

HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Special Hybrid meeting held on 24th May 2024.

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

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

Present: Councillor J.E. Charles (Chair); Councillor N.C. Thomas (Vice-Chair); Councillors G.M. Ball, C.M. Cowpe, R.E. Godfrey, S. Lloyd-Selby, J.M. Norman, and C. Stallard

Also present: Councillors C.P. Franks, H.C. Hamilton, W.A. Hennessy, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport, and Wellbeing), Dr. I.J. Johnson, and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

76 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.”

77 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors I.R. Buckley, C.A. Cave and A.M. Collins.

78 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

79 CALL-IN- COUNCILLOR C.P. FRANKS - SOCIAL CARE RECORDS SYSTEM – CABINET: 25TH APRIL 2024 -

The Call-in was received from Councillor Franks following consideration by Cabinet on 25th April 2024 (Minute No. C319 refers).

Councillor Franks called the item in due to the fact that they considered it important for Members of the Scrutiny Committee to fully consider and understand the issues surrounding the proposed procurement of a replacement Social Care Records System for Care Director (WCCIS) that would become end of life by January 2026. Therefore, Committee needed to consider the issues, risk, and value for money before the Cabinet decision was progressed.

The Cabinet report presented sought approval from Cabinet to enter into an agreement with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MCTCBC), Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) and Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) regarding the procurement of a replacement social care system for CareDirector (WCCIS) that would become end of life by January 2026.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council was currently contracted to CareDirector, more commonly known as WCCIS (The Welsh Customer Care Information System) and the report outlined the current situation with regards to the system, when the contract ended, and the timescales for decisions that would be required in future months with a view to procuring a new system.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health was supported at the meeting by the Director of Social Services, as well as the Head of Digital, to provide a response to the call-in.

In introducing the report, the Chair advised that the meeting had been arranged in line with the Council's Call-In procedure as per section 7.24 of the Council's Constitution and that the running order would reflect the criteria as set out in 12.4 of the Scrutiny and Cabinet Roles and Responsibilities Protocol. The Chair also took the opportunity to remind Committee of its remit, to safeguard those who are vulnerable, and therefore to consider the matter under that objective.

The Chair then invited Councillor Franks to address the Committee in support of the call-in submitted. To which, Councillor Frank raised the following points:

- Councillor Franks was thankful for the Committee accepting the call-in as the matter was an important one to review given the significant increase in costs involved.
- It was concerning that the report was not clear on who was responsible for the project and that no substantial reports on the matter had been presented to Scrutiny in recent years.
- With the greatest respect for Social Services staff, the question was raised as to their ICT qualifications and expertise in order to manage the service.
- The report before the Committee was full of financial risk and yet did not set out any accurate costings for the project, neither did it state the impact on service users should the project fail.
- In summary, Councillor Franks questioned who was driving the project as well as who was politically answerable in terms of Cabinet Member for the project and suggested that Cabinet be asked to provide a comprehensive response to their questions.

Following Councillor Frank's representations, the Chair subsequently invited the responsible Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health to provide their response. To which, the Cabinet Member stated the following:

- The report put before the Committee recognised that the Council needed to start the process of upgrading the Council's records system due to the fact that the system the Council currently had in place, as part of the WCCIS programme, which was a collaborative Welsh Government backed

programme, was not supported past January 2026. It was acknowledged that the report did not have all of the detail at the current time.

- The Council had a Head of Digital officer who had the expertise to lead the project and therefore the project was not reliant on Social Services Directorate staff, however, Social Services staff were fully involved in the project in order to inform service delivery and requirements.
- The report set out previous procurement difficulties, as well as the context, and that there was a dedicated organisation for Wales looking into that matter. However, with the fast-approaching deadline for a new system, and no clear way forward at this time, the Council had had to take a proactive look at other ways to move forward with the project using recognised industry frameworks.
- In terms of any financial risk, funding was available from Welsh Government, but the funding had not yet come forward but was expected as the project progressed.
- The Vale of Glamorgan Council had engaged with other neighbouring Local Authorities: Merthyr, Rhondda Cynon Taff, and Bridgend, as said Authorities were already making headway and therefore the Council wished to capitalise on the experience and success of the other Local Authorities.
- The report also stated the various clauses were put upon the project to protect the Council going forward and detailed how the project was in the developmental and scoping stages, and therefore specific answers could not be provided at the current time.
- It was also recognised that developments in technology were happening very quickly and was committed to collaborating with other Local Authorities as well as securing Welsh Government funding in order to move the project forward.
- Key officers involved in the project were meeting up to twice a week in order to maintain progress, and gather further detail to start the process, and further reports would be provided to Cabinet in due course

Following the Cabinet Member's representations, the Chair confirmed that no registrations to speak had been received from members of the public in relation to the item and therefore non-Committee Members were next invited to address. With no indications received from non-Committee Members, the Chair subsequently opened Committee debate.

Councillor Godfrey began discussion on the item by expressing his concerns over the lack of budgetary figures mentioned within the report as well as potential costs in relation to partnership working with other Local Authorities such as Rhondda Cynon Taf that the report stated would be leading on the project. In response, the Cabinet Member reiterated that £2.67m in funding had been allocated by Welsh Government from the Digital Priorities Investment Fund for 2024/ 2025 and a necessary tendering process would be undertaken which would provide the Local Authorities with relevant costings and breakdown figures across the partnership authorities.

Councillor Lloyd-Selby then commented that the Vale of Glamorgan Council needed a fit for purpose system in a relatively short period of time and therefore the report before Committee set out the relevant provisions in what was the early

stages of the project. The Councillor also noted that there had been some user testing of a new system and therefore queried if any feedback had been received as a result. Finally, Councillor Lloyd-Selby sought confirmation that the project working group, which would be leading on the tendering process, would report back to Cabinet at the appropriate time with final cost implications. In reply, the Cabinet Member reiterated that the project was in the early stages of the procurement process and confirmed that the relevant working group would be reporting back to Cabinet at a future date in relation to relevant costings.

In response to a comment from the Chair of the Committee in relation to any possible safeguards that would be put in place to prevent any disastrous cost increases, the Head of Digital advised that the procurement process was taking place on a national scale as per the process undertaken for the previous system WCCIS. Therefore, the regionalised and collaborative approach had meant that costings were not yet available, and it was not until the Vale of Glamorgan had a final business case from Welsh Government and confirmation from Digital Health Care Wales (DHCW) that it would be in a position to confirm the costs. In response to the user testing question raised by Councillor Lloyd-Selby, the Vale of Glamorgan was not at a solid user testing phase, but it had sat with three other providers to check that the new suggested system would align with Vale of Glamorgan service requirements.

In response to Councillor Cowpe's request for further explanation into the qualifications of Social Services staff, the Cabinet Member reiterated that the Vale of Glamorgan Council had both a Head of Digital and Operational Manager for ICT in place to utilise their expertise on the project and Social Services Staff would bring their own expertise to the project in terms of service requirements. Service users would be consulted later on within the process; however, this was still a long way off. The Cabinet Member had requested the Director of Social Services to move forward with the project in partnership with ICT colleagues.

As a supplementary point, Councillor Cowpe applauded the Vale of Glamorgan Council for working with other Local Authorities to draw on their previous knowledge and expertise to date, however noted that other ICT systems across the Social Care Directorate did not function or talk to each other in-house or over neighbouring authorities which was a massive concern. Therefore, Councillor Cowpe queried whether the new system would link in with Welsh community care information systems and/or other Local Authority services and systems. In response, the Director of Social Services advised that the report put before Committee was in relation to an in-house social care records system for the Council and therefore it was not anticipated that the new system would integrate with other external systems. However, any future development of a digital shared record across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan areas would enable the Council to look across different ICT systems, as Councillor Cowpe exemplified, but that was a separate matter. The Council would want to ensure that with any system that was purchased, the system would have the ability to add sharing functionality in the future.

The Chair then raised a recommendation that Scrutiny Committee be given the opportunity to review the proposed agreement before Cabinet sign off. In

response, the Director of Social Services reminded Committee that the timeliness of the project had been a great concern and that any future reporting would need to be taken to scrutiny meetings following the August recess. Therefore, if the Director was unable to progress with Cabinet approval over the August recess period, it could result in the Vale of Glamorgan Council not being able to progress with the rest of the regional partners on the project as well as fail to procure a systems package by January 2026. As a result, the Chair subsequently withdrew their recommendation.

In conclusion, Councillor Lloyd-Selby commented that it was critical that the Vale of Glamorgan collaborated with other Local Authorities in a timely manner and therefore suggested that the Committee support the recommendations as presented within the Cabinet report.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked all participants for their attendance and brought the meeting to a close.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the resolutions of Cabinet made on 25th April 2024 (C319), in relation to the Social Care Records System report, be endorsed.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to discussion held at the meeting on the contents of 25th April 2024 Cabinet report as presented.