

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of an Extraordinary Hybrid Meeting held on 1st April, 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, P. Drake, A.M. Ernest, M.J. Hooper, J.M. Norman, I.A.N. Perry, C. Stallard and S.T. Wiliam.

Also present: G. Doyle (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representative); Councillors G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

788 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”.

789 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors C.E.A. Champion V.P. Driscoll and E. Penn; and O. Carroll (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale).

790 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor A. Ernest declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 – Tree Strategy Update Report. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Ernest was a member of the Penarth Kymin Society as a non-executive member. Councillor Ernest remained in the meeting during the item.

791 PRESENTATION: VALE OF GLAMORGAN AND NATURAL RESOURCE WALES – BATHING WATER QUALITY PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT UPDATE –

The presentation was given to the Committee by the Operational Manager – Enterprise and Specialist Services (SRS), to update them on the partnership work being undertaken between the Vale of Glamorgan Council and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) at two of the designated beaches in Barry, namely Jackson’s Bay and Whitmore Bay, details of which included:

- The background to the bathing water regulations, classifications and the partnership project between NRW and the Council and its various phases. The project was now due to progress to its final phase, to develop fully an automated water quality prediction system and displays for a real-time water quality prediction tool to help provide water quality information to bathers at the two beaches in question.
- The partnership aimed to put the new water-quality prediction models into use by creating an automated system that shared real-time results with the public via electronic signage. During the bathing season (15th May–30th September), the system would issue water quality / pollution risk forecasts, which would be shown on display boards at the seafront and published online. The Vale of Glamorgan Council would be procuring and delivering the full automation system, including its design, development, testing, implementation, and ongoing support.
- In terms of outcomes and benefits for the partnership agreement, the new system would provide real-time bathing water risk forecasts in Barry, helping both managers and the public make informed decisions about swimming. It would also strengthen the reliability of official water-quality classifications. The aim was to have the system operating for the 2026 bathing season, subject to procurement timelines.

Following the presentation, the Committee raised several questions and comments, which were addressed by the Operational Manager – Enterprise and Specialist Services (SRS), including:

- On the Chair's question about the proposed display screens providing information so that the public would know the water quality in that hour, this was confirmed as correct, in that it would offer a prediction on this based on a complex modelling system of the data provided. This would be based on the current conditions on what it would expect the water quality to be, which would tie in with weather conditions and related data.
- Although Councillor Stallard welcomed the final stage of the project, which would enable the public to see its benefits and access those predictions of water quality at Jackson's Bay and Whitmore Bay, this would not improve the water quality, which needed to remain the focus going forward and for Committee to be updated on this in future. She queried if the pollution risk forecasting would be displayed at other local beaches, such as at Ogmore by Sea, or if not why. It was explained that the decision to focus on these two beaches was driven by the aim of improving water quality classifications, and this work was intended to help restore an excellent bathing water classification. The project had been primarily funded by the Welsh Government, with funding initially provided directly through NRW. Reaching this stage had taken many years and required a significant level of investment. The Vale of Glamorgan Council had also contributed funding, including applications for display screens and applying for support through the Welsh Government Brilliant Basics funding programme. At present, the approach had not been extended to other beaches due to the timeframes involved, the technical complexity of the work, and the significant cost. Considerable capital investment had already been required to deliver the project to this point. While the Council would support further funding

applications to expand similar schemes elsewhere, this was a long-term process rather than one that could be delivered quickly.

- Councillor Hooper raised concerns that visitors to beaches often made decisions well in advance of entering the water and queried whether the predictive water quality model could provide forecasts up to 24 hours in advance. It was noted that rainfall was a key predictor of water quality and that forecast data was already available, suggesting this may be feasible. The Member requested that NRW be asked to provide a more technical response if this information was not currently available. It was also emphasised that, while on-site seafront displays were welcomed, water quality information should also be made accessible via the relevant website(s), etc., so that visitors could plan ahead. It was subsequently confirmed that water quality information would be made publicly available via the Council's website. It was explained that the predictive model operated using data inputs at 15-minute intervals, which were then used to generate hour-ahead predictions. The information provided was therefore predictive rather than real-time. It was advised that further technical clarification from NRW would be sought if required.
- Councillor Ernest referred to Penarth beach, with the large number of swimmers there, and the previous postings of water quality assessments near to the beach. This did not appear to be mentioned in the update, and he sought clarification if these assessments would carry on for this year for Penarth beach and beyond. The Chair added to this question by asking that, given that Jackson's Bay and Whitmore Bay would have electronic displays, what information would be available at the other local beaches about water quality. In response it was explained that statutory bathing water signage was required to be displayed at all designated beaches. At Penarth, standard static signage would be there showing the bathing water classification for the forthcoming season, based on sampling results from 2025. The signage would indicate that Penarth had achieved a "good" bathing water classification, and similar statutory signage would be in place at all designated beaches.
- Councillor Wiliam thanked the officer for the report and acknowledged the difficulty of presenting in the absence of NRW. He noted that at previous meetings NRW had been unable to provide clear timetables for improvements to bathing water quality, despite classifications at some locations deteriorating from sufficient to poor, including Watch House Bay. He expressed concern that similar issues affected multiple locations along the coastline, including Ogmore by Sea, Barry and Penarth, and asked whether any measures were now being implemented to improve water quality and over what timescales, citing a desire to see Whitmore Bay regain Blue Flag status and improvement at Watch House Bay. The Chair reminded the Committee that water quality would continue to be pursued as a broader issue and confirmed that NRW and Dŵr Cymru / Welsh Water would be invited to provide a detailed update on this at a future meeting. In response, it was advised that NRW had established a South Central Bathing Waters Project with a dedicated team undertaking catchment-wide investigations to identify sources of pollution at Ogmore by Sea and Watch House Bay, develop an action plan, and propose improvements. It was noted that NRW had committed to presenting further details of this work to the Committee at a later date; unfortunately, the project manager had been unavailable to attend the meeting on this occasion.

- The Chair asked whether advice would be available on-site for members of the public if water quality was shown as poor, to explain what this meant and whether it was safe to enter the water. It was advised that the precise wording of the display signage had not yet been finalised, but this would be considered once a contractor was appointed to automate the system and populate the public displays. It was noted that, under bathing water regulations, the advice associated with an official “poor” classification was that people should not swim. It was confirmed that discussions would be held with NRW to determine appropriate wording should a poor prediction be displayed, and the Chair emphasised the importance of clearly explaining this information for public understanding.
- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services emphasised the importance of monitoring water quality and confirmed that this remained a key priority for the Council. He highlighted the necessity of continued joint working with NRW and Dŵr Cymru / Welsh Water, noting that water quality issues extended beyond coastal waters to include inland watercourses. He advised that recent meetings had taken place regarding the River Cadoxton, particularly in relation to flood prevention. The Cabinet Member welcomed the work being undertaken by officers and partners to ensure beaches were safe for public use and expressed support for rolling out improvements across all designated bathing beaches, with particular focus on those currently classified as poor. He acknowledged that NRW had multiple competing priorities but confirmed that he continued to lobby strongly on these issues.

Following these discussions and scrutiny of the report, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Natural Resources Wales be requested to provide information as to whether the technology exists that would allow the public to have sufficient notice of the water quality on beaches before they head off and plan their day, and to clarify that if that technology does not currently exist, were Natural Resources Wales planning on investing in such technology.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to comments made at the meeting.

792 TREE STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT (CX) –

The update report, as outlined by the Neighbourhood Services Operations Manager, provided an overview of progress on the Vale of Glamorgan Tree Strategy since its adoption. The Strategy underpinned the Council’s commitment to protecting, monitoring, enhancing and valuing the local environment, supporting biodiversity and addressing the climate emergency. Key points raised included:

- An updated action plan (21 actions) at Appendix A set out the progress made, lead departments, partners and funding requirements. Completed actions included establishing an internal tree inspection service, implementing an electronic asset system, launching a tree information webpage, introducing

the Friends of Trees volunteer scheme, and completing feasibility work for a community tree nursery.

- Internal awareness of the Tree Strategy had improved across the Council, supporting its implementation as a corporate, rather than service-specific, strategy.
- Community engagement had been promoted through a Tree Strategy roadshow held at seven locations across main towns. While generally well received, future roadshows would adopt wider promotion, including greater use of Town and Community Councils, social media and the Council's website.
- Tree planting targets had been significantly exceeded, with strong emphasis on applying "right tree, right place" principles. Large-scale planting was delivered through major schemes such as the River Thaw, the Local Nature Partnership and Porthkerry Country Park, alongside continued street-scene planting in towns including Barry, Penarth and Rhosse.
- Urban tree canopy cover varied across the Vale, with Penarth having the highest level. A five-year Capital Programme was supporting planting and maintenance, alongside ongoing work to identify new planting and regeneration opportunities with partner service areas.
- Volunteer involvement and community participation had expanded, supported by a dedicated webpage and sign-up system.
- Future priorities included delivering remaining actions, securing external funding, integrating the Tree Strategy with the Green Infrastructure Plan and developing a tree sponsorship scheme. Ongoing challenges remained around space constraints, pest and disease risks, and budget pressures.
- Emerging initiatives included a "garden forest" approach and more efficient watering methods to support tree establishment.
- Overall, the programme demonstrated substantial progress in expanding and managing tree canopy cover, with continued investment and partnership working identified as critical to achieving long-term environmental and climate resilience objectives.

Councillor Hooper subsequently raised concerns on the planting of trees on the Waterfront at Barry, which the developers had not fulfilled. He also raised two specific points for clarification. Firstly, he asked whether the Council's tree asset management system allowed direct engagement by individual residents, enabling them to report concerns or provide updates about local trees. While recognising the important role of organised community groups, the Member emphasised the need for individual residents – such as those who took a personal interest in a tree outside their home – to understand how they could engage directly with the Council.

Secondly, the Member sought reassurance regarding the use of tiger mulch in street tree pits. Given ongoing issues with vehicles mounting pavements, he queried how durable and resilient this material was when subjected to heavy vehicle weight.

Finally, he commended officers for their cross-departmental working, describing it as exemplary practice for the Council. He highlighted the importance of early education and awareness, particularly among young people, to build respect for trees and reduce incidents of damage or vandalism in residential areas. In response, it was advised that work was nearing completion to allow residents to report tree-related

concerns directly through a front-facing, GIS-based asset management system, similar to existing reporting arrangements for issues such as waste or street lighting. The system would enable users to select a specific street tree or park location and would clearly indicate whether the tree was Council-owned; where it was, an online reporting form would be available to submit concerns. The system was close to launch and would provide a more accessible and user-friendly method for public engagement. On the use of tiger mulch, it was explained that the material would be primarily used only for very narrow footways with tree pits, so that a permeable surface would be in place next to the tree that would allow for safe pedestrian passing but also irrigation of the tree, with conventional surfacing beyond that point. While acknowledging that vehicles did sometimes mount pavements, it was noted that tiger mulch had previously been trialled in locations such as Broad Street without evidence of damage and was considered to be reasonably resilient, although it remained under review.

Councillor Wiliam raised several points. He welcomed the proposal to hold further roadshows and suggested Romilly Park as a suitable location, noting it attracted a wide range of residents with differing views on tree planting. He referred to concerns raised previously by residents in Cannon Hill when trees had been removed and left as stumps or fully tarmacked over. He welcomed reassurance that, where appropriate, trees would normally be replaced in urban areas, subject to site suitability. He also highlighted the need for ongoing tree maintenance, particularly in Romilly Park near Romilly Avenue, where dense canopy growth within and outside the park was causing ongoing issues and required continuous monitoring and budget provision. Finally, he sought clarification on the management of ash dieback, asking at what point a tree would be removed, given that trees were graded and that budget constraints meant removal would only take place once a specific threshold had been reached. In response, the Councillor was advised that previous roadshows had been well received and had taken place at seven locations, mainly in urban areas with suitable space for the trailer used. Future roadshows could be spread more widely, with an intention to hold events in each main town or area, including Romilly Park, over a three-week period. The Neighbourhood Services Operations Manager emphasised that engagement at these events had previously been very positive, with valuable discussions covering a wide range of tree-related issues. The Neighbourhood Services Operations Manager outlined the Council's proactive replanting approach, confirming that where street trees were removed, replacement planting was planned for the following planting season, using appropriate species and applying replacement ratios based on trunk size. It was noted that utilities and historic changes could sometimes limit replanting in original locations. In relation to maintenance, it was confirmed that trees in areas with dense canopy cover were assessed by the Council's Arboriculture Officer, with crown thinning or reduction undertaken where necessary to manage weight and safety. The assessment process for ash dieback was explained, including that trees were graded from stages one to four. Trees at stages one and two were monitored annually, while trees at stages three or four were removed due to instability. It was further noted that ash trees not affected by ash dieback were retained unless other removal criteria applied. In response to a query regarding previously tarmacked areas, the Neighbourhood Services Operations Manager advised that replanting would be considered where residents requested it and were willing to assist with watering, with

priority given to locations where community support helped make best use of available resources.

Councillor Ernest raised concerns about several trees in Penarth that were leaning out towards the pavement, noting that this created a potential risk to parked vehicles, despite no fault on the part of the drivers. He asked whether these trees were under investigation. In response, it was advised that any concerns about public trees should be reported to C1V (the Council's contact centre), where they would be referred to the Council's Arboriculture Officer for assessment. It was confirmed that all highway street trees had been inspected within the past 18 months, and that leaning trees were assessed for stability. He explained that many trees had grown with a natural lean towards the highway and were acceptable provided they met specific highways clearance standards. Trees falling within these parameters were subject to ongoing monitoring rather than immediate intervention.

Councillor Drake asked whether tree diseases other than ash dieback, including acute oak decline, had been detected locally and whether these were being monitored. In response, the Neighbourhood Services Operations Manager advised that, to their knowledge, acute oak decline had not yet been identified within the Vale. It was explained that the Council's Arboriculture Officer was part of a professional network and worked closely with colleagues to monitor emerging tree diseases, with appropriate action taken if and when issues arose.

The Chair referred to previous discussions on the draft Tree Strategy, noting that while it focused on Council-owned trees, the importance of engaging private landowners had also been highlighted. She asked whether any progress had been made in engaging private landowners to support wider tree canopy objectives across the Vale. In response, the Neighbourhood Services Operations Manager advised that good progress had been made through the Council's Countryside Services and the Local Nature Partnership in engaging with private woodland owners and other private landowners. The next phase of work would involve greater engagement with residents in the street scene, including offering advice on trees, etc., to those with suitable front gardens. The officer confirmed that the option of providing tree advice as a chargeable service was under consideration, recognising that residents often sought impartial and reliable guidance on tree health rather than advice driven by personal preference. Progress was also reported on engagement with schools, with 17 schools now participating in annual tree surveys. It was noted that this approach helped schools understand their ownership and maintenance responsibilities, reduced risk, and supported canopy retention. The officer emphasised that maintaining and properly managing existing trees was essential, as replacing lost canopy through new planting took many years to achieve.

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services welcomed the detailed and informative presentation, the report and the development of the Tree Strategy, noting it had been championed over some time in partnership with officers, voluntary groups, and in particular the Penarth Tree Forum. He acknowledged that tree planting and canopy growth took time but emphasised the vital role trees played in addressing climate change, improving air quality, and supporting environmental resilience. Thanks were given to Council officers and volunteer groups for their ongoing work in maintaining and managing trees, especially in the face of

increasingly wet winters and drier summers, which placed greater pressure on young trees during establishment. The Cabinet Member encouraged Councillors and residents to raise requests for tree planting, highlighting that a dedicated budget was now in place, while also acknowledging challenges associated with underground services / utilities in urban areas. He reaffirmed the commitment to promoting increased canopy cover across the Vale and commended the Arboriculture Officer for their recent on-site work and positive impact.

Following these discussions and scrutiny of the report, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted and the proposed priorities for the next reporting period be supported.
- (2) T H A T the Committee's thanks be passed onto all staff for their hard work in developing and implementing the Council's Tree strategy.

Reason for recommendations

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

793 TASK AND FINISH REVIEW – ON PROVIDING GREATER ACCESSIBILITY TO BEACHES IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN –

The report was presented by the Vice-Chair (who was also the Chair of the Task and Finish Review Group), which asked Members to consider the findings and recommendations of the review into the provision of more accessible beaches to residents and visitors to beaches in the Vale of Glamorgan.

The Task and Finish Group established met on 9 occasions (7 formal meetings and 2 informal ones to draft the report) in order to review and to undertake a 'deep dive' exercise into the accessibility at local beach locations. The Group undertook various factfinding work and site visits in relation to this topic (the minutes of the formal meetings and site visits were provided as part of Appendix B to the report).

The Vice-Chair raised several points about the review, which could be summarised as follows:

- Thanks were given to officers, the tenant representative, voluntary Organisations and representatives, other Group Members and contributors for their support and evidence provided for the review. The numerous representations from several internal, Council, representatives and witnesses and external contributors were detailed in Appendix B to the report.
- Site visits and external input were critical to the quality of the evidence base for the review.
- Meetings were productive and collaborative. Members gained a strong understanding of accessibility issues.

- In terms of the review / report findings (as detailed in the report at paragraph 2.5)., the Group had set out clear objectives supported by an Action Plan, which had been drafted for Members' consideration (Appendix A to the report). This was a mix of beach-specific and overall, County-wide, actions, aspirational ideas, and recommendations which could be delivered more immediately or concretely. Many of the recommendations aligned with existing budgets and work programmes, and there was a focus on "quick wins" to deliver visible, positive, improvements early.
- There was a commitment, through the Action Plan, to ongoing monitoring, review and progress updates for the Committee, with the potential for future meetings of the Group to track the implementation of the Review also.
- Key proposals highlighted included the creation of a "one-stop shop" for beach accessibility information online. This would include accessibility, water quality, mental health support, and practical visitor information and be designed to support a wide range of users (wheelchair users, families, mental health needs). Also, measures which complemented the existing audit of signage at beach locations, particularly around accessibility: this included an emphasis on improving clarity and effectiveness of existing signage and better promotion of accessible facilities, such as at Barry Island.
- Overall, the report provided a strong basis for improving beach accessibility.

The Chair and the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport agreed with the above points made. This work strengthened the Council's coastal management service and improved its ability to provide facilities for residents across the Vale of Glamorgan and for visitors. The timing of the Task and Finish Group had been particularly beneficial, as it enabled the prioritisation of capital funding in the following financial year to deliver projects and actions identified in the report and accompanying Action Plan. This represented a very positive outcome, especially for those who had previously been unable to access beach facilities in their existing form. The work also enhanced the experience of visitors, including those who had not been able to fully enjoy these beach locations. Importantly, it created opportunities for early "quick wins", allowing visible improvements to be delivered in time for the current bathing season and resulting in positive and tangible outcomes.

Councillor Hooper welcomed the report and he highlighted the proposal to install mental health support signage at Cold Knap, describing this as an important initiative. He suggested that similar signage should be considered at other beaches, noting that beaches were often places of solace for individuals in difficult circumstances and that clear signposting to support services would be beneficial across all relevant beach locations in the County. Councillor Wiliam also supported this, and the suggestion was endorsed by the Vice-Chair for it to be a 'general' recommendation, citing the efforts of groups such as the Friends of Glamorgan Heritage Coast, to raise awareness through posters at a least some local beaches. The Chair also stated that although there were specific recommendations or actions for each of the relevant beaches, some of these would be considered in the overall County and coastal context as well.

Councillor Perry noted that Transport for Wales had recently announced a review of bus stop accessibility across Wales, which he welcomed, particularly for those not travelling by car. He observed that the report appeared somewhat car-centric and

highlighted that, while the proposals of the report included the provision of additional all-terrain wheelchairs, it did not address all-terrain mobility scooters. He suggested these should be considered, as they were a slightly different vehicle and may serve a slightly different group of users with specific mobility needs. The Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport advised that delivery of the Action Plan would inform future learning and improvements, and he confirmed that any additional matters identified during implementation could be incorporated, inviting Members to raise further issues during the summer and bathing season for consideration as part of the project.

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services welcomed the work of the Task and Finish Group, highlighting the value of site visits. He supported clear, consistent signage, emphasised the importance of mental health signposting at beaches, and stressed the need to improve accessibility and communication following adverse weather. He confirmed he would discuss the matters raised with the Head of Neighbourhood Services.

The Committee was also asked to establish the next Task and Finish review. This would consider the interlinked issues of refuse on local beaches and the wider matters around local holiday resorts. This would also include the Committee making an initial agreement as to the size, composition and membership of this new Task and Finish Review Group. Following discussions on the scope and composition of the new Task and Finish Review Group, further details would be provided on the exact scope of the Group as part of the review process (such as a focus on litter at these sites, etc.) and a provisional list of Group Members was agreed, with the aim also to reach out to Co-opted Members of the Committee to participate. The Group would provisionally include: Councillors G.M. Ball, C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake, A.M. Ernest, C. Iannucci-Williams, J.M. Norman, S. Lloyd-Selby, C. Stallard and S.T. Wiliam.

Following these discussions and scrutiny of the report, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the findings and recommendations of the report and review on providing greater accessibility to beaches in the Vale of Glamorgan by the Task and Finish Group (para. 2.5 of the report) be endorsed, subject to the inclusion of two additional suggestions –

- That notices relating to information regarding mental health be located at all beaches in Vale of Glamorgan.
- For consideration to be given around the use of all terrain mobility scooters.

(2) T H A T the Action Plan appended to the report (Appendix A to the report) be endorsed.

(3) T H A T the Action Plan be regularly monitored by the Committee and for further updates to be provided to the Committee in due course.

- (4) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet for its consideration and endorsement.
- (5) T H A T the Committee establishes the next Task and Finish review, as recommended at its meeting on 22nd July, 2025, as part of the report into proposed Task and Finish activities (Min No 241 refers). This to consider the interlinked issues of refuse on local beaches and the wider matters around local holiday resorts.
- (6) T H A T the membership of the next Task and Finish Group to include; Councillors: G.M. Ball, C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake, A.M. Ernest, C. Iannucci-Williams, J.M. Norman, S. Lloyd-Selby, C. Stallard and S.T. Wiliam.
- (7) T H A T the Co-Opted Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee be approached about joining the next Task and Finish Review Group into the interlinked issues of refuse on local beaches and the wider matters around local holiday resorts.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (5) To confirm review topic of the Committee's next Task and Finish Review Group.
- (6) To confirm the membership of the Committee's next Task and Finish Review Group.
- (7) To request Co-Opted Member attendance onto the Task and Finish Review Group.