

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid Meeting held on 6th December, 2023.

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

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

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, G. Ball, S. Campbell, S.J. Haines, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, S. Lloyd-Selby and H.M. Payne.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), G. Doyle, D. Dutch and V. John (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel); Councillors G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), Dr. I.J. Johnson, S.D. Perkes (Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

604 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”.

605 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors B. Loveluck-Edwards (Vice-Chair) and M.J.G. Morgan; and H. Smith (Representative from Tenant Working Group / Panel).

606 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 11th October, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

607 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor W.A. Hennessy declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 – Initial Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Revised Budget 2023/24 and Proposals 2024/25. The nature of his interest 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.

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Councillor J. Aviet declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 – Initial Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Revised Budget 2023/24 and Proposals 2024/25. The nature of her interest 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.

Councillor S.J. Haines declared an interest in Agenda Item 7 – Capital Monitoring for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2023. The nature of his interest was that he was a Committee Member of the Paul Lewis Community Centre, St Athan. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial under 19.3 of the Council's Constitution. Therefore, Councillor Haines remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor H.M. Payne declared an interest in Agenda Item 10 – Consultation – White Paper Ending Homelessness in Wales. However, she had dispensation to speak only at Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings when matters regarding housing and homelessness were discussed relating to finance and property given the Councillor's role for Llamau (paragraphs (c), (d), (f) and (h) of the relevant regulations). Therefore, Councillor Payne remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

608 INITIAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET REVISED BUDGET 2023/24 AND PROPOSALS 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 16th November, 2023 was presented by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer, the purpose of which was to consider the revised 2023/24 budget and initial proposals for 2024/25 for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer presented to the Committee the appended report and slide show which included the following key points:

- The HRA was a ringfenced account and was funded by rental income streams;
- The annual rental increase was capped by Welsh Government (WG);
- To increase rents from 1st April the Council must set rents for 2024/25 in January 2024 to ensure sufficient notice was given;
- The rent notification letter had been received from WG which stated the maximum rental uplift was 6.7% for 2024/25. This was based on CPI as at September 2023;
- Currently the Housing Business Plan 2023/24 was modelling a 5.5% increase for 2024/25. Any additional income from an increase over the 5.5% would be used to contribute to funding Decarbonisation, Welsh Housing Quality Standards 2023 (WHQS23) and New Builds;
- The Housing Business plan 2024/25 was under review and had a submission date of 31st March, 2024 but would be completed alongside the rent setting exercise in January 2024;

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- The Committee was also notified of the original budget for 2023/24 as well as the revised one and the 2024/25 initial proposed budget. Also discussed were the HRA reserves. The related progress and challenges in these areas were outlined to the Committee, including the associated challenges on delivering on the Capital Programme and its projects.

Following the presentation of the reference, appended report and associated slides, the following comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's query concerning the proposed rent increase for the Vale of Glamorgan of 5.5% and what this equated to in terms of a weekly amount for Vale of Glamorgan Council tenants, it was explained that further information and a breakdown on what a weekly increase would look like at 5.5% as well as the Welsh Government (WG) cap of 6.7% would be provided to the Committee following the meeting.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's follow up question concerning the proposed rental increase for 2024/25, currently assumed at being at 5.5%, and when this would be likely to be confirmed, it was explained that the confirmed rental increase would come forward via the HRA report just after Christmas with the proposed initial review at Scrutiny and then on to Cabinet and Full Council.
- Councillor Haines raised queries concerning the anticipated employee costs and what was meant by other staff changes as part of this report and with regard to court costs which had seen a significant reduction due to legal reasons. The Head of Housing and Building Services explained that with regard to court costs and rent arrears, this was tied in with the result of an agreement that was in place with the WG related to annual rent increases which had been signed up by all Local Authorities, including the Vale of Glamorgan Council, and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in Wales. Also connected to this was the point raised concerning other staff costs which likely reflected the increase in the number of staff in the Income Recovery Team which was currently being processed and meant employing two additional staff into the team. In addition, the impact of those additional resources and extra capacity within the team meant that the Council could better manage and address the issues faced by those tenants who were under severe income pressures and finances which in turn helped to mitigate any potential increase in rent arrears and loss of tenancies.
- Councillor Campbell referred to the land sales detailed in the HRA funding and to the number of Voids currently within the Vale of Glamorgan area and their impact on the HRA. In response it was explained that the land sales referred to within the report alluded to land purchased by the Council rather than sales of land. On Voids, it was explained that there were on average 220 Void properties that became available during the year which were classified as minor or major Voids, with minor Voids being able to be turned round in around 20 days but with major Voids requiring longer time to become habitable but these were relatively few in number. Major Voids could require significant amounts of money to rectify due to substantial structural repairs and in order to bring up to WHQS standards. Currently major Voids numbered approximately 3 or 4 within the Vale. A more definitive list of such properties could be provided to the Committee. At present there were approximately 35 Voids in being with some of those falling in the major

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category but with the majority being minor Voids. The minor Voids required minor repairs and these were properties that were being repaired or under offer waiting for a person to move in for only a short period of time and the majority were not sitting empty due to demand for these properties.

- On Councillor Hennessy's query around court costs and how many current court cases were ongoing concerning rent policy, it was explained that there was currently a moratorium on evictions which had been agreed in tandem with WG which meant that the Vale and other Local Authorities would not evict into homelessness households to try and recover rental costs. Previously the Council would have been involved in around 50-60 cases which may be taken into court within a year with only 3 or 4 such cases reaching an eviction stage. The current challenges for tenants around claims for Universal Credit were also mentioned whereby their first payments would not be received until five weeks after they claimed meaning that tenants could not pay in advance for rent and the Council would have to work with tenants to pay this amount over a period of time in order to claw back any arrears.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and appended report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the revised 2023/24 budget and initial proposals for 2024/25 be noted.

Reason for recommendation.

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

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

The reference from Cabinet on 16th November, 2023 was presented by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer, the purpose of which was to review the work being undertaken around setting the 2024/25 Budget Planning Cycle and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2028/29.

The Committee was updated on the key areas of the report which included:

- With regard to the budget planning cycle, the Council faced an extremely challenging budget going forward including a long process which revolved around the financial strategy through to initial proposals, initial consultation and final approval of budget.
- The financial strategy took into account the numerous cost pressures faced by the Council associated with delivering the Corporate Plan and its focus on supporting the most vulnerable including areas of social care and regarding homelessness and housing. As part of this process there was the need to consider savings and sustainable finances, the appropriate level of reserves, the generating of local tax revenues and fees and charges in order to ensure collective responsibility, accessibility and transparent finances and to deliver best value.

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- Concerning the Medium Term refresh, this would be extremely challenging for 2024/25 and in the medium term. Key challenges were referred to including the Welsh Government (WG) grant, Council Tax and the significant overall gap in terms of Council finances due to exceptional cost pressures such as social care, pay, school budgets and in areas around environment and housing.
- In terms of next steps, the Committee were given the key milestones in the process over the November – February / March 2023/24 period which ranged from the UK Government budget through to the WG settlement, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) rent setting and Business Plan approval and review by Full Council through to the draft Final Budget being approved.

Following the presentation of the reference and appended report, the following comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Lloyd-Selby stated that the Council faced difficult decisions going forward in terms of financial pressures and the subsequent choices and decisions that had to be made. She also referred to the areas of the report concerning the Council review of income raised from various sources plus the need for consideration of the structure and combination of services in order to leverage the most value for money. On income raised via sales, fees and charges, etc. and the relevant timescales, it was explained that Council officers had been advised when looking at potentially increasing fees and charges that as well as looking at increasing these in line with inflation, if these also related to a discretionary service, that the income from those fees and charges also needed to be covering the full cost of delivering that service. In support of this, a number of budget working groups had been set up across the Directorates to look at this. Tied in with this review were a number of strategies already in place around the Council's Tax base so that the number of residents charged Council Tax was increasing and there was an improvement in recovery rates. Furthermore, there was a review being undertaken around the Council's borrowing costs and interest that was earned on investments and reserves. These and other proposals were being put together as part of the budget which would include consultation with Scrutiny in due course.
- With regard to Councillor Lloyd-Selby's follow up query around the pressure on the budget as a result of the use of bed and breakfasts (B&B) and other types of temporary accommodation, it was explained that there still remained significant numbers of households which needed to reside in temporary accommodation, including B&Bs and such pressures continued even with the addition of some new build Registered Social Landlord (RSL) activity coming on stream over the last 12 months. Currently these numbers were not plateauing, and the Council was looking to source more cheaper alternative temporary accommodation to help reduce the financial pressure in this area. As part of this the Council was talking to a number of providers both within and without the Local Authority boundaries in order to expand the amount of accommodation that might be available in order to address the ongoing issues around housing and homelessness. Such pressures were also seen in other Local Authorities within Wales. The Council was also looking at other measures in order to discharge its statutory duties such as around shared

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accommodation, running its own private leasing scheme as well as working with colleagues in relation to empty homes and to look at acquisition activity in relation to the selling of private properties to the Local Authority. At this stage there was no indication that WG would be providing further financial assistance in relation to temporary accommodation for next year. The Chair of the WLGA had written to Welsh Government asking for some flexibility around existing grant streams that could be diverted to temporary accommodation rather than preventative schemes which were becoming increasingly difficult to do due to the numbers of people presenting as homeless and requiring temporary accommodation at this time.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and appended report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Refresh of Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2028/29 be noted.

Reason for recommendation.

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

610 CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING SUMMARY REPORT (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 16th November, 2023 was presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services, the purpose of which was to provide a summary on the activity that had been undertaken in relation to Corporate arrangements for Safeguarding across the Council and to provide assurance around safeguarding activity taking place across the Council.

The Committee were informed about:

- The Council's Corporate responsibility to ensure that there were effective arrangements in place for safeguarding children and adults at risk.
- This report provided a mid-year update on the effectiveness of those arrangements and the developments to date.
- An outline of the Corporate Safeguarding Group (CSG), which ensured that there was scrutiny and assurance of corporate safeguarding arrangements, including monitoring a safeguarding 'dashboard', with a suite of collated data on key Council activities, a review of safeguarding training and accompanying materials, and its work with the Local Authority Designated Officer for Safeguarding (LADO) as well as with the Regional Safeguarding Board.
- Committee Members were also updated on progress made in terms of Corporate Leadership and Accountability, the review and update of Corporate Policy, scrutiny and assurance, safer recruitment and training in relation to safeguarding, as well as the efforts around the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks undertaken by the Council.

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Following the presentation of the reference and appended report the following comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- On Councillor Campbell's query about the non-mandatory nature of training undertaken by School Governors and whether this had been a Council or Welsh Government (WG) decision, it was explained that the CSG was reviewing this for the Vale of Glamorgan, to see if this could be made into mandatory training or at the very least to have greater emphasis and encouragement on School Governors to undertake relevant training.
- Councillor Payne asked about corporate safeguarding measures and housing, and whether the new data set monitored by the CSG included referrals. The Councillor was told that information concerning referrals via Environment and Housing was included in the Corporate Safeguarding Annual Report. The majority of referrals came via the homelessness route and for vulnerable clients in temporary accommodation, where safeguarding measures were actively in place. The relevant data would be shared with the Councillor and Members in due course.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and appended report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T both the reference and appended Cabinet report on the activity that had been undertaken in relation to Corporate arrangements for Safeguarding across the Council be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the reference and report to provide assurance around safeguarding activity taking place across the Council as well as to ensure that there was a wide-reaching level of Member oversight.

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

The report was presented by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer, in conjunction with the Finance Support Manager, the purpose of which was to provide 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 to the report provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate 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, which was described as extremely ambitious. As seen from previous years, it was extremely challenging to deliver a programme of this size especially in the current economic environment. Revised forecast outturn was projected at £107.653m.

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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 amounting to £5.545m.

In terms of those parts of the Capital Programme within the remit of this Committee, the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Housing Improvement Programme – New Build, were referred to, concerning the £700k uncommitted in-year and removed from the capital programme to release funding back into reserves and capital receipts, and slippage of £3.8m of the new build scheme budget to the 2024/25 Capital Programme (due to procurement and resourcing challenges) respectively. Also mentioned was the progress on capital funding and implementation of various projects such as the Target Hardening and Empty Homes' Grants.

Following the presentation of the reference and appended report the following comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- On Councillor Haines' concerns around the DFG, reassurance was given that there was demand for this grant and efforts were being made by the Council to implement these grants and spend the funding but the issue lay with challenges in commissioning contractors to undertake the necessary works. On his other queries concerning the Paul Lewis Centre and Llandow and a New Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC), these would need to be addressed at the relevant Scrutiny Committee.
- On Councillor Hennessy's queries on the progress of the Colcot Clinic project and Eagleswell housing development, these were making good progress and were currently on course to be delivered on time and within budget. A site visit for the latter would be arranged.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made on delivering the 2023/24 Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee in the attached Appendix 1 to the report be noted.
- (2) 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.
- (3) T H A T the changes to the 2023/24 and future years' Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 and detailed within the body of the report from paragraph 2.12 onwards, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-3) Having regard to the content of the report to advise Committee of the progress on the Capital Programme, the use of Emergency Powers and changes to the Capital Programme.

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

The report, presented by the by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer, in conjunction with the Finance Support Manager, advised Committee of the Quarter 2 Revenue Monitoring position for 2023/24. Key headlines included:

- The revenue position for 2023/24 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures, including increased demand in respect of Childrens' and Adults' Social Care as well as schools, reflected in an overall unplanned use of reserves of £6.768m and a further £6.5m for schools.
- The report sets out a revised budget which strips out Corporate Recharges, as well as a number of steps to be taken in year to help mitigate the emerging overspend and safeguard reserves, this included tighter controls on borrowing, expenditure and recruitment and a review of the Capital Programme.
- Challenging and significant savings and efficiency targets had been set for 2023/24, with significant progress having been made which included a target of £2.75m for schools and £4.628m of Corporate savings. The Council reserves remained healthy but a large number were committed to delivering the Capital Programme. These were used for funding Council priorities, manage known risk and ringfenced budgets as well as investment. Transfers included those areas that needed to see a 'smoothing' out of pressures over the medium term, i.e. energy and homelessness. However, projected reserves for year-end were forecast at £57m, down from £110m at the start of the year.
- In terms of the year end position for those areas in the Committee's remit, a number of pertinent areas were outlined to the Committee on the forecast year-end position, including the Youth Offending Service projected underspend (£92k), an expected break-even position for General Fund Housing (using £45k of reserves), for Private Housing / Disabled Facility Grants, the service was projected to be over budget by some £92k this year and required to be offset via reserves. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) were expected to outturn on target.
- Various pressures for those services within the remit of the Committee were projected for DFG, SRS (relating to the whole service, not just the Vale of Glamorgan Council) and General Fund Housing (including hotel accommodation for homeless people through to support for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees and ICT).
- Efficiencies for those services related to the remit of the Committee were also covered, with examples from SRS, Private Housing and General Fund Housing, i.e. a £21k reduction in Vale base contribution to SRS.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

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.

613 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2023/24 (DEH) –

The abridged performance report, presented by the Head of housing and Building Services, outlined 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. The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Q2 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance.

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 provided a summary of progress against the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2023/24 as aligned to the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. This included what the Council had achieved through to areas of improvement and emerging areas both in terms of development and of concern in sync with the Council's Well-being Objectives. Achievements and challenges of note included the success of the new Vale tenants newsletter, the Shared Regulatory Services' (SRS) apprenticeship scheme and 'rogue trader' prosecutions through to challenges around budgetary restrictions and shortages of land for future social housing development.

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

- On the Chair's query on the delivery of a potential Gypsy and Traveller site in line with the findings of the 2023 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, although no new sites had come forward, new opportunities were being looked at and attempts were being made to have a greater dialogue with the community in question over potential sites via a mediator to help break down barriers.
- Councillor Hanks raised a number of queries around digital engagement, the One Stop Shop and the transition of Council pool cars over to electric vehicles (EV). On digital engagement, it was explained that the Housing Team used the 'Digital Buddies' group of volunteers to help Council tenants to engage digitally and that elsewhere in the Council other workstreams were being undertaken in this regard. The financial pressures seen with the One Stop Shop reflect the more general pressures seen with commissioned housing support services. Welsh Government funding (via the Housing Support Grant (HSG)) was not being cut at this time but was not keeping up with rising costs and inflation and there were efforts to stop any cuts in the

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HSG and therefore to housing support. The One Stop Shop provided an excellent range of housing support services and ‘triage’ for help and advice on accommodation and related issues, but budgetary pressures and any cuts would impact the provision and prioritisation of these services. On the move to EVs, a report was due to go to Cabinet, with further information to be sought for Members.

- Councillor Hennessy asked about the percentage of Council tenants involved in Council related schemes such as the tenant working groups and how the Council engaged with Council tenants who could not access digital technology. On Council tenant schemes, the Council was looking to expand these, through ‘taster days’ and recruitment and interest via the tenant profiling data, as well as restarting the Sheltered Housing Group. On Council engagement with tenants, both digital and non-digital means were used i.e. a renewed focus, post-pandemic, for Housing staff to be visible and to physically attend local communities and Council estates for routine inspections, etc.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

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 Wellbeing Objectives within the remit of the Committee, be noted.

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

Reason for recommendations

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

614 CONSULTATION – WHITE PAPER ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN WALES (DEH) –

The report was presented to the Committee by the Operational Manager, Public Housing Services, the purpose of which was for the Committee to consider the proposed changes brought forward by the Welsh Government (WG) and identify key impacts which would inform the Council’s response to the consultation. Key points included:

- By way of background, the WG was consulting on proposals to end homelessness in Wales. The proposals within the White Paper formed part of a long-term transformation process to the homelessness and housing system, as set out in the Programme for Government and Co-operation Agreement.
- The Council had been requested to respond formally to the proposals, a copy of which could be accessed at Appendix 1 to the report. A summary of the key proposals was highlighted in the body of the covering report.

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- The intention was, following the consultation process, for the Council's response to the proposals to be approved by Cabinet and submitted to WG by 16th January, 2024.
- The proposals were set out under five key themes, which included: Reform of existing core homelessness legislation; the broader role of the Welsh public service in preventing homelessness; targeted proposals to prevent homelessness for those disproportionately affected; improving access to accommodation and lastly, how those changes could be implemented.
- Key changes and impacts to the way the Vale of Glamorgan Council handled housing and homelessness if the proposals were implemented, i.e. the abolition of the priority need and intentionality test around housing and homelessness provision, as well as the challenges in terms of resourcing the proposals in light of the limitations the Council faced in terms of appropriate housing, accommodation and the related demand. Although WG had suggested these would be 'aspirational' proposals they would still be put into legislation which would give additional responsibilities to the Vale.

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

- The Chair stated that while the aspirations of the proposals in the White Paper were admirable, there were clear concerns on how the Vale of Glamorgan Council would be able to resource and manage these.
- Councillor Payne referred to the potential challenges and difficulties in pursuing the proposal of always providing supported housing for under-25s under the Council's current resources and access to appropriate accommodation, which would also require significant investment.
- Councillor Payne also commented on the potential conflict in the White Paper concerning proposals around Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) and individuals' housing options and choices.
- Councillor Payne queried the 'unacceptable behaviour' restrictions and criteria within the White Paper and report, including whether Council Housing staff were suitably trained and trauma informed in order to deal with persons presenting as homeless and who may be suffering from various trauma concerning their circumstances, have behavioural challenges and complex needs and whether such staff adequately protected and supported. It was explained that Housing staff were appropriately trained, and trauma informed, as well as having the empathy and experience to support persons presenting as homeless in order to support them as much as possible. Unacceptable behaviour would entail actions which would likely result in an outright possession order if a person was a tenant. Staff involved in this process were engaged with, offered support and were monitored by line management and others to ensure that they could continue to carry out their vital role and support with homeless persons.
- Councillor Haines commented on the statutory duty placed on Local Authorities to draw up a PHP setting out steps to be taken to secure accommodation along with a duty to review PHPs every 8 weeks or more when there were changes of circumstances. He felt that this could place undue pressure on Council staff in the Housing Solutions Team due to current homelessness numbers. He suggested that the duty to review should start at

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a higher time span, i.e. 12 weeks and then work towards an 8-week review. The Operational Manager, Public Housing Services, in response, referred to the challenges around this proposal and its implementation, with only a relatively small team of Council staff and limited budgetary and other resources available. The Council was also trying to empower people via their PHPs and help them to take charge of their circumstances.

- Councillor Haines also felt that persons with certain disabilities and care needs would be adversely affected by the proposed abolition of the priority need and intentionality test, as this would unduly impact their specific needs and affect their ability to be near local support networks, as well as the proposals ignoring the extra barriers such persons faced. In response, it was stated that in effect prioritising everyone the same would mean that no one could be prioritised with an unintended impact on those with care and disability needs who needed housing.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby stated that it was important that the WG had a baseline understanding of the current situation and pressures faced by the Vale of Glamorgan Council, other Welsh Local Authorities and, indirectly, on various other public bodies i.e. the NHS, around housing and homelessness, as well as the need to define the related timescales to implement the White Paper proposals. It was explained that this consultation involved discussions with various public sector bodies and partners, including the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), plus ongoing discussions with WG to stress the challenges faced in implementing these proposals i.e. the decline in the availability of private sector accommodation, increased housing demand due to the cost-of-living crisis, etc.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby also cited the need to impress on WG that although these proposals were aspirational, should they become legislation, these would place additional statutory duties and pressures on the Council and its resources, although some measures were already being undertaken by the Council.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby asked if the Council's response to the consultation on the White Paper be shared with the Committee, and that it received any subsequent updates.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following comments of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee be included in the Council's response to the consultation:

- While the aspirations of the proposals in the White Paper were admirable, there were clear concerns on how the Vale of Glamorgan Council would be able to resource and manage these.
- The potential challenges and difficulties in pursuing the proposal of always providing supported housing for under-25s under the Council's current resources and access to appropriate accommodation, which would also require significant investment.
- There was a potential conflict in the White Paper concerning proposals around Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) and individuals' housing options and choices.

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- Regarding the statutory duty placed on Local Authorities to draw up a PHP setting out steps to be taken to secure accommodation along with a duty to review PHPs every 8 weeks or more when there were changes of circumstances, it was felt that this could place undue pressure on Council staff in the Housing Solutions Team due to current homelessness numbers. It was suggested that the duty to review should start at a higher time span, i.e. 12 weeks and then work towards an 8-week review.
- It was felt that persons with certain disabilities and care needs would be adversely affected by the proposed abolition of the priority need and intentionality test, as this would unduly impact their specific needs and affect their ability to be near local support networks, as well as the proposals ignoring the extra barriers such persons faced.
- It was important that the Welsh Government had a baseline understanding of the current situation and pressures faced by the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other Welsh Local Authorities around housing and homelessness, as well as the need to define the related timescales to implement the White Paper proposals.
- To stress to Welsh Government that although these proposals were aspirational, should they become legislation, these would place additional statutory duties and pressures on the Council and its resources, although some measures were already being undertaken by the Council.
- That the Council's response to the consultation on the White Paper be shared with the Committee, and that it receives any subsequent updates.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure the views of the Committee were considered as part of the Council's response to the White Paper consultation.