

No.

## HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 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.J. Haines, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, S. Lloyd-Selby and H.M. Payne.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), G. Doyle, 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, 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), C. Stallard, E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

### 789 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”.

### 790 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors S. Campbell and M.J.G. Morgan and D. Dutch (Representative from Tenant Working Group/Panel).

### 791 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

### 792 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor W.A. Hennessy declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 - Initial Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 Proposals for Consultation. The nature of his interest was due to being a recipient of a telecare service from the Council (Telecare service and charges having been referred to in

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the reference and report in question). He had dispensation to speak and vote at Council meetings on general matters, but to speak only if the issue was prejudicial, on issues relating to telecare services (paragraphs (d) and (f) of the relevant regulations).

Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 - Initial Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 Proposals for Consultation. The nature of her interest was a personal not prejudicial interest, due to family members being in receipt of services for Social Care and Telecare. She had dispensation to speak only on issues relating to Telecare and Care Package services at Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings (paragraphs (d) and (f) of the relevant regulations).

Councillor H.M. Payne declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 - Proposed Corporate Strategy for Children who Need Care and Support 2024-28. The nature of her interest was the reference to Llamau in several parts of the report, which was her employer. 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).

Councillor H.M. Payne declared an interest in Agenda Item 7 - Homelessness – Rapid Rehousing Plan Update. The nature of her interest was the reference to Llamau in the report, which was her employer. 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).

#### 793 INITIAL BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 TO 2028/29 PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, the purpose of which was to put forward the Council's budget proposals for consultation with residents, other stakeholders and the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

A presentation was given to the Committee to accompany the report, which highlighted the key points, including:

- The revenue budget headlines setting out the challenging budget process, cost pressures, the need to prioritise funding for Social Care, Schools and Homelessness as well as details around the Welsh Government settlement, Council Tax increase and savings requirements for Council services.
- Linkages between the budget and the Let's Talk about Life in the Vale Survey, including survey responses to the Committee, i.e. the priority from residents concerning to 'buy or rent a good quality home'.
- The Budget Planning Cycle and the various stages from the initial submission of cost pressures through to review by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Business Cabinet.

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- The summary of the five-year position, including the increase in funding in 2024/25 of £13m, the draw down of the Homelessness Reserve to mitigate the homelessness cost pressure, the relative protection for services such as Learning and Skills and Social Services as well as the intention to extend this to General Fund Housing, and the intention for the homelessness pressure to be addressed through the Rapid Rehousing Program and the use of the Reserve be stepped down across the period subject to close review, etc.
- The 2024/25 Draft Revenue Summary by Area and Scrutiny specific cost Pressures (Cost of B&B Homelessness Accommodation).
- Saving proposals (both tactical and transformational) and Scrutiny specific savings (i.e. the Budget Adjustment Pre-Tenancy Adviser and Voluntary Assisted Tenancies budget).
- The use of Council Reserves i.e. £2.7m of reserves to be used as part of these proposals, mainly from Homelessness and Energy, through to reserves established to support Transformation and the need to review additional reserves for Social Services and Budget Risk.
- The Council had achieved around 85% of its savings in 2023/24.
- The next steps in the budgetary process, from consultation with various stakeholders and Scrutiny, through to the final draft of the Budget going to Cabinet and then on to Full Council for ratification.

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

- On Councillor Hennessy's query on the £2.7m of reserves and whether these were being used towards the cost of hiring the hotel in Rhoose for temporary accommodation, it was explained that the majority of that cost pressure was associated with ensuring the provision continued in 2024/25.
- Councillor Franks, with permission to speak, asked about the 'no one left out' housing grant provided by Welsh Government (WG) and whether this would continue to be paid for the next financial year. It was explained that this grant had been reduced this current financial year, which had helped to create the cost pressure for bed and breakfast (B&B) provision. The WG Homelessness Prevention Fund had seen a reduction from £5m to £2m due to pressures on WG, which had impacted homelessness prevention measures etc. for the Council, i.e. the temporary accommodation funding and the Vale Assisted Tenancy Scheme. Councillor Franks asked if his concerns could be raised by the Committee with Cabinet via a referral of this report and his comments, but the Vice-Chair felt that the 'no one left out' funding was already addressed within the report and would be considered by Cabinet and any comments would have to be balanced with the recognition that the WG financial settlement had been received as well as the need to recognise the significant cost pressures that were coming from Education and Social Care. This proposal was subsequently voted on by the Committee but did not pass.
- On Councillor Lloyd-Selby's request for clarification on the WG settlement to local government, it was confirmed that the U.K. Government had provided a 2.1% settlement to WG but who had in turn passed on a 3.1% increase to its settlement to local government. She also felt the finance officers involved in this report should be thanked for all their efforts.

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

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the reference and appended report on the Initial Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 Proposals for Consultation be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

794 DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2024/25 TO 2028/29 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 was presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, the purpose of which was for Committee to be consulted upon the draft Capital Programme proposals for 2024/25 to 2028/29.

The Operational Manager – Accountancy provided a presentation for the Committee which gave Members the key points around the report which included:

- The Committee were informed that in terms of capital bids and proposals there was not a great deal specifically relevant to this Scrutiny Committee, with the majority of the investment in the Housing space having been picked up as part of the Housing Improvement programme that was previously brought to the Committee and those proposals would be included as part of the final Capital Proposals at the end of February.
- In terms of the provisional settlement that had been awarded by Welsh Government this was very much broadly in line with the funding that had been previously received in 2023/24 with a decrease of £11k from the 2023/24 General Capital Funding of £6.997m.
- As no further indication had been received from Welsh Government it had been assumed that from 2025/26 onwards the level of capital funding would be flatlined at £6.986m and then would remain constant for the remainder of the period of this programme.
- A summary of the draft Capital Proposals as they stood at 18<sup>th</sup> January was provided with it being noted that those housing proposals reflected the Housing Improvement Plan as they stood at this point in time.
- The reference to ‘pipeline’ schemes in the proposals table referred to those schemes that were subject to a business case approval; once such a case had been approved these would be moved up to the relevant Directorate.
- In terms of capital bids that were requested to be returned by 20<sup>th</sup> October, in total 47 bids had been submitted with those bids in 2024/25 required to be funded just short of £18.9m and the Council had an unallocated Asset Renewal of £366k at this point in time.
- There was around £1.3m of unallocated Asset Renewal in 2025/26.

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- The various draft Capital Proposals were outlined although it was noted there were no bids proposed to be funded which were relevant to this Scrutiny Committee and the Final Capital Programme would reflect the content of the Housing Improvement Plan approved by Council in January 2024.
- Finally the next steps in terms of the process for the Capital Programme outlined from consultation through to Scrutiny and endorsement and approval by Cabinet and Full Council.

Following the presentation of the reference and appended report with the relevant slides, the following comments and queries were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Hanks outlined her disappointment that the new Household Waste Recycling at Llandow had been taken out of the capital schemes and asked whether the £100k allocated to the site improvements, i.e. roads, would be spent in due course. In response, it was explained that the current understanding was that there were some improvements that were currently being undertaken on the site including resurfacing of the roads, with some additional provision to be provided in the 2024/25 programme but further details would be sought and provided to the Councillor and the Committee.

Scrutiny Committee having considered the reference and appended report, subsequently

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the reference and appended report on the Draft Capital Programme Proposals 2024/25 to 2028/29 be noted.

#### Reason for recommendation

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

#### **795 PROPOSED CORPORATE STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN WHO NEED CARE AND SUPPORT 2024-28 (DSS) –**

The report, presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services, provided the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the proposed Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support 2024-28. The proposed Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report was the third Vale of Glamorgan Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support, which was a reflection of the Council's responsibilities in this area as the result of legislation, Welsh Government (WG) and Health Board policies. First endorsed by Cabinet in October 2016, the initial three-year Strategy marked a significant change in recognising the responsibilities of the whole Council in enabling children in need of care and support to receive the right help at the right time to improve their well-being and protect them from harm, and in aligning the roles of multiple Directorates in delivering the associated actions. The second Strategy built on these foundations and positively reflected the cross-sector relationships within its Action Plan. The third Strategy continued this legacy having been developed in partnership with the Council's external partners in Health, the

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Third Sector and through engagement with children and young people and their families and carers.

The proposed Strategy identified how, utilising an integrated model of services, the needs of children, young people and their families would be met, within the resources available to the Council and its partners, during the period 2024 to 2028. The Strategy was underpinned by four Objectives and a number of principles which focussed on working together with children, young people, their families and carers to provide support as early as possible.

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

- Councillor Haines asked for clarification on what the Corporate Strategy Management Group was. It was explained that this was a group of senior officers including Heads of Service involved in the provision of services for children and young people within the Council but also included senior representatives from Health and Third Sector bodies as well. This Group helped to develop the Strategy and to monitor the subsequent actions as well as assist in the various elements around the related workshops. Following the reply, Councillor Haines raised concerns about the Third Sector bodies that sat on the Group who were in effect monitoring their own services and wanted reassurance that there was a break point between them and the service provision. In response, it was explained there were a number of Third Sector organisations that were directly commissioned by the Council whether for housing related support or via Social Services and there were mechanisms outside of the Group which had been put in place to monitor those commissioned services. Also, as part of the workings of this Group, the various members positively challenged each other to help develop the required actions, which included the representatives of the Third Sector bodies. In terms of further reassurance to the Committee, there was outside of this, in terms of commissioned services, detailed analysis undertaken to ensure that the outcomes and outputs of those commissioned services were delivering and were providing what was required which was independent of this Group.
- Councillor Hanks stated this was a thought provoking and extremely interesting report and asked how confident the Head of Housing and Building Services was in terms of Objective 3 on the provision and commission of a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality services with the current state of Council budgets and sought reassurance on this. It was explained that the Council already provided a range of accommodation support services such as direct access type services funded through the Housing Support Programme, but it was also acknowledged that the Council had an opportunity of using the Council's own Housing Development Programme to be able to be a bit more innovative in terms of the type of accommodation support provision that it had. This would involve utilising existing resources as well as leveraging in some additional capacity from other areas e.g. receive integrated capital funding via the Regional Partnership Board as well as other projects which were already in the pipeline. The Council was also actively looking at alternative sources of accommodation, but resources were always clearly going to be an issue but

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by way of reassurance the Council continued to look at working more collaboratively both in terms of working with Social Services and with Health. There would be a range of provisions in the next 18 months that would provide additional flexibility and innovation in terms of accommodation services that would be provided to children and young people.

- The Vice-Chair referred to Objective 4 of the proposed Corporate Strategy with regard to better housing options and housing support for children and young people. Taking into consideration the cost pressures and difficult decisions having to be made by the Council at present, she asked if it could be expanded on what the options were and what this would mean in reality. She also asked whether it would be fair to state that whilst it was acknowledged that the highest proportion of Looked After Children were part of kinship caring it was her understanding that until central government changed the welfare system and gave equal rights to kinship carers that it would still be a struggle or a factor to consider going forward in terms of the number of people coming forward to act as kinship carers. In response to the first question, anecdotally the Council was aware of young people who the Council would rehouse and move into independent living through choice but it was also found there were pitfalls associated with that as well as there being experience of young people perhaps losing accommodation or difficulties managing that accommodation and part of this action was around recognising that it may be appropriate for some additional levels of support in order to maintain their tenancies in order to ultimately ensure that young people would be able to maintain their accommodation. However, it was currently recognised that there was insufficient supported housing for young people who need that additional support or chose to live for a bit longer in a supported environment. It was the supported housing element that the Council was looking to increase either in a community-based setting or through the development of new housing with such measures currently being in the pipeline with colleagues in Social Services and Health. It was acknowledged that it would be useful at some stage in the future to bring a report to the Committee to provide further details about such projects which were currently in the pipeline and the various options that were being taken forward which would help to give the Committee sufficient reassurance in terms of the deliverability of this pipeline work. In relation to the second question, the Corporate Parenting Panel had acknowledged the pressures seen in both the foster caring and kinship caring arrangements and these had been discussed by the Panel recently. However, there was also acknowledgment that there were extreme pressures within the system including the financial pressures and budgetary requirements on Council officers within areas such as Childrens Services.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report subsequently

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made in developing a new four year Corporate Strategy and Action Plan for Children who need Care and Support be noted.
- (2) T H A T the proposed Strategy and the associated Action Plan be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

796 HOMELESSNESS – RAPID REHOUSING PLAN UPDATE (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Operational Manager, Public Housing Services, which highlighted the significant pressures relating to homelessness in the Vale of Glamorgan and updated Members regarding actions being taken to address the situation via the Council's Rapid Rehousing Plan. The report also flagged up additional actions, currently being considered, to assist high numbers of households affected by homelessness and reduce the current use of bed and breakfast type accommodation. Key points included:

- There had been a massive increase in demand for temporary Council and social accommodation due to changes in the housing market, high interest rates and increased rents in the private rental sector.
- The Council had been successful in moving people on from temporary to permanent accommodation, but this had been offset by the higher levels of people presenting to the Council as homeless.
- A key part of the Council's plan remained preventing homelessness in the first place which continued to be the most desirable outcome and the most cost-effective i.e. working with schools and young people, as well as the efforts of the Council's Housing Solutions team, but this remained a constant challenge due to the various pressures on tenants and housing.
- Other key parts of the Rapid Rehousing Plan involved increasing the supply of accommodation (both Council house building and increased social housing, as well as maximising the use of private rented accommodation, purchasing of land for housing development, conversion of other buildings into dwellings, etc.), changes to the allocations procedures so households in the greatest housing need were prioritised for social housing and the ongoing need to use temporary accommodation, such as block booking of local hotels.

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

- Councillor Hennessy queried how long on average people were staying at the hotel accommodation at Rhose and what the makeup of the homeless were between families and single persons there. It was explained that there were 75 rooms currently being used at the hotel accommodation in question, with 6-8 families being there at any one point in time, with the remainder made up of single persons. In terms of timeframes for people staying in this type of temporary accommodation, the small number of families residing there typically moved on to more permanent accommodation after 3-5 months. Single persons typically stayed in temporary accommodation for a lot longer, due to the shortage of appropriate accommodation.

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- On Councillor Hennessy's other query concerning the timeframe and cost in order to renovate the former Olive Lodge B&B which would be converted into self-contained temporary accommodation for homeless people, it was explained that the renovation was due to start shortly or had just started and that details on costs would be forwarded to the Committee once confirmed. A viability assessment had been undertaken to ensure that this development was viable and achievable.
- Councillor Payne stated that tackling homelessness was a complex issue and extremely challenging, with 11,000 people in temporary accommodation across Wales. She cited the good work already being undertaken by the Vale of Glamorgan Council through the various teams in terms of housing young people through a number of projects and schemes, and the new development in Coldbrook Road which could take up to 120 people off the housing and temporary accommodation lists. She also asked about the housing duty and people presenting as homeless, as well as people registering for Homes4U, in light of Rapid Rehousing. On these questions, it was explained that for Homes4u this was the central means of allocating Council housing in the Vale, which was a scarce resource. There were still 6,200 persons on the Homs4U list, some of whom were considered as high priority in terms of housing need. The Council also required people to have a local connection; however, those without this could still be considered but would be treated as a lesser priority, except under certain circumstances, i.e. victims of domestic abuse. But this could change under the proposals within the Welsh Government (WG) White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby raised the issue of significant increases to rents for tenants in the private sector within the Vale (around 15.6% of households in the County) and the impact this was having on housing and homelessness as well as there being no private lets available for the Local Housing Allowance rate locally. She enquired what the best route would be in order to raise concerns on the clear need to raise the Local Housing Allowance rate at a UK level. She also enquired about the benefits of buying back previously purchased Council properties. On the Local Housing Allowance, lobbying had been undertaken by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in conjunction with Community Housing Cymru and WG to UK Government on this matter. The affordability of private rental properties would remain a challenge at least in the short to medium term. On buying back former Council accommodation, the advantages of doing this lay with them meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and generally requiring less remedial work to be done to them. They also tended to be located within housing estates and areas where the Council already owned homes and therefore made the management of them much easier. The Councillor urged the Committee to recommend to Cabinet that they lend the Council's voice to help amplify calls and lobbying of the U.K. Government in order to increase the Local Housing Allowance rate to ensure private rents were affordable. It was also important to refer anyone facing difficulties in keeping their homes and tenancies to the one stop shop (Pobl), the Council's Housing team and other bodies.
- The Vice-Chair raised the part of the report showing the drop in the numbers of tenants that had been prevented from losing their tenancies by the Council

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(from 70% to 50%) and whether certain private landlords were resisting approaches by the Council to stop tenancies being evicted. It would also be useful for the Committee to receive further information or a report on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's pilot exercise on the conversion of existing Council and non-residential buildings to increase the supply of permanent and temporary accommodation as part of an innovative approach to tackle homelessness. On the prevention of eviction and homelessness, this was an increasing challenge. Private landlords' circumstances were all different and were subject to various financial and other challenges, but generally speaking they engaged with the Council with regard to preventing tenancies being lost, and subsequently some of these could then be salvaged. Work was undertaken on the prevention of eviction and homelessness for private tenancies on a case-by-case basis. The Council worked in partnership with private landlords who were generally both responsible and shared similar values to that of the Council. A recent landlord forum had illustrated the challenges that they faced and for some it was no longer financially viable to continue letting out their properties to tenants. The Council could offer support, etc. on a case-by-case basis in order to save tenancies, due to prevention being a more cost effective and beneficial solution than housing people in temporary accommodation post eviction. The Head of Housing and Building Services added that access to private rental accommodation was only part of the solution to the current housing crisis, in conjunction with other measures to address the housing situation and other challenges around housing which would have to be faced in the near future i.e. the pressure on private homeowners when their fixed term mortgages came to an end, and which could impact on the levels of presentations of homelessness in the Vale. Local Authorities and WG were looking at how to address this emerging issue.

- Councillor Hanks added that as well as further information being provided to the committee on the pilot exercise on the conversion of existing Council and non-residential buildings, additional information should be shared with the Committee concerning the Emphasis project and the work being undertaken with Llamau in this area. These requests would be added to the Committee's work programme for future reporting.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report subsequently

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the current service pressures arising from homelessness and progress in implementing the Rapid Rehousing Plan be noted.
- (2) T H A T the steps being taken to reduce the use of temporary accommodation be noted.
- (3) T H A T the following comment be referred to Cabinet for their consideration:
  - The importance of the Vale of Glamorgan Council to lend its voice to help amplify calls and lobbying of the U.K. Government in order to

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increase the Local Housing Allowance rate to ensure private rents are affordable.

(4) T H A T the Committee be provided with updates on the conversion of existing Council and non-residential buildings to increase the supply of permanent and temporary accommodation, as well as a review of the Emphasis project and the work being undertaken with Llamau in this area.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(3) In order for Cabinet to consider lending the Vale of Glamorgan Council's support to calls and lobbying of the U.K. Government to increase the Local Housing Allowance rate to a more affordable level.

(4) For Committee to receive updates on the work being undertaken in these areas, as part of the Council's efforts to tackle homelessness and implement rapid rehousing.