

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET:13TH APRIL, 2023

REFERENCE FROM GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 27TH FEBRUARY, 2023

“750 COST OF LIVING SUPPORT FOR FOOD, WARM SPACES AND OTHER MEANS OF SUPPORT (REF) –

The Reference from Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on 9th January, 2023 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources.

The report had originated from Cabinet which had outlined a series of activities that the Council had been doing in terms of supporting residents and staff in terms of cost of living. The report referenced a national study completed by Audit Wales and published last November called ‘Time for change - poverty in Wales’. That report explored the challenges of poverty across Wales, and it detailed a number of recommendations for national and local government. Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report was the management response plan from the Council.

The Director advised that the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee had also considered the reference from Cabinet, and that Committee had noted the response to Audit Wales’s report in terms of the Council’s action plan. That Committee also requested that further update reports to Cabinet on the Council’s response to the Audit Wales report would also be referred. The Scrutiny Committee expressed an interest in being regularly updated on progress, and monitoring reports would also be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee.

The Chair, Mr G. Chapman, referred to the impact on rural communities, as it appeared that the main focus was on urban areas, and he queried the assistance being planned for rural and hard to reach areas.

As a Ward Member for a rural area, Councillor J. Protheroe stated that from an outside perspective, rural wards could often appear quite wealthy but there was hidden poverty. Councillor Protheroe stated that as she and her fellow Ward Councillor were aware of the issues, they had asked for some information and data around people claiming benefits to see if that indicated anything. They discovered that 6% of residents were in food poverty based on their benefit entitlement. She commented that it was easy for the focus to be town centric, but there needed to be a different approach when considering rural communities because the same approach would not work. Therefore, innovative approaches were being looked at, such as a mobile food pantry which was accessible for people that lived miles from an urban area with limited public transport and limited funds. It was important for the Council to think ‘outside the’ box and not forget rural communities.

The Chair agreed with the points raised and stated that the Council needed to think holistically when it came to the approaches being considered for rural communities. In reply, the Director stated that it was pleasing that the Council had secured funding with Public Health and other agencies to develop the kind of different approaches discussed and that support for a food poverty project in the rural Vale was being explored, in addition to the work in Llantwit Major.

Mr. M. Evans (Lay Member) queried that given the level of resources required and the financial implications, whether the completion dates were achievable. In response, the Director stated that the Audit Wales report was useful because it highlighted some of the national observations and areas of good practice and helpful suggestions. Last year, the Council had brought together a group of officers from across the organisation to look at the work being undertaken and to ensure there was a strategic focus on the areas of most need. That had also meant that the Council was more efficient when it came to implementing its approaches, as Council Departments worked more closely together. A good example of that was the creation of warm spaces. Going forward into next year, the Council had identified within the Annual Delivery Plan, three critical challenges. One was the critical challenges around the cost-of-living crisis, and the Council's Strategic Leadership Team would be meeting shortly to consider the delivery of objectives for next year.

It had been recognised that it was an area that required the Council to act in a community leadership role, so the Audit Wales report was useful when it came to developing that. The work was also linked to the Public Service Board's Wellbeing Plan which included activity of the wider public sector, directed at some of the most deprived areas so that approach could also be more holistic.

There being no further comments or query, the Committee

RESOLVED -

(1) T H A T the following views raised by the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on 9th January 2023 be referred with the report to Cabinet as part of their consideration of the Council's actions in response to Audit Wales's work:

- It was important for the Council to look at raising the awareness, as well as expanding the delivery, of warm spaces and related services throughout the Vale of Glamorgan, and to look at deepening such support i.e. to provide services that deal with isolation, and support vulnerable residents and communities.

(2) T H A T Cabinet be advised of the view of Governance and Audit Committee for greater consideration and emphasis to be placed on cost living challenges facing rural communities.

Reasons for decisions

(1) Having considered the contents of the reference and the related report.

(2) To highlight the cost of living challenges facing rural communities which may receive less emphasis in comparison to urban areas.”

Attached as Appendix – Reference from Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee: 9th January, 2023; Reference from Cabinet: 15th December, 2022.

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 27TH FEBRUARY, 2023

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 9TH JANUARY, 2023

“596 COST OF LIVING SUPPORT FOR FOOD, WARM SPACES AND OTHER
MEANS OF SUPPORT (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 15th December, 2022 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources, which was intended to raise awareness of the range of support that was being undertaken by the Council and its partners around the Cost of Living Crisis, food and fuel poverty, and other areas of need for residents within the Vale of Glamorgan. This reference also responded to the recent Audit Wales ‘Time for change – poverty in Wales’ report and Members’ views were sought on this response.

The current economic and related challenges faced by the Council and other Local Authorities within the UK were outlined, which were also detailed in the Audit Wales National Study, the COVID-era Community Impact Assessments, Economic Impact Assessments and the Public Services Board (PSB) Wellbeing Assessment. These challenges included growing food insecurity and the pressures relating to the increased cost of living.

The various grants and related schemes were outlined, including food support organisations such as Big Bocs Bwyds with ‘pay as you can’ models in place alongside the Vale Foodbanks who provided crucial crisis support. Also, In the previous financial year the Council received funding of just under £100,000 from Welsh Government (WG) and via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). This went into a number of funding streams, including support for school-based food and other support initiatives such as the Penarth Food Pod (run by the Council Housing Team), as well as Vale Foodbanks. The funding also helped the Council to create and distribute over 1,200 essential food and hygiene support parcels, in collaboration with partners, such as Pobl and Atal y Fro. £100,000 of National Lottery money had also been secured by the Council, in tandem with partners, to expand the range of services on offer at the CF61 Community Centre in Llantwit Major as the More Than Food Hub project.

The Director also referred to the establishment of a cross departmental Cost of Living Group in order to ensure that the maximum value was being delivered and to strategically shape the Council’s response to the crisis.

The work undertaken by the Council concerning the WG’s Cost of Living Scheme was highlighted, with 36,000 households having been supported so far by this Scheme. The Winter Fuel Scheme was also being processed via the Council, with almost 9,000 people having been paid at this time.

Additional information on funding streams would be provided to the Committee via the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, although at this time it could be confirmed that in total the Council received £166,000 in terms of additional funds and had committed just under £159,000 of those.

Funding had helped to purchase additional food stock and support food banks at a time of decreasing donations, as well as help establish 'pop up' foodbanks and support community workshops for cooking.

The 'Warm Welcome' Project was outlined, which entailed funding the establishment of a network of 'warm spaces' throughout the Vale of Glamorgan (there were currently 33 such spaces) for people to attend, engage in various activities and access support or advice. The Warm Welcome web page had been launched on the Council's website, which included an interactive map that allowed residents to search for a warm space that was close by and provided information about the operating hours and what activities were available.

The range of other support offered by the Council and partners was mentioned, including the Cost-of-Living webpages, raising the public profile of the Warm Spaces Project, through to providing Council staff with the Real Living Wage.

In response to the Audit Wales report on poverty in Wales and its recommendations, which included that Local Authorities should produce strategies that dealt with, and measured the performance of, addressing poverty in their areas, the Council had drafted a management plan or framework that set out what actions the Council intended to take, allocating both a responsible officer and a due date for delivering these activities.

Following the Officer's presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- Both Councillors Campbell and Carroll drew the Committee's attention to those areas of the Vale where there was not necessarily the groups or volunteers available to access this funding in order to provide cost of living support or spaces and which therefore needed additional support in order to set up and access these. The Director of Corporate Resources stated that he would arrange further discussions with both Councillors in order to address their concerns and what could be done to expand the relevant support in their wards. He explained that initially the rationale for setting up warm spaces had been to establish these in areas where there were existing facilities that could handle them in order to get them up and running quickly.
- On Councillor Perkes' query on having performance data concerning how the various support services were used and their demographics, it was explained that such information would be collected, but this would have to be 'light touch', in order to not create an excessive burden on the volunteers manning the warm spaces, etc. Also, 'case studies' would be collated in order to identify which groups needed support and how best to provide it.
- Councillor Morgan stated the Warm Spaces Project was a tremendous initiative, but it was important that for those older or more vulnerable residents who did not have access to online information or were reluctant to attend,

were either made aware of the support available or encouraged to use it via more traditional methods. It was explained that as well using the Council's website and social media in order to raise awareness of cost-of-living support, information leaflets, posters and banners had also been produced and distributed within local community areas around the Vale. On the Councillor's further comment about the use of warm spaces after Winter as spaces for those persons who felt lonely, isolated or vulnerable, in order to have social interaction as well as other support, this was something the Council was considering in order to build on the legacy of warm spaces and cost of living support. At Llantwit Major, a project addressing self-isolation was being undertaken in conjunction with Age Connect and Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS).

- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services added that the warm spaces and other cost of living support were vital projects and much needed in the Vale. As well feeding and keeping residents warm, these spaces would also help to break down social isolation. It was also important that Council tenants got in touch with the Council when faced with issues around their boiler and heating.
- The Chair and Vice-Chair echoed the points made by the Committee and others around the importance of utilising the cost-of-living support and warm spaces to help break down loneliness and improve mental wellbeing, as well as the need to expand these services further within the Vale, and to extend their use after Winter.

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

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following views of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee be referred with the report to the Governance and Audit Committee for consideration, with the views of the Committee to be also referred back to Cabinet as part of their consideration of the Council's actions in response to Audit Wales's work:

- It was important for the Council to look at raising the awareness, as well as expanding the delivery, of warm spaces and related services throughout the Vale of Glamorgan, and to look at deepening such support, i.e. to provide services that deal with isolation, and support vulnerable residents and communities.

Reason for recommendation

In order that the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet can consider the views of the Committee as part of their consideration of the Council's actions in response to the Audit Wales Report."

Attached as Appendix: Report to Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee:
9th January, 2023

Appendix

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 9TH JANUARY, 2023

REFERENCE FROM CABINET: 15TH DECEMBER, 2022

“C169 COST OF LIVING SUPPORT FOR FOOD, WARM SPACES AND OTHER MEANS OF SUPPORT - (EL/PR) (SCRUTINY – CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES AND HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES) –

The Leader presented the report, the purpose of which was to present an overview of the work the Council had undertaken to address the cost of living crisis. This included help to improve access to food across the Vale of Glamorgan and outline how this work and funding opportunities connected with providing a Warm Welcome this winter, other work to assist people struggling with the rising cost of living and to raise awareness of the recent Audit Wales ‘Time for change – poverty in Wales’ report and the Council’s proposed response.

The Leader referred to Paragraph 2.6 of the report and that she had been provided with updated figures to the published table, as follows:-

Funding Stream	Date Received	Total Received	Total Awarded to Date	Total Number of Organisations Supported	Approx. Total Number of Service Users per Week (approx. at the time of bid received)
Household Support Fund	14/04/2022	£32,747	£32,747	6	598
Direct Food Support Fund 1	06/10/2022	£17,151	£0	N/A	N/A
Direct Food Support Fund 2	16/11/2022	£32,945	£30,420	7	605

Cost of Living Discretionary Fund	09/06/2022	£50,000	£50,000	7	303
Food Partnership Fund	Awaited	£97,000 (indicative)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Warm Banks Fund	15/11/2022	£33,196	£14,611.80	9	3,460
Total		£166,039 (£263,039 including indicative)	£127,778.80	19*	4,966

*Some organisations had been successful in more than 1 bid across the different streams.

With regards to warm spaces, one user of Barry Library had appreciated a warm welcome, was able to read a book, watch the children's activities and offered a hot drink and a hot water bottle, leaving her feeling supported and appreciative of the efforts made by the staff. On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader thanked the team in Barry Library, as well as all the other library staff, and anyone working to ensure that residents of the Vale of Glamorgan were cared for and supported.

This was a matter for Executive decision.

Cabinet, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the report and intended way forward to distribute the remaining 2022/23 funding streams be noted.

(2) T H A T the report be referred to Corporate Performance and Resources and Homes and Safe Scrutiny Committees for their information and in particular consideration of the Council's response to the Audit Wales Report, with their views referred with the report to Governance and Audit Committee for consideration, with any views of those Committees referred back to Cabinet for approval of the actions in response to Audit Wales's work.

Reasons for decisions

(1) To enable Members to consider the progress being made in the delivery of multiple funding streams and projects to improve access to food.

(2) The report was subject to scrutiny by those Committees and the response to the Audit Wales Report considered by the Governance and Audit Committee prior to approval by Cabinet.”

Attached as Appendix – Report to Cabinet: 15th December, 2022