

No.

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid Meeting held on 12th December, 2023.

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

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby (Chair); Councillor I.A.N. Perry (Vice-Chair); Councillors C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake. V.P. Driscoll, A.M. Ernest, M.J. Hooper, C. Iannucci, E. Penn and J. Protheroe.

Also present: Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, C.P. Franks, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and Dr. I.J. Johnson.

638 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair 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”.

639 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor S.T. Wiliam.

640 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 14th November, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

641 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 5 – draft vale of Glamorgan Council Annual Delivery Plan 2024-25. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Lloyd-Selby was a Trustee of the Vale Food Bank and had been provided with support from the Council. Councillor Lloyd-Selby stated that she had received dispensation from the Standards Committee, so remained in the meeting for the duration of the agenda item.

Councillor V.P. Driscoll declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item 8 – Annual Delivery Plan Monitoring Report: Quarter 2 Performance 2023/24. This was a personal interest in that Councillor Driscoll was the Director of a company that had applied for a Council grant. The nature of the report meant that Councillor Driscoll was able remain in the meeting for the agenda item.

No.

642 REFRESH OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2023/24 TO 2028/29
(REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 16th November, 2023 as contained within the agenda was presented.

Councillor M. Hooper asked a general query regarding cost pressures and when would the Council need to consider the sort of activities and services that it provided. Councillor Hooper also referred to opportunities in relation to invest to save and he queried whether the Council had considered the introduction of a Tourism Levy and whether any regard had been given to introducing fees for residential parking permits. In reply, the Operational Manager – Accountancy, stated that in relation to a zero-based budget the key issue was in relation to the resources required to carry out the impact of undertaking a full zero-based budgeting exercise. However, it had been recognised that the Council would need to consider zero-based budgeting exercises for the more transformational proposals in order to achieve a balanced budget. There would also be some opportunities where the Council sought cost recovery. In terms of a Tourism Levy, the Operational Manager confirmed that there were no such proposals at present and in relation to residential parking permits, there was a proposal as part of the savings programme. Regarding the points relating to a Tourism Levy, the Director of Place advised Members that Welsh Government had consulted on Tourism Tax powers, but these had yet to be introduced so the Council was at present unable to bring in a levy even if it wanted to. This would be a political decision for the future.

Councillor A. Ernest commented on the proposal to increase the Council charge for void properties. He also referred to increase in fees and charges which he felt were “self-defeating” and would impact on the level of sports participation, and he was also concerned that events had posted a loss. Finally, Councillor Ernest commented on the budget shortfall for the staff pay award, which would likely result in a significant increase in Council Tax. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that in relation to void properties, there were specific policy reasons for charging a premium in order to try and bring back in to use some of the empty properties in the Vale and to help with the demand for housing. In addition, the charge would also raise an income stream to assist the Council to meet some of the needs for housing. With regards to fees and charges, the Council’s proposal was to increase prices by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) where possible. There were some areas where the increases would likely be below CPI, with one area being youth sport. Most fees and charges related to discretionary services and the Council’s aim was to achieve cost recovery which would enable services to continue within the difficult financial climate. Around events, the Operational Manager advised that historically the Council had funded base contributions from a specific reserve, but that reserve had been completely used up during the previous financial year, so the Council was looking to create a base budget as well as undertaking feasibility work in relation to sponsorships or separate funding streams to assist.

The Chair stated that she was sure that the Scrutiny Committee would support the commitment to ensure services to the most vulnerable residents were maintained and that the Committee’s support would be relayed to Cabinet. The Chair also

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wished to highlight that as the Council was facing significant challenges in terms of its budget position, that it was important for the Council to emphasise to the public during consultation exercises to set out the financial challenges within the reality of the economic pressures that the Council was facing in order to ensure that the public expectations were managed. The Chair's recommendations were agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee supports the commitment to ensure services to the most vulnerable residents are maintained and for this to be relayed to Cabinet.

(2) T H A T Cabinet be also advised of the view of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee that as the Council was facing some significant challenges in the terms of the budget position, that it was important that the Council emphasised the need to ensure that public consultation clearly set out the financial challenges within the reality of the economic pressures that the Council was facing in order to ensure expectations were managed.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the discussions at the meeting and the contents of the report and to advise Cabinet of the views of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

643 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 30th November, 2023 as contained within the agenda was presented.

The Chair queried the Council's work to improve its relationship with the third sector, social enterprises and Town and Community Councils. In reply, the Director of Place stated that from the perspective of his Directorate, this related to the Shared Prosperity Fund and the work of the Creative Communities Team. One of the areas that the Director of Place was looking to strengthen was in relation to working more closely with the third sector, voluntary groups and community organisations. Therefore, funding had been allocated to the Shared Prosperity Fund to support the activities of those groups and an Officer appointed to support the 3 most deprived wards in the Vale of Glamorgan in order to assist with the cost-of-living crisis as well as other areas of focus. As that work was a corporate objective, the Director of Place stated that it would be more appropriate for the Director of Corporate Resources to comment and provide a more detailed response, so a full reply would be sent via email.

Subsequently, it was

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RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the draft Annual Delivery Plan 2024-25 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

644 CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2023 (DEH) –

The report provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2023. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1 to the report.

Appendix 2 provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March through to 30th September, 2023, including any changes requested within the report.

The report set out any requested changes to the 2023/24 and future years' Capital Programme.

The report noted the current approved Programme of £129.298m, but it was important to note that this was unlikely to be delivered and slippage was requested of £18.801m. Schemes would be closely monitored over the coming months, and it was anticipated that further slippage requests would be made in future reports.

Due to the current financial situation, the Council's Capital Programme had undergone a review. The report requested changes that would release funding back into the Council's reserves, capital receipts and other sources of capital funding to ensure finances were more sustainable and the Capital Programme was deliverable. It was proposed to remove some uncommitted schemes and vire money to help mitigate future years' revenue pressures as shown in the table below.

Funding Source	£'000
Reserves	2,174
Capital Receipts	500
General Capital Funding	2,450
Borrowing	400
Revenue Contribution to Capital	21
Total	5,545

The Chair queried why £400k had been uncommitted to the Electric Vehicle Replacement Scheme. In reply, the Operational Manager advised that was related to funding that had not been committed during the year, and as a part of the Council's review which highlighted that that money was no longer required and therefore could be used to mitigate some of the financial pressures within the revenue budget. In terms of the delivery of electric vehicles, that was part of a wider strategic review that was being undertaken by the Council.

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Councillor A. Ernest asked for further detail regarding overspends to the Transport for Wales bus stop improvements programme and the bus infrastructure programme. He also referred to an additional £50k required for the Belle Vue community scheme. In response, the Operational Manager stated that the queries would need to be taken away and further detail provided via email.

Councillor J. Protheroe referred to the household refuse recycling centre for Llandow and attempts to find a new site. Councillor Protheroe queried why the carry forward had been reduced by £750k and what were the current plans for finding a new site. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that in terms of the overall budget of £1.95m that was the estimated cost to deliver the new project for a new recycling site at Llandow. At present, the Council had been unable to find an appropriate site but resurfacing work had begun to improve vehicle access to the current recycling site at Llandow and further resurfacing work would continue. The Operational Manager added that in terms of the budget of £1.95m, £1.2m had been slipped into the next financial year. The £750k remained in the current budget for this year which meant that no actual money had been taken out of the budget, but there had been a reprofiling. Therefore, it was likely that the current year's budget would have to be carried forward into the next financial year.

Councillor M. Hooper referred to the budget capital spend for the City Deal and queried whether there was any more detail regarding the difference between the projected and actual spend. In addition, Councillor Hooper stated that when the budget of £129m had been set inflation was at a lower level so he queried the impact that increased inflation had on the Council's Capital Programme. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that in relation to the City Deal the information within the report reflected a reprofiling which had been advised by the City of Cardiff Council which managed that budget area. Further information was available, and the Operational Manager stated that this would be sent via email. In terms of the impact of inflationary pressures, the Operational Manager stated there would have been some loss of value, particularly in relation to the costs associated with the construction industry and that would have had an impact on the volume of work that the Council could undertake. The Operational Manager stated that she would take the query away and undertake an assessment and provide further information in due course. The Chair also added that a report regarding the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in the New Year.

Councillor Ernest referred to the minutes of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal stating that these could be in more detail and the Chair stated that Councillor Ernest's comments would be noted.

The Chair commented that it was not always clear why a programme or scheme had been delayed or slipped so it would be helpful if future reports contained greater information, including occasions where there had been a budget overspend.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made on delivering the 2023/24 Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, as shown in the attached Appendix 1, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the use of delegated authority within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.8 and detailed within the body of the report from paragraph 2.7 be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Committee, as detailed in the attached Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (4) T H A T the changes to the 2023/24 and future years' Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.3 to 2.7 and detailed within the body of the report from paragraph 2.16 onwards, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

645 QUARTER 2 REVENUE MONITORING 2023/24 (DEH) –

The table below sets out the Revised Budget by Directorate:

Directorate	Amended Budget 2023/24 £000's	Projected Outturn 2023/24 £000's	Variance £000's	Unplanned Use of Reserves £000's	Residual Variance 2023/24 £000's	Use of Reserves 2023/24 £000's
Schools	114,239	114,410	171	171	0	8,921
Learning and Skills	14,050	14,671	621	621	0	1,718
Social Services	85,260	93,529	8,269	5,884	2,385	9,912
Environment and Housing	31,809	33,009	1,200	0	1,200	295
Corporate Resources	17,081	16,781	-300	0	-300	519
Place	3,401	3,493	92	92	0	485
Policy	30,678	27,393	-3,285	0	-3,285	-42
Use of Reserves	-2,096	-2,096	0	0	0	-2,096
Total	294,422	301,190	6,768	6,768	0	19,712
Housing Revenue Account	15,538	15,538	0	0	0	0
Adjusted Total	309,960	316,728	6,768	6,768	0	19,712

The revenue position for 2023/24 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures, with increasing demand in respect of Children's and Adults' Social Care and significant increases in the cost of placements and care packages, Support for Additional Learning Needs continued to be an area of significant pressure within Learning and Skills. The Council was also experiencing continued inflationary pressures in respect of School Transport. Across services inflationary

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pressures were also being experienced in respect of pay, most notably where market forces were being utilised and for the funding gap between provision for the 2023/24 pay award and the likely pay award for 2023/24.

The Council had identified a number of steps to be taken in year to help mitigate this emerging overspend and safeguard reserves, this included tighter controls on expenditure and recruitment and a review of the Capital Programme. The Corporate Resources Directorate had identified a potential underspend of £300k to be offset against emerging overspends and there was a projected underspend of £1m against Council Tax income due to the projected collection of arrears, new properties, changes in allowances and premiums on empty homes.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set for 2023/24 this included a target of £2.75m for schools and £4.628m of Corporate savings. The progress against these savings targets was reflected in the Appendix and are summarised in the table below.

Directorate	Target	Projected	% Achieved	Mitigation	Mitigation Achieved %	Shortfall	Shortfall %
	£'000s	£'000s		£'000s		£'000s	£'000s
Policy	1,615	1,615	100%	-	0%	-	0%
Resources	582	331	57%	250	43%	1	0%
Neighbourhood and Housing	1,000	640	64%	40	4%	320	32%
Learning and skills	564	383	68%	-	0%	181	32%
Social Services	681	556	82%	-	0%	125	18%
Place	265	173	65%	-	0%	92	35%
Total	4,707	3,698	79%	290	6%	719	15%

Projected transfers to and from reserves are set out in the table below.

As at	Balance 01/04/2023	Capital Funding	Planned Transfer (from) reserves	Planned Transfer to reserves	Unplanned Drawdown from Reserves	Estimated Balance 31/03/2024
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
General Fund	11,523	-	- 496	0	- 171	10,856
Insurance	4,877	-	0	0	0	4,877
Service Reserves	22,521	- 672	- 6,329	42	- 6,666	8,896
Risk and Smoothing Reserves	29,802	- 3,276	- 3,966	0	-	22,560
Capital	17,726	- 10,331	0	403	-	7,798
Schools	7,254	-	-	0	- 6,500	754

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Housing Revenue Account	16,486	- 15,537	0	0	0	949
Total	110,190	- 29,816	- 10,791	445	- 13,337	56,690

The Chair referred to the £850k overspend in relation to pot holes and highway patching and asked why that had arisen. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport provided some background around the status of the Highway Asset report undertaken in 2019. That report had indicated that the Council required £3.5m per annum to maintain highways. A current review of that was underway, and it was expected for the annual figure to rise to somewhere in the region of £5m. That had meant that the costs associated with maintaining the highways had increased. The price to repair a pothole was currently the same as was paid in 2021, but as the Council's Capital budget had been restricted, there were fewer capital schemes being undertaken. That meant that the number of potholes was more challenging. It was likely that the end of year budget overspend would be in the region in £1.5m. Previous overspends had been managed through the use of reserves, but as reserves were reducing, the overspend would continue for future years unless the budget was increased.

Councillor M. Hooper queried that in relation to pot holes, was there not an underspend last year. Councillor Hooper also queried whether all efficiencies for the current financial year had been identified and also if the Council had put restrictions on staff recruitment and he asked how many vacancies the Council was carrying which would not be filled. In reply, the Operational Manager stated that in relation to the pot hole underspend that was reported last year, that related to the Council's Capital Programme for resurfacing work and the timing of when works could be undertaken as adverse weather played a key part as to when works could be undertaken and how long the resurfacing treatment lasted for. Therefore, money would be slipped into the next year to undertake work in the summer as opposed to the winter. The Committee noted that generally most of the Council's resurfacing budget was spent by October time, but some money was kept in case of emergencies. In terms of efficiency savings, the Officer stated that savings had either been mitigated against additional sources of income or offset by reserves with an expectation that savings would be achieved in full during 2024/25. Regarding staff vacancies, the Operational Manager stated that the numbers would be sent via email. The Officers added that there had not been a hold on staff recruitment but there was more scrutiny and assessment when undertaking a recruitment exercise. That meant that the Council was holding more vacant post than normal.

Councillor J. Protheroe queried the rationale around how budget savings were identified. In response, the Operational Manager clarified that the Council tried to avoid setting broad saving targets as there had been difficulty in delivering full savings in the past, so the Council had adopted an approach where by Directorates are asked to put forward proposals based on a series of percentages of the budgets. Progress on meeting savings would be regularly reviewed at a Corporate level, with other saving opportunities identified.

Councillor V.P. Driscoll referred to ash dieback and queried whether the Council had sufficient reserves to address the worst-case scenario. The Operational Manager

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stated that it had been recognised that the reserves were not sufficient and so a base budget would be required to address issues going forward.

Councillor E. Penn referred to road resurfacing work and the level of budget in 2021 which was the same as the current budget and he queried if the work undertaken came under the same specification. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport confirmed that the specifications were the same which related to the depth and width of potholes which required attention.

There being no further comments or queries, the Committee

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2023/24 Revenue Budget be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

646 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2023/24 (DP) –

The performance report presented the Council's progress at Quarter 2 (Q2) (1st April to 30th September, 2023) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2023/24) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Due to current capacity challenges within the Corporate Performance Team, the format for this Quarter's (Q2) Annual Delivery Plan Monitoring Report had been revised temporarily, to enable the Council to continue to provide Elected Members with an overview of progress in delivering its Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the remit of each Scrutiny Committee.

The presentation appended at Appendix A to the report provided a summary of progress against the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2023/24 as aligned to the remit of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Q2 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance. Upon consideration, the Scrutiny Committee was recommended to refer their views and any recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

Councillor M. Hooper asked for more information regarding the work of the Officer to support the wards of Buttrills, Gibbonsdown and Court. Councillor Hooper referred to the introduction of the 20mph speed limit and asked what had the Council done to ensure its staff were adhering to the new limits. He also queried whether the Council was using its soft power to encourage taxis and bus services to remain at the limits. With regard to the Officer to support the 3 wards, the Director of Place stated that the Officer had only been in post for a few weeks, so were in the initial stage of making connections and understanding the needs of the areas. More information would be sent via email.

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In response to the queries regarding 20mph speed limits, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that enforcement of 20mph zones was the responsibility of the Police but there were soft measures that the Council employed such as signs and speed humps. Welsh Government guidance regarding enforcement was fairly new, so practices were still “bedding in”. In terms of ensuring that Council staff complied with the limits, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport advised that the Council had a policy that staff needed to adhere to. She stated that any employee in charge of a Council vehicle was required to comply with the speed limits. If any person had concerns regarding the speed of a Council vehicle, then these could be reported via the appropriate channels. In addition, Council vehicles were fitted with trackers and periodic reports were produced so the Council would review information when available. With regard to buses and taxis, there were very little powers that the Council possessed, and the issue of enforcement was one for the Police.

Councillor A. Ernest queried progress of the Cogan Interchange. In response, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport clarified that Transport for Wales were currently undertaking the initial WelTag assessment work. As that work progressed there would be opportunity for community engagement and involvement in relation to any specific proposal for that location and in relation to creating better links to other parts of Penarth and the wider area.

Councillor J. Protheroe referred to the work being undertaken with E-ON and she stated that she would like more clarification of what that work was. In reply, the Director of Place stated that the query related to funding provided for private dwelling to retrofit green heating and energy solutions and was dependant on income of the household. Councillor Protheroe also raised the issue of community energy and was advised that the Council was developing a local area energy plan with colleagues within the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal on a regional basis and that plan would look at how energy was used across the Vale of Glamorgan and also how that would look for the future. Consultants had been recruited to look at the plan in more detail so work was ongoing. In addition, the Council was also reviewing its Local Development Plan which contained programmes around decarbonisation which would also reflect schemes to improve carbon capture within both old and new buildings. Therefore, consultants had also been employed to identify best practice and to outline future opportunities. It had been identified that one of the few Councils in the UK to include decarbonisation within the Local Development Plan was Bath, so the Council was engaging with the same consultants who had undertaken the work for Bath Council.

In reply to Councillor Perry’s comments regarding the use of narrow roadways and agency/emergency vehicles parking on footways, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that Welsh Government were currently looking at proposals around giving Councils the powers to enforce penalties for parking on pavements causing an obstruction. The outcome of the Welsh Government proposals and consultation were therefore awaited. In terms of road design, the Council would use narrow roads for new housing developments but there was insufficient money to redesign the existing road network. With regard to phone use and driving a vehicle, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that

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that was illegal so that would be a Police matter. However, the Council would be involved in road safety initiatives in conjunction with the Police.

Councillor Hooper queried concerns regarding the water quality at Ogmore Beach and he queried what measures had been considered in ensuring the safety of bathers and whether that was something that should be highlighted within the report. Councillor Hooper also queried the complexities of UK Government funding schemes and particularly the Levelling Up bid and the ability of a Council to meet deadlines. In reply, in relation to the water quality at Ogmore Beach, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that the position in the report reflected the end of Quarter 3 so it was likely that it would be an emerging risk within the Quarter 3 report. The quality of water was also the responsibility of Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Water and the Council had an interest in ensuring that the water quality was as good as it could be, particularly from a tourism perspective. Therefore, the Council would be required to place signs in the area advising of the water quality issues and the Council would also look to identify what had caused the poor quality readings and to also work with the other agencies to ensure improvements to the water quality.

Councillor Ernest referred to staff challenges and the difficulties in attracting officers with the appropriate qualifications and experience in order to fill some long term vacancies. In reply, the Director of Place stated that this was not unique to the Vale of Glamorgan and other Local Authorities had been struggling with filling a number of vacancies. Regarding his Directorate, it had become more difficult to attract university graduates and that would be linked to the rate of remuneration offered by Councils and the impact of the budgetary pressures facing the public sector. In order to overcome some of the issues the Council had responded, for example with regard to the challenges to recruit heavy goods vehicle drivers, the Council had increased the pay offer. Within the Planning Department, the Council had employed students who were required to undertake a year out during study and that meant that when they were coming to the end of their courses it encouraged those students to come back to the Council when their studies were complete. However, the issues were complex and the reasons extremely varied.

There being no further comments or queries, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Quarter 2 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2023/24 commitments as aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives within the remit of the Committee be noted.

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

Reason for recommendations

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