

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot and Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

22 February 2023

Chairperson: **Councillor P.Rogers**

Councillors: T.Bowen, C.Clement-Williams, J.Henton, R.G.Jones, S.Paddison, S.Purse, S.H.Reynolds, A.J.Richards and M.Spooner

Officers In Attendance K.Jones, A.Jarrett, N.Pearce, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, R.Crowhurst, N.Blackmore, C.Furlow-Harris, L.McAndrew, J.Woodman-Ralph and C.John

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, S.Harris, S.K.Hunt, J.Hurley, N.Jenkins, S.Jones, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn, D.M.Peters and J.Hale

1. **Chairs Announcements**

There were none.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were none.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 October 2022, 21 November 2022 and 30 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Cabinet Scrutiny scrutinised the following Cabinet items:

Self-Assessment 2021/2022

Members received information on the Council's draft self-assessment for 2021/2022. The Council is required to publish the self-assessment within 4 weeks of approval as per the circulated report.

Members commented on the amount of detail in the report and suggested the idea of having a conclusion at the start to get a better overview at the beginning of reports. Officers advised that they had a statutory requirement to include specific details but advised that they will be introducing an easy read version when they publish. Officers also advised that they will take on board comments about having a summary at the beginning of reports, when they put together the 2022/23 assessment.

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

Establishment of Liaison Forum in Respect to Afan Valley Adventure Resort

Members were informed of the request of Wildfox Resorts Afan Valley Limited, to establish a liaison forum with representatives of Wildfox Resorts Afan Valley Limited in respect of the development of the Afan Valley Adventure Resort. The main purpose of the liaison forum is to ensure the maximisation of the social, environmental, and economic benefits of the Afan Valley Adventure Resort for the local communities, as per the report.

Members expressed concerns relating to both items 8 and 9 of the Cabinet agenda pack. It was noted that the valley's community impact and workforce impact for both reports detailed that there were no implications. Members felt that there would be considerable workforce impacts in relation to the reports due to administrative support that would be required from relevant departments.

Members also felt that there may be an impact on other wards and consideration of including members from the Lower Afan valley on the liaison committee would be beneficial. Officers explained that it would be open to members who had been appointed to the appropriate forums to identify if there are any issues that could have

neighbouring impacts on adjacent wards and the terms of reference can always be reconsidered in those forums.

Members also queried the possibility of having the minutes of the liaison forum circulated to the Scrutiny Chairs. Officers advised that as the liaison committees are outside bodies, the minutes would not be circulated to all representatives of the council. Officers further suggested that as part of the forward work program of scrutiny, that the council find ways to make sure chairs were regularly kept updated and to try and find ways to put standing items on agendas and consider those matters.

Officers took on board the points raised and advised that when looking at the valley and workforce impacts the reason there were no impacts recorded on the report was due to the purpose of the report detailing the set up in general, relating specifically to the governance framework that has been put in place and the terms of reference. It was noted that further reports detailing the works of the projects would include the appropriate impacts.

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

Establishment of an Advisory Panel in Respect of the Global Centre for Rail Excellence

Members were informed of the Establishment of an advisory panel in respect of the Global Centre of Rail Excellence and the terms of reference of the Global Centre of Rail Excellence Advisory Panel established by GCRE Ltd. They also were asked to agree Council representatives to the various committees established by the Advisory Panel, following a request by GCRE Ltd, as per the circulated report.

The main discussion for this item took place under Item 8. Members noted that they would need to make sure that NPT Representatives on those committees are aware of concerns of locals so that they can represent them fully.

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

Phase One of the Accommodation Review.

Members were advised that officers were seeking approval to close five of the Neath Port Talbot Council's operational staff-based office accommodation buildings and declare them surplus to operational requirements with effect from 31st March 2023 as per the report.

Officers explained the purpose of this accommodation review is to enable the local authority to reduce the number of buildings the authority is occupying because not only is the authority paying rent on those, but also the energy usage and other resulting utility bills associated with those occupied buildings. Reducing the buildings would help to drive down costs so that services can be protected and to ensure that sustainability principles that the authority, the UK government, and Welsh government want to achieve which is a secure Net Zero carbon by 2030 are being met.

Officers stated that they will be looking to utilise the buildings that are being retained in the long term as they do not want to move staff into another building which is going to cost the authority to operate or alternatively move them into another building that may form part of a later phase of the accommodation strategy. Officers stated that this is just Phase One of a multi-phased strategy.

Members sought clarification and detail on the issue on page 91/92 of the report, where up to six rooms in Cimla hospital being retained for specialist training purposes for social services and wanted more detail on why and whether there is a timeline in place and a process for arranging relocation.

Officers advised that the rooms have been retained for manual handling training and a timeframe for officers to take out that specialist equipment and relocate it has not been decided, however officers will let the committee know as soon as they have one. Officers also provided a brief explanation of what staff would be moving and where they would be moving to in relation to social services.

There was a discussion about the detail of the report with members suggesting that the report should have had detailed breakdowns on each proposal and an explanation on the saving costs of the closure of buildings or the surrendering of the lease. Officers agreed to provide a more detailed breakdown for members and circulate them

after the meeting along with further detail being included in future reports.

There was a discussion around the security and ongoing costs of keeping and maintain empty buildings until they are sold. Officers advised that not all properties would require security to be present. The properties would be inspected once vacated to ensure that they are secure, and the authority will have a care and maintenance responsibility for them going forward.

Members were advised that the authority will have service charges and buildings will still need to be heated while they're empty to prevent any damp penetration and disrepair. Officers advised that compared to the costs incurred by buildings fully occupied or partially occupied it will be significantly less.

There was a discussion around potential implications for the ending of leases with CVS which could cause knock on affects for local people and cause costs moving forward. Officers said that in preliminary discussion with the organisations who own the buildings, there would not be an adverse impact upon those owners because of the authority removing itself from the leased property.

Members questioned how the report achieves its savings in regard to the £158,000. Members wanted to understand if that included business rates and if it assumes the immediate sale of those two buildings quickly. Members felt there was detail lacking in terms of whether the report assumes that the authority will still have the two properties for 12 months. Members felt it there was not enough detail to understand what it is they were agreeing to and that the report has been used in a line of a budget to balance the budget but there is no guarantee that it will come through to fruition. Members expressed concerns that there should be more detail within that budget paper and asked that this information is circulated to all members of council as it is relevant to the budget that will be decided in Council in March.

Officers explained that in the report there are several assumptions that have been built into the costs, as officers will not know the outcome as it's all associated with the marketing of that property. Officers advised that the responsibility approving the sale of properties rests with the cabinet board for decision. Members expressed concerns that without knowing whether the assumption that has been used on the cost saving relies on sales happening and some members were uncomfortable that they may recommend a

decision that may result the sale of a building without considering other options.

Following Scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board with One member voting against the recommendation.

Capital Budget Monitoring Report 22/23 as of the End of December 2022

Members were provided with information in relation to the delivery of the 2022/23 Capital Programme as per the report.

Officers also provided an overview of the report advising that it is the monitoring report for the capital program as at the end of December. It detailed that the previous Capital programme agreed by Cabinet was 70.4 million pounds this report proposes a new capital programme for this year of 54 million pounds with a number of amendments detailed in the report showing the changes from the previously approved budget to the one proposed in front of Cabinet.

Members raised concerns in relation to the number of areas that are listed for reprofile and the number of under-spends throughout the report. Members highlighted 29 areas of reprofiling at an estimate of £21,000,000 for the capital projects next year. Members highlighted the Disabled Facilities Grant, City Deal, Margam Park, Supported Living and school maintenance as areas they wanted clarity on.

Officers agreed that there was a significant amount of reprofiling. Officers explained that with the Disabled Facilities Grants there was a significant amount of budget carried forward from 2021/22 due to an inability to get contractors to work during the pandemic, which was added to the 22/23 budget. Due to capacity of the supply chain, it was reprofiled again because again they cannot get people to do the work.

Officers explained that there is limited capacity within the regeneration team in relation to the City Deal, and difficulties in being able to recruit suitable people to the project teams. Officers have been working throughout the year in terms of the Shared Prosperity Fund bids, the Levelling Up Fund bids, the Wild Fox resort etc, which means that some of those City deal projects have had to move into next year.

Officers also advised that in terms of some of the school programme, the Welsh government has allocated additional money during the year, so that has moved the money into next year. This means that the authority is spending some Welsh government money instead. Officers also explained that there is a limited window where you can undertake Capital work in schools so there is a capacity and a profiling issue.

In relation to supported living, officers explained that it is a contribution the authority is making towards a project that City and County of Swansea are running, which means a delay in terms of contribution to that project.

In relation to Margam Park, officers advised that there is further work being undertaken in terms of the project there, with the report due back before and the relevant cabinet board soon.

Members wanted to know what officers are doing to address the lack of workforce in relation to implement Capital Works programs going forward.

Officers explained that the authority has strengthened several functions in the environment directorate across Planning, Highways and Regeneration and that the authority will be looking to do the same with the shared Prosperity fund monies that they have got.

It was also explained that there will be a proposal coming forward in the next couple of months around some of the more strategic Investments the authority has got and a reshaping of the way in which the authority responds to those.

Further proposals will emerge in the next couple of months meaning that resources for the larger projects are limited. It was explained that the authority has been unable to recruit people to project teams despite extensive attempts utilising various channels for the advertising. The authority has however secured approval from the programme board to appoint a consultant to undertake duties in terms of the first phase so that the authority can make progress.

The authority has got risk registers in place for all projects and officers report to programme boards on a regular basis in relation to those risks and officers are comfortable they can achieve the

outcomes that were initially identified albeit subject to the delays referred to in the item.

There was a discussion around the lack of detail in reports around the items discussed, officers gave some context around the shift in the risk profile that the councillors needed to manage. The Chief Executive advised that because lots more information is put into every report, it is consuming even more officer time and officers are very much struggling in some areas in terms of capacity and encouraged members to ask for more detail to understand risks.

Members asked officers if Pontardawe Arts centre Cinema will have the money spent on it in the coming financial year, members also questioned that given inflation, the projects reprofiling at the same amount could mean that the project may need some additional funding.

Members stated that the budget papers make it clear that the projects and centres will start covering their own costs in full without subsidy. Members felt that particular public centres may find this difficult and noted the importance of the upcoming budget discussion.

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

Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for 2022-2023 as at the End of December 2022

Members were provided with information in relation to the Council's projected revenue budget position as per the report. Officers also added that they were pleased to note that the latest projection is that that the Council's overspend (excluding schools) has reduced to £86k after reserve movements.

Members queried page 123, and the section relating to levies and contributions, aside from the Fire Authority, the report listed other levies and contributions. Members wanted an example what those are those bodies were.

Officers explained that there is a £46,000 for the Swansea Port Health Authority Levy, £1000 Levy for the Margam Joint Crematorium Committee £117 000 Levy for the Corporate Joint Committee. There is also a contribution towards the Archive Service for £96 000 and a

contribution towards the Magistrates Court of ten thousand pound given the £270,000 that is detailed in total.

Members questioned the report section on page 119 relating to the housing advice support tenancy service predicting and overspend of £656,000. With the report saying it is incorporated into policy. Members highlighted that the report does not explain how the overspend will be paid for.

Officers advised that it is a change of Welsh Government policy. Officers have put it in as a pressure under consideration. Officers explained that the authority is looking at the rapid rehousing policy and implementing that as soon as possible as it is hoped that will bring some of that down. Officers also advised that the authority needs to move to more of a prevention element of this in the hope that it will bring the overspending down, advising that officers are working on a different approach to housing over the coming months and are doing a lot of work behind the scenes to try and reduce the overspend. He informed members that they will be updated in more detail in the next couple of months.

Members were sympathetic to the work of officers and disappointed that the change in legislation has not been funded and noted that it is a matter of lobbying the Welsh Government to seek funding for such matters.

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

The 2022-2023 Risk Register Monitored and Report

Members received an update on the Council's Strategic Risks as per the report.

Members asked for an update on the risk of a land slip at Panteg, Cyfyng Road. Officers explained that there had been issues in relation to the demolition of phase one of Cyfyng Road. The authority are liaising with the owners of the properties and the solicitors acting on their behalf are currently making last-minute amendments which will not make any significant difference to the outcome.

Officers have the contractor's Health and Safety and Construction Design Management details, which have been considered internally,

with the contractors hoping to be on site in the middle of March. Officers advised that two weeks prior to starting on site the authority will be advising the local community that the works are going ahead to demolish phase one and are hoping that after the demolition of phase one we will then have a momentum for phase two.

Members were advised that phase two is more complex as the insurance companies are still failing to pay out the owners of those properties because they do not think there is a real health and safety issue associated with those properties. Officers are hoping that once phase one is started that it will send a clear message to the insurance companies and phase two can be progressed.

Members asked about the risk of there being insufficient investment in the Council's major infrastructure and wanted to know if the authority have considered the risk of buildings maintenance when putting together the risk register. As well as whether it was possible to have an up-to-date condition record of all its buildings, whether that risk has been considered and assessed and not met the criteria to be put in the register.

Officers explained that the report seems to be missing the mitigations as the authority does have property asset management plans but seems to have fallen off the report. For example, the basis in which the authority selects schools within the Strategic School Improvement program considers the risks around the buildings. Officers reiterated that there are mechanisms in place that have assessed the risks around the authority's property assets, but it appears that the lines relating to building maintenance must have been accidentally left out on this iteration of the report.

It was agreed that there was some missing detail from the report that reflect the arrangements around property asset management and those would be included in the next report next time

It was also agreed that officers would circulate a copy of the Asset Management Plan to members.

5. **Forward Work Programme 2022/23**

Members decided that they wanted the 2022-2023 income generation report added to the forward work programme.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were none.

CHAIRPERSON