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## CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 14.11.13

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**Present:** Councillor Dyfrig Jones (Vice-chairman in the chair).

**Councillors:-** Lesley Day, Elwyn Edwards, Trevor Edwards, Aled Evans, Selwyn Griffiths, Jason Humphreys, Charles W. Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, June Marshall, Dafydd Meurig, Mair Rowlands, Gareth Thomas and Eirwyn Williams.

**Officers present:** Gareth James (Member Support and Scrutiny Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

**Present for item 4 below:-**

Alwyn Evans Jones (Head of Human Resources Department)  
Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)

**Present for item 5 below:-**

Alwyn Evans Jones (Head of Human Resources Department)  
Geraint Owen (Senior Human Resources Manager)  
Stephen Barnard (Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager)

**Apologies:** Councillors Gwynfor Edwards, Simon Glyn and Michael Sol Owen; Councillors Peredur Jenkins and John Wynn Jones (Cabinet Members).

**1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

**2. URGENT ITEM**

This item was not included on the agenda; however, the Chairman agreed that it could be discussed as an urgent item under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 because of the need to programme the committee's work over the coming months.

It was noted that the Chairman was having difficulties with the dates of the committee meetings and the preparatory meetings between now and the end of his chairmanship and as he was eager to continue in the chair until the end of his term, there would be a need to change the dates of the committee meetings in January and March and the preparatory meeting in February.

In addition, it was noted that neither the Chairman or Vice-chairman were available to chair the next meeting at 1.00pm on 26 November and it was agreed, subject to the availability of a room and translator, to move the meeting to 10.00am to enable the Vice-chairman to be present.

A member expressed disappointment that the Chairman could not attend the meetings.

**RESOLVED that the Member Support and Scrutiny Officer will confirm the arrangements of the next preparatory meeting with members and will contact them further with the new dates for the January and March meetings of the committee and preparatory meeting in February.**

### **3. MINUTES**

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 5 September 2013 as a true record.

### **4. GWYNEDD AMDANI!**

**Cabinet Member: Councillor John Wynn Jones**

Submitted – the report of the Member Support and Scrutiny Manager, requesting the committee:-

- To consider the contents of the appendices to the report and ask questions as required;
- To consider how best to encourage the citizens of Gwynedd to register for the Cyd Cymru Plan;
- To consider registering as a Partner for Cyd Cymru.

The Member Support and Scrutiny Manager set out the context and the Head of Human Resources Department elaborated on the background to this and noted:-

- That this was a very new project and that the Project Group had not met yet.
- The more individuals that registered with Cyd Cymru, the cheaper everyone's energy bills would be.
- That Energy Helpline had been awarded the tender to facilitate the plan and assist residents to register.
- That Energy Helpline was moving the work forward in three steps. The first step had been implemented by now and it was now possible for anyone to register with Cyd Cymru.
- That the second step, along with an assessment of the first step, would take place in January / February. It was intended to bring Gwynedd into the second phase, in the hope that some information would be available regarding the first phase by then so that the propriety of moving into this direction could be assessed.
- That this plan was included under a group of projects being led by the Chief Executive under the 'Our Council' emblem.
- That it was very early days at present and that there would be much more to report in January / February.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that it would be the Council's role to work in partnership to encourage as many as possible of the county's residents to purchase their energy through this plan, rather than going to the open market.
- In response to an enquiry, the Head of Human Resources Department noted that he assumed that the Council, as an organisation, would be able to buy into a scheme of this kind, but that this would need to be checked with the Council's energy officers. The Head of Economy and Community Department added that the Procurement Unit was looking at methods of obtaining a better bargain for the

Council in terms of energy price, although possibly not through this specific project.

- It was noted that this was fundamentally a worthwhile and simple plan.
- Enquiries were made as to whether or not schools would be a part of Gwynedd's plan. The Member Support and Scrutiny Manager suggested that the question could be asked to the Cabinet Member – Resources. The Chairman noted that the purpose of the item in question was to consider people on the domestic tariff, although it was understood that efforts were in the pipeline to attempt to obtain a similar bargain for people who purchased on a business tariff, including schools, the Council itself, etc.
- The importance of working with the third sector was emphasised in order to make registration as simple as possible for people, in particular for the elderly.
- Concern was expressed after the Head of Economy and Community Department stated that the plan would be restricted to people on benefits, as there were people in work, but who were on low salaries, who were in a worse financial situation. Should the plan be open to all without exception, it would also be cheaper for everyone and the purchasing powers of wealthy people would assist the less fortunate. It was suggested that a message should be sent to Cyd Cymru stating that their literature was misleading as it promoted the plan for all. A strong message should also be sent to the organisation stating that they should accept everyone on the plan and that it should not be means tested as that complicated things and encouraged people not to register.
- It was suggested that a page should be created at once on the Council's website providing a clear and simple explanation about the plan and the benefits and to incorporate a link to the registration form on the Cyd Cymru website. The members should be informed when the page had appeared on the website so that they could get the message out to their electors, and those who did not have access to the internet should be assisted to register by other methods, e.g. over the phone.
- In response to a suggestion that this plan skewed the market, the Head of Economy and Community Department replied that this was a complicated matter, but that this was an opportunity to make a difference to households for the next three years and that advantage should be taken of this campaign whilst the broader discussion regarding energy costs took place.
- It was noted that there was a need to ensure that all agencies in Gwynedd conveyed the same message and that the message was a simple one.
- The Head of Human Resources Department was asked to update the committee on the work of the Project Group following an assessment of the first phase.

## 5. THE COUNCIL'S WORKFORCE

### Cabinet Member: Councillor Peredur Jenkins

#### (A) Staff Engagement Survey 2013

Submitted – the report of the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager on the results of the recent staff survey.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- Concern was expressed that staff morale was low and a series of questions were raised regarding how the survey had been held. In response, the Head of Human Resources Department explained that the purpose of the survey was not to measure morale, but rather measure engagement, namely how

staff went about collaborating with the Council to give the best to the people of Gwynedd. It was noted that the survey was open to all, except school staff. A great effort had been made this year to reach the manual workers as this was the group that was least likely to fill a questionnaire. He noted further that it could not be concluded that there was more dissatisfaction among the staff of some departments as so many different questions were being asked. In terms of managers, he noted that the results of the previous survey showed that the training and development they had received had been successful. However, in terms of leadership, the staff did not feel that the Council's strategy messages were clear; however, there were programmes in the pipeline to attempt to rectify this. He noted further that the decision to use the Times Best Companies survey had been very ambitious, but that the Council was eager to attempt to set itself up against the best in the country, both public bodies and private companies.

- It was suggested that the engagement often affected morale.
- The work programme to resolve the matters raised in the survey was welcomed.
- A request was made for members to receive a copy of the results of every staff engagement survey from now on.
- The fact that the Council was looking after its staff was welcomed.

(B) Sickness Management

Submitted – the report of the Senior Human Resources Manager to the Corporate Health, Safety and Welfare Panel on Sickness Absences 2012-13.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- In response to an enquiry regarding the 'Other' sickness category, the Senior Human Resources Manager noted that it was assumed that much stress was being hidden under this category as people were unprepared to state that they were suffered from stress. He elaborated upon the Council's efforts to focus on improving staff awareness of the methods and techniques to avoid / cope with stress. It was noted also that people were sometimes uncertain about which category to use and that they therefore tended to place their sickness under the 'Other' category. However, a campaign was afoot to ask people to note the exact nature of their sickness so that the departmental administrator, who was more familiar with the categories, could record it under the correct type of sickness.
- It was suggested that it would be beneficial to look at the 2012-13 performance table per individual department (page 2 of the report) and the table on the type of sickness (page 3) as a grid in order to see whether or not specific conditions occurred in specific departments. The Senior Human Resources Manager replied noting that this was being done, although it was not done formally in order to analyse in detail, and he agreed that this could be developed further.
- In response to an enquiry, the Head of Human Resources Department confirmed that this Council had never used surveillance techniques to measure sickness.
- In response to an enquiry regarding 'Monday and Friday Sickness', the Senior Human Resources Manager elaborated upon the efforts of the absence reduction project, where personnel officers, occupational health advisors and managers in the services collaborated to promote general

health and well-being, along with the arrangement of holding capability panels on the grounds of ill health.

- It was emphasised that it would be better to see an increase in absence levels rather than home carers who had a cold etc, continuing to go into work and then transferring their infection to the vulnerable people in their care. It was suggested that an additional category could be included for this type of situation. In response, the Senior Human Resources Manager noted that the Council's health and well-being promotion programme focused much on staff in the care field. It was not intended to criticise people for being absent; rather seek to be supportive and improve the quality of their health.

(C) Officers Retiring and Returning

Submitted – information for the year 2012-13 and the clause adopted by the Council as part of its Annual Pay Policy.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- In response to the observation that the figures appeared very low, the Head of Human Resources Department noted that the figures had been received from the Pensions Unit, who had information about every individual who had left the Council, and that the officers had worked through the list to see whether or not any individual had returned to the Council's employment.
- A member alleged that there had been cases in the past where staff were aware that a person was going to return as a consultant. The Head of Human Resources Department asked the member to bring any specific case to his attention.
- It was suggested that a message should be sent to the Education Department stating that it was unfair and immoral to re-employ head teachers who had retired when so many young people were unable to get a job.
- It was suggested that it would be beneficial for the committee to receive an analysis of these figures on an annual basis.
- It was suggested that officers who retired and went to work in other parts of local government, e.g. town and community councils, should be considered. The Chairman noted that this was outside the remit of this Council and the member agreed to raise the matter with the Head of Human Resources Department outside the committee.

**6. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2012-13**

Submitted – the report of the Member Support and Scrutiny Manager, requesting the committee:-

- To consider the Appendix to the report, offer changes and approve it, if appropriate, as a record of the work of the scrutiny committee for the year, to be included in the Annual Scrutiny Report.
- To consider and recommend how best to track the implementation of the recommendations.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- Discontent was expressed that it was not possible for members to raise matters from the minutes at committees. The Member Support and Scrutiny Manager replied and noted that this involved changing the Council's Constitution. Tracking the scrutiny recommendations was a different matter and was part of the role of members as scrutinisers.
- It was suggested that the date of presenting each recommendation to a Cabinet Member should be noted.
- It was noted that the 73% of the recommendations of this scrutiny committee that had been accepted by the cabinet members for 2012/13 did not include the 11 recommendations that derived from the committee's discussion on the Procurement Strategy where no response had been received regarding them. With that in mind, the final percentage could be lower. A request was made for the Cabinet Member – Economy to prepare answers to the 11 recommendations. On a point of clarity, the Chairman of the Sustainable Procurement Scrutiny Investigation Group noted that the Cabinet Member had asked the department to undertake an investigation into the procurement system as a whole. It was suggested, should that be the reason for the lack of response, that the scrutinisers needed confirmation of that.
- It was noted that the recommendations deriving from the discussion of the committee on the Council's Performance Report 2011-12 were divided over a number of headings and if they were individual recommendations, the percentage fell even lower. There was a need to reconcile these with the remainder of the recommendations by noting them separately.
- It was noted that the fact that the recommendation had been refused was not the important issue, rather why it had been refused. It was suggested to include a sentence, or paragraph at most, to explain why a recommendation had been refused, and in the context of a recommendation that had been refused, a sentence should be included noting that and explaining how that recommendation had been implemented. To this end, it was also suggested that the report should note the date of accepting or refusing the recommendation.
- It was noted that there was a need for an agreement with the Cabinet regarding when they would be responding to a recommendation, even if that response would only note that there had been no opportunity to consider the matter thus far. It was suggested that the joint-meeting between the scrutiny chairs and the Cabinet should discuss this and reach an agreement on the way forward.
- In reference to the decision of the Preparation Meeting on 8 October to remind Cabinet Members of the need to implement the recommendations and to ask for updates, the Member Support and Scrutiny Manager suggested that it would be useful to identify individual members of the committee to track specific items with him, so that they could be brought in more extensively to the work outside the committee itself. Also, when submitting recommendations to the Cabinet Member, a specific date should be determined for meeting the Cabinet Member to obtain an update of the situation and include a note of that meeting in the report in due course.
- In addition to noting the expected impact, any concrete impacts that could be measured should also be noted.
- It was suggested that the 2013-14 report should refer back to this year's report and provide an update of the situation.
- A member noted that he did not feel satisfied with the outcome of the scrutiny investigation into systems thinking because the conclusions of the research group had been disregarded. To this end, he suggested that the relevant Cabinet Members should be approached again to request answers. The Chairman of the Investigation had agreed to do this with the Manager.

The Chairman noted that the committee would receive a draft of the updated annual report at some point over the coming months.

**7. SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2014**

Submitted – the latest version of the work programme.

**RESOLVED to discuss the work programme at the next Preparatory Meeting.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.50am.