

No.

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 15th January, 2025.

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

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

Present: Councillor J. Protheroe (Chair); Councillor E. Goodjohn (Vice-Chair); Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, P. Drake, R. Fisher, C.P. Franks, H.C. Hamilton, S.M. Hanks, Dr. I.J. Johnson, B. Loveluck-Edwards and N.J. Wood.

Also present: Councillors G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) 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”.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING MID-YEAR SUMMARY REPORT – NOVEMBER 2024 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 19th December, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented with the Head of Service for Human Resources advising that the report provided an update on the arrangements in place for safeguarding children and adults at risk. A Corporate Safeguarding Group (CSG) also ensured that there was scrutiny and assurance for corporate safeguarding arrangements. The work of the CSG continued to take place with the focus on the strategic overview of safeguarding activities across the Local Authority and a conduit for exploring emerging issues and priorities that were cross-cutting. The CSG met on a quarterly basis and representatives had shared areas of priority and emerging themes. The report also highlighted that recommendations from Internal Audit which had taken place during 2023/24 had been actioned with the CSG regularly updating progress against specific actions and identified officers’ responsible for taking forward specific areas of work and providing progress updates.

Councillor G. Carroll, having regard to the recent reports in the press of the “grooming gang scandal” enquired as to whether the Council was aware of any such incidents having taken place in the Vale of Glamorgan although he was very confident that there were none, he sought assurance from the Head of Service. In

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response, the Head of Service said that she was not aware of any incidents but that she would seek an update from the Director of Social Services and provide a written response to all Members of the Committee.

The Chair also enquired as to whether contractor safeguarding responsibilities were referred to in tender packs and again, the Head of Service advised that she would check the position and advise Members accordingly.

Councillor Carroll subsequently recommended (seconded by Councillor Wood) that the Council undertook a review of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy in light of the “grooming gang scandal” to ensure any lessons learned from other Local Authorities were considered. A number of Members however did not feel that the current report warranted that type of review at this stage. Councillor Dr. Johnson enquired as to what format the review may take, in particular relating to timescale, what the review should cover as well as what the Committee would consider the intended outcome to be.

Councillor Carroll said he was looking for an understanding of how other Local Authorities had dealt with it, what the failings were so that the Vale Council could learn from any failings. He again reiterated the fact that he was not suggesting that there were any concerns in the Vale, but that he suggested the review be undertaken in light of the “grooming gang scandal” within the UK.

Councillor Loveluck-Edwards, having heard the rationale for the review, said that she was still no clearer for the necessity at this stage and that, in her view, the requirement for a review of the Vale of Glamorgan Council’s policy needed to be evidence based and as far as she was aware there was none. She was also aware that the whistleblowing legislation also gave a level of protection and that she would not be in agreement for a review to be undertaken for a review’s sake.

Following a request a recorded vote then took place as follows:

Members	For	Against	Abstain
George Carroll	√		
Pamela Drake		√	
Robert Fisher	√		
Christopher Franks			
Ewan Goodjohn		√	
Howard Hamilton		√	
Sally Hanks		√	
Dr. Ian Johnson		√	

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Belinda Loveluck-Edwards		√	
Joanna Protheroe		√	
Nicholas Wood	√		
TOTAL	3	7	

Following the vote with the recommendation not being carried, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Corporate Safeguarding Mid-Year Summary Report – November 2024 and the reference be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

AUDIT WALES: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, DECEMBER 2024 (DCR) –

The Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer presented the report advising that as part of the Audit Wales' annual audit work programme for 2023/24, the Auditor General for Wales undertook a review of the Council's financial sustainability during the spring to summer of 2024. Similar reviews were carried out in all 22 Welsh Local Authorities focusing on:

- the strategies to support councils' long-term financial sustainability;
- councils' understanding of their financial position; and
- councils' reporting arrangements to support regular oversight of their financial sustainability.

The key findings from this work across local government in Wales had been pulled together into a national report, at Appendix A to the report.

The key findings of the national report (Appendix A) was that overall, most councils had arrangements in place to support their short-term financial sustainability but had yet to fully develop their longer-term plans. The appended report also provided some context of the financial challenges faced by councils and reflected on what the findings meant for the future financial sustainability of councils and how this could be strengthened. The Chair considered that it was most helpful for the Committee to consider the picture across Wales commenting that the need for multi-year settlements should be considered by Welsh Government. Councillor Dr. Johnson also reiterated that he found that it was important to consider the national and local picture commenting that councils have had to deal with 15 years of cut backs on local funding. He further commented that he thought that the Governance and Audit Committee may be the best committee to consider, together with officers, what could be learned from other Local Authorities in similar situations as the Vale. However,

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the Head of Finance advised that there was no real nearest neighbour in relation to the Vale and the Council was the third lowest spending across Wales and that all councils were different. He also noted the Committee's comments about the budget process being more transparent and he believed that the Council's current budget setting process was very transparent and had a lot of detail within it. He was proud of the work that had been undertaken but he welcomed any improvements that Members could suggest. There was also clear narrative in relation to borrowing and the way the Council used its reserves. Councillor Goodjohn said that the Council had been very prudent in its management of the situation with the Chair agreeing with the comment highlighting that the Council had undertaken really good work and that no council in Wales had filed a 114 Notice.

Councillor Loveluck-Edwards keen to ensure that community engagement took place and that early conversations were undertaken with residents with more focus requested that more community engagement be encouraged going forward.

Councillor Carroll enquired referring to improving productivity asked what actions the Council would be taking in the long term. The Head of Service referred to the reshaping and transformation programme including the Brilliant Basics programme review of systems and processes that was being undertaken. Although the Director commented that some areas would be easier to measure than others it was something that the Council was keeping under regular review.

Following a question as to how much money had been allocated to the Brilliant Basics programme, the Director advised that no dedicated budget had been provided and although some funding was available to support the development of the programme it was being undertaken within existing resources. It was also being resourced by existing Council staff with the intention to adopt the approach throughout all Council Services.

Following a query from Councillor Carroll regarding development of new technology and digital opportunities, the Director said the work being undertaken currently linked with the work being undertaken within Digital Services which the Council was working towards. Councillor Carroll also asked if a further update report in relation to such matters could be presented to the Committee to provide more detail for Members. The Director advised that he would be happy to present that to a future meeting.

Councillor Goodjohn enquired as to whether there could be more external input with regard to the budget setting process with the Head of Service advising that he would be happy to go away and have a think about how that could be achieved.

The Chair, enquiring as to the numbers noted under the ALN provision for students, said that she was surprised by the figures being presented, with the Head of Service also saying that he was similarly surprised at the numbers and would look into it to make sure they were correct.

Scrutiny Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the findings of the Audit Wales’ report on the Financial Sustainability of Local Government, December 2024 (attached at Appendix A to the report) with reference to the findings of the Vale of Glamorgan Financial Sustainability Review Report (presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 20th November, 2024 and appended as a background paper to the report) be noted.

(2) T H A T the report be referred to the Governance and Audit Committee and thereafter to Cabinet with the Scrutiny Committees comments as follows –

- that the Committee’s view that Welsh Government be requested to consider multi-year settlements going forward be pursued;
- that the comparisons with other Local Authorities in Wales and the national picture was important to see the commonalities and differences between Local Authorities with it being suggested that the Governance and Audit Committee may be the best avenue to consider with officers what lessons could be learned from other Local Authorities in similar situations to the Vale;
- that further considerations / initiatives be considered to encourage community engagement;
- that a further report on the work being undertaken within Digital Services be provided to the Committee in due course;
- that consideration be given as to what external guidance could be provided to support the Council’s budget setting process;
- that the figures in relation to the ALN provision for students be reviewed.

Reasons for recommendations

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

(2) To ensure the Council responded appropriately and implemented areas of improvement as identified by Audit Wales and to ensure oversight by the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet.

PROJECT ZERO UPDATE REPORT (DCR) –

The Operational Manager for Corporate Strategy and Insight in presenting the report advised that the report and Appendix A detailed the wide range of activity being undertaken to ensure the Council continued to deliver against commitments in the Climate Change Challenge Plan and to take forward Project Zero with the Operational Manager for Corporate Strategy providing an overview presentation of the report to Committee. This included details of shared examples of ongoing initiatives, for example biodiversity. The RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings of progress against the steps in the Climate Change Challenge Plan were also contained within the report. Progress and developments from April 2024 to September 2024 included: the reporting of the Council’s Carbon emissions for 2023/24 as reported to the Welsh Government, the development of the Carbon

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Management Plan, the reflection of the importance of respecting and celebrating the environment within the draft Corporate Plan 2025-30, and the development of a new Public Services Board (PSB) Climate and Nature Charter.

The report detailed the Council's Net Zero Carbon emissions for 2023/24, as reported to Welsh Government, at section 2.5 and provided Members with an update regarding the finances associated with Project Zero and the use of the Project Zero reserve. The report also provide updates on the PSB work to tackle the climate and nature emergencies which was a priority within the PSB Well-being Plan.

The Chair asked if the Project Zero update could be provided alongside the Carbon Management Plan to future Committee meetings in order that they could be considered alongside each other. Having regard to the increase in emissions, which she said was concerning, she asked whether the formula was working and whether it was based on spend. She was also keen that the Council continued to challenge itself when setting targets. The Director advised that the Project Zero report provided a significant amount of detail, it contained lot of information and officers were looking to see how best the information could be reported going forward.

Although not suggesting that a significant amount of progress would have been made, Councillor Goodjohn enquired as to what progress had been made to date with regard to the discussions that had taken place at the Committee meeting in November where the officer was present from the Wales Centre for Public Policy. The Operational Manager advised that colleagues were looking at all the recommendations from those discussions which were to be considered by the Project Zero board.

Following a query it was also noted that matters being considered by the Committee's Procurement Task and Finish report regarding the supply chain would be reported to Committee in due course with any agreed recommendations subsequently being referred to Cabinet for approval.

Councillor Dr. Johnson said that he was of the same view as the previous two speakers as it was difficult to know the impact for the Council, especially if the Council was not clear on the Welsh Government methodology. He agreed there was lots of information in the report, the RAG rating system could certainly assist the Authority to see where the Council was not succeeding and where it was succeeding. He also asked for more clarity on how such matters would be addressed in the future and how the Council would support organisations to reach the standards it expected. The Director said that in terms of resources and availability to match the scale of the challenge, the Council was aware there was a difference between what it needed to do and the resources to do it. It had considered that within Scope 1 it would look to see what the greatest impact would be and that officers considered this to be a challenge for reporting purposes. The RAG status was used for a broad range of activity and that these were useful in order to scrutinise and challenge. However, he said that he would like to have a future conversation with Members of the Committee around how to present the Carbon Management Plan and progress against targets.

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With regard to flood management plans and surface water issues, Councillor Dr. Johnson asked for the RAG status for such plans to be made available, with the Director advising that he would provide this information via email.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress detailed in the report and Appendix A in relation to the challenges within the Climate Change Challenge Plan and the work of the Public Services Board be noted.
- (2) T H A T the RAG rating of progress from April 2024 to September 2024 in Appendix A to the report be noted.
- (3) T H A T the Council's carbon emission for 2023/24 as reported to the Welsh Government at section 2.5 be noted.
- (4) T H A T the funding available in reserves and the projects awarded funding to date through a variety of routes be noted.
- (5) T H A T the updates on the Public Services Board work to tackle the climate and nature emergencies be noted.
- (6) T H A T the Corporate Performance Indicator data for 2023/24 as relevant to Project Zero at Appendix C to the report, and relevant results from the Let's Talk Survey at Appendix D to the report, be noted.
- (7) T H A T the following comments be referred to Cabinet to be considered alongside the comments of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee following their meeting in January 2025 –
 - that any future Carbon management plan and Project Zero reports be presented to the Committee alongside each other and that a discussion takes place in the future with Committee Members as to how to present progress against targets;
 - that clarity be provided going forward on how the Council was or was not succeeding in relation to the RAG Status;
 - that RAG status information be provided to Members in relation to Flood Management plans and surface water issues.
- (8) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to consider that the report be distributed to all Elected Members, members of the Public Services Board and all Town and Community Councils for their information.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1-6) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

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(7) To enable Cabinet to consider the comments of the Scrutiny Committee as part of its consideration of progress in delivering the Climate Change Challenge Plan.

(8) To update all Elected Members and other stakeholders on the arrangements in place to deliver Project Zero.

1ST, 2ND AND 3RD QUARTER SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKING 2024/25 AND UPDATED COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2024/25 (DCR) –

The report advised Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's historical recommendations and the proposed Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2024/25 –

- 2023-24 Recommendation Tracking (Appendix A);
- 1st Quarter Recommendation Tracking April to June 2024 (Appendix B);
- 2nd Quarter Recommendation Tracking July to September 2024 (Appendix C);
- 3rd Quarter Recommendation Tracking October to December 2024 (Appendix D);
- Updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2024/25 (Appendix E).

The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, in presenting the report, advised that the Committee was being requested to consider the status of the recommendations within the report, it being noted that under the recommendation for the 24th May, 2024 meeting further discussions were to be undertaken with the Operational Manager for Communications around the setting up of a working group to consider how the Council pursued further engagement with the public as part of its Public Participation Strategy. The officer also commented that with regard to the references to Cabinet from the Committee's December meeting referred to in Appendix D, Democratic Services had recently been informed that these had been slipped by the Chair of Cabinet to a February meeting. The status was therefore still noted as ongoing.

The Chair of the Committee also took the opportunity to provide Members with an update in relation to the report of the Procurement Task and Finish Group, stating that it was anticipated that the report would be presented to the Committee before the end of the current financial year.

It was subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the status of the actions listed in Appendices A – D to the report be agreed, it being noted that the report of the Task and Finish Procurement Group was intended to be presented to the Committee for its consideration prior to the end of the current financial year.

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(2) T H A T the updated Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2024/25 attached at Appendix E be updated as discussed in the meeting and uploaded to the Council's website.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To maintain effective tracking of the Committee's recommendations and having regard to discussions at the meeting.
- (2) For public information.