

## CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of an Extraordinary Hybrid Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2024.

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.D.D. Carroll, P. Drake, C.P. Franks, H.C. Hamilton, S.M. Hanks, Dr. I.J. Johnson, B. Loveluck-Edwards and N.J. Wood.

Also present: Councillors J. Aviet, L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 1044 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”.

### 1045 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor S.J. Haines.

### 1046 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

### 1047 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor Ewan Goodjohn declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 – Work to Tackle Poverty and the Current Cost of Living Crisis. The nature of his interest was that his mother was the Chair of a community centre that received warm space funding which was referenced to in the report. This was a personal, not prejudicial interest.

Councillor C.P. Franks declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 – Work to Tackle Poverty and the Current Cost of Living Crisis. The nature of his interest was his links to Dinas Powys Library, which had been part of the Warm Spaces initiative. The Councillor had dispensation to speak only on matters relating to Dinas Powys Library and Activity Centre (including grant applications) when being discussed at both Vale of Glamorgan and Dinas Powys Community Council meetings (paragraphs (d), (f), (g) and (h) of the relevant regulations).

## 1048 WORK TO TACKLE POVERTY AND THE CURRENT COST OF LIVING CRISIS (DCR) –

The report, co-presented to the Committee by the Director of Corporate Resources and the Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Insight, provided an update on work being undertaken across the Council and working in partnership with other bodies in the public, private and third sector organisations to tackle poverty, and to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. A holistic view had been undertaken, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data.

The data showed that there were issues of poverty across the Vale of Glamorgan and that the cost-of-living crisis was continuing to cause hardship, with increasing issues of affordability with regards to food, energy and housing.

The report illustrated the breadth of work undertaken to support people into employment, help families and young people through financial and wellbeing support including various sports opportunities as well as developing work within schools to use them as community hubs. The report highlighted the work to tackle food insecurity by supporting projects that improved access to food, reduced loneliness and isolation through supporting the development of community spaces and provided financial support to individuals through a number of schemes.

Other work highlighted was around home insulation and energy efficiency, community warm spaces social hubs, the cost-of-living support webpages set up on the Council's website, Value in the Vale (VIV) volunteering scheme, the support from Shared Prosperity funding, additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and the increase in funds allocated to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to manage the impacts of increasing rent prices in the private rental sector.

The report also provided details about the use of the cost-of-living reserve which was established as part of the 2023-24 budget, demonstrating how the Council was matching the use of reserves with the Council's core priorities as set out in the Financial Strategy which underpinned the development of recently approved budget proposals. Shared Prosperity funding was also supporting a number of projects that would be helping to target poverty and address the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

A number of questions and comments were raised by the Committee, including:

- On the Chair's queries on the Council's efforts to help rural communities in the Vale access crisis services and to engage and encourage social enterprises, it was explained that the report referenced a range of services that had been set up in the rural Vale such as in Wick, Llantwit Major and St Athan and the Council's efforts to extend these services elsewhere, with additional funding now in place. On social enterprises, the work that the Council was undertaking with Cwmpas to explore the relationship between the Council and the third sector, social enterprises and town and community councils was

- cited, which offered the opportunity to further develop a response which supported residents across the Vale of Glamorgan.
- The Vice Chair made a number of comments and queries around the positive work of the Older People's Champion and the Council's Age Friendly Team concerning the Age Friendly Strategy, the work of the Housing Team with Council Tenants, the seemingly relatively small number of cost-of-living schemes coming through, any update on the C-Card Scheme and the possibility of the Council continuing the provision of additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of FSM. In response, the Director of Corporate Resources was keen schemes to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis were increased, and the report referred to the use of the Council's Cost of Living Reserve whereby £25k in funding was shared out to 31 applications (out of 75 received), as well as signposting to other forms of support. Going forward, reporting would highlight what were new or existing schemes. On the C Card Scheme there was no additional information at this time, but the work undertaken in conjunction with the new officer in this role was highlighted by the Vice-Chair. On support for those families in receipt of FSM, discussions were underway for using Council reserves, but there had not been any specific conversations on extending this into the summer holidays, but the Council was working with the Health Service to see if more targeted provision and support could be offered via local schools in the summer break; further updates on this would be shared with the Committee.
  - Councillor Dr. Johnson, raised a number of points, including the need for an update on the report format i.e. making it easier to follow, less 'broad' and the use of an appendix or table to ascertain the length of schemes, how they were funded, their progress, outcomes, etc. He also enquired on how much of the Cost of Living Reserve had been spent and whether the Council had spoken to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and others on the withdrawal of FSM funding by Welsh Government and following their admission at the High Court they had broken their own law by not providing further funding for FSM vouchers during school holidays. In addition, he raised queries around DHP, expenditure on community payments, rent arrears and the 'rebranding' of a number of projects and schemes linked to this topic and whether these were better or worse than their previous iterations or was the Council simply 'reinventing the wheel' by doing this. On the rebranding of schemes, this was part of an effort to combine and restructure these in a set of aligned, coherent themes and outcomes which would also feed into the Councillor's suggestion on the presentation / format of the report. This would help to provide Members with information in future on a scheme-by-scheme basis, how they were funded, what they were intended to do, what was their impact and the chronology or the timeline behind them. On DHP, the query on whether this rolled over and on Council tenant rent arrears, further information would be sought from Finance officers and shared with the Committee. Similarly, the query on FSM would be taken back to Learning and Skills officers to answer. Where funding could not be given to community projects due to the £25k allocated having been used, applicants were signposted to other schemes or sources of funding who could assist and in many cases this had been successful.
  - Councillor Carroll welcomed the inclusion of information regarding Council Tax Reduction and stated that it was important for the report to consider the

impact of higher Council Tax had on residents and households, including the most vulnerable within the Vale of Glamorgan and on their finances. This would help to focus minds at the Council to ensure that money was spent efficiently. In response, the Councillor's comments would be taken back to the relevant team to look at how the impact of Council Tax could be focused on more in reporting, including budgets. The inclusion of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was explained as being due to the feedback from this Committee.

- Councillor Loveluck-Edwards referred to the Welsh Benefits Charter that the Council and other Welsh Local Authorities had signed up to and Universal Credit. She enquired if the Charter could be used to help raise awareness to residents either in or out of work as to what benefits they could claim in light of the cost-of-living crisis. It was explained that the Council had undertaken a number of awareness raising campaigns for residents to claim benefits such as Pension Credit. The Communications Team in the Council would be asked to increase the messaging on entitlements through social media, newsletters, etc. The Chair echoed the Councillor's concerns on the impact of Universal Credit on some of her constituents when trying to increase their working hours, etc., as well as the challenges for people getting support and advice from the Department of Work and Pensions.

There being no further questions, Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the work being undertaken with regards tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis which was a critical challenge within the Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2023-24 and the new Annual delivery Plan 2024-25 be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Welsh Benefits Charter and the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of the cost-of-living reserve to support those in need be noted.
- (4) T H A T the Committee supports and endorses that future reports on cost of living work should be reported to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- (5) T H A T the format of the report be revisited in order to address the comments raised by the Committee on this.
- (6) T H A T Cabinet considers continuing the provision of additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of free school meals (FSM).

#### Reasons for recommendations

- (1-5) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(6) For Cabinet to consider the comments of the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee as part of its consideration of progress of work to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

#### 1049 REQUIRED LEARNING REVIEW (DCR) –

The report, presented by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, was intended to provide Committee Members with an overview of the current required / mandatory learning provided as workplace compliance across the Council and for them to consider the proposed approach to reviewing the same. As a Local Authority and employer, the Council currently provided a number of modules of required or mandated learning, which an employee needed to complete as part of their probation process and at regular intervals, which the Council entitled 'workplace compliance'.

The report sought to highlight the current provision in relation to required / mandatory learning and the completion rates for modules currently on offer.

The report also highlighted how the Council sought to comply with regulatory requirements, mitigate risks, and address emerging challenges through mandatory learning mandates whilst balancing these requirements alongside the potential implications for employee engagement, morale, and the effectiveness of mandating learning. Also referred to was reaching the required staff audience in an engaging way, enriching the learning experience and empowering the Council's staff to be the best they could be to its citizens and the communities the Council served.

In addition, the report sought to address the recommendation brought from the Governance and Audit Committee in relation to Whistleblowing, i.e. the need to strengthen employee understanding, awareness, along with a willingness to report issues, around Whistleblowing.

Finally, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development emphasised that workplace compliance was part of a more rounded review of the induction process, which would offer new staff greater understanding of key areas of the Council, including the Corporate Plan, Annual Delivery Plan, the mechanics of staff communication and the democratic process. The online iDev training and learning system for new and existing staff helped to monitor compliance and helped to ensure that staff achieved a 100% completion of such e-learning and modules in order to complete their probation period.

Following the report, a number of questions and comments were raised by the Committee, including:

- The Chair raised the status of Display Screen Equipment (DSE), Equality and Welsh Language training and whether they were mandatory training modules for new staff. It was explained that they were not specific modules but were part of the wider induction process i.e. these areas were discussed in the section in the induction process concerning working for the Vale of Glamorgan

Council, as well as new staff being signposted to further learning and topics such as the Welsh Language.

- Councillor Carroll referred to the need to ensure that at the start of the induction process and subsequent required learning for Council staff, a more 'staggered' approach was taken in order to avoid any unnecessary, 'box ticking' exercises. In response, it was stated that the Council was actively seeking to avoid a 'tick box' approach to learning and training for staff and to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach by taking a more multi-faceted approach to learning and training. On the Councillor's follow up question on the mandatory nature of asbestos training for all Council staff and whether this reflected an issue with asbestos at the Council, it was explained that this training was being reviewed with the Health and Safety Team, but currently remained mandatory in order for staff to identify asbestos should they encounter it in the course of their work. This did not imply that there was asbestos at Council premises but was merely a precaution as seen in other organisations.
- The Vice-Chair referred to the 'heavy lifting' that ICT undertook in the Council as a relatively small team and as part of the induction training it would be useful to provide more ICT 'how to' modules and guides as part of the induction process in order to raise awareness of ICT and the use of digital technology more effectively. It was explained that this was being reviewed already by the Head of Digital and some relevant training / learning had already been added to the Council online learning and training system (iDev) concerning ICT, such as Cybersecurity. The Council was also working on including learning around ICT tips, as well as more efficient use of software and digital technology.
- Councillor Dr. Johnson referred to the review of required / mandatory learning to be undertaken as part of the Council's People Strategy, and asked when this would be coming to an end, how this would be rolled out, and what could be done to ensure that staff only undertook mandatory training that was absolutely necessary for their role, in order to avoid unnecessary work pressures on them. Furthermore, would the review put into context what mandatory learning and training all staff needed to do and those areas that only needed to be done by staff in the relevant team or workstream. It was explained that the review would hopefully be completed in the Autumn and would encompass a more job centred approach to mandatory learning, etc. as well as stipulating what learning would be required of all staff to do irrespective of their work role. Further details would be provided to Committee in Autumn.
- The Chair asked whether all Welsh Local Authorities undertook the same or similar mandatory training, had the same learning requirements and if so, whether these could be 'pooled' together or a joint approach be undertaken with other Local Authorities in terms of training and learning in order to achieve economies of scale for similar training objectives. It was explained that some interim work had been done on this with both Welsh and other UK Local Authorities, with training and learning streams not being that dissimilar so far, but further data was needed to be gathered on this before a full set of conclusions and results could be drawn.

There being no further questions, Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Required Learning Review report be noted.
- (2) T H A T Cabinet consider the comments made by the Committee in relation to the proposed approach and scope of mandatory/required learning for Council staff:
  - The importance of providing more ICT ‘how to’ modules and guides as part of the induction process in order to raise awareness of ICT and the use of digital technology more effectively.
  - To ensure that at the start of the induction process and subsequent required learning for Council staff, a more ‘staggered’ approach was taken in order to avoid any unnecessary, ‘box ticking’ exercises and lessen the impact on staff work pressures.
  - To look at a joint approach with other Local Authorities in terms of training and learning in order to achieve economies of scale for similar training objectives.
- (3) T H A T the response to the recommendations of the Governance and Audit Committee with regards to Whistleblowing be noted.
- (4) T H A T a further report be provided to the Committee once the review has been completed.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order for the Committee’s views to be considered by Cabinet.
- (3&4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

1050 GLAMORGAN VOLUNTARY SERVICES (GVS) ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 (VS) –

The report, presented by Rachel Connor, a representative from Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS), outlined to Members a summary of all areas of Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS) activity during 2022/23.

The report considered the achievements in year, the development of advice services, including delivery of one-to-one support, its role as an information service, the move to digital and social media, as well as the provision of practical and non-digital services, i.e. reliable printing.

Another element of the work of the GVS related to funding the information service which provided support for 81 groups throughout the year with a reported £650k of funding obtained as a result of the advice and information given by GVS

Other highlights included: various funding events had been held with representatives from funders giving valuable advice on a one-to-one basis to third sector organisations; the ongoing importance of accessing funding and resources and the challenges around this; the advantages and value of partnership working in achieving the shaping and delivery of services; the work of the GVS towards becoming a dementia friendly organisation; the work around its volunteering outreach work and service; its work in helping to tackle food poverty (i.e. via the FoodShare project) and the use of various community focussed spaces throughout the Vale of Glamorgan.

Following the presentation of the report, the Chair asked whether GVS undertook any outreach work to more rural communities in the Vale of Glamorgan, such as offering them volunteering opportunities or if not, whether this could be considered by GVS in future. It was explained that GVS did offer opportunities for volunteering to various parts of the Vale, such as through the use of volunteering 'fairs', where local third sector organisations were invited to attend and set up stalls for local residents to go along and sign up for volunteering activities. Following the massive peak in volunteers during the Pandemic, this had now trailed off; the representative from GVS urged Members to help publicise the benefits of volunteering and the importance of volunteering to local residents.

There being no further questions, Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS) Annual Report 2022/23 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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