

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 19th September, 2023.

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

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

Present: Councillor S.D. Perkes (Chair); Councillor I.A.N. Perry (Vice-Chair); Councillors C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, A.M. Ernest, M.J. Hooper, C. Iannucci, S. Lloyd-Selby, E. Penn and S.T. Wiliam

Also present: Councillors B.E. Brooks (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Place) L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), C.P. Franks and G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing)

357 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer 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.”

358 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

359 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

360 FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 20th July, 2023 was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, the purpose of which was for the Committee to consider the financial pressures over the medium term and the Strategy put in place for delivering the 2024/25 budget and sustainable finances over the medium term.

In addition, a number of slides were presented to the Committee which outlined the Strategy, economic outlook, current five year position and approach.

Key takeaways from the report and presentation included the Council needed to look at revising cost pressures and closing the funding gap that had been identified. In terms of the approach to the budget for this period, the intention was to adopt an approach which would be broadly similar to the 2023/24 period. Also outlined were the principles that would be followed such as in terms of delivering the Corporate Plan and focusing on supporting the most vulnerable within the Vale, as well as ensuring that the budget strategy implemented was sustainable. Other areas that would inform the Strategy would be ensuring appropriate levels of reserves, collective responsibility to manage finances as well as delivering best value.

The economic outlook remained challenging, despite the slowing down of inflation, including a high Bank of England base rate. These challenges were coupled with a lack of clarity concerning the Welsh Government grant and ongoing cost pressures around areas such as investment and demographics which were linked to Social Services and Education. Consideration also had to be given around cost pressures concerning pay awards for staff. In terms of cost pressures within the remit of the Committee, this included areas such as homelessness and the need to address the gap in this provision following the fallout from the Welsh Government grant, whilst the rapid housing strategy and other policies to address the increase in homelessness and housing also required to be implemented. It was believed in 2024/25 the funding gap as a starting point would be approximately £6.4m. Directorates were currently in the process or reviewing those cost pressures which were expected to increase.

In terms of addressing these issues and taking a suitable approach it was important for the Council to look at funding sources and the need to challenge the cost pressures to ensure that these were sound. As these were aligned with the Council's corporate priorities there would also need to be a review of potential savings, the need to look at schemes, service transformation and whether the Council could identify any digital innovation as well as looking at reserves as a means of supporting investment.

Following a query from Councillor M. Hooper regarding the timescales for the notification of the budget settlement from Welsh Government, the Operational Manager advised that the current understanding was that there would be a slight delay and the likely announcement being 19th December, 2023.

Councillors S. Lloyd-Selby and E. Penn commented that it was important for the Council to relay to members of the public the reasons for the significant pressures facing the Council.

Subsequently it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T both the Cabinet reference and the appended report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of both the Cabinet reference and report on the Financial Strategy 2024/25.

361 DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25 AND INITIAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2024/25 TO 2028/29 (REF) –

The Operational Manager – Accountancy presented the reference from Cabinet of 20th July, 2023.

The Cabinet report provided the Council's Draft Capital Strategy for 2024/25 attached at Appendix 1. The Capital Strategy provided a framework which outlined how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of corporate objectives, along with an overview of how associated risk was managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. The report also set out the current five-year Capital Programme for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29.

The Operational Manager advised that based on the final settlement for 2023/24 from Welsh Government, the Council was expecting similar capital funding for 2024-25 but it was difficult to predict capital resources over a long-term period as the level of general capital funding provided by Welsh Government was usually advised on a year-by-year basis and their priority areas of spend which would change over a period of time. Also, the cost of a capital scheme was significantly more than it was a couple of years ago.

For schemes specifically under the remit of the Committee, the officer drew Members' attention to Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report and references to the vehicle replacement programme, asset renewal, highway improvements, flood risk management, coast protection and land and drainage and bridge structures.

Councillor M. Hooper commented that it was important for the Council to communicate to the public around how and where it spent its funding, particularly in relation to the Cardiff Region City Deal.

There being no further comments, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the draft Capital Strategy 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1 be accepted.
- (2) T H A T the Initial Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29 be accepted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to both the Cabinet reference and the appended report and discussions at the meeting.

362 REVISED HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE THREE YEAR PLAN 2022 – 2024 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 20th July, 2023 was presented by the Neighbourhood Manager Highway Maintenance.

It was advised that the Highway Maintenance Three Year Resurfacing Plan 2022 to 2024 identified carriageways requiring treatment to prevent further surface and structural deterioration that would be undertaken in financial year 2022/23 onward and superseded the previous Plan 2019 to 2021. The carriageways listed within the Plan for resurfacing had been assessed in accordance with the 'Highway Maintenance Scoring Matrix' which was attached at Appendix B to this Report.

The 'Highway Maintenance Scoring Matrix' identified several criteria and data factors which enabled a score to be derived and the prioritised three-year plan for resurfacing to be established.

Locations for resurfacing that were listed at Appendix A that were showing no score had been brought to the Council's attention following highway inspector or stakeholder requests. Those locations remained on the list until scored for the purpose of monitoring and record keeping for the Highway Maintenance team.

It was reported that resurfacing works was costly, and that form of treatment generally related to major and heavily trafficked routes. Roads that would receive surfacing works in financial year 2023/24 would be selected from the prioritised resurfacing list.

Councillor C. Ianucci queried whether there were any plans or what the timeline was for including smaller potholes that might be a risk to cyclists. In reply, the Neighbourhood Manager Highway Maintenance stated that generally the Council used the 40 millimetres intervention criteria and so the response would be within the allocated timescales with the approved external contractor. It was, however, unclear if the Council would respond more quickly if the pothole was an active travel route, so that was something that required further consideration. Councillor M. Hooper stated that it was very important for cyclists to be given further consideration particularly as one of the main reasons for the 20mph speed limits was to encourage more people to cycle. Therefore, it was vital for the roads and routes to be safe. The Committee agreed for that to be a formal recommendation to Cabinet.

Councillor I. Perry referred to the A48 as being a strategic route which needed resurfacing, but it was low down on the Council's list. In the meantime, the surface of the A48 was noisy and unsafe which was not covered in the Council's criteria. Councillor Perry also stated that the Council's app needed to be looked at

as it could be more user-friendly. He also outlined that there was no definition of what was an essential part of a defective highway, and he suggested that the road scoring matrix should be reviewed with noise given greater consideration. The Neighbourhood Manager Highway Maintenance clarified that noise was not considered as part of the Council's scoring matrix. It was also advised that when resurfacing roads, the Council would use the best material to reduce road noise. Councillor Perry's recommendation regarding the inclusion of noise on the scoring matrix, having been seconded and voted upon, was not carried.

Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby queried whether the individual needs of residents with a disability were considered as part of the scoring criteria. In reply, the Neighbourhood Manager Highway Maintenance stated that individual needs of disabled residents were not currently considered under the criteria, however lots of residents would reach out the Council so these were recorded.

Councillor A.M. Ernest referred to Rectory Road in Penarth for which the road works required approval. The Neighbourhood Manager Highway Maintenance stated clarified that it had received Cabinet approval.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T both the Cabinet reference and the appended report be accepted.
- (2) T H A T Cabinet be requested to review the Council's criteria matrix to reflect properly the needs of cyclists and to ensure that roads and routes are suitable.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to both the Cabinet reference and the appended report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order to request an assessment to ensure that the needs of cyclists are reflected within the Council's Policy.

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

The reference from Cabinet of 7th September, 2023 was presented.

The Annual Self-Assessment formed part of the Council's legislative requirements and performance management framework, which entailed the self-assessment of its work against the Annual Delivery Plan, which formed part of the overall Corporate Plan for 2020 to 2025. The Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report 2022/23 was appended at Appendix A, with an "easy read" version at Appendix B.

This was a considerable piece of work, which evaluated a wide range of performance, engagement and other data insights from the Council's annual planning and performance framework including the annual Directorate Self-Assessment and Peer Challenge process which enabled the Council to draw conclusions on how well it was using its resources to support the achievement of the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. This also tied in with how Directorate services were applying the five ways of working [Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015].

The Council believed that on balance it had met its Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2022/23, in what continued to be another challenging year for the Council. It had attributed a judgment of 'Good', reflecting the achievement of over 85% of in-year activities and performance target. Use of resources by the Council was also judged to be 'Good' because it had good evidence of how resources had been used economically, efficiently, effectively and equitably to enhance performance, achieve outcomes, meet need and was in a strong position to secure future service improvements. From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken throughout the year via the internal and external audit work programme as well the findings of the performance evaluation, reasonable assurance could be given that the governance arrangements for the Vale of Glamorgan Council continued to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Workshops and other means of engagement with partners, trade unions, local businesses, residents and Council staff were also undertaken as part of this self-assessment process.

Councillor M. Hooper commented on the balance within the report and made reference to changes to green waste and black bag collections so the narrative could reflect more the tough decisions that the Council had made.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment Report 2022/23 be accepted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to both the Cabinet reference and the appended report and discussions at the meeting

364 QUARTER 1 REVENUE MONITORING 2023/24 (DEH) –

The Accountant presented the report, the purpose of which was to advise the Committee of the Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring position for 2023/24.

The table below set out the Original Budget and Virement requests for approval by Directorate.

Directorate	Original Budget 2023/24	Virement Request 2023/24	Amended Budget 2023/24	Projected Outturn	Variance
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Learning and Skills	130,711	-33	130,678	130,678	0
Social Services	88,858	33	88,891	89,891	1,000
Environment and Housing	34,260	700	34,960	35,960	1,000
Corporate Resources	5,047	-667	4,380	4,380	0
Place	4,261	60	4,321	4,321	0
Policy	33,381	-93	33,288	31,288	-2,000
Use of Reserves	-2,096	0	-2,096	-2,096	0
Total	294,422	0	294,422	294,422	0
Public Sector Housing (HRA)	10,672	0	10,672	10,672	0
Total	305,094	0	305,094	305,094	0

The revenue position for 2023/24 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures, with increasing demand in respect of Children's and Adults Social Care and significant increases in the cost of placements and care packages and support for Additional Learning Needs continued to be an area of significant pressure within Learning and Skills. The Council was also experiencing continued inflationary pressures in respect of School Transport. Across the services inflationary pressures were also being experienced in respect of pay most notably where market forces were being utilised and for the funding gap between provision for the 2023/24 pay award and the likely pay award for 2023/24.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set out for 2023/24 this included a target of £2.75m for schools and £4.628m Corporate savings. The progress against those savings targets were reflected in the Appendix to the report and summarised in the table below.

Directorate	Target	Projected	% Achieved	Mitigation	Mitigation Achieved %	Shortfall	Shortfall %
	£'000s	£'000s	%	£'000s	%	£'000s	£'000s
Policy	1,565	1,565	100	-	0	-	0%
Resources	582	308	53	73	47	1	0%
Neighbourhood and Housing	1,000	883	88	40	4	77	8%
Learning and skills	564	405	72	-	0	159	28%

Social Services	681	681	100	-	0	-	0%
Place	265	133	50	-	0	132	50%
Total	4,657	3,975	85	313	7	369	8%

Projected transfers to and from reserves were set out in the table below.

As at	Balance 01/04/2023	Capital Funding	Planned Transfer (from) reserves	Planned Transfer to reserves	Unplanned Drawdown from Reserves	Estimated Balance 31/03/2024
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
General Fund	11,523	0	-496	0	0	11,027
Insurance	4,877	0	0	0	0	4,877
Service Reserves	22,521	-646	-6,426	42	-3,246	12,246
Risk and Smoothing Reserves	29,802	-4,404	-4,022	165	0	21,541
Capital	17,726	-14,885	-477	823		3,187
Schools	7,254	0	-6,500	0		754
Housing Revenue Account	16,486	-15,537	0	0		949
Total	110,190	-35,472	-17,921	1,030	-3,246	54,581

In reply to a query from Councillor A. Ernest regarding funding to tackle the issue of Ash dieback, the Operational Manager – Accountancy advised that the Council's response had been from funding through a reserve under Project Zero and through budgets allocated to manage country parks. It was understood that the initial problem was perhaps underestimated, but the Council was spending a considerable sum, particularly in relation to highways and the removal and replanting of trees. It was however important to fully reflect the issues through the budget setting process and as a cost pressure.

With regard to trees, Councillor. S. Wiliam stated that it was important for the Council to allocate sufficient budgets not just for Ash dieback but for all trees. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport advised that the Council was in the process of producing a Tree Strategy that would cover all trees and not just Ash dieback. The Strategy would be presented initially to Cabinet and then onto the Scrutiny Committee for consideration, possibly for the November meeting.

Councillor I. Perry queried whether there was any way to reduce the costs of street lighting. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that the Council had already introduced LED lighting which was more efficient and represented a significant investment. That was definitely the right course of action as the Council's energy costs would be considerably higher if

LEDs had not been installed. There were cost saving options that could be explored such as turning off lights during certain hours, but the important factor was a reduction to the price of wholesale energy and the need to consider the impact on other budget areas.

Subsequently it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2023/24 Revenue Budget be noted.

(2) T H A T the virements included as part of the report as set out in Table 1 be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the content of the report and discussions at the meeting.

365 CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH JUNE, 2023 (DEH) –

The purpose of the report was to advise Committee of the progress on the 2023/24 Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th June, 2023 within their remit.

The report provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th June, 2023. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1 to the report.

Appendix 2 to the report provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March through to 30th June, 2023, including any changes requested within the report.

The report set out any requested changes to the 2023/24 and future years' Capital Programme. The report noted the current approved programme of £125.813m, being the Council approved Programme of £103.968m plus slippage of £8.733m from 2022/23 and additions of £13.112m.

It was important to note that many areas were continuing to experience an increase in costs associated with the delivery of schemes. Tenders were being received over the current allocated budgets and officers were reporting the requirement to re-negotiate submitted tenders.

Schemes would be closely monitored over the coming months and it was anticipated that slippage requests would be requested in future reports. Officers would continue to work with project managers and sponsors to ensure value for money and that all possible funding opportunities were identified and were fully explored.

Councillor A.M. Ernest referred to the Barry Dock Interchange which represented a £1.5m investment and he asked which bus services were currently using it. The Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport clarified that it was important to consider that it was not just a bus interchange but also contained other facilities including a drop off for taxis, electric bikes and electric vehicles charging points. Funding for the interchange came mainly from the Cardiff Region City Deal with some additional money from Section 106 contributions. With regard to bus services, it had been initially proposed that the Number 88 service would use it, but that service had since been withdrawn. It had been recognised that bus services were a significant challenge because of a decrease in users following Covid, and how things moved forward, was for discussion with Welsh Government and other local authorities in the South Wales area. It was also important to consider that the Interchange was well placed and close to a new major development at Barry Docks, so the linkages to the train station was key as the was the need to have infrastructure in place to attract new bus service. The Committee to hold a site visit which would be arranged by Democratic Services.

Councillor M. Hooper commented that there needed to be a more strategic approach given that the City Deal was hosted by Cardiff Council which also ran Cardiff Bus, and so, it was important to ensure that there was proper scrutiny. The Chair replied by outlining that there was a Joint Scrutiny Committee which included members from each of the ten partner authorities.

In being invited to comment, the Cabinet Member, Councillor B. Brooks, offered reassurance that Council Officers were working incredibly hard to find ways to improve bus services. There were well known funding issues following Covid and work was ongoing to ensure that the Vale had sufficient bus services. The Cabinet Member reiterated previous comments around the Interchange having a range of facilities not just for buses and she highlighted the improvements made around Subway Road.

There being no further comments or queries, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made in delivering the 2023/24 Capital Programme within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee be noted as per Appendix 1 attached to the report.
- (2) T H A T the use of Delegated Authority within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee, as set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report, be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee, as detailed in Appendix 1 attached to the report, be noted.
- (4) T H A T the changes to the 2023/24 and future years Capital Programme within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee, as set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

366 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE 2023/24 (DP) -

The report presented Quarter 1 performance results for the period 1st April, 2023 to 31st March, 2023 in delivering the 2023/24 Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Three Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q1 to reflect the good progress made to date in meeting the Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2023/24. One Corporate Well-being Objective (Well-being Objective 3) was attributed an Amber performance status at Q1.

90% (447 out of 494) of planned activities outlined in the Annual Delivery Plan had been attributed a Green performance rating reflecting the positive progress made during the quarter, 1% (4) of activities had been attributed an Amber status and 9% (43) of planned activities were attributed a Red status.

Of the 173 performance measures aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, data was reported for 43 measures where a performance status was applicable. 51% (22) measures were attributed a Green performance Status, 12% (5) Amber status and 37% (16), Red status. A performance status was not applicable for 129 measures with 27 of these relating to measures establishing baseline performance for 2023/24, 92 measures are reported annually and for 10 measures no update no data was available.

In relation to the planned activities within the remit of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, 93% (151 out of 161) were attributed a Green performance status, 1% (1) were attributed an Amber performance status and the final 6% (9) were attributed a Red status. Of the 7 measures reported, 43% (3) were attributed a Green performance status, 28.5% (2) were attributed an Amber status and 28.5% (2) were attributed Red status.

This quarter, the areas for improvement outlined in the presentation had been revised to reflect an overview of service plan specific improvement areas aligned to the Annual Delivery Plan, emerging areas of development and activity, and emerging areas of concern specific to each Scrutiny Committee's remit across all 4 well-being objectives. This reflected the changes requested by Members on performance monitoring and aligned with the 13 Principles - Effective Scrutiny Action Plan. This approach would enable Members to focus on upcoming priority areas and areas where further probing should be considered, alongside progress against the Annual Delivery Plan commitments.

The report sought Members' consideration of Q1 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance.

Upon consideration, the Scrutiny Committee was recommended to refer their views and any recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

Councillor M. Hooper queried the action to complete and deliver the parking and enforcement policy for Barry Island. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport advised that there were two separate targets, the first being the enforcement policy which required some updating and the second was related to residents parking permits. Both were currently in draft, but due to demands and limited resources, they would be progressed following completion of the Tree Strategy and the roll out of the 20mph speed limits.

There being no further comments or queries, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Quarter 1 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2023/24 commitments as aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Wellbeing Objectives within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee, be noted.

(2) T H A T the remedial actions to be taken to address areas of underperformance and to tackle the key challenges identified within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.