

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 11th September, 2024.

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

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

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards (Vice-Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, S.J. Haines, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, S. Lloyd-Selby and H.M. Payne.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale) and G. Doyle and V. John (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representatives) and Councillors G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing) and S.D. Perkes (Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement).

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 G. Ball and M.J.G. Morgan and D. Dutch (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representative).

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 10th July, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor J. Aviet declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 6 - Closure of Accounts 2023/24, Agenda Item 7 – Capital Closure of Accounts 2023/24 and Agenda Item 8 – Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring 2024/25 in that she was a Council Tenant.

Councillor W.A. Hennessy declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 6 – Closure of Accounts 2023/24, Agenda Item 7 – Capital Closure

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of Accounts 2023/24 and Agenda Item 8 – Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring 2024/25 in that he was a Council Tenant.

ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORT: 2023/2024 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 18th July, 2024 was presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services.

Cabinet had been updated on the work that had been undertaken in relation to corporate arrangements for safeguarding across the Council.

There was corporate responsibility to ensure that there were effective arrangements in place for safeguarding children and adults who required specific Council services. The Annual Report 2023/24 provided an overview of the Corporate Safeguarding activities taking place across the Local Authority.

Following their presentation the officer advised of the following in response to Committee Members' questions:

- Although there were no direct resource implications at a corporate level identified by the report, an increased awareness of people's legal responsibility to report safeguarding concerns did have an impact in terms of increasing demand on services. This was particularly relevant within Social Services, although the numbers of referrals for adults specifically had plateaued.
- Multi-agency referrals (MARF) made by the Housing Solutions Team for every child placed in temporary accommodation had been implemented following an incident at a Council hostel and in response to the risks associated with some of the service's users. Families were informed as part of the application process that such referral would be made and many of the families involved required significant support and viewed the referral as a support mechanism. Although the referrals enabled the Council to target resources appropriately, the majority of referrals did not result in action which would add additional difficulty for the families concerned. More information regarding this could be provided to Committee outside of the meeting.
- Although shared and hostel accommodation were not ideal placements for children, the reality was that in some cases no alternative was available.
- The voice of the child was of great importance to the Council and was an intrinsic part of its corporate strategy work around Children and Young People Services.
- A significant amount of work had occurred in schools, particularly over the past few months, regarding community cohesion and hate crime and further work would be carried out to support schools to continue to help communities around these issues.
- Although reported incidents of child exploitation and racial hatred were limited in the Vale of Glamorgan with no reports being made last year, this could reflect a lack of awareness around how to report such issues, and so a separate report on the work of the Prevent Programme could be brought

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to Committee to promote awareness of preventing and addressing radicalisation.

With no further questions or comments, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the reference from Cabinet of 18th July, 2024 and the Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report: 2023/24, be noted.
- (2) T H A T a report on the work of the Channel Panel and Prevent programme within the Vale of Glamorgan be presented to a future meeting of this Committee

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the Cabinet reference and the report, and to discussions at the meeting
- (2) To advise the Committee further on these aspects of safeguarding for Vale of Glamorgan residents.

DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL-SELF ASSESSMENT 2023/24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 5th September, 2024 was presented by the Director of Environment and Housing.

The report had sought Cabinet endorsement of the Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment Report 2023/24 as the basis for consultation.

The Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report (attached at Appendix A to the report) drew on a wide range of information sources to assess the progress made by the Council in meeting its Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2023/24 as aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. The findings would enable the Council to identify how it could further enhance its internal processes and use of resources to improve and support achievement of its Annual Delivery Plan commitments and the Corporate Plan 2020-25 Well-being Objectives.

The Annual Self-Assessment report was a requirement for Welsh Local Authorities under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E), which required the Council to keep its performance under review, consult on and then publish a report setting out the conclusions of its self-assessment once in respect of every financial year.

The Council had evaluated a wide range of performance, engagement and other data insight from its Annual Performance Calendar of activities including the annual Directorate Self-Assessment and Peer Challenge process, the Annual Governance Statement and progress with delivery of the ADP commitments for

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2023/24, which had enabled conclusions to be drawn on how well resources were being used to support achievement of the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. This had informed the Council's main Annual Self-Assessment judgements below.

For the period 2023/24, the Council judged that it had made good progress in delivering its Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan 2020-25. The Council had achieved 85% of 591 planned activities and associated targets set in what was an ambitious Annual Delivery Plan given the context of ongoing significant service demand pressures and a difficult financial and economic climate. The areas of underperformance identified from performance monitoring remained areas of focus in 2024/25 and were reflected in the Council's Annual Delivery Plan and service level delivery plans for the period.

The draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2023/24 provided a 'Reasonable Assurance' judgement from the Head of Internal Audit on the Council's governance, risk management and internal control effectiveness, which indicated that from a governance perspective systems and processes were generally sound. An Internal Audit Opinion of either 'substantial or reasonable assurance' had also been given to 82% of risk-based reviews undertaken in-year testing the effectiveness of the internal control environment with 92% of all recommendations issued being in the low to medium priority categories. Additionally, feedback from the Council's Governance and Audit Committee and all Scrutiny Committees on last year's Annual Self-Assessment report had been taken on board to improve how progress was monitored and reported against the Annual Delivery Plan and the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives across the Council and publicly.

An overall judgement of good had been attributed to the Council's use of resources. However, this judgement reflected an aggregation of individual Directorate level judgements given to how well services had utilised their people, assets, finance, performance and risk management and engagement insights to deliver on the Annual Delivery Plan commitments. A judgement of 'Fair' was attributed to the Council's finance, commissioning and procurement to reflect the ongoing demand pressures in service areas and subsequent impact on the budget as well as the significant pressure on departments to deliver financial savings. This was considered appropriate as whilst returning a breakeven position on the 2023/24 budget, this was achieved after a drawdown on reserves to meet significant demand pressures in a number of service areas which was not a sustainable option for the long term. Similarly, a judgement of 'Fair' was attributed to engagement insights reflected the need to embed existing pockets of good practice across all Council services and in recognition of commitments made to take forward the learning from the findings of the Life in the Vale Survey 2023.

A key part of the Annual Self-Assessment was to sense-check the Council's performance judgements and the emerging findings in terms of areas for future focus to ensure that the Council remained outward focussed as an organisation, responding to the things that mattered the most to Vale of Glamorgan citizens and partners. A programme of engagement activities commenced in July and was scheduled to conclude in September 2024, targeting the public, Council staff and other key stakeholders including a partners drop-in event, an online staff event, attendance at a series of community public events and various social media

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communications. The Draft Self-Assessment report including a public summary would also be widely circulated with a request for feedback.

As part of the engagement work, Elected Members, via Scrutiny Committees, would be consulted on the draft report with their views informing the Final Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report. Governance and Audit Committee had a specific role set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E Act), in contributing to the Annual Self-Assessment report and a draft report must be provided to the Committee to review with the Council responding to any recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions that it intended to take.

The findings from the consultation work would be reflected within the final Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report which would be subject to further consideration by Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet prior to being presented for endorsement by Full Council in December 2024.

This year's Self-Assessment findings (2023/24) would also inform the Council's first Panel Performance Assessment (PPA), an independent assessment of the Council's improvement journey required under the LG&E Act, to be undertaken once during an electoral cycle. This was scheduled to take place in the late autumn of 2024 (Cabinet minute refers: C26, Annual Performance Calendar 2024/25 appended as background papers to the report) enabling the Council to build on its own self-assessment with both findings informing the development of the Corporate Plan 2025-30.

The self-assessment findings were informed by data, performance and engagement insights covering the period 1st April, 2023 to 31st August, 2024, enabling the Council to reflect on the most up to date position including any emerging challenges, risks and areas for improvement, which would inform the development of the new Corporate Plan 2025-30 and associated Plans for 2025/26.

Following the presentation, the Director and the Head of Housing and Building Services advised the following in response to Committee Members' questions:

- The following steps were being taken by the Council to assist landlords and tenants in understanding their legal rights and responsibilities –
 - Council advisors sign-posted tenants to legal advice regarding issues around eviction, as the Council was invested to keeping residents in their existing homes;
 - The Council had a Shelter Cymru accommodation worker, based within the department to assist residents within this type of enquiry;
 - The Council had good working relationships with Shelter, Citizens Advice and Rent Smart Wales which it could signpost and refer residents to;
 - If landlords were not compliant with the regulations they could be referred to colleagues in Shared Regulatory Services who might undertake enforcement action, or to Rent Smart Wales who may withdraw a landlord's status if appropriate.

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- Communication campaigns had been undertaken to promote tenant rights, and further work could be conducted with the Communications Team to reinforce legislation and raise awareness around the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 via social media.
- Complaints received regarding the Directorate had doubled, due in part to financial and resource savings making services unavoidably slower. Additionally, the new system of waste collection was more complex and involved more potential points of system failure like collecting a larger variety of types of waste. Garden waste collections had generated a larger number of complaints since becoming a chargeable service.
- The reasons behind slower services could potentially be further explained to residents in order to manage their expectations and help to align them more closely with the services the Council was able to provide.
- A very low figure of less than 1% of daily collections were missed each day although officers were aiming to improve this figure.
- The new Corporate Plan provided an emphasis on working with residents to improve standards and co-produce services. Key to this were early engagement and effective communication with residents.
- Innovation around front line services would be crucial as the costs of providing social care, for example, increased.

With no further questions or comments, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the contents of the reference from Cabinet of 5th September, 2024 and the Draft Vale of Glamorgan Council Annual Self-Assessment 2023/24 report, be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Operational Manager for Accountancy. The purpose of the report was to advise Committee that the accounts were complete and to inform Committee of the provisional financial revenue position of the Council for the 2023/24 financial year. The officer advised that the Statement of Accounts will be approved by Council in November, following an external audit by Audit Wales.

The Council encountered significant revenue pressures during 2023/24. Particular pressures were in respect of inflationary pressures, particularly regarding contracts and pay pressures (which reflected cost of living, market pressures and the Council's commitment to paying the real living wage).

The Council continued to experience significant demand pressures for supporting Children's Services, Homelessness and pupils with Additional Learning Needs during 2023-24.

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The year end revenue position was a breakeven position after net transfers from reserves of £34.235m, made up of £417k transferred from the Council Fund, £12.961m from the Housing Revenue Account, £11.785m transferred into specific reserves from revenue and £12.078m transferred from specific reserves to provide one-off funding for projects and overspends and £8.779m drawdown from reserves to fund the capital programme and for displacement required by capital grants. The Council Fund now stood at £11.106m as at 31st March, 2024.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set for 2023/24 which included a target of £2.75m for schools and £4.628m of Corporate savings. The progress against these savings targets was reflected in the Appendix to the report, and, whilst services had mitigated some savings in-year in 2023/24, these savings would be kept under review in 2024/25 as services moved to identify those on a more sustainable basis over the medium term.

After taking account of Directorate movements to and from reserves, the revenue outturn showed a surplus of £2.080m which it was proposed to transfer to reserves to be utilised as follows:

- £2m - Establish a new reserve to offset Education Deficits in 2024/25 on a provisional basis whilst the Council worked with schools on establishing a co-ordinated approach to tackling school deficits;
- The balance of £80k had been transferred to the General Fund.

The Housing Revenue Account had a slighter reduced projected draw down on the ringfenced reserve of £12.961m, reducing the level of its ringfenced reserve to £3.525m, which was thought to be reasonable in the context of the pressures in the service area in 2024/25.

The level of Useable Reserves reduced in-year, though by less than had been projected, but some of those commitments had been slipped into 2024/25 in accordance with Capital Expenditure slippage. The Council undertook a further reserve reallocation exercise in-year, as outlined in the 2024/25 budget proposals, and this was reflected in the outturn position.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the report and the financial measures taken and proposed be noted.
- (2) T H A T the allocation of overall Council surplus as set out below, be noted:
 - £2m transfer to new reserve to offset school deficits on a provisional basis in 2024/25;
 - £80k to Council Fund to offset general pressures.

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Reason for recommendations

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

CAPITAL CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager, the purpose of which was to inform Committee that the accounts were complete, and to advise of the provisional financial position of the Council's Capital Programme for the 2023/24 financial year. The officer advised that the Statement of Accounts will be approved by Council in November, following an external audit by Audit Wales.

The report provided detail on the closing of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April, 2023 to 31st March, 2024. Details by scheme, that were relevant to this Scrutiny Committee, were shown in Appendix 1 to the report.

Appendix 2 to the report provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2023 through to 31st March, 2024, including any changes requested within this report.

Several schemes totalling £5.395m were required to be added late into the programme and the report noted the current adjusted Programme of £103.829m and capital expenditure during the year of £88.620m.

Despite capital schemes facing continued challenges due to a number of issues, including significant cost increases and shortages of resources, it was pleasing to note that the 2023/24 Capital Programme out turned at £88.620m and 85.35% of the programme was spent before the end of the financial year.

Due to the dedication, commitment and hard work across all Directorates, the report noted the current adjusted Programme of £103.829m and net slippage of £15.013m which required approval by Emergency Powers into the 2024/25 Capital Programme.

For this Scrutiny Committee, the position regarding the budget was a variance of £6.523m against an adjusted programme of £48.398m. Outturn for this Scrutiny Committee was recorded at £41.875m and slippage of £6.521m had been requested.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the year-end capital position for financial year 2023/24, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the additional scheme budgets as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

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(3) T H A T the summary position of the changes in the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2023 to 31st March, 2024, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, be noted.

(4) T H A T the Emergency Power approved in respect of the slippage as set out in Appendix 3 of the report, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and to discussions at the meeting.

QUARTER 1 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Finance Support Manager, the purpose of which was to advise Committee of the Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring position for 2024/25.

The revenue position for 2024/25 continued to reflect challenging demand and inflationary pressures with continuance of the key service pressures that were seen in the 2023/24 outturn position into 2024/25. The cost pressures allocated as part of the 2024/25 budget were adjusted to reflect the funding available, and therefore did not provide full funding for pressures, and those pressures had continued to increase in the first quarter of 2024/25. Across the services, inflationary pressures were also being experienced in respect of pay, most notably where market forces were being utilised, and for the funding gap between provision for the 2024/25 pay award and the likely pay award for 2024/25. The Council only allocated very limited contractual inflation as part of the 2024/25 budget and has not allowed for general inflation for some years and this would have a general impact on the resilience of revenue budget. The delays on implementation of savings would also impact the 2024/25 outturn across services.

Unplanned use of reserves of approximately £13.629m have been forecast for 2024/25. The Council has various workstreams progressing to mitigate the unplanned use of reserves and reduce in-year overspends.

Challenging savings and efficiency targets had been set for 2024/25. The progress against those savings targets was reflected in the Appendix to the report. The Council also continued to monitor the delivery of 2023/24 savings not achieved in-year.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2024/25 Revenue Budget be noted.

(2) T H A T the virements requested as part of the report be noted.

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Reason for recommendations

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

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

The report, which was presented by the Finance Support Manager, advised Committee of the progress on the 2024/25 Capital Programme for the period 1st April, 2024 to 30th June, 2024. Details by scheme were shown in Appendix 1 to the report.

Appendix 2 to the report provided a summary of the position of the Capital Programme by Directorate from approval at Council on 6th March, 2024 through to 30th June, 2024, including any changes requested within this report. The report set out any requested changes to the 2024/25 and future years' Capital Programme.

The report noted the current approved Programme of £139.927m.

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

Schemes would be closely monitored over the coming months and it was anticipated that slippage requests would be requested in future reports. Officers would continue to work with project managers and sponsors to ensure value for money and that all possible funding opportunities were identified and were fully explored.

The officer also pointed out an error in the report's purpose on page 1. Changes to the Capital Programme would not be requested of this Committee, as this was the remit of Cabinet.

Having fully considered the matter, the Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the progress made on delivering the 2024/25 Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

(2) T H A T the use of Delegated Authority within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.5 and detailed in the report at paragraph 2.27, be noted.

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(3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Committee, detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

(4) T H A T the changes to the 2024/25 Capital Programme and future years' Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, summarised in paragraph 2.4 and detailed within the body of the report from paragraph 2.12, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report and to discussions at the meeting.

ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE 2024/25 (DEH) –

The report was presented by the Director of Environment and Housing. The purpose of the report was to present Quarter 1 performance results for the period 1st April, 2024 to 30th June, 2024 in delivering the 2024/25 Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

Due to current capacity challenges within the Corporate Strategy and Insight Team, the format for this quarter's (Q1) Annual Delivery Plan Monitoring Report had been revised temporarily, to enable Elected Members to continue to be provided with an overview of progress in delivering the Annual Delivery Plan commitments as aligned to the remit of each Scrutiny Committee.

The presentation appended at Appendix A to the report provided a summary of progress against the Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2024/25 as aligned to the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The report sought Elected Members' consideration of Q1 performance results and the proposed remedial actions to address areas of identified underperformance. Following consideration, the Scrutiny Committee was recommended to refer their views and any recommendations to Cabinet for their consideration.

Having fully considered the matter, Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

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

(2) T H A T the remedial actions to be taken to address areas of under-performance and to tackle the key challenges identified within the remit of the Committee, be noted.

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Reason for recommendations

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