

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

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Catrin M S Davies, Bryan Davies , Gareth Davies and Matthew Vaux (Cabinet Members) together with Councillor Amanda Edwards and Elizabeth Evans

Officers in attendance:

Mr Eifion Evans, Chief Executive, Mr Geraint Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer -People & Organisation, Mrs Liz Merriman, Corporate Manager- Human Resources, Mr Russell Hughes-Pickering, Corporate Lead Officer- Economy & Regeneration, Mr Alan Morris, Corporate Lead Officer, Customer Contact & ICT, Mrs Joy Lake, Corporate Manager-Clic, ICT & Customer Services, Mr Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer – Finance & Procurement, , Mr Mark Bridges, Service Manager-Projects & Accounts, Mrs Lisa Evans, Scrutiny Support & Standards Officer and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Services Officer

(10:00am-2:20pm)

1 Welcome and Apologies

Councillor Ifan Davies, Gwyn Wigley Evans and Ceris Jones apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

Councillor Paul Hinge apologised for his inability to attend the meeting as he was on other Council's adopted criteria.

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.

None.

3 Draft Menopause Policy

Consideration was given to the Draft Menopause Policy presented by the Leader, Councillor Bryan Davies. It was reported that a Ceredigion County Council was committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment, where everyone was treated fairly with dignity and respect in

their working environment. It was also committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of the whole workforce.

Menopause was a natural part of ageing, commonly known as 'the change', and it refers to the point in time when periods had ceased for 12 months. It is not always an easy transition but with the right support it could be much better. Whilst not everyone going through the menopause suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do would improve their experience at work. It was estimated that in the UK around 1 in 3 people were either currently going through or had reached the menopause. Ceredigion County Council data in October 2022 records the corporate workforce (excluding schools) as 66.1% (1,355) female, 34.1% (698) of whom were between 45 and 64 and could be at an age where they were likely to be experiencing the perimenopause or had reached menopause. It was therefore important that consideration be given to the needs of this group and proactively manage an age diverse workforce.

The draft Menopause Policy had been developed to help those experiencing troublesome menopausal symptoms, and to support them, their colleagues and managers in tackling the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms.

The policy aims to:

- Foster an environment in which employees can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause and feel confident to ask for support.
- Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidently have good conversations, and were clear on the Council's policy and practices, supported by Human Resources (HR) and the Employee Health & Wellbeing Officer
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support employees at work.
- Reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms.
- Assure employees that County Council were responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.

The policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of those involved in supporting affected employees within the workplace. It gives an overview of menopausal symptoms, their effect and offers guidance to employees and line managers of the support and information available to help them deal with the issues arising from the menopause.

The policy would be supported with further information and guidance on both the employee areas of CeriNet and practical help for managers on the CeriNet managers' toolkit. The People & Organisation Service would also be providing further support for those experiencing menopausal symptoms by:

- Providing a menopause café where employees could meet and gain mutual support and information. These sessions would be supported by the Employee Health & Wellbeing Officer.
- Provide menopause awareness training for Managers

Councillor Bryan Davies thanked Mr Alison Boshier, Secretary, Womens Officer for Unsiion Ceredigion for all her work in driving this policy for the Council together with the assistance of the Officers in the HR service.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED

- (i) to recommend to Cabinet the approval of the Menopause Policy;
- (ii) that consideration be given for a Menopause Champion for the Authority;
- (iii) that the Council promote the World Menopause Day in October ; and
- (vi) that a workshop be held for all Members and Managers to raise awareness of the Menopause

4 Review of Hybrid Working arrangements

The Leader, Councillor Bryan Davies presented the report and outlined the following in relation to the Hybrid Working arrangements :-

- Background
- Way We Work Project
- Hybird Working Strategy
- Interim Hybrid Working Policy
- Policy Headlines
- Review
- Line Managers

It was reported that the result for employees was similar to that of line managers with over 95% of employees agreeing that their hybrid working experience had been positive. Employees had made their preference clear. The financial benefit of hybrid working did not have as many employees choosing strongly agree but almost 80% of employees believe that it had benefitted them. When asked if they would consider alternative employment if their ability to work in a hybrid way was removed, 39% selected Yes; 24% selected No and the remaining 37% were Unsure.

The survey results were clear that from a line manager and employee perspective hybrid working was seen as a key benefit and retention tool. It was therefore recommended that hybrid working was accepted as a long term flexible working option and that the Interim Hybrid Working Policy should be revised to reflect this.

It was reported if the proposal to permanently adopt hybrid working option for employees was approved this would allow the release of office space which had not been fully utilised during the period of the interim hybrid working trial. The previous 12 months had shown that the current hybrid working desk capacity in Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa was capable of accommodating demand in its current form, accepting however that more permanent arrangements would be put in place in both locations. Over the twelve month period of the trial desk usage peaked in early December and it March 2023 for rooms booked. It was observed that the average usage over the winter months was higher than during the warmer summer months but remained within maximum capacity limits.

It was proposed that officers undertake a review of all Council office accommodation across its estate to identify potential for repurposing. The public engagement on future uses in Council offices resulted in several suggestions of possible usage including using building as facilities for the community, hospital or health care setting, spaces for businesses and residential accommodation.

Members raised concern regarding the perception of the public in relation to working for home and that work was not being carried out, however, this was not the case with Officers being far more productive, for example working during the time that they would usually be working to and from work and between meetings in various locations from their main office. It was agreed that this could be addressed by the Communication Service.

It was AGREED:-

- (i) to recommend to Cabinet to adopt hybrid working as a permanent option for employees able to work as efficiently remotely as in the office;
- (ii) to develop a Hybrid Working Policy to replace the current Interim Hybrid Working Policy and bring back to Scrutiny following consultation; and
- (iii) that the Hybrid work policy should include the requirement of managers to ensure that there was a weekly/bi-weekly or monthly physical team meeting

5 Draft Workforce Plan 2023-2028

The Leader, Councillor Bryan Davies presented the report upon the workforce plan that was a strategic document that outlines the Council's approach to managing its workforce to meet its current and future service delivery needs. It involves analysing the organisation's workforce requirements, identifying any gaps, and focussing on the development plans to address them.

Developing a workforce plan was essential for several reasons:

- **Strategic Alignment:** aligns human resources strategies with the Council's strategic goals. The plan allows the Council to identify critical roles, competencies, and skills required to achieve our corporate objective.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** provides an understanding of the skills and competencies needed to fill future roles. This would allow effective recruitment and retention strategies to be developed which would allow successful engagement with employees with a view to increasing motivation, reducing turnover rates and enhancing employee satisfaction.
- **Succession Planning:** enables the identification of critical posts and potential successors, allowing development, training and mentoring programmes or opportunities to mitigate risks associated with key employees leaving
- **Agility and Adaptability:** by anticipating future workforce needs and skills requirements, the Council could proactively address emerging challenges and capitalise on new opportunities.

As was the case for the 2017–2022 plan, a Strategic Workforce Planning toolkit was used to guide Corporate Lead Officer and their teams through the process. The toolkit assisted in analysing the current workforce before

extending that analysis to identify future workforce requirements, skills and competencies which would be needed to deliver new or improved services.

At the start of the year the People and Organisation Service met with each Service area to introduce the toolkit and to provide provided the workforce data to assist each service area in completing toolkit. This information was then collated, analysed and assessed in line with the workforce objectives within the Corporate Strategy and the requirements of the Sustainability Principles' five ways of working to develop key themes for the Workforce Plan 2023-2028.

The Workforce Plan 2023-2028 recognises the achievements over the course of the previous plan, the link with other corporate strategies, our workforce profile and sets out four key themed priorities to meet the identified challenges.

The four themed priorities set out in the plan were:

1. Realising Potential
2. Candidate Experience and Talent Attraction
3. New Ways of Working
4. Our Culture

The Workforce Plan 2023-2028 sets out an overview of each theme before detailing the actions which would be taken to meet the requirements of the Plan. A set of proposed measures were included at end of the document to allow effective monitoring of progress over the course of the three-year plan.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to:-

- (i) recommend the approval of the Workforce Plan 2023-2028 by Cabinet; and
- (ii) to consider the possibility that apprentices should stay to work for a certain period of time with the Council following the end of their scheme, if the Council had contributed financially to that scheme

6 Update on Clic

Councillor Catrin M S Davies presented the report upon the Update on Clic. The following information was highlighted within the report:-

- Customer Services
- IT developments
- Corporatisation benefits and Strategy
- Statistics on the Clic System

Most of the Members stated that the Clic system worked well, however, it would improve if all services would respond to queries in a timely manner. Councillor Carl Worrall stated that system did not work for him as it had taken months to resolve several issues in his Ward. Councillor Caryl Roberts stated that Corporate Lead Officers were either Steve Jobs or Rodney Trotter when using this system; and that it was not acceptable that a reminder should be sent to them if the issue/query had not been resolved within two weeks, as it should have been addressed sooner. She stated that

she had no issues with the front-line employees on Clic and welcomed this CRM system.

Concerns were also raised by Councillor Roberts that all Members were 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. She stated that she had collated information from Members from other Local Authorities on this issue and that they were allowed to contact officers on all levels direct. She stated that all Members and all Officers should be working together for their communities and as Team Ceredigion. The Corporate Lead Officer - Clic, ICT & Customer Services stated that the Rodney Trotter comment was unfair as officers were working hard in the background to address the backlog.

In response the Chief Executive stated that he was very disappointed with the comments of Councillors in relation to this matter and their unprofessionalism in relation to Corporate Lead Officers in a public forum and expected an apology by the end of the meeting, all Members and Officers should be polite and courteous to each other. All Members could contact the CLO direct to contact officers in their service if a response had not been received in an appropriate timeline. This process had been agreed following the last administration whereby Members had been vocally abusive to junior employees, which was totally unacceptable. The Clic system had been created in order that all queries/issues were logged and addressed accordingly, if Members were dissatisfied with the delay in dealing with the issue they must then contact a CLO so that senior officers follow up any concerns on their behalf. The principle was simple, stated the CEO – log a request for service on Clic; contact a CLO, Corporate Director or CEO if there was an unreasonable delay in actioning the request. If you required information and it was not a request for service please e-mail Senior and middle officers for advice. He also stated that there were 750 less employed in the Council to provide over 120 services, therefore this has had an impact on capacity to deal immediately with every enquiry. However, his and every other senior officer door was always open to members and to note this had always been the message.

The Leader stated he welcomed the comments on the need to improve the Clic system, however, the Rodney Trotter comment was not acceptable. Councillor Caryl Roberts stated that her comment had been taken out of context, but however, stood by her statement in relation to being able to contact all officers direct as Councillors in recent administrations had been able to do so.

It was AGREED -

- (i) to note the report for information; and
- (ii) that Members received training on My account and how to drop a pin to a map to ascertain an exact location of an issue, would be arranged in due course

7 **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)**

Councillor Gareth Davies presented the report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Corporate Lead Officer: Finance & Procurement then gave an overview of the key considerations and also confirmed that a Budget Workshop was being arranged for Members in September in order to kickstart the 2024/25 Budget Process.

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is generally updated on an annual basis. Due to the unprecedented challenge of the 2023/24 Budget setting process, it was not possible to update the MTFS during the Budget process, as all energies were diverted into setting a balanced budget for 2023/24.

The MTFS should not be seen as a formal detailed budget or a tablet of stone, it instead provides an overarching approach that the Council will need to adopt in aiming to achieve its priorities, including taking account of the external legislative, economic environment and indicative projected spending pressures and funding over the period.

The MTFS had therefore been refreshed and now covers 2023/24 to 2026/27. It includes an Executive Summary that covers the key matters contained within the detailed MTFS.

Members attention was particularly drawn to:

- Executive Summary
- The Council's Budget Priorities and the link between the MTFS and the Corporate Strategy 2022 – 2027 and its associated Corporate Wellbeing Objectives
- Indicative Budget Cost Pressures
- Budget Gap scenarios looking at different levels of indicative Council Tax and WG funding
- Sensitivity Analysis of different Budget Variables
- Appendix 1 - Doing things Differently: A Corporate Approach

It was reported that following consideration and feedback from the Committee, the aim was to table the MTFS at Cabinet on 05/09/23 and then Full Council on 14/09/23

Members were generally complimentary of the refreshed and updated MTFS, commenting that it was well presented and relatively straightforward to follow and understand. A range of questions were asked on matters including WG's proposals for a Discretionary Visitor Levy, the post EU funding landscape, the current position on Staff Payawards and the expiry of the Penweddig PFI scheme.

Councillor Elizabeth Evans also provided the Corporate Lead Officer with a list of questions for further consideration at the Budget Workshop.

It was AGREED to note the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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

It was AGREED to note the Forward Work Programme subject to considering a Communication protocol between Councillors and officers

9 Forward work Programme

It was agreed to confirm the minutes of the meeting of the previous meeting as a true record.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 October 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____