

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Special Remote Meeting held at 6.05 p.m. on 20th November, 2023.

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

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor Julie Aviet (Mayor); Councillors Anne Asbrey, Gareth Ball, Rhiannon Birch, Bronwen Brooks, Gillian Bruce, Ian Buckley, Lis Burnett, Samantha Campbell, George Carroll, Charles Champion, Janice Charles, Millie Collins, Marianne Cowpe, Pamela Drake, Vincent Driscoll, Anthony Ernest, Christopher Franks, Wendy Gilligan, Emma Goodjohn, Ewan Goodjohn, Stephen Haines, Sally Hanks, Howard Hamilton, William Hennessy, Nic Hodges, Mark Hooper, Catherine Iannucci, Gwyn John, Dr. Ian Johnson, Susan Lloyd-Selby, Belinda Loveluck-Edwards, Julie Lynch-Wilson, Kevin Mahoney, Michael Morgan, Jayne Norman, Helen Payne, Elliot Penn, Sandra Perkes, Ian Perry, Joanna Protheroe, Ruba Sivagnanam, Carys Stallard, Neil Thomas, Rhys Thomas, Margaret Wilkinson, Edward Williams, Mark Wilson and Nicholas Wood.

524 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Mayor 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”.

525 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors Christine Cave, Robert Fisher, Russell Godfrey, Naomi Marshallsea and Steffan Wiliam.

526 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

527 FINAL DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2022/23 (REF) –

The Leader indicated that the report set out details of the final draft for the Vale of Glamorgan Council Annual Self-Assessment.

She alluded to the genesis of the document which entailed numerous meetings involving Directors, peer challenge, Cabinet Members, Scrutiny Chairs reviewing the self-assessment and how it related to the Annual Delivery Plan, culminating with the

draft being considered by Cabinet on 7th September prior to it being considered by Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee before returning to Cabinet on 19th October. The final draft self-assessment report was considered by the Governance and Audit Committee on 23rd October before final consideration by Cabinet on 2nd November 2023.

She referred to the comments made by the Governance and Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committees relating to the accessibility of the report and she addressed the matter by indicating that it was the intention to produce and circulate a public summary document as part of engagement work informed by feedback from residents and Members on how they would like the Council's performance information reported. That would include an easy read version of the Annual Self-Assessment Report and Bite Size social media posts.

She also touched upon other points raised by Committees relating to the relevance and subsequent removal of the risk to the Council relating to Brexit, the introduction of hybrid meetings, public engagement and consultation regarding how the Council prioritised its spending. This would be an area where Members would need to focus in the forthcoming budget considerations given that a significant proportion of the budget was accounted for by Social Services and Learning and Skills (74%) and other Council services were experiencing extreme budget pressures.

She also referred to the work to promote to citizens of the Vale of Glamorgan the budgets available, the discretionary spending decisions to help increase awareness, and to the intended raising awareness work in relation to the budget post setting process throughout the year and this was reflected in the Annual Self-Assessment as an area of focus for the coming year. In relation to public engagement, the critical challenges and priorities were a further area of focus and had been included in the Annual Self-Assessment Report and she referred to the "Let's Talk About Life in the Vale" survey used to inform Council decisions and to progress plans for focus groups to ensure all residents are represented, including those seldom heard groups.

In concluding the Leader indicated that she was aware that most Members had participated in at least one meeting where the Assessment had been discussed, if not taking part in the actual initial self-assessment discussions that went on during the summer.

The Leader moved that the views, discussion and comments made at each of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, Governance and Audit Committee and Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committees held on 13th, 18th and 20th September, 2023 respectively be noted and that the consultation summary findings and the updated Final Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report 2022/23 be endorsed.

This was duly seconded by Councillor Brooks

Councillor Hooper acknowledging the Leader's comments, considered the report to be a missed opportunity. He was pleased to see some challenges that came through the scrutiny process being reflected in the changed narrative, particularly pleased with regard to Project Zero, which the Council recognised will be extremely

challenging. He was pleased to hear the Leader reference the need for improving accessibility of this report in the future and also pleased to see the reference to Brexit removed. He considered the report could be viewed as overly positive and to be useful to Members and the public he wanted to see the report accurately reflect the Council's actions in terms of the experience of Vale residents. This Self-Assessment he said did not do this and for this reason he signalled that the Plaid Cymru Group would not be supporting approval of the report.

Mirroring comments made by Councillor Hooper, Councillor Carroll referred to the comments of the Leader and the consultation on the Annual Self-Assessment through the Council's various Committees and the linkage with the Council's Corporate Plan and Annual Delivery Plan. The main headline he took from the report was that most key indicators, including on use of resources, the administration had rated its performance as good. He believed that residents would be astonished at that assessment. When looking at the Council's record in the year in question, he stated that Council Tax had increased again, however, with better management of the budget, a Council Tax freeze was possible. He felt that the Administration had not used the 2022-2023 period as an opportunity to improve the way the Authority was run. When considering a key indicator within the report, use of resources, matters had not improved, which saw another Council Tax rise imposed for the current financial year. He also alluded to issues with waste collections and the garden waste service with a charge being introduced for the latter. It was his view that whilst the Self-Assessment had been completed in good faith and honesty, it was delusional. When looking back over the past 12 months when measuring the Council's performance against key indicators he could not see how these had been considered as good and it was clear to him that the Council must improve. He indicated that he would not be endorsing the report.

Councillor Franks thought that Council taxpayers would be astonished that it was considered that it met its targets and that the Council regarded its performance as good. The main response from residents would be that the Council was on the verge of failing. When taking account of school budgets the state of highways and pavements, play areas, community centres and the decline in bus services there had been considerable criticism from residents covering a wide range of issues. He was disappointed that the Administration had not delivered for its residents. He indicated that he would not be supporting the report's recommendations.

Councillor Mahoney considered the report laughable when taking account of the results of engagement with residents. He considered that the consultation was fake and a sham. He pointed to recent consultation in his Ward relating to ward boundary changes where residents had not been told of the consultation. He did not see how the Council could rate its performance as good when the majority of responses indicated the opposite. He acknowledged that running a local authority was difficult with the financial constraints, but it was clear to him the Council had not taken the public with it, he indicated that he would not be supporting the report's recommendations.

Councillor Wilson referring to the previous speakers comments did not see these as based on any facts apart from anecdotal comments on consultation responses. The fact was that the Council was making improvements, an example of which was the

resource recycling centre at Atlantic Trading Estate. Referring to the comments made by Councillor Carroll relating to Council Tax matters, the fact was that the Council Tax rise was substantially lower than inflation at that time. The public were aware of the reasons for higher inflation at almost 10% and that was down to the U.K. Conservative Government. No Member wished to raise Council Tax, but without doing so the Council would use and run out of reserves similarly to those Councils who had already done so, referring to the Conservative controlled Woking Council. He was amazed that Councillor Carroll had not stated anything that was constructive given the challenges faced by the Council. The fault lay with the U.K. Conservative Government.

Councillor Dr. Johnson referring to the comments made by the previous speakers, it was no surprise the public would not take the report seriously as the Council was marking its own homework. He was pleased that the Leader was addressing the accessibility and some of the ideas put forward. However, these were the same as the previous year but not acted upon. The challenge to address was that the Administration perceived itself differently to what the public did in terms of the Council's wider performance. He also considered it dangerous to cherry pick those things the Council did better at. He thought it strange that the report stated everything was good when it had not been. It was important to reflect on matters that had not gone so well and correct these which is why it was important to improve the format of the report, making reference to hybrid meetings, the overspend on the Oracle system, delays in green waste collection, £3m bus interchange and many other matters. There was a raft of matters that the Council had not done well on. There were lots of challenges and lots of good work the Council had done, but the report needed to be able to reflect both and, therefore was not an accurate reflection of the Council's performance. Given the requirements of Section 91 and Section 90 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act in 2021 the Council needed to have a better position on this rather than simply telling everybody the Council was good and it's the people's fault for thinking that it was bad. He indicated that he would be voting against the report and called for a recorded vote. The relevant number of Members indicated their agreement.

Councillor Perry referred to the residents outrage at the recent felling of trees with no explanation in St. Nicholas and to other similar events and actions of the Council. He felt that the report lacked honesty. He accepted that the Council did lots of good things, this was undermined by not reflecting on what it's not doing so well. There were areas where officers did well and not so well and it was important to focus on these areas which had not been recognised in the report which was disappointing.

Councillor Brooks did not accept the criticism that the Council had been dishonest with its assessment of its performance. She acknowledged that there was work still to be done. The environment that the Council was faced with was challenging with the impact of the U.K. Government budget setting being significant. Difficult decisions had to be made relating to non-statutory services when faced with statutory services which protected the most vulnerable and priorities had been reflected in the report. Members were misrepresenting information in terms of projects undertaken such as the bus interchange, which had not been funded by the Council.

Councillor John was astounded by some of the comments made bearing in mind the report had been considered by the Scrutiny Committees. It was clear that some Members would rather play politics. The situation was tough and it would remain so. Members were well aware of the external pressures impacting on all Councils which had had an impact on the delivery of Council services and some projects.

Councillor Hodges disputed previous comments made in relation to the funding of the bus interchange and reminded Members that it was public money and a project that the Council wished to see delivered. He questioned whether due diligence had been carried out on the project given few buses were operating from the facility. Turning to the matter of funding and who was responsible for the Council's overall funding, whilst the Administration blamed U.K. Westminster Government, the Labour controlled Senedd had agreed to the future funding formula. He did not think that Scrutiny Committees worked being asked to note reports and alluded to the lack of hybrid meetings which would aid debate on such issues and achieving a truthful report. He indicated that he would not be supporting the endorsement of the report.

The Leader, in summing up, indicated that she found the discourse very disappointing. She reiterated the journey the Self-Assessment report started in terms of peer challenge meetings, including scrutiny chairs and in the summer it went to Scrutiny Committees with all having had an opportunity to be involved in the wider process of drawing up the Council's Annual Delivery Plan and Corporate Plan and all also having been involved in consideration of Service Plans, all of which had received the response of noting. She took issue with Councillor Hodges' comments regarding Scrutiny Committees receiving reports to note. Reports from the Cabinet were not sent for noting and welcomed constructive dialogue. Vale residents did deserve honesty. There was a fully agreed Strategy with funding to deliver the transport interchange which was not just about buses. Without that Plan funding would not have been available to improve Subway Road, Barry. Previous reports to Cabinet, available to all Members, set this information out and where funding came from. Turning to Councillor Carroll's comments relating to easy options, she reminded all there were no easy options. There had to be a balance of priorities in what the Administration wanted to do and officers had used a combination of innovation, creativity and hard work to develop strategies. She referred to political grandstanding and welcomed the collective input from all 54 Members to get the Council through the next budget setting process. Referring to Councillor Mahoney's comments relating to the lack of consultation on recent boundary changes, he had had the opportunity to take part in a cross-party group to consider the proposals but he had chosen not to attend.

In conclusion, the Self-Assessment had been considered by the Council's Scrutiny Committees and nothing had been brought up, however, when the matter was considered at the Council meeting there were inaccurate comments made and political grandstanding which did not reflect well on all. She re-affirmed that the report recommendations be approved.

A Recorded Vote took place on the report recommendations.

Members	For	Against	Abstain
Anne Asbrey		√	
Julie Aviet	√		
Gareth Ball	√		
Rhiannon Birch	√		
Bronwen Brooks	√		
Gillian Bruce		√	
Ian Buckley	√		
Lis Burnett	√		
Samantha Campbell	√		
George Carroll		√	
Charles Champion		√	
Janice Charles		√	
Millie Collins		√	
Marianne Cowpe		√	
Pamela Drake	√		
Vincent Driscoll		√	
Anthony Ernest		√	
Christopher Franks		√	
Wendy Gilligan	√		
Emma Goodjohn	√		
Ewan Goodjohn	√		
Stephen Haines		√	
Howard Hamilton	√		

Sally Hanks	√		
William Hennessy		√	
Nic Hodges		√	
Mark Hooper		√	
Catherine Iannucci	√		
Gwyn John	√		
Dr. Ian Johnson		√	
Susan Lloyd-Selby	√		
Belinda Loveluck-Edwards	√		
Julie Lynch-Wilson	√		
Kevin Mahoney		√	
Michael Morgan	√		
Jayne Norman	√		
Helen Payne	√		
Elliot Penn	√		
Sandra Perkes	√		
Ian Perry		√	
Joanna Protheroe	√		
Ruba Sivagnanam	√		
Carys Stallard	√		
Neil Thomas	√		
Rhys Thomas		√	
Margaret Wilkinson	√		
Eddie Williams	√		

Mark Wilson	√		
Nicholas Wood		√	
TOTAL	30	19	

RESOLVED – T H A T the Final Draft Vale of Glamorgan Council Annual Self-Assessment Report 2022/23 as considered by Cabinet on 2nd November (Minute No. C143 refers) be approved.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.