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Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Wednesday, 28 February 2024

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT

County Councillors B Davies, L Roberts, D Bebb, C Robinson,

Co-opted Members K Chedgzoy, S. Davies, M Evitts

Officers:

Clive Pinney – Legal and Monitoring Officer

Jane Thomas - Director of Corporate Services

Lynette Lovell – Director of Education

Nina Davies – Director of Social Services and Housing

Diane Reynolds - Director of Economic Development and Growth

Matt Perry – Chief Officer - Place

Catherine James – Head of Transformation and Democratic Services

James Langridge Thomas – Deputy Head of Transformation and Communications

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors R G Thomas, A W Davies, D Meredith, G Morgan, S McNicholas, G Preston

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE

General:

- The Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan known as ‘Stronger, Fairer, Greener’ the priority work for the Council driven by the Cabinets works programme and ambitions and sets out three wellbeing objectives and provides the actions to deliver them.
- The purpose of the Plan was to present the wellbeing priorities for 2023-2027. It was important to note that the plan did not cover the full work of the Council as services compile and monitor individual service improvement plans.
- Each wellbeing objective progress was monitored and tracked, with outcomes provided from a results-based accountability approach.
- The sustainable principle showed long term involvement, prevention, collaboration, and integration.
- An engagement overview demonstrated activities carried out throughout the quarter.

- Assurance was given that targets were challenged and analysed at a service level and through service performance meetings with Directors and Portfolio Holders. It was noted that some targets were statutory.
- More detailed explanatory commentary would provide clarification around the reasons for why measures were at certain levels or why no data had been specified.

Committees Comments:

- Appreciation was shared for the significant amount of data provided in the report and the hours taken to provide such a substantial report.
- The overall picture provided in the report for a scrutiny audience did not provide enough statistical information for both service and geographical areas. And suggested that Individual security committees could carry out deep dives into certain areas of concern.
- A form of reflection could be developed to ensure full awareness of the target audience, which was to be fully considered,
- It was asked that the Council were mindful of who the report would be available to and ensure it was effective for readability and meaningfulness.
- The report was a work in progress and still in the development stages, however it was noted that more developed data was being provided for each quarter.
- It was asked that all wider learning could be shared with scrutiny committees and the whole Council.
- The scorecard held a significant amount of data but could be used more effectively. It was important that the report was balanced, useful and meaningful. Statements within the report were not backed up with evidence on occasion and difficult to acknowledge fully.
- The information in the measures section triggered more questions which led the reader to the commentary which was useful and helpful.

Points raised:	Responses received from Officers:
Objective 1	
Concerns were raised around the significant drop in positive feedback showed on the engagement overview.	It was explained that the statistics showed the drop in responses received from Q1-105 to Q3-36 which was not representative of County and were encouraging the engagement process.
It was stressed that some engagement events (Day Opportunities consultation) had been poorly attended and asked how people could be encouraged to attend.	33 face to face events took place across the County, with a mixed attendance rate, but overall, the Service were pleased with the outcome. A survey had also been carried out with more than 400 responses. The full outcome results will be presented to Scrutiny.
It was commented that the scorecard contained a lot of data but could be used in a more effective manner. It was felt that a long-term view across measure could not be gained.	The data provided in the report needed to be balanced to ensure usefulness for challenge. Officers were happy to take specific feedback from Members to develop

	the report that would be more publicly acceptable.
It was asked if the statement 'continuing to improve and develop' under the 'What progress has been made in the period' for Education around the ALN and Inclusion Team as there was no evidence to demonstrate progression.	It was stressed that a member development session was planned as requested by the scrutiny committee. The scorecard demonstrated how the ALN and Inclusion Teams within the Education Service had supported and contributed towards the Objective as there were no specific measures for the service.
It was asked why a drop in positive feedback had occurred and if it was related to any particular service and if lessons learned were being captured and fed back to service areas.	It was explained that it was difficult to draw learning from such low response numbers and alternative engagement avenues were being explored.
It was asked what practical measures the Council was taking to ensure that engagement opportunities were available to everyone and future approaches with the pace in developments in digital communications.	Group working with different colleagues including those from the Health Board were trialling engagement models with various representatives to ensure a joined-up approach. How the Council runs in the future is fundamental to Sustainable Powys and need to monitor future developments and keep up to date to what is relevant to the Council.
Concerns were raised around the number of people who contact the services below and do not receive any information or advice, what happens to the enquires or communication 03. Number of contacts to social services (ASSIST and Front Door) ^[OBJ] 08. Number of contacts to social services (ASSIST and Front Door) receiving information and advice.	A breakdown of detailed information was provided to the scrutiny committee on a monthly basis. ASSIST was a key focus for the service and would be a priority for scrutiny in the near future. Feedback would be taken back to the Team to develop the commentary within the report to provide more value.
It was asked how targets were set and needed to be ambitious but realistic.	Targets were set, challenged, and analysed at a service level and through service performance meetings with Directors and Portfolio Holders. It was noted that some targets were statutory, and the report also included specific service measures.
007. measure did not indicate the level of satisfaction of tenants.	The star survey was undertaken every two years across Wales. Feedback would be taken back to the service to provide additional quarterly commentary.
Fly tipping satisfaction had dropped to 51% and asked if it was related to vehicles being out of use for a short	The statistic would reflect the whole of the Council and not to specific issues.

time. Objective 1 Customer services.	
Objective 2	
It was asked when the data would be available for 017. For information around the real living wage	Data collection options were being explored and how to build requirements into contracts.
An explanation was requested why 020. Average day sickness was red (1.9) in quarter three and green in quarter two (2.17).	Sickness targets reflect changes of seasons throughout the year.
It was felt that the figures should reflect the whole workforce including schools. The objective looks at training and employment opportunities and how the economic situation can be improved and would benefit from including total employment.	Capturing apprentices and young people including schools was a valued point and would be considered to add to the commentary for how services contribute and support the objective. The Wellbeing Assessment and the Wellbeing Bank would be able to provide more information.
It was asked how apprenticeship payments worked within the Council.	Information would be provided to the Committee.
001. Were staff losing jobs or being made redundant, as there were a lot of short term or fixed term contracts. Concerns were raised around succession planning and not having available roles to move into and the difficulty in recruitment some services.	Turnover of staff definition would be confirmed and provided to the Committee. Grow your own schemes had been successful in some services within the Council with the number of agenda staff being reduced. Schools are being engaged around apprenticeships and recruitment drives have led to successful recruitment.
It was felt that the data contained within 011. and 012. was valuable, but more information could be provided to stress the impact on the service from the introduction of Family Liaison Officers.	The Family Liaison Officers grant funding had been expanded and a Manger recruited. Anecdotal data rather than figures could be provided.
Objective 3	
028. Council homes, it was noted that the long-term targets were broken down and the annual targets were monitored and noted that the phosphate issues were causing delays.	
038. Number of rough sleepers – how confident were the Council of accuracy of that figure.	The Council rely on information being provided and officers would check if food banks and other organisations were being asked for figures.
More clarity was requested around the figures for homeless and rough sleepers and asked that point 33 and 37 commentary was expanded.	It was explained that those without a roof or a home were amongst the figures but also the homes in Powys housing register which included those

	under threat of losing their home and people that have a home but would like to change due to varying circumstances.
036. The definition of absolute poverty was requested and asked where the information for children living in absolute poverty was obtained.	National Indicators (including free school meals) were used which contained the national definition of absolute poverty.

Conclusions:

- Documents provided to Scrutiny are done so in a timely manner, they must be complete, up to date and contain accurate information.
- Full narrative explanations were to be provided around the data for clarity and more effective challenge.
- Comparisons year on year, and the provision of segment progress for long targets would help to analyse the performance of the Council.
- The document audience must be more considered, including the presentation of information for the Council to achieve the widest possible audience.
- Improvements could be made for a more aesthetically pleasing document, removing the amount of grey cells and providing the data broken down into service area and geographically would greatly help.

Scrutiny's Recommendation to Cabinet	Accept (plus Action & timescale)	Partially Accept (plus Rationale, Action & timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
1. The target audience for any document must be evaluated and considered for the Council to encompass value, effectiveness, and readability.			
2. Complete, accurate and up to date documents must be provided to Scrutiny Committees in a timely manner to enable full and effective challenge.			

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