

**Matter which the Chair has decided is urgent by need of requiring Scrutiny Committee consideration in line with timescales relevant to the Council's 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan consultation and approval process.**

## **HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **BUDGET WORKING PARTY MEETING**

Notes of the Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

Present: Councillors J.E. Charles, N.C. Thomas, G. Ball, C.A. Cave, R. Fisher, and J.M. Norman.

Also Present: E. Barker (Principal Accountant), J. Bennett (Head of Adult Services and Vale Alliance), L. Carver (Director of Social Services), G. Jones (Operational Manager for Accountancy), O. Khan (Graduate Accountant), I. McMillan (Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding) and A. Rudman (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer).

(i) Apology for Absence-

This was received from R. Evans (Head of Children and Young People Services).

(ii) Update on the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee Budget Working Party Meeting –

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, the Committee considered a reference from Cabinet in relation to the Refresh of the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2024/25. Following debate on the item and a recommendation moved by Councillor Cave, the Committee recommended that arrangements be made for a working party meeting to be held between Finance Officer(s) and Members of the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, as confirmed at the meeting, i.e. Councillors Charles, N.C. Thomas, Ball, Cave, Fisher and Norman, to meet to receive additional insight and understanding of the significant and increased spending for the Social Services Directorate, identified savings, as well as future transformational opportunities for Members to better scrutinise future spending, with it being noted that any issues / recommendations be referred back to the Committee for consideration and that Cabinet be informed accordingly.

A meeting was subsequently scheduled on behalf of the Chair of the Committee and the Chair began proceedings by thanking all participants for attending.

Councillor Cave then reiterated her inspiration behind calling for the meeting following a task and finish working group previously undertaken by the Homes &

Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. Following which, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer advised, for clarity, that the establishment of a Task and Finish Working Group was a separate process to the meeting at hand.

Therefore, the meeting had been called independently, discussion at which could be summarised as follows:

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<p>Councillor Norman – With regards to children in care, how many children were now placed in foster care outside of their own home and therefore not with relatives?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that there were currently 348 children looked after by the Local Authority, however some were placed with relatives. The Director further added that 83 young people were being provided with support but resided with a relative or friend of the family and 41 were residing with their parents with relevant care orders in place.</p> <p>In addition, Councillor N. Thomas noted that all 348 children had some form of cost involved in their care irrelevant of the form of support provided.</p>
<p>As a supplementary question, Councillor Norman then asked if officers had any information with regards to the length of terms of care expected?</p>	<p>In reply, the Director of Social Services advised that he did not have the specific information to hand, however the Council’s Corporate Parenting Panel regularly received a list of placements for each child looked after by the Local Authority and there were typically between 12-16 children at any given time placed in residential care which incurred high costs. Fostering care also incurred costs, however the cost for external placements was significantly higher.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – In referring to the recent 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 Cabinet report, Council Cave noted an increase in spending for the Social Services Directorate of 31% which was an increase from 29% in the previous financial year, however an increase of 6% since 2015/16 in the pre-Covid period which was at 25%. Councillor Cave then questioned whether the 6% increase for Social Services was considered by officers</p>	<p>The Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that the 6% figure quoted was in relation to the overall Council budget figures and, in response to a subsequent question from Councillor Cave as to how much of the 6% sat within the Social Services Directorate, advised that identified cost pressures for the Directorate were formulated via two approaches. The first approach being previous historical forecasts and the second being an increase in demographic pressures</p>

<p>when preparing the mid-term financial plan?</p>	<p>which had not in the past always been directly funded. For example, the forecasted £650k submitted within the latest proposals had been formulated based on demographic projections in relation to residents over the age of 85.</p> <p>The Director also added that increases were not directly related to an increase in need but also an increase in the number of persons involved and the £650k ringfenced sum mostly related to individuals over the age of 85 when care services were more likely required. Since 2011 the Council had predicted the cost around the £650k mark and the Directorate worked with accountancy to establish the figure.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Was the 6% increase in proportion to the Social Services increased spending?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that the 6% was in the relative share of the overall Council budget and that the 6% increase was not specifically and only in relation to the Social Services Directorate but It was necessary for the Council to predict Social Services' cost pressures. However, it was important to note that the Directorate had been on budget for the previous 12 years. The increase for the Social Services Directorate reflected a national picture across the UK and the Social Services budget was taking a larger cut of the overall Council budget however, the Social Services Directorate related to statutory services and spending and therefore it had been necessary to cut services across other Directorates in the Council in order to maintain services provided to the most vulnerable of residents. The Council had also been making cuts over the last 10 years.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – In recognising that the Social Services Directorate spend would have a ripple effect and impact on other areas of Council spending, Councillor Cave queried whether the £650k ringfenced sum was additional funding drawn down from Welsh Government?</p>	<p>In response, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that theoretically, the ageing population in the Vale of Glamorgan was reflected in the demographic data that Welsh Government used to calculate the settlement that the Council received. Welsh Government would have a limited</p>

	<p>amount of funding available that the Vale of Glamorgan would have a calculated cut of, however this sadly would not cover all of the funding the Council needed. Also, the cut that was received from the Council was also subject to inflationary pressures.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Agreeing that the financial climate was complex and having experienced the national pandemic as well as being aware of the ageing population in the Vale of Glamorgan, was there any way the Council could make forecasting of budgets better?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that the Directorate had brought several reports to both Scrutiny and Cabinet which set out the financial climate for the Committee, for example, recent reports on domiciliary care and market stability. At the times that the reports were presented the Director had advised that a number of reports collectively set a very stark scene.</p> <p>In addition, over the last two financial years the Council had experienced a 10% increase in inflation. Three quarters of the funding available to the Social Services Directorate was spent on care sourced from external providers and the remaining quarter was used to provide necessary staff. It was important to note that with inflation increasing 10% per year, over the last two years that was an approximate increase of 20% but sadly the budget available to the Directorate had not increased to match inflation, which was related, in the main, to day-to-day cost of living items such as food costs and increasing utility costs.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – In referring to the aforementioned splits in Directorate funding, Councillor Cave queried whether the three quarters or the quarter was hit more by the rise in inflation?</p>	<p>In reply, the Director advised that both were impacted. The cost of services the Council provided internally were more expensive than what it was able to source externally because of the necessary additional costs around staffing such as pension requirements and meeting the real living wage. As an aside, it was also worth noting that by meeting those requirements there was also a difference in the quality of the service provided. The provision of internal services provided an essential</p>

	safety net on the vent of the failure of an external provider.
<p>Councillor Cave – It was acknowledged that the settlement that the Council received from Welsh Government was not enough and that the Council did not have immediate control of how funds were provided to the Council from Welsh Government, however, it was concerning that in the Member Development Session offered to Members in relation to finance, the Chief Executive stated that no one fully understood the funding formula.</p>	<p>In reply, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that the Council could follow the formula through in order to establish its expected settlement figure through previous data and forecasts, however, the adjustments required in the pot of money made available to the Council was often where there could be a lack of clarity.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – With a lack of clarity beyond 2024/25 it was very difficult for Members to scrutinise, and it was therefore imperative that the Council remained focused on forward planning. Therefore, was there anything that Members could do to improve the financial forecasting in the short and medium term?</p> <p>Councillor Cave then gave an example of a budgeting example for Devon Council which provided the said Council with a buffer for future eventualities.</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that officers did predict years in advance as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan process but what had not been possible to do was to predict the excessive inflationary pressures.</p> <p>In addition, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that there were multiple budgets under consideration across the Social Services Directorate for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and that these were aligned to predicted settlements to be received from Welsh Government. What was clear to the Council was that there were significant pressures in Education, Social Services and Homelessness that were not enough to cover related services in full. The report provided to the Scrutiny Committee stated what the Council was doing for the 2024/25 financial year, but also future years as well, which was why there were references to transformational approaches.</p> <p>In addition, Councillor Thomas added that the Council did undertake modelling work to safeguard against calculated eventualities and the Director of Corporate Resources would provide annual population data to be used in the modelling work which documented that the Vale of Glamorgan area had a higher number of elderly people. What</p>

	<p>could not be predicted was external global factors that were contributing to the current cost-of-living crisis. Inflationary consideration had to be reactive, but the Council's predictive work was very strong.</p>
<p>Councillor Norman – How often was population data from Welsh Government updated in order for it to make its settlement calculations?</p>	<p>The Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that Welsh Government drew data from various sources, for example the National Census, but also from information provided to it from the Council itself such as outturn figures. All the collective information was assessed by Welsh Government on an annual basis and the Council also had the opportunity to verify its own data before being finalised. Population data used by Welsh Government was not always the latest information available so Welsh Government would often update periodically on certain statistics, for example data from their population subgroup. Welsh Government would look at the impact of data across the Local Authority to ensure a transparent process and finance officers would track progress in order for the Council to understand why there were changes in financial figures. It was important to note that the Council wished to maintain a steady funding stream rather than have large fluctuations in order to maintain consistency.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – What were the Directorate's priorities for the next year and how had those priorities been established, as well as how would the Council deliver against the priorities?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that the priorities for the Directorate were as per those set out in the Director's Annual Report that had previously been presented to the Scrutiny Committee and continued to be so on an annual basis. The highest priority for the Directorate at the current time was the stability for children looked after by the Local Authority and child protection as the sustained increases in demand were outstripping the Council's ability to respond.</p>

	<p>In relation to Adult Services, an increase in demand was also obvious but this primarily related to an increase in the numbers of older persons residing in the Vale of Glamorgan as well as mental health support. The Head of Adult Services then added that for Adult Services, the increases in demand were due to more complex needs being identified and therefore individuals having to access a variety of services all at the same time, and therefore it was not just the sheer numbers but also the complexity of needs to help people to stay at home. But individuals were also relying heavily on unpaid carers.</p> <p>In response, Councillor Cave advised of her own personal experience of caring for a relative and suggested that, in addition to the lack of support generally given by the council, a first step for people might be a booklet or information leaflet outlining what the council and others offered in terms of help and support.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Did officers think that there were specific reasons why the numbers of young people as well as adults requiring mental health support had increased?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that there was a very long list of possible reasons why a young person's mental health could be affected. Additional external factors by example being county lines and online exploitation. The Director also added that there appeared to be a direct link in relation to socio-economic factors and the general cost of living. It was now common for both parents to have to work in the family home in order to afford general living costs and therefore it could be argued that children were receiving less parenting in the home.</p> <p>In addition, the Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding added that there was a much greater awareness within the general public on how to report concerns with regard to a child or young person and therefore this increased public awareness contributed to the increase in the number of</p>

	<p>referrals to the Children and Young People Services.</p> <p>The Director also noted that the national pandemic and lock down requirements had a significant impact on young people who lived through that period and the full psychological impact was not yet known.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Were there any works ongoing to bridge the gap for young people’s development to prevent future damage, e.g., a repair programme being offered in schools.</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that the matter of a young person’s development needs following the impact of the national pandemic was very complicated as often the young person’s needs were not just related to a delay in development but also other health and care matters. Each individual young person would be unique and each young person’s skills would vary. For example, although a young person may not have had many opportunities to develop their in-person skills, their online skills would have progressed.</p> <p>In addition, the Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding advised that, since the national pandemic, Welsh Government had given funding to schools to support pupils to catch up post covid. In terms of issues that were a factor at school, it was quickly apparent that it was not simply just an issue of attendance but also developmental needs. It was clear that the Council had not yet seen the full impact of the pandemic for young people however, the service had already documented an increase in referrals to the Children and Young People’s Service.</p>
<p>Councillor N. Thomas – Have the costs and work put into preventative care for looked after children increased in the hope that more low-level intervention is required before children are submitted to care?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that there had been an increase in preventative efforts however, it was recognised that there was more work to be done. It was also important to have the necessary qualified staff to deliver services and it was acknowledged that how much the Council paid would attract the right candidates.</p>



	<p>The Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding also advised that the Senior Management Team within Children and Young People’s Services was looking at best practice models across the country. Other practice methods were being looked into in order to ‘invest to save’ however, this was a very difficult task and a report on the proposed Corporate Strategy for Children who Need Care and Support 2024-28 was scheduled for the next Committee agenda which would include more information.</p> <p>In addition, the Operational Manager for Accountancy added that relevant cost pressures would be set out within the expected report and that related works would be funded in full and this was now a permanent financial change.</p> <p>Councillor Cave acknowledged the difficulty in trying to install preventative measures at the same time as dealing with immediate needs.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Was the Council engaging with university students in order to recruit and train relevant staff into the Directorate?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that 18 university students were sent to foundation courses this year, but officers were not able to say how many would convert into qualified staff.</p>
<p>Councillor Charles (Chair) – Could the Council improve services at all by spending less money and if so, why has this not been undertaken before?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that savings proposals had been set out in the savings plan which in some cases resulted in better services and were cheaper than in previous years. By way of example, a number of unaccompanied asylum children were currently looked after by the authority and homed in the Cardiff area, so the Vale of Glamorgan Council was looking to purchase its own properties so providing the accommodation would be cheaper in the long run.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services also added that developments in technology and equipment availability were being</p>

	<p>explored to ascertain if technology could reduce care costs, for example, reducing carer numbers from 2 down to 1, if necessary, equipment and technology was available to provide support.</p>
<p>Councillor Charles (Chair) – Would it be possible to use ex-service accommodation in the St. Athan area to house the aforementioned unaccompanied asylum children?</p>	<p>In support of the Chair's question, Councillor Norman advised that 30 Syrians/Afghan families were now moving into the area.</p>
<p>Councillor Charles (Chair) – In light of frequent and various requests received by Councillors for information on where relatives could go for support in relation to caring for elderly relatives, it was suggested that an informative booklet or leaflet be produced by the Council.</p> <p>In support of the Chair's suggestion, Councillor Cave provided an example of a rural village who had two local residents support the other residents in the community. One person provided maintenance support around the home and the other provided personal care needs. Therefore, if an individual in the community had a problem and they required support then all other members of the community knew where to go to access support.</p>	<p>The Head of Adult Services advised that micro-enterprises, as exemplified by Councillor Cave, were often instigated by the local community in order to access low level care which was then expanded upon by the local authority at a later date. Examples were evidenced within Flintshire Council, Powys Council and Pembrokeshire Council.</p> <p>In response to Councillor Norman's subsequent question as to how micro-enterprises were funded, the Head of Adult Services advised that the enterprises were either funded privately by local residents or funded in lieu of the care sourced by the local authority. What had worked well in previous communities was a community connector programme whereby a single person was employed to implement and source care if no community support was in place.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Would the Council be looking to run a pilot for a community connector programme?</p>	<p>Officers are currently looking into the approach and had already taken some steps forward with the 'Your Choice' model. The Council endorsed a community connector programme approach however it would need to be undertaken in a timely manner. In response to a subsequent offer from Councillor Cave that a pilot be run in their local community, the Director advised that at the current time, there were no resources available to undertake a pilot.</p>

	<p>In response, the Head of Adult Services advised of a scheme called Solva Care whereby an individual was subsidised £12 per week by the local community and Councillor Cave subsequently offered to consult with the Head of Adult Services further to explore establishing a future pilot with the scheme.</p> <p>In addition, the Head of Adult Services apprised the meeting on the various steps of care support and advised that community care in the first instance was the primary preventative care route which would be followed thereon by local authority support and then following local authority support onto health care. However, the move to health care could be very difficult and therefore the Council was looking to grow its efforts in relation to preventative care.</p>
<p>Councillor Norman – In relation to school transport fuel, staffing and demand increases for young people with care needs, how was the Council managing this?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that transport was one area the Council was focussing on for savings for the next financial year, the Council had its own vehicles but also sourced ad-hoc contracted services. There were potential savings, but these needed to be explored further and would be reported upon via the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>In addition, Councillor Cave advised that more joined up thinking across Council Directorates was relevant, e.g., Planning Committee approving schools but no highways in place which had therefore made it vital for parents to use the local bus service.</p>
<p>Councillor Charles – Could officers provide further clarification on the meaning of ‘autism satellite provision’ as stated in previous reports please?</p>	<p>The Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that the Chair’s question related to a cost pressure within the Education Directorate and referred to a specialised unit within the mainstream school setting to support pupils with additional and often complex needs. The Council had already established units within schools in the</p>

	Vale of Glamorgan however, an additional need was identified which, if met could ensure that the Council could provide better educational outcomes.
Councillor Fisher – In relation to expedient growth in young people with complex educational needs, were officers aware of the rate of growth?	The Director of Social Services advised that education colleagues would be better qualified to answer the Councillor’s question rather than themselves however, for a child on the autistic spectrum then the Council would support them however best they could if the family had in fact decided to seek support. It was recognised that early diagnosis could help to prevent future and more in-depth contact with the Social Services Directorate.
Councillor Fisher – How was the Council avoiding the need for the parents of an autistic young person from staying home due to the child’s related behaviour?	The Director of Social Services advised that Ysgol y Deri actively supported its young people to stay in mainstream education but would have to defer to Education colleagues for a more detailed response.  In support, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that there was an established demographic growth for the support provided at Ysgol y Deri and the Council currently allowed for 40 pupils per year group, which was already covered in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The Council had already established a need for a new building and the Learning and Skills Directorate were exploring locations to establish new units as not to impact mainstream education.
Councillor Charles – As a supplementary question, the Chair asked officers why there had been an increase in the number of young people requiring additional learning support?	In reply, the Director of Social Services advised that there were suspected correlations between more young people surviving premature births which would not have been the case historically and also the fact that parents would seek a medical diagnosis much earlier when identifying behaviours of concern. It was recognised that receiving an early diagnosis and relevant medication could make a huge

	<p>difference to the life of the young person.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – How could the Council capitalise on what it was already aware of and use the advances in technology to be more forward thinking?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that the Council had already made great developments in relation to Telecare Services and, although there was room for further technological development, the Council was leading the way in relation to this area of care support which had already been reported to Committee. The Council also needed to consider the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) and the Head of Adult Services was already meeting with external organisations to explore future developments.</p> <p>In addition, the Head of Adult Services advised that they were in regular communications with the Council's Head of Digital Communications in relation to digital developments, for example, ways to minimise the amount of time required for trainee social workers to be completing tasks in front of a computer freeing more time to deliver hands on care.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – Could the Council undertake an innovation day to invite organisations to meet in order to expand the Council's knowledge of external services and expertise available and to ensure that the Council was being seen to be innovating?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that the Head of Adult Services and themselves were already using connections to hear about future developments as soon as possible through the ADSS Cymru network and the Council was already making innovative efforts.</p> <p>The Council was a unique business in that it was never in a position to stop services to focus entirely on new areas of work and therefore innovation was required alongside day-to-day operations. The Council always strived to implement new work alongside day-to-day operations, but the services provided to vulnerable individuals would always take priority.</p> <p>In response to subsequent comments from Councillors Cave and Norman in</p>

	<p>relation to using Elected Members more as a local resource as well as local voluntary sector groups, the Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding advised that officers were already presenting to the Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee in the near future on the work undertaken in partnership between the Social Services Directorate and the Voluntary Sector. The Council was continuing to pursue relationships with the Voluntary Sector in order to be more innovative in its work. The Council was also encouraging the Voluntary Sector to collaborate with the Council in order to present new ideas the Voluntary Sector may have.</p>
<p>Councillor Fisher – Was the Council making any efforts to help individuals who were working prior to the national pandemic that had not yet been in a position to return to work?</p>	<p>In reply, the Director of Social Services advised that the Council had focussed on its workforce in order to ensure that any physical or psychological needs were met through the Occupational Health Service.</p>
<p>Councillor Fisher – Taking note of the fact that the Council had reserves in place, how much of the reserves were ringfenced to provide social care?</p>	<p>The Director of Social Services advised that there was a Social Services reserve which the Council would be relying upon. In addition, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that the Social Services reserves were historically reduced to £10m and for the 2024/25 financial year new proposals were being prepared to reallocate additional funds for the Social Services Directorate due to the volatility of service demand.</p>
<p>Councillor Cave – In reference to the 18<sup>th</sup> of January Cabinet report which referred to ‘demand management’ the Councillor requested further context on what the term meant and how it could be achieved?</p>	<p>In reply, the Director of Social Services advised that the term was an umbrella term and related to the Council managing the numbers of people approaching the Council and requesting services and the Council subsequently signposting individuals to other services without adding additional pressure on the local authority’s resources. The term also referred to the Council ensuring that it did not over provide its services</p>

	<p>as to be detrimental to current service users.</p> <p>In response to Councillor Cave's subsequent comment that the term meant the Council being smarter in the way it directed services; the Director advised that the term covered a whole range of matters.</p>
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At the end of discussions, the Chair thanked all parties present for their time and stated that the meeting had been really useful for Members to gain a more indepth understanding and asked the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer to confirm next steps.

In response, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer advised that minutes of the meeting would be provided to officers and the Chair for clearance prior to the minutes being presented to the next meeting of the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee in February for consideration. This would ensure that the entire Committee had the opportunity to consider the meeting minutes in line with the Corporate Budget consultation currently underway and subsequent future approval by Cabinet and Full Council.

The Chair then raised the suggestion of having further meetings of the Working Party, on a quarterly basis, for a maximum of 2 hours, involving a selection of Members on the Scrutiny Committee, to which the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer advised that the suggestion would be added as a recommendation within the minutes for the entire Committee to consider and decide upon.

## RECOMMENDED

- 1) T H A T the minutes of the budget working party meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2024 be noted.
- 2) T H A T an informative booklet or leaflet outlining what the council and others offered in terms of help and support be produced by the Council.
- 3) T H A T an Innovation Day be arranged and hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- 4) T H A T a Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee Budget Working Group be established to meet on a quarterly basis.

## Reasons for recommendations

- 1) Having regard to the discussions held at the working party meeting and to inform the wider Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee

Members.

- 2) To support elected members in dealing with enquiries received from the relatives of elderly individuals requiring support.
- 3) To invite external organisations that are making developments in technology and equipment, which may be used to support care services, to meet collectively to expand the Council's knowledge of external services and expertise available.
- 4) To provide further and more regular opportunity for select members of the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee to receive additional insight and understanding of the significant and increased spending for the Social Services Directorate, identified savings, as well as future transformational opportunities for Members to better scrutinise future spending, with it being noted that any issues / recommendations be referred back to the Committee for consideration.