RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 9th July, 2025.

The Committee agenda is available here.

The recording of the meeting is available here.

Present: Councillor J. Protheroe (Chair); Councillor E. Goodjohn (Vice-Chair); Councillors G.M. Ball, S. Campbell, G.D.D. Carroll, P. Drake, R. Fisher, C.P. Franks, E.J. Goodjohn, J.M. Norman and N.J. Wood.

Also present: Councillors A. Asbrey, L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources) and G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing).

153 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”.

154 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors Dr. I.J. Johnson and B. Loveluck-Edwards.

155 MINUTES–

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 21st May, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

156 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

157 Q4 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 19th June, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the HR Business Partner. Following presentation of the reference, the Officer advised the following, in response to questions and comments from the Committee:

- The policies related to sickness absence allow for a phased return to work approach, this is recommended by Occupational Health, is monitored by Human Resources and the relevant managers, and considerably used to support staff members.
- Comparative data could be provided to committee members regarding non-work-related stress and the current levels versus those of the past 10 years, particularly in relation to those pre-pandemic.
- In relation to a query on the impact of hybrid working on productivity, the Hybrid Working Policy allowed for managers to indicate the amount of time that staff needed to be office-based, and this could vary across service areas. Further information on this could be provided to Committee.
- Officers used the sickness absence data to look at what support and preventative measures could be put in place for staff, for instance in providing staff with flu vaccinations, providing a counselling service, and health and safety work assessments.
- A holistic approach was taken to sickness absence and training was being developed to enable managers to manage staff stress levels and look to reduce stress factors.
- The HR Dashboard allowed officers to look for areas of concern regarding sickness absence across various services.
- The Hybrid Working Policy had been in place for some time and the Business Partnership team were working closely with managers, identifying whether or not staff need to be in the office, and also challenging whether or not staff needed to be working at home.
- Reasons for non-work-related stress among staff included bereavement, in which there had been a recent increase for staff members taking sickness absence.
- Officers could look into analysis of successful measures taken to assist staff with sickness relating to stress, and data could be obtained via Westfield Health regarding uptake of programmes provided through them. Information could also be relayed to Committee regarding the number of Occupational Health referrals made, and the support that staff received from this service, including phased return to work processes.
- Officers worked closely with the Health and Safety team with regards to wellbeing action plans, to support staff coming into the workplace when ready to do so.
- Information could be provided following the meeting regarding whether the further reasons selected for absence relating to non-work-related stress were provided by the employee, or by Officers, as these varied across service areas.

With no further questions or comments, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the contents of the Cabinet reference, the report and April 2024 to March 2025 sickness absence figures provided in Appendix A, be noted.

(2) T H A T the following requests be forwarded to the relevant officers:

- That Committee receives comparative data relating to employee stress levels comparing current levels to those of 10 years prior to now;
- That Committee receives information regarding services supplied to the Council by Westfield Health;
- That Committee receives information on the successes in efforts to assist staff back to work following longer periods of sickness absence.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) Having regard to the content of the reference and report, and to discussions at the meeting.

(2) For the Committee's information.

158 CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 3rd July, 2025 which had been circulated to all Committee Members prior to the meeting was presented by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer. Following the presentation, the officer provided the following advice in response to questions from Committee Members:

- Schools had received all the grants due to them for 2024/25.
- Schools were now submitting their new budgets for approval, and this was where there was not a full picture available regarding grants due to schools currently, and this was not expected until later in the year.
- It would be helpful, for example, for schools to know what the position would be in regard to grants due by 1st April each year, and to receive all grants at the start of the financial year, to allow for effective financial management.
- Although the Council had been lobbying Welsh Government around the funding formula and the allocation of resources to the Authority, the timing of grants to schools was another area where additional lobbying could be useful.
- The Vale of Glamorgan continued to be the lowest funded Authority for schools within its schools 'block', however, the Council had put significant levels of resources above the funding level, and so in relation to resources available to schools, the Vale of Glamorgan was fifth lowest.
- While schools were doing their utmost to maintain balanced budgets in very challenging positions, it was difficult to understand how some schools had the exceptional levels of deficit that they did, given the resources that were available to them.
- Officers were working on a one-to-one basis with schools showing the highest levels of deficit.
- There was now a procurement resource in place to support schools, and although staff costs were the key element of school budgets, it was right to look into other areas, such as schools' procurement practices, to identify ways to improve their financial situation.

- Further information could be provided to committee regarding debts other than Council Tax arrears, for example through non-payment of leases, owed to the Authority.

With no further questions or comments, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Cabinet reference and the appended report on the Closure of Accounts 2024/25 be noted.

(2) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to lobby the Welsh Government around the timing of confirmation and receipt of their grant funding for Vale of Glamorgan Schools.

(3) T H A T the appropriate Officers organise a joint briefing for Members, as an update on work being carried out regarding overspends in Education, particularly regarding School Transport and Additional Learning Needs.

(4) T H A T the Resources Scrutiny Committee write a letter to the relevant Senedd Members highlighting the Committee's view that the education funding formula should be reviewed, as it is not benefitting Vale of Glamorgan schools, or children.

<u>Reasons for recommendations</u>

(1) Having regard to the content of the reference and report and discussions at the meeting.

(2) Due to the issues that delays in confirming and receiving such funds cause, for both the Local Authority and Vale of Glamorgan Schools, in being able to effectively manage budgets.

(3) For Members' information.

(4) To highlight the impact of financial pressures associated with the funding formula on Vale of Glamorgan schools.

159 CAPITAL CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 3rd July, 2025 which had been circulated to all Committee Members prior to the meeting, was presented by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer. Following their presentation, in response to a Committee Member's query, the Officer advised that the information contained in the report's Appendices labelled 'Band B Ysgol Y Deri', related to the new school building. The Officer also advised that information regarding the total cost of this scheme following a new contractor being required, could be forwarded to the Chair to share with the Committee.

With no further comments or queries, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Cabinet reference and appended report on the Capital Closure of Accounts 2024/25, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

160 TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON THE REVIEW OF THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN'S PROCUREMENT POLICY, FUNCTION AND STRATEGY –

The report, presented by the Chair, advised Committee on the Task and Finish review work that had been undertaken by the former Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The Task and Finish Group reviewed the governance of the Procurement Policy and Procurement Strategy in terms of its focus on sustainability, decarbonisation and social value in order to fully understand the status quo, its challenges, and areas which may need improvement, further investigation and/or development, through the lens of the Vale of Glamorgan Council (VOGC) cutting its Carbon Emissions from the Supply Chain and maximising social value outcomes for the Authority. The report contained a series of recommendations, divided into 8 sections or topic areas, these being:

- Documents;
- Training;
- Creation of a Community of Practice (CoP);
- Creation of a Commissioning Procurement Board;
- Resourcing;
- Reporting Data Collection;
- IT Systems;
- Piloting a Circular Approach to Procurement.

Following presentation of the report, in response to a question from the Vice-Chair, the Chair advised that the report's recommendations were now for Cabinet Members to consider, and that the Chair would expect the current Procurement Policy to be reviewed at the same time, so that Cabinet could consider whether they could support the recommendations made by the Task and Finish Review Group.

With no further comments or queries, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet, and for Cabinet to consider supporting the recommendations within it.

Reason for recommendation

In order for potential improvements to the Council's procurement function, identified by the Task and Finish Review Group, to be considered by Cabinet.

161 TASK AND FINISH REVIEW ACTIVITY REPORT (DCR) –

The report was presented by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, and requested Members to consider items and topics of investigatory group work (Task and Finish Review) for the new Resources Scrutiny Committee.

A range of suggestions was collated from Members of the Committee at its meeting held on 21st May, 2025, with additional details on a number of these suggestions being forwarded to the Chair and Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer after the meeting.

The Director of Corporate Resources, along with the relevant Heads of Service and Officers have assessed the suggestions and provided feedback on the scope and feasibility of these, taking into consideration the work that had already being carried out by Officers. For certain topic suggestions, further work may be needed to refine the scope of the topic investigated in order for these to be assessed and responded to fully by Officers, and so that they were achievable within the 12-week Task and Finish Review cycle.

Where possible, and where a topic or section of a topic had been identified as achievable in the shorter term, Officers had indicated this within their feedback. Where a topic had been identified as already having work underway to address an issue, this had also been indicated, and in some instances, a potential area of alternative focus had been suggested.

The proposed suggestions, and a narrative regarding the feasibility scoping for each one, was attached at Appendix A to the report. One Task and Finish Review topic had been identified as being appropriate for progression as the first topic that the Committee undertook, this being 'The Council's Communications Strategy', as detailed in Appendix A (1).

The Scrutiny Committee was therefore requested to agree that this proposed topic be selected as the first Task and Finish Review's focus, with other suggested topics remaining open for further discussion. Additionally, Members would be able to suggest topics for Task and Finish Review throughout the year, if the opportunity to consider any emerging area arose.

In addition, the Committee was requested to confirm and agree the size and membership of the first Task and Finish Review Group. The suggested number of Members on a Task and Finish Review Group was 6, but a lower or higher number could be accommodated based on the wishes of the Scrutiny Committee, with the Chair decided by the "home" Scrutiny Committee. Ideally the Task and Finish Review Group would have representation from all political groups. Where practicable, political balance was encouraged. For a group of 6 participants, this would be 3 Members of the Labour Group, plus 1 Member each from Llantwit First, the Conservative Party and Plaid Cymru groups.

Committee was also asked to determine whether representation from any interested parties outside of the organisation would have merit.

Once the review topic and membership had been agreed, Democratic Services would prepare a schedule of meetings, with it being envisioned for a review to be completed within 12 weeks. This would exclude the summer recess.

It was planned that the first meeting of the Task and Finish Review Group would include appointment of a Chair and Vice-Chair. The first meeting would also include consideration of a full scope of how the review would be completed. The Group would also be asked to consider the most appropriate time for it to meet, and any expert witnesses that it may like to call to provide evidence and guidance, and to answer queries.

At the conclusion of the review, a subsequent report and recommendations would be fed back to the relevant Cabinet Member(s), the home Scrutiny Committee(s), and Cabinet for consideration.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the topic of ‘The Council’s Communications Strategy’, as detailed in Appendix A (1) to the report, be agreed as the first Task and Finish Review topic undertaken.

(2) T H A T the following Members of the Committee be appointed to the Task and Finish Review Group, subject to the agreement of those Members who were nominated, but not present at the meeting (indicated with * below):

Councillors B. Loveluck-Edwards*; E.J. Goodjohn; Dr. I.J. Johnson*; G.D.D. Carroll; S. Campbell; J.M. Norman and J. Protheroe.

<u>Reason for recommendations</u>

(1&2) Having regard to the content of the report and Appendix A, and in order for the Committee’s Task and Finish work to commence.