

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 6TH JUNE, 2024

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 24TH APRIL, 2024

“1048 WORK TO TACKLE POVERTY AND THE CURRENT COST OF
LIVING CRISIS (DCR) –

The report, co-presented to the Committee by the Director of Corporate Resources and the Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Insight, provided an update on work being undertaken across the Council and working in partnership with other bodies in the public, private and third sector organisations to tackle poverty, and to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. A holistic view had been undertaken, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data.

The data showed that there were issues of poverty across the Vale of Glamorgan and that the cost-of-living crisis was continuing to cause hardship, with increasing issues of affordability with regards to food, energy and housing.

The report illustrated the breadth of work undertaken to support people into employment, help families and young people through financial and wellbeing support including various sports opportunities as well as developing work within schools to use them as community hubs. 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.

Other work highlighted was around home insulation and energy efficiency, community warm spaces social hubs, the cost-of-living support webpages set up on the Council’s website, Value in the Vale (VIV) volunteering scheme, the support from Shared Prosperity funding, additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and the increase in funds allocated to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to manage the impacts of increasing rent prices in the private rental sector.

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 which underpinned the development of recently approved budget proposals. 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.

A number of questions and comments were raised by the Committee, including:

- On the Chair's queries on the Council's efforts to help rural communities in the Vale access crisis services and to engage and encourage social enterprises, it was explained that the report referenced a range of services that had been set up in the rural Vale such as in Wick, Llantwit Major and St Athan and the Council's efforts to extend these services elsewhere, with additional funding now in place. On social enterprises, the work that the Council was undertaking with Cwmpas to explore the relationship between the Council and the third sector, social enterprises and town and community councils was cited, which offered the opportunity to further develop a response which supported residents across the Vale of Glamorgan.
- The Vice Chair made a number of comments and queries around the positive work of the Older People's Champion and the Council's Age Friendly Team concerning the Age Friendly Strategy, the work of the Housing Team with Council Tenants, the seemingly relatively small number of cost-of-living schemes coming through, any update on the C-Card Scheme and the possibility of the Council continuing the provision of additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of FSM. In response, the Director of Corporate Resources was keen schemes to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis were increased, and the report referred to the use of the Council's Cost of Living Reserve whereby £25k in funding was shared out to 31 applications (out of 75 received), as well as signposting to other forms of support. Going forward, reporting would highlight what were new or existing schemes. On the C Card Scheme there was no additional information at this time, but the work undertaken in conjunction with the new officer in this role was highlighted by the Vice-Chair. On support for those families in receipt of FSM, discussions were underway for using Council reserves, but there had not been any specific conversations on extending this into the summer holidays, but the Council was working with the Health Service to see if more targeted provision and support could be offered via local schools in the summer break; further updates on this would be shared with the Committee.
- Councillor Dr. Johnson, raised a number of points, including the need for an update on the report format i.e. making it easier to follow, less 'broad' and the use of an appendix or table to ascertain the length of schemes, how they were funded, their progress, outcomes, etc. He also enquired on how much of the Cost of Living Reserve had been spent and whether the Council had spoken to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and others on the withdrawal of FSM funding by Welsh Government and following their admission at the High Court they had broken their own law by not providing further funding for FSM vouchers during school holidays. In addition, he raised queries around DHP, expenditure on community payments, rent arrears and the 'rebranding' of a number of projects and schemes linked to this topic and whether these were better or worse than their previous iterations or was the Council simply 'reinventing the wheel' by doing this. On the rebranding of schemes, this was part of an effort to combine and restructure these in a set of aligned, coherent themes and outcomes which would also feed into the Councillor's suggestion on the presentation / format of the report. This would help to provide Members with information in future on a scheme-by-scheme basis, how they were funded, what they were intended to do, what was their impact and the chronology or the timeline behind them. On DHP, the query on whether this rolled over and on Council

tenant rent arrears, further information would be sought from Finance officers and shared with the Committee. Similarly, the query on FSM would be taken back to Learning and Skills officers to answer. Where funding could not be given to community projects due to the £25k allocated having been used, applicants were signposted to other schemes or sources of funding who could assist and in many cases this had been successful.

- Councillor Carroll welcomed the inclusion of information regarding Council Tax Reduction and stated that it was important for the report to consider the impact of higher Council Tax had on residents and households, including the most vulnerable within the Vale of Glamorgan and on their finances. This would help to focus minds at the Council to ensure that money was spent efficiently. In response, the Councillor's comments would be taken back to the relevant team to look at how the impact of Council Tax could be focused on more in reporting, including budgets. The inclusion of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was explained as being due to the feedback from this Committee.
- Councillor Loveluck-Edwards referred to the Welsh Benefits Charter that the Council and other Welsh Local Authorities had signed up to and Universal Credit. She enquired if the Charter could be used to help raise awareness to residents either in or out of work as to what benefits they could claim in light of the cost-of-living crisis. It was explained that the Council had undertaken a number of awareness raising campaigns for residents to claim benefits such as Pension Credit. The Communications Team in the Council would be asked to increase the messaging on entitlements through social media, newsletters, etc. The Chair echoed the Councillor's concerns on the impact of Universal Credit on some of her constituents when trying to increase their working hours, etc., as well as the challenges for people getting support and advice from the Department of Work and Pensions.

There being no further questions, Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the work being undertaken with regards tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis which was a critical challenge within the Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2023-24 and the new Annual delivery Plan 2024-25 be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Welsh Benefits Charter and the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of the cost-of-living reserve to support those in need be noted.
- (4) T H A T the Committee supports and endorses that future reports on cost of living work should be reported to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- (5) T H A T the format of the report be revisited in order to address the comments raised by the Committee on this.

(6) T H A T Cabinet considers continuing the provision of additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of free school meals (FSM).

Reasons for recommendations

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

(6) For Cabinet to consider the comments of the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee as part of its consideration of progress of work to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.”

Meeting of:	Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 24 April 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Work to tackle poverty and the current cost of living crisis
Purpose of Report:	To update on work being undertaken to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.
Report Owner:	Tom Bowring – Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring – Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Due to the corporate nature of this report, no specific Ward Member consultation has been undertaken.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report provides an update on work being undertaken across the Council and working in partnership to tackle poverty, and to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. • This report illustrates the breadth of work undertaken to support people into employment, help families and young people through financial and wellbeing support including various sports opportunities as well as the developing work within schools to use them as community hubs. • This report highlights the work to tackle food insecurity by supporting projects that improve access to food, reduce loneliness and isolation through supporting the development of community spaces, and provide financial support to individuals through a number of schemes. • This report also provides details about the use of the cost-of-living reserve which was established as part of the 2023-24 budget, demonstrating how the Council is matching the use of reserves with the Council’s core priorities as set out in the Financial Strategy which has underpinned the development of recently approved budget proposals. Shared Prosperity funding is also supporting a number of projects that will be helping to target poverty and address the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. 	

Recommendations

1. That Committee consider the work being undertaken with regards tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis which is a critical challenge within the Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2023-24 and the new Annual delivery Plan 2024-25.
2. That Committee consider the Welsh Benefits Charter and the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy.
3. That Committee notes the use of the cost-of-living reserve to support those in need.
4. That the Committee considers if future reports on cost of living work should be reported to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.
5. That the Committee refers this report and any comments to Cabinet for their consideration.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure Committee is aware of the work being undertaken with regards to tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis which is a critical challenge within the Annual Delivery Plan 2023-24 and the Annual delivery Plan 2024-25.
2. To ensure Committee is aware of the Welsh Benefits Charter and the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy.
3. That Committee are aware of the use of the cost-of-living reserve to date.
4. To enable the Homes and Safe Communities to consider progress on cost of living activities as the scope of the Committee includes reducing poverty and social exclusion.
5. To enable Cabinet to consider the comments of the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee as part of its consideration of progress of work to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council has identified the cost-of-living crisis as a critical challenge in this year's Annual Delivery Plan. In addition, the Council has set out how tackling poverty is a key driver for our work, reflected in the Public Services Board's Wellbeing Plan, the Council's Corporate Plan and as part of the Financial Strategy.
- 1.2 The Council identified three critical challenges in the Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) 2023-24, the critical challenges are Project Zero, Cost-of-Living and Organisational Resilience. Due to persisting pressures and the continued need to respond, these challenges have been carried forward to the ADP 2024-25.
- 1.3 In addition to quarterly performance monitoring, progress on Project Zero is reported twice a year to Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet, and there are regular reports on issues relating to organisational resilience including HR and OD issues, risk management, asset management and financial monitoring reports. It is intended as set out in a report on Strengthening Communities to this Committee

in October 2023 that progress on work related to the cost of living is reported twice a year to this Committee and Cabinet. The progress reports will update Members on work relating to tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

- 1.4 A significant amount of work is taking place across the Council and in partnership to tackle poverty and alleviate the pressures felt by the current cost of living crisis. This report endeavours to provide an overview of this work, highlighting the different workstreams and organisations involved.
- 1.5 As part of the 2023/24 budget, the Council established a cost-of-living reserve of £854K to fund work to alleviate the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis. Details of how this funding is being utilised will be included in the twice-yearly progress reports.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Impacts of deprivation and the cost-of-living crisis in the Vale

- 2.1 Our data tells us that there are issues of poverty across the Vale of Glamorgan and that the cost-of-living is continuing to cause hardship, with increasing issues of affordability with regards to food, energy and housing. Three Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the Vale of Glamorgan are identified through WIMD 2019 as being in the top-10% most deprived LSOAs in Wales. A further seven LSOAs are included in the 10-20% most deprived LSOAs in Wales. All ten LSOAs are in Barry. There is a consistent correlation between these areas and higher proportions of people on lower incomes, who are in receipt of Universal Credit and in receipt of unemployment support. There is a recognition that these groups have been identified as most vulnerable to the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis and experiences of deprivation. The Bevan Foundation's [Snapshot of Poverty in Winter 2023](#) found that people on Universal Credit were five times as likely to report that they sometimes, often, or always struggle to afford the basics as the general population. Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has further enforced these findings, highlighting that 90% of low-income households on Universal Credit are currently going without essentials.
- 2.2 Since March 2022, there has been a consistent month-on-month increase in the total number of people in receipt of Universal Credit. As reported in the Vale monthly economic insight report, in December 2023, a total of 11,165 people were in receipt of Universal Credit in the Vale of Glamorgan, 6,811 of those in receipt of Universal Credit were Not in Employment, while 4,356 were In Employment. The cost-of-living crisis has been associated with sharp increases in the rates of inflation, driven by growing food and energy prices. Following its peak of 11.1% in October 2022, Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) has slowed, but remained at 4% in the 12 months to January 2024. Some households experience higher effective rates of inflation as they must allocate a higher proportion of their household income to cover essentials. On average, lower income households spend more of their income on these essentials. In the Vale, in 2022-23 there was a growth in the number of food parcels distributed by Trussell Trust food banks. In 2022-23 in the Vale, 6,610 parcels were distributed by the trust, an increase of 2,202 from the 4,408 distributed in 2021-22.

- 2.3** Utilising this insight, the Council has established and pursued a range of activities to support residents relating to skills, employment, housing, access to affordable food, and energy advice both across the Vale and in the particular areas of most acute deprivation.

Recent National Policy Developments

- 2.4** The Welsh Benefits Charter outlines the aims for the Welsh Benefits system. Welsh Benefits include Free School Meals, Council Tax reduction scheme, Schools Essentials Grant, and Education Maintenance Allowance. At present, these benefits are separate from each other, and people must make different claims to access the support. The Charter aims to make it easier for people in Wales to claim Welsh Benefits they are entitled to. The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip announced the creation of an external steering group, the group is tasked with developing an action plan to streamline Welsh Benefits. In the coming months, colleagues in Revenues and Benefits services will be kept informed on the steering group's work via regular updates that will be provided to the Welsh Revenues and Benefits Managers Group. [Welsh Benefits Charter | GOV.WALES](#)
- 2.5** The Welsh Government have published their Child Poverty Strategy that sets the direction for Welsh Government actions to tackle child poverty over the next decade. Work is underway to understand the implications and expectations that the Strategy will have on Local Authorities, so that we can align priorities with our own work to tackle Child Poverty within the Vale of Glamorgan. [Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024 | GOV.WALES](#)

Key Activities

- 2.6** The following paragraphs detail a range of activities that are being taken forward as part of the Council's activities to tackle poverty and respond to the cost-of-living crisis. These are reflected in the Council's ADP 2023/24 and 2024/25. Appendix A also details relevant performance measures within the Council's Performance Management Framework for 2024-25 which will assist in monitoring progress against this critical challenge.

Support with Employment

- 2.7** There has been significant work undertaken to support people into employment across the Vale of Glamorgan. Throughout 2023 426 individuals have been helped through CELT+ an employability project that supports people to find work, attend training, start a business, update their skills or volunteer. There is also a pod service providing elements of pre-employment support focussing on helping individuals to get ready to look for and consider employment. The pod opened in October 2023 having already seen 160 individuals and a further 108 helped through pod outreach (268 in total). A specialist CELT+ worker has worked with 60 economically inactive individuals in the rural Vale and helped 19 of these into employment.
- 2.8** The Supported Employment Mentors have worked with 95 young people and 13 have entered supported employment.

- 2.9** Engagement figures through Communities for Work (Cfw+) since April 2023 have been positive with 571 engagements achieved against a profile of 450 with 120 job entries and 57 training outcomes being achieved.
- 2.10** Youth Strategy has remained a top priority, with referrals and youth engagement remaining high. Welsh Government figures showed Vale of Glamorgan as the top performing local authority in terms of engagement for 16–24-year-olds, across all local authorities in Wales. The Youth Job Club and 50+ Job Club continue to be successful, being delivered from Barry and Penarth Job Centre Plus.
- 2.11** 11 QuickStart positions have been created and filled within various Council Departments to support young people with a 6-month paid work placement.
- 2.12** An offer of employability support is available in 11 different venues in the Vale to ensure outreach to people in the community. Venues include the Gathering Place in St Athan, CF61 in Llantwit Major, Castleland Community Centre, and the Buttrills community centre in Barry.
- 2.13** Partnership working continues to be positive and effective within the Vale, with regular meetings with CELT+, Working Wales, and Job Centre Plus. Joint events have taken place such as "Look Forward, Step Ahead" that looked at providing support for individuals with criminal records. Further partnership work has been undertaken with Adult Learning Wales, two successful Teaching Assistant courses have been completed, one in Barry and one in Penarth, with a majority of the individuals moving into employment.
- 2.14** A programme of taster courses was delivered in 6 Primary Schools in the Palmerston Cluster from November - December 2023. These included: ESOL Arts & Crafts, Hair and Beauty, Creative Writing (E/Skills) and Art & Craft. Approximately 30 learners participated in learning activities with 60% additionally gaining accreditation. A successful engagement event was held for Family Engagement Officers which included planning and identifying local needs for future provision.
- 2.15** Three new Digital Skills courses for jobseekers have been delivered at Barry Job Centre, Penarth Job Centre and Careers Wales. These were attended by 10 learners. A 6-week programme of Digital Workshops has been delivered at Palmerston Centre promoting Digital Literacy across a range of topics and was attended by 30 learners. A new programme of workshops has been planned for January in partnership with Cardiff Met.
- 2.16** Engagement Funding saw 115 Taster learning activities take place through the summer with 631 participants. In addition, the adult learning team participated in 28 events and engaged with approx. 400 participants.

Support for Families and Young People

- 2.17** Significant work has taken place across the Council to support families and young people with the rising cost of living and related issues. A range of work within our Youth Service has provided vital support to young people by offering various financial and wellbeing support. Throughout 2023, the Youth Service has continued to offer all its venues as warm and safe hubs, providing a range of activities based on healthy living and providing warm drinks and food. All Youth Service activities and sessions are

free, with no cost to any young person attending any open access clubs. Hygiene and period dignity products are also provided at all clubs. The Vale Youth Service has partnered up with the YMCA Healthy Relationship Service to develop the C-Card Scheme which provides free condoms and sexual health information.

- 2.18** A targeted Saturday session has been established using the youth homeless project funding where young people who are at risk of homelessness are supported through the provision of food parcels, wellbeing parcels, hygiene parcels and other measures. Where a session involves a meal activity, attendees are able to take food home for the week ahead. Further targeted support projects are continuing and where identified additional Christmas food hampers were provided to young people and families in need. These families have been identified under the Family Ties project which involves bringing young people together and supporting mediation between families.
- 2.19** The Youth Service are working collaboratively with partners to increase half term holiday activities, and where possible providing at no cost. There has been a widening of support for learners to access additional free activity within their communities, with funding being provided to community groups such as DoJo Training Ltd, a dedicated martial arts meeting space offering support to socially isolated children and an engagement space for the Youth Service.
- 2.20** Work is ongoing with uniformed groups in the Vale, with approximately £12k being used to subsidise annual membership for all young people that require it due to the rising costs of memberships and uniform. There are an estimated 700 young people who will benefit from this support. Funding has been used to subsidise Duke of Edinburgh costs supporting young people with the resources needed for the expedition such as tents etc.
- 2.21** The Energise Youth project, a partnership project between the Sports Development Team and the Youth Service aims to support young people aged 11 – 16 with low physical activity rates and mental wellbeing to improve their health and wellbeing through physical activity. To date 36 young people aged 11 – 16 have been supported to access free activity from a menu of community based physical activity and sports opportunities. The Sports Development Team have liaised with local community clubs and organisations to pull together a menu of activities that are appropriate to this age group and who will hopefully inspire the young people to want to continue with activity once the initial free sessions have finished. The young people are identified by support workers within the Youth Service, who also support them to attend the activity where relevant. As well as supporting attendance at activities, a bank of sports kit is being purchased to support those where lack of appropriate clothing/footwear is a barrier to participation. The project is currently funded through funding secured by the Sports Development Team from Sport Wales. It is hoped that the project will continue to be rolled out in the new financial year with the potential to increase the referring partners where funding allows.
- 2.22** The Sports Development Team works to increase sport and play participation to support health and wellbeing, with a focus on tackling inequalities. The main focus is to support those facing barriers to participation and cost is a large barrier faced by many who want to participate so the team support low cost / no cost activities through projects such as:

- Free extra-curricular activities within schools (with a focus on areas affected by socio economic factors such as Barry)
- Community work – free sports sessions (e.g. skateboarding), disability inclusion
- Library Loan Sports Equipment bags – residents are able to loan out (free) sports equipment bags as they would a library book (piloting in Barry Library at the moment)
- Sports Equipment Loan bags available at Food Pods – families can loan out (free) sports equipment bags for a period of time
- Free online resources - <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/enjoying/Sports-and-Play/Sport-and-Physical-Activity/Sports-and-Physical-Activity-Development.aspx>
- Free activities such as playschemes, Play Rangers, free sports coaching sessions during school holidays
- Pre-school – trying to get affordable sessions linked to community organisations
- Youth Wellbeing programme - free activities for teenagers

2.23 The Vale of Glamorgan Council has also provided support to families through the School Essentials Grant and Free School Meals. The School Essentials Grant is available to assist families on a low income to buy school uniform, sports kit, uniform for enrichment activities, school bags, and stationery. For the year 2023/24 all year groups were eligible to apply for the School Essentials Grant. This has helped with the uptake of Free School Meals as the application was combined. There is a concern that with universal free school meals for primary school children if any year groups are removed from the School Essentials Grant, which has been in the case in the past, then there will be no incentive for them to complete a free school meal application as there is no reason for them to apply. This would impact the level of funding a school receives as it is linked to the number of pupils eligible for free school meals. There are currently 3519 in receipt of Free School Meals, and 3118 School Essential Grants have been awarded.

2.24 There has been a focused effort to provide period dignity products to young people across the Vale at no cost. Since April 2023, 61 Period Dignity Collection Points have been based in community settings across the Vale of Glamorgan within Libraries, Civic Centres, Leisure Centres, Foodbanks, Gyms, Hostels, Youth Centres, Family Centres, Day Centres etc. Additionally, 21 Period Dignity dispenser Units are situated at Collection Points which is 34% of the overall collection points. Approximately 100 home deliveries have been made per quarter to young people. Nearly 90% of schools in the Vale have accessed Period awareness sessions run by a qualified teacher during 2023, with 2477 pupils taking part. Approximately 2000 bags (containing 2 x medium pads, 2 x super pads, 1 x pantyliners) have been sent out to school pupils, home deliveries, refugee groups, and events. All pupils who attended the sessions were offered and received a reusable item, either a reusable pad or a pair of period underwear.

Work with Schools

- 2.25** Our schools continue to be at the forefront of work being undertaken in response to the difficulties that many people are experiencing. A number of schools now run Big Bocs Bwyd and other food and advice projects that are ensuring children and their families have the knowledge, skills and experiences with food to meet their needs and thrive, linking in with partners such as Citizens Advice and others.
- 2.26** One example of a new piece of work being undertaken is within the Pencoedre Learning Community. Colleagues from across the local authority are working together to tackle the inequalities and inequities across our most deprived communities through a Community Focused Schools and Local Authority Partnership approach through the Pencoedre Cluster: A Thriving Community Project which is led by the Executive Head Teacher of Oakfield and Cadoxton Primary Schools and the Director of Corporate Resources. Together colleagues are working through 3 subgroups (Healthy, Safe and Secure) to improve the life experiences of Pencoedre families through creative, collaborative partnership working of key community stakeholders, facilitating the better use of public funds, and delivering social impact. All subgroups have developed measures of success along with a suite of actions to have a direct impact on our families in some of our most deprived areas. The work of the sub-groups has recently been consulted on with a focus group of parents and Family Engagers in order to ensure that they are relevant and appropriate.
- 2.27** There is an increasing focus on meeting the family in familiar spaces with schools being identified as effective community hubs. Family Learning, Citizens Advice and Families First are working with Family Engagers in each school to support families to thrive.

Housing & Council Tax Reduction

- 2.28** The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact households' ability to access and sustain tenancies in the Vale. Private sector rents have risen, by around 12% in the last year and average rents are now nearly double the local housing allowance (this is the maximum amount of benefit paid towards housing costs). There are currently no homes available to rent privately at the local housing allowance rate in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 2.29** Increasing private rents have meant more households joining the Council's Housing waiting list, which has risen to over 6,200 people. They have also made it increasingly difficult for the Council's Homelessness team to secure accommodation for people at risk of homelessness, into private rented tenancies. This has led to an increased use of temporary accommodation, with over 300 households placed in temporary accommodation at any one point in time. It has also led to a situation where the majority of social housing in the Vale is let to homeless people, effectively channelling households down the homeless route.
- 2.30** Council housing rent arrears remain high with over 1,600 Council housing tenants in arrears and average debts rising to £562. The Housing Income team continue to work closely with tenants to provide support and advice and the specialist Money Advisors within the team manage a growing caseload, offering budgeting advice, help with claiming benefits and income maximisation. The team also assist with

grant and loan applications, as well as ensuring people are on the lowest tariffs for utilities.

- 2.31** The Housing team also delivers a range of community investment projects and initiatives to assist tenants to improve their quality of life. These include employability support to help tenants with barriers to employment, health and well being initiatives digital inclusion initiatives and support to get involved in volunteering. These opportunities are available to all Council tenants but promoted towards individuals who may need it most based on tenant profiling data held. The Community Investment work is a key way of promoting tenants well being and sustaining tenancies.
- 2.32** At present 8,977 residents are being assisted with their Council Tax charge through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and for 2023/24 £11,531,901.10 has been paid out in Council Tax Reduction. For 2024/25 this is currently set to increase to £12,321,904.59.

PSB Project – Working in our most deprived communities

- 2.33** As part of this project a Senior Community Development Officer was recruited for a two-year post and is located in the Council's Community Development Team. The officer has been in post since August 2023 and is working with the 3 areas of the Vale that were listed as being in the top 10 most deprived in Wales according to the 2019 WIMD report: Gibbonsdown 2, Buttrills 2 and Court 3. A comprehensive engagement plan has been created and a steering group made up of representatives of the PSB has been established.
- 2.34** The initial stage of this project has been to engage with the wider communities and support organisations in these areas to gain a greater understanding of what the communities need. This has included, but is not limited to: Community Centres, Schools, Organisations, Councillors, members of the community and internal Council departments. Officers have attended focus groups, workshops, events and had 1-2-1 meetings with the public. Following the completion of this wider level of engagement and the identification of common themes across these areas, a more focused engagement will be undertaken to understand the challenges and assets. The aim is to establish strong relationships within the communities and support them to grow community led programmes that will address the challenges they face. and to challenge PSB partners about what changes are needed. The officer is also linking in with other activities in the areas for example the PSB Amplifying Prevention work, Food Vale, and the work in the Pencoedtre school cluster.

Tackling Food Insecurity

- 2.35** The Council continues to be involved with and supportive of projects that improve access to food including the Vale Foodbank, Big Bocs Bwyd and similar school-based projects, food pantries such as the GVS Foodshare at CF61 in Llantwit Major and the Penarth Food Pod run by the Council's housing team.
- 2.36** Welsh Government have recently awarded an additional £68,964 funding to the Vale of Glamorgan Council as part of their Direct Food Support Scheme. This follows the £33,447 previously awarded as part of the same funding scheme earlier this financial year and which was distributed to projects across the Vale. Work is currently

underway with regards to the use of this additional funding in conjunction with funding for food partnership activity through Food Vale.

- 2.37** Work continues to progress in partnership with Food Vale to maximise the use of the Welsh Government funding previously awarded to support Food partnerships in 2023/24. Work to further develop the Vale of Glamorgan's local food partnership, Food Vale, is ongoing through the Food Vale Project Support Officer post hosted within the Food Vale team of the UHB and which is funded through the Welsh Government funding. The postholder who began in the summer of 2023 has responsibility for a range of work, including exploring opportunities on how to create more resilience in the local food system which has seen the establishment of the cross-sector Vale Food Insecurity Workshop Group, widening understanding of food insecurity across the Vale, and supporting developments of new food support projects in our more rural areas to increase access to good quality affordable food. A new project which has received some funding through Food Vale is the Wick Food Hub. The biweekly Food Hub established in December 2023 has improved access to good quality food in the rural community. Based at the local sport pavilion the Food Hub has provided free food every other Saturday alongside a welcoming warm space with free refreshments. The Hub's model is currently being reviewed ahead of a third phase.
- 2.38** Partners are continuing to work together through the Llantwit Food Project, which is led on behalf of partners by two coordinators within Food Vale and the Strategy and Insight Advisory Group of the Council. The monthly More Than Food Hub which brings support agencies together alongside the weekly CF61 Food Share, St Athan Clothes Bank and More in Common Chatty Cafe providing free, friendly, and safe support under one roof continues to be developed.
- 2.39** The success of the project was recently recognised through the project being named as the Ystadau Cymru 2023 award winner. The Ystadau Cymru award, presented by Welsh Government Minister for Finance & Local Government, celebrates collaboration across the public sector. It has a particular focus on shared asset management and the success that can be achieved when different bodies work together.
- 2.40** Recent project activity has seen partners successfully launch a new FoodShare pantry in the Gathering Place, St Athan on the 10th January 2024. The FoodShare is managed by GVS in line with their successful Foodshare Pantry in Llantwit Major and run by their FoodShare Coordinator and a team of local volunteers. This provision helps support access to affordable food in the rural area and has been developed along the same blueprint as the Llantwit Major model to provide wider wrap around support for the community.

Energy Company Obligation 4 (ECO4)

- 2.41** The Energy Company Obligation 4 (ECO4) is the latest UK government scheme (running from 1/04/22 to 31/03/26) that places legal obligations on energy suppliers to deliver energy efficiency measures to domestic premises which are designed to tackle fuel poverty and help reduce carbon emissions.

- 2.42** The Vale of Glamorgan Council is working in partnership with Cardiff Capital Region and the energy company E.ON to support households in poorly insulated homes, making those households more energy efficient and helping lessen the impact of rising energy bills.
- 2.43** Information on the Scheme in the Vale of Glamorgan is published on the Home Energy Efficiency webpage [Home Energy Efficiency \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](http://valeofglamorgan.gov.uk) Regular social media posts are published as well as other outreach work to raise awareness of the scheme including in person engagement and a joint marketing programme (events, flyers and targeted mailing by E.ON) is scheduled to be undertaken during 2024.
- 2.44** Ten applications for ECO4 Flex have been received to date and all have been approved by the Council's Regeneration Team.
- 2.45** The Council's Regeneration Team also administer Interest Free Housing Loans (Local Authority mortgage) to help property owners keep their homes safe warm and secure as well as assist with costs to make properties more energy efficient e.g. replace defective roofs, windows and doors, remedy damp and structural defects and help with the cost of new heating systems
- [Interest Free Housing Loans and Empty Homes Grants \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](http://valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

Tackling Loneliness and Isolation

- 2.46** In 2021 the Vale of Glamorgan successfully bid for 3 years of grant funding from the Welsh Government Connected Communities: Loneliness and Social Isolation funding between 2021 – 2024. The bid, developed by the Vale of Glamorgan Council, GVS and Age Connects ensured the Vale of Glamorgan received £22,727 per year to develop an older people's Westen Vale hub by moving Age Connects into Illtud House, Llantwit Major and to provide a small grass roots community grant funding stream where each year third sector organisations can apply for up to £2,000 to support work tackling loneliness and isolation across the Vale. The grant is managed and administered by GVS with all applications being discussed and agreed by a funding panel with representatives from GVS, Age Connects and the Council. Over the first two years the fund has supported 12 organisations. The third and final grant stream from the Welsh Government Connected Communities: Loneliness and Social Isolation funding 2021 – 2024 saw 15 applications submitted, 9 of which were successful in receiving grant funding and support a range of activity including support with community warm spaces social hubs, befriending services, community transport, refugee community support, activities for people with learning disabilities, and support for mental health and well-being.
- 2.47** Over the last 14 months the Age Friendly Vale team have been working with the Vale 50+ Strategy Forum, colleagues across the Council and partners to deliver activities and events with a social element to directly target loneliness and isolation. This activity aligns to the Age Friendly Vale Charter's eight commitments, specifically that 'people have a sense of purpose, feel respected and are actively engaged in their communities'. In addition to bringing together older people for the purpose of connecting and socialising, activities provided accessible opportunities to get active

outdoors and in nature, take part in crafting, learn a new skill and access information and support on ageing well.

- 2.48** As well as social events for older people, colleagues have been working collaboratively to deliver intergenerational activities within its five sheltered housing schemes across the Vale. Examples include the community garden at Crawshay Court, Llantwit Major, The Big Bird Watch and volunteer makers clubs where older people are working with younger people to craft items for a local wildlife charity. To celebrate achieving age friendly status and joining the WHO's global network of age friendly communities, the PSB hosted an intergenerational event, bringing together partners, community groups and people of all ages for a celebration of age. All events have been delivered free of charge offering free warm drinks and light refreshments recognising the cost-of-living crisis and possible financial barriers to accessing social activities. As part of event planning and communications, information is regularly provided regarding financial entitlements including pension credits.

Warm Spaces

- 2.49** In 2022-23 the Council developed their Warm Welcome Scheme in response to the rising cost of living, that supported a network of Warm Spaces across the Vale. A dedicated Council webpage was developed to provide residents with an interactive map and directory of warm spaces. In addition, Welsh Government awarded the Council £33,196 to further support and develop Warm Spaces with this funding being allocated to 22 warm spaces across the Vale. This provided a further opportunity for the Council to work in partnership with local community groups and organisations, and a legacy of this work is in the relationships built up and an understanding of how working in partnership can assist in tackling issues such as loneliness and isolation. Although there was no further Welsh Government Warm Spaces grant funding in 2023-24, many warm spaces continued to operate within their own budgets, and the Council webpage has been consistently refreshed to reflect. Furthermore, the Council has now utilised a Cost-of-Living Reserve fund to support several existing and new warm spaces. Further information regarding the use of this reserve and the projects supported is detailed below.

Cost of Living Support Webpages

- 2.50** The cost-of-living support webpages are set up on the Council's website and signpost to a variety of support. These webpages are updated regularly with the most recent overhaul of the webpages taking place in October 2023, which added a breadth of new support primarily identified through a mapping exercise during a cost-of-living workshop with colleagues. [Cost of Living Support \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support)
- 2.51** Since June 2023, the cost-of-living webpages have received 32,876 views by 9,174 people.

Volunteer Rewards - Value in the Vale

- 2.52** Value in the Vale (VIV) is the continuation of the previous Timebanking scheme which was initially only open to Council Housing tenants. External grant funding was secured to support the expansion of volunteering among the seldom heard from and broadening the access to people beyond Council Housing tenants.

- 2.53** From October 2022 to October 2023 VIV secured £8,465 in volunteer rewards through partnerships with local businesses and organisations that reward volunteers for their time and has provided support during the rising cost of living. Rewards include free coffees and food at warm spaces and local cafes, toiletries, car parking, car wash, and wellbeing activities for families. Of the £8,465 available in rewards, £1200 has been redeemed at present. Volunteers have also been given the opportunity to gift their rewards to others who may be more in need.
- 2.54** Additionally, the volunteer scheme has provided the opportunity for experience and training which has helped people back into work. The Value in the Vale dedicated website highlights volunteer stories that demonstrates the positive impact the scheme has had on their lives.

[Volunteer Rewards | Value in the Vale](#)

Funding Overview

Shared Prosperity Funding

- 2.55** Shared Prosperity funding is supporting a number of projects that will also be helping to target poverty and address the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Just under £4million has already been committed to Communities and Place projects across the Vale of Glamorgan. This funding has been allocated to support projects that provide a range of services for young people such as leisure activities including bike hire, skate parks and improved green spaces as well as more strategic projects such as the Public Services Board’s Tackling Deprivation and Poverty programme supporting our communities most in need which is detailed earlier in this report.
- 2.56** Funding has also been made available through the SPF programme via our partners GVS who have set up a grant scheme for community organisations seeking small grants to support their communities with small scale cost of living initiatives.
- 2.57** Additional funding has been allocated to the People and Skills theme and many projects supported here will also support the cost-of-living agenda through a new hub in Barry to advise people about skills and employment opportunities and linking with other service providers to support people with a range of cost-of -living advice and services. (This is now open, see <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/index.aspx>)

Cost of Living Reserve

- 2.58** As part of ensuring an effective response to the cost-of-living challenge detailed in the ADP 2023-24, a cost-of-living reserve has been established. The total reserve as of April 2023 was £854,000 and the table below sets out agreed expenditure following the 19th October 2023 Cabinet meeting.

Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s
Opening Balance	854	325.5	100.5
Funding Agreed			
Budget Contribution Free School Meals (FSM)	-200	-100	0
Additional Contribution Citizens Advice	-30	-30	0

Additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of FSM	-220	0	0
Support for community projects	-25	-25	0
Food Bank Contribution	-3.5	-20	0
Discretionary Housing Payment	-50	-50	0
Closing Balance	325.5	100.5	100.5

- 2.59** The Budget Contribution for Free School Meals (FSM) was agreed as part of the budget report in March 2023 to counteract the loss of transitional protection from December 2024. Welsh Government and the WLGA are currently undertaking a review of the price of a Free School Meal. A contribution towards the Schools budget of £200k was agreed for 2023-24 and a further £100k in 2024-25 to offset the increased cost of free school meals.
- 2.60** An additional contribution has been made to Citizens Advice to provide additional funding in recognition of the increase in the volume and complexity of the work that is being handled for Vale residents. A contribution of £30k has been agreed for 2023-24 in addition to their annual grant of £157,335 from the Council.
- 2.61** Additional support in the school summer holidays to those in receipt of FSM has been provided to support families with the cost of food during the school holidays following the decision by Welsh Government to no longer fund this. The projected cost of £220k was allocated to fund this in the summer holidays.
- 2.62** An additional £3,500 was provided from the reserve to the Vale Food Bank (in addition to the grant funding provided via Welsh Government) and a commitment to maintain this level of funding to £20k in 2024/25 recognising the increase in food bank usage in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 2.63** Officers administered £25k to community projects, supporting various organisations to assist people with the rising cost of living. The funding was focused on supporting organisations that address an urgent need such as food insecurity projects (providing funding to purchase foodstuffs, breakfast/lunch clubs), uniform for schoolchildren and warm spaces. In total 75 applications were received with 31 applications awarded funding, these ranged from £100-£2,500. Through making links with officers across the Council and with external partners, extensive signposting to other forms of support and funding was undertaken when communicating outcomes to applicants.
- 2.64** In addition, £50k was allocated to Discretionary Housing Payments in October 2023 which will help to manage the impacts of an increasing rent in the private rental sector causing more shortfalls. There has been an increase in the number of people who could not afford to pay the difference between the Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs awards and the actual rent being charged. Therefore, the additional £50k from the reserve has contributed to the £194k from the DWP and £23k which was previously added as part of the DHP budget. To date £216,442.39 has been paid out and a further £22,660.43 has been committed, with £4,739.34 recovered from overpayments which brings the amount available to £32,677.52.

Strengthening Communities

- 2.65** Committee will note the recent (October 2023) report on Strengthening Communities which set out the Council's approach to progressing recommendations made by Audit Wales to a number of national studies relating to tackling poverty and the Council's approach to working with the third sector.
- 2.66** This work forms a key part of the Council's transformation programme, Reshaping under the Strengthening Communities theme. The work undertaken above illustrates the significant cross-cutting work underway and the work being facilitated by Cwmpas to explore the relationship between the Council and the third sector, social enterprises and town and community councils offers the opportunity to further develop a response which supports residents across the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 2.67** The Committee are asked to consider the range of work being undertaken with regards to the cost of living and tackling poverty detailed in this report. Reports on all of the critical challenges in the Annual Delivery Plan will be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet twice a year in addition to the quarterly performance reports and it is suggested that future reports on the cost of living are reported to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The activities outlined in this report will assist the Council in contributing to the national Well-being Goals and the Council's own Well-being Objectives as detailed in the Corporate Plan 2020-25. The cost-of-living crisis is a critical challenge in the Council's ADP 2023/24 and 2024/25. The work being undertaken also embeds the five ways of working through involvement and collaboration to develop ways forward, to ensure a longer term thinking and more sustainable approach to how we work and with a more integrated programme of activity. In terms of prevention as the work develops officers will be keen to explore the opportunities for a more preventative approach and how the knowledge and experience of other sectors can assist, particularly with work around cost of living and climate change.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are opportunities to make close links between work on cost of living and also work on climate change, for example on reducing energy use and work around food security. We also know that those living in our most deprived communities are often most impacted by the effects of climate change. We will continue to align activities where possible through the Council and the PSB.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The Corporate Plan 2020-25 and the associated Annual Delivery Plans are key tenets of the Council's Financial Strategy.
- 5.2** This report outlines a range of different funding streams contributing to the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis and work to tackle poverty, including an overview of the use of the cost-of-living reserve established in April 2023.

Employment

- 5.3** There are no employment implications as a direct result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4** There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report, however the work detailed in this report aligns with the Council's socio-economic duty and contributes to work to address economic inequity.
- 5.5** Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken as required on particular schemes.

6. Background Papers

[Cost of Living Support \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk) Cabinet Report December 2022

[Cost of Living Reserve Report \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk) Cabinet 18th October 2023

[Strengthening Communities and Tackling Poverty \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk) Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee 18th October 2023

Council Measures Relating to Cost of Living/Poverty			
Ref	Measure	Annual/ Quarterly	Service
Council Support			
New 2024	Percentage of residents agreeing that the council is doing enough to support residents through the cost of living crisis.	A	SAG Data from Let's Talk Survey 2023 COL
Education and Training			
CPM/023	Percentage of Young people leaving year 13 who are not in education, employment or training.	A	Standards & Provision
CPM/024	Percentage of Year 11 leavers known not to be in education, training or employment (NEET).	A	Standards & Provision
CPM/037	Percentage of Young people leaving Year 12 who are not in education, employment or training.	A	Standards & Provision
CPM/043 (Amended)	Percentage of adults on community learning courses achieving nationally recognised awards/qualifications.	A	Strategy Community Learning & Resources (Replaces previous wording of - Percentage success rate on accredited courses for priority learners.)
Advice			
New 2024	Numbers accessing the Money Advice Team for support.	A	Housing & Building Services
Housing			
CPM/046	Number of tenancies maintained six months after receiving Money Advice.	A	Housing & Building Services
New 2024	Percentage of tenants in rent arrears	A	Housing & Building Services
PAM/036	Number of additional affordable housing units delivered during the year per 10,000 households.	A	Housing & Building Services
CPM/096	Percentage of all households where a positive prevention action succeeded in preventing/relieving homelessness.	A	Housing & Building Services

PAM/012	Percentage of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless.	A	Housing & Building Services
CPM/189	Number of all households in temporary accommodation, by type of accommodation: - Private sector accommodation - Public sector accommodation - Hostels and women's refuges - Bed and breakfast - Homeless at home	Q	Housing & Building Services CPM/189
CPM/190	Number of households in temporary accommodation which are families with children.	Q	Housing & Building Services
CPM/139	The average number of SAP rating for the Council's housing stock.	A	Housing & Building Services
CPM/199	The number of private rented properties where energy efficiency has been improved through direct action from Shared Regulatory Services.	A	Shared Regulatory Services
Business/Economy and Employment			
CPM/053	Average vacancy rate in the Vale's main town centres.	A	Sustainable Development
CPM/133	Number of local businesses advised in relation to funding, business planning and new start-ups.	A	Regeneration
CPM/135	Number of community led organisations that are financially supported.	A	Regeneration
CPM/144	Number of businesses financially supported	A	Regeneration
CPM/154	Number of jobs created and safeguarded through the Councils SPF programme	A	Regeneration
CPM/165	Percentage of C4W+ people engaged against target	A	ALN & Wellbeing

Health			
New 2024	Percentage of residents describing their physical health as being fairly or very good.	A	Neighbourhood Services & Transport SAG will provide data from Let's talk survey 2023
New 2024	Percentage of residents describing their mental health as being fairly or very good.	A	SAG will provide data from Let's talk survey 2023
Arts and Culture			
CPM/069	Percentage of people attending or participating in arts, culture or heritage activities at least 3 times a year.	A	Strategy Community Learning & Resources National Survey of Wales. SAG provides data.
Transport			
CPM/068	Percentage of adults 60+ who have a concessionary bus pass.	A	Neighbourhood Services & Transport
New 2024	Percentage of residents who use the following public or active travel options in the Vale of Glamorgan: a) Public transport b) Walking routes c) Cycling routes f) Community transport	A	Neighbourhood Services & Transport SAG will provide data from Let's talk survey 2023