

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL - COUNTY HALL ON MONDAY, 25 MARCH 2019

PRESENT: County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)
County Councillors M Barnes, K W Curry, J Gibson-Watt, E M Jones, G Jones, I McIntosh, P C Pritchard and D Selby

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillor J Evans

Officers: P Bradshaw (Head of Workforce and OD), Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Gwilym Davies (Head of Property, Planning and Public Protection), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services, N Hughes (Professional Lead - Environmental Health), A Jones (Project Officer Workways+ Powys), Jenni Thomas (Regeneration Manager) and N Young (Corporate Director – Transformation)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors J Pugh and J Wilkinson. Apologies were also received from County Councillors D Evans and L George who were on other Council business as Members of the Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Panel.

2.	ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR
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RESOLVED that County Councillor Gareth Jones be elected as Vice-Chair for the period ending in May 2019.

3.	LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP
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RESOLVED that County Councillor Mark Barnes be appointed as the scrutiny observer onto the Local Development Plan Working Group.

4.	GENDER PAY REPORT
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The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Workforce and OD.

The gender pay gap had reduced over the past year. There was a requirement for the Council to publish this information on its website by the end of March 2019. An action plan would also be produced on how to improve this position further. The Committee commented that there was no benchmarking data in relation to the gender pay gap. It was also noted that the pay gap occurred due to gender stereotyping of roles i.e. certain roles such as part time or some lower paid roles were traditionally more likely to be occupied by women. Some other Councils had improved their gender pay gaps partly through the externalisation of services, which Powys had not done to the same degree.

It was noted that Powys' gender pay gap was better than some other Councils in Wales. As most of the lower paid grades employed women, this was the biggest

issue for Powys in reducing the gender pay gap. The Council's recent decision to incorporate the Living Wage Foundation rates would improve the situation.

The Committee suggested that as part of preparing the action plan an analysis of the lower pay grades be undertaken and to the types of jobs, whether they were part time or full time etc. so that there was a clearer picture of the situation. The Committee asked for the action plan and research to be circulated to the Committee.

Question – Moving forward what will happen to the differentiation between men and women

Response – The recent investment in lower pay grades will still mean that on average women's pay will increase disproportionately faster than men's, which will continue to close the gender pay gap.

Question – Are there any other factors as to why we have a pay gap
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Response – Men are generally in higher graded jobs by comparison to women

Question – Is there any data to show that we are improving as the figures in the report are 12 months out of date

Response – An update could be undertaken on a quarterly basis

A Member commented that the issue here was not about pay equality, but is about getting more women into higher paid salaries.

Question – Is there an issue about the employment process where the Council employs the best person for the job.
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Response – the Council appoints the best candidates on merit regardless of sex and the existence of the gender pay gap does not allow employers to discriminate. However, there are other ways to make higher paid jobs more friendly to women such as the provision of childcare, providing greater flexibility and by advertising roles using gender neutral language. As employers are getting more creative in finding new ways to encourage women to apply for better paid jobs this will improve the gender pay gap over time.
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It was suggested that what the council needed to do was to ensure that there were no unsighted barriers for people seeking employment with the Council.

Question – Has any work been undertaken to see what other Councils are doing to reduce their gender pay gap which Powys could use.
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Response – It would be helpful to learn from other Councils and we could ask the WLGA for information as to what other council were doing so that Powys could compare approaches and assess what might work for Powys.
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Question – When will the Committee be able to see the action plan and will this include family friendly measures
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Response – The action plan should be prepared in the next month or so.
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Outcomes:

Recommended to the Cabinet:

1. That future gender pay reports should contain benchmarking information as to how Powys compares with other Councils in Wales.
2. That further research be undertaken of the lower pay grades to better understand the issues in Powys.
3. That the data should be updated quarterly to improve the ability to monitor progress.
4. That an action plan be prepared in response to the current findings
5. That the Council reviews what other measures are being taken by other Councils in Wales to address this issue to see if any such measures could be adopted in Powys.
6. That a copy of the action plan and research information be circulated to the Committee when available.

5. REMOVING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The Committee received a presentation by the Project Officer Workways+ Powys.

It was noted that there are two separate projects:

- Workways+ Powys is a joint European and Council funded project. A similar project operated in South West Wales previously. When the South West developed its current project Powys established its own scheme as it is in a different European funding area. Workways+ Powys was first piloted in South Powys for a 30+ age group. The current Workways+ Powys project is for a 54+ age group who are economically inactive i.e. not working and not registered as unemployed. It is delivered by the charity Prime Cymru and is a three year project which ends in February 2020.
- Communities for Work+ (CfW+) is a fully Welsh Government funded scheme operating across all of Wales and delivered through local authorities. This is for people aged 16+ who are in or at risk of poverty which includes people who are not working as well as those who are employed. This scheme commenced in 2018 and though it is funded on a year by year basis is anticipated to continue for some years.

The aims and delivery approach of both projects are the same. Support is on a one to one basis, with clients meeting mentors on an individual basis. Both projects also have some discretionary funding available to support clients with training and other barriers they might have to employment.

Participant numbers and job outcomes are behind targets on both projects (-58% for Workways+ Powys) though to a lesser extent with CfW+ (63 participants out of a target of 100) and for this project it is because the mentors were in place for the equivalent of just half the year. Actions are planned to address this situation for both projects, though care needs to be taken not to increase promotions beyond mentor capacity.

It is accepted that the targets were set too high initially. A backlog of assessment by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) meant that there were fewer referrals than expected. The numbers of individuals who are eligible for the

scheme has also dropped since the project started by 12.5%. There has also not been sufficient promotion of the scheme at the start.

The Council is currently negotiating with Welsh Government to get targets lowered and eligibility widened as pro rata to the level of funding the targets should be approximately a third of the current level. Some participants have greatly benefited from support through these projects.

Question – With regard to targets, this is about assessing demand at the beginning. Also is the problem more about people being underemployment in Powys rather than not being employed?

Response – That is a fair point, but the CfW+ scheme can support those who are employed and so can support people who are underemployed through that project, for example by helping them to upskill and so progress within their existing jobs or to try and get alternative better paid jobs.

Question – Young mothers have a particular difficulty with employment due to childcare which can be expensive and time consuming to access. Is there any differentials between males and females on the scheme?

Response – Under Workways+ Powys about 55% of participants are female and 45% male. With the age group eligible for that project (54+ year olds), few then tend to have childcare responsibilities, about 14% on the project do have caring responsibilities of some sort. The gender breakdown for participants on CfW+ was not available at the meeting but it was noted that, any individuals whose barriers to employment was childcare would be referred to PaCE, which is a project that particularly helps with that.

Question – With more people in employment now than there were a few years ago, will it be more difficult to achieve the targets than were set then. As employment continually fluctuates should targets be more flexible i.e. as a percentage of those not working rather than as a fixed number?

Response – This is a fair comment. The numbers of economically inactive 50-64 year olds in Powys have reduced by 12% over the last 3 years, so there are less people eligible for Workways+ Powys now than there were at the time the project was developed. However, applying for European or other project funding requires a specific number as a target.

Question – With the figures being quite low, what value for money is the Council getting from these schemes?

Response – It was noted that additional work is currently being undertaken with the Housing Service to develop CfW+ to particularly support housing tenants, which will bring value to the Council's Housing Service. Workways+ Powys is winding down and so the structure for CfW+ is being reassessed. CfW+ is fully funded by Welsh Government for this current year. Workways+ Powys is costing less per participant than the European East Wales programme document forecast for participants in these types of projects and costing less per participant into a job than are some other similar ESF supported projects.

Question – Is there a way of equating cost against benefits?

Response – We cannot do this accurately but external consultants could evaluate that.

Question – A number of councillors had no knowledge of these schemes and there has been success. What is happening to the staff and mentors from Workways+ Powys when the scheme ends?

Response – They are employed by a delivery organisation which will try to reallocate them to other projects in Wales after this project ends. Members were concerned that the expertise should not be lost. The Project Officer agreed to speak to the delivery company about this issue.

Question – What other projects are being run by the Council where Members have no knowledge of the financial return for such schemes?

Response – The Corporate Director, Economy and Environment advised that for this scheme there was scrutiny and audit of the scheme through the Wales European Funding Office (WEFO). Workways+ Powys is part funded by the Council whilst CfW+ is fully funded by Welsh Government and the Council should not miss the opportunity of utilising such schemes.

The Council needs to learn from what targets were initially set and what they should have been. There should also be a closure report on Workways + Powys in relation to what was done and what we have learned. With regard to the link to the Housing Service this should be reviewed in 12 months' time

RECOMMENDED to the Co-ordinating Committee that a further review of Workways+ Powys and CfW+ be undertaken in March 2020.

6.	EXEMPT ITEM
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

7.	FEASIBILITY STUDY
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The Committee received and considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Housing and Public Protection.

The Committee whilst supportive in principle of the overall concept set out in the report expressed reservations regarding some aspects of the proposal. It was suggested that further detailed work would be required prior to a decision being taken as to whether to finally proceed with the proposal or not.

Outcome:

Recommended to the Cabinet:

- 1. that if the Cabinet approves the preparation of an outline business case, further detailed work be undertaken in relation to the proposal to take account of the Committee's comments, prior to a decision as to whether or not to proceed to a full business case being prepared.**
- 2. that if the project proceeds that the outline business case be submitted to scrutiny for comment.**

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)