



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

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee held Hybrid on  
Tuesday, 29 November 2022 at 5.00 pm

### **County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-**

Councillor G Hughes   Councillor S Morgans

### **The following Councillors were present online:-**

Councillor J Bonetto   Councillor S Evans  
Councillor S Evans   Councillor C Middle  
Councillor K Morgan   Councillor G L Warren  
Councillor G E Williams   Councillor M Ashford

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

Mr P Mee – Group Director Community and Children's Services  
Mr C Hanagan – Service Director Democratic Services and Communication  
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director Finance and Performance  
Mr N Elliot – Service Director Adult Services  
Mrs S Daniel – Principal Scrutiny Officer

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

### **Apologies**

Councillor J Edwards   Councillor J Brencher  
Councillor M Powell   Councillor K Webb

**In absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, the Service Director  
Democratic Services and Communications sought nominations for a  
Chairperson for the meeting. Cllr G Hughes was nominated and  
seconded and took the Chair for the meeting.**

## **22.     Declarations of Interest**

None

## **23     Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** The minutes of the meeting of the 7 November 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

## **24 Consultation Links**

The Principal Scrutiny Officer advised Members of the consultation links that were available to them for information. She advised if Members had any queries in relation to the consultation they could speak with the Democratic Services Team.

## **25 Council Performance Report - Quarter 2 (2022-23)**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication introduced the Quarter 2 Council Performance Report (to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022) and noted that the report sets out the financial and operational performance of the Council as at Quarter 2 2022/23, that is, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

The Service Director Finance and Performance then provided Members with an overview of the report and fed back that the Quarter 2 revenue budget position is projecting a £10.277M overspend, this excludes the cost implications of the 2022/23 pay award for NJC employees, agreed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022, and the 2022/23 teachers pay award offer made by Welsh Government, these equating to an estimated increase in the pay bill of £10.5M for the current year, and results in an overall projected overspend of almost £21M.

The Service Director continued the overview of the report and covered revenue and capital budget performance; treasury Management prudential indicators; Organisational Health information including staff turnover, sickness and Council strategic risks; Corporate Plan priority action plan updates including investment updates; a progress update on the implementation of recommendations to enhance the Council's response to extreme weather events; and a progress update in respect of the Council's on-going work to tackle Climate Change.

A Member referred to the turnover of staff and high sickness levels in Community and Children Services and requested clarity on the extent of work being undertaken to support staff returning to the workplace as timely as possible and asked if there was any correlation between the sickness and turnover rates. The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services fed back that a range of support is in place for staff via the Council's Occupational Health Service, this being in parallel with close engagement with Service Managers to ensure Management continue to fully understand reasons for absence and can tailor support accordingly. The Service Director went on to note that specific focus has been afforded to staff well-being within Community and Children's Services, recognising the very challenging working environment frontline workers operated within during the pandemic and also on-going pressures in specific areas.

The Director of Adult Services added that there are on-going challenges in respect of staff requirement and retention, this being recognised and addressed through a workforce development strategy and supporting action plans. He also advised there have been scenarios, where initially recruitment had been successful and new staff appointed to roles in social care but they found that the work was not for them and instead opted to take opportunities outside of social care and the Council. The Director added that some staff who have worked for social care for several years were also leaving for other job opportunities and that staff retirement, due to ageing workforce, has also been a factor contributing to the level of staff turnover. The Director concluded that there is currently no direct correlation between staff turnover and sickness absence levels.

A Member referred to the proposal for schools to contribute 50% of the 2022/23 pay award cost and asked if there is opportunity to review this, following receipt of the settlement in December, due to the challenges a 50% contribution requirement will likely place on schools. The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services fed back that the 50% contribution relates to the 2022/23 financial year with the Settlement announcement due in December relates to the 2023/24 financial year. The Service Director added that the proposal was for the local authority and schools to each make a 50% contribution for the additional 2022/23 pay award cost over that already budgeted for, and the Council and schools will continue to work closely together as part of financial planning and management arrangements. The Service Director also noted that the 50% schools contribution is a one-off contribution in 2022/23, with the on-going financial implications from 2023/24 onwards being fully funded by the Council.

A Member noted the reduction in income for fixed penalty charge notices and requested further clarity on the reason. The Service Director fed back that the income level is showing an improving trend in quarter 2 compared to quarter 1, with a contributory factor being lower levels of footfall. The Service Director added that Enforcement Officers will continue to take a pragmatic and professional approach, in line with Council policy, when issuing fixed penalty charge notices.

A Member referred to the staff turnover in Children's Services and Schools and asked if exit interviews are undertaken. The Service Director confirmed that discussions take place at a service level and indicated that further information will be requested for reporting back to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Director of Adult Services added that exit interviews have been prioritised as part of the workforce strategy in Children's Services and this was now being rolled out as a dedicated programme of work in Adult Services.

A Member noted that the action to work with suppliers on the areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf that have poor access to broadband connectivity to ensure they are factored into future planning is not on target and

requested clarity on the work being taken to progress this. The Service Director referred to the progress update set out in the action plan and noted that progressing this area is included as part of the Council's Digital Strategy. The Service Director fed back that an up-to-date position will be requested from the service area.

A Member referred to the lower level of Leisure Services income being received and sought clarity on the impact of key factors such as the cost of living crisis, the risk of further customer drop off as Leisure Services may be viewed as a luxury from a user perspective and competition from the private sector. The Service Director fed back that the Council's Leisure Strategy commits to on-going investment to continue to provide high quality facilities at affordable prices, recognising the current pressures on household income. The Service Director added that the Council's facilities will continue to be promoted, alongside introductory offers, to help retain existing customers and also attract new customers.

A Member asked how the Authority is supporting staff in returning to work from long term sickness. The Service Director fed back that managers have on-going engagement with staff, including those on sick leave, to ensure timely and appropriate support can be put in place that assists well-being and return to work where staff are absent. The Service Director went on to reinforce the importance of on-going engagement with staff to ensure a sound understanding of the needs of the workforce alongside the delivery of service priorities. The Service Director added that this approach is underpinned by a number of mechanisms such as support networks, an interim hybrid working policy, advice and guidance to promote a healthy lifestyle and career development within the Council.

A Member referred to the Pentre Flood Alleviation Scheme outline business case not being on target and current performance for the % of vulnerable/repeat victims of anti-social behaviour that feel safer as a result of intervention. The Service Director confirmed that further information on the current position of these areas will be requested from the service areas and feedback provided to the Committee.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. Members scrutinised the Council's financial and operational performance position as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 (Quarter 2).
2. Considered whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report in line with the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

## **26 2023-24 Budget Consultation**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication introduced the report to Members to provide the opportunity for the Overview &

Scrutiny Committee to respond and contribute to the Council's phase 1 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Service Director Finance and Improvement Services provided Members with an overview of: the Council's 2022/23 financial position and outlook over the medium term; general approach for 2023/24 (in respect of the phase 1 budget consultation process); 2023/24 Budget Setting – key strategic building blocks; the Council's Priorities; and Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The Service Director indicated that the overview of these areas intended to assist Members in formulating their feedback, in line with the Committee's Terms of Reference and being a consultee as part of the 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.

Following conclusion of the presentation, Members were invited to provide their feedback on the key strategic building blocks, the Council's priorities and CTRS. Members fed back the following comments and observations:

### **Schools**

The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay cost pressures in our schools?' and 'Do you think an efficiency saving should be built into the schools budget?'

One Member asked what level of reserves schools were holding and fed back that Schools should be utilising reserves as part of their financial planning and contributing to the Council's budget setting arrangements.

Another Member disagreed with this point as schools held different levels of reserves and the Council should take this into account in allocating an efficiency saving requirement. The Member added that children's education was hugely disrupted during the pandemic and any efficiency savings will continue to impact on the ability of schools to support pupils catch up; therefore the Council should provide sufficient resources to cover costs in schools.

### **Social Care**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment?'

Members were all in agreement that this area should be prioritised and the Council should continue to invest in this area as it supports the most vulnerable in our communities.

### **Fees and Charges**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the requirement for fees and charges to be reviewed individually and the continued need to take into account the impact on service users is a reasonable approach (and not apply an across-the-board increase in line with the 12 month CPI rate (as at Oct 22) of 11.1%?'

Members agreed that any changes to fees and charges should be considered on a service-by-service basis and a blanket approach should not be taken. Members added that the Council should ensure services remain affordable to individuals in the community which should, in turn, support an uptake in the use of specific services.

### **Service levels**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'What service areas provided by the Council are important to you?' and 'Do you think the Council should consider changing the level of services for any of these and if so how? For example, reviewing the frequency that services are provided, or opening times, depending how often services are used?'

Members fed back that services for the vulnerable should be protected and any efficiencies should have minimum disruption to services.

### **Council Tax**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should increase Council Tax next year by '0% to 3%', 'between 3% and 5%' or '5%+?' and 'The level of Council Tax versus maintaining or reducing service levels?'

Due to the current cost of living crisis, Members did not want to see an increase above the '3% - 5%' as residents are already facing increases to food, energy, rent/mortgage and fuel costs. Members also fed back that they were keen to keep any increases to council tax as low as possible and, as part of this, minimise reductions in service levels.

### **Efficiencies**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you support the Council's strategy on efficiencies?', 'Do you think we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services?' and 'Are there any specific areas where you think the Council could be more efficient / any examples of Council Services not being efficient?'

A Member asked if the Council is looking to sell some of its land and assets, taking into account their condition, to generate income. The Service Director fed back that the Council reviews its land and buildings on an on-going basis and plans and manages these arrangements via the

Corporate Asset Management Plan to ensure the use of assets are optimised to support efficient service delivery. The Service Director added that where the on-going review process identifies options to dispose of assets, in line with service delivery requirements, the Council will progress such opportunities.

Another Member agreed with the Council strategy on efficiencies and fed back that the Council should continue to rely on its expert managers to be innovative and effective and review how we can do things better.

### **Council Reserves**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should continue with its strategy around the management of reserves?'

The Committee agreed that it is important to keep reserves at an adequate level, especially during the current very challenging and volatile financial environment. Another Member fed back that there should be more information given to the public on how the Council uses its reserves as the public have an expectation that reserves should be used during times of austerity.

### **Council Priorities**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should focus on the five key areas of digitisation, commercialisation, early intervention and prevention, Independence and Efficient and Effective Organisation to maximise resources and deliver improved services?'

Members agreed with the approach to the Council's priorities and fed back that leading the way on digitalisation will help support better outcomes for our residents.

### **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on the following:

Extended Payments – 'Do you think that 4 weeks is a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work?'

Members agreed that a 4-week period is adequate and should be retained as this provides individuals with support as they return to work.

War disablement – 'Do you think that it is reasonable for the Council to continue to totally exclude War Disablement and War Widow's Pensions income when assessing entitlement to CTR Scheme?'

Members supported the exclusion of the whole amount of War Disablement Pensions and War Widow's Pensions when calculating Council Tax Reduction Scheme entitlement.

Backdating claims – 'Do you think that 6 months is a reasonable period to backdate claims for working age and pensioners?'

Members agreed that the backdated claim period of 6 months was adequate and should be retained.

**RESOLVED:**

1. Members provided feedback to the Council's Phase 1 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.
2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication to formulate a response on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Council's Phase 1 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.

**27 RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication introduced the report to provide Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the preferred options on the future provision of accommodation with care for older people in Rhondda Cynon Taf and the modernisation and investment proposals contained within the report. Future reports will be presented to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Director of Adult Services provided the Scrutiny Committee with preferred options on the future provision of accommodation with care for older people in each of the Council's nine residential care homes. The Director advised Members that this report will then be presented to Cabinet to seek their approval to consult, where relevant, with the current residents and their families, staff and other stakeholders to enable the Cabinet to make informed decisions on the preferred options for each home.

Members sought assurance that the proposals to create more extra care accommodation would not impact adversely on existing care home staff and that appropriate engagement, where necessary, with staff around redeployment and voluntary retirement options would be undertaken, should the decision within the report be taken forward. Members also sought assurance that the cost of care paid by people would not increase.

The Director of Adult Services advised that in terms of housing related support arrangements in extra care, Linc Cymru, the Council's preferred Housing Partner, would be responsible for the employment of these staff,



as they are now, and this would not impact existing care home staff. He added that the Council would be responsible for either directly providing or commissioning the care provided in the accommodation and provided reassurance that any decisions by the Cabinet would be accompanied by engagement with all staff affected, in line with the Council's Management of Change policy. The Director explained that the redevelopment preferred options would not increase the care costs paid.

Members raised concerns relating to the decommissioning of existing care homes before the development of new accommodation and asked for clarification of the new sites identified for development, relating to Ferndale House in Ferndale and Ystrad Fechan care home in Treorchy.

The Director of Adult Services advised that the preferred options state that decommissioning of the named care homes would only result following the development of new care accommodation within the identified locality. The Director added that location of new sites is currently not in the public domain, but explained that the sites being considered are in the locality of the existing care homes and this requirement was included in previous consultation feedback relating to Ferndale House.

The Director also advised that Ystrad Fechan Care Home is temporarily closed, and this site is not suitable for redevelopment as a Care Home. He assured Members that officers are working with LINC Cymru to develop options in the Treorchy area and added that feasibility reports will be developed if Members agree to progress the preferred option.

A Member stated that there is a public expectation that Garth Olwg Care Home in Church Village would continue to remain open following the Cabinet's previous decision, and expected this to be reflected in the public consultation.

A Member commented on the potential for the preferred option for Garth Olwg Care Home to meet local opposition and sought clarification on the demand for accommodation for people with a learning disability that supports the proposal. The Member also asked what would happen to the staff currently employed.

The Director of Adult Services advised that there is a demand for new supported accommodation in the Taf area and across the County and that waiting lists for placements existed. He added that any decisions around staff will be subject to consultation and meetings will be held with staff and Trade Unions in line with the Council's Management of Change policy.

Members sought assurance that the proposals provided provision for dementia care in order to meet current need and future demand. A Member mentioned the increasing challenges for families supporting people with dementia who also need nursing care and access to specific

health care funding.

The Director of Adult Services advised that the Council promotes care accommodation that provides a home for life, which will be able to support people with dementia and complex care needs and this is reflected in the proposals for the Council's care homes. The Director added that there will be times however when someone's care needs cannot be met within extra care or residential care, for example someone with nursing needs and they would need to be cared for in nursing accommodation registered to meet their needs. The Director reassured Members that Adult Services works with families to assess need and risk in order to ensure the right care and support offer.

Members discussed and agreed that the care accommodation are needed as the current provisions are not fit for purpose as they are now. Members also agreed that modern day facilities are needed throughout the County Borough and acknowledged that the demand for traditional residential care has reduced as people wish to remain living independently in their own home in the community. Members reiterated the importance of engaging with families at every stage of the process.

The Chair sought further clarification on the proposals to redevelop Clydach Court.

The Director of Adult Services advised that the refurbishment of Clydach Court into a modern care home with ensuite rooms is not viable, and that complete redevelopment of Clydach Court to build a new home is the only sustainable option for the existing site. The Director added that this option would require transfer of the existing residents to another care home to undertake the redevelopment unless a different site was found to build a new home first.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. Acknowledged the contents of the report to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 5 December 2022, at Appendix A
2. Considered whether the Committee wishes to scrutinise in greater depth, any matters contained within the Cabinet Report, at Appendix A.
3. Determined any comments and recommendations Scrutiny Members wish to put forward to Cabinet for consideration; and in doing so authorise the Service Director Democratic Services & Communication to report these to the Cabinet as part of Cabinet determining next steps.

**28      Urgent Business**

None