

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 2nd December, 2024.

Present: Councillor S. Campbell (Chair); Councillors C.M. Cowpe, P. Drake, W.A. Hennesy, S.D. Perkes and N.C. Thomas.

Representatives of Trade Unions: J. Ballantine (GMB), L. Bonni (GMB), J. Davis (UNISON / Vice-Chair), G. Davies (UNISON), J. Green (UNISON), M. Morris (NASUWT) and N. Savage (GMB).

Officers: T. Dickinson, I. McMillan and H. Moses.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor J.E. Charles, M. Canavan (NEU), M.L. Davies (UCAC), T. Haughton (GMB), M. Hudson, E. Jones. G. Pappas (UNISON) and S. Williams.

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 29th April, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

However, N. Savage (GMB) queried the composition of the quorum for trade union / employee members and representatives. A brief outline was given at this point and further details on this were raised later in the meeting.

(e) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Groups (For Information) –

(i) Social Services Consultative Forum – 5th March, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum held on 5th March, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting be noted.

(ii) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 1st May, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 1st May, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting be noted.

(iii) Social Services Consultative Forum – 3rd July, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum held on 3rd July, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting be noted.

(iv) Health and Safety Forum – 5th July, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Health and Safety Forum held on 5th July, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Health and Safety Forum meeting be noted.

(f) Dates of Other Directorate Consultative Groups for Noting –

To be shared with the Forum following the meeting.

(g) Draft Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan 2025-30 –

Cabinet, on 10th October, 2024, had referred the report to all Scrutiny Committees, Community Liaison Committee and Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee as part of the programme of consultation requesting any comments to be shared with the Director of Corporate Resources to inform revisions to the Corporate Plan, prior to Cabinet considering a final draft in due course. This had been taken to the Forum as well, in order to update them and provide an opportunity for them to consider, comment and be consulted on this Plan.

The report (and accompanying presentation) was presented by the Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight, which included a draft of an ambitious new Corporate Plan for the Council from 2025-2030. It set out how the draft Corporate Plan had been developed, the consultation and the timetable for the Plan.

The Corporate Plan set out five proposed new Well-being Objectives which were a requirement under the Well-being of Future Generations Act and framed how the Council would contribute to the national Well-being goals and deliver its vision for Strong Communities with a Bright Future. In terms of drafting the Plan and thinking about the content and the new objectives, the Council had been mindful to take into account the results of the Let's Talk About Life survey where there had been a really good response from residents in terms of them telling the Council about life in the Vale and their thoughts. The Council had also looked at the information that came through the self-assessment exercise itself, where it was looking at how it was performing as an organisation and areas of concern to make sure that this was feeding into the Plan and also making sure to align the Plan and the commitments with the Plan in terms of the work being undertaken as part of the new Reshaping Programme.

The Plan detailed the activities that would be undertaken to deliver these objectives and the outcomes they would deliver. It included a statement about what organisations could expect from the Council when working with it as a clear commitment to partnership working.

The Plan included a range of actions that would contribute to the Council's work to tackle and prevent poverty, responding to the climate, nature emergencies and reducing inequalities. Tackling poverty was integral to the related objectives.

The commitments within the Corporate Plan would be reflected in the subsequent annual plans together with a suite of performance measures which would detail how different Council services would contribute to the delivery of the Council's five Well-being Objectives.

Publishing the Council's Well-being Objectives at the start of the financial year would enable it to meet its statutory obligations under the performance duties of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA), both of which placed specific duties on the Council in relation to objective setting and reporting. Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the Council was required to publish its Well-being Objectives by 31st March each year and to keep these under review.

The Plan would ensure that the Council contributed to the national well-being goals and its duties there in terms of economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being, as well as setting out the five new well-being objectives for the organisation. Again, they had been framed by listening to what residents had told the Council and where the Council was thinking the focus would be for the coming five years.

The Council also this time as a new element of the Corporate Plan included a statement about working together and that was very much about what people could expect when they worked within the Council. This was framed around its values.

The consultation on the Corporate Plan would close at the end of this week, on Sunday. In the new year it would go back to Scrutiny and Cabinet for approval and then on to Full Council for consideration.

Also highlighted was the work undertaken in terms of engagement and consultation around this process. There had been a number of public drop-in sessions, stakeholder engagement focus, for example on the relationship statement, and engagement with the Youth Council and the 50 Plus Forum, as well as a number of other meetings, such as the Equality Consultative Forum and staff engagement.

The Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight also advised the Forum that members could also contact her outside of this meeting on any questions they may have and encouraged them to get involved in the consultation process and to encourage others to do so as well.

Following consideration of the report by the Forum, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(h) Reshaping Programme Update –

Cabinet had, on 10th October, 2024, approved the report and Appendix A been emailed to all Councillors, Members of the Joint Consultative Forum, all Town and Community Councils, the Public Services Board, the Regional Partnership Board, the Council's diversity networks and the Equalities Consultative Forum for their information, inviting any views to be shared with the Chief Executive for consideration.

The report, presented by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, provided an update to Members following approval to develop the Reshaping Programme in January 2024. Reshaping Services was the transformational change programme launched in 2015 and which enabled the Council to mitigate the impact of austerity whilst delivering significant financial savings. With a significant financial challenge facing the Council in the medium-term, Cabinet endorsed plans to again refocus Reshaping around a framework for transformational change under five themes of Target Operating Model, Service Transformation, Strengthening Communities, Digital Innovation and Economic Resilience.

The programme was closely tied in with the Corporate Plan, which was out for consultation. The consultation process would end on 8th December, and the Council had engaged with trade union colleagues during this part of the consultation programme and the GMB and others had provided a considerable amount of feedback in terms of this. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development encouraged as many trade union colleagues as possible to engage as well, as their feedback would help shape the Corporate Plan moving forward.

The Reshaping Programme would help set out how to deliver the Corporate Plan and was split into six sections ranging from the Programme's vision through to delivery. Also provided were the top ten key priorities, which included:

- Brilliant basics and automation: improving customer/resident service, linked to automation and service reviews in high volume services.
- Key assets – Dock Office and Kymin.
- Key income generation opportunities – Car Parking.
- Neighbourhood Services standards and approach (Linked to Brilliant basics).
- School budget management – working with schools, especially those in deficit / at risk of financial deficit.
- Schools' agency staff model.
- Additional Learning Needs.
- Public transport and school transport services.
- Social Services demand management.
- Homelessness.

The reshaping prospectus would be really challenging and stretching in terms of targets, etc. particularly in the current financial climate. It was therefore crucial for engagement with trade unions, employee groups and networks, as well as leaders and managers throughout the Authority as part of the consultation process for the Corporate Plan and the Reshaping Programme. For example, a number of management development sessions with all the Council's line managers had taken place across the Authority over recent months and had meant taking on board all of the subsequent feedback. This was also another reason to take this to the Forum today for their input.

Councillor Thomas welcomed the update and stated that Elected Members had had the opportunity to consider and contribute to the Corporate Plan and Reshaping Programme already and was therefore keen to hear the views of the trade unions and other employee representatives at this Forum or elsewhere in due course.

The Forum, having considered the report,

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(i) Verbal Update on the Culture Plan –

The update on the Culture Plan was given by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development to the Forum, in order to apprise members and representatives of the work currently being undertaken to draft the Cultural Plan, which would 'sit behind' both the new / updated Corporate Plan and the Reshaping Programme.

The Cultural Plan, in tandem with the other plans and programmes mentioned, would look at what the Council was seeking to achieve as a local authority and identify the gaps between where the Council was now and what it was seeking to achieve culturally as well as how it would address those gaps moving forward. It would build

on the work undertaken with regard to the existing Culture Book / Plan that the Council currently had in place.

The draft Plan would be going out for consultation to all relevant groups and stakeholders around mid-December, which would align with the Corporate Plan timeline and process.

Trade unions and employee representatives were encouraged to engage with this process, particularly those members who may have had a similar undertaking with another Local Authority and maybe able to share their experiences or any best practice.

Key areas for the Plan would include diversity and inclusivity, as well as how the Council operated in terms of its values and how these would be delivered.

Subsequently, the Forum was asked to provide any initial thoughts or suggestions and to be involved in the consultation process.

Councillor Thomas commented on the need for trade union and employee representative involvement in this process and that of the various staff networks within the Council, such as GLAM, Diverse Staff Network and Abl. It was also important to have greater trade union engagement with these networks as well in order to ensure they were fully active, effective and heard.

N. Savage (GMB) referred to the points raised around trade union engagement, participation, relationships and liaison with the Vale of Glamorgan Council in relation to its values and structures. She felt that the GMB union did not have parity of facilities time as compared with other trade unions or similar bodies within the Vale of Glamorgan Council. It was explained that GMB currently had a part time facilities arrangement in relation to facilities time which had previously been sufficient for the GMB representative(s). However, the GMB were now looking to change this arrangement, and the Council was seeking the rationale for this from the GMB. This was not currently in the remit of the Forum and would be looked at outside of this meeting with the aim of resolving this going forward.

The GMB representative added that the union was not getting its allotted three days and one of the reasons that she had raised the composition of the trade union representatives at this Forum and whether they were elected or non-elected by their memberships to attend at the start of the meeting was the impact on GMB members and the need to consult them on this with regard to future attendance at the Forum. It was confirmed that there was a mixture of elected and non-elected trade union and other employee representatives at the meeting today. It was intended that there should be elected representatives present on this Forum and that was something that was actively encouraged, with the Council recently broadening the Constitution for this Forum to allow regional representatives to attend when there were no elected representatives locally. Some trade unions were finding it very difficult to have elected trade union representatives locally or available due to operational constraints and the Council was trying to support those trade unions affected with that. Subsequently, this meant the need for some last-minute substitutions to ensure the

quorum at this meeting. The Council's aim was to get as many trade unions and employee representatives as possible to attend the Forum.

Councillor Cowpe felt that it was not an ideal situation to be having on a regular basis, and that trade union and other employee representatives should be elected by their members to attend this Forum as much as possible. Both the Chair and Councillor Thomas referred to the challenges in getting trade union attendance and the efforts made in order to address and improve this situation in order to encourage trade union and other employee representation to attend the Forum for their voice to be heard and their input regarding Council activities. Without these efforts, the Forum could not be quorate, and no meetings held. The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer stated that further work and discussions would be undertaken with the relevant colleagues in order to take this forward.

It was explained that the Forum had lost its elected local GMB Union representative recently through retirement, but the Council was working with the GMB on having a locally elected representative(s) at the Forum moving forward. The Council had two newly elected GMB representatives from a school setting and from a social services setting, and it was working with the GMB on who the elected representative would be who would be granted facilities time.

Following consideration of the verbal update, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the verbal update be noted.

(j) Update on Recruitment and Retention –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the update to the Forum, stating that the relevant document had been drafted at the end of August this year and presented to the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) in September.

The intention was to review the Council's recruitment and retention practices, with a consultation on this going on until the end of December. As part of this, the documentation around this review had been shared with the relevant employee networks, consultative forums, school groups and others, such as the youth and older persons' forums, service user groups and the Equalities Forum.

As part of this, the Council was looking at the communications and branding of local government, which was both rewarding and a challenging career and to focus on younger generations and diverse groups to consider a role in the Local Authority.

There had been positive feedback on the recruitment trials that had been undertaken, including from those applicants who were neurodiverse or faced other challenges. Feedback had also been sought from teaching staff, with a plea from the head of service to increase this type of engagement.

Councillor Thomas asked what the Vale of Glamorgan Council was doing to reach out and engage with secondary school pupils, in order to highlight undertaking

teaching and other public sector careers when they were older. The Operational Manager - Employee Services explained that this was currently ad-hoc, and varied from school to school, but the Council was engaging with schools to ensure that pupils were made aware about the world of work, including the various roles and careers available within the Council (200 plus different career opportunities). The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development added that it was challenging to expand such engagement with schools and pupils, due to capacity and negative social media feedback around public sector roles. It was important to re-emphasise the rewarding, flexible and beneficial work that undertaking a role in local government could provide. She also provided examples of individual feedback, including from trade union colleagues, that had been provided already as part of this process, i.e. considering children looked after as internal candidates, to look at improving, tailoring and simplifying job specifications and descriptions and to revisit where job adverts were placed. Further slides and details could be provided at the next meeting of the Forum, in order to give a fuller picture of the feedback gathered as part of this exercise, as well as sharing BI statistical analysis on how the Council was recruiting, including details on protected characteristics.

Councillor Perkes asked about the statistics on the perceived lower promotion opportunities for people from protected characteristic or ethnic minority backgrounds as opposed to those from a white background and whether the figures involved were Vale specific or national / generic. It was explained that this was a general figure but was also reflective of this Council as well as other local authorities. This was being addressed through measures such as working with all the Council's staff networks on how it could increase opportunities across all staff with protected characteristics, the setting up of more 'balanced' recruitment panels, reverse mentoring opportunities as well as asking all staff to update their personal details, and, as part of that approach, the Council engaging with all of its networks to ask people to fill in some of the equalities details. Feedback on this indicated that, for example, some staff with neurodivergent conditions were not reflecting these in their personal details form nor identifying it as a disability or other protected characteristic, which would be looked into further.

N. Savage (GMB) referred to possible employee concerns about notifying a new employer, such as the Council, of them having a neurodivergent condition and therefore this needed to be looked at as part of this review holistically and for mandatory training for interview or recruitment panels in terms of dealing with this. Also, it was important to make application forms as accessible and appropriate to the needs of the roles being recruited for and the prospective applicants as possible. It was explained that with regard to application forms this was already being addressed and a more bespoke recruitment process was trialled within Social Services, which had offered a valuable number of lessons and insight and a move away from a 'one size fits all' approach. It was important for the Council to be more flexible in how it recruits, how it advertises and how people can apply to work for it.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that from a cultural awareness perspective, the Council was looking at rolling out broader cultural awareness training and how it would do that. She asked whether trade union colleagues had any access to funding or could support the Council in other

ways around this, as well as offering further feedback around recruitment and retention.

Following consideration by the Forum, it was

AGREED – T H A T the update be noted, with further updates on this process to be shared with the Forum at its next or future meetings.

(k) Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Report –

The report was presented to the Forum by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, in order to update and share its findings with the Forum, following the recommendation by the Joint Council for Wales that the report be shared with all Welsh Local Authorities' Joint Consultative Forums or similar.

It had been presented by the Council's Director of Social Services to the Joint Council for Wales on behalf of ADSS Cymru, in order to highlight work around:

- Delivering social care in an anti-racist Wales; and
- Recruitment and career progression for staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

As part of this survey work had been undertaken, including around race and the self-description of ethnic minorities / communities and to move away from such terminology, such as using the term 'global majority' instead. As a local authority, the Council had also been in discussions with its relevant staff networks around using more appropriate descriptor(s).

The survey / feedback therefore included service users' experiences with recruitment practices in Social Services, including the fairness of the appointment process, but also when individuals were recruited within an organisation, and the challenges that were faced by them, as well as the promotional opportunities available to them.

The Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding, Social Services outlined further details about the report. This included the fact that the report had been undertaken had been positively received by Social Services, the mixed picture in terms of service users' experiences throughout Wales (with some local authorities further ahead than others in this area) and there being still a considerable amount of work to be done to address the issues raised. The Forum's attention was drawn to the recommendations set out within the report, which would need to be reported on by the Council on an annual basis, as well as within the Annual Director's Report for Social Services going forward.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development added that the report had gone to the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and Human Resources (HR), because a lot of the actions or recommendations needed to be built on from the culture perspective and in terms of the recruitment and retention practises of the Council. The recommendations had been built into the reshaping programme for Social Services and they would have a wider impact across the rest

of the Council too, including with the various staff diversity networks and the report had also been positively received by trade unions / employee groups. It was the intention to bring, possibly to the next meeting of the Forum, statistical data and analysis on the progress of this piece of work.

Councillor Perkes stated that she looked forward to seeing the statistical analysis around this work, and how the Council was progressing in helping those people and staff with protected characteristics.

On the Chair's question on whether this would be a separate piece of work or be incorporated into the wider Reshaping Programme, it was explained that SLT and the employee networks felt it should underpin existing projects such as the Corporate Plan, Culture Plan, etc.

N. Savage (GMB) asked whether the report reflected on pay grades and structures across local authorities and whether it looked at how these and the wider job evaluation process could be made to remove barriers to job retention. It was explained that this report did not cover these areas, but the ADSS were commissioning other pieces of work that may cover these topics in future. The Council were looking at not just pay grades but also the need to encourage and support staff in terms of educational attainment and career development, particularly for those staff starting at the foundation level.

Following consideration by the Forum, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(I) Date of Next Meeting –

To be confirmed. Possible dates would be considered around April and the Forum to be updated accordingly.