

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 8th March, 2023.

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, G.M. Ball, I.R. Buckley, S. Campbell, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy and S.D. Perkes

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), G. Doyle, D. Dutch, V. John and H. Smith (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel), Councillors C.P. Franks, H.C. Hamilton and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

806 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”.

807 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor M.J.G. Morgan.

808 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 8th February, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

809 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

810 PRESENTATION: CIVIL PROTECTION UNIT (CPU) UPDATE –

The presentation was given to the Committee by the Principal Civil Protection Officer, who outlined the key points about the Unit, its staff, structure and activities.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council, under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA), had a statutory responsibility as a category 1 responder with other agencies, such as the Emergency Services, Health Boards, and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to ensure the seven duties under the CCA were discharged. The South Wales Local Resilience Forum (SWLRF) was hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council within the Civil Protection Unit (CPU) and was the platform by which multi-agency resilience across the South Wales area was enabled. The CPU was based within the Environment and Housing Directorate and at the Alps in Wenvoe, which helped the Council to undertake such statutory duties.

The last few years had been particularly busy and challenging for the CPU, due to the following: COVID-19 (including the work around the COVID-19 inquiry); the need for a Humanitarian response, such as with the Ukraine conflict and refugees (i.e. the CPU was part of the initial setting up of welcome centres and arrival centres for Ukrainian refugees); the need to bolster building security for Council buildings via the Building Security Group and the impact in helping to implement the imminent 'Martyn's Law' around greater protective security at events and crowded buildings / venues (following the lessons learned from the Manchester Arena bomb attack).

The CPU had also undertaken an Emergency Plan Framework Review, and the various incidents that the CPU had dealt with over the year were outlined, ranging from the continued Covid-19 and Humanitarian responses, Traveller activity within the Vale, various storms, extreme heatwave, through to Industrial Action and Avian Flu. The CPU also interacted with a number of groups and inquiries, ranging from the Covid-19 Inquiry through to the Events Safety Advisory Group (ESAG).

Following the Officer's presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee.

On Councillor Perkes' query on how many events the CPU advised on within the Vale of Glamorgan in a year, it was explained that no exact figures could be given at this time, although the CPU had supported numerous major and other events in the Vale of Glamorgan, i.e. the Vale Show, 'Cadstock', etc, with smaller events being held in Penarth and Cowbridge. Figures on this would be shared with the Councillor and Committee in due course.

On Councillor Campbell's query on CPU support for Ukrainian refugees, it was explained that the CPU had been involved in setting up the national welcome centres brought in under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, including Llangrannog and the Arrivals 'Hub' at Cardiff Wales Airport. The Council's Housing and Homelessness teams had subsequently been involved in the running of these schemes.

On Councillor Buckley's query regarding the Cardiff and Vale CONTEST Board and its counter-terrorism role, it was explained that there were four key themes or 'strands' to CONTEST's role, such as 'Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare'. In particular the 'Prevent' theme tied in with the work undertaken with the Safer Vale Partnership and the Protective Security Preparedness Groups (PSPG). The Cardiff and Vale CONTEST Board also fed into the all-Wales equivalent as part of the all-Wales strategy. On his further question around residents being able to access sandbags in a timely manner and as soon as a Severe Weather Warning or similar

had been issued, it was explained that the Council had access to various systems to help it assess the severe weather risks to roads, etc. within the Vale, in conjunction with the Met Office. These would then inform the decision to open up the Council's sandbag provision prior to the start of severe weather conditions.

Councillor Carroll raised a query on the Community Sandbag Protocol and the challenges for some residents to access Council supplied sandbags, particularly during bad weather, and asked if there was a formal process that identified areas of high risk in the Vale so that measures could be put in place to make the sandbags more accessible to the communities affected. It was explained that the Council had in place a risk assessment of where it was likely to flood within the Vale; however, due to the lack of large or main rivers in the Vale, there tended to be 'flash flooding' which was harder to pinpoint or predict. The Director of Environment and Housing had asked local Town and Community Councils if they wanted to store sandbags, and this would be referred back to him again. However, the actual management of the sandbags would subsequently fall on the Town and Community Councils, which could be a challenge in terms of allocating and storing the sandbags (which were perishable). It was important to build up 'community resilience' amongst residents and Town and Community Councils, in tandem with the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other bodies, such as NRW. The Councillor's suggestions concerning the use by the Vale of Glamorgan Council of a heavy vehicle and other means of getting sandbags to communities impacted by flooding would be looked at by CPU and the Council.

Regarding Councillor Hanks' query on the risk of further snow in the Vale over the next 24 hours and the measures in place by the Council in order to address this, it was explained that no further snow nor icy conditions were expected at this time. The Council had addressed the current snow conditions by 'double-gritting' the roads and support had been provided to Social Services and residential care, with the relevant Council officers also 'on-call' overnight / early morning to offer support should weather conditions worsen.

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services stated that the Council, through the CPU, the Directorates etc. was on hand to assist residents and Town and Community Councils with flooding, severe weather and other civil contingencies, but it was also important for local areas and residents to also be prepared as much as possible, particularly in light of climate change, i.e. through the purchasing of silicone sandbags which were not perishable.

The Principal Civil Protection Officer also added that on the Vale of Glamorgan Council website there was advice available and a framework to help communities to develop plans and resilience around flooding, extreme heatwaves, power outages, etc.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the presentation, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the presentation regarding the Civil Protection Unit (CPU) Update be noted.

Reason for recommendation

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

811 REVENUE MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 31ST JANUARY, 2023 (DEH) –

The report's purpose, as outlined by the Operational Manager – Accountancy to the Committee, was to advise on the progress relating to revenue expenditure for the period 1st April to 31st January, 2023.

The revenue position for 2022/23 had been challenging for the Council both operationally and financially due to the ongoing implications of the Cost-of-Living Crisis, inflationary pressures and the ongoing impact of Covid 19. Emerging pressures during 2022/23 related to the additional pay award settlement, general inflation, particularly in areas such as school transport and cost of living and staffing pressures. In terms of the pay award, this had been offset in most areas by vacant posts.

There were a few financial pressures (and other areas of note) for services within the Committee's remit, including pressures around Council Fund Housing which were linked to the additional pay award and Cadoxton House rental income, as well as pressures around hotel accommodation for homeless clients. A potential un-budgeted pay award of around £43k would be offset by an expected underspend within Council Fund Housing budgets. In terms of Public Sector Housing / Housing Revenue Account (HRA), there was an expected outturn on target with any under / overspends in year to be offset by changes to the contributions to capital expenditure, reducing the drawdown from the HRA reserve. For Private Housing, this was generating less income than budgeted partly due to some of the contractors leaving and also staff turnover during the year, but the Council had engaged a new contractor to help fast track the backlog of works. There was also pressure around the pay award in 2022/23 for this service area. There was an underspend in the Youth Offending Service (YOS) due to vacant staff posts and also some additional funding come from the Youth Justice Board (YJB) as well as a small overspend on the Shared Regulatory Services (SRS), due to an overspend in the Licensing area (which would be addressed by a transfer from the Regulatory Services Reserve).

The reallocation of reserves was referred to, as part of the preparation for the 2023/24 revenue budget, as well as the use of treasury management in order to utilise reserves over any external borrowing on a temporary basis, and the use of investment income to assist the revenue budget.

Following the officer's presentation of the report, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee.

On the Vice-Chair's query concerning Cadoxton House, it was explained that the Council's Finance Team had had discussions around the building's future as part of the Council's Asset Group. Discussions had also been undertaken with the Project Management Team. Given the fact that there was only one tenant in place now at

the building, the Council needed to come up with a strategy going forward. It was explained that Cadoxton House had originally been identified as a community-based resource and as a multi-agency base which included the Police and Social Services. Due to these agencies having reconfigured the way that they delivered services, they had withdrawn from the building with only one service now left within the building. This had resulted in a cost burden for the Council and, due to the Welsh Government (WG) previously funding the refurbishment of the building, if the Council were to dispose of the building, then there was a 'clawback' provision in place which would require the Council to refund the elements of the original grant back to WG. The Council was subsequently looking at undertaking an Options Appraisal and a decision would be made on whether the building was surplus to use and, if this was the case, what was the best method in relation to re-use and / or dispose of the building going forward.

On Councillor Perkes' query around the impact of Jehu Construction going into administration on the Council housing programme and finances, it was explained that the Council had not lost any money as such, but it would potentially cost the Council more to complete such housing developments. For example, in terms of the development at Hayes Road, the Council had now engaged a management consultancy to take on the day-to-day work around the delivery of the accommodation on the site, as well as safeguard the investment that had already been made there, i.e. weatherproofing semi completed houses on the site. Work would be also undertaken on a new development plan and completion date for the site. To re-tender this contract had resulted in a considerable amount of time and resources being used by Housing and Building Services. However, the Council had continued to engage with the sub-contractors that were already working at various sites and once made aware of Jehu going into administration the Council had ensured that those sub-contractors, many of whom were based locally in the Vale, were retained.

Regarding Councillor Campbell's query on the current situation around homeless clients staying in hotel and B&B accommodation and the WG funding provided for this, it was explained that some additional funding had come forward for the next financial year as well as an additional allocation as part of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget via a cost pressure. This would give the Council time to bring in some additional provision as part of the Rapid Rehousing Strategy that was currently being developed. The funding around this area would continue to be monitored due to the need to manage the complexities and the potential pressures involved in this. There had been funding of approximately £1.3m in order to provide a range of measures to respond to transitional and preventative arrangements concerning the housing of homeless persons. Part of this was to be used for hotel and B&B provision (which was still in relatively high demand), but also elements of the fund would be used for preventative work such as saving existing tenancies and preventing evictions through the contribution of some of the cost around rent arrears and also look at expanding the use of Discretionary Housing Payments. These mitigations would ultimately help to lessen the impact on the Council's budget as well as mitigating the costs on those families and individuals who found themselves in such a precarious position. Another challenge was the Council's capacity to move on people from temporary accommodation into more permanent housing. The draft Rapid Rehousing Plan would help to address some of the longer-term issues around

homelessness and particularly the length of time that people were currently spending in temporary accommodation.

On Councillor Hennessy's query about the development of the Eagleswell site, it was explained that the Council was about to enter into a contract to procure units of accommodation for the site as well as the contractor to undertake preliminary works on the site and the relevant surveys.

On the Vice-Chair's query concerning the appointment of a Rapid Rehousing Officer for the Council, it was confirmed that a co-ordinator had been appointed as part of the Rapid Rehousing proposals from WG.

On Councillor Aviet's query around the services provided by Pobl in the Vale, it was explained that Pobl offered various services around housing support-based issues but was not commissioned to directly provide accommodation; such requests would be automatically signposted back to the Council to provide the necessary support.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report,

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the position with regard to the Authority's 2022/23 Revenue Budget be noted.
- (2) T H A T the arrangements to offset the projected overspends in 2022/23, as set out in the report, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

812 CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 31ST JANUARY 2023 (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme for the period 1st April, 2022 to 31st January, 2023.

Capital schemes were facing continued challenges due to significant cost increases, which could necessitate scheme re-engineering or re-tendering, resulting in delays to projects. Project officers were also reporting long lead times on the delivery of materials and a shortage of skills / skilled staff in some areas.

Of particular relevance to the Committee was the reprofiling of the Housing Improvement Programme in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 Capital Programme due to the challenges referred to above, with a slippage of £3,272m and a revised budget of just over £21m.

The Council continued to work hard to identify opportunities to accelerate expenditure against the Housing Improvement Program and this would also be kept under review.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report,

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the progress made on delivering the 2022/23 Capital Programme, within the remit of the Committee, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the use of Delegated Authority within the remit of the Committee, as set out in the report, be noted.
- (3) T H A T the use of Emergency Powers within the remit of the Committee, as detailed in the attached Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (4) T H A T the changes to the 2022/23 and future Year's Capital Programme within the remit of the Committee, as set out in the report, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

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

813 SERVICE LEVEL ACTIVITIES AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS TO DELIVER THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN 2023/2024 (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services, set out the planned service activities (as outlined in Service Plans) and associated performance targets within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee. These set out the specific areas of focus associated with the delivery of the Council's Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) for 2023/2024 as aligned to its four Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

In line with the Council's statutory duties it continually reviewed the relevance of its Well-being Objectives, which were confirmed as still being relevant in delivering improved outcomes for Vale of Glamorgan citizens and contributed to the national Well-being Goals.

The commitments in the final, approved Annual Delivery Plan 2023/24 were reflected in 15 Service Plans which were provided for information in the background papers to the report.

Scrutiny Committee Members were asked to review the contributions from services (through planned activities and proposed performance measures and associated targets) as relevant to the Committee's remit that would support achievement of the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for the period 2023/24 which were set out in Appendices A and B to the report.

Committee Members were informed that the Service Plan priorities for Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) were yet to be agreed as a result of the processes and governance arrangements in place for this but would be shared with the Committee in due course.

Following the officer's presentation of the report, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee.

Regarding Councillor Buckley's query on there being no actions against some ADP / Service Plan measures, it was explained that the actions did not fall into the overall aim of the relevant ADP / Service Plan heading, nor fall within the remit of this Committee.

On the Vice-Chair's query concerning the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) measures outlined as part of the Service Plan and the work being undertaken by the Council and partners in tackling ASB in the Vale of Glamorgan (such as in Barry), the various joint measures were outlined, i.e. the utilisation of the upgraded CCTV network to help identify persons involved in ASB (to be shared, with other key information, with various partners, such as the Police and the Safer Vale Partnership, as well as internally, i.e. the Strategic Leadership Team). Due to the young age of some of the persons involved in acts of ASB, the Council and partners were also working with local schools in order to address this behaviour and any potential safeguarding issues of those young persons involved, as well as being involved in greater engagement with those local areas affected by ASB.

On the Chair's follow up query on engagement with traders on Holton Road following a spate of ASB and related incidents, such as vandalism, at the location recently, the Head of Housing and Building Services stated that the Community Safety Team (CST) would have engaged with local shops and businesses in the area, and the Police had already spoken to local shops around CCTV evidence, etc. The Operational Manager, Regeneration added that the main link between the CST and local businesses was via the Town Centre Development Officer. Several ideas and projects had been discussed with traders, such as the use of radio systems. Due to the cost of implementing these measures, the possibility of external funding was being looked at. The Operational Manager was also keen to see a more direct relationship develop between the CST and traders' groups.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report,

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the planned service activities for 2023/24, as contained in the Service Plans and as they relate to the remit of the Committee (Appendix A), be noted and endorsed.

(2) T H A T the proposed measures and service performance targets for 2023/2024, relating to the remit of the Committee (Appendix B), be noted and endorsed.

Reason for recommendations

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

814 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE 2022/23 AND PROGRESS AGAINST EXTERNAL REGULATORY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT (DEH) –

The performance report, presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services, set out, for Members' consideration, the Council's progress at Quarter 3 (Q3) (1st April to 31st December, 2022) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2022/23) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. Highlights included:

- All 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives were attributed a Green performance status at Q3 to reflect the good progress made to date in meeting the Council's Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2022/23.
- 93% (353/380) of planned activities outlined in the Council's Annual Delivery Plan had been attributed a Green performance reflecting the positive progress made during the quarter, 1% (3) of planned activities were attributed an Amber status and 6% (24) of planned activities were attributed a Red status.
- In relation to the planned activities within the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, 93% (51 out of 55) were attributed a Green performance status and the final 7% (4) were attributed a Red status. Of the 9 measures reported, 56% (5) were attributed a Green performance status and 44% (4) were attributed Red status.
- For ease of reference, performance exceptions aligned to the Scrutiny Committee's remit now highlighted the current status of Red performing actions identified in the previous quarter to show direction of travel, and the proposed remedial actions that had been undertaken to progress these actions. One key area that had seen improvement in this section however, was the percentage of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless which had increased to 70%.
- In terms of the Strategic Insight Board (SIB) Insight Tracker, relating to existing external regulatory recommendations and proposals for improvement, a number of local and national actions had been completed in relation to the Committee's remit: How Local Government Manages Demand: Homelessness (1 action), Homelessness Reviewed: An Open Door to Positive Change (11 actions) and Delivering with Less: Environmental Health Services review (9 actions).

Following the officer's presentation of the report, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee.

With regard to Councillor Perkes' query on the Court Road temporary housing development, it was explained that a number of persons had moved on from this accommodation to more permanent forms of housing, although not as many as was originally hoped for. However, there were a number of single person housing developments due to go on stream in the near future which would help to address

this. The Court Road development had been successful and was well managed and maintained by residents. This was also endorsed by the Chair, who had received positive feedback from one of the current residents on living at Court Road.

On Councillor Hennessy's query around the Caravan Licensing Review, referred to in the exception reporting, this would be referred back to colleagues at Shared Regulatory Services (SRS). On his follow up query around the Colcot Clinic housing development, it was confirmed that the demolition and clearance of the site had been undertaken, with the subsequent construction / development of the site imminent, with it now being in the hands of the contractors to implement this. Any future updates on this development would be shared with the Committee.

The Vice-Chair commented on CPM/092: Average number of working days to let an empty property and the longer time taken to arrange viewings and signs ups for older persons' accommodation, and if this was something that she could help with as the Vale Older People's Champion. It was explained that the longer timeframe related to the void process itself, i.e. the need to provide adaptations and other changes to the property which may require time. It should be noted however, that turnaround times between a person accepting a Council property through to moving in was still only 20 working days, which was a considerable improvement to the timeframes seen only a few years ago.

Councillor Buckley stated that the use of RAG ratings, etc. helped to make the ADP monitoring report much more accessible and comprehensible to Councillors and wanted to thank the officers involved in drafting it.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report,

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2022/23 commitments, as aligned to the Council's 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.

(3) T H A T the progress made to date in addressing the recommendations and improvement proposals made by the Council's external regulators be endorsed, and it be recommended to the Governance and Audit Committee and thereafter to Cabinet that the following completed actions from the Insight Tracker, as relevant to the remit of the Committee, be removed:

- Delivering with Less: Environmental Health Services review (9 actions).
- How Local Government Manages Demand: Homelessness (1 action) and Homelessness Reviewed: An Open Door to Positive Change (11 actions).

Reasons for recommendations

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

(3) To ensure the Council implements its regulatory recommendations and improvement proposals and responds appropriately to the recommendations and proposals for improvement identified through the Audit Wales' programme of local and national Local Government Studies.