



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 20 December 2023 at 3.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Joint Consultative Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor A Morgan Councillor M Webber (Chair)
Councillor A Crimmings Councillor G Caple

Trade Union Members in Attendance

Mr P Crews (Unison)
Mr C Jones (GMB)
Ms L Davies (Unite)
Mr A McCarthy (Unite)

Officers in attendance

Mr P Mee – Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Ms L Lawson, Performance Manager

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

2 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and to the extended invite to the Education Trade Unions and for the benefit of whom, introductions were made.

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the 7th February 2023 were an accurate Reflection of the meeting, subject to the addition that Mr G Morgans attended the meeting on behalf of Mr C Jones (GMB).

4 THE ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT 2022/23 INCORPORATING THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Performance Manager and Chief Executive provided the Joint Consultative Committee with the Council's Self-Assessment for 2022/23, in advance of consideration by Council, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which sets out duties to consult about the extent to which the Council is meeting its performance requirements. The statutory consultees include every trade union recognised by the Council.

For background, Members were advised of the previous assessment for 2021/22 and the Performance Manager continued by noting that the nine themes identified in 2021/22 remain relevant. In addition, two further themes had been highlighted and it was added that the Council needed to continue to strengthen its arrangements for service user engagement and participation, particularly the evaluation of outcomes. Following on, it was noted that the Council also needed to further strengthen and articulate its organisational culture and values on equality and diversity and, in doing so, support its on-going arrangements in setting out clear expectations for staff and services.

It was explained that the Council's Self-Assessment is integrated with its annual Corporate Performance Report, which was contained within Appendix 1 of the report, and comprises six sections, as set out at paragraph 4.5. The process and approach to compile the Self-Assessment was also advised upon.

Before handing over to the Chief Executive the Performance Manager concluded that through the arrangements in place the Council could evidence that it meets the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act.

The Chief Executive reinforced the regular reporting mechanisms taken forward to Members in respect of the Council's strategies and policy developments which forms part of the self-assessment. The Chief Executive added that the self assessment reflected the diverse range of functions and services provided by the Council and scale of services delivered upon.

The Chief Executive took the opportunity to reflect on the previous nine themes identified in last year's self assessment including financial resilience, workforce pressure and climate change strategy and commented on the good progress against such themes, although reiterated that they still remained relevant due to their medium to long term nature. The Chief Executive referenced the corporate functions within the self assessment, and how the Council have applied the sustainable development principles and confirmed that he was satisfied that the assessment outlined how the Council was discharging its functions effectively for its residents and service users.

The Chair thanked officers for the detailed reports and the comprehensive information contained within, and commented on the financial pressures experienced by the Council.

Mr P Crews, (Unison) referenced the Local Government Settlement and how this would affect any strategies and priorities identified. The Chief Executive provided feedback on the importance of funding to deliver and inform the Council's priorities going forward.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- I. To review the draft Self-Assessment at Appendix 1 and consider whether it is an accurate and robust reflection of the position of the Council and its services and meets the requirements of the [Local Government and Elections Act 2021 Part 6](#).
- II. To offer any observations to the Chief Executive prior to consideration by Council in January 2024.

5 WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES - THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2024-2030 (FOR CONSULTATION)

Through the report, the Chief Executive provided the opportunity for the Joint Consultative Committee to contribute to the development of the Council's new Corporate Plan from 2024/25 – 2029/30.

The Chief Executive advised that the new draft Corporate Plan sought to set the overall direction for the Council, describing its vision, purpose and ambition as the local authority for the County Borough and referred Members to Appendix 1 of the document which provided a draft plan for the next six years.

It was added that the new draft Corporate Plan would build on previous Corporate Plans and be a key part of the Council's budget, performance and delivery planning processes. As a result, the draft Corporate Plan must take into account the fact that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and the wider public sector continues to face significant financial and other challenges. It was noted that the Corporate Plan would need to address the current and future challenges as well as meet a legal duty to develop and agree a Well-being Plan.

The Chief Executive highlighted the priorities identified through the plan as:

- People and Communities;
- Work and Business;
- Nature and the Environment; and
- Culture and Heritage.

In respect of consultation, it was advised that the elements that will contribute towards a new Corporate Plan have been informed by listening to and hearing what residents of all ages, communities, partners, and staff have been telling the Council across a wide range of engagement activity. It was confirmed that this approach would continue during the development of the plan and the associated actions.

Before receiving the Committee's comments in respect of the draft plan, it was advised that the new Corporate Plan would be approved by Council in conjunction with the approval of the 2024/25 budget in March 2024.

The Chair spoke of the ambitions and clear vision of the Council over previous years and the resilience of the Council in dealing with unforeseen circumstances and the positive collaborative working during such periods, with organisations, the community and staff.

Mr P Crews,(Unison) queried how the Council will look to achieve its ambitions reflecting on the recent Local Government Settlement announcement, with particular reference to the cuts to protected business rates. The Chief Executive agreed on the difficulties of setting an ambitious long term plan when the Council is facing significant financial challenges, however added that the Corporate Plan provided a high level strategic framework, with detailed action plans in place to support the delivery of agreed priorities.

Mr C Jones (GMB) spoke of the leading way of the Council which always put the Council at the forefront and welcomed the ambitions in the plan. Mr Jones reiterated concerns in respect of financial challenges and commented on the importance of continual staff communication and early engagement to which the

Chief Executive noted and commented on the importance of staff as the Council's most valuable asset which was supported by the Chair.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care spoke of the challenges for Health and Social Care and also spoke of the significant investment made by the Council within these areas alongside the positive on-going aspirations of the Council.

Mr A McCarthy (Unite) commented on the support and value of social care and spoke of the importance of social partnership engagement, and sought clarity on what lessons have been learnt around engagement following recent service changes and also reflected on the greater need for social partnerships with the financial pressures facing the Council and the potential erosion of facility time. The Chief Executive welcomed the comments and spoke of the importance of engagement with Trade Unions on the new draft corporate plan to help develop the correct objectives and priorities for the Council and the related wellbeing plan. The Chief Executive spoke of the increasing demand and complexities within social care and commented that if such demand continued then services would not be sustainable in the long term and the need for Local Authorities to challenge and adapt the service models being delivered. The Director of Human Resources also provided a response in respect of facility time, advising that although this has been reviewed and reduced, it was still of a comparable if not better position than other Local Authorities.

Trade Union members commented on the timings of service change proposals and the importance of collective partnership engagement for the benefit of all. The Chief Executive fed back that the Council continues to be fully committed to open and constructive engagement with Trade Unions and indicated that, in the context of the challenging financial outlook, the Council would welcome Trade Union colleagues coming forward with ideas and proposals to deliver more efficient services.

It was **RESOLVED**

- I. To provide feedback on the early draft elements of the new Corporate Plan and whether it sets out:
 - a) A clear vision and purpose for the Council.
 - b) The right priorities/Well-being Objectives for the Council, namely
 - People and Communities
 - Work and Business
 - Nature and the Environment and
 - Culture and Heritage.
 - c) The principal actions within each Well-being Objective that will have the greatest impact to achieve the new Vision.
 - d) Clear commitments in respect of residents, staff and partners.
- II. To note the engagement on the four proposed Well-being Objectives and the high level priorities.

6 BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/25

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services presented the report to Members which sought the views and comments of the Joint Consultative Committee as consultees to the first phase of the Council's 2024-25 Budget

Consultation. Members were advised that the Committee's feedback would be incorporated into a Budget Consultation report, alongside all other feedback received from stakeholders, for consideration by Cabinet as part of developing a draft Revenue Budget Strategy for 2024/25.

To assist the Committee, the Service Director Finance and Improvement Services proceeded with a PowerPoint presentation on the phase 1 Budget consultation.

The Chair thanked the Service Director for the overview of the key strategic building blocks to help inform the development of a draft revenue budget strategy for the 2024/25 financial year. The Chair also spoke of the importance of setting a reasonable Council Tax level, commenting on the high levels of deprivation and challenges within communities across the County Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care commented on the stable financial position of the Council and also reiterated the need for a Council Tax level to be as low as reasonably possible.

Mr P Crews (Unison) thanked the Service Director for the presentation and the detail contained within. A query was raised as to the funding of Police Community Support Officers by the Council and also the Council's continued financial commitment to its Apprenticeship Scheme.

The Service Director confirmed that funding is in place to support Police Community Support Officer provision. In respect of the Apprenticeship Scheme, the Service Director confirmed that the Council continues to support both Graduate and Apprentice Schemes, this being informed by its workforce planning arrangements and funded through a mix of core and one-off resources.

Mr C Jones (GMB) referenced the minimum general reserve balance level of £10Million as set out by the Council's Section 151 officer and requested clarity on the view of Audit Wales in this regard. Reference was also made to the earmarked reserve balances and how often these are reviewed.

The Trade Union Member also commented on the Council Tax level proposal and referenced the Welsh Government comments on local authorities keeping Council Tax at a low level and potential for capping, and sought clarity on what the cap might be, indicating that a higher Council Tax level may prevent future job losses and service change proposals.

The Service Director advised of the rationale for the £10Million minimum general reserve level set out by the Council's Section 151 officer, this being a professional judgement based on the financial pressures facing the Council, the strength of its balance sheet and the need for continued financial stability into the future. The Service Director added that Audit Wales has a statutory responsibility to audit the Council's statement of accounts each year, that includes its reserves, with the latest audit opinion being unqualified i.e. a clean audit opinion.

In respect of a council tax cap it was advised that Welsh Government has not considered it appropriate to set an arbitrary level of council tax increase, albeit Welsh Government has indicated its on-going expectation that local authorities will take a responsible approach to setting council tax levels.

The Service Director noted examples of the specific purposes for which the Council's earmarked reserves had been allocated and provided assurance around the on-going and robust arrangements to monitor reserve levels that included in-year updates reported to elected Members to enable this area to be scrutinised and also options for elected Members to consider to re-allocate reserves, where appropriate, to support further additional investment into Corporate Plan priority areas.

A further query in relation to invest to save was raised to which the Service Director fed back that the Council has in place a rolling programme of operational invest to save schemes of in excess of £1M per year alongside other specific invest to save schemes being progressed such as hydro and solar projects.

Following the discussions it was RESOLVED:

- I. To provide feedback, as the Committee considers appropriate, as part of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.
- II. To request the Service Director for Democratic Services & Communications to provide Cabinet with the feedback of the Joint Consultative Committee

This meeting closed at 4.40 pm

**Cllr M Webber
Chair.**