over-spending, the Chief Executive will expect a plan of action from the Director, and that typically there will be 4-5 performance areas requiring intervention following high level discussions. Alongside this we heard of a move to ensure that Directors and their senior reports are fully aware of their agreed spending limits and their accountability for keeping within them.

Data Strategy

The Committee welcomed the possibilities created by the new style of reporting performance information based on sound collection and use of data. We heard that controls will be put in place to ensure data is held safely.

Sharing public service data

Whilst Members are pleased that the performance management framework is up and running internally, they wish to emphasise the potentially huge benefits ahead if public services succeed in sharing their data. This is particularly and strategically important in establishing a '*single view of the child*'. We note a project to achieve such sharing of data is underway led by the Council and, notwithstanding the complexities and problems which will be encountered, within 18 months-2 years we can look forward to it coming to fruition.

Comparability of service delivery

Members wish to highlight that the past few years of homeworking by Council staff has revealed some disparity of responsiveness and effectiveness across Council service areas. There have been some performance improvements but also some perceived falling levels of service delivery unrelated to Covid constraints. We would

like to see that the new data system has the capacity to measure and report performance effectively. Where there are high levels of homeworking it will be important to track progress to ensure a level of comparability across all services in the maintenance or improvement of performance. Members are also aware of service areas which have used the recent crisis to innovate and positively adapt ways of working, but this is not seen as having been a consistent process across the board.

Timelines

The Committee noted that prioritising data for use in the Performance Management Framework will be driven forward during 2022. We note it will potentially take up to a further year to integrate all internal data sets and embed the processes. There are currently skill shortages and a need to train the network of performance and data management leads within the Council.

My sincere thanks once again for the time you commit to the scrutiny of Council performance. As this letter conveys the Committee's concerns and observations but makes no formal recommendations I will not expect a response.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Chris Lee, Corporate Director Resources
Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships
Dylan Owen, OM Policy & Improvement
Chris Lloyd, Enterprise Systems & Data Manager
Kane Woodking, Senior Business Analyst
Mr David Hugh Thomas, Chair, Governance & Audit Committee
Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations
Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
Andrea Redmond, Committees Services Officer