

Minutes of the Meeting of CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held Hybrid - Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Thursday, 19 October 2023

PRESENT; Councillor Rhodri Evans (Chair) Councillors Ifan Davies, Endaf Edwards, Elaine Evans, Ceris Jones, Hugh R M Hughes, Ann Bowen Morgan, Caryl Roberts and Carl Worrall

Also in attendance: Councillor Catrin M S Davies and Gareth Davies (Cabinet Members); Councillors Amanda Edwards, Elizabeth Evans, Wyn Evans and Gareth Lloyd

Officers in attendance:

Mr Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer – Finance & Procurement, , Miss Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer – Democratic Services, Mr Alun Williams, Corporate Lead Officer – Policy & Performance, Mrs Diana Davies, Corporate Manager-Partnership & Performance, Ms Marie Neige-Hadfield, Corporate Complaints & Freedom of Information Manager, Ms Cathryn Morgan, Equalities and Inclusion Manager, Mrs Dwynwen Jones, Scrutiny Support Officer and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Standards Officer

(10:00am-12:25pm)

1 To elect a Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2023.2024 municipal year with immediate effect

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Elaine Evans be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of 2023/24 municipal year with immediate effect.

2 Apologies and Personal Matters

Councillors Euros Davies, Eryl Evans and Paul Hinge apologised for their inability to attend the meeting together with the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies.

Councillor Caryl Roberts apologised to all Corporate Lead Officers for her comments at the last meeting, which in her opinion had been misinterpreted. However, Councillor Roberts stated that it was not appropriate to make the comparison and she took responsibility for her actions.

3 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)

Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

None.

4 Tackling Hardship Strategy Annual Report 2022.2023

This report sets out the steps taken by Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) to provide a coordinated response to the increased risk of hardship in Ceredigion. This was the last report of our stand alone 'Tackling Poverty Strategy'. Going forward, it had been agreed that the PSB Poverty sub-group would ensure that combating poverty was maintained as a cross-cutting issue across all areas of work undertaken to deliver Ceredigion PSB's Local Well-being Plan 2023-28. A workplan was currently being developed to assist the Council with this.

The three key objectives of Ceredigion Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020-2023 were:

1. To develop a shared understanding with partner agencies of the evolving impact of COVID-19 on hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
2. To co-ordinate and consolidate collaborative efforts with partner agencies in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance
3. To identify gaps in support and evolving hardship needs in order to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.

Currently, the Council had achieved the objectives of the strategy. The Poverty sub-group has met regularly and discussed a wide range of issues to help us understand the impact of hardship on Ceredigion citizens. The data dashboards that were developed to support this work were widely used by partners and had been recognised across Wales as an example of good practice.

The Tackling Hardship action plan and regular reporting had helped the Council to coordinate their actions. The Cost-of-Living webpage on the Council website and the Cost-of-Living leaflet, which was posted to all Ceredigion postcodes in winter 2022, had helped to promote the available help and assistance. Gaps in support had been identified and, while the Council were unable to address all these gaps, they were able to respond to some, for example the network of 54 Warm Welcome Spaces that offered a warm and friendly place for communities to come together during winter 2022.

There full report for the period March 2022 – April 2023 was presented.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to receive and endorse the Tackling Hardship Annual Report 2022-23.

It was also agreed that an email be sent to the Clerk of the Community Council wards not covered by food banks namely Llandyfriog, Llanddewi Brefi, Tregaron and Ystrad Fflur on the process of setting up these banks in their Ward.

5 **Annual Report of Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information reports 2022.2023**

The Corporate Lead Officer, Policy and Performance presented the information relating to the Council's Compliments, Complaints and FOI activity between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. The report itself included specific information on the number and type of compliments received, the different complaints stages, performance and outcomes relating to these and information on compliance with FOI and EIR legislation.

A report detailing the compliments and complaints activity in relation to Social Services was also presented, and information about the Lessons Learned as a consequence of (corporate) complaints was also provided. The main report consists of a section about the contact received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("the Ombudsman") during the reporting period. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter to the Council was also presented and provided further details about all Ombudsman activity for Ceredigion, as well as for other Council's across Wales.

This was the fourth consecutive report where there had been no Ombudsman investigations commenced or formal reports issued in relation to complaints made against the Council. Whilst there were fewer Ombudsman referrals during this reporting year, the Council had a consistently high rate of Early Resolution/Voluntary Settlements. It was therefore acknowledged that challenges remain in relation to the complexity of complaints received, a general increase in activity surrounding complaints, FOI, Ombudsman referrals and referrals to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), as well as the challenges associated with the delivery of the Complaints and FOI Team itself. These challenges had inevitably had an impact on the Council's ability to meet its performance objectives in relation to prescribed timescales.

In brief it was reported, that:

- 465 Compliments were received
- 403 Enquiries were processed by the Complaints & FOI Service
- 144 Complaints were received: Stage 1 = 96 Stage 2 = 48
- 35 'Contacts' received via the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
- 882 FOI & EIR requests processed by the Complaints & FOI Service

In summary, it was reported that:-

- There were significantly more Compliments received during this reporting period. Improving the way that compliments were captured remains a piece of work that the Complaints and FOI Team needs to undertake, but that was being delayed due to capacity constraints.
- The service received a greater number of enquiries – many of which were either allocated back to the service areas to resolve pro-actively, or formal responses were required in order to explain why such matters could not be dealt with under the complaints procedures.

- It was worth noting that the number of complaints received by the Council was the third lowest in Wales.
- A great deal of work was needed to prevent Stage 1 complaints from escalating to Stage 2 unnecessarily on account that it had not been possible to respond within the prescribed timescale of ten-working-days.
- Compliance with timescales under Stage 2 also requires attention, as do the shortcomings in complaints handling that were referred to the Ombudsman. The Complaints and FOI Team continues to face challenges in meeting the demands of rises in the numbers of compliments, complaints, and FOI activity.
- There were fewer Ombudsman referrals than last year, but the number of Early Resolution / Voluntary Settlements was the highest in Wales.
- Complaints about Refuse Collection and Planning matters continue to be the main reasons for complaints; however, these services were predisposed to attracting complaints and these must be taken in context with the level of activity undertaken by these two service areas.
- Compliance with Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) timescales were at the lowest level reported, at 54% and 44% respectively. A great deal of work was being undertaken to improve on this.

Areas to focus on were:-

- Improving adherence with timescales prescribed in complaints and FOI/EIR policies/legislation
- Increase the resilience within the Complaints and FOI Team
- Reinforce the principle that complaints are owned throughout the Council
- Deliver a comprehensive training programme on complaints handling
- Improving system for capturing compliments and data surrounding lessons learned
- Continuing with open, transparent, and citizen-centred approach to resolving concerns

It was AGREED to note the contents of this report in advance of its presentation at the Cabinet meeting on 7th November 2023.

6 Update on the Banking Services Contract

The Chairman reported that a request was received from a member of the public on the 27th of July 2023 requesting that he considered as an agenda item the provision of banking services to the Council in light of concern about the urgent need to address climate change and to take all necessary steps to achieve 'net zero'.

The member of public stated as follows:

We feel that the issue of who the authority banks with, what the effects of this may be, and how the authority might best move forward to ensure that its

monies and investments help to address climate change rather than reinforce it, would benefit from the thorough consideration and investigation that the Scrutiny Committee could provide. In accordance with Members of the public addressing the Committee, Mr Grimsell attended the meeting to address Members on this matter.

The Corporate Lead Officer, Finance and Procurement then presented a report giving an overview of what was in scope within the Banking contract and where the current tender process had got to, including noting that Environmental matters had been given consideration within the scoring criteria.

Following questions from Members, it was agreed to note the report for information.

The Chair thanked Mr Grimsell for attending the meeting to address his concerns.

7 To consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Forward Work Plan was agreed as presented.

8 To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes.

Councillor Caryl Roberts proposed amendments to the draft minutes as follows:

- Delete the reference to **Officers** in paragraph three of the Clic item as Councillor Caryl Roberts was only referring to Corporate Lead Officers “informed following the first meeting after the election by the Chief Executive that Members should not contact any **officers** direct in relation to issues, only the Corporate Lead Officers, Corporate Manager, or himself.
- Delete the reference to Corporate Manager also in paragraph three of the Clic item that “Members should not contact any officers direct in relation to issues, only, the Corporate Lead Officers, **Corporate Manager**, or himself”
- To add a sentence “The Chief Executive stated that someone around this table is lying”

A discussion ensued regarding the addition of the sentence and advice was provided by the Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services. During consideration of proposed amendments of the minutes it was **RESOLVED** to exclude the public and press during consideration of this item on the basis that discussion related to individual(s) and that such information, should not, on balance, be disclosed to the public and press.

It was agreed to exclude the press and public from the meeting in accordance with paragraph 12 of the Access to Information rules.

Following discussion, the meeting returned to a public fora.

Councillor Caryl Roberts withdrew the proposed additional sentence and this was seconded by Councillor Ann Bowen Morgan.

Following a vote, it was AGREED to confirm the minutes of the meeting subject to the following amendments:-

- Delete the reference to **Officers** in paragraph three of the Clic item as Councillor Caryl Roberts was only referring to Corporate Lead Officers “informed following the first meeting after the election by the Chief Executive that Members should not contact any **officers** direct in relation to issues, only the Corporate Lead Officers, Corporate Manager, or himself.
- Delete the reference to Corporate Manager also in paragraph three of the Clic item that “Members should not contact any officers direct in relation to issues, only, the Corporate Lead Officers, **Corporate Manager**, or himself”

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 December 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____