JOINT PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (COMBINED MEETING OF START WELL, LIVE WELL, PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEES)

Minutes of an Extraordinary Hybrid meeting held on 11th February, 2026.

The Committee agenda is available here.

The recording of the meeting is available here.

Present: Councillor J. Protheroe (Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, G.M. Ball, G. Bruce, C.A. Cave, C.E.A. Champion, A.M. Collins, P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, C.P. Franks, E.J. Goodjohn, E. Goodjohn, S.M. Hanks, N.P. Hodges, M.J. Hooper, C. Ianucci-Williams, Dr. I.J. Johnson, S. Lloyd-Selby, B. Loveluck-Edwards, J. Lynch-Wilson, N.B. Marshallsea, J.M. Norman, H.M. Payne, S.D. Perkes, I.A.N. Perry, C. Stallard, N.C. Thomas and S.T. Wiliam.

Co-Opted Member: Dr. M. Price (Roman Catholic Church).

Also Present: L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), R.M. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sports and Well-being) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

651 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.”

652 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors I.R. Buckley, S. Campbell, W. Gilligan, W.A. Hennessy and E. Penn.

653 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 16th December, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

654 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

655 INITIAL BUDGET 2026/27 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27 TO 2030/31 (REF) –

The Head of Finance presented the report surrounding the Council's budget proposals and provided an overview of key headlines, including that the Council was faced with approximately £28m of pressures in 2026/27, which equated to approximately £84m across the medium term. They indicated that there was a gap of £6.584m, which was being met by reductions in pension costs (£3.812m) alongside Reshaping and savings (£2.772m), which was lower than previous years. They shared that the Council continued to be the second lowest funded Council per head of population in Wales and spent significantly above its notional formula needs assessment for Education and Social Services, and that Council Tax had been modelled on a 5.5% increase.

They further shared the timelines associated with the budget, including around the provisional settlement in November, provisional deal shared in December ahead of the final settlement confirming the 4.3% uplift being confirmed on 20th January, and indicated that he was still involved in lobbying Welsh Government for a multi-year settlement.

The Head of Finance provided an overview of the journey of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which showed the position as at 4th December, 2025, and was subsequently updated to reflect further pressures, settlements, and the impact of savings and reducing the pensions fund, which all culminated in the budget being presented. He provided an overview of the pressures identified within the budget including £3.224m in investment, £0.714m due to demography, £11.694m due to pay inflation, £5.971m due to general inflation, £0.060m due to capital financial alongside other pressures such as social care and schools which totalled £6.064m. He then provided an overview of savings including those related to income £436k, Procurement £50k, Service Transformation £1.557m and Tactical savings, £729k, and highlighted how these savings were reduced compared to previous years.

They then presented the proposed Council Tax increase being modelled on 5.5%, with proposals also considering 6.5%, with both rates meaning that the Vale of Glamorgan would still be the 6th lowest Council Tax in Wales for Band D properties, and that due to the current situation, further details were included surrounding the schools' budget as a high profile area, identifying how the Council had fully funded the pay award, invested £1m towards historic pressures, and was investing in a number of schemes such as Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Mainstream support (£510k), Welsh Medium ALN Resource Base at Ysgol Bro Morgannwg (£216k) and developing specialist resource bases in schools in Sy Cyres and Cowbridge (£193k).

The Head of Finance closed by providing an overview of the reserves position, with estimated balances until 2031 based on current budget strategy, seeing a gradual reduction of usable reserves on a year-by-year basis, and a deficit position across Schools' reserves which would have a detrimental effect on the wider Council's financial sustainability.

Councillor Dr. Johnson thanked staff for their work in producing the budget and recognised that the overall financial situation had improved in recent months, largely due to Plaid Cymru's support of Welsh Government's budget in increasing funding for local government. They recognised that there were fewer cuts to services proposed than previous years and the positive impact that this would have for residents. They then reflected that based upon the pension fund and increased income; they were unsure around the proposed Council Tax increase which was above inflation. They questioned if the additional million for Schools would be enough as their debts were substantial and queried if the funding being provided for Social Care was sufficient, particularly when looking at right-sizing. They then sought to understand if enough was being done to support Vale 2030's ambitions surrounding decarbonisation and the nature emergency, and to further understand the rationale behind the secondary proposal of what an additional 1% Council Tax increase could unlock, as there was reference to areas such as parks, youth services and rural buses, but there was not sufficient detail to enable a fully considered decision.

The Head of Finance responded that there had been fewer cuts in the savings programme, with the last 4 years seeing £8m per year, and that a more modest programme would allow concentration and focus to maximise delivery. They responded that the £1m for schools would help as there were some schools which were only in minor deficits which would be helped by this additional funding, and reflected that there was volatility within Social Care based upon a number of factors which drove overspends, but that the Directorate had robust arrangements in place to try and manage this, including a Budget Board. They further shared that whilst not prevalent within the revenue budget, there were several schemes in the Capital Programme being proposed to support decarbonisation.

The Leader responded that when looking at the budget, there were three areas of concern which an additional 1% Council Tax increase would address. These included youth services, with a focus on prevention, which were felt to be needed by young people, particularly in deprived communities alongside rural bus services, with some of the county's rural areas being at the top of deprivation scales due to connectivity. They indicated that there needed to be consideration of what was good enough and what the community needed and also explained that parks were another potential area in seeking Green Flag status as local residents were passionate and valued these spaces. They shared that further information surrounding these proposals would be shared ahead of the Full Council meeting to approve the budget, reflecting that it was only be a 31p per week for Band D residents, and that alongside Plaid Cymru counterparts, Council Leaders of all political persuasions needed to be thanked for their role in lobbying Welsh Government ahead of potential uncertainty following the Senedd elections in May.

Councillor Franks questioned how robust the budget was, reflecting on what he felt to be the current failure in funding schools. They indicated that a recent ESTYN national report shared the potential risks of schools not having adequate funding to deliver the curriculum and sought to understand how the proposed budget would address these challenges. They also reflected that the highways budget felt inadequate, and that roads were falling to bits, with low grade repairs leading to longer term costs.

The Chief Executive responded that these issues were inter-related, and that difficult choices needed to be made to balance the budget and that Audit Wales would be looking at the robustness of the overall budget. They shared that there needed to be a look at all 53 schools across the County, but only a minority were causing serious concern, where recovery plans were difficult, and that whilst he would like to spend more on schools and highways, the Council needed to ensure that its budget was managed accordingly.

Councillor Franks further sought to understand what had happened in the proposed meeting between schools and the Council following the issuing of legal notices, as the meetings were cancelled short notice and a small press release issued.

The Chief Executive responded that the work had not stopped, meetings were underway with seven schools, and that they had been constructive to date in trying to find a path forward. They indicated that these meetings were just starting and that there would be regular dialogue to continue working on recovery plans in partnership to overcome the financial challenges.

Councillor Ewan Goodjohn highlighted that the additional investment in Social Care and Education was approximately £25m, approximately 7% of the revenue budget, and that this was positive following years of Council Tax increases alongside service reductions. They reflected that Youth Services had a positive impact on the community, providing a benefit to young people, particularly those who were not in education, employment or training, saved lives and helped in building the wider community, and that the service was particularly needed in the most deprived areas, such as his local ward in Cadoxton.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the comments of the Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration ahead of final consideration at Full Council.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that Cabinet consider comments ahead of any further budget considerations.

656 DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2026/27 TO 2030/31(REF) –

The Head of Finance presented the programme proposals, which he felt to be more ambitious than previous years, as demonstrated by the increase to £129.175m in 2025/26 and £451.611m over the next five years. They shared that this was broken down with funding from general capital funding, capital receipts, reserves, grants and contributions and unsupported borrowing (the recently agreed Housing Revenue Account).

He provided an overview of proposals within the programme including:

- £42.12m on building new schools and £2.32m on existing schools and £92.35m across the 5 year programme in total for Learning and Skills;

- £18.168m on building new homes and £24.158m on improvements to existing homes and £278.24m across the 5 year Housing Improvement programme;
- £3.07m on resurfacing roads and £1.18m on structures and £16.25m across the 5 year programme on road resurfacing and structures;
- £635k on decarbonisation schemes and £1.815m across the 5 year programme. (This was in addition to the NZC funding included in the new school builds budget above.);
- £339k on Children's Services Emergency Fostering Property and £380k on Social Service properties roof works with PV installation over the 5 year programme;
- £4.6m between 2026-27 and 2030-31 for Specialist Accommodation for Older People (including nursing care);
- £1.5m in 2026/27 for fleet management;
- £4.015m for slope stablisation works to address Penarth Marina landslip;
- £19.786m Levelling Up Fund (which was delayed to changes in UK Government);
- £450k Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant;
- £750k Pride in Place Grant.

They closed by identifying the next steps for the budget, and that following this Scrutiny session, a draft budget would be presented to Cabinet on 26th February ahead of final approval at Full Council on 9th March.

Councillor Franks queried if the Council had the staff and expertise needed to deliver on the projects identified, and to understand if there was a breakdown of the £16m over 5 years for roads as this could be consumed by a few large schemes. The Head of Finance advised that the Council had been addressing skills and capacity issues across the Council to ensure the delivery of the programmes of work, and that a detailed breakdown of highways spend was outlined in the appendices of the report.

Councillor Champion sought to understand the spend allocated to Cowbridge Primary School, to which the Operational Manager – Accountancy advised that the breakdown was included in the appendices and would be on a pipeline basis over 3 years at a cost of approximately £20m.

The Leader reflected that 18 schools had been completed since 2018, with 3 in progress, and that there had been approximately £340m investment in school buildings, which had had significant community benefits as part of the capital works, and a positive economic impact for area for employers and subcontractors, with approximately 50% of local staff from the area and 97% of staff from Wales, and emphasised the more the Council could invest in capital programmes, the better longer term outcomes would be.

Councillor Dr. Johnson welcomed the capital projects and investment in society and reflected that the Council were fortunate to be one of eleven Councils in Wales able to build their own housing stock. They expressed that residents were always surprised at the cost of building schools, referencing Sir Richard Gwynn School which cost approximately £62m, and that whilst he welcomed the increased Capital Programme compared to previous years, it was not possible to know which plans

would be delivered in the financial year as there may be delays outside of the Council's control such as postponements, contractor or supply issues. They shared that he believed there needed to be another Welsh Medium Secondary School in the county urgently as Bro Morgannwg was already close to full, potentially in the West of the Vale, and sought to understand when this would materialise as this was not included in this year's Capital Programme.

The Director of Education shared there was an intention to build another Welsh medium comprehensive school alongside a Welsh medium special school but a significant amount of planning would need to be undertaken to support the ambition of developing Welsh medium education.

The Chief Executive shared that the Western Gateway scheme was closer than ever and that this now had the in principle support of the Health Board, and that they would be looking to Welsh Government for the main source of funding for another Welsh medium school, alongside Section 106 agreements, and that multiple pieces of a complex jigsaw needed to come together to unlock this, but that this should be coming forward in future proposals.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the comments of the Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration ahead of final consideration at Full Council.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that Cabinet consider comments ahead of any further budget considerations.