

No.

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 22nd December, 2021.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor M.R. Wilson (Chair); Councillor P. Drake (Vice-Chair);
Councillors: G.D.D. Carroll, R. Crowley, V.P. Driscoll, G. John, Dr. I.J. Johnson,
S. Sivagnanam and J.W. Thomas.

Also present: Councillors N. Moore (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), L. Burnett (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration), P.G. King (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport), K.F. McCaffer (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Arts and Culture), L.O. Rowlands and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services).

699 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

700 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor G.A. Cox.

701 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 17th November, 2021 be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment on page 508 regarding Councillor Sivagnanam’s comments on the Draft Welsh Language Promotion Strategy:

- That as well as the comments already recorded in the minutes, Councillor Sivagnanam was also specifically talking about self-selection and Welsh medium schools acting as a middle-class filter, as well as asking whether there were statistics available on the people accessing Welsh medium schools around diversity, socio-economic position and if they were from BAME communities.

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702 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

703 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN 2022/23 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was presented by the Head of Policy and Business Transformation as part of the consultation process.

The Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) was based on the Council's 5-year Corporate Plan and acted as a 'bridge' between the Corporate Plan and next year's actions, with an emphasis on six cross cutting themes:

- Project Zero.
- Community capacity.
- Hardship.
- Care and Support.
- Transformation.
- Infrastructure.

The ADP for 2022-23 was aligned to the Council's four Well-being Objectives. The Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives and associated commitments for 2022/2023 as outlined in the draft Annual Delivery Plan would be reflected in the Service Plans for 2022 -2023 which would be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committees in the New Year together with the proposed service improvement targets for 2022-23.

A consultation process around the draft ADP started on 29th November, 2021 and would run through to 9th of January 2022. This would include the public, partners, staff, Trade Unions, Town and Community Councils and a presentation to all scrutiny committees. The ADP would then be amended and go back to Scrutiny, then on to Cabinet and Full Council.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Dr. Johnson commented that overall, the ADP demonstrated the sheer breadth of the work undertaken by the Council but there was a need for the language to be 'sharpened' and to avoid too many 'buzzwords' when talking about the various outputs within the ADP and report, as well as refining what counted as an output.
- The Chair asked for more information about several aspects within the Plan, such as delivery for year three of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan, achieving Age Friendly status for the Vale and progress work as part of national action around race equality, sexual orientation and gender identity and how the Council were getting on with that at the moment, as well as the Move More, Eat Well Plan and the expansion of 'Your Choice'. He asked the Head of Policy and Business Transformation to come back to

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the Committee with answers to these at a later date. In the meantime, the Head of Service explained that for Age Friendly status, some funding had been secured from Welsh Government (WG) which was supporting the application and the process to become recognized as being age friendly in conjunction with the Public Services Board. For Move More, Eat Well, work was being undertaken with the 'Big Fresh' Company within schools.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference, report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the draft Annual Delivery Plan be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

704 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2021/22 (MD) –

The purpose of the report, as outlined by the Head of Policy and Business Transformation, was to present Quarter 2 performance results for the period 1st April, 2021 to 30th September, 2021 in delivering the Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

The performance report presented progress at Quarter 2 (1st April to 30th September 2021) towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan (2021/22) commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Positive progress had been made in delivering the in-year commitments in relation to the Annual Delivery Plan (2021/22). The performance had contributed to an overall GREEN status for the Plan at Quarter 2 (Q2).

All 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q2 to reflect the progress made to date. This was positive given the ongoing challenges arising from the pandemic.

As part of this there been a number of achievements that directly related to the remit of the Committee, which included successfully engaging with residents across the Vale via social media and Vale connect subscriptions, 89.5% of customer enquiries to C1V were resolved at first contact through to the ongoing work of installing EV charging points with work undertaken to the buildings infrastructure to accommodate the charging points at the Alps and Civic Offices.

The relevant exceptions which were currently classed as Red and areas for improvement were also highlighted to the Committee and the reasons for these given i.e. the C1V refurbishment project had been delayed because of internal and external capacity and supply issues and work was underway to revise the Local

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Flood Risk Management Strategy which had been delayed pending guidance from Welsh Government.

In terms of the Coronavirus Recovery Update, one key item to note was the work underway to review the three main corporate office buildings and how they may be used in the future to support a hybrid model of working between home and the office for Council staff.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor John raised the issue of one area detailed as needing improvement, namely the Transfer of Assets to for other organisations to operate facilities such as sports grounds, parks, etc. This was an ongoing area for improvement, and the Councillor felt this needed to be looked at again, due to the pressures that sports clubs and others were experiencing due to the pandemic. The Councillor had some ideas on this that he would like to discuss with the Head of Policy and Business Transformation and his team in the New Year.
- Councillor Dr. Johnson asked for an update on the progress made on stakeholder engagement to inform a review of future service modelling in social care and the Flood Risk Management Strategy. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation would collate the relevant information from the departments involved and circulate this to the Committee.
- The Chair raised a number of questions concerning Vale Connect, Twitter numbers, Armed Force Covenant, Dementia Group and the Cogan Interchange. The Head of Policy and Business Transformation would collate the relevant information and circulate this to the Committee. Although it was confirmed that the Council's corporate English language Twitter account had circa 21,500 followers at this time.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2021/22 commitments as aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Wellbeing Objectives within the remit of the Committee be noted.

(2) T H A T the remedial actions to be taken to address areas of under-performance and to tackle the key challenges identified within the remit of the Committee be noted.

(3) T H A T the progress being made through the Council's recovery strategy and the Directorate recovery plans in response to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic be noted.

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Reason for recommendations

(1-3) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

705 REVENUE MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021 AND REVISED BUDGET FOR 2021/22 (REF) -

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was presented by the Interim Head of Finance / S151 Officer, outlining the position with regard to revenue budget monitoring for the period 1st of April to 30th September 2021, taking into account the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the Council finances.

The revenue position for 2021 / 22 continued to be challenging for the Council both operationally and financially due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Funding continued to be available from Welsh Government (WG) to cover the financial pressures to the end of the year. However, some of the funding was changing and the funding, for example, for social care would be tapering off between now and the end of the financial year.

The Council continued to make monthly claims for expenditure, and quarterly claims for loss of income from WG for COVID-19 related issues.

At this time of year, the original budget was usually reviewed for any required adjustments and an amended budget had been calculated and was shown in the report. The adjustments made did not affect the overall net position of the Council. They were purely accounting adjustments largely outside the control of the services or were virements between services.

Furthermore, a small overspend had been reported for Learning and Skills, as well as for Social Services and Environment and Housing which would be met from their respective reserves.

There was also projected a favourable balance on the general policy budget with £2m relating to capital charges and current estimates projecting that the Council Tax budget would outturn with a surplus on collection of £2m.

Due to the uncertainty around the level of the settlement and the value of cost pressures that had been identified and reported it was proposed that the sum was transferred into the Council Fund and its use would be considered by the Budget Working Group when was taking into account all factors in formulating a balanced revenue and capital budget for the final proposals which would be presented to Cabinet and Council in February and March 2022.

Finally, an efficiency target of £500k was set for the Council for 2021/22, with a shortfall against this target currently showing.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

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- Councillor Dr. Johnson asked for more information on the £4 million favourable position reported for General Policy and with regard to the Council Tax element, was this a recovery from last year or additional collection this year and for an explanation regarding the capital charges element. Regarding capital charges, it was explained that the underspend was as a result of the Council having to borrow less and was therefore able to borrow internally this year, thereby saving money. On the favourable position regarding Council tax, the Council has increased the collection of arrears. The arrears had gone down from the beginning of the year by £2 million and also there had been a reduction in the number of exempt properties and the number of properties in the Vale had actually increased, so it was a combination of factors that had led to the current position.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2021/22 Revenue Budget be noted.
- (2) T H A T the amended revenue budget for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

706 CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was presented by the Interim Head of Finance / S151 Officer.

The Interim Head of Finance outlined the current position of the Capital Programme and highlighted the increased costs on capital schemes due to an uplift in prices for plant and material costs. They also highlighted the funding received from WG to fund some initiatives, such as the Penarth Food Pod and Early Years Childcare as well as via s106 monies and the Local Transport Fund.

Details on capital schemes, as well as the use of emergency powers and delegated authority within this area were also provided in the report.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Carroll referred to the Llandough Bus Shelter, funded through s106 monies. The bus shelter had been damaged and had been out of service for 12 months, which had an impact on the elderly and the

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vulnerable in the local community. The Interim Head of Finance / S151 Officer and the Managing Director would take it back to the relevant officers and teams. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport shared the concerns raised and explained that the delay in repairs was due to insurance agreements and supply chain issues. It was currently projected to be completed in February 2022 as long as the issues described could be resolved.

- Councillor Dr. Johnson asked about Ysgol Sant Baruc and the new site on the Barry Waterfront, the ongoing issues there and the impact on the timeframe for Band B funding. The Managing Director (MD) replied that the Council was extremely frustrated at the delays with the consortium involved and were looking to get this matter progressed urgently. If there was no further progress soon, then the Council would look to take the site back from the consortium and deliver the school itself, with the Council having a good track record of delivering 21st Century Band B schools and delivering the first zero carbon school in Wales. Some progress was being made now, and specific timings and deadlines were looking to be set, but it was unlikely that the school would be completed until mid-2023. The Band B funding would also not be impacted by the delay, although the delays could have an effect in terms of material costs (due to rises from supply chain issues) but this was something that the Council were working on sharing with the consortium. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration echoed the Managing Directors comments and stated that the Council would take legal action to take the site back if required.
- On Councillor Dr. Johnson's query on the Barry Dock Interchange and the funding / spending requirements involved, the MD and / or the Interim Head of Finance would come back to the committee on an answer for this.
- Councillor John commented on the issue of ongoing delays to repairs to sites such as Boverton Bus Stop and at Llandough due to the pandemic and supply chain issues, with these possibly slipping into the new financial year.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made on the 2021/22 Capital Programme be noted.
- (2) T H A T the use of Delegated Authority referred to in the report be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers referred to in the report be noted.
- (4) T H A T the changes to the 2021/22 and future years Capital Programme, referred to in the report, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

707 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2021/22 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was presented by the Interim Head of Finance / S151 Officer who outlined the range of external influences that had impacted on the treasury management activity of the Council during the year, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic, to UK interest rates and the performance of the major global economies, as well as the rising costs of energy and disruption to global and local supply chains.

Of particular note, was the revised estimate for new loans required to support the capital programme for 2021/22 which was £11.805M (£3.429M supported), but this sum could fluctuate dependent on the delivery and financing of the capital programme key schemes such as the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, although, as stated previously, it was the intention to borrow internally this year.

The Council's investment strategy was to secure the best return on as wide a range of investments options as possible i.e. Debt Management Deposit Facility, Local Authorities, Treasury Bills, Money Market Funds and Lloyds Instant Access Accounts as well as recently investing with Santander Bank PLC via a high return notice account.

The Authority proposed to extend the maturity period of loans to other Local Authorities from 365 days to 2 years. The maximum deposits per institution would be £5m and taking into account reserve projections it was proposed the maximum sum invested over 364 days would be restricted to £10m in total.

All Treasury Management activity complied with the CIPFA code of practice and all other relevant legislative provisions.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Dr. Johnson queried the impact of the recent Bank of England increase in its base or bank rate on the Council, which was confirmed as having only a relatively small impact on the Vale i.e., the Debt Management Office had gone from a negative interest rate to 0.3 – 0.7 %, which underlined the ongoing need for the Council to diversify and to widen its investments.
- Councillor Driscoll commented on the substantial difference between the income the Council received from lending compared to the rates being paid for Council borrowings and asked if these could be brought closer together and would the rate of loans remain fixed. It was explained that the longer-term loans were under a fixed rate which would not change, and the Council endeavoured to ensure that investments, etc were not under negative or adverse rates.

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Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Treasury Management mid-year report for the period 1st April, 2021 to 30th September, 2021 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

708 INITIAL REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2022/23 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 TO 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was presented by the Interim Head of Finance / S151 Officer.

As part of this, the Interim Head of Finance presented the most up to date data following the publishing of the (provisional) Welsh Government (WG) settlement, with highlights such as:

- This amounted to an increase of 10.51%, which was an above average settlement and equated to £17.695m.
- This included funding for National Insurance, Teachers Pay/Pension 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- The WG's reference to this settlement now including the Pandemic Hardship Funding would need to be clarified.
- Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) had increased by £21.45m or 8%.
- Some of the previously calculated revenue shortfall and cost pressures would now need to be revised due to the new settlement (currently net cost pressures amounted to £27m).
- The various options / scenarios for Council tax increases were outlined.
- Grant funding was a mixed picture, ranging from reductions in areas such as Reducing Infant Class sizes to increases in other areas, i.e. Children and Communities Grant, although these were at an all Wales level and more concrete details on funding would come through in the weeks ahead from WG.
- The settlement also included funding for Welsh Councils around paying the Real Living Wage for Social Care staff, the expansion of Free School Meals as well as for Early Years and Childcare, where further information from WG would also be required.
- It also appeared that WG would allow the Council to claim in advance for block booking for next year for its homelessness provision, thereby lessening the £2m cost pressure in this area if the full 12 months was allowable.
- Other issues were outlined, such as the inclusion of the Fire Service cost pressure of £175k and the need to revisit the school transport cost pressures.

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- Although better than expected, the revenue settlement still resulted in a shortfall in funding and further work would be undertaken to balance the budget, which may require the use of existing reserves.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor John commented that the settlement was much better than expected and referred to the issues raised at the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and the importance to fund cost pressures relating to statutory services such as Waste, and Highway Maintenance.
- Councillor Dr. Johnson raised a number of issues, including free school meal provision and the need for adequate funding, more information on the situation regarding the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF) and commented on the consistency of the figures around the settlement, with the WG and Vale totals being slightly different and adjusted. The Interim Finance Officer stated that Committee would have additional scrutiny of the finalised revenue budget proposals. On the ICF, further clarity from WG would be needed to establish what the level of funding would be and what the criteria was for this. On the consistency of the overall settlement figures, she pointed out that the difference shown was the comparison of last year's AEF (Aggregate External Finance) to the new AEF and WG's figures included adjustments hence the difference between the Council and WG figures
- Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration wished to add that the Council faced some challenging decisions going forward, with sizeable cost pressures which the WG settlement would not fully cover, such as Education, but this involved measures which would result in a huge leap forward, such as the extension of free school meals for primary schools, as well as the push for more after school activities and healthy food initiatives, such pilot schemes and other innovative steps would also help to attract further funding which would be beneficial.
- The Chair also raised a number of issues, concerning the impact (i.e. from UK Government) on the funding and cost implications of public sector pensions schemes (LGPS and Teacher's) as a result of the 'McCloud judgment', the ongoing importance of maintaining healthy reserves in order to fund various Council schemes and to 'reprofile them if necessary, the direction of travel of consumer and retail price indices on cost pressures, as well as stressing that the other scrutiny committees needed to highlight both priority areas of funding and those areas which could be reprioritised and therefore where savings could be made. On the McCloud decision, the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport explained he sat on the Cardiff and Vale Pension Board and this decision would be part of the triennial actuarial value revaluation which was due from the end of this fiscal year; although his assumption was that it would not be met by the UK Government but by the pension fund and that will be one of its cost pressures. Further, the 'levelling off' of life expectancy could mean that employer pension contributions may not need to be substantially adjusted

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and therefore not an immediate concern from a Council revenue perspective.

- Finally, Councillor Carroll made the point that the 10.6 % increase as part of the WG settlement would hopefully be 'passed on' to Council taxpayers such as through lower Council Tax rates being set.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Cabinet be informed of the comments of the Committee for their consideration as part of the consultation process for the initial revenue budget proposals for 2022/23 and the final budget proposals for 2022/23.

(2) T H A T the Committee supported the emphasis placed on the importance of funding cost pressures concerning Highway Maintenance, as recommended by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

(3) T H A T the recommendations of the Environment and Regeneration, Healthy Living and Social Care and Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committees as above regarding the report be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order that Cabinet be informed of the comments by Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee before making a final proposal on the budget.

(2) In order that Cabinet be informed of the recommendations of the relevant Scrutiny Committees before making a final proposal on the budget.

(3) Having regard to the contents contained therein and discussions at the meeting.

709 INITIAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET PROPOSALS 2022/23 AND REVISED BUDGET 2021/22 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was outlined by the Interim Head of Finance.

The amended budget for 2021/22 included a significant change from a surplus of £25k to a deficit of £11.085m, the reason for this was at the end of 2021, the HRA reserve was higher than projected due to the underspend in the year. Therefore, in order to bring the level of the reserve back in line with the projected level in the business plan, there would be a need to increase revenue spending through an increase in the revenue contributions to fund capital expenditure and by doing this the additional expenditure would be drawn down from the HRA reserve thus bringing it back in line to where the Council had planned.

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There was also a change in the increase of bad debt / doubtful debt provision (the amount had reduced) and in the Capital Expenditure funded from the Revenue Account (CERA), recalculated at £18.786m, which was an increase of £12.394m.

In terms of the proposed budget for 2022/23, the level of the rent increase was not yet known as the rent policy had not been received from WG at this time but would be included in the final report.

The final report would go to Cabinet in February and would go to full Council in March and at the same time the Housing Business Plan, which would be revised, would also go to Cabinet in February, and would need Council approval in March.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Dr. Johnson asked about whether the CERA contributions would be made as the reserves had amassed over the last few years at year end, and it was explained that the current projected spend for HRA was £31m and so it was proposed that CERA would go up to £18.7m and therefore less loans would need to be raised.
- On the Councillor's other question concerning bad debt provision, the explanation given was that the figure had been revised when looking at the annual projection and the Council would be looking to reduce it from the 6% shown on the Housing Business Plan (originally set to that level due to the uncertainty on welfare reforms) to 3 %.
- The Councillor and Chair asked if the Committee could be updated regularly on the position of the CERA and the HRA reserve going forward, such as in March 2022, at the end of the financial year.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Cabinet be informed of the comments of the Committee on the initial Housing Revenue Account budget proposal for 2022/23.

(2) T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee receive an update in March 2022 on the status of the Capital Expenditure funded from the Revenue Account (CERA).

Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order that Cabinet be informed of the comments of Scrutiny Committee before making a final proposal on the budget.

(2) That the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee be updated on the status of CERA.

710 INITIAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2022/23 TO 2026/27
(REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 22nd November, 2021 was presented to the Committee by the Interim Head of Finance / S151 Officer in conjunction with the Operational Manager for Accountancy.

There had been a reduction in terms of general capital funding in 2021/22, meaning an unallocated asset renewal of £1.068M in 2022/23. However, from 2022/24 onwards funding throughout Wales would start to increase again, plus money for decarbonisation would also be provided.

The key issues in terms of capital funding and the allocation of limited resources for the Council lay with the level of funding required for resurfacing of roads, waste transfer and the fleet parking schemes. There was also the potential increase in costs for the 21st Century Schools programme as a result of the rise in construction costs, materials, transportation etc, and the Council was applying to the Welsh Government for additional funding wherever possible, but there may be some match funding required from the Council as part of those schemes.

Current capital bids totalled £16m and so the Council needed to review these robustly and to look at various options including the use of reserves, capital receipts and applying for alternative sources of funding, as well as consideration being given to pushing back some of the schemes into 2023/24 or beyond when the funding situation would be improved.

Following the presentation of the report, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Dr. Johnson referred to the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) in relation to the Capital Programme and the transition to this from the ending of the Band B 21st Century Schools programme in terms of timescales, etc. The Interim Head of Finance / S151 stated that Welsh-medium schools were considered as part of the programme going forward and more details on this had been shared with the members of the Committee via email. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration wished to reassure the Councillor that there were a wide range of considerations for the transition from 21st Century Schools to WESP, not least the criteria to be given by WG i.e. look at rebuilding or retrofitting existing schools in terms of carbon neutral policies. The Vale had been 'ahead of the game' regarding the building of schools as part of the 21st Century Schools programme, which would give the Council more scope to look at further building or development at the end of the 21st Century Schools Programme, should there be finance available.
- Councillor John referred to the recommendation raised at the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee around the importance of prioritising capital bids within the area of Neighbourhood Services relating to statutory services such as Waste and Highway Maintenance and cited the disintegrating wall near to the highway in

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Boverton as an example of where capital funding was most needed for the safety of drivers and pedestrians.

- The Chair wished to add that due to the current position on capital funding, it may be necessary to reprofile certain capital schemes over more years going forward and to look at the rules regarding procurement in order to make some savings, as well as alternative sources of funding. Road surfacing, waste management and other similar projects may incur costs at the beginning but ultimately achieved savings i.e., by reducing maintenance costs longer term and preventing the Council incurring penalties on recycling.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T Cabinet be informed of the comments of the Committee on the Initial Capital Programme Proposals for 2022/23 to 2026/27.
- (2) T H A T the Committee supported the emphasis placed on the importance of prioritising capital bids within the area of Neighbourhood Services relating to statutory services such as Waste and Highway Maintenance, as recommended by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in order to reduce risk and improve public health and safety.
- (3) T H A T the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee recommendation as above regarding the report be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) In order that Cabinet be informed of the comments of Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee before making a final proposal on the 2022/23 Capital Programme.
- (2) In order to fund capital bids relating to statutory services which reduce risk and improve public safety.
- (3) Having regard to the contents contained therein and discussions at the meeting.

711 MATTER WHICH THE CHAIR HAD DECIDED WAS URGENT –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following matter which the Chair had decided was urgent for the reason given beneath the minute heading be considered.

712 LATEST COVID-19 POSITION IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN –
(Urgent for reason of the need to apprise Members prior to the Christmas period of the current situation regarding the Coronavirus pandemic)

The update on the latest position on the pandemic was presented by a representative from Cardiff and Vale local public health team in conjunction with the Managing Director (MD).

Key points from this presentation were:

- The overall case rate for COVID-19 had been stable within the Vale with the roll out of the vaccine and booster jabs but had started to rise with the emergence of the Omicron variant in December 2021, with the age groups most affected currently being the 20–29-year-old age groups as well as 30–39-year-olds. In the over 60s there had only be a slow rise and it would have to be seen how this would translate into hospitalisations (currently relatively low), and which would be closely monitored due to the expectation that it would take anywhere between a week to two weeks to appear on the figures collated.
- The overall cases of the Omicron variant had risen exponentially within Cardiff and the Vale recently, with over 80% of Covid cases now having the S gene target failure (SGTF), an indicator of the Omicron variant, with Cardiff and the Vale being a ‘hotspot’ in Wales at this time.
- Although previous COVID-19 vaccinations were not as effective on Omicron as they had with Delta, the booster jab did seem to prevent the Omicron variant triggering serious illness in infected persons. It also appeared that there were some signs from biological studies that Omicron may be a slightly less severe infection.
- An accelerated booster programme was being implemented, and general measures such as schools having a delayed start to the spring term and the potential for remote / blended learning would be utilised in response to this new variant, with Wales moving to a modified alert level 2 such as reduced mixing and gatherings, as well as Omicron management now being ‘business as usual’ i.e., fully vaccinated contacts under 17 do not need to isolate but daily lateral flow tests recommended.
- The Cardiff and Vale response would also include robust contact tracing and regular meetings i.e., regional incident management team (IMT) and Leadership IMT.
- In summary, it was currently uncertain on what the impact of Omicron would be on the workforce, hospitalisations, etc. and what its severity would finally look like; however, there were measures that would be put in place to help mitigate these effects and reduce transmission, with the Omicron ‘wave’ expected to be short and peak quickly.

Following the presentation, the subsequent comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- On Councillor Thomas’ point on the difficulties of cancelling / rescheduling booster appointments, it was explained that more staff were being recruited in order to meet the demand for such contacts at the vaccination call centre

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and with the booster programme also continuing to be rolled out in the New Year.

- On Councillor Driscoll's point on the applicability of London as the benchmark for Wales and other parts of the UK on how the Omicron variant would develop in their respective areas, particularly with the differences in population densities in Wales and higher vaccination rates, it was too early to say if Wales and the other home nations would experience the Omicron wave differently due to higher vaccination rates and other factors compared to those seen in London.
- The Chair raised a number of issues, including:
 - The effectiveness of lateral flow tests (LFTs); the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) stated that the LFT still worked perfectly well, with the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) as the confirmatory test if required.
 - On how long it takes for the booster dose to work, early studies suggested that it could take between a few days to two weeks to produce effective antibodies.
 - On the potential vaccination of five-year-olds, this would appear to apply to high risk / vulnerable children between 5-10 years old only, as suggested by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), with the Welsh government (WG) probably following the same route as well.
 - On the question of whether children should wear face masks, this was reviewed from time to time by a number of different bodies about their effectiveness and appropriateness. Currently the disadvantages outweighed the benefits for young children to wear masks e.g. not wearing the mask properly.
- Councillor Carroll's question on how the South African 'milder' experience with Omicron had impacted WG policy, if at all, was addressed. Cardiff and the Vale were guided by Welsh Government policy and advice which, in turn, was guided by the WG Technical Advisory Group who looked at the experience of various countries, taking into account the differences and similarities with the UK's population, and assessing the relevance to the local situation as appropriate (e.g. South Africa's relatively young population versus Wales' older one) which could have a bearing on the seriousness of the effects of Omicron on the local population.
- The MD outlined the restrictions that would impact Wales and the Vale of Glamorgan from 6am Boxing Day, from social distancing to staff working from home wherever possible, through to schools having two planning days and a delayed start to the Spring Term. From an organisational point of view, all of this was considered by the Council's Leadership Team and registered as part of the Council's corporate risk register, with monitoring of the education and social care areas of particular importance.
- Councillor Carroll followed up by asking on what contingency plans the council had on handling potential staff absences / impacts to frontline Council services due to Omicron. The MD responded that this had been closely looked at for some time in order to build capacity into the system where there were gaps for key frontline services and for social care i.e. fast track recruitment for social and residential care over the Christmas period.
- On the Chair's point on Schools and their need for clarity and certainty on remote or face to face learning post-Christmas, there was ongoing

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discussions with WG which would be communicated onto schools and parents before the Spring Term started.

- Finally, Councillor John wanted to praise the work of social care staff during the pandemic, which he had first-hand experience of. He also wanted to praise the work and resilience of all frontline staff at the Council such as the refuse teams during COVID-19 saying that 'when the going gets tough, the Vale gets going.' Sentiments that were echoed by the Chair and the Committee as a whole.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the presentation and all the issues and implications contained therein

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the presentation on the latest COVID-19 Position in the Vale of Glamorgan be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the presentation and discussions at the meeting.