



CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.00 PM WEDNESDAY, 5 JANUARY 2022

VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

All mobile telephones to be switched to silent for the duration of the meeting

Part 1

1. Welcome and Roll Call
2. Chairs Announcements
3. Declarations of Interests
4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 26*)
 - 1 September 2021
 - 22 September 2021
 - 17 November 2021
5. Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - To select appropriate items from the Cabinet agenda for pre-decision scrutiny (cabinet reports enclosed for Scrutiny Members)
6. Urgent Items
Any urgent items (whether public or exempt) at the discretion of the Chairman pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Thursday, 23 December 2021

Committee Membership:

Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

**Vice
Chairperson: Councillor S.E.Freeguard**

Councillors: N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, C.James,
S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen,
S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.H.Reynolds,
R.L.Taylor, A.N.Woolcock and W.F.Griffiths

Notes:

- (1) If Committee Members or non-Committee Members wish to have relevant items put on the agenda for future meetings, then please notify the Chief Executive/Chair eight days before the meeting.*
- (2) If non-Committee Members wish to attend for an item of interest, then prior notification needs to be given (by 12.00 noon on the day before the meeting). Non-Committee Members may speak but not vote, or move or second any motion.*
- (3) For pre scrutiny arrangements, the Chair will normally recommend forthcoming executive items for discussion/challenge. It is also open to Committee Members to request items to be raised - though Members are asked to be selective here in regard to important issues.*
- (4) The relevant Cabinet Board Members will also be invited to be present at the meeting for Scrutiny/ Consultation purposes.*

(5) Would the Scrutiny Committee Members please bring the Cabinet Board papers with them to the meeting.

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Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

1 September 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.E.Freeguard

Councillors: N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds, A.N.Woolcock and W.F.Griffiths

Officers In Attendance K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, H.Jenkins, C.Griffiths, C.Jones, J.Woodman-Ralph, H.Hasan, C.Plowman and C.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, D.Jones, L.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards and A.Wingrave

1. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet Board items:

Management of Risk and Liabilities of disused Mine and Quarry Tips within the Authority and the future management of Coal Tip Safety.

Members were advised of the risks and liabilities associated with the historic coal and quarry waste tips within the Authority. Members were also update on the work of the Welsh Government Coal Tip Safety Task Force and the Law Commissions consultation exercise on the future management of Coal Tip Safety in Wales, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members shared concerns around the responsibilities that now lay with private owners and the Local Authority. It was felt that the purpose of the Coal authority were to manage these sites, however the land owners were now required to maintain these spoils which

have an impact on cost. It was asked that these concerns be raised with the Law Commission. Officers understood the concerns raised by members and reassured members that they had also raised the same concerns with Welsh Government. It was noted that discussions had taken place around potential funding that maybe available to help fund these costings imposed on the private land owners.

Members expressed that they would like consideration to be given in writing to the Law commission, raising the concerns around the responsibilities around monitoring and maintenance that now lie with the land owners.

Members asked what monitoring were in place around the spoil tips of open cast mining. It was noted that the large open cast mines within the County Borough are designed to be stable, copies of the plans of the mines were sent to National Resources Wales (NRW) and the Coal Authority to ensure the safety for future generations.

Confirmation was sought around whether Category C and D tips that weren't included in the bids would still be inspected. Reassurance was provided and officers confirmed that inspections of all Category C and D tips would continue dependant on future funding.

Discussions took place around the 7% of tips that are unregistered and what monitoring would be required. Officers highlighted that the Council currently doesn't have a duty where it would be required to take responsibility. However, it was noted that the Council may well wish to step in on these occasions for preventative safety measures. Therefore, it was noted that within the consultation response officers would reiterate these concerns and ask that the responsibilities be reconsidered due to the lack of resources and experience with in the Council. Allowing responsibility to be with Welsh Government and the Coal Authority.

Members asked where the coal tips were located in Neath Port Talbot. Officers explained that there were 404 Coal Tips located all over Neath Port Talbot and explained that identification of the locations were unavailable at this time, however can be shown outside the meeting. Officers also explained the details of the categories of the Coal Tips.

Members discussed what monitoring was in place for the voids left from previous tips as there were concerns around the body

responsible for those. Officer explained that the responsibility is with the coal authority, however, they would raise this issue within the consultation response for clarity.

Members provided reassurance to officers that the concerns raised today would be lobbied to the local MP's to raise their awareness of these issues.

Following scrutiny, members were in support of the recommendations subject to the additional wording to point 35 of the recommendation detailed in the report and an additional recommendation, as detailed below:

- That due to the timescales involved in preparing NPT's response to the Law Commissions consultation, that delegated power be granted to the Director of Environment and Regeneration to prepare and submit a response to the Law Commissions consultation exercise in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Engineering. With such a response addressing concerns on the financial responsibility of the maintenance being passed to land owners.
- That the Consultation Response be submitted to the MP's in Neath and Port Talbot for consideration.

2. **Urgent Items**

Because of the need to deal now with the matter contained in Minute No 4 below, the Chairperson agreed these could be raised at today's meeting as urgent items pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Reason:

Due to the time element.

3. **Access to Meetings**

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following urgent Cabinet Board item:

NPTCBC Support of the United Kingdom's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

Members discussed the urgent report and received information in respect of the implementation of the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy, as detailed within the private report.

Following Scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board

CHAIRPERSON

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

22 September 2021

Chairperson: **Councillor S.E.Freeguard**

Councillors: N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds, R.L.Taylor, A.N.Woolcock and W.F.Griffiths

Officers In Attendance: K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, H.Jenkins, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, C.Furlow-Harris, C.Morris, C.Davies, J.Woodman-Ralph, N.Blackmore, R.Headon, P.Hinder, M.Shaw and S.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, D.Jones, L.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees and A.Wingrave

1. Chairs Announcements

The Committee was informed of a change to the following report on the Cabinet Board Agenda:

- Agenda Item 10 – Corporate Plan Annual Report

An adjustment was to be made to the following sentence on page 56 of the circulated report:

‘Across the three well-being objectives for 2020/21, 64% (53 of 83) of our ‘steps’, i.e. the strategic actions we set to deliver our improvement priorities are on track, 24 of the steps are ‘just off’ track and 6 are off track’

The sentence was to be adjusted to the following:

‘Across the three well-being objectives for 2020/21, 65% (54 of 83) of our ‘steps’, i.e. the strategic actions we set to deliver our

improvement priorities are on track, 24 of the steps are 'just off' track and 5 are off track'

The same adjustment would also need to be made to pages 66 and 182 of the circulated report.

Following the update, Members were happy with the changes, therefore chose not to scrutinise the report.

2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on the 9 June 2021, 30 June 2021 and 28 July 2021 were approved, with the following amendment to the minutes of the 30 June 2021:

During the scrutiny of the agenda item relating to the 'Investments from Reserves 2021/22', the Committee discussed the Levelling Up Fund. Members asked if the following points could be included to the narrative of the minutes:

- *It was noted that during the meeting Members expressed their disappointment in that only 25% of the eligibility of the Levelling Up Fund was applied for; however, Officers provided thorough answers which satisfied Members.*
- *The Director of Education and Regeneration confirmed that there was £125k available for consultancy work which will allow Officers to work through the detailed plans of any future funding e.g. the Shared Prosperity Fund.*
- *Members wanted their thanks to Officers and the Director of Environment and Regeneration to be portrayed.*

3. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet Board items:

Revenue Budget Monitoring and Update Report 2021/2022

Members received an update in relation to current budget projections for the 2021/22 financial year.

Officers mentioned that the Revenue and Budget Monitoring and Update Reports were being provided to Members on a by-monthly basis due to the impact of Covid-19.

It was highlighted that the current predicted underspend this year was £1.583m; this was partly due to the reimbursement of loss of income

and the expenditure from the Welsh Government's Hardship Fund. The circulated report detailed that to date, the Council had been reimbursed £2.4m, and that a loss of income claim of £1.221m for quarter one had also been agreed.

In a previous meeting of the Committee, Members were informed that an additional £12m was recently allocated to the Council from Welsh Government; Members asked if this additional money had been reflected in the underspend and overspend of the circulated report, and if they were not, could they be put into the reserves to offset burdens which residents may face going forward, such as Council Tax.

It was highlighted that Members were informed of the additional £12m that was put into reserves, at the meeting held on 2 June 2021; during this meeting it was stated that this money was allocated to specific reserves across the various service areas. Officers confirmed that these monies were still in the reserves, other than the reserve movements as detailed on pages 26 and 27 of the circulated report. It was added that a report which was approved by Cabinet on 30 June 2021, also identified the use of around £4m of reserves which was shown in the reserves scheduled on Appendix 3 of the circulated report.

The Committee was informed that currently, the predicted specific reserves was around £54m; the end of year position will not be known until May 2022. It was mentioned that the Council will be setting its budget for 2022/23 at the beginning of March 2022, which was in advance of the closing of this financial year.

By Members receiving the monthly updates, it provided them with the knowledge of what the predicted position will be for the budget setting meeting in March; there will be opportunities to review the level of reserves being used in order to underpin the base budget and/or for specific initiatives that the Council proposes. However, it was noted that Members should be mindful of the reduction in reserves and of the financial sustainability of the Council.

It was highlighted that within the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate, there was a £17k underspend on Aids and Equipment. It was asked if the Authority had the provision to reclaim and reuse any of the equipment when a resident passes away. Officers explained that the predicated underspend was due to allocating additional monies into that budget during previous years. It was confirmed that there was mechanisms in place by which some equipment could be

reutilised, however sometimes it was not financially viable. Officers agreed to provide Members with further details regarding what type of equipment could be re-used.

In regards to the £75k overspend on parks and open spaces, it was queried whether the cost of dealing with the issue of ash die back was going to be an ongoing issue, and if the Council will be able to cover future issues that will arise. The Director of Environment and Regeneration confirmed that there was a programme of work for the ash die back issue; this was a large project which was set over multiple years, given the scale of the Council's assets, level of forestry, and having regard to the budget. It was mentioned that the Council would continue to try and secure funding, where possible, from Welsh Government and Natural Resource Wales (NRW); the Council was successful in securing additional grant funding at the end of last year, which had contributed to the overall cost of dealing with ash die back.

A discussion took place in regards to the scrutiny of individual Directorate budget reports; each Scrutiny Committee received the budget report relevant to their remit, and were provided with a more detailed picture of the various overspend and underspend in the service areas. However, it was noted that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to scrutinise all Directorate budget reports, even after they had been scrutinised at the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

It was highlighted that some Members of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee did not sit on the membership of another Scrutiny Committee; which made it difficult sometimes to identify when/where budget reports were taken for scrutiny. It was identified that Officers will consider reports going to future meetings of each of the other Scrutiny Committees, in order for Members to review the detail.

The Committee discussed the Council Tax increased income which was detailed in Appendix 4 of the circulated report, as part of the general reserve balance; the table showed that the Council Tax increased income was at Cr £1m. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services explained that Neath Port Talbot Council (NPTC) had set the Council Tax collection rate at 97% when setting the Council Tax base. It was stated that the Council Tax Team had been undertaking extensive work to collect and pay out money for the Council, Community Councils and the Police and Crime Commissioners Office; the collection rate was around 97.5% last year

and 98% the previous year. Members were informed that NPTC had placed top in recoveries across Wales in the past two years, and placed in the top four in the past five-six years, in terms of Council Tax collection. Officers added that the £1m was related to the collection of more than 97% in Council Tax, and reflects the hard work that the Team have carried; collecting the money and paying it out to the individual bodies that require the money.

Members relayed their thanks to the Teams in Finance for their hard work.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report

The Committee were presented with the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 Annual Report for the period 2020-2021.

A question was raised as to the progress of the pilot on anonymised job application forms to facilitate a fair and transparent recruitment and selection process. Officers confirmed that this had not been implemented yet as it relied on the introduction of the new HR/payroll database. An update on the current position would be sought from the Head of Human and Organisational Development and circulated to outside of the meeting.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

Purchase of Hybrid Meeting System and Refurbishments to the Council Chamber

Members were provided with a report regarding the request to purchase a hybrid meeting system and refurbishment of the Council Chamber to facilitate the attendance at such hybrid meetings.

Officers explained that there had been various changes in legislative obligations in respect of Council meetings that would need to be in effect by May 2022; this was due to the introduction of the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It was mentioned that the circulated report also aimed to address some of the feedback received from Members who took part in the recent Member Survey, relating to this matter. Officers stated that the hybrid meeting system would offer Members choice in regards to how they attend meetings; they would be able to join a meeting in person, or join virtually at various other location such as their workplace or home.

A discussion took place in regards to public participation; it was highlighted that a report would be presented to the Democratic Services Committee on this matter in the coming months. Members were informed that the Council was beginning to establish its participation agenda, which will provide the opportunity for public speaking in meetings and petition schemes; this was an aim to try and improve participation in democracy. It was added that this was also a requirement of the new legislation.

The importance of having a high quality and efficient system in place for hybrid meetings was raised. It was noted that the proposal contained within the circulated report covered the various options and sources that Officers had looked into; the key focus was ensuring ease of access for Elected Members and the public, and meeting the needs of the users. It was added that training opportunities would be provided to all Members once a system was put in place.

Concerns were raised in regards to connectivity, and how this could be a barrier to participating in meetings. Officers confirmed that a lot of thought had been given to connectivity issues; the Members IT Reference Group had recently been re-established and would be looking at various IT matters. It was mentioned that one of the first areas of work would be developing a survey to issue to all Members, in order to gain an understanding of their IT issues, including connectivity.

Further to the discussion on connectivity, it was stated that there were physical reasons with BT Openreach in regards to why some households struggled with connection; it was asked if it was possible to prompt the Welsh Government to push this issue forward. Officers explained that the Council would be looking into specific resolutions for Members' personal set-ups; where there were issues identified that could not be resolved in the short term, Officers will look into other buildings across the County Borough in which Members could utilise to take part in meetings. Members were informed that the City Deal was undertaking a regional digital project; one of the aspirations within that regional programme was to identify areas where there were difficulties in terms of connectivity, and how the Council could work within the City Deal arrangements to overcome these.

Due to the nature of the connectivity issues, it was suggested that Cabinet give consideration to make representation to the Welsh Government on this matter.

Following concerns raised regarding the costings of the proposals, it was stated that the Cabinet Member for Finance had contacted Welsh Government to raise this issue and had queried whether there was any more funding that could be utilised; the Cabinet Member would continue to lobby Welsh Government on this.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

South West Wales Corporate Joint Committees

An update on the current status and progress in relation to the creation of the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) was provided to Members.

The circulated report stated that the CJC will be able to co-opt such members to the CJC and determine/agree the terms of membership of any co-opted participant (e.g. voting rights, role, funding contribution etc.); Members expressed their concerns in regards to Co-opted Members having voting rights. The Chief Executive mentioned that the four Leaders of the four Councils, which covered the South West Wales area, very much had the same concerns. It was highlighted that when Welsh Government indicated that they were going to impose these arrangements on Local Authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) had made it clear that the maximum flexibility was to be provided to the locally Elected Members to determine how the CJC's would be set up. However, the exception to this was the position of the National Parks Societies, in which some voting rights had been granted on strategic land use and planning matters that fall within their purview.

Reference was made to the response letter from Rebecca Evans AS/MS, Minister for Finance and Local Government, which was detailed in Appendix 1 of the circulated report; the letter stated that it was intended that a CJC, in consultation with its constituent Councils, will be required to agree appropriate locally determined overview and scrutiny arrangements. Members queried whether any thought had been given in advance, to the appropriate scrutiny arrangements that could be put in place. Officers explained that the Monitoring Officers had been looking at different options for constituting these arrangements; this had been an ongoing process due to the various different regulations that had been confirmed at different times during the summer period. It was noted that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services was leading on this particular element of work, and had started to prepare a report which outlined a number of

different scrutiny models for consideration; when the formal reports were brought to the relevant meetings, Members will have the opportunity to feed into the processes before the arrangements were signed off. It was added that the Council was awaiting updated guidance from Welsh Government on this matter.

Detailed within the circulated report, it stated that Officers had been liaising with neighbouring authorities and convened a group comprising Chief Executives, Directors of Environment, Finance Directors (S151 Officers) and Monitoring Officers which meets on a fortnightly basis to progress these discussions; it was asked why there was not Elected Member representation in this group. It was confirmed that the Chief Executives and the Leaders of the four Authorities had been meeting on a regular, informal basis in order for the Leaders to provide a steer on the work that was being undertaken, and to feed into the advice that was being prepared for Members to review; currently, the set-up of the shadow form of the CJsCs was being looked into, since most of the regulations had been established.

A discussion took place in regards to the impacts on the valleys communities. It was noted that the valley impacts will particularly be drawn out in some of the specific duties that had been introduced by the legislation; for example, the CJsCs must develop a regional economic development strategy, a regional transport policy and a regional strategic land use plan. Officers highlighted that the interest around valleys impacts would be in the way in which those particular pieces of work were developed, to ensure that the needs of the valleys communities were appropriately reflected in that work.

Members raised concerns regarding the potential of losing Council staff and their expertise to the CJsCs. It was stated that the four Leaders were very clear that the Council should be setting up the CJsCs on the minimum necessary basis in the first instance; therefore only providing the resources where the legislation specifically requires them. As previously mentioned, it was required to develop a regional economic development strategy, a regional transport policy and a regional strategic land use plan; these will form the business that the CJsCs must undertake. Officers confirmed that it was currently not proposed to establish a permanent team of staff for the CJsCs, instead it was currently being proposed that the work would be shared out amongst the four Authorities, similar to the arrangements with the City Deal; and then looking into seconding some of staffs time into those roles. Officers added that the money that the Council

was putting into the CJsCs, as part of the levy, will be money that the Council will be seeking to recover and claim as the cost of the time of staff.

Depending on how the CJsCs develop, there was a risk that Council staff will move from their current roles into this other entity. It was mentioned that throughout the pandemic, the labour market had become far more competitive; the Council was struggling to recruit into a range of roles and struggling to sustain individuals in certain roles. This highlighted the importance, moving forward, of the Council needing to start investing in growing the workforce.

Members asked if the Terms of Reference and the Constitution for the CJsCs had been established, and if Members views could be included in order to highlight their concerns. Officers explained that the necessary regulations for the CJsCs to be constituted had been developed and communicated over the summer; the Monitoring Officers had started to draft the Constitution based on some of the principles that the four Leaders had asked to be built in. It was stated that the Terms of Reference and Constitution would not be signed off until each of the four Local Authorities and the National Park Authorities had sight of them; Members will be able to comment on the detail and provide their views to the Leaders. The Committee was informed that the first key meeting to make decisions regarding this, would be before the start of the Christmas period.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

4. **Forward Work Programme 2020/21**

The Committee noted the Cabinet Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2021/22.

CHAIRPERSON

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Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

17 November 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.E.Freeguard

Councillors: S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds, R.L.Taylor and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, H.Jones, C.Furlow-Harris, R.Headon, S.Davies, T.Davies, C.Plowman, J.Woodman-Ralph, L.Beynon, J.Hodges and M.Roberts

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, D.Jones, L.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees and A.Wingrave

1. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet items:

2021/2022 Risk Register Monitoring

Members were provided with an update on the Council's Strategic Risks.

The circulated report stated that there was currently a significant number of pressure points across the Council where there was an insufficient supply of workforce to meet Service Demands; Members queried what steps were being taken to reduce the pressure points. Officers explained that there was an All Member Seminar scheduled for 18 November 2021 in which Members would be briefed on the current Service Demands and the plans going forward.

Members made reference to the investment to support high risk victims of domestic abuse via the VAWDASV (Violence Against

Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) Leadership Group, and asked for further information on how this would be implemented. The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing agreed to circulate information regarding this matter to Members in due course.

One of the treatments associated with the financial resilience risk was to intensify citizen engagement with the budget challenges, securing citizen commitment to behaviours that will reduce or remove demand on Council services; it was asked how this was going to be achieved. It was noted that in terms of citizen engagement, the Council had recently concluded the 'Let's Talk' campaign which asked residents to identify what was important to them following the outbreak of the pandemic; there were over 1,700 respondents, 500 of which had stated they wished to be contacted in the next phase of the consultation exercise. The Council also had a Citizen's Panel which had around 500 members, and a Community of Practice; both groups will be contacted for future engagement. It was highlighted that the budget consultation and the service recovery consultation will both be promoted as much as possible; this will be done in many ways such as online, in libraries and through the Local Area Coordinators (LACs). Officers added that over the winter period, the Council will be running a three month campaign in order to engage with the public and ensure they were aware of how the Council impacts on their lives and, were aware of the work the Council had undertaken during the pandemic.

Officers confirmed that the following listed treatment associated with the financial resilience risks was related to Elected Members and all of the Councils stakeholders; to improve the quality of evidence adduced to exemplify the financial resilience challenges of the Council and ensure this was understood by those involved in the decisions on local government budgets.

The Committee raised concerns with the readability of the Strategic Risk Register and provided suggestions which would allow Members to interpret the document and gain a better understanding of the overall picture, which would therefore enable them to monitor it more effectively. Officers stated that in future they would include explanatory words into the report and provide as much clarity as possible based on the feedback provided by Members.

The circulated report highlighted the management of Landslips and Quarries on Council owned land; it was asked if Coal Tips should be included in this treatment. Officers mentioned that the comment

section of this treatment did indicate that the Council was carrying out inspections in relation to Coal Tips, and managing the assets carefully; this was one of the recommendations of the recent work that the Coal Authority had been undertaking nationally. It was noted that Neath Port Talbot Council was doing this in advance of the task force being set up by the Coal Authority; it was the good practice that had been in operation in this Council, which had led to some of the recommendations being formed from the task force. Officers were confident that the comments in the risk register was up to date, however in future would refer to the task force and replace 'Tips' with 'Coal Tips'.

Following on from the above, it was queried who monitored the medium risks that potentially could become high risk. Members were informed that all of the tips within the area had been classified from A-D, and those that were within the Councils ownership and control were being inspected on a regular basis in regard to their risk; those at the highest risk (class D) were inspected more frequently than those at the lowest risk (class A). It was confirmed that when inspecting the medium risks, Officers will determine if it had deteriorated or not; if so, it will be re-classified and the inspections would increase accordingly, or alternatively Officers would try to secure funding to implement mitigation measures.

Members asked for Officers to expand on the following point detailed in the circulated report; to review the potential for capacity/release or reduction in cost from internal, shared service or through external collaboration. Officers confirmed that they would collate more information on this and provide Members with a response outside of the meeting.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

Quarter 1 (1st April 2021 - 30th June 2021) Cabinet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The Committee received the Cabinet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Quarter 1 (1st April 2021 - 30th June 2021).

Reference was made to the performance indicator relating to the percentage of all planning applications determined in time; the performance in quarter 1 had slipped against the targets due to the current pressures in this service. The Chair of the Planning Committee asked if an email could be sent to all Elected Members to inform them of these pressures, and that planning applications were

likely to take longer than usual until the staffing levels were improved. Officers highlighted that colleagues in the Planning Service were struggling with the workload as there were a number of vacancies within the service and a large demand from developers; the Council was about to engage on a new recruitment process due to the issues in securing qualified and experienced staff. It was mentioned that this will help to improve the performance going forward; however, at the moment colleagues were trying to deal with issues on a priority basis. It was confirmed that the Director of Environment and Regeneration would send an email to all Members as mentioned above.

A discussion took place in relation to the average time (in seconds) to answer telephone calls in Welsh; Members were concerned with the detail contained within the circulated report against this particular performance indicator, and asked what was being done to lower the length of time to answer a call in Welsh. The Chief Executive explained that there was a general issue with contact into the Councils contact centre; the hybrid working system had proven to be problematic when staff at the switchboard were trying to transfer calls to an appropriate person. It was noted that there were lots of different reasons for this, in particular there were technical problems with the system; this was likely due to the quick turnaround of setting up the home working arrangements. Members were informed that the Chief Digital Officer was currently working through the various solutions; however, there was a wider piece of work to carry out over the next six months relating to the contact strategy. It was noted that the Council had more Welsh speakers in Customer Services than it had ever had before; however, the performance indicator highlighted that there was still more work to do around this.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Annual Report 2020/2021

The Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Annual Report 2020-2021 was presented to the Committee.

Members highlighted the importance of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, and stated that it needed to be included in the Covid 19 recovery plans with other strategic services and objectives. It was suggested that a review of the Strategy take place, with partners, to identify where and how progress needed to be made.

The Chief Executive mentioned that the longer term recovery plan would be provided to Members in December; as part of this plan,

Officers were proposing that a new wellbeing objective be formed which will focus on the Council's work relating to local environment, heritage and culture. It was noted that these themes had come through very strongly from residents who took part in the Let's Talk campaign; this new wellbeing objective will enable Officers to prioritise these factors and give them a greater focus. It was confirmed that the Welsh language would be included within the overall wellbeing objective; Officers welcomed the suggestion of the review of the strategy with partners. Members were informed that one of the requirements of the Welsh language standards relating to the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, was to undertake an evaluation and review within the five year period of the Strategy; following the publication of the recovery plan, Officers will be working on the development of the new Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.

Members supported bringing the reporting period into line with other strategies, however raised that the Council was currently half way through the next reporting period. Officers stated that they had hoped to bring this report to Cabinet in September but unfortunately were unable to do so due to issues with gathering information from partners. Going forward, it was confirmed that Officers would aim to bring annual reports earlier in the year.

The circulated report detailed that one of the actions in the Strategy was to ensure that sports clubs were encouraged and supported to use Welsh in formal and informal club settings. Members asked what support was being provided to help the sports clubs to encourage this. Officers explained that this information was provided by one of the Council's partners and further detail would be sought and provided to Members accordingly.

Members raised the importance of using incidental Welsh, and asked to be informed of any types of schemes to promote the use of incidental Welsh; this will allow Members to provide the information to their constituents.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture assured Members that Welsh language and culture was being promoted continuously through both English and Welsh schools.

Reference was made to the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Task and Finish Group that was set up a few years ago to develop the Strategy; it was queried how this fitted in with the current work being undertaken and future work going forward. Officers explained that each time annual progress was reported, it was in light of the

work undertaken in the development of the Strategy by the Task and Finish Group. It was mentioned that the Task and Finish Group could be re-established for the development of the new Strategy, if Members were so minded.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

Local Biodiversity Duty Plan 2021

Members were informed of the updated Biodiversity Duty Plan (2020-2023).

It was queried that when the Council receives applications for developments, how much weighting would be put on the biodiversity aspect of it versus the job creation and the economy. The Director of Environment and Regeneration stated that planning and the decision making process had always been a balancing act; the Council undertakes consultations with statutory and non-statutory consultees, and frequently gain a difference in opinion. It was noted that the role of the Planning Officer would then be to balance those issues, and make an informed judgement based on policy and guidance both at national and local level. Members were informed that the climate change agenda was becoming more and more of a priority; and the emphasis on developing a sustainable environment was also a priority for Welsh Government and Local Authorities, whether that be in terms of residential provision, economy or the natural environment. Officers stated that the Council will continue to ensure that these elements would be taken into account as part of the decision making process, however it was also required to take account of the other interests as they were material determination of planning applications. It was added that the Council was taking its responsibility very carefully and was securing funding to initiate some of its own biodiversity schemes.

In terms of the Local Development Plan (LDP), it was noted that when Officers received candidate's sites for the new plan, they will be ensuring that biodiversity was taken into account when the master planning work was being undertaken. Members were informed that the Council had previously signed up to the Place Making Charter which was focused on creating communities; making sure there were houses and jobs, whilst also linking them up through green infrastructure. It was stated that Officers would be undertaking a green infrastructure assessment which will look at active travel and biodiversity; this will ensure that all elements were integrated.

The Committee commended the Local Biodiversity Duty Plan and thanked the Teams involved in the work of this project.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by Cabinet.

2. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

The Cabinet Scrutiny Forward Work Programme was noted.

CHAIRPERSON

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