



CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.00 pm WEDNESDAY, 17 APRIL 2024

**MULTI-LOCATION - MICROSOFT TEAMS AND CONFERENCE ROOM
2, PORT TALBOT CIVIC CENTRE**

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Part 1

1. Chairs Announcements
2. Declarations of Interests
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 16*)
 - 14 February 2024
 - 28 February 2024
4. Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - To select appropriate items from the Cabinet agenda for pre-decision scrutiny (cabinet reports enclosed for Scrutiny Members)
5. Forward Work Programme 2023/24 (*Pages 17 - 18*)
6. Urgent Items
Any urgent items at the discretion of the Chairperson pursuant to Section 100BA(6)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

7. Access to Meetings
To resolve to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

Part 2

8. Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s
- To select appropriate private items from the Cabinet agenda for pre-decision scrutiny (cabinet reports enclosed for Scrutiny Members)

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Thursday, 11 April 2024

Committee Membership:

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

**Vice
Chairperson:** Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: T.Bowen, H.C.Clarke, C.Clement-Williams,
C.Galsworthy, J.Henton, J.Jones, R.G.Jones,
S.Paddison, R.Phillips, S.Pursesey, S.H.Reynolds
and A.J.Richards

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

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

Members Present:

14 February 2024

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: T.Bowen, C.Galsworthy, J.Henton, J.Jones, R.G.Jones, S.Paddison, S.Pursey, S.H.Reynolds and A.J.Richards

Officers In Attendance K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, N.Daniel, S.Rees, J.Woodman-Ralph, B.Griffiths, D.Griffiths, K.Jones, L.McAndrew, A.Spooner-Cleverly and P.Chivers

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.Harris, S.K.Hunt, N.Jenkins, S.Jones, S.A.Knoyle, A.Llewelyn and C.Phillips

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 8, and 12.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr. Rob Jones, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Trustee of Taibach Community Library, Personal Interest

Cllr. Sean Pursey, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Trustee of Taibach Community Library, Personal Interest

Cllr. Scott Jones, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 - Trustee of AVCL (connection with Cymer Swimming Pool), Personal Interest

Cllr. Simon Knoyle, Agenda Item 12 – Board Member of Glynneath Training Centre, Personal Interest

Cllr. Sian Harris, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Chair of Ffrindiau Creunant, Personal Interest

Cllr. Wyndham Griffiths, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – member of Bulldogs and Forces Champion, Personal Interest

Cllr. Tim Bowen, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Forces Champion, Personal Interest

Cllr. Sonia Reynolds, Cabinet Agenda Item 12 – Trustee of Canolfan Maerdy, Personal Interest

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on 28th November 2023 and 13th December were approved as true and accurate records.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Audit Wales – Springing Forward Strategic Workforce Management – Neath Port Talbot Council

Members referred to page 33, paragraph 24 of the Audit Wales report contained within the Cabinet Agenda pack. The report noted the councils current strategic risk rating does not adequately reflect the residual risk faced by delays in developing succession plans and identifying business critical roles. Members questioned whether the risk register has been updated to reflect this point, and what work has been carried out since the publication of the report to address the situation.

The Head of People and Organisational Development confirmed that the Strategic Risk Register is currently under review, and this process will include work on succession planning. The Head of Service summarised the actions that have been put in place to increase the number of services that have succession plans in place with identified

business critical positions. During the last calendar year, 72 Managers have attended Succession Planning Workshops and the workshop has been embedded as part of the Core Development Programme for Managers. Work is ongoing to review the toolkit used for succession planning with the aim of it being digitalised. An analysis has been undertaken of the succession plans that are currently in place. Accountable Managers have been reminded of the importance of ensuring that succession plans are in place.

Members expressed concern that a number of key senior managers have left the authority and the experience of these business critical officers has been lost. Members commented that the rate of recruitment was not matched with posts vacated.

The Head of People and Organisational Development acknowledged the importance of managers engaging with succession planning. It was noted that the council's successful appointment rate has increased over a period of two years from 82% to 93% and recruitment activity has increased by 40%, with a positive turnover rate. It was acknowledged that some posts remain hard to fill, particularly in specialist areas.

The Chief Executive gave assurance that this is an important area of work which will remain a priority going forward. The council is currently operating in a tight labour market. Workforce information is shared with Personnel Committee to enable members to track progress.

Members were pleased to hear of the rise in recruitment targets but expressed concern relating to staff retention and the financial cost of using market supplements in relation to hard to fill posts.

The Head of Service confirmed that market supplements are a tool that can be used when appropriate and the scheme is due for review. It was noted that pay is only one aspect of the employee remuneration package and other benefits made the council an attractive employer.

The Director of Social Services confirmed that the use of market supplements in Social Services has worked well and helped to retain experienced staff. There are financial benefits in applying market supplements rather than the alternative of backfilling vacant posts with agency staff. It was noted that the recruitment of social workers is difficult at present.

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive responses.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Local Bus Tendering

The Head of Engineering and Transport gave a brief overview of the report as contained within the Cabinet Board agenda pack.

Members thanked officers for their work on this matter and for the positive outcome. Members questioned if the whole budget had been utilised or whether there was any possibility of additional routes being re-instated.

The Head of Service confirmed that routes cut in October 2023 would be re-instated. Welsh Government have agreed that the £200k in-year underspend can be retained for future use. It is recognised that there are still shortcomings in the Networks, some of the elements of the services have not been registered. A report was taken to Cabinet recently which gave permission to award De Minimis Subsidy Award contracts, with a view to backfill any emerging gaps. Early discussions are ongoing regarding franchising the bus network.

In relation to staff requirements, Members asked if there was any certainty in relation to the framework as the project heads towards franchising. In relation to the £200k underspend on bus services, members asked for clarification regarding commercial services that haven't been registered and what impact that may have before any gaps are filled.

The Head of Service advised members that a Transport for Wales network review had identified areas where improvements to journey times are needed; it is hoped that the review data will lead to infrastructure improvements. A system of real time passenger information will be rolled out within Neath Port Talbot during the course of next year, this roll out is in advance of other parts of Wales. Work is underway regarding franchising and the network structure. Full details of the franchising areas have not been announced but there are likely to be nine areas within Wales with Neath Port Talbot falling under Mid/South Wales. It was confirmed that the internal team comprised of 1.2 staff who will have responsibility for 42 contracts, scheduling, timetabling and complaints in addition to their current duties. There is a need to expand the team via the management of

change process with potentially the creation of two new roles to ensure the team is sustainable and resilient. It was noted that the officer role is identified as business critical and a succession plan is in place.

Members commented that succession planning is difficult in smaller departments with a big discrepancy between grades within the teams.

Officers confirmed that the requirement for a new bus service between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Hospital has been identified, this was considered during the tender process but no action was taken due to funding uncertainty. Operators have registered services to the hospital at the detriment of the local network and there is a need to plug this gap in service.

Members asked for clarity in relation to any gaps in service post 1 April 2024.

Officers confirmed that a seamless transition depended on the Traffic Commissioner accepting the short term notice given by First Cymru. If the Traffic Commissioner did not accept the short term notice, there may be a break in service.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

5. **Committee Action Log**

The Committee Action Log was noted.

6. **Forward Work Programme 2023/24**

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

7. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items

8. **Access to Meetings**

Resolved: To exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

9. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

**Third Sector Grant Funding – Award of Grants for 2024-2025
(Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Cllr. P Rogers
CHAIRPERSON**

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

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

Members Present:

28 February 2024

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: H.C.Clarke, C.Galsworthy, J.Henton, J.Jones,
R.G.Jones, S.Paddison, R.Phillips, S.Pursey
and S.H.Reynolds

**Officers In
Attendance** K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce,
C.Griffiths, H.Jones, N.Daniel, C.Furlow-Harris
and A.Thomas

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

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 8 and 9 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on 20 December 2023, 22 January 2024 and 21 February 2024 were approved as true and accurate records.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3

Members thanked officers for providing clarity outside of the meeting, in relation to £3.87m mentioned on page 24 of the report, which has been moved back into specific reserves due to uncompleted works. Members questioned whether a sufficient number of officers were in place to complete necessary works during the revenue year.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that two items made up the majority of the £3.87m moving back into reserves; £2.379m relates to a delay in purchasing large recycling vehicles, which has been postponed whilst a fleet review is undertaken. An amount of £700k was budgeted for remodelling the Crumlin Burrows Transfer Station, this work has been delayed until 2025. There are 12 other entries going back to reserves; challenges in staff recruitment has been a contributory factor particularly in the Environment Directorate.

The Director for Environment and Regeneration confirmed the circumstances that have been outlined and advised members that market supplements had been used with some success in certain services to address staff recruitment issues. There is outstanding budget to tackle the capacity issues that have been discussed with members previously.

Members referred to page 30 of the report contained within the agenda report pack and the projected energy, efficiency, transition and contingency £600k underspend. Members enquired whether the £700k that is stated as being transferred into the accommodation reserve to fund energy efficiency lighting schemes during 2024/25 will be transferred as a capital or revenue project.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the funding will be transferred into the accommodation reserve which is a revenue reserve. The projects will be delivered as capital projects but will be funded from a revenue reserve. It was noted that capital expenditure can be funded from revenue reserves but not vice versa. Two large scale led lighting refurbishment projects have been identified in the Quays and Neath Civic Centre but were undeliverable by the end of this financial year, funding has been transferred into reserves for use next year when the projects will be built into the capital programme.

Members questioned why the projects were not identified as capital projects from the outset and why there was such an underspend.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration advised members that efforts were being made to establish a team of officers concentrating on areas such as energy efficiency, net zero carbon, climate change and ecology. There has been difficulties in growing the team to the required capacity. A number of staff are tasked to decrease the energy costs of the authority, ensuring assets are operating as efficiently as possible. Regular building studies are undertaken, and business cases are in place to demonstrate where there is a return on investment should capital schemes be progressed. Much of the work of the team is business as usual activity, therefore there is no specific budget code for the work and it is carried out within salary costs, which are consumed by the Environment Directorate.

Members asked whether a sufficient number of staff were available to drive projects forward to reduce energy costs.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration confirmed that there continues to be an insufficient number of staff in the team but a budget and structure is in place to address this. Currently, there are two technical experts and one administration officer in post who have responsibility for building assets in addition to strategy objectives to reduce carbon footprint and energy consumption. There has been a very poor level of interest to some of the vacant posts but interviews are being held for the Manager post shortly. It was noted that it is challenging to secure the appropriately skilled people to deliver the councils objectives.

Members referred to page 26 of the report contained within the agenda pack and expressed concern at the change in the reserve position of schools. Members questioned whether any schools are not going to be in a deficit situation or whether schools would be considering redundancies due to the funding situation.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning advised members that there is an awareness of schools current financial situations and likely positions going forward. Any schools that are currently in deficit have recovery plans in place. It is likely that redundancies will take place in some schools going forward due to the overspend position across the whole school sector; schools may consider voluntary redundancies to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Members asked if there was an average cost for any reviews undertaken by the council.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the cost of each review was linked to the amount of work involved, and therefore there was no average cost. It was noted that most reviews are signed off by Cabinet or Cabinet Boards so members will be aware of costs involved. Each review will have a business case stating the costs will be repaid by savings delivered.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Capital Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3

Members requested an update of spend in relation to the Pontardawe Arts Centre Cinema project.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed the start date for the Pontardawe Arts Centre Cinema project was delayed. Member approval was sought to continue with the project, due to insufficient funding. The contractor is due to start on site within the next three weeks which will result in more spend in terms of design work and materials.

Members referred to page 47 of the report and asked for further information in relation to £441k that is yet to be spent on the Regeneration Harbourside Infrastructure.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed more narrative would be contained in future reports. In relation to the large infrastructure project on the Harbourside, this was funded by European funding which was match funded from council funding. The residual funds remaining will be used to settle the final account, once this is agreed.

Members referred to page 54 of the agenda report pack and questioned whether the £10k budget for the Neath Library refurbishment, related to the old or new library. Members also requested further information in relation to the £10k budget for the Byass works site.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed the budget for the Neath Library related to a feasibility study to explore the potential refurbishment of the old Neath library. The Director of Environment & Regeneration

confirmed the budget for the Byass Works site related to the development of a masterplan within the wider Harbourside area. Due diligence and feasibility studies are being carried out in the area to establish what can be delivered and whether aspirations are achievable.

Members referred to page 45 of the report and raised concern that grants were not fully utilised in relation to the Capital Maintenance for Schools.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the budget line shows a spend of 2.379m at the end of December against a budget of 2.9m. There has been a delay in some expenditure but it is expected that the budget will be fully utilised. The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that with reference to the Supporting Learners with Additional Learning Needs £60k spend against the 1.3m budget, works are progressing on the provision at Blaenhonddan and Ysgol Hendrefelin. There have been some delays between works being completed and invoicing.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

5. **Forward Work Programme 2023/24**

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

CHAIRPERSON

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Cabinet Scrutiny Committee
(All starting 2pm unless otherwise stated)

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Contact Officer
17 th April		
26 th April	PSB – Wellbeing Plan (Training Session)	Vanessa Dale
8 th May		
9 th May	PSB – Wellbeing Plan	Vanessa Dale
29 th May		

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