

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 12th July, 2023.

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

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

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards (Vice-Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, G. Ball, S. Campbell, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy and S. Lloyd-Selby.

Also present: – C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), G. Doyle and V. John (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel); Councillors L. Burnett (Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), E. Goodjohn and G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing).

184 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”.

185 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors M.J.G. Morgan and S.D. Perkes; and D. Dutch and H. Smith (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel).

186 MINUTES –

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

187 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

The following declarations of interest were received:

Councillor Aviet declared an interest in Agenda Items 4 and 5 – Closure of Accounts 2022/23 and Capital Closure of Accounts 2022/23, respectively. The nature of her interest in both items was that she was a Vale of Glamorgan Council tenant. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(ii)(A) of the Council’s Constitution. Therefore, Councillor Aviet remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

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Councillor Hennessy declared an interest in Agenda Items 4 and 5 – Closure of Accounts 2022/23 and Capital Closure of Accounts 2022/23, respectively. The nature of his interest in both items was that he was a Vale of Glamorgan Council tenant. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(ii)(A) of the Council's Constitution. Therefore, Councillor Hennessy remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

188 CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2022/23 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager, the purpose of which was to inform Committee of the provisional financial position of the Council for the 2022/23 financial year. This was provisional pending a final review by Audit Wales.

The Council encountered significant revenue pressures during 2022/23. Particular pressures were in respect of the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, inflationary pressures particularly in respect of contracts and pay pressures. There had also been significant demand pressures on homelessness, Children's Services and pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

Despite these pressures, the year-end revenue position was a breakeven, balanced position after net transfers from reserves of £17.029m. This was made up of £987k transferred from Council Fund, £953k from the Housing Revenue Account, £11.785m transferred into specific reserves from revenue and £15.554m transferred from specific reserves to provide one off funding for projects and £12.307m drawdown from reserves to fund the Capital Programme and for displacement required by capital grants. The Council Fund now stood at £11.523m as of 31st March, 2023.

The report referred to those areas of the accounts which were of particular interest to the Committee, and which fell under their remit, highlights of which included:

- The Youth Offending Service (YOS) outturned with a favourable variance due to a rebate on various non-domestic rates and a saving on staff costs due to vacant posts in year.
- Both Regulatory Services and Council Fund Housing also broke even due to various factors, including underspends, transfer of reserves and additional funding received during the year from Welsh Government (WG).
- Private Housing had an adverse variance of £2k mainly due to an occupational therapist post in the Disabled Facilities Grants section.
- The Housing Revenue Account had a smaller than projected draw down on the ringfenced reserve of £953k, reducing the level of its ringfenced reserve to £16.486m.
- A Council-wide revenue savings target of £500k had been set for 2022/23 and an outstanding balance for 2021/22 of £170k was also monitored throughout the year. Whilst some savings had been identified from underspends in year such as vacant posts, services had moved to identify these on a more sustainable basis for 2023/24.

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- As part of the preparation for the 2023/24 budget, a review of reserves was undertaken and some reallocation had been made to ensure that they more accurately reflected key budgetary risks for the updated list of corporate reserves, including the homelessness and housing reserve.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the report and the financial measures taken and proposed be noted.
- (2) T H A T the allocation of the overall Council surplus be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

189 CAPITAL CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2022/3 (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Finance Support Manager, provided details on the provisional year-end position on the Capital Programme for the period 1st April, 2022 to 31st March, 2023. Any slippage mentioned in the report had been approved under emergency powers.

The overall position on the revised 2022/23 Capital Programme was a variance of £1.677m against an adjusted Programme of £82.468m. The position regarding this Committee and the budget was a variance of -£1.019m against an adjusted Programme of £22.523m. Outturn for the Scrutiny Committee was recorded at £23.542m and slippage of -£1.249m had been requested.

The overspend position reflected the fact that more of the budget had been slipped forward than had been necessary, so approval had been given to reverse an element of that slippage back into 2022/23 and the approved slippage amounts for this Committee were included in Appendix 3 to the report.

The successes of the Council's Capital Programme were highlighted, particularly those areas within the remit of the Committee, such as the Hayes Road social rent development.

The breakdown of outturn for areas relating to this Committee by Directorate, was available in the appendices to the report, as the related budgets did cut across various Directorates.

Following the presentation of the report, the Vice-Chair commented on the Housing Improvement Plan and the importance of the Council implementing this in terms of social housing, including the ongoing building of Council housing. This was particularly important in light of the pressures on the private rented sector and landlords, where significant numbers were considering selling their properties due to rising costs.

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Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the year end capital position for financial year 2022/23 be noted.
- (2) T H A T the additional scheme budgets as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.
- (3) T H A T the summary position of the changes in the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 7th March, 2022 to 31st March, 2023 as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be noted.
- (4) T H A T the Emergency Power approved in respect of the slippage as set out in Appendix 3 to the report be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

190 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 4
PERFORMANCE 2022/23 (DEH) –

The performance report was presented by the Director of Environment and Housing which outlined the Council's progress at Quarter 4 (Q4) (1st April, 2022 to 31st March, 2023) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2022/23) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. The Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) provided a one-year 'snapshot' of the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan. The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Q4 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance.

In relation to the planned activities within the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, 95% (52 out of 55) were attributed a Green performance status and the final 5% (3) were attributed a Red status. Of the 17 measures reported, 71% (12) were attributed a Green performance status, 6% (1) an Amber status and 23% (4) were attributed Red status.

The appended presentation was intended to provide Members with an overview of end of year performance earlier in the calendar year for those areas under the Committee's remit and under the 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, including relevant examples of achievements made i.e. around the ongoing opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships for local residents and the work undertaken via the 'One Stop shop' in Barry and the Money Advice Team in supporting local residents and tenants with their financial, welfare and other issues. Also referred to were areas requiring improvement, i.e. reviewing construction related programmes due to rising costs.

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Overall, all 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q4 to reflect the good progress made to date in meeting the Council's ADP commitments for 2022/23.

For ease of reference, performance exceptions aligned to the Scrutiny Committee's remit highlighted the current status of Red performing actions identified in previous quarters to show direction of travel at end of year. This enabled Members to quickly gauge whether proposed remedial actions had been undertaken in year to progress these actions. This approach of reporting exceptions reflected the changes requested by Elected Members on performance monitoring of the ADP. For this Committee, the exceptions included the supply of Council rented accommodation, accessibility to the Greenlinks adapted services for disabled residents, the turnaround of void properties, etc. The rationale for these exceptions and the measures being undertaken to address these going forward were provided in the report.

Following the presentation of the report, a number of comments were made, and questions were raised, by the Committee, including:

- On the Chair's query regarding Service Plan Action NS/A010 and the recent meeting of the Vale of Glamorgan 50+ Forum in relation to improving accessibility to Greenlinks adapted service transport (including the issue of bus stops and information displays / signage), it was explained that this was a well-attended event (including the Council's Older People's Champion), where Council officers had discussed at length these issues with a diverse range of attendees and the wider transport issues for the Vale, as well as the way forward. These had been positively received by the Forum and Council officers had been invited to further meetings of the Forum as a result.
- Regarding Councillor Campbell's comment on Service Plan Action NS/A010 and the Council's need to focus on improving the Vale's public transport links, and not just the supporting infrastructure (i.e. bus stops) it was explained that the Council, whilst having control over the highway (and therefore the ability to improve related bus stops, etc.) could not control or influence the private bus companies that utilised them or which routes they wished to service. Companies were free to make the decision of which routes were commercially viable or not. However, it remained important for the Council to maintain such infrastructure for their ongoing or potential use going forward. It was important that the Council and Elected Members encouraged local residents to use buses and other forms of public transport for both their health and environmental benefits as well as protecting vital services for the more vulnerable members of the community. Another potential option for the Council was to look at using Greenlinks to help 'fill the gaps' within this area.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's query on the Council's house building programme and whether the proposed schemes would still be delivered on time in the face of ongoing cost of living pressures, rising material prices, etc., the Head of Housing and Building Services explained that there were no concerns on the timeliness or deliverability of the house building schemes currently being developed. Work was being undertaken between the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Councils in terms of establishing a housing partnership in order to streamline processes and improve procurement practices around house

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building, thereby accelerating the completion of these schemes and creating a 'critical mass' in order to attract building contractors to help take the Council's house building programme forward. The Council had also undertaken the building of properties at Hayes Wood itself, following the withdrawal of Jehu and the subsequent employment of a management company to assist. The advantage for the Council had been dealing with subcontractors directly and the ability to utilise local workers to help benefit the local economy. Longer term, the main challenge around house building would be the acquisition of additional, local, land. However, work was being undertaken with Welsh Government (WG) and other partners about the possible use and development of land they may own in the Vale.

- Councillor Aviet queried Performance Indicator CPM/092 concerning 'void' / empty Council owned accommodation, and the drop in performance in terms of turnaround and time for completion in making these properties habitable, suggesting that in some cases it may be quicker for new tenants to undertake decorating or similar works themselves, with the Council providing the relevant materials to help achieve this. Both the Head of Housing and Building Services and the Operational Manager, Public Housing Services, addressed this by stating that although paint / decorating packs could be made available to tenants, often the work undertaken by Council staff at such properties entailed wider aspects of maintenance as well as decorating with the need to ensure that tenant accommodation met the latest iteration of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). Also, new tenants may not be able to undertake such works themselves due to their circumstances or vulnerabilities, as well as financial circumstances and so there was a need to balance allowing tenants to decorate / refurbish Council properties themselves and the Council or other professionals undertaking such work when tenants could not do this themselves, thereby not 'setting up people to fail' in their tenancy. On the concerns raised by the Councillor on flooring in older Council properties (such as those consisting of chipboard), she was advised to notify Housing and Building Services should she have any specific examples of this so that they could be rectified.
- The Vice-Chair asked whether the increasing costs of repairs to 'void' accommodation and others, as well as the rising number of properties that were now deemed as requiring major works were linked to issues concerning the mental health or vulnerabilities that some Council tenants maybe experiencing during the current cost of living crisis and financial difficulties being faced. It was explained that void properties were largely as a result of a tenancy coming to an end rather than due to financial hardship and eviction, because the Council and all 22 Welsh Local Authorities had signed an agreement with WG to limit evictions (only in exceptional circumstances) given the current economic crisis and the Council was seeking to help tenants maintain their tenancies through help with the Money Advice Team, etc. The increase in major repairs were due to encountering older Council properties with issues such as damp and the Council undertaking such repairs whilst empty or void instead of disrupting tenants once they were in the properties concerned. It was added that tenancies came to an end primarily due to tenants sadly passing away or having to go into a nursing home, but a further 'deep dive' into the recharge costs and the reasons to see if the Council could correlate this with information about rent arrears or household incomes or if

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there was a pattern in terms of the type of property stock, etc. could also be explored.

- The Vice-Chair also felt that the Council should be looking into expanding apprenticeships into areas such as house building and other areas of need.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's query on whether the Council would be helping to promote the WG refreshed Warm Homes Wales Programme (in order to help tackle fuel poverty, address damp in housing, etc.) among landlords and tenants in the private rented sector (PRS), it was confirmed that the Council would both help promote this scheme and would offer support itself via the relevant directorates, working groups and teams to tenants and landlords in the PRS i.e. the Corporate Property Team around energy saving advice and the Empty Homes Officer to help with funding for landlords to bring empty housing back into use and to the necessary standard. The Councillor suggested that Elected Members be provided with a briefing on this area by the relevant working group(s) in order to help communicate this out to Vale residents and tenants in the PRS via surgeries and social media. This would be looked into in order to arrange for a future date.
- The Head of Housing and Building Services informed Committee that, concerning Performance Indicator PAM/036 (number of additional affordable housing units delivered during the year per 10,000 households), although this was showing as Red this was not a full year figure, which in fact showed that the Council had met this target (26 per 10,000 households).

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Quarter 4 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2022/23 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.