

No.

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Special Hybrid meeting held on 15th January, 2024 at 6.10 p.m.

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

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

Present: Councillor Elliot Penn (Deputy Mayor); Councillors Anne Asbrey, Gareth Ball, Rhiannon Birch, Bronwen Brooks, Gillian Bruce, Ian Buckley, Lis Burnett, Samantha Campbell, George Carroll, Christine Cave, Janice Charles, Millie Collins, Pamela Drake, Anthony Ernest, Christopher Franks, Wendy Gilligan, Russell Godfrey, 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, Naomi Marshallsea, Michael Morgan, Jayne Norman, Helen Payne, Sandra Perkes, Ian Perry, Joanna Protheroe, Ruba Sivagnanam, Carys Stallard, Neil Thomas, Rhys Thomas, Steffan Wiliam, Margaret Wilkinson, Edward Williams and Mark Wilson.

692 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business, the Deputy 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.”

693 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors Julie Aviet, Charles Champion, Marianne Cowpe, Vincent Driscoll, Robert Fisher and Nicholas Wood.

694 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

The following declarations of interest were received:

Councillors William Hennessy, Julie Lynch-Wilson and Margaret Wilkinson declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 3(a) – Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25, in that they were Council tenants but that their personal interest did not equate to a prejudicial interest.

Councillor Helen Payne declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 3(a) – Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25, in that she was an officer of Llamau. However, she had a dispensation to speak only when

No.

housing and homelessness matters were discussed relating to finance and property given her role at Llamau.

Councillor Mark Hooper declared that he had a personal interest in that he was a special advisor on Climate Change in relation to Welsh Government's portfolio and that he had a dispensation to speak and vote.

695 FINAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024/25, RENT SETTING 2024/2025 AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25 (REF) -

The Deputy-Mayor took the opportunity to remind Members that the reference from Cabinet of 11th January 2024 had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting with the Leader then presenting the report and the reference to Council.

The Leader commenced by advising that the report had also recently been presented to and agreed by the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. She indicated that the Housing Revenue Account was a standalone account and reminded Members that tenants in the Vale had voted some years ago for the housing stock to remain within Council control. The plan was ambitious with the ultimate aim being for the Council to be its own developer and to develop good quality homes for local people. The Council also wanted to build more Council houses and upgrade existing stock so residents could live in efficient and well-maintained properties, that were environmentally sustainable and as low energy usage as possible. Welsh Government had set the policy for social housing rent commenting that for comparable properties Council housing rent was lower than private sector rents. She felt it was important to differentiate in that private landlords in the main would be seeking a profit whereas the Council would use any surplus to reinvest in good quality housing for local people. She duly moved the recommendations set out in the report. This was duly seconded by Councillor B. Brooks.

Councillor Dr. Johnson commented that it was difficult to ensure that every service area received adequate funding to carry out the work necessary for the Council, but harder still was deciding how the Council raised funds. He welcomed the additional focus in respect of the way the Council treated its tenants as a corporate landlord. However, he had attended the recent Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee and listening to the debate had noted how unfair the rents were proposed to be increased for some of the most vulnerable members of the community. The Administration were seeking an increase of 6.7%, higher than the previous year's increase of 5% and at a time of a cost-of-living crisis with the current inflation rate lower than the proposal before the Council. He felt that the Council was punishing its tenants for raising the Council Tax to the cap proposed by Welsh Government. Due to the fact that tenants had previously voted to remain with the Council he felt that the Council should therefore be looking after them. He indicated that there was a reason why the Council tenants paid less than those living in the private housing sector and as a result the numbers on the waiting lists continued to be high due to the fact that rents the public housing section were more affordable. He questioned the fairness

No.

of raising rents of vulnerable families to support the building of new houses and why it was a priority to ensure the Council's accounts were balanced by 2053 some 30 years in the future. He further questioned why the Welsh Government was not allocating sufficient resources to improve the Council's standards and reiterated his belief that it was simply unethical to refer to the cost-of-living crisis and then raise Council Tax and rents more than necessary. His view was that the Council needed to revisit how it paid for the Council housing and how it repaired and improved its housing quality standards. He signalled that his Group would be voting against the proposals and called for a recorded vote.

Councillor Carroll referred to the inflation busting increase which tenants were being asked to pay. He asked why the rise was necessary and suggested it was down to a failure of the Council's Administration to manage the Housing Revenue Account sufficiently and had failed to produce a credible Housing Business Plan resulting in the proposed 6.7% rise. He alluded to a number of cuts in services such as waste collections, the introduction of fees and charges for garden waste and education related matters. He considered it was time for the Administration to reflect on its performance and for the Council Leader to reflect on her performance and not to 'pass the buck' onto tenants by asking them to pay more.

Councillor Collins advised that she was disappointed that the Council wanted to raise rents by 6.7% in a time when many of the Council tenants were already experiencing difficulties. The country was in a cost-of-living crisis and tenants finance were being squeezed. The rent rise proposed was above inflation and would force tenants to tighten their belts further in a time when many were already choosing between eating or heating. She enquired as to what other plans had been looked at before the proposals were made.

Councillor Charles commented that the uplift was the maximum allowable uplift that had been set by Welsh Government which the Council was proposing.

Councillor Hennessy, a Member of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, stated that he had opposed the proposals at its recent meeting when the matter had been considered. He felt that the Administration should be thinking of the impact on its tenants.

Councillor Perkes, referring to the proposed sustainable improvements to Council properties, indicated that Council tenants would see financial savings in the form of reduced energy costs. She reminded Members that the recent UK Government Autumn Statement made no reference to Council's having any extra funding to support services and therefore the Council had to consider how best to manage its resources and to implement proposed changes for its tenants. It was an ambitious building plan, but she advised that there were over 300 homeless families and the proposals over the next few years intended to provide a further 81 properties for residents to rent. In conclusion she stated improvements needed to be made to the existing housing stock so that it provided quality accommodation, fit for the future.

No.

Councillor Hooper indicated that if the plan was ambitious, compassionate and reflected real life experiences he would have supported it, but in his view it failed on all three measures.

Councillor Godfrey commented that there was no information within the report on steps being taken to recover rent arrears and stated that Welsh Government should be seeking to encourage private sector landlords to ensure that there were more homes for people.

Councillor Mahoney felt it was important for everyone must take some of the burden of the financial challenges facing the Council, including its tenants and made reference to the fact that many Council tenants did not pay their own rent as they received some form of state benefit.

Councillor Wilson referring to the many comments made during the debate reminded Members that the proposed rise was lower than inflation. The headline rate had only recently fallen and that given the current uncertainty in the UK and the wider world, no one could predict what inflation was likely to be in the short term. Repairs to accommodation had increased more than 6.7% and in some cases, costs had increased by as much as by 25% due to the price of materials. The situation was a difficult one and he was sympathetic, but the Council had to invest for the future.

Councillor Franks indicated that the Administration could not be trusted given its recent failures and indicated that he did not support the proposals.

Councillor John, referring to some of the previous comments made, alluded to the previous years control of the Council by the Conservative Group and to their failure to invest in Council housing stock. He referred to the increased costs of raw materials for the development of houses and to the fact that some private landlords rents in the area were becoming unaffordable for young people, with many adding their names to the Council's housing waiting list.

Councillor Ewan Goodjohn, directing his question to Councillor Franks, enquired what he thought the Council should be spending its funding on and what services Councillor Franks would like the Council to stop providing in order to balance its accounts. The Council was spending £2m on providing temporary accommodation at the Holiday Inn, whereas those needing such support should be entitled to affordable good quality homes. The energy efficiency proposals being 15% of the plan would provide a saving for Council tenants. Support to Council tenants in relation to the claiming of benefits was also something that the Council would continue to address to ensure residents received the benefits they deserved and were aware that they were eligible for other support they may not think to claim. Council rents were the lowest in the County and as much as the Council did not want to raise rents, the increase in Council costs could not be offset forever.

The Leader, responding to the comments made during the debate stated she did not recall the Chair of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee making any comments or voice any concerns at that meeting when the matter was discussed, other than to vote against the proposals. She indicated the Cabinet

No.

would have been happy to discuss any alternatives put forward during that meeting. The proposals would provide for a number of improvements to be made, including those for people with access needs. She also drew attention to the fact that raw materials had doubled in price, there had been a rise in inflation and although inflation was falling there were still significant residual inflationary pressures yet to feed through into supply chain above 10% in the UK economy and these costs were impacting on the cost of developments. Referring to the debate, she had not heard anything to improve on the proposals and was happy to support a recorded vote if only to ensure that the public were aware of the names of those Members who were being unrealistic in addressing the aim of the Council which was to provide affordable housing for the most vulnerable residents. In most of her discussions with residents around the County many had been asking when more housing affordable housing developments would commence. She had responded by advising them that the Council would be building them as quickly as it could.

A recorded vote took place on the approval of the report recommendations. The relevant number of Members indicated their agreement for a recorded vote.

Members	For	Against	Abstain
Anne Asbrey		√	
Gareth Ball	√		
Rhiannon Birch	√		
Bronwen Brooks	√		
Gillian Bruce		√	
Ian Buckley	√		
Lis Burnett	√		
Samantha Campbell			√
George Carroll		√	
Christine Cave		√	
Janice Charles		√	
Millie Collins		√	
Pamela Drake	√		
Anthony Ernest		√	

No.

Christopher Franks		√	
Wendy Gilligan	√		
Russell Godfrey		√	
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		√	
Naomi Marshallsea	√		
Michael Morgan	√		
Jayne Norman	√		
Helen Payne	√		
Elliot Penn	√		
Sandra Perkes	√		
Ian Perry	√		

No.

Joanna Protheroe	√		
Ruba Sivagnanam	√		
Carys Stallard	√		
Neil Thomas	√		
Rhys Thomas		√	
Steffan Wiliam		√	
Margaret Wilkinson	√		
Eddie Williams	√		
Mark Wilson	√		
TOTAL	30	17	1

Having been put to a recorded vote it was subsequently

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the final Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2024/25 as set out below be approved:

	Original 2023/24	Change	2024/25 Final Proposed Budget
			£000
Expenditure			
Supervision & Management – General	4,366	329	4,695
Supervision & Management – Special	1,604	345	1,949
Repairs & Maintenance	4,681	319	5,000
Capital Financing Costs	5,327	465	5,792
Rent, Rates, Taxes & Other Charges	221	49	270
Increase in Provision for Bad Debts	948	79	1,027
Capital Expenditure from Revenue Account (CERA)	17,187	(8,990)	8,197
	34,334	(7,404)	26,930
Income			
Dwelling Rents	(22,453)	(3,340)	(25,793)
Non Dwelling Rents	(173)	(13)	(186)
Interest	(156)	111	(45)
Charges For Services and Facilities	(601)	(83)	(684)

No.

Contribution towards expenditure	(74)	(20)	(94)
Grant Income	(205)	0	(205)
	(23,662)	(3,345)	(27,007)
(Surplus)/ deficit for the year	10,672	(10,749)	(77)
Working Balance Brought Forward as at 1st April 2024	(11,621)	10,672	(949)
Working Balance Carried Forward as at 31st March 2025	(949)	(77)	(1,026)

(2) T H A T an average rent increase of 6.7% as detailed in the Cabinet report of 11th January, 2024, be approved.

(3) T H A T the increase proposed for other services as set out in the table below and detailed in the Cabinet report of 11th January, 2024, be approved.

50 Week Basis	2023/24 Actual Charges	2024/25 Proposed Charges	
	£	£	
Grounds Maintenance	1.47	1.49	per week
Cleaning of communal areas	2.75	2.92	per week
Lighting of communal areas	1.85	2.51	per week
Laundry Facilities	0.41	0.62	per week
Window Cleaning	0.16	0.18	per week
Lift Maintenance	0.99	1.33	per week
Door Entry	0.50	0.71	per week
Intercom	0.94	0.95	per week
CCTV	0.95	0.0	per week -Nil one year only
Sewerage Treatment Plants	426.66	455.25	per annum
Cesspools	411.50	439.00	per annum

(4) T H A T all changes to rents and service charges be approved and implemented from 1st April, 2024, with the first week of April being a non-chargeable rent week and that increase notices are sent to tenants two months in advance of the new charges coming into effect as required by the Rented Homes Wales Act.

(5) T H A T the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25 attached at Appendix A to the Cabinet report of 11th January, 2024 be approved.

Reasons for decisions

(1) To facilitate budget monitoring and to demonstrate a balanced budget with a drawdown from HRA reserves to bring the reserve back into balance with the Housing business Plan 2023/24.

No.

- (2) In order that new rent levels are set within the specified Welsh Government guidelines and to meet the tenant notification deadline as required by statute.
- (3) That charges are approved and to meet the tenant notification deadline as required by statute.
- (4) In order that charges are approved, new rent levels are set within the specified Welsh Government guidelines and to meet the tenant notification deadline as required by statute.
- (5) To approval for the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/53.