

No.

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid Meeting held on 18th June, 2024.

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

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

Present: Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby (Chair); Councillors P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, A.M. Ernest, M.J. Hooper, J.M. Norman, E. Penn and J. Protheroe.

Also present: Councillors A. Asbrey, R. Birch (Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language), C.P. Franks, S.J. Haines, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

142 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”.

143 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors C.E.A. Champion, C. Iannucci-Williams and S.T. Wiliam.

144 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 21st May, 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to it being noted that Councillor Driscoll offered his apologies for the meeting in question (these were not received in time for inclusion in the relevant minutes).

145 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

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146 DEVELOPMENT OF THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025-2030, PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE CALENDAR 2024/25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th June, 2024 was presented by the Director of Place in conjunction with the Director of Environment and Housing.

This was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation, which helped to break down the various key areas of the report for the Committee, including the Corporate Plan Development, Panel Performance Assessment (PPA), Learning from 2022 / 2023 annual self-assessment and the proposed approach for 2023 / 2024 and the Annual Performance Calendar. After each of these sections there was a pause in the presentation in order to allow questions or points of clarity to be made by Members, etc.

Following the presentation of each of the relevant sections of the report, a number of questions and comments were made by the Committee, these included the following:

Councillor Hooper queried if it would be better to move away from having a five year period for the Plan and to look at something more flexible and agile in light of emerging and unforeseen issues and events, in order that the Council could more effectively address the pressures or challenges that the Council would face as a result. It was explained that there was a set of fairly rigid guidelines which the Council had to follow in terms of preparation of the Corporate Plan, but, as much as possible, the Council tried to draft the Plan in such a way that there was a degree of flexibility and that it could be amended in light of unpredicted events that might occur in the future. In addition, the existing Plan had stood up pretty well in light of events such as the cost-of-living crisis, the war in Ukraine, the rise of inflation, Covid-19 and the impact of Brexit. It was essential that as an organisation the Council had a core plan to work to and the five-year time span for this was recognised as good practice but with the built in flexibility in order to account for as many issues and unforeseen circumstances as possible.

Councillor Ernest queried the role of so called “backbench” Elected Members as part of the Panel performance assessment. It was explained that as part of the PPA timetable, as detailed within the body of the report, there was reference to the involvement and engagement of scrutiny and the wider body of Elected Members in the PPA process as well as Full Council. This also included Members of the Governance and Audit Committee.

In relation to the learning from 2022/23 Annual Self Assessment and proposed approach for 2023/24, Councillor Hooper raised the disconnect between the previous PPA and the results of the “Let’s Talk About Life in the Vale” residents survey and the importance, wherever possible, of the self assessment being aligned as much as possible with the views expressed through the residents’ survey. This was in order that the Corporate Plan was better informed and that it provided real benefits to the residents of the Vale. It was explained that the self assessment process in conjunction with the new peer challenge / review would help the Council to get a more moderated view of its performance. It was explained that the self assessment and feedback from the residents’ survey would never fully align due to the fact that

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they were looking at slightly different things but with the new process and mechanism in place around external peer reviews, this would help them to align more than they had in the past.

The Chair referred to the Annual Self Assessment 2023/24 timetable and her concerns around the engagement on the self assessment with staff, members of the public and other key stakeholders during August 2024. This was because August was traditionally a holiday period for many people and she queried how Council could ensure that the engagement would remain meaningful if significant numbers of people were away. It was explained that such concerns had also been raised at the recent Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting and those concerns had been taken back to the relevant colleagues in order to address. It was also pointed out that over the year there had already been many instances of engagement with various stakeholders and there would be a number of stakeholder events during the course of July and the rest of the summer months. There would also be opportunities for engagement and consultation potentially in the Autumn period as well.

Councillor Protheroe made an operational request concerning engagement and insight which she stated was obviously critical to the formation of the Corporate Plan in order to help identify and design what service users needed. She stated that the use of surveys as part of this process was good but could be quite binary in terms of the questions that were put to people surveyed and she wanted the Council to look at how it could do more in terms of how it demonstrated to residents that it was listening to their concerns and comments as well as putting service users at the heart of what it did as a public body. She queried whether within the additional engagement and insight that was going to be undertaken that such information could be fed back to this Committee in order that it could see exactly what was happening and what was being done with the information. It was explained that these comments would be passed on to the Director of Corporate Resources in order to assist.

Councillor Ernest supported the comments and concerns raised about the month of August being used as part of the engagement process and the impact of this holiday period on response rates. He would support any recommendations about seeking the August date either being realigned in some way or other measures taken to ensure that the calendar or timetable for the process gave adequate opportunity for consultees to provide meaningful feedback. The comments would be referred to the Director of Corporate Resources as the relevant Director involved in the consultation and engagement process.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – That the following comments / recommendations from the Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration:

- That the Council ensures that the self-assessment process aligns as much as possible with the views expressed through the recent resident survey Let's Talk About Life in the Vale.

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- That the concerns and potential risks raised by the Committee in relation to the annual self-assessment and the related timetable for engagement be considered. As part of this, consideration should be given to a more flexible approach to the engagement timetable, such as extending the length for consultation and engagement, in order to ensure that this is meaningful and representative.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that Cabinet has the opportunity to consider the Committee's comments / recommendations as part of its consideration of the report and to ensure that all relevant stakeholders have the opportunity to engage in this process as well as ensuring that the consultation is sufficiently robust and effective.

147 PETITION SUBMISSION – SCHOOL CROSSING SUPERVISORS (DCR) –

The Council's new petition scheme was agreed by Full Council on 7th March, 2022, and the scheme was implemented on 5th May, 2022. The scheme set out how members of the public may submit a petition (including e-petitions) and how the Council would respond to any submissions.

On 1st May, 2024, a petition from a P. King was received by the Council entitled "Save our Lollipop Lady". The petition stated: "VOG Council plan cutbacks. Removal of 11 Lollipop ladies' jobs. Making cutbacks in child safety is unacceptable. This is a vital service being provided that families around the Vale require".

Subsequently, a report had been produced which included information from the Director of Environment and Housing setting out the Council's current position and proposals. The Committee was therefore being asked to debate the matter and refer any recommendations on to Cabinet.

As the Lead Petitioner, P. King had been invited to present the petition at the Committee meeting, and in line with the Council's petition scheme, would be afforded 3 minutes speaking time in which to address the Committee. She wanted the Committee and Council to reconsider the proposed removal of her local community school crossing guard due to not only the crucial safeguarding role she undertook for local children in crossing roads within the local community, but also the familiar, friendly and reassuring presence that she and her role provides to local children and residents, including teaching children to cross the road safely. Her removal would mean that the roads would be less safe for children to cross and increase the volume of traffic locally, with children being driven to school by their parents instead. This in turn negatively impact health and the environment, as well as increase the risk of road traffic accidents, particularly for the children. Any savings accrued through removing this service to the Council would be negligible and would be outweighed by the negative impacts already alluded to and child safety. Other unmanned crossings in the locality would be insufficient and even unsafe for local children to cross without supervision.

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The Director of Environment and Housing subsequently presented the report to the Committee, with a key update being that there were no plans to remove staff / manned crossing services currently situated in the Vale of Glamorgan. The Council had managed to find £83k of the £100k savings previously identified from other sources. Unfortunately, schools had not been able to undertake such services themselves and therefore the Council would continue to cover these non-statutory but essential services in order to ensure child safety on local roads. In tandem with this, the Council would review the pedestrian crossing points to see if they would benefit from the use of lights / controls or Zebra crossings, particularly in light of the natural reduction in numbers of school crossing staff over time, and with the introduction of controlled crossings and 20mph zones near schools which had yielded benefits. However, the remaining staff that manned the remaining 11 manned crossing sites had been reassured that their jobs were not under threat. This hopefully would provide reassurance to the members of this petition and the wider communities they represent.

Following the report, Councillor Haines, with permission to speak, welcomed the reassurance provided by the Director of Environment and Housing over the manned school crossings, particularly in relation to his Ward in St. Athan. He wished to remind the Committee and the Director that St. Athan was growing with additional housing to be built in the near future and it was important for the Council to consider that in terms of any review on any school crossings need to look towards the five ways of working and to future development with any savings that would be made on reducing manned crossings being so small as to be negligible. The Director acknowledged the importance of involving the local Ward Members in any discussions around school crossings. He accepted the importance of applying the five ways of working in making such decisions and it would be useful to have controlled crossings in tandem with school crossing patrols in order to provide extra assistance for pupils crossing. Pedestrian surveys were undertaken to see where people actually crossed prior to any decisions being made in tandem with liaising with local Ward Members and taking into account sustainable development principles.

The Chair queried what the cost of a light controlled crossing would be to the Council. It was explained that this depended on the width of the road, but essentially these could cost anything from £100k upwards, particularly if you had a traffic island in the middle and separate signal heads. Zebra crossings were a cheaper option but they were not particularly effective outside schools.

Councillor Franks, with permission to speak, stated it was good to hear that there would be no cut backs on manned school crossing patrols but queried why this cut was proposed in the first place which had caused a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness and concern for local residents, and how the related £83k worth of existing savings had already been achieved and were not identified before the Council's budget was considered by Members. In response, it was stated that the decision in this area was ultimately taken by Elected Members as part of the budget report and proposals as well as the budget that went for approval to Full Council. On the £83k savings, this was found as a result of the end of year financial process, with such savings having then taken time to be properly identified. The Councillor noted that not all Councillors had approved the budgetary savings or cuts.

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Councillor Hooper welcomed the Petition and the presentation by the Lead Petitioner at the meeting and irrespective of the change of mind by the Council, this demonstrated a local community that was not prepared to accept things being done to them without their permission. He stressed that as well as infrastructure and other considerations around school crossing patrols, it was also important to note that the crossing guards represented an essential part of a local community and helped to weave together the social fabric of local communities and residents and improved the local quality of life as well as providing safety. Although there were options around electronic control systems, etc., it was important to protect these manned services at the highest possible level and he would welcome input on the political decision made on this by the relevant Cabinet Member who was in attendance. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services, with permission to speak, stated that the item around the Petition at tonight's meeting was an example of the Council listening to the public and that local residents had the ability to arrange petitions not just to be presented to Full Council but also to Scrutiny, and this was a good example of the Council taking on board the views of local residents and members of the public. He also cited other examples where local residents and Scrutiny Members had been listened to, for example around changes to public toilets and the reversal of cuts in that area. He also stressed that school crossing guards were valuable assets to their local communities, not just in helping people, particularly young children across the road, but also being the "eyes and ears" of their community in the area and would love to work with Scrutiny Members in order to help identify funds and savings elsewhere in order to remove such potential cuts in future.

Councillor Protheroe asked some questions around the actual provision of school crossings, with there being up to 50 primary aged schools in the Vale and wondered what was happening with the other 40 which already had an alternative solution in terms of crossings in place and how these kept children safe. As part of the review with the remaining 11 schools that had a manned school crossing, would a requirement for additional level safety be something that would be considered as well. She also cited the experience from her own Ward with the introduction of the 20mph speed limit which had been a huge benefit and had been welcomed by the Ward but the area nearest to the school had actually been reversed back to 30mph which could impact children who were walking on the very narrow pavement nearby and her hope that this would be reversed back to 20mph eventually as part of a review. It was explained that there was a criteria in place for school crossing patrols whereby a footfall survey would be undertaken in order to ascertain how many people, including young children, crossed, who crossed the crossing at a certain time as well as looking at other provision such as the use of 20mph outside locations such as schools. In addition, other speed controls could be put in place to mitigate traffic. Such reviews and assessments of schools would only take place if a safety issue had been identified and currently only a particular set of schools were being looked at. In terms of 20mph review, this was ongoing by Welsh Government and was in its listening phase for consultation and comments being fed into it. The route raised by the Councillor and other similar ones were being looked at as part of this process and were being factored into the Welsh Government's new guidance on the 20mph routes which was due to come out at the end of July and which could result in a number of changes.

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Councillor Ernest referred to the Cabinet decision to cut back on certain areas within Neighbourhood Services, which included not just school crossing patrols but also areas such as potholes and other road maintenance which had not been agreed by all Members. He felt it was important that the Council wherever possible still provided school crossing patrols but where they could not be provided then a suitable alternative was put in place to ensure safe options such as controlled crossings or reduce speed limits around schools. The Chair reminded Committee that when proposals came in the form of budget reports etc. Scrutiny Committees still had the opportunity to call these in or any related specific issues relevant to the Committee.

The Chair raised a query by Councillor Champion who unfortunately was not able to join the meeting who enquired as to whether the Council had considered any form of sponsorship in relation to picking up the funding costs of school crossing patrols. In response it was explained that the Council had not looked at sponsorship in terms of this service, but such forms of funding had been used in other service areas but with current budgetary constraints such alternative forms of funding could be looked at in order to support school crossing patrols in the future.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following comment / recommendation from the Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration:

- That Committee supports the decision, as outlined at the Committee meeting tonight, that no steps be taken to remove current school crossing patrols until a review has been carried out as appropriate to ensure child safety.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report, the comments made by the lead petitioner, as well as the discussions at the meeting.

148 PROJECT ZERO UPDATE REPORT (CX) –

The report and Appendix A detailed the wide range of activity being undertaken to ensure the Council continued to deliver against commitments in the Climate Change Challenge Plan and to take forward Project Zero. This included the RAG (red, amber, green) rating of progress against the steps in the Climate Change Challenge Plan. Progress and key highlights from October 2023 to March 2024 was covered in the report. The report provided Members with an update regarding the finances associated with Project Zero and the use of the Project Zero reserve. The report also provided updates on the Public Services Board (PSB) work to tackle the climate and nature emergencies which was a priority in the PSB Well-being Plan. The report, at Appendix B, showed updated Performance Indicators for 2024/25 and also updated on the approach to programme management.

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Following each relevant section of the report, Committee Members and others were offered the opportunity to provide comments or questions with regard to the relevant sections, which included the below.

The Chair queried the Draft Tree Strategy where she noted there had been good discussion about this previously at Committee and the consultation had ended in March in terms of the Strategy. It would be really helpful for the Committee to know what the response had been so far and when this would be finalised in order for it to begin to be acted upon operationally. In response the Director of Environment and Housing stated that there had been a positive response so far to the Tree Strategy, the first draft was currently in place but was not complete until some additional missing consultation responses had been provided. These entailed two substantial submissions from local groups and once these had been provided the draft would be forwarded to the relevant Cabinet Member and be considered in due course, but with the aim that a report would be finalised as soon as possible. On the implementation at an operational level, elements of the Tree Strategy pre finalisation were already being implemented such as the principles around increasing the tree canopy in urban areas which was embedded in most of the Council's processes as well as increases in the Capital Programme both for planting and for maintenance of trees. Finalisation of the Tree Strategy would mean that volunteer groups could then become involved in helping to implement the Strategy as well.

Councillor Penn referred to the Restore the Thaw scheme and whether the Council worked in this area to help improve water quality as well as other habitats. Also, regarding the Tree Strategy, would the Council accept crowdfunding to replace relevant trees in town centres should that funding source be available. The Director of Place replied to the Restore the Thaw query by stating that this project intrinsically included the Thaw itself and was aimed at the habitat which included the Thaw valley as well as the river and therefore water quality would be a key issue as well as the planting and restoration of the habitat alongside. It was noted that a grant had been provided as part of this work around the Thaw which had been supplied by Natural Resources Wales with water quality and habitat restoration also key to their aims and objectives. The project had been extremely successful so far in achieving results with significant tree planting on a wider scale. On the crowd funding for trees, the Director of Environment and Housing stated that the Council would welcome crowd funding and assistance or engagement from local residents with this.

Councillor Drake also referred to the Tree Strategy and the monitoring of new tree diseases which were coming across to the United Kingdom, including Wales, and how the Council was addressing these. In response, the Director of Place stated that the Council had an ecologist who worked for the Council as well as an arboriculturist in the Neighbourhood Services Team who both monitored tree diseases which had increased due to various factors such as climate change and kept themselves abreast of any concerns around these or other emerging threats. These officers also worked with various networks in order to help monitor and address this issue.

Councillor Protheroe referred to Challenge 13 – 18 within the Climate Change Challenge Plan Progress appendix to the report, noting the apparent lack of progress in cutting emissions in the supply chain. She subsequently asked how the Council

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was addressing this issue. The Director of Place replied that the Council was currently working with Ardal in conjunction with the new procurement system, which was taking time to be bedded in however. The system would however help to feed through on emissions in due course and would tie in with new legislation that was coming out in October. Councillor Protheroe stated that although Ardal could help with tendering, the responsibility of putting a specification together and commissioning what it was that the Council would need as an authority to purchase would have to sit with the Council and with the service areas. Therefore, a firm strategy would be needed internally to address this. In response, the Director of Place stated that issues would be fed back, and work that had previously been done around the new procurement system had knocked back some of the other work which the Council would have liked to have done from an internal procurement standpoint, such as in terms of carbon reduction. However, this was an ongoing process which was being tackled across all departments. Subsequently, when putting together contracts and tenders the Council was working with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in order to incorporate carbon reduction considerations into these.

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services, with permission to speak, urged residents to use the re-use shop at the Atlantic Trading Estate, referred to the implementation of commercial recycling as well as residential, and the need to procure more items at a local level in order to reduce the impact of carbon emissions; although it was noted that due to procurement practices being fairly rigid, the Council still had to go through the correct process.

Councillor Hooper referred to the budget streams for Project Zero, which appeared to be inadequate in meeting the 2030 targets and enquired how these could be maximised. The Chair noted that a number of important initiatives were dependent upon time-limited funding and asked what steps were being taken to ensure the sustainability of that work. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services responded by saying he agreed that the Project Zero agenda needed to be pushed more, noting that Wales was now ranked as the second-best country in the world for recycling, which had included the efforts of Vale residents in helping to achieve such targets. He would raise the comments made at the Committee to Cabinet for their consideration. Councillor Hooper added that it was important now to weight Project Zero as part of the Corporate Plan as one of the biggest challenges for the Council over the next five years. On time limited funding, it was explained that the Project Zero reserve was not time limited but a reserve that had been set up which could be accessed for related projects, as well as maximising the potential of the reserve by providing match funding of relevant projects which met the requirements of other funds such as the Shared Prosperity Fund, while satisfying Project Zero requirements as well. The Shared Prosperity Fund would be coming to an end in March 2025, however the hope was that it would be replaced by another iteration in due course. Due to this the Shared Prosperity Fund had been used for some projects ensuring that the capital part of the programmes had been delivered within the timescales and before the funding came to an end. One of these included the work on the longstanding network of footpaths and bridleways within the Vale and beyond. On budgetary restrictions, it was acknowledged that the Council was currently in a very difficult budgetary position which did not look likely to improve going forward but it was emphasised that climate change remained an absolute, key,

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part of the Corporate Plan for 2025-2030 and the declaration made by the Council in terms of the climate and biodiversity crises. The Programme Manager Project Zero (Climate Change) added that the Council was looking at various ways to maximise external funding and the utilisation of existing technologies and assets in order to help achieve Project Zero for the Council, as well as helping to achieve behavioural change.

The Chair referred to the slow progress with the work being done by the Public Services Board (PSB) and what was being done currently to strengthen this work, particularly around shared priorities. The Programme Manager Project Zero (Climate Change) explained that there were challenges in bringing all the relevant groups who were part of the PSB together. However, she was still confident that work would be on track and work with the PSB would continue around climate change and Project Zero with the Vale of Glamorgan Council involved.

Councillor Protheroe referred to work that was being undertaken with the PSB and local partners around procuring things more locally and whether any work connected to something similar to the Preston model or community wealth building in terms of buying local items had been considered. It was explained that currently for the Annual Report the PSB section was being pulled together and there would be a section in there on climate issues and some of the procurement work that was happening across different partners but currently the Programme Manager Project Zero (Climate Change) was not aware of any work along the lines of the Preston model or similar, but would come back to the Committee on that and feed back into the PSB group when they next met.

Councillor Hooper referred to the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) and was disappointed to see that this had fallen back due to it fitting in well with the Tree Strategy and asked about the reasons why this had happened i.e. budgetary constraints. In response, the Director of Environment and Housing explained that due to legislation around the planning process for new developments, the Council was working on a set of documents to provide to the public to explain the situation more clearly and the relevant department had put in a cost pressure bid for extra staff resource but were unsuccessful because of the Council's budget challenges. Due to this, a resource would need to be found elsewhere in order to produce the relevant document on drainage. Furthermore, due to priorities around flood management, the work around SuDS had unfortunately had to be given less of a priority, but this would be tackled in due course.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the progress detailed in the report and Appendix A in relation to the challenges within the Climate Change Challenge Plan and the work of the Public Services Board be noted.

(2) T H A T the RAG rating of progress from October 2023 to March 2024 in Appendix A to the report be noted.

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(3) T H A T the funding available in reserves and the projects awarded funding to date be noted.

(4) T H A T the updated Corporate Performance Indicators relevant to Project Zero at Appendix B to the report be noted.

(5) T H A T the following comment be referred to Cabinet, to be considered alongside any comments made by the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee who will consider this report on 19th June, 2024:

- The concerns raised around the ‘weighting’ of the Project Zero agenda and the importance of making Project Zero ‘front and centre’ in the Corporate Plan.

(6) T H A T it be recommended to Cabinet that this report be distributed to all Elected Members, members of the Public Services Board and all Town and Community Councils for their information.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(5) For consideration by Cabinet as part of its consideration of the progress made in delivering the Climate Change Challenge Plan.

(6) In order to update all Elected Members and other stakeholders on the arrangements in place to deliver Project Zero.

149 CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION CITY DEAL – JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE NOMINATED DEPUTY (DCR) –

The report sought the Committee’s nomination of a named deputy representative on the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal – Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC). The nomination would then need to be approved by Full Council.

The Committee subsequently voted for a nominated deputy to represent the Council at the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal JOSC, who would be entitled to vote at said meetings in the absence of the Chair of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Iannucci-Williams was nominated as deputy, and this would subsequently go to Full Council for ratification.

Scrutiny, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Councillor Iannucci-Williams be recommended to Council as the nominated deputy to represent the Council at meetings of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal - Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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(2) T H A T Councillor Iannucci-Williams, the named deputy, be entitled to vote at meetings of the Joint Scrutiny Committee in the absence of the Chair of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

Reason for recommendations

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