

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 14 September 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)

Councillors John Griffith, Richard Griffiths, Richard O. Jones, Bryan Owen, Alun Roberts, John Arwel Roberts, Nicola Roberts

Co-opted Member: Mr Keith Roberts (The Catholic Church)

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services), Richard Dew (Portfolio Member for Planning and Public Protection), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Major Projects & Economic Development), R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Youth, Libraries & Culture) Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities) R.G. Parry, OBE, FRAGS (Portfolio Member for Highways, Property and Waste), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Council Business), Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance) Ieuan Williams (Portfolio Member for Transformation & the Welsh Language)

By Invitation: Councillor Dafydd Roberts (Chair of the Finance Scrutiny Panel)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer
Director of Education, Skills & Young People
Interim Director of Social Services
Head of Highways, Waste & Property
Head of Housing Services
Interim Head of Adults' Services
Head of Democratic Services
Head of Profession (HR) & Transformation
Chief Public Protection Officer (LP)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Lewis Davies, Mrs Anest Frazer (Co-opted Member)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Kenneth Hughes, Mr Alan Hughes (Audit Wales), Mr Gareth Wyn Williams (Local Democracy Reporter), Accountancy Services Manager (BHO), Energy Island Programme Delivery Manager (LD), ICT Team Manager (MH)

The Chair welcomed all those present to this virtual meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee after which formal introductions were made.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillors Richard Griffiths, Aled Morris Jones, Richard Owain Jones, Dylan Rees, Nicola Roberts, Alun Roberts and Robin Williams (not a member of the Committee) declared a personal but not prejudicial interest with regard to Item 3 on the agenda on the basis of voluntary work which they had variously undertaken during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 9 March, 2020 were presented and were confirmed as a correct record.

3 SCRUTINISING THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY (INCLUDING THE FINANCIAL IMPACT)

The report of the Chief Executive outlining the Council's response to date to the Covid-19 pandemic in accordance with its responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 in relation to emergency preparation and response co-ordination at local level was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Chief Executive introduced the report by emphasising that the response to the pandemic is still ongoing and that the situation can change very quickly and with it the Council's response to the situation. It is still an uncertain and challenging time for all concerned. Although the Council has been primarily focused on responding to the Covid-19 emergency it has in recent weeks taken a tandem approach in order to plan for recovery and the gradual re-opening of services being mindful of the fact that the situation remains fragile and some distance away from the new normal. The Chief Executive referred to the excellent collaboration seen in Anglesey between all services' staff, elected members and the Council's partners within the community and also more broadly at regional and national levels, and she stressed the importance of the continuation of team work if the Covid 19 virus is to be managed and overcome. She further advised that for the purpose of scrutiny, today's report focused on the following key areas:

- the effectiveness of the governance structures and arrangements and internal processes for managing the emergency;
- the success of the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable individuals (children, young people and adults);
- the impact of the pandemic on the Council's financial position and the mitigation measures put in place for the short and medium term;
- identifying lessons to be used to inform the Council's response to the recovery period for the new normal;
- to assist in the preparation work for any subsequent surge.

The Deputy Chief Executive in guiding the Committee through the report in greater detail referred to the following aspects and confirmed that the Council's priorities and decision-making has throughout been driven by considerations of safety – both that of staff and the community; of business continuity - in particular front line services; and of new work - much of which was unanticipated but which required the Council to respond and adapt with immediate effect.

- Governance Arrangements – emergency planning governance arrangements were put in place nationally, regionally and locally to lead the response to the pandemic. At local level the Council established an Emergency Management Response Team (EMRT) to lead the Local Authority’s response to Covid 19 comprising of the Leader, Deputy Leader, Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Service. The EMRT initially met on a daily basis to co-ordinate the Council’s response to the pandemic, and the preparation of daily Situation Reports summarising key issues and risks to inform and escalate matters requiring attention built in assurance to the response. The EMRT’s work streams were centred on community, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), surge planning and excess deaths. The structures and processes established at the outset of the emergency have provided a sound foundation for ensuring safety and business continuity and have helped inform plans, resources and local need and enabled the Council to support businesses and communities. The EMRT continues to meet but on a scaled down, weekly basis at present.
- Member Communication and Engagement – the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive have updated Group Leaders consistently and regularly. This has included daily updates provided for all Elected Members and staff, regular Member briefing sessions and formal reporting to meetings of the Executive in June, July and August. The Council’s website has also been regularly updated to provide the latest information on the local response to the pandemic and service related issues. Social media has been utilised extensively to communicate key messages and announcements the aim being to provide accurate and reliable information.
- Key Risk Areas – a specific emergency risk register was created at the outset and has been reviewed and updated weekly. The key risks have been prioritised in terms of time and effort and these have included care homes, contact tracing and testing, personal protective equipment, dealing with outbreaks, supporting vulnerable families, the impact on the Council’s finances and the impact on the Council’s workforce.
- In highlighting specific risk areas for scrutiny as noted below and documented in detail within the report, the Deputy Chief Executive in each case explained the challenges faced, how the Council responded and the outcome achieved –
 - Provision of PPE to Council Staff
 - Ensuring the wellbeing of residents and staff of Council care homes
 - The impact on Council budgets (including payment of grant monies)
 - Redeployment of Council staff
 - Enabling safe remote working and the future
 - Safeguarding vulnerable individuals and broader well-being matters beyond statutory safeguarding responsibilities
 - Managing Track, Trace and Protect at a local level
- Lessons learnt and the way forward – an initial reflection and learning exercise was undertaken in late June, 2020 in the form of a SWOT analysis which was completed individually by members of the management team in service areas and collated into a single submission by the Head of Service/Director. Following further review and consideration, the Strategic Leadership Team agreed the standout issues from a corporate perspective in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and these are set out in the report.

The Leader outlined her part in regularly liaising and communicating with national, regional and local stakeholders and she referred in particular to the role of the WLGA. She paid tribute to the Council’s staff many of whom had worked very long hours over a length of time as part of the emergency response in difficult and challenging circumstances. She agreed that it was important to learn from the local response to Covid 19 in preparation and planning for recovery and the next normal.

Councillor Dafydd Roberts, Chair of the Finance Scrutiny Panel provided the Committee with an overview of the Council’s financial position confirming that the Panel had been

provided with a detailed analysis of the same at a meeting on 3 September where it was explained that the immediate financial impact of dealing with Covid 19 (wherein it was envisaged that the Council could be heading for a £3m overspend in 2020/21) had been mitigated by a decision in March, 2020 to borrow £10m with the PWLB to ensure the Council had sufficient cash flow going into the crisis; by an early release of Revenue Support Grant payment by Welsh Government and by a decision to issue the 2020/21 Council Tax bills thereby securing a flow of Council Tax income from those who pay their Council Tax in full or by direct debit. As at May, 2020 the council tax income collected was 1.5% lower than for the same period last year. The Council has been reimbursed by Welsh Government for the business support grant payments it has made (approximately 1,500 applications with in the region of £22m distributed). On the other hand, although the Council has had to shoulder additional costs in dealing with the pandemic the majority of those costs have now been recovered from Welsh Government. The income lost – estimated at £774k - across a range of services as a consequence of the closure of facilities such as leisure centres has also been reimbursed to a large extent by Welsh Government from whom the Council has been able to claim £725k. The longer term situation remains uncertain with services and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme expected to come under pressure as the Furlough scheme ends and unemployment levels in all likelihood rise. The Chair thanked Councillor Dafydd Roberts for the update.

Councillor Robin Williams, the Portfolio Member for Finance in agreeing with the broad outline of the Council's financial position above confirmed that the worst case scenario had been avoided for now but that challenges remain for which the Council must be prepared going into the autumn and winter periods.

The Director of Function (Resources)/ Section 151 Officer in concurring with those sentiments said that he considered the greatest risk to be the potential effect of the pandemic on the wider long-term funding landscape and given the level of support already made available by both the UK and Welsh Governments, whether future levels of public spending will be sufficient to enable local authorities to deliver services effectively. **The Committee noted the information presented regarding the impact of the pandemic on the 2020/21 budget and the mitigation measures put in place to positively influence recognising also that the pandemic will likely have an impact on the Council's medium term financial position.**

There was a consensus within the Scrutiny Committee about the professionalism and commitment with which the Council's Officers had dealt with the pandemic and praise also for the organisational response in terms of the support provided to businesses and communities, the clear messaging and the interpretation and clarification of a raft of regulations. In considering the report, the Committee raised the following issues –

- The Committee acknowledged that the pandemic had changed working practices in necessitating a rapid and significant shift to remote working which had created both opportunities and challenges. The Committee sought assurance that the Council's workforce is being supported as regards their mental health and wellbeing and that flexibility will remain a feature of workplace practice beyond the pandemic. The Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation provided assurance about the practical plans in place to ensure the health, safety and well-being of staff over and above existing counselling and occupational health services. She referred as examples to the Learning Pool and the range of modules contained therein, weekly newsletter updating staff on relevant matters and containing ideas for keeping both physically and mentally well and a dashboard to help social care staff keep up to date with training. Additionally, managers have been advised to keep in regular contact with their teams. The Chief Executive acknowledged the importance of agile and flexible working in responding to the emergency situation and confirmed that in addressing the new normal the Council would be looking at different ways

of working. **The Committee was agreed that employee and community well-being be prioritised in its forward work programme.**

- The Committee referred to the Covid 19 outbreak at the Two Sisters meat processing plant in Llangefni and asked whether lessons had been learnt from dealing with the outbreak that could be applied in the event of a similar occurrence in future. The Chief Executive clarified that a rapid response and swift escalation to Welsh Government were key to successfully managing the outbreak and that regular contact was maintained with Welsh Government throughout. As a result of the experience gained, the appropriate structures and processes are now in place should the Council have to respond to a similar event in future. The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted the importance of sharing information in a clear and consistent way and said that word of mouth still remains one of the most effective ways of getting messages across.

- The Committee acknowledged the challenge of ensuring the wellbeing of residents and staff of Council care homes in the crisis and enquired about the lessons learnt from an outbreak of the virus in one Council care home early in the lockdown period. The Interim Head of Adults' Services clarified that making available designated beds for Covid (red) and non Covid (green) patients to prevent wider transmission within the care home setting and ensuring the use of PPE throughout the home were operational steps that were seen to be effective. Mindful of the specific needs of individuals with dementia and the particular difficulties in isolating those individuals, staff would sit with them to provide comfort and reassurance. Recognising also the importance of residents' emotional and psychological well-being in maintaining contact with families and friends, the Council purchased and disseminated i-pads to all internally managed care homes to facilitate personal contact and virtual consultations.

The Committee in noting this information referred to the importance of testing and enquired how ensuring easy access for care homes to the UK Portal and the speedy return of test results could be facilitated. The Chief Executive confirmed that a letter to this end had been sent on 10 September jointly to Welsh Government's Health and Social Services Minister and the NHS Chief Medical Officer and suggested that a further letter lending Scrutiny's weight to this message would be of great help. The Interim Head of Adults' Services said that weekly meetings of a regional steering group of BCUHB and local authority officers has been key in ensuring orderliness with regard to testing but that more could be done to strengthen the UK Portal system. **The Committee was agreed that a further letter should be sent on behalf of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to reiterate this message.**

- The Committee acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on the economy and the business sector and in light of the winding down of the Furlough scheme sought clarification of measures taken by the Council to support local businesses, promote the local economy and strengthen town centres. The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer referred to the £22m distributed to local businesses as part of the Welsh Government's package of support and outlined the rateable value basis on which this funding was allocated with additional support being given to small businesses. The ending of the Furlough scheme is expected to result in a rise in unemployment with implications for applications to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which are also expected to increase. None of the Council's staff were put on furlough which was primarily intended to protect jobs in businesses unable to trade rather than local authority staff paid for by public funding with the exception of local authority staff who are funded fully from commercial income generated. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Council has developed a draft Economic Recovery Plan with one of the main considerations being how and where to prioritise resources to the greatest effect especially as many business critical decisions lie with the UK Government as part of large scale economic recovery programmes.

- The Committee referred to managing the Track, Trace and Protect (TTP) Strategy at local level and asked about the initial collaboration with Ceredigion Council. The

Committee further noted that the system is only effective if individuals comply with self-isolation guidance, and it enquired about the effectiveness of enforcement and any additional measures that can be taken in this respect. The Chief Executive confirmed that based on the experience of a Ceredigion pilot, the Council established and piloted its own Contact Tracing process which was used to inform the development of a regional model. The North Wales Contact Tracing Service has since been established for which Flintshire Council is the lead employer and has contact tracing teams aligned to each of the North Wales authorities providing a regional as well as local contact tracing service. The Chief Public Protection Officer confirmed that although it involves the Council's Environmental Health Service, the Police and Public Health Wales working collaboratively, TTP relies primarily on people taking personal responsibility for self-isolating when required to do so; the capacity, resources and expertise to comprehensively police and enforce the scheme are not available. **Given its importance in effectively managing Covid-19, the Committee was agreed that TTP be incorporated within its Forward Work Programme as a priority area for monitoring; further, a reference to the Committee's concerns regarding the sufficiency of resources to support effective enforcement be made in the letter which it was previously agreed be sent to Welsh Government.**

- The Committee enquired about the safety of schools and school staff. The Director of Education, Skills and Young People provided assurance that every step had been taken to ensure that schools are Covid secure confirming that schools have been thoroughly and comprehensively risk assessed. Co-operation between the LEA and school Head teachers is good and regular meetings are held to share experiences, information and practice. This was corroborated by Mr Keith Roberts the Catholic Church's education representative on the Committee who said that he thought that the current arrangements are working effectively and that regular information is provided by the LEA to keep schools up to date.

- The Committee acknowledged the commitment of the Council's staff in difficult circumstances and noted that some services will have experienced greater pressure than others; the Committee sought assurance that the Council had been able to respond to requests for support by transferring staff to service areas where the need was greatest. The Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation clarified that early in 2020 the Authority was one of a few in Wales to have agreed with the trade unions and adopted a policy allowing for the redeployment of staff in an emergency situation. The policy enabled staff to be approached to undertake alternative work during the emergency pandemic and 800 forms were completed by staff indicating their willingness to assist with redeployed roles; however, some services such as Environmental Health for example involve specialist roles requiring specific expertise and qualifications and are therefore not easily filled. Whilst the Authority's Workforce Planning Strategy seeks to assess and determine future workforce needs it could not foresee a pandemic; however the Authority will be seeking to evaluate the lessons learnt from the experience of dealing with the pandemic from a Human Resources perspective in order to plan for future needs. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that as well as developing economic, destination, social services and community recovery plans the Authority is also looking at organisational recovery from the perspective of working differently and working more thematically across the organisation providing staff with increased opportunities to gain experience in other areas and developing transferable skills with a view to becoming a more adaptive, nimble and responsive organisation.

- The Committee noted the likely repercussions of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions on the mental health of children and young people and sought to gain assurance about the capacity of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to deal with additional demand. The Chief Executive in acknowledging the point made advised that the matter might be best addressed through regional structures.

Following consideration of the report and a full discussion of the matters raised therein, the Committee RESOLVED –

- To note the Council's response to the pandemic thus far and to commend the commitment of Officers and staff in their response to the emergency.
- To note the lessons learnt and good practices developed specifically in managing the 2 sisters outbreak and preventing wider community transmission and also in responding to an outbreak at one Council owned care home.
- That a letter be sent to Welsh Government's Minister for Health and Social Services and the NHS Chief Medical Officer by the Chair of this Committee to emphasise the Committee's concerns about the following–
 - Access to testing and in particular the need to ensure that care homes have easy access to the UK Portal and that test results are returned in a timely way.
 - Ensuring compliance with guidance and the need therefore to make available sufficient resources to support effective enforcement under the Trace Track and Protect strategy.
 - To recognise that the Covid-19 crisis and related lockdown restrictions may lead to additional demands on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and to note that capacity within CAMHS will be raised and addressed through regional structures.
 - That the well-being of Council employees and communities and monitoring the effectiveness of the Trace, Track and Protect strategy be included as priority areas on the Committee's forward work programme during 2020/21 and beyond.
 - To recommend to the Executive that the Programme Boards submit regular progress reports to both scrutiny committees on recovery planning and delivery for the next norm.

4 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's forward work programme was presented for consideration.

It was resolved –

- To agree the current version of the forward work programme for 2020/21 subject to the inclusion of the well-being of Council employees and communities, and monitoring of Trace, Track and Protect as priority areas to be revisited in future.
- To note the progress thus far in implementing the forward work programme.

ACTION: Scrutiny Manager to update the forward work programme accordingly.

**Councillor Aled Morris Jones
Chair**