

No.

## HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Hybrid meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 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.M. Ball, 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) and G. Doyle, D. Dutch, V. John and H. Smith (Tenant Working Group/Panel Representatives) and Councillors G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), S.D. Perkes (Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement), and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

### 193 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.”

### 194 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor S.J. Haines.

### 195 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

### 196 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor Lloyd Selby declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 5 – Work to Tackle Poverty and the Current Cost of Living Crisis. The nature of her interest was due to her being a trustee of the Vale Foodbank that had been a beneficiary of support from the Council.

197 SHARED REGULATORY SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Head of Shared Regulatory Services, the purpose of which was for Committee to consider the Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) Business Plan 2024-25. The Plan had been ratified by the Joint Committee and formed a part of the SRS annual reporting process set out in the Joint Working Agreement. The report also aimed to raise awareness among Committee Members on the progress being made on the work of SRS, within the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.

A PowerPoint presentation was also given to the Committee, covering a number of areas around the Plan. This included the background to SRS, its governance, structure and the business planning process. Reference was made to the five strategic themes that provided the 'golden thread' that ran through the Plan and the service it helped to deliver, as well as how these themes were turned into and realised as actual outcomes / outputs.

A reflection on the previous Plan for 2023-24 was provided, which set out the service achievements during 2023-24 under each of the strategic themes. This ranged from post-COVID recovery and the full resumption of SRS Food inspection programmes and enforcement, through to the appointment of an Environmental Health professional as an Empty Homes Officer in the Vale of Glamorgan Council area, minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector and the extensive work protecting the Vale's most vulnerable residents. This key area for the Committee covered SRS tackling scams, rogue builders and doorstep crime, the issuing to, and use of, 'call blockers' by residents, the work of the Wales Illegal Money Lending Unit and tackling the underage sale of alcohol, as well as illegal vapes and tobacco. As part of this, SRS was undertaking a new, more sophisticated approach due to the involvement of organised crime groups in these areas, which had yielded significant results in terms of seizure and convictions. Other new approaches in 2023-24 included the use of Closure Orders under the Antisocial Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 and with regard to the challenges for recruitment and retention within SRS, by undertaking the so-called 'Growing our Own' approach by developing existing staff internally.

The challenges for 2024-25 were also outlined, including recruitment and retention, new areas of regulation without additional government funding and the increasing complexity of investigations, within a reduced budget.

Following the presentation of the report, the Committee raised a number of comments and queries. Firstly, on Councillor Aviet's query on fly tipping on Council owned land, it was explained that this issue was not dealt with by SRS, but rather the relevant enforcement team within the Council.

The Vice-Chair raised a number of queries on the future work programme for the SRS and whether, as part of the rise in doorstep crime, the emergence of solar panel installation doorstep scams had been considered as well as the regulation of beauty services undertaken by individuals and salons, and services involving the use of fake and potentially harmful slimming injections. In response, the Head of Shared Regulatory Services started with the solar panel query and stated that

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this was part of an 'anything and everything' approach by doorstep criminals and others to get the attention and interest of potential victims. The work of SRS in this key area was intelligence led and action would then be taken accordingly, which formed part of a 'joined-up' approach with partners in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom in order to spot emerging trends and threats. She was not currently aware of the rise in solar panel related scams, but this would be looked into and any information that the Councillor could share on this would be extremely useful. On beauty salons and treatments / injections, a licensing regime was expected to come into effect soon for piercings, tattooing, acupuncture and electrolysis. However, it was recognised that there were other areas of beauty and related procedures or treatments that were not covered by regulation, with this being looked at in England already and with it likely to also be reviewed in Wales. In the meantime, such procedures could potentially be looked at without specific regulation in place, and she asked the Councillor to share any information she may have in order to look into it and if required refer to the appropriate agency.

Councillor Payne asked if, with regard to recruitment and retention for SRS, SRS were looking at apprenticeships and / or local (or wider, i.e. regional) recruitment as part of this. It was explained that the use of apprenticeships was intended to be a large part of the recruitment and retention drive for SRS going forward, but this would be dependent on the establishment of an appropriate, regulatory, apprenticeship, which was hoped would be set up in due course. As part of this, the accompanying qualification for these apprenticeships was already in place. Councillor Payne offered her experience with apprenticeships if SRS required any help in this area, with the Chair echoing the Councillor's emphasis on the importance of apprenticeships as the way forward for recruitment, and on offering help and support with this.

Councillor Morgan referred to the ease of reporting via the SRS website / contact details therein, but asked how reports of incidents, such as loan sharks, made via 101, etc. would get referred to SRS from the Police or other agencies. Also, in terms of reports made concerning environmental issues and pollution, where would these sit in terms of the relevant agencies (i.e. SRS or Natural Resources Wales (NRW)) and how did these agencies relate and communicate with each other. On reports made via 101, etc. and how they were referred, it was explained that SRS worked closely with the Police and other agencies, with good quality referral mechanisms in place for areas such as illegal money lending and with awareness raising training provided for front line staff in these agencies. On environmental / pollution reporting, SRS worked closely with NRW in these areas, with NRW being the lead agency in such cases.

Councillor Lloyd-Selby raised the point made in the report around certain foodbanks giving out food past their use-by dates and welcomed the fact that SRS would be addressing this issue as part of their work programme. This was important due to the need of recipients receiving this food having the reassurance that the food they were receiving from the foodbanks was safe. She also referred to the Plan's emphasis on further engagement with Elected Members of the Council on areas where they had local knowledge and experience, i.e. rogue trader and other potential scam incidents involving local residents and asked how this would be taken forward. She also suggested that the report and Business

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Plan be shared with all Elected Members, which, due to its wide-ranging coverage of various issues impacting local residents, would be of interest and use to Councillors. On foodbanks, it was explained that the incident with use-by dates had been as a result of that particular foodbank having been extremely successful in getting a lot of food donations in, and what was required was a greater management and rotation of this stock going forward. The Councillor's offer of help and support in this area would also be taken up. On Member engagement, SRS would be looking to build this up in order to help address doorstep crime, etc., and to encourage greater reporting of these by local residents, via help from their elected representatives, with their local knowledge and understanding. Greater engagement would also be undertaken via SRS attendance and reporting at the Council's scrutiny committee meetings and the SRS Joint Committee.

Committee Members also congratulated SRS on the report, Business Plan and the work they undertook, despite the current challenges faced.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the content of the report and the Shared Regulatory Services Business Plan for 2024/25 attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be shared with all Elected Members of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

#### Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order that all Elected Members were made aware of the Shared Regulatory Services Business Plan and the related work being undertaken by the Service.

#### 198 WORK TO TACKLE POVERTY AND THE CURRENT COST OF LIVING CRISIS (CX) –

The report, co-presented by the Director of Corporate Resources and the Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight, provided an update on work being undertaken across the Council and in partnership with others to tackle poverty and to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. The cost-of-living crisis was considered to be a critical challenge within the Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2024-25. The report highlighted the work to tackle food insecurity by supporting projects that improved access to food, reduced loneliness and isolation through supporting the development of community spaces and provided financial support to individuals through a number of schemes. The report also provided details about the use of the cost-of-living reserve, which was established as part of the 2023-24 budget, demonstrating how the Council was matching the use of reserves with the Council's core priorities as set out in the Financial Strategy and Annual

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Delivery Plan. Shared Prosperity funding was also supporting a number of projects that would be helping to target poverty and address the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

Following the presentation of the report, the Committee raised a number of comments and queries. Firstly, the Chair shared her own experiences in the past with food insecurity, cost-of-living pressures and the challenges of keeping a roof over her head. She was extremely pleased and encouraged to see the work that the Vale of Glamorgan Council and partners were doing in providing critical help and support with food security and other facets of people's cost-of-living concerns.

Councillor Payne asked about the Welsh Benefits Charter, and whether the Council collected data on additional funding that was available for local residents who needed assistance, for example, the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) and church related funding. It was explained that although some data was collected in relation to this, the Council did not have a complete overview of it and this was something that was being looked at in order to getting a better understanding of the funding situation. In addition, there was a lot of work being done in this area by both public and voluntary sectors, and in order to better 'profile' this kind of support, it was essential to bring all these streams together in order to better inform decision making for the Council, its teams (i.e. income, money advice, welfare, housing benefits, etc.) and other partners going forward.

Councillor Lloyd-Selby asked whether the data the Council collected provided sufficient detail on how easy it was for residents to access the benefits, entitlements and financial support that the Council administered locally. This would tie in with the work currently being undertaken via the Welsh Benefits Charter and its national steering group. It was explained that currently the Council did not have that level of insight into accessibility to benefits, etc., by local residents, but that would be something that Council officers would look into expanding for both Council and non-Council provision and support. Although the information available did suggest that local residents found it easier to access benefits and entitlements where provision was closer to them, rather than based in a central location, and the positive impacts of having made this information more readily available to people online, offering support via schools, as well as the extensive work done concerning benefits and entitlements for older people via the Vale 50+ Strategy Forum in conjunction with Age Friendly Vale activities.

The Vice-Chair raised a number of comments and queries concerning funding / provision for additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of free school meals (FSM), the funding for the network of Warm Spaces across the Vale, with Autumn and Winter approaching, and whether the data used as part of the report also helped the Council to look forward and help it prepare to address the cost-of-living challenges going forward. She also raised the good work undertaken by the Age Friendly Vale team in raising awareness of entitlements for older people and the importance of Councillors in engaging in this area as well. It was explained that the current report was looking at the past and present, but going forward the new Corporate Plan would be taking forward a longer-term view and focus on tackling poverty and deprivation, as well as the work being undertaken with Cwmpas and the development of a set of measures relating to

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cost-of-living / poverty, attached to the report. On Warm Spaces, the Council was looking to judiciously use and maximise the grant funding and other (discretionary) funding streams available and to tie this in with food insecurity, as well as tackling homelessness and other factors around deprivation for residents and Council tenants. Regarding additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of FSM, information on free or affordable activities during Summer were provided via the Family Information Service and which were held in various venues such as libraries and sports / play facilities. Also, the work undertaken by Big Fresh and others within local schools over key parts of the holidays around activities and raising awareness of healthy eating were outlined.

Councillor Hanks pointed to the impressive work undertaken by Council staff, detailed in the report, to help local residents with food insecurity and tackling other areas of deprivation.

The Chair asked about funding for foodbanks. In response, it was explained that the Council had provided funding to the Vale Foodbank over the last two years, via the Council reserves. Various food insecurity related funding streams from Welsh Government had also been used to support the work of the Foodbank and other food insecurity projects within the Vale, rather than direct Council contributions being used. The Chair suggested a visit to the Vale Foodbank to see the work being undertaken to address food insecurity.

On Councillor Hennessy's query on how the Council communicated about the location and access to Warm Spaces and other forms of support to those residents who could not access the relevant website or do so digitally, it was explained that information was also shared via local community groups, leaflets, press releases and via local printed free newspapers, as well as the main website, which was extensively used by residents.

The Chair and the Committee wished to thank the relevant officers involved in the report and those on the frontline areas of support for their efforts in tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

Subsequently, it was

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the work being undertaken with regards to tackling poverty and the cost of living crisis which was a critical challenge within the Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2024-25, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the use of the cost of living reserve to support those in need be noted.
- (3) T H A T the Committee visit the Vale Foodbank to see the work being undertaken to address food insecurity and related issues within the Vale of Glamorgan.

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(4) T H A T, following consideration of the report by the Committee, the following comment be referred to Cabinet for their consideration, as well as that of the relevant Vale of Glamorgan Council officers:

- The Committee felt that it was important for the Vale of Glamorgan Council to review whether the data it collected provided sufficient detail on how easy it was for residents to access the benefits, entitlements and financial support that the Council administered locally. This would tie in with the work currently being undertaken to develop the Welsh Benefits Charter (as detailed in the report) and its aim of making it easier for people in Wales to claim Welsh Benefits they were entitled to.

Reasons for recommendations.

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

(3) In order for Members of the Committee to be able to see the work being undertaken to tackle food insecurity and related issues within the Vale of Glamorgan.

(4) In order for Cabinet and the relevant Council officers to consider the comments made by the Committee as part of their consideration of the progress being made on the work to tackle poverty and the cost of living crisis.

199 PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD (PSB) PROJECT UPDATE: WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN OUR COMMUNITIES THAT EXPERIENCE HIGHER LEVELS OF DEPRIVATION (CX) –

This report was presented to the Committee jointly by the Operational Manager - Corporate Strategy and Insight and the Senior Community Development Officer. The purpose of the report was to present an overview of the work of the Public Services Board (PSB) led project and statutory partnership, where the Council and various public sector and other partners were working with people who lived in the Vale of Glamorgan's most deprived communities. These included the three Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within the Vale of Glamorgan ranked as overall most deprived within the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019, which were Gibbonsdown 2, Court 3 and Buttrills 2.

This was part of the rolling programme of providing Committees with insights into the work of the PSB. The work of the PSB was usually reported to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The Committee in question had requested that the work of the PSB be also reported to other Committees whose remits aligned to elements of its work in order to broaden the understanding of the PSB's activities amongst a wider range of Elected Members.

Since taking up post in August 2023, the Senior Community Development Officer had led the next phase of work to engage with the communities and organisations working in the relevant areas to identify possible opportunities for partners and

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others to act to improve existing inequities and improve well-being for residents. An overview of the work was provided in more detail throughout the report.

A presentation was also given to Members, which accompanied the report, outlining the reasons and factors why the three LSOAs had been focused on and the progress to date on engaging with and supporting the communities and local groups involved therein, as well as working with other professional partners.

Also highlighted were the key community and other assets identified from this engagement, ranging from spaces and people, through to resources and culture. Common themes and issues identified by these communities were also highlighted, including additional learning needs (ALN), Pencoedtre High School, anxiety / lack of confidence, youth issues and transport. Furthermore, the current successes, as well as challenges, of this project were raised ranging from the building of key partnerships with community groups, locally based projects and others, through to the need to get lower level and more local, granular, data (including domestic abuse within these communities) through to the timescales needed to ensure that the changes coming from this engagement were properly established. Partnership project updates were given with regard to the Pencoedtre Learning Community Project and the Amplifying Prevention Project with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, as well as on the progress of the PSB Steering Group. Finally, details on how the goals and objectives of the PSB Well-being Plan tied in with helping to address the issues of deprivation, etc., these local communities faced were provided and the next steps for the project were also highlighted (i.e. the launch of a brand for this project called 'Your Place', the completion of the first stage engagement in order to move on to the creation of the relevant work streams and more focused action plans and community workshops).

Following the presentation and the report, the Committee raised a number of comments and queries including Councillor Lloyd-Selby's query on what schemes and engagement had been undertaken specifically within the Buttrills Ward, particularly around older residents who represented a significant demographic there and who was also keen to support the Council and PSB's work with this. In response, there had been a lot of work undertaken specifically in the Buttrills Ward, such as work and engagement with the local food pantry and its customers, as well as the local primary and high schools and face to face contact with local residents through a 'door knocking' exercise in the social housing areas of the ward in order to properly gauge and gather information on residents' needs and priorities to see how these could be taken forward as part of the work of the Steering Group, as well as building stronger relationships and engagement. In terms of older people, there was active engagement with, and feedback from, older residents via the local community centres in the Buttrills Ward which was being fed into this work. It was stressed that the project was moving from an initial 'discovery' phase of quite broad engagement to looking in more depth on those key domains around the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and other areas raised by residents, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as taking stock of what the data collated was telling this project. This was in order to help map out the work and support currently being undertaken locally in the areas concerned, as well as identifying any 'gaps' in terms of community engagement



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and where additional services and initiatives would be needed and linked in with, i.e. the Community Safety Partnership and Health Board.

On Councillor Morgan's request for an update on the other part of the PSB Well-being Plan, the work on Age Friendly Vale, it was explained that a report on this had been considered by the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee and would be included in the PSB annual report that was due to go to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee in the near future. On the Councillor's follow up query on the importance of engagement with older members of the community and what materials and information Councillors could be given to help support older residents get the help they needed and address the concerns they had around a wide range of areas such as social care, it was explained that the Council and its partners, as part of the PSB, had already picked up on a range of these areas from housing to social care through to transport (identified as 'domains' under the World Health Organization status for age friendly). In conjunction with this, a charter was being developed by partners in terms of age friendly engagement and provision, as well as a consultation being undertaken to develop the age friendly action plan, with the project team attending a wide range of different community venues as part of this. The subsequent report would be shared with the Committee and the Age Friendly Officer would be asked to reach out to Councillor Morgan around his comments and any additional information or work that could be provided and undertaken in light of these.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the work being undertaken on this project to engage with, and give support to, people who live in local communities that experienced higher levels of deprivation be noted.

(2) T H A T Members receive further updates on the work of this project during the year, in addition to the progress reported as part of the Public Services Board Annual Report, with those updates to be provided on a six-monthly basis.

Reasons for recommendations.

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

(2) To enable Members to be updated on the work of the Public Services Board to work with people who live in local communities that experienced higher levels of deprivation in a manner that best satisfied the needs of the Committee.

200 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE 2023/24 (DEH) -

The report was presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services (with support and assistance from the Operational Manager, Regeneration), the purpose of which was to present Quarter 4 (Q4) performance results for the period

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1<sup>st</sup> April, 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2024 in delivering the 2023/24 Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. The presentation was intended to provide Members with an overview of end of year performance as early as possible, ahead of the more detailed Annual Self-Assessment 2023/24.

Three of the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q4 and one Well-being Objective was attributed an Amber performance status (Well-being Objective 1). This reflected the good progress made to date in meeting the Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2023/24. In addition, 91 % (463 out of 507) of planned activities outlined in the Annual Delivery Plan had been attributed a Green performance rating reflecting the positive progress made in-year, and 9% (44) of planned activities were attributed a Red status. In relation to the planned activities within the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, 91.8% (66 out of 73) were attributed a Green performance status and the final 8.2% (6) were attributed a Red status. Of the 20 measures reported where a RAG rating was applicable, 60% (12) were attributed a Green performance status, 10% (2) an Amber status and 30% (6) were attributed Red status.

With reference to Appendix A to the report and the performance for this period as aligned to the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, the Committee was given highlights of what had been achieved, the areas for improvement, emerging areas of development and activity, as well as emerging areas of concern.

For ease of reference, at Appendix B to the report, performance exceptions aligned to the Scrutiny Committee's remit highlighted the current status of Red performing actions identified in previous quarters to show direction of travel at end of year. This, in conjunction with further updates and details provided on these performance exceptions by the Head of Housing and Building Services (with support and assistance from the Operational Manager, Regeneration) at the meeting, would help enable Members to quickly gauge whether proposed remedial actions had been undertaken in year to progress those actions.

Following the presentation of the report, the Committee raised a number of comments and queries. This included Councillor Hennessy's queries on the Service Plan Actions for maximising Council rented accommodation in relation to the Eagleswell Road development; namely, its progress, when would the new occupants take ownership here and whether its use would solely be for housing Ukrainian refugees. Members were informed that there would be a special meeting of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Planning Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> July which would be considering and deciding upon this development. In the meantime, the Council continued to take delivery of additional units for the site with groundworks ongoing. Occupancy for the site would be subject to the development having been approved at the Planning Committee meeting. On whom the occupants for this development would be, no assurance could be given that these would solely be made up of Ukrainian refugees, although these would be the primary group that the accommodation would be used for. However, due to changing circumstances in the Ukrainian refugee situation and the need to house

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families currently living in temporary accommodation for long periods of time, meant that the occupancy criteria for this development had to be reassessed in order to fully utilise this development and the availability of family sized units there.

Councillor Morgan commented on the work being undertaken by the Council and partners with older residents in their communities, and that it was extremely positive to see how this was clearly set out and highlighted in the report and by the Head of Housing and Building Services at the meeting tonight.

Councillor Lloyd-Selby referred to the performance exception CPM/096: Percentage of all households where a positive prevention action succeeded in preventing / relieving homelessness and no commentary having been provided for this. She sought more information on this area, due to it being an area where the Council would clearly have taken positive action with some success. It was explained that a narrative was provided for this performance item, but this had not subsequently been added to the final draft. Unfortunately, there had been a drop in the percentage rate / performance levels with regard to taking such preventative action, as compared to pre-COVID levels, which had previously stood between 70-80% of homelessness cases being prevented. A number of factors were involved, including higher levels of landlord evictions and issuing of the relevant notices, limited capacity in the private rented sector and higher rental costs therein, with local housing allowance rates not keeping up with these and a general lack of affordable housing supply in Wales and the United Kingdom overall.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Q4 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2023/24 commitments as aligned to the 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.

Reason for recommendations

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