

Minutes of the Meeting of CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held Hybrid - Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Tuesday, 12 March 2024

PRESENT; Councillor Rhodri Evans (Chair) Councillors Euros Davies, Ifan Davies, Endaf Edwards, Elaine Evans, Eryl Evans, Raymond Evans, Paul Hinge, Hugh Hughes, Caryl Roberts, Ann Bowen Morgan, and Carl Worrall

Also in attendance: Councillor Bryan Davies, Catrin M S Davies, Clive Davies, Matthew Vaux (Cabinet Members) & Gareth Lloyd and Gwyn Wigley

Officers in attendance:

Mr Elin Pryor, Corporate Lead Officer, Legal & Governance, Mr Geraint Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, People and Organisation, , Mr Alan Morris, Corporate Lead Officer, Customer Contact, ICT&Digital, Ms Marie-Neige Hadfield, Complaints and FOI Manager, Mrs Diana Davies, Corporate Manager - Partnership & Performance, Mrs Liz Merriman, Corporate Manager- Human Resources, Mrs Katy Sinnett-Jones, Governance Officer, Mrs Dwynwen Jones, Scrutiny Support Officer and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Standards Officer

(2:00pm-4:10pm)

1 Apologies

Councillor Ceris Jones apologised for her inability to attend the meeting. Mrs Diana Davies also asked that apologies were recorded for Alun Williams, Corporate Lead Officer for Policy, Performance & Public Protection.

Councillor Ann Bowen Morgan apologised that she would be leaving the meeting early.

2 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.

Councillor Euros Davies, Endaf Edwards, Elaine Evans, Rhodri Evans and Paul Hinge declared a personal interest in item 3 below.

3 Family Leave and Support Policy, Leave and Absences Policy, Flexible Working Policy, Prevention and Management of Stress Policy, Driving at Work, Council Fleet Policy (reviewed).

Consideration was given to the policies presented by Councillor Bryan Davies. It was reported that the People & Organisation Service had been continuing to review, develop and update key policies. Following consultation, the following policies had been discussed, amended and agreed by the recognised corporate trade unions:

- Family Leave and Support Policy
- Leave and Absences Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Prevention and Management of Stress Policy
- Driving at Work Policy – Council Fleet (revised)

The purpose of all employee policies and procedures was to clearly set out the behaviours, processes and procedures required, how they could gain advice and support and, where applicable, the consequences of not adhering to the policy and/or procedure. The introduction of these policies had a negligible financial impact and it expected result in an overall cost saving through the reduction of sickness absence and the associated cost of providing cover for that absence.

Family Leave and Support Policy

This policy replaces elements of the current Work Life Balance Policy and focusses on the leave, pay and support arrangements across a number of family related areas including maternity, adoption, adoption through surrogacy, maternity/adoption support (previously paternity), shared parental leave, and parental bereavement leave. The revision of previous policy arrangements ensures that the Council was compliant with current legislation.

Proposed changes within the policy include:

- Outlines the requirements for Working Time Regulations and annual leave entitlement whilst on maternity or adoption leave
- Paid time off for partners to attend two antenatal appointments
- Provides greater clarity on procedures, pay and support available across suite of family leave arrangements
- Two weeks full pay for maternity/adoption support leave
- Introduces statutory parental bereavement leave following the death of a child under 18 or a stillbirth from 24th week of pregnancy, including two weeks full pay
- Provides up to two days paid leave for employees undergoing IVF treatment
in addition to time off to attend hospital appointment
- Signposts to the Council's Carers Policy which outlines the support for those employees with caring responsibilities

Leave and Absences Policy

This policy replaces elements of the current Work Life Balance Policy and the Annual Leave and Holiday Pay Policy. The policy focuses on the annual leave, time off for public duties, special leave and absences. The revision of previous policy arrangements ensures that the Council remains compliant with contractual amendments for employees under National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) terms and conditions.

Proposed changes within the policy include:

- Incorporate the changes made to annual leave entitlement for NJC employees following the 2022/23 national pay negotiations
- Reflects the changes to fixed annual leave between Christmas and New Year which ensures continuity of service delivery to the public
- Reduces the period in which time off in lieu (TOIL) can be taken from 13 weeks to 8 weeks
- Introduces paid time off to attend cancer screening
- Allows up to 90 minutes time off to attend blood donations but expectation is that these are arranged outside of working hours
- Clarifies the entitlement and eligibility for other special leave

Flexible Working Policy

This policy replaces elements of the current Work Life Balance Policy and also incorporates elements of the Interim Hybrid Working Policy. The policy has three main areas: flexi-time scheme, hybrid working scheme and formal flexible working requests.

Flexible working can allow employees to balance their work commitments with their responsibilities and interests outside of work. This can aid health and wellbeing, reduce turnover, increase motivation and talent attraction. The revision to the previous policy arrangements ensures that the Council is compliant with current legislation

Proposed changes within the policy include:

- Flexi scheme - reduces to a 4 week accounting period and the bandwidth reverts to pre-Covid parameters – 7:30am to 7:00pm
- Hybrid working scheme – work styles reduced to three, needs of the service remains the over-riding principle and hybrid working not a substitute for caring responsibilities
- Flexible working requests – updated to ensure compliance with new legislation regarding eligibility and the number of applications per annum

Prevention and Management of Stress Policy

This is a new policy which aims to establish an effective and consistent approach to the prevention of work-related stress and to provide supporting services where cases of work-related and non-work-related stress are identified. The policy will also help managers and employees recognise and manage stress in a pro-active manner.

Whilst pressure and demand will be part of many workplace roles there are factors that can lead to employees feeling excessive pressure. If these are not properly managed they can lead to increased sickness, anxiety, depression or other mental ill[1]health. It is important to note that stress is a state, not an illness but if mismanaged it can lead to the development of mental and physical illnesses. A decrease in the number of days taken annually as a result of stress related sickness absence will benefit the Council in terms of productivity and cost reduction for providing cover, where relevant, of that employee's absence.

The policy sets out a stress risk assessment framework which consists of

- Individual Stress Risk Assessment
- Team Stress Risk Assessment
- Workforce Risk Assessment

Driving at Work – Council Fleet (revised)

The Driving at Work – Council Fleet Policy was approved and implemented in

February 2022. To assist the operational administration of the policy some minor amendments have been proposed as follows:

- Amending the Driver Agreement to a Driver Protocol and removing the need for drivers of fleet vehicles to sign the document
- Clarifying that any changes to a driver's ability to drive a vehicle, whether due to health or licence issues, need to be reported to their supervisor who must then inform Fleet Management.
- Additional text for clarification of testing for controlled drugs

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to recommend to Cabinet to APPROVE the following policies to ensure compliance with new legislation and to support recruitment and retention, employee health and wellbeing, and operational effectiveness:-

- (i) Family Leave and Support Policy;
- (ii) Leave and Absences Policy;
- (iii) Flexible Working Policy;
- (vi) Prevention and Management of Stress Policy;
- (v) Driving at Work – Council Fleet Policy; and
- (iv) subject to approval of item (ii), Policy titled Leave and Absences Policy, to include Adult Volunteers for the Cadet Force were entitled to up to 5 days paid leave. This places the Authority in a position to apply for the ERS Gold Award (currently achieved Silver Award).

4 Report on Ceredigion Senior Coroner's 2022 Statistical Return and Report of the Chief Coroner

Consideration was given to the Report on Ceredigion Senior Coroner's 2022 Statistical Return and Report of the Chief Coroner. The Senior Coroner for Ceredigion prepares an annual report ('Statistical Return') on deaths reported to the Coroner, which was sent to the Ministry of Justice for publication as part of the Coroners' Statistics on the UK Government website.

The Senior Coroner should also provide a report to the Council which should be published on the Council's website, and include relevant statistics on current/concluded cases (with comparison figures for previous years), an update on Coroner work and relevant issues, a summary of the Coroner's team and staffing arrangements, and any future plans. To date, this report had not been presented to the Council by the Senior Coroner.

An update on the current situation was provided on the following:-

- Ceredigion Statistical Return for 2022

- Report of the Chief Coroner
- IT Software and equipment
- Inquests 2023

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED

(i) to note the report for information; and

(ii) that the Committee write to the Senior Coroner requesting a report within 3 months to the Council which should be published on the Council's website, and include relevant statistics on current/concluded cases (with comparison figures for previous years), an update on Coroner work and relevant issues, a summary of the Coroner's team and staffing arrangements, and any future plans as it was important to receive a Local Authority report, to support the Council with its public body transparency and accountability arrangements, given the fact that the Council makes financial and service provision to the Ceredigion coronial area.

5 Complaints, Compliments and Freedom of Information half-yearly report

Consideration was given to the Complaints and Compliments half-yearly report. It was reported that the report provided information relating to the Council's Compliments and Complaints activity between 1st April 2023 and 30th September 2023. The detailed report was provided as appendix 1 and includes specific information on the number and type of compliments received, the different complaints stages and information surrounding performance and outcomes.

It was acknowledged that challenges remain in relation to the complexity of complaints received and there is a consistent increase in all activity managed by the Council's Complaints and FOI Team.

Brief Overview:

171 Compliments were received

180 Enquiries were processed by the Complaints & FOI Service

116 Complaints were received: Stage 1 = **68** Stage 2 = **48**

19 'Contacts' received via the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

523 FOI & EIR requests processed by the Complaints & FOI Service

Currently, it was evident that more complaints were received in this reporting period than in earlier years. Efforts were ongoing to continue positive engagement with all service areas to resolve complaints efficiently and effectively.

- The service continues to deal with a significant number of 'enquiries' – though these would normally be referred to services for direct resolution. To clarify, an 'enquiry' was the term assigned to concerns that are either premature and do not yet meet the threshold of a 'complaint', or they were concerns that were received whereby the complaints policies do not apply (i.e. 'properly made decisions', complaints that are out of time, or issues that

should be addressed via other means etc.). Therefore, a comprehensive and meaningful response is still warranted.

A great deal of work continues to be made by the Complaints and FOI Team to prevent Stage 1 complaints from escalating to Stage 2 unnecessarily, on account that it was not possible to respond within the prescribed timescale of ten-working days.

- Compliance with timescales under Stage 2 was also deemed to be an area requiring attention, though this was attributed largely to the challenges faced by the Complaints and FOI Team in light of increases in workloads.

Areas to focus on

- Improving performance in respect of meeting prescribed timescales that are set out in complaints policies and legislation
- Reinforce the principle that complaints should be owned by all staff and services throughout the Council
- Continuing with open, transparent, and citizen-centred approach to resolving concerns Wellbeing of Future Generations

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to note the contents of this report in advance of its presentation at the Cabinet meeting on 14th May 2024.

6 Digital Strategy 2024-2030

Councillor Catrin M S Davies presented the Digital Strategy 2024-2030. It was reported that the Customer Contact, ICT and Digital service had developed a new digital strategy following the expiry of the 2018 ICT and Digital Strategy. As part of the process of preparing this strategy discussion were carried out across the authority, a Digital maturity workshop supported by WLGA and a Data Driven organisation carried out by a consultancy and Wales Audit had carried out an audit into our Digital Strategy thinking which had helped shape requirements. Core strategies across Wales were also considered.

The strategy was long term and aims to deliver three bi-annual digital plans which could deliver the strategic outcomes outlined within the strategy. The strategy seeks to deliver a “Digitally Confident Ceredigion a county which was confident to develop, innovate and deliver digital services in partnership with our communities. Communities which are connected, engaged and ready to benefit from them”.

The strategy aims to deliver these outcomes under three strategic pillars:

1. Digital Organisation
2. Digital Residents
3. Digital Communities

The strategy was designed to support the national digital missions and to support Ceredigion to deliver on their 4 corporate objectives.

- Boosting the economy, supporting businesses, and enabling employment

- Creating caring and healthy communities
- Providing the best start in life and enabling learning at all ages
- Creating sustainable, green, and well-connected communities

The strategy would see digital embedded across all services and strategies to ensure the provision of innovative and efficient services for all. The following aims would be delivered:-

- Develop a digitally skilled, confident workforce with the capacity and skills to adapt and innovate.
- Support the community to be digitally confident, able to access and benefit from digital services.
- Support delivery of digital connectivity improvements for the whole county.
- Provide the council and its partners with sustainable, resilient, and secure ICT services.
- Support the development and delivery of a socially prescribed model which creates caring and innovative communities.
- Support the delivery of Technology Enable Care solutions which enable independence.
- Develop Digital leadership skills across the workforce.
- Provide our staff with the tools and systems to work efficiently and effectively.
- Deliver digitally mature services which reduce bureaucracy, improve efficiency to deliver real financial benefits.
- Deliver digital solutions which support the delivery of Net Zero.
- Work to ensure security and resilience underpins all we do.
- Make better use of data to support decisions and become a data driven organisation.
- Provide citizens with 24/7 access to services via a My Account and online services.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED:-

- (i) to recommend the approval of the Digital Strategy 2024 -2030 by Cabinet;
- (ii) to recommend the strategy for public consultation; and
- (iii) to recommend that the strategy following public consultation be represented to the Committee for consideration, prior to Cabinet approval

7 Forward Work Programme

It was AGREED to note the Forward Work Programme as presented.

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

It was RESOLVED to confirm as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the previous meeting

**Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and
Scrutiny Committee held on 21 March 2024**

Chairman: _____

Date: _____