

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Douglas Fowlie (Chair)
Councillor Dyfed Wyn Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Geraint Bebb, Aled M. Jones, R. Llewelyn Jones, Jackie Lewis, Llio A. Owen, Keith Roberts, Sonia Williams, Arfon Wyn.

Co-opted Member: Gillian Thompson (Parent-Governor – Primary Schools Sector)

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi (Leader and Portfolio Member for Economic Development), Neville Evans (Portfolio Member for Leisure, Tourism and Maritime), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience), Nicola Roberts (Portfolio Member for Planning, Public Protection and Climate Change), Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services and Community Safety), Dafydd Roberts (Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Highways, Waste and Property), Robin Williams (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Finance).

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer (for item 3)
Director of Social Services
Head of Regulation and Economic Development (for item 3)
Head of Highways, Waste and Property (for item 3)
Head of Adults' Services
Head of Housing Services
Head of Democracy (DS)
Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation
Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager (GM)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
Webcasting Officer (FT)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Alwen Watkin, Ieuan Williams, Mr John Tierney (Co-opted Member representing the Catholic Church), Mr Marc B. Hughes (Director of Education, Skills and Young People)

ALSO PRESENT: None

The Chair in welcoming everyone to the meeting extended a special welcome to Gillian Thompson to her first meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee as Parent-Governor representative for the primary schools sector.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Sonia Williams declared a personal interest only in relation to any matters referring to finance and the third sector.

Councillor Jackie Lewis declared a personal interest only in relation to any matters referring to Menter Môn.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 20 June, 2023 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 MONITORING PERFORMANCE: CORPORATE SCORECARD Q1 2023/24

The report of the Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation incorporating the Corporate Scorecard for Quarter 1 2023/24 was presented for the Committee's consideration. The scorecard report portrays the current end of Quarter 1 position against matters relating to customer service, people and financial management and performance management.

The report was presented by Councillor Carwyn Jones, Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience as a positive and encouraging portrayal of performance in the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year with 89% of the performance indicators performing above or within 5% tolerance of their targets. The report highlights several areas where performance has been good in relation to the NERS indicators, the number of empty homes brought back into use, Adults' Services, waste management, homelessness, disabled facilities grant installations and planning specifically indicators 35 and 37 (the percentage of planning applications determined within time and the percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days respectively). The Corporate Health Performance indicators and Customer service indicators have also performed well, and at the end of the first quarter the Council is Green and on target with regard to attendance management with 2.1 days having been lost to absence per FTE in the period. The performance against Indicator 09 (the percentage of FOI requests responded to within timescale) at 84% has improved compared to the same quarter last year but because of the change in target from 80% to 90% completed within timescale, is ragged Amber for the first quarter of 2023/24. The performance for this and indicators 29 and 30 in relation to Housing Services (turnaround of lettable units and rent lost to properties being empty) and indicator 36 in relation to the Planning Service (the number of planning appeals dismissed) which are off target will continue to be overseen and monitored by the Leadership Team to secure improvements into the future. The Council like many others is facing financial challenges and budget pressures are beginning to emerge due to the ongoing and well documented cost of living crisis. The financial position will be reviewed closely during the year.

The Portfolio Member said that he hoped the information presented provides Scrutiny with the assurance of the maturity of the discussions around performance and that while good performance is highlighted and acknowledged, the focus remains on maintaining performance going forwards and ensuring that further progress and improvements are made in the areas identified.

The Committee welcomed the report and was pleased by the consistency of performance overall. In scrutinising the details of the report, Members raised and discussed the following issues –

- Recognising that 89% of the Authority's PIs exceed or are within 5% tolerance of their targets at the end of the first quarter, assurance was sought that the remaining 3 underperforming indicators will improve.
- Noting that a budget overspend is forecast for the end of the 2023/24 financial year, the Committee sought clarification of the mitigation measures in place to address pressures on service budgets and the arrangements for monitoring them.
- That the previous performance report to the Committee in June 2023 referred to arrangements to amend the current scorecard to ensure its alignment with the new Council Plan 2023-28. The Committee wanted to know what changes had been made or are planned for the scorecard and the timeframe for their implementation.
- In relation to Performance Indicator 29 (The average number of calendar days to let lettable units of accommodation excluding DTLs), the Committee sought further information about the background and context to the PI and asked for clarification of the challenges envisaged in trying to reduce the time taken to turnaround the units, and linked to this indicator, the performance against Indicator 30 – the percentage of rent lost due to properties being empty.
- The variance between income and budget – Financial Management Indicator (03) where the performance was ragged Red.
- In welcoming the improvement in the Disabled Facilities Grant indicator (Indicator 28), the Committee wanted to know what had contributed to the positive performance and whether there were any lessons to be learnt and shared with other services.

Officers and Portfolio Members responded to the points of discussion by providing assurances as follows –

- That the performance reports to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee over time have shown that where the Leadership Team has investigated the performance data and identified areas for improvement and has led on that process then progress has subsequently been made e.g. the improvement in performance from Quarter 4 2022/23 to Quarter 1 2023/24 with regard to Indicator 09 - the percentage of FOI requests responded to within timescale. There is therefore confidence in the ability of the Council's performance management approach and system and in the guidance and direction provided by the Leadership Team to deliver continuous improvement as evidenced in the reports to Committee and on that basis, it is hoped that the next quarter will see further progress being made.
- That although the Council budget is projected to be overspent at year end, the factors that could influence the outcome one way or the other in the remaining 9 months of the financial year are numerous and varied. The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer referred to some of those factors as including a rise or fall in the demand for services, the number and complexity of cases presenting in children's social care, and the effects of the weather in terms of income generated over the summer months and impact of bad weather over the winter on roads and infrastructure. Added to those is the uncertainty around the pay settlement for non-teaching staff for 2023/24, the level of inflation and energy costs as well and the continuing cost of living crisis which could result in more people seeking help from the Council. Where there are budget pressures specifically in children and adult social care then discussions are being held with the service to identify ways of managing expenditure and costs while still responding to needs. The Council's other services have been asked to review all non-essential expenditure. Should the situation persist, then there are options for curtailing expenditure for example by not filling vacant posts but mindful of the potential

effects on capacity and service provision. Whilst a budget overspend can be met from the Council's reserves, this will reduce the ability to use those reserves to balance the budget for 2024/25. The financial position will be kept under close review and should become clearer at the end of Quarter 2. With regard to the variance between income and budget this is due to the way in which Social Services income has been recorded having been accounted for in the wrong period. The data will be adjusted before reporting to the Executive and is expected to be much closer to budget so is primarily an accounting issue rather than an issue of significantly reduced income.

- That the intention had been to develop a new scorecard so that its targets are in alignment with the objectives of the new Council Plan 2023-28. That work has taken until August to complete meaning that the new scorecard would have to be introduced midway through the financial year making reporting on performance throughout the year difficult. Whilst a new draft scorecard has therefore been prepared it has been decided with the agreement of the Leader and informal Executive that the current scorecard should remain effective until the end of March 2024 to ensure consistent reporting on a yearlong basis. The new scorecard will be trialled in quarters 3 and 4 to ensure the KPIs are appropriate and add value. Elected Member input into the new scorecard will be invited over the autumn and winter so that the scorecard is ready to be implemented on 1st April 2024. It is considered that such an arrangement would better facilitate the transition from the current scorecard linked to the previous Council Plan to the new scorecard linked to the 2023-28 Council Plan.
- That performance against Indicator 29 regarding the number of days taken to let lettable units of accommodation has declined because of the high number of properties that require significant work to bring them back to WHQS standards before they can be re-let again. Of the 45 properties which were empty for over 40 days, 30 (66%) of those were classed as in need of major works. As the number of properties that require significant work increases, the turnaround of those properties becomes more difficult because of the lack of available workers to complete the works required. It is expected that performance against the indicator will improve as the number of major works properties reduce thereby increasing capacity to complete properties. The performance of Indicator 30 (percentage of rent lost due to properties being empty) is directly connected to Indicator 29 since the more time it takes to let a property the greater the rent income lost.
- The improvement in the Disabled Facilities Grant Indicator 28 has been influenced by the type of work completed within the quarter for example if the work completed is relatively straightforward then the number of days on average taken to deliver the grant reduces. It is hoped that performance against the indicator will remain Green for the year but is dependent on the number of care plans coming through the system and the nature of the adaptations required.

Having reviewed the Corporate Scorecard for Q1 2023/24 and having noted the responses of Portfolio Members and Officers to the issues raised it was resolved –

- **To note the Corporate Scorecard report for Q1 2023/24 including the areas of improvement outlined along with the areas which the Leadership Team is exploring and investigating to manage and secure further improvements into the future in relation to FOI requests, the time take to re-let lettable units of accommodation, rent lost due to empty properties and planning appeals and,**
- **To recommend the scorecard report and mitigating measures outlined therein to the Executive.**

4 FINANCE SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS REPORT

The report of the Scrutiny Manager setting out the work of the Finance Scrutiny Panel for the period from June to September, 2023 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

Councillor Geraint Bebb, Chair of the Finance Scrutiny Panel provided an overview of the issues considered by the Panel at its meetings held on 8 June, 2023 and 7 September 2023. At the former meeting the Panel scrutinised the Quarter 4 2022/23 Revenue Budget Monitoring report specifically the demand on Social Services and Housing Services and the pressures on Social Services budgets. A development session on debt management was held and the Panel's work programme for the subsequent six-month period was discussed. At the September meeting the Panel received a budget monitoring report in respect of all Council budgets for Quarter 1 2023/24 and areas of emerging risks were discussed. Detailed consideration was given to Homelessness Services in a separate item and the Panel's Work Programme for September to April 2024 was confirmed. No matters had been escalated for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's attention.

The Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer advised that the Panel was established to scrutinise financial performance in more depth and detail than the work programme and commitments of the parent Committee allow, the purpose being to provide assurance about the Council's financial management and to enable the Panel's members to develop a greater understanding of service budgets. The Panel's discussions are focused on specific areas and topics and the Panel will form part of the 2024/25 budget development process over the coming months.

In considering the feedback from the Finance Scrutiny Panel, the Committee raised the following matters –

- Ways in which the work of the Panel could be further strengthened.

Councillor Geraint Bebb confirmed that the Panel would continue to scrutinise budget performance with the receipt of Quarter 2 data at its next meeting. It is important that the Panel ensures that it is asking the right questions and the right time to obtain the information it needs and to highlight any emerging issues and/or risks.

- In terms of the direction of the Panel's work, whether the work being delivered by the Panel should be more accessible to the public.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that the Council has an established structure of public meetings and that the three scrutiny panels are convened in private by design to allow the panels' members to delve in detail into matters that involve information of a confidential nature that is not publicly available in order to enable the panels to provide the level of assurance required by the two parent scrutiny committees. Any matters identified by the scrutiny panels as areas of concern can be escalated to the attention of the parent scrutiny committee and the parent scrutiny committee is also provided with regular progress reports on the work of the panels. It is considered therefore that the Council is transparent in the way it conveys the work of the scrutiny panels and its outcomes via the quarterly reporting arrangements.

- Whether the Panel should be scrutinising any other areas in addition to those on its work programme

Councillor Geraint Bebb confirmed that the Panel will be targeting its attention on the areas facing the greatest financial challenges with Children and Families' Services and Adults'

Services being the foremost among those areas. Other areas will be scrutinised as any issues/risks are identified.

It was resolved to note –

- **The progress made during the last period in terms of the work of the Finance Scrutiny Panel and,**
- **The significant progress made in terms of developing a self-evaluation and questioning strategy as a basis for the work of the Finance Scrutiny Panel.**

5 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE (WELLBEING) REPORT 2022/23

The report of the Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation incorporating the annual Performance and Wellbeing Report for 2022/23 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The report was presented by Councillor Carwyn Jones, Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience. The report reflects the progress made against the work streams of the Transitional Plan which was the detailed work plan for 2022/23 and shows that 54% of priorities have been completed, 29% are ongoing into 2023/24, 13% are behind schedule but with mitigating measures are likely to be brought back on track and 4% have been cancelled. Also documented is the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis and the range of support provided with Welsh Government grant funding to help local residents experiencing difficulties as a result of the crisis. Overall, the Council has demonstrated good progress and commitment in various domains over the past year as attested to by the report which refers to specific achievements in relation to re-energising the economy and embedding positive economic change; enabling the visitor and hospitality sector to capitalise on the Island's increased popularity whilst protecting its assets and communities and maintaining and modernising critical community services in care and education. The Scorecard results for the year also demonstrated good performance with 71% of the indicators showing green against targets and an additional 20% showing within 5% of their targets. Further work will be undertaken to address the few underperforming indicators as well as maintaining and improving on the good performance. Thanks must be given to the Council's staff for their hard work over the course of the year and to the Island's residents and communities for the resilience they have shown in challenging times. In reflecting on the contents of the report and the achievements delivered during 2022/23, the Committee discussed the following –

- The arrangements to raise awareness of the Council's successes i.e. where would the public look to learn about what the Council has accomplished during 2022/23
- The measures that were put in place that had this positive impact on performance and whether any lessons could be learnt from that process for sharing across the organisation.
- Whether the cost-of-living crisis has had a bearing on the Council's ability to serve the people of Anglesey.
- Considering the information contained within the 2022/23 Annual Performance and Wellbeing Report, the performance areas that need to be prioritised based on risk during 2023/24.

Officers and Portfolio Members further advised as follows –

- That the Council's values as set out in the Council Plan 2023-28 include championing the Council and the Island and the Annual Performance Report for 2022/23 provides a basis and justification for doing so. Communicating what the Council does and what it has achieved begins with the Elected Members who through their interaction with their communities and the wider public can promote the Council and its works. Large scale projects such as building new schools are publicised at the point at which the decision is made. Should the Annual Performance Report be approved by the Executive then the intention is to extract some of the headlines and infographics from the report to post on social media and within internal communications and further for the future, the plan is to develop this process so that key messages from Council reports can be instantaneously amplified for a wider audience without having to expend time on editing and reviewing text and narrative to produce concise and communicable information. This ambition however is constrained by the resources available and the demands of day-to-day operations on officer time. The Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience referred to the Council's press and communications office which despite being a small team is proactive in publicising the Council's services, events, and achievements.
- That every Council Service has its own service plan which set outs the priorities for the service and how those will be delivered as well as documenting how the service will contribute to the achievement of the corporate objectives. Heads of Service are responsible for the management and performance of their own service and work with colleagues and teams to ensure that the objectives of the service are successfully delivered and operational performance is maintained. Experiences and good practice are shared within and across teams as well as with the Leadership Team so that lessons can be learnt and improvements made where required.
- That the cost-of-living crisis has led to a rise in demand for Council Services especially Social Services. The number of referrals to Social Services has increased as has their complexity with many cases involving mental health issues with resulting pressure on staff, resources and assessment timescales. The Council has established a strategic preventative group to analyse data and demographics and to assess the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on Island residents and the good working relationship it has with third sector organisations and partner agencies is also helping the Council in understanding the situation within communities and on the ground. The advantages of being a smaller scale authority are that provision can be adjusted promptly to meet changing needs and to provide solutions quickly.
- That the Council's Annual Delivery Document for 2023/24 charts the work which the Council will be undertaking in the year to achieve the objectives of the Council Plan 2023/28 and it provides a roadmap for reaching specific targets set for the year. Additionally the Council's Annual Self-Assessment Report for 2022/23 provides an evaluation of the overall performance of the council for the year including what and how it can do better with regard to performance, the use of resources and managing risk. Based on the evidence drawn together for the assessment from a range of sources, specific areas for improvement have been identified and will be monitored throughout 2023/24. A third component of the Corporate Planning and Performance Management Framework is the corporate scorecard which in tracking specific performance indicators helps identify underperforming areas as well as any downward trends in performance and enables mitigating measures to be put in place to address underperformance in an iterative process where risks are identified, acted upon, and monitored.

Further questions were raised by Members in relation to the amber status of key action (9) where the Council has committed to work with local businesses to empower and enable them to exploit opportunities provided by Council contracts and in relation to expediting repair works to the Breakwater in Holyhead.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council is the midst of dealing with a range of competing priorities including planning for the Holyhead Freeport and preparing bids for the Shared Prosperity Fund meaning that the expertise of the small economic development team has been diverted to other work streams. However the concern is noted and the Head of Regulation and Economic Development will be asked to clarify the implementation plan and timescale with regard to key action (9). Nevertheless a number of projects which were being planned last year have now reached the implementation stage and have been the subject of engagement and awareness raising activities. It is hoped that progress on these projects can be reported when presenting the 2023/24 Annual Performance Report. The Leader of the Council commented that procurement processes are being reviewed and updated with a view to strengthening local procurement.

With regard to the Breakwater the Chief Executive provided an update on the latest position in relation to the planned refurbishment of the Breakwater and advised in response to questions about the manufacture of materials for the works and whether that process would be undertaken locally that while the Council cannot intervene in Stena Line's procurement process, he could make enquires about the procurement approach and the construction methodology. With any project the Council emphasises with the developer the importance of utilising local employment and local supply chains and securing local benefits is part of the Council's core principles and approach to development. The Chief Executive confirmed in response to a request by Councillor R. Llewelyn Jones as a Local Member, that he would be provided with a written update on the Breakwater situation.

Having considered the documentation and the additional information provided by the Officers and Portfolio Members, it was resolved to recommend the Annual Performance and Wellbeing Report 2022/23 to the Executive as a fair and complete reflection of the Authority's work over the period.

Actions: The Chief Executive to –

- **Clarify with the Head of Regulation and Economic Development the implementation plan and timescale in relation to Key Action (9) under the Re-energising the economy and embedding positive economic change work stream, and**
- **Provide Councillor R. Llewelyn Jones, Local Member with a written update on the position in relation to refurbishing the Holyhead Breakwater.**

6 NOMINATION TO THE FINANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

The report of the Scrutiny Manager requesting the Committee to nominate one of its members to serve on the Finance Scrutiny Panel was presented for consideration. The report provided information about the background and context to the Panel along with its terms of reference. The vacancy on the Panel had arisen following the appointment of Councillor Dafydd Roberts to the Executive and his subsequent resignation as member of the Panel.

It was resolved to nominate Councillor Ieuan Williams to serve on the Finance Scrutiny Panel.

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Scrutiny Manager incorporating the Committee's Forward Work Programme to April, 2024 was presented for consideration.

The Scrutiny Manager in referring to the next scheduled meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 18 October 2023 advised Members that as there is only one programmed item for consideration at the meeting it is recommended that the meeting be cancelled.

Reference was made by a member of the Committee to the number of items programmed for the Committee's January 2024 meeting and the possibility of convening an additional meeting to spread the load more evenly was raised. Reference was also made to public participation and the public's views on scrutiny matters to which the Scrutiny Manager responded by confirming that the Council has processes for public involvement in scrutiny including the Public Speaking at Scrutiny Committee Meetings Protocol.

It was resolved –

- **To agree the current version of the Forward Work Programme for 2023/24.**
- **To note the progress thus far in implementing the Forward Work Programme and**
- **To agree that the next meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 18 October 2023 be cancelled in accordance with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Manager.**

**Councillor Douglas Fowle
Chair**