



Report of the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 13 February 2024

Call In of Cabinet Decision – Customer Charter and Service Standards Framework

Purpose:	To consider the Cabinet decision on Customer Charter and Service Standards Framework, in line with the Council's Call In procedure.
Content:	Original Cabinet decision and information on the Call In procedure including background, the role of Scrutiny and next steps.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided in line with the Call In procedure and merits of the Call In.
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1. Call In of Cabinet Report

1.1 In accordance with the Council Constitution (Cabinet Procedure Rules, Part 4.4 Paragraphs 19 & 20 – **see Appendix 1**), the Committee is required to consider the Call In of a Cabinet decision made on 18 January 2024 on the following report:

- Customer Charter and Service Standards Framework (Report of the Chair of the Corporate Services & Financial Resilience Service Transformation Committee) - see **Appendix 2**

1.2 The Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet show the following decision being taken on this report:

Resolved that:

- 1) The Customer Charter & Service Standards Framework set out in Appendix A of the report be approved and adopted from 1 April 2024.
- 2) Authority be delegated to Directors and the relevant Cabinet Member, to make any minor changes to the Standards as appropriate and always in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance (Joint Deputy Leader of the Council) and the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation (Joint Deputy Leader of the Council).

2. Reason(s) for Call In

- 2.1 The Call In was requested by Councillor Sandra Joy, supported by Councillors Allan Jeffery, Peter May, and Stuart Rice, and deemed valid by the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Presiding Member. The reason(s) given for Calling In the decision are as follows:

The reason for the Call In is because we believe that the Cabinet made this decision without being fully appraised of the concerns expressed by members of the Corporate Services and Financial Resilience STC in a minuted meeting on 12th December, when this policy draft was discussed. They were under the impression that this policy draft had been accepted in its entirety by this STC, and that is not the case. The Chair of the Corporate Services and Financial Resilience STC omitted to share with the Cabinet members the concerns that were raised.

During this STC meeting, significant concerns were raised about the timescales for processing applications for free school meals. This is noted as 28 working days, almost six weeks. (Other timescales for people experiencing hardship were also raised in the meeting, but we are focussing on the direct impact on vulnerable children.)

Please note that children who are eligible for free school meals are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. They have no access to funds. Concern was expressed that such a child could potentially be in a position where they are unable to access any food during the day for up to six weeks.

The Council officer present informed the Committee that she would 'take that back to the Heads of Service' and 'feed back to you'. This did not happen until after the Cabinet had met and made their decision, so again they were not appraised of the concerns raised.

Obviously, supporting evidence that this was raised can be provided, both via the minutes of the meetings referred to here and the recordings of both meetings: the STC and the Cabinet meeting, as well as subsequent email exchanges with Council officers.

In summary, we believe that, the decision to adopt the Customer Charter and Service Standards Framework without amendment is unsafe, in that we believe the Cabinet would have been unlikely to accept that any vulnerable child should be expected to go without food every day for almost six weeks whilst adults process the required paperwork.

- 2.2 Extract from the Minutes of the Service Transformation Committee meeting referred to are attached as **Appendix 3**.

3. Role of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee shall consider the reasons for the Call In against the decision made by Cabinet and will hear from lead Councillors and Officers involved in the decision-making process to respond to the Call In and answer questions.

- i) If satisfied with the explanation it will so indicate to enable the Cabinet decision, as made, to be implemented;
- ii) If 'no longer concerned', but not minded to indicate that it is 'satisfied with the explanation', it is in order for the Committee to resolve that 'the explanation be accepted but not endorsed by the Committee';
- iii) If still concerned about the decision, then it may refer it back to Cabinet or the relevant decision maker / body for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns. The Cabinet, decision maker / body shall then reconsider its decision before making a final decision.

- 3.2 Any recommendations from the Committee, having considered the merits of the Call In, will be communicated to relevant decision-makers.

4. Response to Call In

- 4.1 The Councillor(s) who have made the Call In have been in communication with relevant Councillors / Officers about their concerns and a way forward. A note from the Council's Chief Executive (attached as **Appendix 4**) explains what the Council is able to do in terms of processing applications for Free School Meals, for the elements within its control, and indicates intention to make a change to the Service Standards.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee is being asked to consider and review the Cabinet decision and as such there are no additional direct legal implications beyond those set out in the Cabinet report seeking that original decision.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee is being asked to consider and review the Cabinet decision and as such there are no additional direct financial implications beyond those set out in the Cabinet report seeking that original decision.

7. Integrated Assessment Implications

7.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee is being asked to consider and review the Cabinet decision and as such there are no additional direct integrated assessment implications beyond those set out in the Cabinet report seeking that original decision.

Background papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Extract from Council Constitution - Call In Procedure and Flow Chart (<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s97888/Cabinet%20Procedure%20Rules.pdf?LLL=0>)

Appendix 2: Cabinet Report - 18 January 2024 (<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=51867&PlanId=0&Opt=3&LLL=0#AI49583>)

Appendix 3: Extract from Minutes of the Corporate Services & Financial Resilience Service Transformation Committee – 12 December 2023 (<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/g11260/Printed%20minutes%20Tuesday%2012-Dec-2023%2014.00%20Corporate%20Services%20Financial%20Resilience%20Service%20Trans.pdf?T=1&LLL=0>)

Appendix 4: Response of the Chief Executive