

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 14th June, 2023.

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

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

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards (Vice-Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, S. Campbell, G.D.D. Carroll, W.A. Hennessy, S. Lloyd-Selby, M.J.G. Morgan and S.D. Perkes

Also present: – C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), G. Doyle and V. John (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel); Councillors I. Buckley, C.P. Franks, E. Goodjohn, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), R.R. Thomas, E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health), and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

116 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”.

117 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors G. Ball and S.M. Hanks; D. Dutch and H. Smith (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel).

118 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 17th May, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

119 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

120 VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL: ANNUAL PERFORMANCE
CALENDAR 2023/24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 25th May, 2023 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources. The purpose of the appended report was to present the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Performance Calendar for 2023/24, which outlined the key plans/reports that would be subject to consideration by Members throughout the year. Highlights included:

- An update of the 3 key aspects of work associated with corporate performance: the self-assessment process, panel peer assessment process and the overall performance calendar.
- The self-assessment report, looking at the Council's potential to improve and also how it utilised people, assets, finance and performance information to improve and support the delivery of its wellbeing objectives.
- The report included reflections undertaken by Council officers, Elected Members, Cabinet and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) on this new arrangement and process.
- Reference to the changes that would be introduced as part of this year's process to help provide additional rigour i.e. further consideration of the risks that could impact the Council's activities, some standard preparation for the peer challenge sessions, where directors challenge one another's Directorate level self-assessments.
- Members from Scrutiny and Cabinet Members would also be involved in the process, with an initial draft going to Scrutiny, Governance and Audit as well as Full Council meetings.
- Self-assessment had to be undertaken annually; but once in every five-year electoral cycle, the Council was required to Commission an external peer challenge via a panel performance assessment and that was undertaken independently of the organisation.
- Commissioning the panel performance assessment to align with the development of the new Corporate Plan would provide an opportunity for the findings to help shape the new Corporate Plan and Annual Delivery Plan for 2025/26. Determining the timeline for the assessment was a political decision. Given the significant preparatory work required, Cabinet was being asked to give consideration to the timing of the panel performance assessment to allow enough preparatory time (i.e. early 2024).
- Appendix A outlined a rolling programme of collaborative work with Members throughout the 2023/24 Annual Performance Calendar to develop their skills and knowledge and strengthen their involvement in shaping and refining the key plans, reports and processes that would support them in their key role of assessing whether the Council was achieving its Well-being Objectives, delivering value for money and improving the well-being of its citizens.
- Following the success of the informal, developmental, Elected Member sessions as part of last year's performance process, these sessions would be run again throughout this year's process as well.

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Following the presentation of the report, the Committee raised a number of comments and queries.

Both Councillors Morgan and Lloyd-Selby highlighted the clarity but also comprehensive nature of the report. Councillor Lloyd-Selby added that it was beneficial that the report and performance process focused on capturing engagement with members of the public and also recognised and was transparent about the risks that the Council's departments were facing i.e. the impact of the cost of living crisis. The Councillor asked when the proposed Member Workshop would be held in July and whether this was open to all Members or just those who sat on the Governance and Audit Committee. In response, the Director stated he would look into when the proposed workshop in July would be and that this would be open to all Elected Members, focusing on the Annual Self-Assessment Report.

Councillor Perkes felt that the self-assessment and peer assessments with the Directors were extremely beneficial in terms of assessing performance and how best to meet the corporate objectives and provide support to Council officers and colleagues.

On the Vice-Chair's query on whether there would be 'mop-up' workshops for Members should they be unavailable for July's session, the Director would reach out to colleagues in Democratic Services to see if this could be facilitated whilst taking into account the demands and availability of Members, as well as looking at holding a pre briefing session following the Summer recess. On the Chair's follow up query on what times these sessions would be held, the Director was keen to get feedback from the Committee and other Elected Members on suitable times, taking into account their other commitments, such as work and caring responsibilities.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and appended report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T both the Cabinet reference and appended Cabinet report in relation to the Annual Performance Calendar 2023/24 be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

121 SHARED REGULATORY SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN (DEH) –

The report was presented to the Committee by the Head of Shared Regulatory Services. The purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with the opportunity for pre decision scrutiny of the Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) Business Plan. The Head of Shared Regulatory Services also provided a presentation giving the Committee a summary and overview of the new Plan, which included several key areas of interest:

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- The background to SRS, which provided an integrated service to deliver Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing functions across the Bridgend, Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Local Authorities.
- The governance of SRS and its structure which was based on function rather than profession.
- The SRS Business Plan was outlined, its five strategic themes to help deliver the statutory requirements and their outcomes.
- Reflections on the SRS Business Plan for 2022-23 were offered, including its achievements and challenges faced.
- Looking forward to 2023/24, key challenges for SRS and the Plan included: regaining lost ground following COVID, recruitment and retention of staff in certain roles, new regulations, budgetary constraints, the rise in use of 'vapes' and the need to monitor and address underage sales and the supply of illegal versions of these, assisting in the implementation of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for housing in the private rented sector (PRS) and the Empty Homes Strategy for the Vale, as well addressing concerns around dog breeding.
- In terms of next steps, the draft Plan required ratification by the Joint Committee, which would be presented to them on 21st June, 2023.

Following the presentation of the report, the Committee raised a number of comments and queries.

Councillor Carroll asked about waste collection changes and the move to the 3-weekly collection of black bags. He queried if Environmental Health had assessed the impact of these changes, particularly for residents of flats i.e. the potential for overflowing communal refuse collection points attracting rats. The Head of Housing and Building Services wished to reassure the Committee that flats would not be included in these changes to refuse collection at this time. As a landlord for social housing, including flats, the Council would be looking, in conjunction with the Cleansing section, at how to improve recycling for flats, etc. and address issues around the storage of waste.

On the Councillor's other question regarding the figures provided in the Plan on the percentage of private rented properties and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) improved through the removal of category 1 hazards 2021/22 and the lower numbers in the Vale compared to Bridgend and Cardiff, it was explained that this was a 'quirk' in the way that the statistics were reported. Going forward, statistics would be provided in relation to both category 1 and category 2 hazards which would give a far better representation of the work that was being done. The statistics however, only related to the PRS, rather than social housing, but all social housing had to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) which took into account the housing, health and safety rating system upon which the categorisation of risk was identified, and social landlords were required to address category 1 and serious risks. This was also bolstered by the Renting Homes Act.

Councillor Lloyd-Selby referred to the budgetary and other pressures caused by the legacy of COVID and the cost-of-living crisis and the high risk of impact on service delivery. It was extremely helpful that SRS would take steps to mitigate

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those cost pressures in terms of taking a risk-based approach to priorities. She asked if SRS had to reprioritise, due to budgetary constraints, how would that be communicated if that had a significant impact in any area of business. It was explained that a case would need to be provided to the partner Councils in order to set out what services needed to be provided going forward and what areas SRS would stop delivering on. It would entail a fine balancing act between Core services that needed to be preserved, which included statutory services, and non-statutory services, which could also be just as important and beneficial, such as the work done to support vulnerable residents i.e. the installation of call blockers. The Councillor suggested that the Plan should set out the process through which any significant reprioritisation of services undertaken by SRS would be decided and how such a reprioritisation exercise would be communicated and consulted upon, as part of the process through which a final decision is made with the partner Council. Also, it was suggested that the Business Plan, once finalised, be shared with all Elected Members.

The Vice-Chair asked if SRS could reach out to Elected Members more regarding areas of concern and safeguarding for the public, such as rogue traders, scams, illegal money lending, illegal vapes and doorstep crime. In turn, this information could be circulated at local events via Members, community groups, as well as the expansion of related initiatives i.e. the Cowbridge and Penarth Hairdresser Project. The Head of SRS stated that it was important to get those messages out to vulnerable and other residents around doorstep crime, rogue traders and fraud in a timely manner and to help people to spot the signs and report these instances to SRS or the Police or to be able to come forward and be comfortable to report if they have been a victim of a scam, illegal money lending, etc. This was now particularly acute, due to the cost-of-living crisis. Engaging with Elected Members would definitely help to achieve this as well as greater engagement with local communities such as the Women's Institute and the potential expansion of the Hairdresser Project. A further update or report on the emerging risk of vaping for younger people would be brought back to the Committee at a later date. On the SRS Business Plan's reference to PRS (including energy efficiency) the Vice-Chair suggested that the Committee consider undertaking a Task and Finish exercise on how, in tandem with the Council, PRS could help to offer affordable, healthy, energy efficient and secure properties across the Vale of Glamorgan to help tackle the current housing crisis. The Head of Housing and Building Services outlined the various energy saving measures, and challenges around these in order to meet carbon zero and other targets for social housing and PRS. He also referred to the importance of PRS in helping the Council discharge its statutory housing duties at a time of acute housing shortages and the challenge of residents to access affordable housing, as well as the work of the Council and SRS to regulate, improve and encourage PRS housing to help accommodate residents.

On Councillor Perkes' query about the work that SRS would now be undertaking with Council officers in the Vale around empty homes (as it already did so in Bridgend and Cardiff), it was explained that a dedicated Environmental Health Officer with the necessary powers would assist the Vale's Empty Homes Team on a more proactive basis in order to deliver more effective results. On the Councillor's follow up question on the geographic breakdown of illegal cigarette sales / seizures in the Vale, the specific figures would be sought and shared with

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the Committee. In general, when mapped across Wales, illegal tobacco seizures tended to be most common in areas with the greatest social and economic deprivation.

Councillor Buckley, with permission to speak, asked about the seemingly insufficient deterrence provided by the courts in terms of handing out relatively light penalties to the perpetrators of doorstep crime, fraud etc. It was explained that the courts had sentencing guidelines they had to follow and had to deal with each case on its individual merits, although sentencing could still be quite severe in certain matters, such as fraud. On his concern around vaping and the targeting of younger persons, SRS and other agencies were pushing for the kind of restrictions that the sale of tobacco and cigarettes currently had applied to vapes and vaping paraphernalia. Finally, on his query concerning educating residents on not putting in waste to black bags that could attract rats, the Head of Housing and Building Services explained that every resident would be written to by the Council in relation to the changes in recycling and waste, including advice and guidance for residents on waste management, as well as looking at waste collection points, including for flats, in the longer term.

Councillor Goodjohn, with permission to speak, asked about a new income stream identified by SRS, the Homes for Ukraine initiative, time taken for residents to get through to the relevant officer via the SRS doorstep crime 'hotline' and savings made on the removal of vacant posts at SRS. On the new income stream, it was explained that there were a few such potential income streams in development, coupled with building on existing sources of income, i.e. reinstating accredited training courses for partners and other clients, following COVID. On Homes for Ukraine, SRS worked with officers from all 3 partner Councils on this, with around 500 property checks being undertaken by SRS. On the doorstep crime 'hotline', there would be a 'warm' transfer straight to one of the safeguarding or major investigations officers, although less immediate calls may be addressed less quickly through the call routing system on C1V. On budget savings on vacant posts, over £100k of savings had been made through their deletion.

On Councillor Aviet's query about 'coerced' street begging being undertaken in Cardiff and Vale, it was explained that this would be a South Wales Police rather than an SRS matter, unless it involved an element of street trading which required a licence.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T, following its consideration by the Committee, the following comments be included as part of the consultation on the draft Shared Regulatory Services Business Plan for 2023/24, prior to the Plan's submission to the Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee:

- The Plan should identify the need for a clear process through which any significant reprioritisation of services undertaken by Shared Regulatory Services would be decided by the partner Councils. In

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the context of ongoing cost pressures, such as those resulting from the cost-of-living crisis, consideration should be given as to how such a reprioritisation exercise would be communicated and consulted upon, as part of the process through which a final decision was made.

- The Plan should also look at how Shared Regulatory Services could engage with Elected Members more regarding areas of concern and safeguarding for the public, such as rogue traders, scams, illegal money lending and doorstep crime.

(2) T H A T the Committee identified the private rental sector and how it could help to offer affordable, healthy , energy efficient and secure properties across the Vale of Glamorgan, as part of supporting the Vale of Glamorgan Council to tackle the current housing crisis and discharge its statutory duties around housing, as an area that could be reviewed by the Committee in future and consideration be given to setting up a Task and Finish Working Group in order to achieve this.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order that the Committee's comments could be considered prior to the finalisation of the Shared Regulatory Services Business Plan for 2023/24.

(2) To provide the Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise in more depth how the private rental sector could help tackle the current housing pressures faced in the Vale of Glamorgan in conjunction with the Council, subject to consideration by the Committee and the Scrutiny Committees' Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group in line with Corporate Objectives and in compliance with Council policy.