

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid meeting held on 24th March, 2026.

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

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

Present: Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby (Chair); Councillor C. Iannucci-Williams (Vice-Chair); Councillors G.M. Ball, C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, A.M. Ernest, M.J. Hooper, J.M. Norman, I.A.N. Perry, C. Stallard and S.T. Wiliam.

Also present: M. Blackmore and G. Doyle (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representatives); O. Carroll (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale); and Councillors A. Asbrey, J. Aviet, B.E. Brooks (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places), C.P. Franks, S.M. Hanks, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), Dr. I.J. Johnson, H.M. Payne, S.D. Perkes (Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement), N.C. Thomas and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

760 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”.

761 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor E. Penn and K. Mitchell (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representative).

762 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 6th January, 2026 and the meeting held on 20th January, 2026 be approved as the correct record for each meeting.

763 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

764 REVIEW OF PILOT LEISURE ACTIVITY AT COSMESTON COUNTRY PARK (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 5th February, 2026 was presented by the Director of Place to the Committee, the purpose of which was for the Committee to consider the reference and the associated report, and that any recommendations be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

The Director gave a presentation summarising the Cabinet's recommendations to carry out full year ecological and water quality checks in 2026, pause any new water activities, and report back to Cabinet later that year. The presentation also outlined the background to the report, noting that previous activities at Cosmeston, such as paddleboarding, diving, canoeing and boating, had had minimal impact. The Council needed to consider how to sustain the Country Parks under budget pressures, with the Aqua Park pilot helping to assess the balance between leisure use and environmental protection for future planning. Key issues included visitor numbers and the economic impact of the pilot (16,000 visitors and £960k respectively), and the long-term sustainability of the County's Country Parks. Water quality and safety results were within acceptable limits, with only one isolated anomaly and injuries relating to the pilot which were assessed to be minor, typical, and unrelated to water quality. Ecological impact included Natural Resources Wales (NRW) assent (twice) in relation to the Aqua Park, several ecology reports, and a recommendation for a new baseline assessment. The community response to the aqua park pilot, including petitions, objections and comments from the Vale Action Group (VAG), was outlined, such as a petition with 7,585 signatures and concerns raised about the ecology, noise, water quality and safety. Despite this, the pilot data was considered invaluable for shaping a longer-term strategy for leisure uses and activities at Cosmeston. In terms of next steps, the Council would pause any new water-based leisure activities during 2026, carry out full ecological and water quality baseline assessments, undertake a wider review of land and water leisure activity opportunities, and report back to Cabinet late in 2026 regarding developing suitable opportunities.

The eight written representations by members of the public and groups that had been submitted to the Committee in relation to this pilot were also addressed as follows:

- Zebra mussels had been in the lake for over 20 years, likely brought in by birds. DNA testing in 2025 suggested the possible presence of killer shrimp, though this was unconfirmed and would have pre-dated the pilot.
- The eastern lake had previously been used for swimming and other water based recreation, but swimming ceased due to safety and the lack of lifeguard provision rather than any water quality or pollution issues.
- The NRW granted assent for the activity twice under Section 28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and ecological surveys by both the operator and the Council found no unacceptable impact on birdlife, though a full 2026 ecological baseline was recommended. Starry stonewort remained healthy and had spread from the west to the east lake.

- Feedback from Country Park staff indicated no significant increase in noise complaints, antisocial behaviour, traffic / parking pressures, or unauthorised water use during the pilot period.
- Planning permission was not required due to the pilot's temporary nature and the development rights of the Council and its agents.
- The associated containers were being removed; but the anchors would remain to avoid disturbing starry stonewort (to which the NRW had given assent to).
- Regarding the financial points raised, all income from the pilot (and parking) would go directly toward: Country Park upkeep, ecological work and facility improvements (e.g. toilets, parking).
- The water quality testing schedule at Cosmeston would increase in 2026, moving from twice-monthly sampling in January to weekly testing from April to September, replacing the historically less frequent shoreline-based testing. The newer approach, which sampled water away from the shore to avoid anomalies caused by wildlife and visitor activity, would continue throughout the 2026 baseline assessment.

Subsequently, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places was invited by the Committee to speak, who emphasised the critical importance of the County's blue and green spaces, especially after the pandemic, when outdoor areas became a "refuge" for many people. She stressed the ongoing importance of encouraging people to use these spaces. Ensuring parks were sustainable for future generations required income generation, and the pilot activity had provided an income that could be ploughed back and help fund improvements such as new facilities and ecological work. She also talked about the wider developments and improvements to the County's Country Parks, and their benefits, with round 78% of visitors to these having come from outside the area, which also brought wider benefits. Taking a pause this year in terms of the any new water-based leisure activities would allow a proper evaluation of environmental changes, as habitats naturally evolved.

Two public speakers, S. Robson and S. Lenaerts, spoke on this item, and raised several points and concerns, starting with S. Robson who raised a number of issues on water quality and related concerns on public safety at Cosmeston. He stated that water quality was about protecting swimmers from sudden pollution spikes caused by events such as heavy-rain "first flushes," pollution spills, or leaching from nearby landfill sites. These events were unpredictable, meaning anyone entering the water was always at risk. He argued that historic E. coli and Enterococci data, not just recent samples, showed the real pattern of danger. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests had revealed high levels of E. coli and Enterococci at the shoreline of east lake, which had exceeded the legal safety limits set. NRW and Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) had confirmed the lake's water quality as poor. If Cosmeston were an official bathing site, it would have been required to close. He added that extra sampling did not solve the issue because results took three days, meaning exposure would occur before contamination was detected. In conclusion, he said Cosmeston's water quality was not suitable for a children's aqua park, that dangerous spikes happened too often to mitigate, and that another year of testing would not change the lake's history, leaving future users inevitably exposed if water activities were re-started at the location.

On Councillor Perry's point of clarification, it was explained that the data on the levels of E. coli and Enterococci had been obtained via FOI requests through Public Health Wales, which had taken some time to obtain.

S. Lenaerts argued that the Council's claim of "no damage to wildlife" at the location of the Aqua Park was not supported by its own evidence. She said the Thompson Ecology report did not confirm that biodiversity or legal requirements had been adequately addressed; instead, it stated it could not give such assurance. She added that NRW had already warned that the surveys were incomplete because they missed the peak breeding season and included no direct measurement of disturbance, making the conclusions unreliable. She reminded the Committee that the Vale Action Group had submitted a detailed, evidence-based report in October 2025, drawing on research, FOI data, consultation, and scientific input, which raised concerns about protected species, missing baseline data, planning issues, risks to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and flawed survey methods. She felt this evidence was dismissed. She emphasised that NRW, the Action Group, and the independent review all raised unresolved concerns, yet the Council continued to present the ecology as "settled." She said this was now an issue of how evidence was handled, not just ecology. She also criticised the lack of oversight at a protected site, noting there was no dedicated wildlife officer and no visible involvement from the Council's Ecologist.

She concluded that the Council had incomplete data, had been warned about its limitations, and had disregarded credible concerns. Presenting uncertainty as certainty, she said, was not robust scrutiny. She urged the Committee to reject the Cabinet's report and questioned how the Council could still claim "no damage to wildlife" given the evidence presented.

On Councillor Perry's subsequent point of clarification about how the Vale Action Group raised their concerns, etc. with the Council, it was explained that they contacted the Council via email, sent out invitations, etc., which the speaker felt were dismissed, not followed up adequately or remained unanswered.

The Director of Place responded to the points raised by the public speakers as follows. On engagement with the Vale Action Group, the Council had received approximately 2,000 emails in relation to the Aqua Park, with many of these coming from the Action Group. All emails had been responded to, including some very detailed replies given. This was the same for the various, related, complaints that had been made to the Council as well. The Action Group report had also been considered as part of the Thomson study. The report had not been allowed by the Action Group to be presented to the Committee or to be made publicly available. The advice of NRW and the Council's Ecologist had also been followed to the letter of the law. Thomson had looked at the information provided and as part of their recommendations found no evidence of harm to any species or ecological damage but recommended a full baseline assessment in 2026 to ensure the Council had the data needed for future decisions. The Council was following this advice in full and acting in line with all guidance provided. It was reiterated that NRW advice had been followed and the Council's Ecologist had been involved in every part of the decision-making process relating to the pilot.

On the issues around water quality, the Director explained that some of these were based on a misunderstanding. For some time, rangers had taken samples only at the lake edge, often in reed beds, which led to occasional anomalous spikes caused by birds or dogs contaminating shallow water. To address this, the Council introduced a more robust testing regime using samples taken from within the lake, away from areas prone to edge contamination. He clarified that Cosmeston was not tested as an official bathing water site, so bathing-water standards did not apply. However, testing in and around the Aqua Park location showed no breaches of water quality standards. One sample referred to showing high bacteria levels was taken by the operator in the wrong location, during extreme wind, and without a boat; the company later deemed it invalid, which is why it was not shared with the Council. Another elevated sample came from a public beach area on the opposite side of the lake, which was occasionally used informally for swimming and could be contaminated by uncontrolled activity. This area was not close to the Aqua Park site. He stressed that throughout the summer, testing at the Aqua Park location consistently showed no elevated levels, and long-standing users, such as canoe and diving clubs, had never reported illness. He also confirmed that NRW and SRS were not unhappy with the Council's testing approach, which included extra sampling after heavy rainfall even though the lake had no river or stream inflow. Overall, he said the Council's testing regime was risk-based, robust, and provided an accurate picture of water quality at the Aqua Park site.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places added that the ongoing water testing at the site would help the Council make an informed decision about any long-term plans at Cosmeston. She stressed the importance of keeping an open mind until the results were known, noting that nothing was "on or off the table". Her priority was ensuring that everyone, dog walkers, families and wildlife, could continue to enjoy the park and that its habitats remained sustainable. The aim was to gather the evidence needed to make a well-informed decision that protected the country parks while welcoming all visitors.

Councillor Franks, a non-Committee Elected Member was invited to speak. He felt that the Cabinet should recognise the strong public opposition to the Aqua Park and future activities of this nature at the site. He argued that the Cabinet ought to "cut its losses" and accept that many residents did not want this intrusion into the Country Park. He questioned the £960k figure that had been mentioned, asking whether it represented economic benefit to the whole of the County or just extra direct income to the Council. He added that prolonging the issue would be unwise and would reflect poorly on the Cabinet. He concluded that there was no merit in continuing to pursue such activities at Cosmeston and suggested that the Committee recommend the Aqua Park scheme be permanently dropped. The Director of Place explained the £960k figure referred to the overall economic benefit to the Vale, as assessed by the tourism and economic development consultants commissioned to review the operation. He explained that he could not disclose the figure received by the Council from the project but confirmed that any money received was reinvested directly back into the Country Park.

Subsequently, Councillor Hooper, a Committee Member raised a point of order regarding the income received by the Council from the Aqua Park and that it should

be available to the Committee in order to properly consider the report and actual figures involved. It was explained that this was potentially a commercially sensitive issue regarding the private company involved but further advice would be sought on how to best obtain and share the information from the operator to the Committee in due course, including a future Part II report if required, from both the Council's Monitoring Officer and the company operating the Aqua Park. Councillor Hooper wished that his concerns be noted, as Councillors should have access to such sensitive information under Part II, due to their adherence to the Council's Code of Conduct and that the relevant legal and procedural advice should have been sought prior to the meeting, due to the nature of the report and its information having already being known. The Chair reminded the Committee that the report and other agenda papers had been received in advance of the meeting, and any such queries could have been raised prior to the meeting.

Subsequently, the Committee Members, including the Vice-Chair, Councillors Ernest, Perry, Stallard and Wiliam, made several comments or raised queries about the report, which were addressed by the Director of Place as follows:

Bathing water standards were set by European regulations and required around four years of testing to achieve formal designation. These standards applied mainly to coastal and certain inland waters. In this case, the Council was not encouraging general bathing in the lake outside the regulated Aqua Park activity. Although users did enter the water, it was not classified as long-term swimming use. This was similar to how the Aqua Park had been permitted to operate in Cardiff Bay, where the water did not meet bathing-water standards. The Council was confident that Cosmeston's water quality was high but acknowledged that past testing was less rigorous because it had not been linked to bathing-water requirements. As part of the pilot however, a strict testing regime was carried out in the actual activity area, and this enhanced regime would continue during the year when no activities were taking place. This would give a clearer picture of water quality away from the lake edge. The Council was not encouraging swimming outside regulated activity and, for that reason, would not be applying for a bathing-water designation for Cosmeston.

On the indirect effects / economic impact of the Aqua Park, this would be assessed on the number of visitors, spending on refreshments and activities inside / outside the Country Park and the figures calculated from those. This was done via the 'Steam' tourism consultants who undertook an assessment and calculation of the figures that could be attributed to the Aqua Park and its related benefits at Cosmeston.

The SSSI designation covered both lakes and both the Council and NRW already believed starry stonewort was likely present in the eastern lake as well. Before the Aqua Park was installed, the operator commissioned a diving survey, which confirmed its presence, and NRW was aware of this before granting its assent. Since then, the starry stonewort had increased significantly in the eastern lake and was thriving, regardless of the Aqua Park's presence. NRW recently issued a further assent to retain the concrete anchors, indicating that the plant's presence in the eastern lake would not affect any future consent decisions.

On the possible presence of killer shrimp, boats were launched into Cosmeston Lake on a regular basis by various users, including the canoe club, the diving club, and Council rangers, who used a boat for water sampling and operational purposes such as public safety. All boats were required to follow strict biosecurity cleaning and inspection procedures both before entering the lake and on removal. These measures were in place partly because known invasive species, including zebra mussels, were already present. Regarding the suggestion that a boat, owned by the Aqua Park operator and believed to have come from Rutland Water, may have introduced invasive species, it was stated that the vessel would also have been subject to the same biosecurity controls as all other boats entering the lake. Given that boats from multiple organisations, including Cardiff Canoe Club, were used on other waters where invasive species were present, strict biosecurity procedures applied universally to all lake users. A dedicated cleaning and inspection area was located by the launch ramp, and compliance was required before boats were launched and after they were removed.

Regarding planning matters, following a formal complaint the Council's enforcement officer reviewed the position and confirmed that planning permission was not required for the temporary activity as operated. It was noted that if the activity were to become permanent, or involve permanent structures, the planning position would likely be different. Any such considerations would form part of the baseline assessment process.

Also, any information, concerns, etc. submitted by the Vale Action Group had been fully considered by the Council as part of the decision-making process, etc. around the pilot and as part of the consideration on activities and developments at the location.

On the issues, points and concerns raised about the purpose of Cosmeston Country Park, the economic impact of the Aqua Park, the impact of the previous use of the nearby area as a chemical and other waste dump, figures around tourism and activities there, as well as parking fees / income, and local Ward Member and resident concerns about the pilot, these were also addressed by the Director of Place. This included the Director noting the historical context of Cosmeston Country Park, which was sometimes misunderstood. The original masterplan, prepared when the park was established by the former South Glamorgan Council and later transferred to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, identified the western lake as a natural area and the eastern lake for active recreation. The eastern lake had been used for various leisure purposes, including motorboating, prior to the park opening in the early 1980s, and recreational use of the water had continued over many years. In relation to water quality, it was confirmed that the Council undertook annual testing of the lake for heavy metals and other chemical contaminants due to the site's proximity to an historic use as a quarry and landfill. This testing was carried out in addition to routine microbiological sampling, to ensure there was no leaching into the water and to protect the SSSI designation. Tourism impact assessments were undertaken using external consultants, based on visitor figures linked to the Aqua Park use and spectators, in line with their standard methodology. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places added that the Country Park(s) including Cosmeston were for everyone, and which was for both wildlife conservation and recreational use and was therefore not going to be turned into 'a theme park' as

had been suggested. It was important for the assessment of Cosmeston to be undertaken, and for Committee Members, Elected Members and the public to take part in this and contribute to it.

Concerns were raised on the perceived degree of uncertainty around water testing and its efficacy, particularly as this assessment on water quality and safety would only be intensified after the pilot had already taken place.

Concerns were also raised about the potential conflict between different users and their needs around Cosmeston Country Park, such as between those for extended leisure activities (such as the Aqua Park) and those who did not want these activities there. There was insufficient information on the income generated (or not) by the Council regarding the Aqua Park, etc., despite the Council's emphasis on income generation and financial sustainability. This also included greater clarity needed on the numbers and figures featured in the report, such as those on the economic impact estimates and the breakdown of numbers visiting the Aqua Park specifically and those visiting Cosmeston for its other facilities and landscapes and the need to look at previous years' figures by way of comparison and analysis. Therefore, more meaningful numbers and data in this regard would be welcome to help compare the information concerned. It was explained that the figure of 16,000 represented the total number of Aqua Park users and associated spectators, as advised by the operator and used by the Council's tourism consultants. The Council did not operate a system to count individual visitors entering or leaving Cosmeston Country Park, as access to the park was free and only car parking charges applied. Visitor numbers were therefore estimated using car parking data and other indicators, compared against previous years to assess any uplift in park usage. The Aqua Park itself was a private operation, and payments to use it were made directly to the operator. The operator provided usage information to the tourism consultants to enable assessment of the overall 'global' economic impact, which informed the figures set out in the report.

A Motion and recommendation were suggested by Councillor Perry, that, given the level of public opposition and concerns over water quality, the Committee recommended that activities including aqua park operations potentially exposing children to contaminated water were not permitted at Cosmeston Country Park. This was subsequently voted on, via a Recorded Vote:

	For	Against	Abstain
G.M. Ball		√	
C.E.A. Champion	√		
P. Drake		√	
V.P. Driscoll	√		
A.M. Ernest	√		
M.J. Hooper	√		
C. Iannucci-Williams		√	
S. Lloyd-Selby		√	

J.M. Norman		√	
I.A.N. Perry	√		
C. Stallard		√	
S.T. Wiliam	√		
Total	6	6	0

Due to there being a tied vote, the Chair, with her casting vote, voted against the Motion / recommendation and therefore it was not carried.

Councillor Perry subsequently offered a further, alternative, Motion / recommendation (as below), which was also seconded.

A further Recorded Vote took place. The below recommendation was voted on by the Committee, under a Recorded Vote, as follows:

	For	Against	Abstain
C.E.A. Champion	√		
P. Drake		√	
V.P. Driscoll	√		
A.M. Ernest	√		
M.J. Hooper	√		
C. Iannucci-Williams		√	
S. Lloyd-Selby		√	
J.M. Norman		√	
I.A.N. Perry	√		
C. Stallard		√	
S.T. Wiliam	√		
Total	6	5	0

Therefore, the vote to support the recommendation set out below was carried.

Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet consider the following: that the precautionary principle should be applied and the maximum weighting be given to the protection of the ecosystem of the lakes at Cosmeston Country Park, with no weighting given to Council income when the Council considers an aqua park and similar activities at Cosmeston Country Park and its lakes.

Reason for recommendation

To be referred to Cabinet for their consideration, following the discussions at the meeting on the reference and report, and the issues raised by Committee Members, public speakers and others at the meeting, as part of their consideration of the Review.

765 ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING AND PLACE DIRECTORATE PLANS 2026/27 (OUTLINING YEAR 2 ACTIVITIES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND ASSOCIATED PERFORMANCE TARGETS TO DELIVER VALE 2030, THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN 2025-30) (DP / DEH) –

The report presented for Members' consideration the planned activities, performance measures and associated performance targets in the Place (Appendix A) and Environment & Housing Services Directorate Plans 2026-27 (Appendix B). The Place Directorate Plan aligned primarily to the remit of the Place Scrutiny Committee. The Environment and Housing Directorate Plan aligned to the remits of both the Place and the Live Well Scrutiny Committees and would be considered by both. These were presented to the Committee by the Director of Place and the Director of Environment and Housing. The Directorate Plans had been informed by the Council's 50 commitments detailed in Vale 2030 and actions and measures had been aligned to the five well-being objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan for the period 2025-30. They also aligned with, and helped meet, the Council's statutory obligations. The other Directorate Plans were being considered by relevant Scrutiny Committees, and their collective comments and recommendations were to be considered by Cabinet on 16th April, 2026.

A joint presentation was given to the Committee covering the following:

- An overview of, and the context for, the Directorate Plans;
- The structure and composition of the Directorate Plans;
- Environment & Housing Directorate Plan – key issues, risks, actions, measures and targets for 2026/27;
- Place Directorate Plan – key issues, risks, actions, measures and targets for 2026/27.

Scrutiny Committee Members were asked to review the Place and Environment & Housing Directorate Plans 2026-27 (planned activities, and proposed performance measures and associated targets) and how they would support delivery of the commitments and outcomes in Vale 2030. Members were also asked to refer any comments and recommendations with regards to the Place and Environment & Housing Services Directorate Plans 2026-27 to Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement.

Following the presentation, the relevant Cabinet Members referred to the key, positive, aspects of the Directorate Plans (such as recycling and street scene activities, the work of Safer Vale, housing development and quality standards, etc.) and the considerable work undertaken by Council staff as part of these plans.

Councillor Ernest raised a query in relation to the report and major project consultations (e.g. the former Wilko site in Thompson Street and the Western and Eastern Gateways). The Director of Place addressed this, including the consultation and development work at the Wilko site and the work ongoing around the Eastern and Western Gateways, in terms of collaboration and usage by the Council with other agencies and partners and having a mixed use for these, with various facilities and residential accommodation to be included.

On Councillor Champion's queries and comments around the South Wales Metro bus services (including the use of the term 'metro' which did not materially alter or improve the service) and the location of extra GP surgeries within the Western Vale and elsewhere, including greater collaboration between the Council and the Health Board on this. On GP surgeries, there were talks ongoing between the Council and the local Health Board in relation to the Local Development Plan and locating / siting surgeries within the Vale. He also raised a query around the Local Area Energy Plan. Research was being commissioned around a local heating policy and local heat networks, to be reported back in the next 12 months.

From the Chair, clarification was sought regarding the reference in the Place Directorate Plan to a future focus on income generation at the Council's Country Parks, and how this would align with the learning from the Cosmeston Aqua Park pilot. It was queried whether the same proactive approach to ecological surveys and environmental assessment undertaken during the pilot would be applied to any future income-generating proposals. It was confirmed that this would be the case and that any future work would focus on the enhancement of existing facilities rather than the introduction of significant new commercial activity. It was noted that both Country Parks already contained café facilities and that improvements to these form part of planned reshaping or redevelopment work. At Cosmeston Country Park, the café was being, or would shortly be, taken over by the Big Fresh Food Company, which was investing in internal refurbishment to improve the visitor experience. Similar opportunities were being considered at Porthkerry Country Park, alongside improvements to public facilities such as toilets. The Council would also continue to explore external grant funding to support such improvements, noting that many funding schemes required a Council contribution of at least 30%, an approach that has been applied to recent projects at both parks. Any future income-generating opportunities, including potential licensed operators providing food and other items, would be progressed with the emphasis on maximising income while minimising the impact on the parks, with protection of the natural environment remaining the priority.

The Chair added that the investment in the Country Parks was welcome, in terms of planting and facilities, and thanks should be given to all those Council staff, etc., who had worked hard to make the Country Parks accessible and provide a positive experience for users of these sites and facilities.

Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Place (Appendix A to the report) and Environment & Housing Services (Appendix B to the report) Directorate Plans and associated measures and performance targets for 2026/27 contained within them, relating to the

scope of the Committee, be endorsed and referred to Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that the planned activities, associated measures and performance targets for the Place and Environment & Housing Services Directorates, as detailed in the Plans and within the scope of the Committee, were relevant and together with the other three Directorate Plans would become the main means through which performance against Vale 2030 would be monitored and measured during 2026/2027.

766 HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE 3 YEAR PLAN: 2026 – 2029 (REF) –

The reference / report from Cabinet of 12th March, 2026 was presented by the Council's Neighbourhood Manager – Highway, the purpose of which was for Committee to consider the main report and appendices, including the details of the Highway Maintenance Three Year Plan 2026 – 2029, prior to it being formally agreed.

A presentation was given to the Committee, which covered the following key points and proposals of the Plan:

- The four key priorities (carriageway resurfacing, surface dressing, thin surfacing and footway improvements);
- An introduction to the Plan, including the Council's duties on, and the importance of, maintaining the adopted highway network of the County, the proposed Plan, treatments and priorities (Appendix A to the report), budget allocation, scoring process / road allocation, and the process for those highways needing immediate attention;
- Following previous recommendations from Scrutiny, the scoring matrix for roads had been changed to capture Active Travel considerations;
- Further background to the Plan and its proposals, the involvement of the Highway Maintenance Team, the assessment process for works to the highways and funding / borrowing considerations for the planned works and future investment in highway maintenance;
- A breakdown of the various highway surface preventative treatments and forms of maintenance, including cost effective alternatives.

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services welcomed recent innovations in road treatment, noting the successful pilot in Barry and the value of ongoing partnership working with local and other universities. He also highlighted that investment in footways had been doubled to £400k over the next two years, improving accessibility and supporting walking and active travel, alongside carriageway maintenance. Members were encouraged to raise any roads requiring attention, while it was emphasised that schemes were prioritised using a robust, evidence-based approach, including machine scanning, visual inspections, public complaints, and consideration of traffic volumes and public transport routes. The Cabinet Member referred to continued lobbying for additional funding, acknowledged

the support received from Welsh Government, and confirmed that new resurfacing methods and technologies continued to be explored. It was further reported that 27,000 potholes had been repaired in the previous year, and thanks were extended to Council officers and staff for their ongoing work.

Councillor Champion thanked Highway officers and their teams for their ongoing work. Concern was raised about the condition of North Road in Cowbridge, which, although a minor road and not included on the prioritised list, continued to experience recurring potholes following repeated utility works and patch repairs. Reference was also made to a BBC Panorama programme on potholes, aired approximately eight months earlier, which examined alternative approaches to road repairs. He stated that this had previously been raised with the Chief Executive and requested that officers consider reviewing the programme if they had not already done so.

Councillor Franks, a non-Committee Member, thanked the Highways team for their work in addressing ongoing issues but expressed concern that the team lacked sufficient resources to manage the scale of the problem. Reference was made to programmed highway works that had been halted the previous autumn after warning signs were erected and residents notified, due to funding having seemingly run out. The Councillor recalled seeking assurance at a previous Council meeting that this situation would not recur and expressed frustration at what he felt was a lack of commitment. He believed that residents were increasingly concerned about the poor condition of roads across the County, including the number, depth, and danger posed by potholes. The Councillor described the situation as unacceptable and urged the Committee to recommend to Cabinet that adequate resources be allocated to enable the Highways team to carry out their work to an even higher standard. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services replied that while he would have liked to see greater investment in highway servicing, it was acknowledged that budgets were limited. It was noted that Council Tax had increased and that funding pressures across services such as Education and Social Services had already been debated at Full Council. His principal concern was ensuring that funding was used effectively. It was highlighted that officers targeted available resources on priority sections of roads rather than full resurfacing, which was considered a sensible and efficient approach. It was unclear whether overall performance in this area was better or worse than other Local Authorities but acknowledged that relevant data could be reviewed. He concluded by emphasising the need to move the matter forward.

Councillor Perry raised an issue affecting both his ward and much of the wider rural Vale: lanes with passing places that had evolved over time and had not been resurfaced for many years, if at all. When drivers pulled into these passing places – particularly at night or in wet conditions – the surface could give way, causing vehicles to drop into holes deeper than typical urban potholes, resulting in vehicle damage. He asked whether the surfacing of these passing places could be extended. The Neighbourhood Manager – Highway replied that there were many informal passing places in rural areas that had developed naturally over time. These were typically grass verges forming part of the adopted highway but not the surfaced carriageway. Maintenance generally involved trimming them back, often using unbound material to address deep ruts or depressions. However, as there was no

proper formation beneath, resurfacing them was not considered appropriate as it would not last. He asked to be informed of specific locations so they could be looked at, and he agreed to raise the issue with highway inspectors. From a safety perspective, the passing places would continue to be maintained to ensure vehicles could pull off safely, but they would not necessarily be resurfaced.

Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Highway Maintenance Three Year Plan: 2026 – 2029 be noted. Therefore, as no further recommendations affecting the proposed Plan were received from the Scrutiny Committee, the Highway Maintenance Three Year Plan: 2026–2029 was agreed.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents and recommendations of the reference and report, as well as the discussions at the meeting. To enable the final Plan to be approved following its consideration by the Place Scrutiny Committee.