

POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Williams(Chairperson)
Councillors Ash-Edwards, Carter, Chowdhury, Henshaw,
Hinchey, Hunt and Thomson

34 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

35 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Chowdhury declared a personal interest in Item 4 as she works with Public Health Wales.

36 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

37 : PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

The Chairperson advised that it is Committee's statutory responsibility to undertake strategic overview scrutiny of the Cardiff Public Services Board's (PSB) performance. The Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Council's Constitution confers on Committee the power to make recommendations to the PSB in respect of its functions or governance arrangements and copy Committee's recommendations to Welsh Ministers and the Future Generations Commissioner. Members would receive a presentation of the partnership's work over the past year including its review of governance arrangements.

For this item, the Chairperson welcomed (External witnesses): Alun Michael, Police & Crime Commissioner; Charles Janczewski, Vice Chair of Cardiff PSB & Chair of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and Fiona Kinghorn, Executive Director of Public Health, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. (And from Cardiff Council): Councillor Huw Thomas, Chair of Cardiff PSB & Leader; Paul Orders, Chief Executive; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities; Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships.

The Leader, as Chair of the PSB, the Police & Crime Commissioner and the Vice Chair of the PSB were invited to make opening statements after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members asked about the impact of increasing demand pressures and declining public expenditure on partnership working. Members heard about successful solutions, such as the management of hospital discharge by the "pink army," which has minimised greater cost pressures. The growing need for partnership solutions in

the face of these challenges was noted, and there was reassurance that there is an urgent focus enabling partners to address issues collaboratively and find solutions.

Members considered citizens to be a significant stakeholder in partnership working. Members were assured by the importance placed on consultation with citizens. The Committee welcomed the overall acknowledgment that public consultation could be improved. The Commissioner's suggestion to address overlap in partner consultations and taking a more coordinated approach through the Board was noted. The Committee expressed an interest in reviewing the outcomes the Board currently monitors around the effectiveness of citizen engagement.

Members suggested the potential value of reintroducing community planning partnerships, especially considering the challenges to public services. Members were advised that the approach had been resource-intensive with often low community take up. Members noted the joined-up locality working on key issues within communities. Members did, however, feel there could be an opportunity to reinstate engagement between PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) and local Councillors.

A discussion took place around the impact of public service pressures on partner workforces, especially in the health service. The significant pressures and emphasis on the importance of supporting staff in response to these challenges was noted.

The Committee learned about the Director of Public Health's report on Amplifying Prevention, which addresses themes targeting inequity, including a focus on childhood vaccinations, bowel screening, and healthy eating. The Commissioner also mentioned collaboration with Public Health Wales to develop a response to research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), indicating the Board's emphasis on both crime prevention and addressing health inequality.

Members noted the Vice Chairman's commendation of the Board for undertaking a comprehensive governance review, particularly addressing the relationship between the CPSB and the RPB (Regional Partnership Board). Members acknowledged the need for continual review due to incremental growth in partnership structures and commended the review process.

Members were assured by all partners understanding the line of sight whilst acknowledging the different locations that the CPSB and the RPB serve. Members were pleased to hear that the RPB Annual Report is now presented to the Board each year, and this adds to this enhanced clarity and connection between the organisations.

Members discussed the financial savings achieved through partnership working and noted that many actions have resulted in a return on investment, with the benefits often seen through cost avoidance rather than direct budget savings.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

38 : BUDGET 2023/24, MONTH 6 MONITORING REPORT

The Chairperson advised Members that for this item they would receive an update on the budget for 2023/24. This item provides the Committee with an opportunity to monitor the Council's financial position at month 6 of the 2023/24 financial year.

For this item, the Chairperson welcomed Cllr Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation & Performance; Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources and Ian Allwood, Head of Finance.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members noted that the improved Revenue budget position at month 6, compared with month 4, was primarily achieved through the utilisation of £800,000 from reserves in the General Contingency fund and a Capital Financing underspend of £1.5 million.

Members inquired about whether the improved Revenue budget position is artificially improved. Members noted that since month 4, the pay award has been agreed, removing it as a risk, and there remains £1 million in the contingency budget. Members were assured that the monitoring report is structured to prompt management action to reduce the overspend. Officers advised there is close collaboration between the Finance team and service areas, involving regular senior management team conversations and focused one-to-one reviews with lead Directors. In situations of budget overspend, accountants challenge and may potentially delay the filling of all vacant posts in overspent services.

Members sought clarification that the option for staff to express an interest in redundancy remains open. The Council is permitted to capitalise any associated costs within certain rules, and this will be examined as part of the forthcoming budget. It was noted that the Corporate Director Resources prefers proactive workforce planning.

Members were concerned about the Children's Services overspend. They sought clarity on the breakdown of overspend and suggested engaging backbench Members in discussions. Officers advised that the Children's Services budget position is considered a Corporate issue and a multidisciplinary team is exploring invest-to-save options improving outcomes for children. Innovation is deemed necessary, and contributions from backbenchers via Scrutiny are welcomed.

Members asked questions around the ambitiousness of service change and efficiency savings, given the level of underachievement. Officers explained that the underachievement was acknowledged as possibly due to timing and unforeseen developments, such as the situation with St. David's Hall. Lessons are being learned, recognising that savings through service change carry higher risk than efficiency savings. Members noted Officers acknowledgement that percentages achieved will need to increase by year-end.

Members were concerned about low capital receipts at £183,000 compared to the £3 million target. Officers explained the need to balance the delivery of capital receipts against ensuring the best market values, considering it is a 5-year rolling target.

Members asked questions and noted the response that the Council can use Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funds to purchase council assets for repurposing. However, they noted that the Council must ensure that the value paid is a fair market rate.

A discussion took place around how the Chancellor's Autumn Statement might impact the Council's budget planning, especially considering the proposed funding strategy for the Indoor Arena development. Officers advised that they expected a challenging 2024/25 budget and the potential impact of interest rate changes.

Members requested a written response from the section 151 officer regarding the Autumn Statement's implications on the Council's budget planning and clarification of how revised growth figures in the Autumn Statement might affect the delivery of projects funded by borrowing, including the Indoor Arena.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

39 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

40 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13 December 2023, 4.30pm.

The meeting terminated at 8.00 pm