

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 4th December, 2024.

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

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

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, G.M. Ball, S.J. Haines, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy and S. Lloyd-Selby.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale); G. Doyle, H. Smith and V. John (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representatives); Councillors C.P. Franks, 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).

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”.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors B. Loveluck-Edwards (Vice-Chair) and H.M. Payne; and D. Dutch (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representative).

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 6th November, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillors J. Aviet and W.A. Hennessy declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 4 – Initial Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Revised Budget 2024/25 and Proposals 2024/25 (Reference) – as they were both Council tenants.

No.

INITIAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET REVISED
BUDGET 2024/25 AND PROPOSALS 2025/26 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 28th November, 2024 was presented by the Head of Finance / S151 Officer.

Following the presentation, Officers advised the following:

- Regarding spending on consultancy fees, consultants were used in Housing Services, for example, to assist in the building of a new IT system; to conduct background work on the development programme; and in more general terms, where there was not the expertise amongst in-house teams.
- There was a typographical error in the table at the end of paragraph 2.12, which should refer to 2024/25 and not 2023/24.
- Where paragraph 2.15 referred to a reduction in the provision for bad and doubtful debts of £191k, based on 3% instead of 4% reflecting collection rates, this meant that collection rates had been more successful than previously anticipated.

With no further questions, committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the Cabinet reference and appended report be noted, subject to the typographical error regarding the financial years covered in paragraph 2.12 being corrected.

Reason for recommendation

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

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

The reference from Cabinet of 28th November, 2024 was presented by the Head of Finance / S151 Officer.

Following the Officer's presentation, they advised the following in response to queries from Committee Members:

- Work was being carried out by Officers to lobby for increased funding, through the Council's networks, and with the Welsh Local Government Association. This included pointing out flaws in the formula used to calculate the level of funding from Welsh Government that the Council received. However, for significant changes to be made to the funding formula, all 22 Welsh Local Authorities would need to agree to such changes.

With no further questions, Committee subsequently:

No.

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

Reason for recommendation

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

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

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager, who provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2024. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by directorate from approval at Council on 6th March through to 30th September, 2024, including any changes requested within the report.

The report set out any requested changes to the 2024/25 and future years' Capital Programme and noted the current approved Programme of £137.168m.

It was important to note that many areas were continuing to experience an increase in costs associated with delivery of schemes. Tenders were being received over the current allocated budgets and officers were reporting the requirement to re-negotiate submitted tenders.

Schemes would be closely monitored over the coming months and it was anticipated that slippage requests would be requested in future reports.

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

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

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

No.

(4) T H A T Committee write to the Police and Crime Commissioner, as a supporter of the Council on funding matters previously, and following their presentation to Committee, to emphasise the need for ongoing funding for measures such as CCTV to assist in combatting domestic violence.

Reasons for recommendations

(1-3) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

(4) In order to highlight the need for and to encourage further support with funding, particularly on an ongoing basis.

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

The performance report was presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services, who apprised Committee of Council's progress at Quarter 2 (1st April to 30th September, 2024) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Following a proof of concept using the Council's existing Corporate Performance Framework of measures and actions to develop its use of Power BI to support performance reporting, a Quarter 2 performance snapshot had been produced for the current Annual Delivery Plan (2024/25) which was detailed in the presentation appended to the report at Appendix A. The snapshot provided an overview of progress against planned actions and performance indicators aligned to the Council's 4 Well-being Objectives and listed any exceptions (Red actions attributed a Red RAG rating) in an accessible format. This had been produced as part of developing the Council's approach and would be subject to further refinement informed by the views of officer colleagues and Elected Members throughout the 2024/25 performance reporting period, with a view to informing the Council's monitoring and reporting arrangements for the new Corporate Plan 2025-30. The Council was currently working towards producing Scrutiny Committee remit specific performance snapshots which would be reported at Quarter 3.

The presentation appended at Appendix A to the report provided a summary of progress against the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2024/25. Slides 2-7 of the presentation provided a performance summary of the Annual Delivery Plan at Quarter 2. Slides 8-12 provide a Committee specific overview of progress against the ADP priorities as aligned to the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Quarter 2 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance. Upon consideration, the Scrutiny Committee was recommended to refer their views and any recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

Following presentation of the report, Officers advised the following in response to Member questions:

No.

- The repurposing of the former hotel, Olive Lodge, into temporary accommodation for the homeless was progressing very well, and it was planned that it would be available for letting in March or April 2025. A report was due to be presented to Cabinet shortly, regarding appropriating the former Community Centre, Cadoxton House, for similar use.
- There were currently no families housed by the Council in bed and breakfast accommodation, with the last family having successfully moved on in the past week. This success was due in part to going live with the new temporary housing development at Eagleswell in Llantwit Major.
- Individuals who appeared to be street-homeless and had originated in other areas but were now presenting as though street-homeless in The Vale of Glamorgan, had recently been highlighted to The Council. Once investigation had been carried out, most, if not all such people, had been found to have accommodation options elsewhere. Some such people in the Barry area may have given up their access to accommodation voluntarily. Financial reasons, rather than access to accommodation were often the reason for such individuals travelling to the Vale, and while the Council had a humanitarian responsibility to them and needed to investigate the matter, the Authority where they held a local connection held the overall responsibility for their housing needs. This was not a new issue or one that was unique to the Vale.
- The Council funded the Pobl One Stop Shop in Barry town Centre, where staff could offer outreach support to individuals facing housing issues and signpost them to other agencies, if needed.
- A very small number of individuals had exhausted all temporary accommodation options and had not been able to sustain a placement. In these circumstances, the Council worked with third sector agencies who may be able to support them. While the Council did not give up on an individual in need, it could be very difficult to assist when a client may not wish to engage with the Council, and alternative accommodation was not always available at short notice.
- All available options were looked into by Officers to avoid anyone being on the streets, particularly in colder weather, and there were other initiatives such as church-based organisations in Cardiff for instance, that aimed to assist people when pressures increase during the winter.
- In circumstances where there was no local connection to The Vale of Glamorgan, the Council could assist them, for example, to travel to the Authority where they did have a connection. If a person who was vulnerable presented with an immediate need, the appropriate assessments and referrals would be made, and another Authority could be contacted if it was necessary to try to secure emergency accommodation.

With no further questions, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the Quarter 2 performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25 commitments, as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, within the remit of the Committee, be noted.

No.

(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.

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.

QUARTER 2 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25 (DEH) –
(Matter which the Chair had decided was urgent by need of ensuring clearance of the Cabinet Report prior to publication and consideration of the Q2 Revenue Monitoring position on a timely basis and alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 Refresh and Update Report)

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager, who advised the following:

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

Across the services inflationary pressures were also being experienced in respect of pay, most notably where market forces were being utilised and for the funding gap between provision for the 2024/25 pay award and the likely pay award for 2024/25. The Council only allocated very limited contractual inflation as part of the 2024/25 budget and no general inflation for some years and this would have a general impact on the resilience of revenue budget. The delays on implementation of savings would also impact the 2024/25 outturn across services.

Unplanned use of reserves of approximately £14.226m, which represented a further increase on the unplanned use of reserves reported at Quarter 1 of £13.629m, the Council had various workstreams progressing to mitigate the unplanned use of reserves and reduce in year overspends.

No.

The majority of the unplanned use of reserves would be met from Service Reserves, however £486k had been shown against the General Fund. It was not envisaged that this funding would be taken from the General Fund at year end and this sum would be the first priority for offsetting or mitigation in year should there be any emerging underspends or areas of mitigation identified in year. This would ensure that the Council Fund was maintained at the policy level for this financial year.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set out for 2024/25 which included a target of £7.676m Corporate savings. The progress against these savings targets was reflected in the Appendix to the report. The Council also continued to monitor the delivery of 2023/24 savings not achieved in year.

In the context of the additional pressures reported as part of Quarter 2 Monitoring, it was now the case that all use of reserves was being considered by Senior Leadership Team to provide additional rigour. Further recruitment controls were also now being implemented equating to a recruitment freeze for posts that did not have statutory requirements. Further examination of the use of Grant Expenditure would be undertaken by the Accountancy team. In addition some workstreams identified as part of reshaping would be accelerated, such as Demand Management in respect of Adult and Children's Social Services and School Transport arrangements.

Following presentation of the report, the Officer advised that the key pressures within this Committee's remit were homelessness and resettlement and the use of hotels and hostels to meet demand.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently:

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2024/25 Revenue Budget, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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