

No.

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 10th December, 2024.

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

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

Present: Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby (Chair); Councillor C. Iannucci-Williams (Vice-Chair); Councillors C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, M.J. Hooper, J.M. Norman, E. Penn, J. Protheroe and S.T. Wiliam.

Also present: Councillors L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), C.A. Cave, C.P. Franks, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), H.M. Payne, E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

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”.

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 12th November, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/26 TO 2029/30 REFRESH AND UPDATE (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 28th November, 2024 was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy to the Committee, the purpose of which was to give Scrutiny the opportunity to review the work mitigating the cost pressures and for their consideration, with any recommendations to be referred back to Cabinet.

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A short presentation accompanying the reference and report was given to the Committee, highlighting the key areas for consideration, including those areas of the budget, etc. falling within the remit of the Committee. These included:

- Council spending 2024/25: a significant proportion of the budget was allocated to Schools and Social Care, with only a small percentage of the budget allocated to the services and areas within the remit of the Committee.
- The planning cycle for the budget was outlined.
- The impact of the U.K. Government, particularly the Chancellor's Budget Statement, on Welsh Government funding and that of the Welsh Local Authorities, including the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- The cost pressures and limits to funding faced by the Council, which had resulted in a projected raw budget gap of £25.9m and an adjusted one of £14.838m.
- The management of such cost pressures and the measures undertaken for these (including those for Environment and Neighbourhood Services), plus the associated impact from the Welsh Government (WG) settlement, the impact on Council Tax and the need for Council departments and services to make a significant contribution to the reshaping / savings programme including schools and social care.
- The work around reshaping and the transformation of Council services.
- The engagement and consultation process as part of setting the Council's budget.
- Next steps: including the work undertaken by the Budget Work Groups, through to work undertaken on the budget post-WG Settlement and consultation with the Strategic Leadership Team, bringing the budget to Cabinet in January next year and this would be followed by four weeks of scrutiny and public consultation before the Draft Budget was presented to Cabinet later in February, and then for approval by Council in early March 2025.

Subsequently, on Councillor Champion's query concerning the presentation and details on Ysgol Y Deri demography being pared back, this would be addressed outside of the meeting as it fell outside of the Committee's remit.

The Chair raised a question on the potential financial consequences of the work undertaken by the relevant Environment and Neighbourhood Services teams in the wake of the recent powerful storm on operational budgets, and whether there was any contingency within the Council's financial planning for events such as that. The Director of Environment and Housing explained that the Council had a bad weather reserve, but it would only be used at the end of the year if it was needed, but otherwise the existing budget would be used to cover any additional expenditure. Also, a number of Council staff were available at the time of the storm due to being on winter maintenance duties on standby, and so these were utilised to help, thereby minimising the costs incurred. The Chair wished to pass on the Committee's thanks to the efforts of the teams involved with helping out residents during the storm.

There being no further questions, and after considering the report, the Committee subsequently

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RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Cabinet reference and appended Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 Refresh and Update report, outlining the work in mitigating the cost pressures, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of both the Cabinet reference, the appended report and discussions at the meeting.

GREENLINKS COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SERVICE UPDATE REPORT
(DEH) –

Councillor Cave had requested consideration of the Greenlinks bus service. She, in her request for consideration, explained this was a vital service for many people (including the majority of older people) in order to travel from the rural villages in the Western Vale, due to the lack of other alternative public transport in such areas. She was concerned about the current state of the Greenlinks service and felt that there should be greater and more regular monitoring of Greenlinks by this Committee, as well as greater Council officer involvement in running the service effectively and which had appeared to have been missing for some time.

The report (and accompanying presentation) was outlined to the Committee by the Operational Manager Transport Services in order to inform the Committee of the status and future plans of the Greenlinks service following the request raised by Councillor Cave. Key points included:

- The Greenlinks bus service was a Demand Responsive Transport Service (DRT) and had been operating in the Vale of Glamorgan for 13 years. The service was operated using permits issued by Sections 19 of the Transport Act 1985 and could also operate under Section 22 permits.
- The Service formed part of the Council's provision of public transport with the aim of providing transport for those who had no access to local public or private transport or those who were unable to access public transport due to physical or mental abilities.
- The Greenlinks service generally operated between 09:00 and 16:00, Monday to Friday; however, it was also available to hire in the evenings and weekends for group members.
- An overview of the service was given, including the current size of the Greenlinks vehicle fleet, the numbers of staff, drivers and volunteers available, the booking system used, the suspension of Section 22 Services post-COVID due to driver shortages, membership and the number of journeys undertaken and projected via this service.
- Data for the number of travel requests and group bookings (including those successfully fulfilled) was also provided to the Committee for the April-September 2024 period.
- Funding, in terms of total costs and sources, was shared, with funding Primarily coming from S106 funding, in conjunction with some other sources

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of funding and income generated through fees and fares. Other potential sources of funding were being looked at, including the Shared Prosperity and Best Network funds.

- The challenges and impacts of the absence and subsequent recruitment of a Transport Officer for the service were discussed, plus the channels used and events established in order to promote its use among residents and relevant individuals or groups.
- The current status and achievements around volunteer driver recruitment and expansion for the service were outlined, as well as the challenges and new methods employed around payment for the service, post-COVID.
- Details on the update of the service's fleet of vehicles were discussed (i.e. modernisation and decarbonisation of its vehicles) and its membership survey on improving its service provision.
- The reintroduction of the G1 Service was highlighted to Members and the next steps for the service through the themes of service growth, feedback and adaptation, as well as an effective funding strategy.

Following the presentation of the report, a number of comments and queries were raised at the meeting, which included the following.

Councillor Cave, whilst welcoming the report and presentation, felt the following about the service:

- That it had not been properly managed for some time prior to the recruitment of a new Transport Officer in order to oversee the service. She had highlighted this issue previously when the previous Council Tax rates had been set by the Council, with a percentage (around, she believed, 1%) of this being allocated to be used for bus services, although this service had not been functioning properly at the time for the Rural Vale.
- She was pleased that the ticketing machines would be now serviced correctly and that the issues around invoices for service users were also being resolved, particularly as these users consisted of the most vulnerable groups and individuals in the County.
- It was important that the Committee would, going forward, have regular oversight and updates on this service and to ensure that it was monitored effectively in order to avoid a repetition of some of the issues previously faced by it.
- She reiterated the importance of this service for the Rural Vale, and referred to the improvements in the booking service, although there were still some concerns that service users were sometimes being left in doubt as to whether the bus service would be picking them up.

The Chair assured the Councillor that the Committee received regular reports on Vale of Glamorgan bus services, with further information on the Greenlinks bus service being provided on future iterations of the report going forward. The Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources responded to the comments concerning Council Tax and funding for Greenlinks, by stating that it was half a percentage point which had been allocated to public transport as part of the previous Council Tax rate agreed. However, the Greenlinks service was funded

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separately, such as through S.106 funding. Where a Greenlinks bus was fitted with a scanner, then a Bus Support Grant could be used. The Council Tax money used for public transport had been used to help subsidise public transport west of Barry (such as non Greenlinks bus services) due to a lack of financial viability. The Operational Manager Transport Services addressed the comments on making service users aware that they were still receiving their Greenlinks transport, by stating that the process was that all service users that had requested the service were contacted, whether they were going to be transported or not. He asked for further information from the Councillor outside of the meeting in order to address this issue.

Councillor Protheroe referred to the importance of volunteers and their further recruitment in order to help restore the Greenlinks services, such as the G1 service, for areas such as the Rural Vale. Such volunteers were the 'backbone' for rural communities, and she was keen for someone from Transport Services to come to her ward and talk to the community about volunteering opportunities. The Chair added to this by asking how members of the public could contact the Council about volunteering as drivers and in other opportunities for the Greenlinks service. On the latter question, it was explained that a rebranded leaflet for the service now contained contact details on such opportunities and this would be shared with the Committee in due course. On the former query, a member of Transport Services would come along and speak to the local community about volunteering for the service.

Councillor Champion also referred to a regular coffee morning held in his Cowbridge ward which officers could also attend and talk about volunteering opportunities for the Greenlinks service. He also queried on what he felt was the lack of consultation or discussion with Cowbridge Ward Members on the diversion of a significant amount of S.106 funding from Cowbridge to the Greenlinks service. He asked who made the decision on this. He valued the benefits of the service to the Cowbridge area, but it was also important to have more engagement from the Council with local Elected Members. It was explained that the decision-making process around the allocation of such funding was via Cabinet. They had decided a number of years ago to allocate some of the S.106 funds to the Greenlinks service across the County. This was usually done in conjunction with the Council's S.106 Officer and the relevant local Ward Members being informed as well. This concern would be taken up with the S.106 Officer. Councillor Champion clarified that the local Members had been notified but after the event. The Chair stated that in her experience local Elected Members were usually notified before the allocation had been made and asked if this could be taken back to and progressed by the relevant Council officer. The suggestion for an officer to attend the coffee morning would also be looked into.

Councillor Franks, with permission to speak, referred to the work of Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern and their close links with the Greenlinks service, resulting in a positive outcome for the local community and the relationships formed with these two bodies which dealt with the challenges around arranging transport effectively.

There being no further questions, and after considering the report, the Committee subsequently

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RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Greenlinks Community Transport Service Update Report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2024 (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2024. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2024 through to 30th September, 2024, including any changes requested within the report. The report set out any requested changes to the 2024/25 and future years' Capital Programme. The report noted the current approved Programme of £137.168m.

The £46m slippage meant that the Council could potentially be left with a slightly more deliverable programme of approximately £90m.

There were two requests under the Additions, Virement and Re-profiling section of the report that were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee that requested to add in a grant for the Vehicle Replacement Programme and vire budget from the Circular Economy – Sorting Equipment and Baler Scheme to the Atlantic Trading Estate – Operations Fleet Parking Scheme.

There were five requests under the slippage section of the report that were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee. The first requested to re-profile the scheme for Dinas Powys Flood Resilience and three to carry forward budget for Penarth Marina Landslip, Retaining Wall at Windsor Road and Llanmaes Construction. The final requested under the Place Slippage section to carry forward budget for Restore the Thaw.

There were eight Delegated Authority within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee, that had been approved which requested to use Section 106 money across several schemes.

It was important to note that many areas were continuing to experience an increase in costs associated with delivery of schemes. Tenders were being received over the current allocated budgets and officers were reporting the requirement to re-negotiate submitted tenders. Subsequently, schemes would be closely monitored over the coming months, and it was anticipated that slippage requests would be requested in future reports.

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Officers would continue to work with project managers and sponsors to ensure value for money and that all possible funding opportunities were identified and fully explored.

After considering the report, the Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made on delivering the 2024/25 Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee be noted in the attached Appendix 1.
- (2) T H A T the use of Delegated Authority within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.6 and detailed in the report at paragraph 2.43 to 2.50 be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Committee, detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (4) T H A T the changes to the 2024/25 Capital Programme and future years' Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.4 to 2.5 and detailed within the body of the report at 2.22, 2.24, 2.30 to 2.33 and 2.35, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

QUARTER 2 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25 (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, set out a significant in year overspend. Furthermore, the revenue position for 2024/25 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures with continuance of the key service pressures that the Council reported as part of the 2023/24 outturn position into 2024/25. The cost pressures allocated as part of the 2024/25 budget were adjusted to reflect the funding available and therefore did not provide full funding for pressures and these pressures had continued to increase across the first half of 2024/25. There was evidence of increasing demand in respect of Children's and Young People's Care and Adults' Social Care reflecting an increased incidence and complexity of need as well as significant increases in the cost of placements and care packages. Support for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) continued to be an area of significant pressure within Learning and Skills with corresponding pressures on school transport costs for pupils in ALN provision and the overspend reported of £1.231m was significant in the context of over £500k of cost pressures awarded to this area for 2024/25.

Cost pressures had also been experienced in various service areas within the remit of the Committee such as under Highways Maintenance, staffing budgets – market

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forces payments to HGV drivers, amongst others. There had been some mitigation through the income from recycling and potentially additional grant funding.

In terms of the savings position in year, Neighbourhood Services in particular had a number of lines of savings for 2024/25 and a number of complex savings to progress. However, progress continued to be made against those savings and there had been some additional amount of resources from the Transformation Team in recent months that had meant a number of those savings lines had started to move forward and the aspiration was for further progress to be made in the remainder of this financial year.

Also of note was that the projected outturn for the Place budget for 2024/25 was at a breakeven position at year-end.

After considering the report, the Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2024/25 Revenue Budget be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Revised Budget 2024/25 set out as part of this report be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2
PERFORMANCE 2024/25 (DP) –

The performance report, presented by the Director of Place (with the Director of Environment and Housing), detailed the Council's progress at Quarter 2 (1st April to 30th September, 2024) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Following a proof of concept using the Council's existing Corporate Performance Framework of measures and actions to develop its use of Power BI to support performance reporting, a Quarter 2 performance snapshot for the current Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) had been produced which was detailed in the presentation appended to the report at Appendix A. The snapshot provided an overview of progress against planned actions and performance indicators aligned to the Council's 4 Well-being Objectives and listed any exceptions (Red actions attributed a Red RAG rating) in an accessible format. This had been produced as part of developing the Council's approach and would be subject to further refinement informed by the views of officer colleagues and Elected Members throughout the 2024/25 performance reporting period, with a view to informing the Council's monitoring and reporting arrangements for the new Corporate Plan 2025-30. The

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Council was currently working towards producing Scrutiny Committee remit specific performance snapshots which would be reported at Quarter 3.

The presentation appended at Appendix A to the report provided a summary of progress against the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2024/25. Slides 2-7 of the presentation provided a performance summary of the Annual Delivery Plan at Quarter 2. Slides 8-13 provided a Committee specific overview of progress against the ADP priorities aligned to the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

The overall RAG status for the Annual Delivery Plan was Green, with a significant percentage of Measures ((RAG) Statuses) also being Green.

Exceptions specific to the Committee were also outlined, with any relevant commentary or update provided, as well as the achievements within the remit of the Committee under the Council's 4 Well-being Objectives, through to emerging areas of concern.

Following the presentation of the report Councillor Hooper asked when the Vale of Glamorgan Local Area Energy Plan would be coming to the Committee for consideration and scrutiny, following it going to Cabinet. It was explained that the intention was for it to go to Scrutiny once further clarity had been sought in terms of the impact on it from the current financial position of the Council, etc., including a decision on how the various related actions would be implemented and resourced, and identifying those areas that were of particular interest and relevance to the Committee. A resource plan could then be shared with the Committee. However, Councillor Hooper stated that the report should be seen by the Committee as soon as possible due to its importance as a strategic document on energy needs locally, rather than wait for the various aspects of resourcing, etc. to be addressed. It was subsequently agreed by the Chair and the Committee that the Vale of Glamorgan Local Area Energy Plan would come to the Committee for consideration and scrutiny in the new year.

After considering the report, the Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Quarter 2 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25 commitments as aligned the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Corporate Plan Wellbeing Objectives within the remit of the 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 Committee, be noted.
- (3) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Local Area Energy Plan come to the Committee for consideration and scrutiny in the new year.

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Reasons for recommendations

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

(3) To ensure that the Committee was able to adequately consider and scrutinise the Plan, in particular those areas that fell within the Committee's direct remit.