

POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 JANUARY 2024

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

49 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received. The Chairperson noted that Cllr Bowen-Thomson was yet to attend a Committee Meeting or send apologies and requested that a reminder of the need for apologies be passed on by a Member of the Labour group.

50 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Carter, Henshaw and Joel Williams declared personal interests in items 4 and 5 as they have family members employed by the Council.

51 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

52 : BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/25/ASK CARDIFF BRIEFING

The Chairperson advised Members that this was an opportunity for an update on the Council's budget modelling in light of the Provisional Settlement, along with news of the budget consultation. Members were reminded that the Council's Budget Consultation for 2024/25 was currently live. Committee's task was to note how budget modelling is progressing and consider this year's approach to budget consultation. Members could contribute to the consultation and feed any concerns and observations to the Cabinet to inform discussion and debate in preparing their final 2024/25 budget proposals, which would come to committee's February meeting.

For this item, the Chairperson welcomed:

- Cllr Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation & Performance,
- Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources,
- Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships,
- Dylan Owen, Operational Manager for Policy and Performance,
- Claire Owens, Principal Research & Consultation Officer

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members noted the better than expected 4.1% provisional settlement for Cardiff, which after modelling presents us with a £30.491m budget gap to close from savings. Members were pleased to hear that £10m of savings have already been found without impacting on frontline services, and that the budget consultation, whilst recognising it relates to just a third of council finances, will assist in determining the remainder. Members were reassured that the 4-week live budget consultation, informed by Ask Cardiff headline findings, will be analysed, and the report made available to inform final budget savings proposals, within 2 weeks of the consultation closing.

Members considered that the additional 1% settlement figure compared with the 3% on which the budget was previously modelled should result in some originally proposed savings being protected. Committee Members noted the lack of detail on how changes to specific grants might affect Cardiff's final settlement, and that Cabinet Members and Officers were unaware of the changes to social services and homelessness grants prior to the announcement. Despite some uncertainty in respect of specific grants, Members were pleased that some services, such as Youth Services would be protected. Officers offered to confirm the Council's understanding of the grants position prior to the announcement.

The Committee wished to congratulate Officers on an excellent and accessible budget consultation document. Members considered the thematic layout, and the genuinely open questions were good. In addition, Members highlighted that Cardiff Civic Society had pointed out a discrepancy between the online and hard copy versions of the consultation in relation to Parks and were reassured that the substance of the questions remain the same.

Some Members felt the consultation contained controversial proposals that could scare residents. Officers provided reassurance that the survey recognises the need to be honest with residents, that all possible frontline service changes had been included in the survey, and all savings, if taken, would amount to £4m. Members noted, however, that the section on Council Tax is relatively small, and there is no option to reduce arena funding.

Members agreed that over time there has been a successful broadening of

the consultation approach however Members would also like to promote more ward consultations on matters such as Schools Organisation Planning and Highways investment in active travel, particularly as they are long term capital budget investments. Members noted the view that such issues sit more comfortably within the Ask Cardiff consultation, and Officers will consider a review of whether such questions could be included. However, Members considered the 4-week timescale for this consultation to be very tight in which to access all hard-to-reach groups. Officers advised that they are targeting a high response rate online and will be reviewing responses weekly; will be using social media to target underrepresented groups and using a bespoke approach in the final week where gaps are identified.

Members noted Officers view point that public feedback is valued but the consultation is not a referendum, Members wished to re-iterate their view that public feedback should be listened to by the administration.

The Committee sought clarification in respect of reports in the press that savings may include a reduction in the number of city centre litter bins. Members were advised that the focus would be on retaining cleanliness in those areas with high footfall, rather than quieter residential areas. Members noted that resources to street cleansing have increased over previous years, these are challenging times, however there is a strong drive to increase recycling targets.

Members were mindful of the budget challenges currently faced by schools in their communities and were seeking reassurance that the 4.1% settlement will be wholly passed on to schools' budgets. Members stressed that the Council should be mindful of the implications of short-term revenue savings on long-term capital costs, particularly on building maintenance matters. Officers advised that they consider education a priority and the Council will do all it can to support schools, Members sought further assurance that schools will not be expected to offer efficiencies within existing budgets.

Members noted the productive conversations with Welsh Government with the aim of securing an earlier indication of the provisional settlement in future years and urging that more specific grants are increasingly made available through the General fund.

Members noted that Cabinet continues to lobby the UK government on the matter of teachers' pensions and were assured that there will be ongoing trade union and staff engagement on employment savings matters.

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

53 : PARTICIPATION STRATEGY 2023/27

Members were reminded that in line with Committee's Terms of Reference they have responsibility for the scrutiny of Council policy developed to address citizen engagement and consultation. Councils across Wales are required to develop and publish a strategy on encouraging participation in decision making to comply with the Local Government (Wales) Act 2021. The legislation also requires that the Participation Strategy addresses ways of promoting awareness among local people of the work of members and how to become a member of the council. Therefore, delivery of this strategy had been a collaboration between the Council's Policy & Performance function and its Democratic Services function.

The Chairperson added that this process is now at the stage of Cabinet considering the final Participation Strategy next week, and Members have an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny. Officers from the Performance function and from Democratic Services were attending to take Committee through developments since March 2023 to deliver this Strategy and questions would be taken on each part separately.

For this item, the Chairperson welcomed:

- Councillor Julie Sangani, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Equality,
- Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services,
- Gareth Newell, Head of Performance and Partnerships,
- Dylan Owen, Operational Manager for Policy and Performance and
- Claire Owens, Principal Research & Consultation Officer

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Part 1

Members sought assurance that closing the feedback loop post consultation is a priority for directorates. Members were advised that feedback is currently passive and subject to team capacity, but going forward the Directorate will take practical steps, such as using social media platforms, developing quarterly newsletters with links to Cabinet and Scrutiny reports, and targeting communities of interest more directly.

Members wished to understand why some citizens are difficult to contact. Members were advised that, in the case of ethnic minorities, it is primarily because they are unaware of the availability of information, however improvements are actively sought with the Council asking other employers/partners to share their networks. Members noted the aspiration to break down barriers by developing a dynamic relationship with advocacy groups.

Members considered that Equality Impact Assessments (EIA'S) were a key element of consultation and considered it would be useful if the Council had a KPI, with a target, to enable the monitoring of engagement with underrepresented groups over time. Officers agreed that monitoring progress on this matter needs to be put in place going forward.

Members stressed the importance of corporate-wide control of consultation, to ensure all engagement is valuable and good practice. Officers advised that the Senior Management Team take a view that all directorate consultation must seek assurance from Cardiff Research Centre, to ensure it meets good practice.

Referring to comparative reporting, Members agreed that qualitative data is extremely useful, and they welcomed the favourable quantitative response figures comparative to other authorities. Members considered however that Officers should be reporting proportions rather than population, to ensure parity of comparison.

Members were advised that as part of the Participation Strategy, the Council will attempt to engage with a broader variety of community organisations. Members felt strongly that the circulation of hard copy versions of council consultations should extend to all wards. Specifically, where there are no Council premises (hubs/libraries) in wards, then in non-council community venues.

Members were delighted with the recognition that grass roots community groups would unlock an improvement in response numbers and considered they could assist with identifying suitable venues.

Part 2

Members noted the view that in seeking to correctly implement the Participation Strategy the Council must be mindful of engaging with all political groups and independent candidates equally. Members felt it was important to be honest and ensure full understanding that potential election candidates must either be a member of a political party or stand as an independent member. Importantly the strategy should stress candidates must be prepared to work hard for the community.

Members felt it was important that the Portal does not simply duplicate information that is available elsewhere (e.g. the Council website). Members cautioned that supporting the Portal could become resource intensive, at a time of financial and resource pressure. Members welcomed the aim to make information more accessible by removing jargon, simplifying and shortening reports and urged that officers continue researching best practice, working with partners and associations, and accessing advice from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

Members acknowledged that standard report templates, procedures, and some bureaucracy is necessary for informed decision making, but considered it would be useful to review the scale and helpfulness of Scrutiny Committee and Full Council papers. Members also suggested that papers should be accessible not only to committee members but to all communities and cut back on jargon to improve public engagement.

Members felt that the age range targeted with information on access to public office could be expanded to include over 65's, given the upward trajectory of the working age.

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

54 : CENTRAL TRANSPORT SERVICES REVIEW - UPDATE

The Chairperson advised Members that Committee's Terms of Reference include responsibility for scrutiny of the Central Transport Service, which is a key support service for all Council Services that rely on fleet vehicles. As such, the Council needs this service to be running effectively. The Chairperson further advised that he had therefore requested a briefing so that Committee understands the key strategic

priorities for the service over the next twelve months. This would also allow discussion of some of the opportunities and challenges facing CTS, including an update on progress being made on its Programme for Improvement. Committee might also identify opportunities for ongoing monitoring and engagement with the service.

For this item, the Chairperson welcomed:

- Cllr Caro Wild, Cabinet Member for Climate Change,
- Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources,
- Dean Thomas, Operational Manager for CTS

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members expressed the need for access to the internal audit report and the programme for improvement for Central Transport Services (CTS).

Members emphasised that scrutiny papers should include these documents for a thorough assessment of progress. Officers agreed to share the improvement plan, and agreed it was essential for scrutiny.

Referring to the Utilisation of Vehicles, Members wished to have access to the internal audit report on CTS, particularly regarding the utilisation of vehicles. Members expressed the importance of examining the full utilisation of council vehicles for improved efficiency.

Members considered a visit to the CTS depot would be very beneficial and they requested a detailed scrutiny session covering aspects such as ownership, vehicle data, IT tracking systems, and examples of effective use.

Members recalled previous aspirations for CTS to generate income by offering services to external organisations and asked what was being done to progress this. Officers advised that services are provided to the public such as MOT's. Members acknowledged the state-of-the-art Coleridge Road facility and welcomed the opportunities for marketing services to other authorities, public service bodies, and partners.

Members emphasised the importance of having the right staff structure in place to capitalise on future opportunities for CTS. Officers advised of the ongoing review of the staff structure to stabilise the management team, culture, and prioritise additional apprenticeships.

Members requested that when an unsatisfactory Internal Audit is reported to the Governance and Audit Committee, the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chair should be notified and also that when another Scrutiny Committee is scrutinising a service with an unsatisfactory audit report, the internal audit report should be automatically included in papers, marked confidential if necessary. This would enhance transparency, oversight, and effectiveness in the scrutiny process.

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

55 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

56 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

28 February 2024, 10.00am (Budget Scrutiny)

The meeting terminated at 7.20 pm

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