



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2022-2027 COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee held on Monday, 30 September 2024 at 5.00 pm

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

**The following Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee Councillors were present online:-**

Councillor J Edwards (Chair)

Councillor B Stephens	Councillor R Davis
Councillor S Emanuel	Councillor Sheryl Evans
Councillor Sera Evans	Councillor G Hughes
Councillor W Jones	Councillor C Middle
Councillor L A Tomkinson	Councillor G L Warren
Councillor R Williams	

### **Officers in attendance:-**

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Ms S Davies, Head of Finance  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services  
Mr. N Griffiths, Head Of Financial Services - Community & Children's Services  
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates

### **County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

Councillor C Leyshon

### **Apologies for absence**

Councillor J Bonetto

## **27 Declarations of Interest**

In accordance with the code of conduct the following declarations were made pertaining to the agenda:

Cllr Sera Evans personal interest in Item 5 “My employer is named in the report”.

Cllr R Davis personal interest in item 6 “My partner works in the voluntary sector and has been involved in discussions regarding Community Asset Transfer”.

Councillor G Hughes – personal interest in item 5 “My wife works as a teaching assistant for the local authority”.

## **28 Minutes**

## **RESOLVED:**

To approve the minutes of the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024 as a true and accurate record of the meeting

### **29 Consultation Links**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications reminded Members of the open consultations and advised Members to contact the Scrutiny Team if further information was required.

He also referred Members to the Cabinet Work Programme to identify matters for pre-scrutiny which was also published on the Council's website.

### **30 Bi-Annual Cabinet Member Engagement**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented the report to Members to allow them the opportunity to scrutinise the decisions undertaken by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Youth Participation and Climate Change within the period set out in the report and to ensure the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

A Member referred to the Council Tax Premiums report and welcomed the decision to increase the premiums on long term empty properties. He asked the Cabinet Member if she anticipated progress in bringing back into use longer term empty properties, those empty for over five years. He also asked how many properties she anticipated being brought back into use through the Compulsory Purchase Order Scheme.

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services, Youth Participation and Climate Change advised that evidence and data does show that the previous decision to introduce a Council Tax premium made a positive contribution to reducing the number of empty properties albeit slower than the Council would like, and was due to a number of factors that included communications issues with absent landlords. She advised Members that Compulsory Purchase Orders were the last resort for the Council and was not something that would be done lightly.

A Member referred to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the Youth Participation team and representatives attended to give their views. She asked the Cabinet Member what improvements could we glean from any new survey and how are the Council addressing some of the issues that were raised from the survey last year. The Member was also interested to hear how the Council will be engaging young people in the democratic process.

The Cabinet Member stated that the YEPS team have been brilliant in reaching out to young people and have taken a Mobile Youth Van around the communities including youth clubs, community drop-ins and street based sessions as the Council recognise that not all young people engage in the same way – by attending traditional meetings, forums, completing surveys, the Council has applied an approach to go to the young people to hear their views. In engaging young people in the democratic process, the Cabinet Member stated that we have to make the voting process interesting and engaging to them. She advised that the YEPS team visited schools and colleges to talk about the voting process and undertook a vote on issues that mattered to them such as mental

health. The young people were very engaged and interested in the process and now the team are having further discussions as to how this can be transferred into the political voting process, which they recognise is not an easy task.

A Member asked about the rollout of the EV Charging across the County Borough. The Cabinet Member replied that significant progress has been made on the rollout of publically accessible EV chargers with chargers available at 56 different sites across the Borough. She advised that the Council is also reviewing which charging sites are utilised more than others to ensure the public demand is taken account of.

A Member referred to a recent presentation Members received from the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director Finance, Digital and Frontline Services on Medium Term Financial Planning to support Members in understanding the use of the Council's budget and reserves. The Member asked if there will be a focus on sharing this information with the public to support their understanding so they are able to contribute to the Budget Consultation.

The Cabinet Member replied that we will ensure residents are provided with comprehensive budget information so they can share their thoughts and priorities. She added that a priority for the consultation is breaking down the language to ensure it is presented in plain English and is easy to understand. She encouraged all Members to complete the consultation as well as promoting it with their residents and encouraging them to also complete it. The Chair asked if there was opportunity to engage young people in the process. The Cabinet Member agreed and stated that they are always looking at new ways to engage young people in the process including a recent visit to the Council offices and Chamber.

**RESOLVED to:**

1. Scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Youth Participation and Climate Change in respect of matters considered and agreed by Cabinet, and key decisions taken during the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024– 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024
2. Identify any areas arising from those matters determined within this period which Committee wish to further scrutinise, as part of revisions to the Committee's published work programme

**31 Q1 Performance Report**

The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services presented the report to Members on the Quarter 1 Performance Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 for revenue and capital budget performance; Treasury Management prudential indicators; Organisational Health information including staff turnover, sickness and Council strategic risks; and Corporate Plan well-being objective action plans (including performance indicators and investment). Following conclusion of the presentation of the report, the Chair opened for Members comments and questions.

The Chair thanked the Service Director for the presentation of the report and also for the work in reshaping the documents to ensure an easier read for Members.

The Chair noted the pressure on Adult Services which states is driven by

external residential nursing placements but an earlier report stated that it was due to under achievement of income due to low occupancy, and requested clarity. The Chair also referred to Children's Services and the projected overspend within Early Intervention Services and asked for the reasons for this position.

The Service Director – Finance Services (Community and Children's Services) explained that the projected under-achievement of income was due to lower occupancy within the Council's home for the elderly establishments and the projected overspend on external residential placements was in respect of services commissioned from the independent sector and included the provision of specialist placements including nursing care for dementia which the Council's in-house care homes do not provide. In relation to Children's Services, the Service Director advised that budget pressures are in respect of employee related costs, including agency workers, linked to service demand, with opportunity being taken to partly off-set these costs through the use of external grant funding.

A Member stated that in her role as Chair of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee she has visited several schools which have benefitted from the Sustainable Learning for Communities grant to understand what has gone well and stated that the positive benefits the grant has had on pupil and staff wellbeing was clear and commented that it has been a fantastic investment into our schools and would like to see this continue. The Service Director fed back that the Council is looking to continue its ambitious programme of investing in schools and a new Strategic Outline Plan has been submitted to Welsh Government setting out a proposed long-term and, subject to approval, agreed projects will be incorporated into the Council's Capital Programme.

A Member referred to the People and Communities well-being objective and the action to ensure schools have detailed knowledge of the progress in pupil literacy, numeracy, Welsh and digital skills and targeted training is developed and support provided for schools where there is specific concern in relation to skills development. The Member sought clarity on the reason for this action not being on target for completion by March 2025. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services fed back that there is on-going engagement between the Council and Central South Consortium in this area, and a further update will be requested on the timescale to deliver this action and fed back to Members.

A Member referred to the production of a strategy for a cultural hub in Treorchy and asked why this was not on target. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services advised that there are two officers working on the project and they will shortly be engaging with the local community. He advised that the Service will also be requested to provide further information directly to the Member on the approach to be taken.

A Member asked for an update on the Community route between Treorchy and Treherbert. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services advised that the current position will be requested from the Service and fed back to the Committee.

A Member referred to the overspend on Street Cleansing as a concern as there is still a lot of litter and fly-tipping throughout the County Borough and asked if enough is being undertaken to educate people on the impact of fly-tipping and littering. Another Member agreed with the comments and stated they would not

like to see the budget reduced in this area, rather increased. Another Member commented that the Council should pursue legal proceedings where people continue to offend in this area. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services advised that street cleansing was a key priority area within the Council's Corporate Plan, this being informed by feedback from residents. The Service Director went on to indicate that the Council undertakes awareness raising activities to support the importance of maintaining a clean environment, alongside on-the-ground street cleansing services, and enforcement is a last resort. He also fed back that street cleansing will continue to be a key priority for the Council and would relay the Committee's feedback to the Service as part of informing on-going service delivery.

In response to a query raised on staff sickness, the Service Director -Finance and Improvement Services informed the Committee that a range of work was on-going to support improvement in staff attendance levels. The Service Director went on to feed back that timely information is provided to managers on staff absence, with arrangements in place for this to be reviewed and challenged and a suite of supportive interventions is in place via the Council's Occupational Health Unit to help staff return to the workplace as timely as possible. A Member asked what measures were specifically in place to provide support to schools in managing their sickness. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services advised that there are Council Human Resources Officers specifically designated to schools to provide support and advice on HR matters, including sickness, with school-based staff also having access to the range of interventions available from the Council's Occupational Health Unit.

A Member raised concerns on the projected overspend within Adult Social Care and was aware of the ongoing pressures on this service area. The Member asked are we getting the modelling right and were resources in the right place for the service area. The Service Director – Finance (Community and Children's Services) fed back that Adult Services is demand led and subject to volatility based on the changing needs of service users requiring support. The Service Director added that the projected overspend is impacted by a number of high-cost placements in line with individual care needs, and the Council works closely with the Health Board to understand service user needs to put in place appropriate and the most cost effective arrangements possible.

In response to a query on grant funding, the Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services advised that grant funding applications are aligned, as far as possible, to the Council's Corporate Plan well-being objectives and are incorporated into financial projections at the point the Council receives confirmation of award of funding.

In response to a query in respect of the action within the People and Communities action plan to establish the detail for the operational model for an urgent community response, the Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services indicated that an update will be requested from the Service and provided to Committee Members.

A Member referred to the Capital Programme variances and asked that future reports include examples of why key projects and schemes have been re-profiled. The request was noted and the Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services confirmed that information in this regard will be incorporated into future Performance Reports.

A Member referred to the Tackling Poverty risk within the Strategic Risk Register, that set out the Council's ability to respond to emerging cost of living pressures and changes in national fiscal policy will require a dynamic approach to risk management; the Member asked how the Council will mitigate this position. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services fed back that a range of actions are being progressed via neighbourhood networks and supporting community groups to develop community resilience. The Service Director went on to provide examples of support arrangements that included food bank support, housing support, engagement with families on the poverty line, employment support programmes to prepare families for work such as interview skills and working with local businesses to provide job opportunities. The Chair was pleased to note in the Report that the social value model has been embedded into procurement procedures as it has made a big difference to our local communities.

A Member referred to the findings of the Your Voice Survey to set 2024-25 priorities for YEPS and partners to meet the needs of young people aged 11-25 and asked if there is sufficient time to complete this by March 25. The Service Director fed back that clarity would be sought from the service area and be incorporated within the Quarter 2 Performance Report.

A Member referred to the projected overspend in Adult Services - Commissioned Services and asked what the contributing factors were. The Service Director – Finance (Community and Children's Services) fed back that nursing and residential care placements is the key area driving the current projected overspend position, with some placements having significant cost implications including transition placements between Children's and Adult Services. Members emphasised the on-going need for Council Services to work together on transitional arrangements.

A Member asked if there are any initiatives to increase housing capacity. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement advised that the Council has secured a Social Housing Grant of £22m for the current year and this is supporting a number of housing related projects. The Service Director went on to feed back that an Empty Property Scheme is in place to encourage and help home-owners to apply for grant funding to bring homes back into use and he provided an example in respect of homelessness whereby a housing assessment centre is in place which focusses on single people who are homeless to provide them with appropriate accommodation. Members were reassured that this continues to be a high priority area of focus for the Council.

A Member asked if the Toilet Strategy could be shared with Members following the meeting.

A Member asked what officers are doing to counteract overspending across all service areas. The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services advised that Finance Officers and Service Managers are working closely together on an on-going basis to review and challenge all areas of expenditure and income, staffing levels and vacant positions and grant funding opportunities. The Service Director added that the Council has a good track record in this regard, as part of robust finance and service management arrangements, and Members will be kept up-to-date on progress as part of quarterly Performance Reports.

A Member asked if information could be referenced on agency expenditure as

part of future updates.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and reflected that some of the key themes from the report can be picked up by the various Scrutiny Committees and asked the Chairs to reflect on their Work Programmes to pick up any issues at their future meetings.

Following conclusion of discussions it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Scrutinise the Council's financial and operational performance position as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (Quarter 1)
2. Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report in line with the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

## **32 Pre-Scrutiny - Corporate Asset Management Plan 2024 - 2030**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised that Members were invited to undertake pre-scrutiny on the Cabinet report which set out recommendations on the new draft Corporate Asset Management Plan 2024-2030. Members were advised that the draft Plan provides a vision for the strategic management of the Council's property assets and sets out draft objectives and priorities for the next 6 years.

Members queried whether any further rationalisation could be considered through a review of the office accommodation strategy and the hybrid working model approach adopted across the Council. This comment was made by Members having recently considered the Medium-Term Financial Plan of the Council. Members were pleased to hear of the 'challenge process' used when reviewing the office accommodation strategy and consideration of lived experiences to inform the way forward.

Members recognised the benefits brought through the Community Asset Transfer process and welcomed its continuation. However, Members had concerns regarding the process itself, which could often be a challenge for local volunteers and sought assurance that where possible further support and training would be provided to such volunteers.

Members welcomed objective 2 of the Plan in respect of Maximising Community resilience and spoke of good examples and positive experiences witnessed with the Lllys Cadwyn building in Pontypridd. Members promoted the need to replicate any learning across other town centres in the County Borough. The Head of Legal – Property and Estates advised that the Council will continue to look for properties suitable to support Town Centre Regeneration which is part of the action plan.

Members of the Committee spoke of the Council's greatest 'asset', its staff, and sought assurance that the needs of staff were always at the front when setting the vision for any hybrid approach to working or office accommodation review. The Head of Legal – Property and Estates advised Members that the impacts on staff are taken into account which is covered in the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy and Asset Management Plan. Service areas are

consulted annually on the suitability of their office accommodation to ensure they have suitable space to deliver fit for purpose services. Members were also reassured to hear that should staff wish to attend offices to work, accommodation will be provided for them, and there is no requirement for staff to work from home if they prefer to attend their offices.

Members queried whether the plan incorporated sites for those presented as homeless and welcomed news of the work being undertaken through a feasibility study in this area.

Members were concerned that the plan did not have robust data against the KPIs referenced within the plan. Officers explained that this was the starting point and such information would be available going forward.

Members highlighted the stakeholders engaged and queried whether sufficient representation from schools was proportionate, considering the number of school assets involved. Members were reassured that the 21st Century Team as a property portfolio holding Service Area would be represented at the Corporate Asset Management Board when a surplus school asset was being considered.

Members sought reassurance that the inclusion and location of EV charging points was appropriately placed and managed when made available at any new site. The Director of Corporate Estates explained that a new back office system for payment for use of the EV Charging points had been installed and was being rolled out to schools. The Director also agreed to check the two schools mentioned and respond to the Member outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** to:

1. Form a view on the draft Corporate Asset Management Plan 2024-2030 and determine whether it sets out:
  - a) A clear vision for the strategic management of the Council's property assets
  - b) The right objectives for the management of the Council's property assets, namely
    - Effective Asset and Estate Management.
    - Maximise Regeneration and Community Resilience.
    - Reduce the environmental impact of the estate.
    - Develop an Efficient and appropriate estate.
2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications to provide feedback to Cabinet on behalf of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**33 Urgent Business**

None

**34 CHAIRS REVIEW AND CLOSE**



Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh

**Councillor J Edwards  
Chair.**