

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 9th December, 2020.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#)

Present: Councillor Mrs. S.D. Perkes (Chairman); Councillor Ms. J. Aviet (Vice-Chairman); Councillors J.C. Bird, Ms. B.E. Brooks, Mrs. C.A. Cave, Miss. A.M. Collins, Mrs. S.M. Hanks, Mrs. R. Nugent-Finn and A.C. Parker.

Also present: Councillor B.T. Gray (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health), Ms. B. Hunt (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative) and Ms. H. Smith (Tenant Working Group Representative),

252 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chairman read the following statement:

“May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

253 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor L.O. Rowlands, Mrs. W. Davies, Mrs. G. Doyle and Mr. A. Raybould (Tenant Working Group Representatives).

254 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 11th November, 2020 be approved as a correct record.

255 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

256 ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORT (REF) –

Cabinet, on 30th November, 2020 had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration following it being noted by Cabinet and agreed for Cabinet to continue to receive six monthly reports on work carried out to improve Corporate Safeguarding arrangements and the effectiveness of relevant Policies.

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The Head of Housing and Building Services presented the report to the Committee, stating that the Council had a corporate responsibility to ensure that there were effective arrangements in place for safeguarding children and adults who required specific Council services. He explained the Annual Report 2019/20 provided an overview of the Corporate Safeguarding Group work plan and other safeguarding activities taking place across the Local Authority. He also informed the Committee that due to the COVID-19 pandemic this report combined both the annual report and mid-term update usually presented to the committee.

The Head of Housing and Building Services led the Committee through the highlights of the report that fell under the Committee's remit:

- A set of new national safeguarding procedures were launched in November 2019. They detailed the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners. The procedures were designed to standardise safeguarding practice across all of Wales and between agencies.
- The recommendations to the Corporate Safeguarding Group (CSG) from the Welsh Audit Review in February 2019 looked to strengthen the Corporate Safer Recruitment Policy. This would be monitored through the CSG.
- The Council had implemented an electronic transfer system for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, thereby speeding up the DBS checking process and providing an electronic portal where applicants were able to apply for DBS checks online, allowing the checks to be approved and tracked by the Council and more importantly ensuring that the disclosure outcome would be available in the majority of cases within 24 to 48 hours.
- In July 2018, the Council adopted the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Regional Strategy, with the Structures and measures now in place to monitor that strategy and the overarching objectives agreed. In terms of the VAWDASV Regional Strategy and its outcomes and outputs, during 2019/20 418 MARAC cases were discussed with 145 cases identified by MARAC as repeat ones.
- Safeguarding remained a priority for the Housing team – for example, this continued to be a standard agenda item at most staff meetings with all Housing staff receiving regular training in Safeguarding and related items. The practices, reviews and policies within Housing had also been updated in line with Cardiff and Vale Regional Safeguarding Board.
- In terms of Housing front line staff (such as Building Services or Neighbourhood Management Team), they were regularly provided with training material and had regular discussions about safeguarding practice, with any issues and concerns raised referred back through the Housing Service in order to take them forward.
- The Housing Team had nominated representatives which attend Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings, with the officers involved being trained to help provide a multi-agency response.
- Despite the ongoing challenges with COVID-19 and recurring lockdowns, the Housing Service had still been able to undertake 1,200 telephone welfare checks on vulnerable households to date. The Tenant Profiling project, previously mentioned at committee, would also help to identify

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vulnerable persons and any other potential safeguarding issues which may need closer monitoring, support and intervention.

- During 2019-20, the Housing team submitted a significant number of Multi Agency - and Adult Safeguarding – referral forms (primarily through Housing Solutions and Housing Management and Rents). Such forms were also automatically submitted for persons placed in temporary accommodation.
- The increased homelessness provision had raised issues and concerns over safeguarding which required COVID-19 compliant visits to residents in temporary accommodation by the Housing Solutions team and the provision of ‘floating support’ by the relevant providers. All residents in temporary accommodation initially receive daily phone calls and ‘drop-in’ and substance misuse services have also been provided at some of the hotels used to house residents in temporary accommodation.
- In June 2019 the Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Co-ordinator (DAARC) Service was launched within the Vale of Glamorgan Council. In 2019/20 1,646 Public Protection Notices (PPN's) were shared from South Wales Police to the DAARC Service. This meant that as a Council there was now a single point of contact which could coordinate the appropriate actions and responses and to follow those cases through, ensuring multi agency participation and the commissioning of appropriate services tailored to the particular individual in a ‘holistic’ manner and avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- The Supporting People Team continued to fund ‘target-hardening’ measures for victims of domestic abuse, for example CCTV, intruder alarms, door locks and lighting for 93 properties within the Vale of Glamorgan in 2019/20. This was only carried out if it met the needs of the victim, otherwise the victim would be moved if necessary.
- The local and national trend since March 2020 had been a decrease in reported domestic abuse incidents, but there had been an ongoing regional effort to find safe spaces for such victims such as at Doctor’s Surgeries, Pharmacies and Supermarkets in expectation of a ‘spike’ of such incidents post-COVID-19 or post-lockdown.
- Regarding Anti-Social Behaviour, there had been a rise in such incidents - particularly environmental ones - since March 2020 in various parts of the Vale. During 2019/20 there were a total of 828 referrals made to the Community Safety Team, with one vulnerable adult also referred to the Safeguarding Team. There had been some notable successes with the implementation of a number of Criminal Behaviour and Civil Injunction Orders, as well as the team successfully gaining two partial closure orders to safeguard people within their own homes and to provide support.
- ‘Channel Panel’ was a programme which identified persons vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism in conjunction with Cardiff Council and other partners and which offered such individuals support. In 2019/20 there were no individuals identified within the Vale that needed this support.

Following the report, Councillor Nugent-Finn asked who was the PPN coordinator, and where they were based to which the Head of Housing and Building Services replied that this was Julie Grady who was based under the Safer Vale Team, at Barry Police Station. The Councillor wished to add that from the feedback she had

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received, this was a far more 'slicker' service now and was a step in the right direction. The Councillor also asked about who funded the Target Hardening equipment, which was confirmed as coming from the Housing Support Grant (HSG) via Welsh Government, receiving over £3m worth of funding for the entire HSG Programme. Finally, Councillor Nugent-Finn asked whether Vale staff had the National Safeguarding application on their work phones, to which the Head of Housing and Building Services replied that all council telephones with the Intune application allowed Officers immediate access to the relevant procedures.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health addressed the Committee and wanted to reassure them that the Corporate Safeguarding Group had continued to meet and be active around safeguarding during the pandemic. Officers had continued to find new ways to make sure they kept in contact with vulnerable persons. Hopefully the timings of these reports would now be back on track.

Councillor Aviet asked if the increase in anti-social behaviour was due to persons not obeying COVID-19 rules or other factors. The Head of Housing and Building Services replied that he would forward a report breaking down the types of anti-social behaviour to Members, adding that due to the lockdown and people being confined to their homes this had contributed to an increase in greater nuisance or neighbourhood related anti-social behaviour. The Officer's reply concerning the breakdown of anti-social behaviour figures was echoed and endorsed by the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health.

The Chairman asked if there had been a substantial take up in the services provided at the hotels for those persons in temporary accommodation. The Head of Housing and Building Services replied that the provision of services to such residents - who maybe previously vulnerable and 'surfer surfing' or street homeless - was not just the offer of beds, but rather provided a 'wraparound' service through partners and the Supporting People Team. The Council also looked at and tried to address the root causes of residents' previous homelessness such as substance misuse and/or employability through various avenues of support. The Chairman followed up on this by asking about 'safe spaces' for victims of domestic abuse and if such spaces were available should another lockdown arise. The Head of Housing and Building Services replied that there had been a lot of activity on social media in conjunction with the Safer Vale Team sending out regular tweets on how individuals could access services but a lot more work was needed within this area – for example, with less face to face contact it was more challenging to pick up on issues of domestic abuse. This meant a more concerted effort to pick up on such issues, for example, raising awareness among staff and partners so that victims could raise their issues to a variety of sources. The Chairman requested that further updates be provided to the Committee on the progress of these measures.

There being no further questions, the Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and Cabinet report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Annual Safeguarding Report 2019/20 be noted.

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Reason for recommendation

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

257 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN (IMPROVEMENT PLAN PART 1) 2021-22 (REF) –

Cabinet, on 30th November, 2020 had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee.

The Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer drew Members of the Committee's attention to a mistake within the report regarding the date of the Coronavirus Recovery Strategy – this should read 'September 2020' not 'September 2021' as shown in the report.

The Director of Environment & Housing Services presented the report, stating that the Annual Delivery Plan was the Improvement Plan (Part 1) for 2021-22 and was aligned to the Council's four Well-being Objectives which were:

- To work with and for our communities;
- To support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth;
- To support people at home and in their community;
- To respect, enhance and enjoy our environment.

The report set out how the draft Annual Delivery Plan had been developed, the proposed consultation and the timetable for the Plan.

The Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives and associated commitments for 2021/2022 as outlined in the draft Annual Delivery Plan would be reflected in Service Plans for 2021 -2022. Work had commenced to develop the service plans which would be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committees in the New Year together with the proposed service improvement targets for 2021-22.

The Director of Environment & Housing Services added that the reasons behind this work was the legislation contained in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA) and the forthcoming Local Government & Elections Bill.

He explained that the draft Annual Delivery Plan provided a 'bridge' between the five-year Corporate Plan and the Annual Service Plans and set out the actions people could expect from the Council in the year ahead and how the four Well-being Objectives would be delivered.

The Plan detailed the activities to be undertaken under Year 2 of the Corporate Plan to be published in Spring 2021. The actions in the Plan reflected the complexity and breadth of services delivered by the Council. The plan was put together through discussions with the Senior Leadership Team and it reflected the changing nature of services, the recovery strategy from COVID-19 and the

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Council's response to the pandemic. Consideration was given to a number of factors such as the Corporate Risk Register, Statutory duties, resources, the Future Generations Commissioner's Future Generations Report, Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment, Covid-19 Economic Impact Assessment, Coronavirus Recovery Strategy, findings from the work of regulators of the Council and the views of residents and partners. As part of the timetable for the Plan it was noted that the consultation with public and partners had been extended to the 5th January 2021 with the overall process to be concluded by April 2021.

The consultation was now live on the Vale website with a short survey emailed out to partners such as Town and Community Councils, Employee Consultative Forum and members of the Voluntary Sector and Joint Liaison Committee.

The Plan detailed the actions to be undertaken under the four Wellbeing Objectives, numbering 105. The challenge lay with the ongoing pandemic but despite this the Plan offered an ambitious vision for the coming year and setting out the commitments that the Council would deliver as well as its response to the ongoing pandemic.

Feedback was welcomed from the Scrutiny Committees and elsewhere, to be fed back through the consultation process to Cabinet and Corporate Performance and Resources Committee.

The Head of Housing and Building Services wished to add that the work undertaken on housing development, by the Supporting People Team, Timebanking and volunteering also featured throughout the Plan.

Having fully considered the reference it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – THAT the draft Annual Delivery Plan be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

258 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2020/21 (DEH) –

Prior to the presentation, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer wished to inform the Committee of a mistake within the appendix to the report, which should read 'Q1 Corporate Risk Register' and not 'Q2 Corporate Risk Register'.

The Director of Environment & Housing Services went on to present the report, the purpose of which was to outline quarter 2 performance results for the period 1st April, 2020 to 30th September, 2020 in delivering the Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. This performance had contributed to an overall 'Amber' status for the Plan at Quarter 2, meaning that the relevant targets would be met.

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The Director of Environment & Housing Services explained that, as raised previously at September's Committee meeting, the report is a Council wide, cross cutting one and therefore he would present to Members the appendix to the report detailing the areas relevant to the Committee's remit instead; the highlights being:

- Objective 3: support people at home and in their community. Despite the ongoing pandemic, the new housebuilding programme had continued with the completion of the new units at Brecon Court and Holm View and with every property fully occupied. Also outlined was the challenge that the Community Safety Team had to face with Anti-Social Behaviour during the pandemic, and the measures to help meet this, such as improvements with CCTV.
- Objective 4: respect, enhance and enjoy our environment. For example, with affordable housing, a grant had been received from Welsh Government for additional housing units at Court Road. This would hopefully encourage Welsh Government to recognise the impact of homelessness and the challenge of housing those people currently in temporary accommodation once the pandemic was over.
- In terms of the Council's overall actions and measures, there were 37 actions and 7 measures that fell within the remit of this Committee, the majority of these falling within the Green or Amber RAG status, which was a testament to the work undertaken by Council staff during the pandemic.
- For the small number of measures and actions that fell under the Red RAG status, these were largely as the result of COVID-19 related factors and the measures taken to improve these had also been identified.
- In terms of areas of improvement, for example, the increased use of digital technology for Council business meant that residents needed to be supported in order to keep pace with this, such as through the Tenant Engagement Strategy. Also, work was ongoing to develop a new Community Investment Strategy.
- In terms of the Coronavirus Recovery Strategy, the ongoing provision of temporary accommodation to homeless persons and the hard work undertaken by the Housing Team in conjunction with this was highlighted as well as the review of CCTV strategy and continuing delivery of affordable housing.

Councillor Cave queried the delay on the Gypsy and Traveller Strategy and if there was any update on this. The Head of Housing and Building Services replied that the Strategic Housing Group met in early December with a draft report concerning this tabled at the meeting and the outcome being a further report drafted on this topic to go to Cabinet in January 2021. The effort to canvas individuals on identifying alternative sites for the Gypsy and Traveller community had been unsuccessful. Work was ongoing however to contact other landowners in order to identify sites that could meet the needs of this community.

The Councillor subsequently asked if one of the options originally discussed for siting this community, to leave the Gypsy and Traveller Community where they were and to deal with the issue of the flood risk at the entrance to the site which had started this process in the first place, was still available. The Head of Regeneration and Planning replied that the Inspector who reviewed this site as

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part of the Local Development Plan Inquiry would not accept this site as an allocation in the plan due to the risk of flooding to the entrance. In order to overcome this there would be several challenges, such as raising the road or providing an alternative access, and there were considerable costs involved with this. The forthcoming Cabinet report in January would look to address the issue by offering a range of options with the aim of securing a long-term solution.

Councillor Parker mentioned that work on reassessing the flood risk at an adjacent site may have a bearing on the Gypsy and Traveller site too and he would come back to the Head of Regeneration and Planning on this.

Councillor Hanks queried the delay on the Marcross Cesspits tender and the change in the outsourced provider for this. The Head of Housing and Building Services confirmed that although the Project Manager had resigned at a key stage in the process, things had moved on however, for example, a specialist Drainage Consultant had been engaged, the detailed surveys and specifications were almost complete and there had been discussions with residents around a solution on re-routing key pipe work. In terms of the tender, it was hoped this would go out early in the New Year. Once the bids had been received, Members and residents would be consulted over costs and so on. The Councillor and the Committee as a whole wished to thank the staff involved in getting this report produced under the current circumstances and the good work involved in achieving the performance set out.

Councillor Nugent-Finn asked the Head of Housing and Building Services to take a look at some suggestions she had around tenant engagement, for example, introducing the National Residency Scrutiny Panel as a template for the Council to use. The Councillor added that she felt that the increased use of re-deployable CCTV was a positive development due to its proven effectiveness in prevention and prosecution. The Director of Environment & Housing Services replied that any suggestions such as those the Councillor had provided on tenant engagement would be taken on board and with re-deployable CCTV that there was a need for the Council to utilise this more due to changes in technology.

Councillor Brooks asked about temporary accommodation and how much capacity the Council had in light of the ongoing pandemic and the knock-on effects on loss of jobs and the attendant loss of housing for affected persons. The Head of Housing and Building Services explained that due to pre-existing concerns around winter pressures, possible easing of COVID-19 restrictions and after consultation with Welsh Government, temporary accommodation capacity had been increased, for example, 'block booking' of hotel accommodation had been made as a precaution, with funding provided by Welsh Government and with a 30-unit surplus currently in reserve. He added that at least some of the homeless who had been housed in temporary accommodation would have been homeless anyway due to non-COVID-19 reasons and the Council was working to deal with the root causes of these. The Housing Team were also looking at better temporary housing solutions with private landlords as an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation.

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The Chairman asked about the 'One Stop Shop' and how this was functioning and the current status of the housing development at the old Civic Amenity Site (Court Road). The Head of Housing and Building Services explained that the 'One Stop Shop' advice service had been operating largely remotely via telephone or 'Zoom' or similar, with a face to face service offered only to those users considered most vulnerable, subject to the appropriate risk assessments due to the pandemic. Regarding the accommodation at Court Road, this was set to be completed by the end of March 2021.

There being no further questions, the Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2020/21 commitments as aligned to our 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.
- (3) T H A T the progress being made through the Council's recovery strategy and Directorate Recovery plans in response to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic be noted.
- (4) THAT the Committee receive further reports or updates on the Gypsy and Traveller Strategy, on Temporary Accommodation, Marcross Cesspits and Tenant Engagement.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1), (2) & (3) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (4) For the Committee to be updated on the progress of these issues.

259 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2020 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager, the purpose of which was to advise the Committee of the progress relating to revenue and capital expenditure for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2020. She explained that the report included the revised budget for revenue which was purely adjusted for technical accounting reasons and were just movements within the overall budget that services were not expected to find nor benefit from.

There was little change in the position at year end forecast, with a projection of a balanced budget. There had been concerns around the Private Housing budget,

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particularly the Disabled Facility Grants fee income which had been heavily impacted by COVID-19, but these had now been mitigated due to funding from the Welsh Government in order to cover the lost income.

Regarding Capital Monitoring, there had been some slippage on the upgrade of the CCTV system and the Housing Improvement Programme, most of which were COVID-19 related.

RECOMMENDED -

- (1) T H A T the position with regard to the 2020/21 revenue and capital budgets be noted.
- (2) T H A T the revised revenue budget for 2020/21 be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

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

260 INITIAL REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager who stated that the Council was required to agree a balanced revenue budget in order to set the Council Tax for 2021/22 by 11th March, 2021. However, the Council's provisional settlement had not yet been announced by Welsh Government with the final announcement being due on 2nd March, 2021. Therefore, this gave the Budget Working Group an extremely tight deadline to work to and a significant challenge to face in setting the budget; hence the need for the consultation process to get started in the meantime through the various Scrutiny Committees regarding the budget and cost pressures involved.

The Finance Support Manager went on to say that as part of the consultation process, Capital Bids and Cost Pressures submitted by all service lines would be reviewed and in conjunction with this, Scrutiny Committees were asked to comment on the cost pressures submitted for the revenue budget regarding services which formed part of their remit.

Regarding the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the Finance Support Manager explained this was a useful 'tool' in order to advise the Budget Working Group of the scale of what was required to balance the budget. The variables used to help determine this included the level of Council Tax set, the assumed Welsh Government settlement, and the level of cost pressures submitted by each department. Following on from this, the Finance Support Manager set out the best- and worst-case scenarios in terms of the revenue budget and related shortfalls:

- The best-case scenario involved a 1% increase in the Welsh Government settlement, no cost pressures submitted be approved and with a maximum

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increase of Council Tax to the Welsh average of 8.4%, meaning the shortfall for the three-year period would be £14.2m.

- The worst-case scenario entailed a 1% reduction of the Welsh Government settlement, all cost-pressures approved and a 4.9% increase in Council Tax (based on this year's increase), resulting in a shortfall of £26.4m over three years.

Furthermore, the Budget Working Group would take into consideration the comments on cost pressures made by this (and the other) Scrutiny Committee(s), as well as the level of Council Tax to apply, the use of cash reserves and, finally, the savings that may need to be made in order to help balance the budget.

The Chairman wished to raise the matter of the Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Community Safety Services, which had been identified as one of the key service areas within the Committee's remit with cost pressures, stating that it was important that this crucial work undertaken through the Council and its partners continued to be funded and implemented due to its ongoing value in dealing with domestic abuse and related issues. She suggested that this cost pressure should be raised with Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. This was agreed by the Committee.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet, the ongoing value and importance of the Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Community Safety Services, when looking at cost pressures and the revenue budget.

Reason for recommendation

In order that Cabinet can consider the comments of the Scrutiny Committee on the continued importance and value of the Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Community Safety Services before making a final proposal on the budget.

261 INITIAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2021/22 TO 2025/26 (DEH) –

The report was outlined by the Finance Support Manager who set out its purpose as the submission of the Initial Capital Programme Proposals for the five-year period 2021/22 to 2025/26 to the Scrutiny Committee for their consultation.

The proposals and forecast were based on an assumption of what capital funding would be available, due to the Council waiting on the Welsh Government announcement on capital funding for 2021/22. As a result, the figures included in this report were based on 2018/19 levels of funding which represented a reduction of 19% in capital funding from the 2020/21 level.

Similarly, the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA), which was the grant that provided capital funding to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), had not yet been announced by the Welsh Government for 2021/22. Therefore, the level of funding had been based on 2020/21 levels which was £2.764m.

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There were no new capital bids for this Committee to consider but there had been changes in the Capital Programme – including slippage – which were listed within the report. Any comments from the Committee would be considered by the Budget Working Group in drawing up the final proposals and Full Council when setting the level of Council Tax by the 11th March 2021.

Councillor Nugent-Finn queried when the Welsh Government's decision on funding would be known, the Finance Support Manager replying the last update on this was that Welsh Government would announce the final settlement on 2nd March 2021 which, due to the tight deadlines entailed, could mean a revision in the dates for the Cabinet and Council meetings to be held in order to consider this.

There being no further questions, the Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Initial Capital Programme Proposals for 2021/22 to 2025/26 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

262 INITIAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22 AND REVISED BUDGET 2020/21 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager stating that the purpose of the report was to submit for consultation the initial Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2021/22, and to inform the Scrutiny Committee of the amended original budget for 2020/21.

The Finance Support Manager explained that the HRA revenue budget account is set on an annual basis, as required by statute, and is balanced at year-end through use of the HRA reserve, the sole purpose of which is to balance the HRA revenue budget. The HRA reserve cannot be in deficit at any point.

The HRA revenue budget is set to maintain the HRA reserve at a prudent level of around £1m. Any growth or inflationary pressures within the HRA must be funded from within its balance. At the end of 2019/20 the balance on the HRA reserve was high at around £7.9m, therefore in order to bring this balance down to a reasonable level the HRA net operational budget for 2020/21 had been set at a deficit of £7.058m.

As the balance on the HRA reserve by the end of 2020/21 should be back within reasonable levels at year-end, due to the amended 2020/21 budget, the 2021/22 HRA revenue budget had been set at a level more in line with the original 2020/21 budget, showing a 25k surplus. This, in turn, would leave a balance of £915k in the HRA reserve at the end of 2021/22, back to a reasonable level. It was noted

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that the 2021/22 budget proposals assumed a 2.7% increase in rents, in line with the Housing Business Plan set in February 2020.

The Head of Housing and Building Services informed the Committee that since the report was written, the Council had subsequently been notified of the rent policy, with a maximum increase this year set at CPI (as set in September 2020) plus 1% which was part of the rent modelling. Rent increases would therefore be set at 1.5% as the maximum amount the Council could consider. This would result in internal discussions being held between the Leader of the Council, the relevant Cabinet Member and colleagues in Finance on how this impacted on the Housing Business Plan and the assumptions made as well as the level of rent raised.

The Committee wished to thank the Finance Support Manager and her team for the hard work involved in providing the finance reports at tonight's meeting.

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the amended Housing Revenue Account budget for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.

(2) T H A T the initial Housing Revenue Account budget proposal for 2021/22 be noted.

Reasons for recommendations

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

263 HOUSING STRATEGIES UPDATE REPORT (DEH) –

The Head of Housing and Building Services explained that the report was a 'sweep up' of the three key strategies that the Committee had been tasked to monitor by Cabinet. These strategies had now come to the end of their lifecycle, with most actions completed bar a few impacted by COVID-19, for example, those relating to tenant engagement.

Key issues for consideration were:

- A tenants' satisfaction (STAR) survey was undertaken 3 years ago and then again last year using the same standard set of questions, with tenant positive satisfaction rates subsequently rising from 81% three years ago to 84% in the latest survey. The Head of Housing and Building Services would bring the STAR survey and the detailed report to the Committee in 2021;
- A 'customer first' culture had been established within the Housing teams, with increased customer service training for staff;
- 11 Neighbourhood Action Plans had been developed which were targeted on specific neighbourhoods and localities within the Vale and their differing needs – for example, in some areas this had included a focus on more

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active methods of tenant engagement, or focussing on employability and training;

- The improvement of accessibility for tenants to Housing Officers, such as names and contact details of Officers given to tenants, which had been welcomed by tenants;
- Regarding the digitalisation of services, expressions of interest had been sought and received from a number of software companies, with staff engagement sessions to be set up in January 2021 and the tender to go out for the Housing ICT system in early April. This system would help agile working and ensure that tenants could report issues quickly and easily;
- Tenant engagement – there was a well-established structure currently in place, but this had been supplemented by more informal or soft touch forms of engagement such as litter picking exercises, in conjunction with other forms of participation such as the Timebanking scheme.
- The ongoing implementation of the Environment and Neighbourhood Strategy – such as the significant capital investment made at the Buttrills estate, Gibbonsdown and Central Estates in Barry and improvement works including cladding to buildings, fencing and better pavements. The Council were looking now to improve communal garden areas and address long-standing parking issues, particularly in more rural estates in the Vale.
- The extensive support and work undertaken by Ward Members, the Residents Group, Council officers and local schools regarding the ‘Everyone’s Garden Project’ which had transformed a derelict area of land close to Margaret Avenue in the Colcot area of Barry.
- In terms of those actions falling under a Red RAG status such as the tenant consultation panel/ sounding board and tenant newsletter, once efforts could be refocused away from COVID-19, these would be looked at again by Housing in order to be resolved.

The Chairman asked where the individual Neighbourhood Action Plans referred to in the report could be found. The Head of Housing and Building Services replied that these would be shared with the Committee via the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer.

The Chairman agreed that going forward, the drawing together of these strategies into one overall strategy and report would be beneficial in providing a central overview.

The Committee wished to thank the Head of Housing and Building Services and the Housing Services staff for their hard work undertaken in connection with these strategies.

There being no further questions, the Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report highlighting the progress made implementing the key actions in the three Strategies be noted.

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Reason for recommendation

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