

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid Meeting held on 10th January, 2024.

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, G. Ball, S. Campbell, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, S. Lloyd-Selby, M.J.G. Morgan and H.M. Payne.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), G. Doyle, D. Dutch, V. John and H. Smith (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel); Councillors L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), C.P. Franks, E. Goodjohn, H.C. Hamilton, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), Dr. I.J. Johnson, S.D. Perkes (Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

666 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”.

667 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor S.J. Haines.

668 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December, 2023 be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment concerning Minute No. 608, page 3 where Councillor Campbell queried land sales. The Head of Service explained the land sales referred to within the report alluded to land purchased by the Council rather than sales of land by it. However, the subsequent email to Committee Members from the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer corrected this by stating that the land sale did in fact apply to a parcel of land sold by the Council to a leaseholder. The sale was in respect of leasehold property in Penarth for which the Council held the freehold as a successor to Penarth Urban District Council. The leaseholder requested to purchase the property and the sale was agreed, being one of the few such properties not previously sold.

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669 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor J. Aviet declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 – Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25. The nature of her interest was that she was a Vale of Glamorgan Council tenant. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(ii)(A) of the Council's Constitution.

Councillor W. A. Hennessy declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 – Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25. The nature of his interest was that he was a Vale of Glamorgan Council tenant. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(ii)(A) of the Council's Constitution.

Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 - Draft Vale of Glamorgan Council Annual Delivery Plan 2024-25. The nature of her interest was that she was the Chair of the Trustees for the Vale Foodbank which worked with the Council to support residents with cost-of-living issues, etc. The Councillor had dispensation to speak and vote on general matters relating to the Vale Foodbank, and to speak only when matters regarding finance or property in respect of the Vale Foodbank, are to be considered at Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings (paragraphs (d), (f) and (h) of the relevant regulations).

Councillor H.M. Payne declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 – Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25. The nature of her interest was that paragraph 2.32 of the report referred to property connected to the Llamau Housing Trust. However, she had dispensation to speak only at Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings when matters regarding housing and homelessness were discussed relating to finance and property given the Councillor's role for Llamau (paragraphs (c), (d), (f) and (h) of the relevant regulations).

670 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 30th November, 2023 was presented by the Director of Environment and Housing. The purpose of the appended report was for Members of Scrutiny to be consulted on the draft Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) 2024-25.

Key points raised about the draft ADP included how the draft ADP had been developed, the proposed consultation and the timetable for the Plan, as well as it how aligned to the Council's four Well-being Objectives contained in the Corporate Plan (2020-25) and addressed the following critical challenges for the Council and partners:

- Organisational Resilience (our finances, people and assets).
- Cost of Living Crisis.
- Climate and nature emergencies

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Following the presentation of the reference and report, the following comments and queries were raised:

- On Councillor Hennessy's query on the council house building programme and the breakdown of the 73 homes delivered, further information would be provided to the Committee following this meeting.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's comments on the critical role of the Third Sector in supporting the Council, it was explained that the Council was trying to ensure, in turn, that the Third Sector was resilient and could continue to work effectively with the Council, in light of challenging budgetary and funding pressures. On the Councillor's further query on the objective to develop and implement the Vale Alliance Model to provide more integrated care including meeting accommodation needs, it was explained that this would include various statutory partners working together to provide a more holistic and preventative approach around social care and health to benefit local communities and to address issues such as mental health and the core drivers of homelessness.
- Councillor Morgan recommended that for Objective 3, "To support people at home and in their community" more details and emphasis be given on what the Vale of Glamorgan Council would do to improve and develop assistance and support to older members of the community in helping them maintain their self-respect and dignity as well as to enable them to live in their homes for longer, in order to address the challenges around an increasingly aging population.
- Councillor Campbell recommended that the consultation period should be extended to the end of January 2024 in order to allow wider and further consultation with local communities and other stakeholders such as trade unions, etc.
- G. Doyle, the Tenant Working Group Representative, raised concerns around possible closures of public libraries, parks, Bowling Clubs etc., due to the pressures the Council was facing. Both the Director of Environment and Housing and the Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources provided reassurance that there was no intention of closing down such services and facilities and the Council was working with the Third Sector and other partners to help ensure such services were sustainable.
- On Councillor Payne's query on the establishment of a local safeguarding operational group to improve arrangements to protect children and adults at risk of neglect, abuse and exploitation in the Vale, it was explained that this group would complement the more 'strategic' Regional Safeguarding Board (in conjunction with Cardiff council) and help to implement local, operational, actions and plans.
- Regarding Councillor Hennessy's query on the possibility of applying the model currently used with local clubs to community centres, i.e. to transfer such assets to local groups and communities to run themselves, a model currently used was for local groups to run such facilities but for the Council to continue to own the buildings. However, the Council was open to alternative options and models of local control and ownership.
- Finally, on the Vice-Chair's query concerning the objective on working with partners to promote and enhance community safety (including addressing

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anti-social behaviour and violence against women) and collaboration with local schools and education, it was confirmed that education services in the Vale would be included in this partnership and the efforts being undertaken in these areas.

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

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following comments be shared with the Director of Corporate Resources to inform revisions to the Annual Delivery Plan, prior to Cabinet considering a final draft in due course:

- For Objective 3, “To support people at home and in their community” more details and emphasis be given on what the Vale of Glamorgan Council would do to improve and develop assistance and support to older members of the community in helping them maintain their self-respect and dignity as well as to enable them to live in their homes for longer, in order to address the challenges around an increasingly aging population.
- If the consultation period could be extended to the end of January 2024 in order to allow wider and further consultation with local communities and other stakeholders such as trade unions, etc.

Reason for recommendation

In order for the Director of Corporate Resources and Cabinet to consider the comments and feedback of Members of this Scrutiny Committee.

671 FINAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024/25, RENT SETTING 2024/2025 AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25 (DEH) –

The report, and accompanying presentation, as outlined by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, detailed the final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget proposals for 2024/25. The purpose of the report was to set the HRA budget for the financial year 2024/25, set the rents and service charges for the forthcoming rent year beginning on 1st April 2024 and present the 30 Year Housing Business Plan starting financial year 2024/25. Key points included:

- The HRA was a ring-fenced account that was self-funded mainly by Council dwelling rents and expenditure which consisted of staffing to manage the provision, repairs and maintenance costs of the housing stock, capital financing costs to service the debt and revenue contributions towards the Capital Programme including decarbonisation and new developments.
- The report (and presentation) also set out the proposed rents and service charges for the coming financial year 2024/25. As part of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act the Council was required to give two months’ notice of any increase in Council Rents to Council tenants. The Council proposed to increase its rent by an average of 6.7% in compliance with the Policy for

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- Social Housing Rents which was issued by Welsh Government (WG) on 27th October, 2023 and in line with the maximum allowable uplift set by WG.
- WG required all Local Authorities with retained housing stock to submit a fit for purpose annual 30-year Housing Business Plan which was in Appendix A to the report.
 - The Housing Improvement Programme reflected ambitious proposals to invest in new build accommodation to address the acute shortage of social housing in the area. The Improvement Programme also sought to decarbonise the existing housing stock through investment alternative energy sources, insulation and other energy efficiency initiatives.
 - The HRA Business Plan was both viable and sustainable in terms of meeting the Council's obligations under Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS23) for existing stock and provides consideration on the investment needed to respond to climate change, new build and regeneration whilst managing the level of debt within the HRA.
 - The presentation also provided an easy reference to the final proposed and adjusted budget for HRA for 2024/25, an analysis of budget changes, summaries for capital expenditure, rental and fees/charges increases, as well as the timetable for the budget to be completed and implemented.

Following the presentation of the report, the following comments and queries were raised:

- Councillor Hennessy raised concerns around the rent increases for Council tenants which, coupled with any potential Council Tax increases, could make for significant rises in costs for tenants. He stated that although WG allowed a maximum increase of 6.7% he felt that this was not necessary for the Council to fully apply. It was explained that the reason for the maximum rental increase was to support the increase in new builds which were much needed for the Vale of Glamorgan area as well as the requirements of the WHQS23 which needed to be funded via the Housing Improvement Programme. It was explained that not to increase to the maximum rate for tenant rents would mean losing the accumulative benefits of such an increase not just over the 2024/25 period but over the whole 30 year period covered. In addition, the Head of Housing and Building Services added that the raising of rents by 6.7% assured continued funding for increasing the housing supply in order to address the homelessness issues faced in the Vale of Glamorgan. It was also noted that housing rents for Vale of Glamorgan Council tenants would continue to be 30% lower than their counterparts in the private sector as well as lower than comparative Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Furthermore, many Council tenants would be eligible for receiving additional support and benefits in terms of helping to pay their rents. Also referred to were the additional costs resulting from WHQS23 and ensuring the Vale of Glamorgan Council housing was more energy efficient and helped towards meeting zero carbon emissions. The additional funding raised from the rent increases would also help those persons still in temporary accommodation and assist in helping them move into more permanent forms of housing.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby stated that the Vale was in a difficult position and even with the increased rents for tenants, these were still comparatively lower than their counterparts in the private sector. The Council had also not been

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seeking to undertake evictions nor to evict into homelessness, with an ongoing emphasis on investing in existing properties. She also reiterated the continued support that would be provided to Vale of Glamorgan Council tenants, and it was important that tenants were supported in claiming the necessary benefits. She also noted that the increase in rents was not driven by the Vale of Glamorgan Council itself but rather by external pressures such as cost of living. The report showed that the Vale of Glamorgan Council would continue to maximise support for its tenants.

- The Vice-Chair stated that Elected Members and the Council itself did not want to undertake such increases but without these there could be no improvements in housing and this would impact the Council's statutory obligations in terms of WHQS23 etc. The Head of Housing and Building Services agreed with the Vice-Chair in that without the rent increases this would impact the delivery of a viable business plan for Housing as well as the Council not meeting its obligations under WHQS 23. The Vice-chair added that Elected Members needed to set out to tenants and residents in the Vale the rationale for these rents increases, etc.
- V. John, the Tenant Working Group Representative, asked whether Council Tax rates would also increase in conjunction with the increase in tenant rents. In response, the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer stated that the Vale of Glamorgan Council would publish its draft budget shortly, with the November Medium Term Financial Plan to Cabinet having modelled 4.9% in terms of Council Tax increases due to the current tough financial environment the Council found itself in. The budget for consultation would be considered in due course.
- Councillor Payne referred to the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other Local Authorities facing the largest housing crisis since the 2nd World War and therefore had to meet the challenge of accommodating the needs of existing tenants and also potential new ones, as well as helping to tackle homelessness and the Council's significant efforts being made through its Supporting People Team. She also referred to the sensitivity analysis undertaken within the report which referred to potential increases in housing benefit to help those tenants that were eligible in order to meet any increases in their rent.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's comments around encouraging tenants to reach out to the Council if they were struggling with their finances and the cost of living, it was explained that there had been an increase in staff resources for the Money Advice Team which could assist tenants with the cost of living and financial concerns. The Council with other Local Authorities had also signed up to the commitment to not evict tenants into homelessness.
- Councillor Goodjohn, with permission to speak, made a number of comments around the proposals including reiterating the fact that no Council tenant would be evicted from their homes should they not be able to afford the increase in payments. Furthermore, the improvements made via WHQS23 and other energy efficiency and de-carbonisation measures would benefit from such funding but also ultimately help reduce tenant and overall Council energy costs. Also, the funding accrued from the increased rents would help the Council move away from utilising temporary accommodation and the costs incurred by this through the building and acquisition of more permanent properties for residents to live in. The Councillor also referred to the fact that

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up to 70% of Vale of Glamorgan Council tenants were on various housing benefits or Universal Credit and therefore would not be impacted by the increased rents.

- On Councillor Goodjohn's follow-up question concerning changes from WG concerning the WHQS 23 standards and the deadlines of targets for reaching EPC A levels for the Council's housing stock, it was explained that all Local Authorities needed to aim to achieve EPC C levels in the next two years. Furthermore, the Council was also required to provide an assessment of all Council properties in relation to what the cost would be for bringing them up to EPC A standards by 2026. The Council had made assumptions in terms of the individual costs of this within the Housing Business Plan and in terms of investment this would continue via the investment programme for the majority of properties which already achieved EPC C. A process was already in place to pilot the initial assessment for approximately 400 properties, as part of this process in order to help inform the Business Plan going forward. It was felt that the aspiration for properties to achieve EPC A by 2030 was probably unrealistic at this time given the costs involved but WG had indicated continued investment in the Optimised Retrofit Programme for existing Council properties. The uplift which would come back through the increased rents would help the Council continue its maintenance and improvement of properties in order to help offset reduced levels of investment which could cause extreme strain on the Housing Business Plan. The full assessment of the housing stock would help inform the Council on how long it would take to achieve full EPC A ratings for all housing.
- On Councillor Goodjohn's query about the estimated amount of money per house that would be needed to reach the EPC A level by 31st March, 2034 and whether there was a guarantee of continued WG funding, it was explained that it was not certain what WG priorities in funding would be in the future. However, the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other Local Authorities were lobbying WG regarding ongoing support to achieve WHQS23.

Subsequently the Chair and Councillor Hennessy raised concerns about the recommendation around the increase of Council rents to 6.7%, whereby it was explained that if this increase was not achieved then the Housing Business Plan and the other related recommendations within the report would not be achievable. As a result, a vote was undertaken whereby the majority of the Committee passed the recommendations.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to approve the final Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2024/25.
- (2) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to approve an average rent increase of 6.7%, as set out in paragraph 2.25 of the report.
- (3) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to approve the increase suggested for other services as set out in paragraphs 2.28-2.35 of the report.

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(4) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to approve all changes to rents and that service charges be implemented from 1st April, 2024, with the first week of April being a non-chargeable rent week and that increase notices be sent to tenants two months in advance of the new charges coming into effect as required by the Renting Homes (Wales) Act.

(5) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to approve the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/53 (draft) attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Reason for recommendations

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

672 3RD QUARTER SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKING 2023/24 AND UPDATED COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2023/24 (DCR) –

The report was presented by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, the purpose of which was to advise Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's historical recommendations and the updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24.

Most historical recommendations had been completed but there were a few recommendations still open / ongoing which had been updated or in the process of being so and any responses had been chased up or sought.

Subject to approval of the Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24, Committee were requested to allow amendments to be made to it prior to uploading:

- For January 2024, the rent setting report entry be renamed to the “Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25” and to add the urgent item concerning the Safer Vale Partnership Strategy 2023-2028 to the Work Programme for January 2024.
- For February 2024, the Revenue and Capital Monitoring reports for Quarter 3 would need to move to March’s meeting instead.

Committee Members were also informed of the updated Scrutiny topic suggestion form and the Scrutiny Public Participation Guide.

Following the presentation of the report, the following comments and queries were raised:

- Councillor Hennessy’s queried the outstanding recommendation for an appropriate housing solution for the Traveller community and what progress had been made. It was explained that an independent third party had been utilised to engage with the Traveller community at Hayes Road. The Travellers had expressed their satisfaction with their current living

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arrangements but would be willing to talk to the Council should a more suitable location be identified.

- On the Vice-Chair's query on the current position on the Youth Justice reports, there were currently two on the Work Programme for February and March respectively.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's query on the annual update for the Tenant & Leaseholder Participation Strategy, it was explained that the capacity issues which had caused the slippage for this had now been addressed and the aim was for the report to be sent to the Committee in Spring 2024.
- Councillor Payne asked about the outstanding recommendation for Members to be invited to the proposed open day for the Youth Justice and Early Support Service. This request would be followed up with the Youth Justice and Early Support Service.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the status of the actions listed in Appendices A to D to the report be agreed.

(2) T H A T the updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24 attached at Appendix E to the report be approved and uploaded to the Council's website, subject to the following amendments being made:

- For January 2024, the rent setting report entry be renamed to the "Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Proposals 2024/25, Rent Setting 2024/2025 and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024/25" and to add the urgent item concerning the Safer Vale Partnership Strategy 2023-2028 to the Work Programme for January 2024.
- For February 2024, the Revenue and Capital Monitoring reports for Quarter 3 would need to move to March's meeting instead.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) To maintain effective tracking of the Committee's recommendations.

(2) For public information.

673 MATTER WHICH THE CHAIR HAD DECIDED WAS URGENT –

RESOLVED – T H A T the following matter which the Chair had decided was urgent for the reason given beneath the minute heading be considered.

674 CALL-IN: SAFER VALE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY 2023-28 –

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Matter which the Chair has decided was urgent in order that the Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to consider and scrutinise this report within the deadline period of twenty working days of receipt of the Call-In Request, as per 7.24(c) of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Constitution

Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson had called in the above item which had been discussed at Cabinet on 14th December, 2023 (Minute No. C186 refers).

Councillor Dr. Johnson stated that the five-year Safer Vale Partnership Strategy dealt with many aspects of community safety, discharged by a range of multi-agency partners. It was an important document which recommended direction of travel on issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), crime and disorder, Violence Against Women, Domestic and Sexual Violence, substance misuse and counter terrorism. This was an increase in the length of the Strategy, which had previously been three years and in the interests of oversight, scrutiny and transparency that the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee should also be satisfied with the final draft of Strategy, as well as Cabinet and the Public Services Board, and should satisfy themselves that the scrutiny arrangements for delivery of the Strategy were appropriate. Councillor Dr. Johnson therefore requested that this be 'called-in' to the Scrutiny Committee for discussion before adoption.

The report was subsequently presented by the Community Safety Policy Manager, who outlined the background (including the statutory duty of the Council to be part of a Community Safety Partnership with other relevant bodies for reducing crime and disorder, substance misuse and re-offending in each local authority area), the development of the new Strategy, including its extension from three to five years, building upon the previous Strategy and to address the challenges faced due to limited resources and the aftermath of the Pandemic. The Strategy highlighted the four priority areas (i.e. prevent and reduce, engage, safeguard and work together) and areas of focus for the work of the Partnership over the next five years (i.e. Anti-Social Behaviour, crime and disorder, the Violence Against Women, Domestic and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) agenda, substance misuse, CONTEST (the counter terrorism agenda) engagement and responding to the Serious Violence Duty).

Also outlined was that the Strategy would be supported by an annual strategic assessment and annual reporting to ensure that the appropriate actions and interventions were being implemented, as well as to monitor and record achievements and areas of improvement. The work of the partnership was driven by an operational group and ultimately governed by the Strategic Board. This work was accountable to the Public Service Board where community safety was reviewed.

Subsequently, the following comments and questions were raised at the meeting:

- The Vice-Chair asked that she and the Chair meet with the relevant Vale of Glamorgan Council Officers concerning this Strategy. This was in order to discuss a mechanism for the regular reporting, oversight and scrutiny of the Strategy going forward as well as further updates on the governance, engagement and communication around this to the Committee. The Head of Housing and Building Services explained that he would be meeting with the Operational Manager - Corporate Strategy and Insight to look at governance

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arrangements and issues and the role of scrutiny would form part of that. The Chair and Vice-Chair would be included in these discussions in order to agree a position on the points raised.

- The above request was made in conjunction with further comments by Councillor Dr. Johnson on the oversight, the balance between strategic and annual assessment and performance as well as the governance of this Strategy.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the call-in and appended report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Committee were satisfied that the Safer Vale Partnership Strategy 2023-28 was appropriate and had adequate delivery and scrutiny arrangements.

(2) T H A T the relevant Vale of Glamorgan Council Officers meet with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee in order to discuss a mechanism for the regular reporting, oversight and scrutiny of the Strategy going forward as well as further updates on the governance, engagement and communication around this to the Committee.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(2) In order to inform Members of the Committee on the progress being made with regards to the Strategy.