

No.

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 26th March, 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, S.M. Hanks,
B. Loveluck-Edwards and N.J. Wood.

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

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 H.C Hamilton and Dr. I.J Johnson.

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meetings held on 19th February, 2025 be approved as a correct record,

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

CONSIDERATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING POSITION AND THE RELEVANT PRESSURES (DCR) –

The Section 151 Officer/Head of Finance introduced the report, sharing that it followed a conversation during the Quarter 2 monitoring process to further understand the situation surrounding the financial position within social care. He acknowledged that it was a complex Directorate in terms of budget setting and monitoring, and that there was a long-established Budget Programme Board in place within the Directorate. He shared that there was a projected £5m overspend, which was an improvement since the previous quarter, and was largely driven by Children

No.

and Young People Services, where there was increased complexity and placement costs, and that within Adult Services, there was an overspend within community care, but this had been largely offset by other funding streams, alongside a balanced budget within the resource management and safeguarding service area. He finally shared that it was accepted most financial pressures identified during the 2025/26 budget process had been built in but not all and that the service area needed to manage the pressures relating to the costs of Adult Placements and provider fee increases.

Councillor Franks stated that they understood the volatility of demand due to the nature of the work, and that the volatility was always in the opposite direction to costs, and questioned how much longer could the cost pressures be sustained as they represented a large proportion of the Council's budget and how did Central Government expect Councils to deal with these pressures? Councillor Protheroe asked if the Council had considered how it could do things differently? The Section 151 Officer responded that organisationally, the Council was looking at a longer-term approach to financial planning, based upon the principles of Reshaping and Transformation.

The Director of Social Services responded that understanding demand was very complicated, but they could predict a rising aging population, particularly those who were over 85 and would need care and support. However, they noted that there was volatility across all client groups, but most prominent in Children and Young People Services, where they may be required to support an entire family unit. They also reflected that they felt the current system was unsustainable, and despite previous governments looking at reform, there was no sign of immediate change. They further discussed some of their transformation activities, including managing demand, the removal of profit for Children Looked After placements, and working with providers to manage inflationary costs, and that this was monitored by a Budget Programme Board, which reviewed the budget and savings regularly, alongside financial controls from frontline staff challenging spend. They emphasised that some Council services were discretionary, whereas Social Services had a range of a statutory responsibilities.

Councillor Carroll queried if the £5.1m overspend due to Children's Placements and what measures were being taken to counter the volatility? The Director of Social Services shared that they were developing accommodation for those in residential care, including step up accommodation, and looking to increase the number of foster carers, alongside providing pre-birth support to mothers. The Head of Children and Young People Services further responded that there was also a significant role in prevention, and the service was working to reduce those entering care or stepping children down from higher interventions. They also shared that they were working with Llamau and Action for Children to develop accommodation, and currently had 2 homes with 6 beds, and were developing 4 additional beds with Llamau, which would be used for some children currently in residential provision. They finally reflected upon the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), which the Council had to take due to a National scheme where they received an allocation, with 36 young people being supported since the scheme started, who often were placed with providers in other areas. They were working to develop in-house accommodation to support these people and also reflected that government funding to support this area

No.

did not cover all of the associated costs, as needs could be longer term and complex.

Councillor Hanks shared with Members that the Heathy Living and Social Care Budget Working Group had been positive previously, and questioned surrounding vacancy rates and agency spend within the Service, to which the Director of Social Services responded that there were less vacancies in Adult Services than Children's Services, and that there was a place for agency staff when using grant funding but that there were a number of vacancies within Children and Young People Services, and using agency social workers, but this was a problem across the country. They finally shared around the number of staff being supported through a social work course, with 4 qualifying recently and a further 14 people due to qualify in the future.

Councillor Loveluck-Edwards welcomed the report and agreed with the need for a similar item from Education. They also queried if there were plans to work with other Local Authorities surrounding agency workers, and if the Council was being as proactive as possible in providing support and future proofing the service by transformation, rather than firefighting. The Director for Social Services responded that the Council had signed up to an Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru pledge to reduce dependency and manage cost surrounding agency social workers, and to try and stop people from leaving the sector, which was being considered to be rolled out to Adult Social Care in the future. They emphasised that the funding model was not fit for the future, and the differences in Wales and England surrounding pay, income and demand opportunities due to the differing legislation.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T Committee receive a further report on the financial position in schools following the detailed briefing provided to all Members recently.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and the details provided by the officer at the meeting.

QUARTER 3 REVENUE MONITORING 2025/25 – CABINET: 6TH MARCH, 2025 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Section 151 Officer / Head of Finance. The Section 151 Officer/ Head of Finance provided an overview of the Council's outturn position up to December 2024, alongside a forecasted year end position. He highlighted that there was a balanced budget, with a range of underspends and overspends across Directorates, alongside the £12.7m unplanned use of reserves, which was driven by pressures such as schools' budgets, transport, additional learning needs (ALN) and Children and Young People Services. He reflected that this was an improvement

No.

from the Quarter 2 position, and was supported by improving income, holding vacancies and the recovering of historical Council Tax arrears. He also highlighted the £7.6m savings target, with 77% savings achieved year to date, alongside the year end reserve balance of £53.4 million.

Councillor Carroll queried the impact of redundancy and retirements within schools in relation to the £5.7m overspend, to which he was advised that the Early Retirement/ Redundancy Committee had been convened to consider any requests for redundancy, and there were schools holding vacancies and not recruiting to posts. He also queried if home to school transport challenges were due to the primary modes of travel, or for more specialist transport, such as taxis for those with additional learning needs, which was confirmed, alongside the reason for the increase of 121 pupils.

Councillor Protheroe queried what the Council was doing to manage the unplanned use of reserves to control spend, to which the Section 151 Officer responded that there were challenges from all managers currently surrounding the necessity of spend, people were holding vacancies, with recruitment activity requiring SLT approval and that there were a range of transformation workstreams being undertaken across the Council.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 31ST DECEMBER, 2024 – CABINET: 6TH MARCH, 2025 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Section 151 Officer / Head of Finance. The Section 151 Officer provided an overview of the current Programme, which sat at £89.933m. He noted that many areas were experiencing increase costs, and that there were many tenders being received above the allocated budget requiring re-negotiation. He highlighted schemes being delivered, including a £470k Small Grant Scheme to childcare providers in the Vale and a £296k Brilliant Basics Toilet Refurbishment grant. He also identified that there were a number of changes to the Capital Programme as highlighted within the report.

Councillor Goodjohn queried when vehicles would be delivered for the Vehicle Replacement Programme. Councillor Protheroe suggested that there was a role for procurement, in exploring how bids could be published to not exceed budgets, to try and control cost as previously discussed at Committee. The Section 151 Officer agreed to further explore this.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

No.

Reason for recommendation

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

RESHAPING SCRUTINY – CABINET: 6TH MARCH, 2025 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th March, 2025 was presented by the Operational Manager – Democratic Services. The purpose of the report was that the Committee had the opportunity to consider the draft Scrutiny proposals and provide feedback as part of the programme of consultation.

The Operational Manager – Democratic Services presented a summary of the proposals being presented to review the Council's Scrutiny arrangements, which were being motivated by a range of internal and external drivers, such as responding the recommendations from Audit Wales, the Performance Panel Assessment and reflecting the Council's new Corporate Plan, Vale 2030. They presented a range of proposals which were being considered to strengthen the Scrutiny function; including:

- Removal of information only / noting / presentation items;
- Training for officers and Elected Members surrounding the value of Scrutiny
- Reducing from 5 Committees to 4 Committees;
- Reviewing the remits of Committees;
- Introduction of investigative scrutiny (via Task and Finish);
- Changing of frequency of Scrutiny meetings to bi-monthly;
- Amending the Corporate Plan's performance monitoring arrangements;
- Enhanced recommendations monitoring.

Councillor Protheroe indicated that they agreed with the need to align the Corporate Plan and consider new ways of working, and to stop spending Committee time debating reports where no meaningful value could be made. They sought further information for what the longer-term plans were for Scrutiny improvement, to which the Operational Manager – Democratic Services shared surrounding training that was being commissioned via WLGA, undertaking a skills and experience audit with Members, the exploration of co-option opportunities, particularly thinking about youth voice, and the opportunities for wider public participation within investigative scrutiny.

Councillor Goodjohn welcomed the proposals as positive and emphasised the devolution of power to back bench Members to direct policy making via Task and Finish as an opportunity to add value. They stated that it was not about people doing less work, but using time better to make proposals, and felt Task and Finish was an opportunity to link with Citizen Assemblies model. They reflected concern over the structuring of Committees, as Start Well would be responsible for a significant proportion of the Council's budget currently, and Place also seemed to have a large portfolio.

Councillor Wood indicated they would await firm proposals before commenting.

No.

Councillor Franks wanted to ensure Members could easily request an item on an agenda moving forward, and if excessively long reports would be a thing of the past. They also questioned if the relevant Cabinet Member should be in attendance. The Operational Manager – Democratic Services responded that all Members were able to suggest items for an agenda currently, and at the start of the year, a session would be held with all Committee Members to help devise a Forward Work Programme. They also indicated that work was being undertaken with officers surrounding emphasising the value of scrutiny of work, but acknowledged there would be no guarantee of reduced reports as it is important for officers not to lead Members.

Councillor Loveluck-Edwards asked how the evidence of the impact of any changes would be monitored, and if there were any emerging themes from consultation to date. The Operational Manager – Democratic Services responded that public perception would be measured via the Let's Talk About Life in the Vale survey, with an iteration due shortly, and then every 2 years, as there were specific questions surrounding residents' ability to get involved and perception of decision making. Bench marking could also be undertaken as Data Cymru were supporting with a wider national survey. This would also be reviewed by Internal Audit following implementation to ensure the desired outcomes were achieved. They also shared how they sought to promote this work and raise awareness through a number of channels, including social media. They indicated that there had been emerging themes similar to those raised in this meeting; including the number and structure of Committees, but that all of these views were being fed back to Cabinet accordingly.

Councillor Carroll indicated that his Group did not support the proposed reduction of 5 to 4 Committees as there would be an increased workload for other Committees and would reduce the capacity for scrutiny. He also shared concern for the timeline and felt that proposals felt rushed and should come back to Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The Operational Manager – Democratic Services responded proposals had been developed iteratively through a series of Member sessions from October 2024 to present, and that the final proposal would be shared with Members in a briefing session, and not a formal Committee due to the timelines involved and the number of Committee meetings at which this proposal had already been considered.

Councillor John shared that it was not the first time the Council had undertaken Task and Finish, and it provided an opportunity to look at areas of concern, which would play a big part of change moving forward.

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T Cabinet be asked to review the proposed Committee structure and remits based upon feedback from Members
- (2) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

No.

ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE 2024/25 (DCR) –

The Director of Corporate Resources presented the performance report, which showed performance to overall be Green. They highlighted that 87% of actions were Green, and that there were a large number of measures which were annual, which would be available at the end of the year. They shared emerging areas of concern including financial pressures, workforce, grant funding, workforce and Project Zero.

Councillor Protheroe questioned what improvements were being made to the Council's Contact Centre, C1V, to which the Director of Corporate Resources responded that support was being provided to the team from a resource perspective, including training and developing a recruitment pipeline. They also shared that digital presented an opportunity to look at how people interacted, and that work was underway to explore the top 20 customer journeys, as there was an appetite for customers to use them, which would shift demand in the Contact Centre to focus upon conversation where human interaction was needed.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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