



**CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**2.00 pm WEDNESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2024**

**MULTI-LOCATION MEETING - COUNCIL CHAMBER, PORT TALBOT  
& MICROSOFT TEAMS**

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**Part 1**

1. Chairs Announcements
2. Declarations of Interests
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 16*)
  - 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023
  - 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023
4. Pre-decision Scrutiny
  - To select appropriate items from the Cabinet agenda for pre-decision scrutiny (cabinet reports enclosed for Scrutiny Members)
5. Committee Action Log (*Pages 17 - 18*)
6. Forward Work Programme 2023/24 (*Pages 19 - 20*)
7. 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).

8. 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**

9. 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, 8 February 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 and  
Microsoft Teams)

**Members Present:**

**28 November 2023**

**Chairperson:** Councillor P.Rogers

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor C.Jordan

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

**Officers In Attendance** K.Jones, A.Thomas, C.Griffiths, H.Jones,  
N.Daniel, S.Davies, C.Furlow-Harris, H.Lewis,  
L.McAndrew, A.Thomas, K.Warren and L.Willis

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

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### 1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### 2. **Declarations of Interests**

None received.

### 3. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

#### **Setting Council Tax Base 2024/25 (Pages 11 - 16)**

Members asked for clarification regarding the setting of Council Tax Base for 2024/25.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that every council in Wales provides Welsh Government with their Council Tax Base as at 31st October. All houses in Council Tax bands A-I are counted and converted to a band D equivalent, the estimated amount of new build properties are added to give a Council Tax Base.

The Welsh Government Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) will evaluate how much the council needs to spend to provide services, the amount of income that's generated by council tax is deducted and a formula is used to work out the amount of the Revenue Support Grant.

Members asked if changes to the current banding system would affect the formula.

Officers confirmed that 85% of properties in Neath Port Talbot fall within bands A-C which decreases the equivalent band D figure. It was noted that the Welsh Government proposals around changes to the council tax system would be reported to Cabinet for consideration of the proposed options.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

### **Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review - Organisational Response (Pages 17 - 66)**

Members referred to the transformational reserve of £1.2m mentioned in the report and questioned the absence of a timeline.

The Chief Digital Officer advised that at the time of the Audit Wales review the accompanying delivery plan to the councils Digital Data and Technology Strategy was being developed. The review noted the council's robust arrangements to deliver the plan. The strategy is now live and there is a full process around prioritisation of demands to digital services. Once demands are prioritised through the Digital Transformation Board they are locked into a digital pipeline and fully monitored and reported back to Corporate Directors on a quarterly basis and an annual review is taken to Cabinet (Policy & Resources) Sub Committee.

Members questioned what projects were already in the Pipeline Tracker and their progress and asked how an assessment can be made to identify what is achievable with the £1.2m reserve. Members also asked how a long term strategy for digitalisation can be put in place considering the fast pace of changes in this field and requested Digital Strategy be added to the Forward Work Programme.

Officers confirmed that no timeline had been set for the strategy due to the speed at which digital technology is changing. The strategic statements in the strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis against the programmes of work locked into the delivery plan, the overarching objectives in the corporate plan and directorate priorities. In terms of the transformation fund, work is already underway to explore how this can support the resourcing of the biggest transformation projects. Care will be taken to ensure the right projects are prioritised for the council and that will be reported for full scrutiny and review.

Members questioned when an update on the timeline would be available and whether the current economic climate was having an impact on the Digital Strategy work.

Officers advised members that the delivery plan is available to be published so can be shared with members. Each of the work programmes within the digital pipeline are categorised across directorates, with financial implications being reviewed as part of the transformation board process. There are around 30/40 different programmes of work in the pipeline, once agreed they are fully resourced with a start and end date with a benefits realisation statements against them - this will be shared with members. Officers confirmed that the financial efficiency savings that these programmes could generate is under review with the service areas. Digital is a way to transform services and resources have to be managed carefully to support the transformation in other service areas. There are areas of focus such as Artificial Intelligence and automation which have started to make net gains in saving officer time.

Members noted that some investments could provide financial benefits in the long term.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that over the last 3 years, the Digital Services budget had been increased by £400k to create additional capacity. Transformation initiatives will be presented to Cabinet in December, proposing using reserves now to deliver longer term ongoing revenue savings.

Members suggested a Digital seminar to explore projects in more detail. The Chair agreed a future seminar would be arranged.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Corporate Plan “Reset, Review, Recover” 2022-2027 Annual Report Period: 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 (Pages 67 - 128)**

Members referred to page 68, item 6 of the report and questioned how much of the Corporate Plan would be based on the results of the Lets Keep Talking campaign and whether there was a sufficient number of responses.

The Director for Strategy and Corporate Services advised members that the Let’s Keep Talking campaign was only one of the factors that will be taken into consideration when reviewing the Corporate Plan. There will be opportunities via the Budget consultation which commences in December with regards to the budget and delivery priorities for 2024/25. The council has engaged with Opinion Research Services an independent social research company, who will present the findings of the Lets Keep Talking survey and give an in depth understanding of the methodology used and the qualitative and quantitative data captured as part of the survey.

Members were unhappy with the number of responses received to the Lets Keep Talking survey and questioned how much weighting is applied to the survey rather than other elements.

The Director for Strategy and Corporate Services confirmed that the survey is not weighted to any one particular element. It is important to ensure that views are gathered from residents, members, businesses, 3rd sector and partners including

trade unions. Members will have opportunities to feed into the discussions around the Corporate Plan priorities for 2024/25

The Chief Executive stated it was difficult to obtain insight from all the different sections of the community but gave assurances that it is the full council who decide the wellbeing objectives and agrees the actions. When gathering information it is important to understand whose views have been gathered and that no one data set will provide a perfect set of priorities due to people's individual priorities.

Members questioned whether appointing an outside body in the current financial climate was appropriate. Members noted that there should be more canvassing of the public and staff to gather data.

The Director for Strategy and Corporate Services confirmed that the external company was appointed to provide capacity to carry out the work. In future, capacity is being built into Digital Services to move forward to channel the information.

Members questioned the cost of the external company and stated that insufficient exit surveys are carried out.

The Director of Strategy and Corporate Services advised that the cost was not available at today's meeting but can be feedback to members. Work will be undertaken to gather Service User Perspective as the Corporate Plan 2024/25 is developed, this will include staff feedback.

Members noted that the Chief Executive was proactive in obtaining resident and staff views but consultation fatigue can be an issue for some people.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that consultation fatigue can be an issue but pointed out that the council has a legal duty to consult. Recent changes in legislation in relation to the Participation Strategy duties brings a more extensive obligation to consult before proposals are formulated and at frequent points during the decision making process, which will involve people in monitoring and evaluation.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

#### 4. **Forward Work Programme 2023/24**

Members asked that an update on the Digital Strategy be added to the Forward Work Programme.

To note the Forward Work Programme with above addition.

#### 5. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.



6. **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.

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

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund Skills and Multiply Round 2 (Exempt under Paragraph 14) (Pages 205 - 234)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Cllr. P Rogers  
CHAIRPERSON**

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## **Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

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

**Members Present:**

**13 December 2023**

**Chairperson:** Councillor P.Rogers

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor C.Jordan

**Councillors:** T.Bowen, C.Clement-Williams, C.Galsworthy,  
J.Henton, J.Jones, S.Paddison, S.Pursey and  
S.H.Reynolds

**Officers In  
Attendance** K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce,  
C.Griffiths, H.Jones, N.Daniel, B.Griffiths,  
N.Blackmore, S.Davies, T.Davies, C.Frey-  
Davies, C.Furrow-Harris, D.Griffiths,  
Chele.Howard, C.Saunders, H.Short, A.Thomas  
and K.Warren

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

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1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr T Bowen      Item 4 (Cabinet Board Agenda Item 7)  
Personal – Family member works at The Gnoll

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

#### 4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

##### **Quarter 2 - Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Officers advised that there was a projected overspend of £3.4m as at the end of September. The Council have continued to try and drive that down so that overspend is minimised and reserve balances are protected as far as possible.

Officers have considered every specific reserve and have determined if they are still required and if they can be repurposed. Through this exercise the Council have managed to repurpose £7.899 million of specific reserves. The intention is to prime three longer transformation initiatives using those reserves.

Member queried on page 27 in relation to Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, based on costs to date the overspend of £132k. Members queried what additional funding is being referred to in the report in relation to covering this overspend. Officers confirmed that when budgets were set a 4% pay allowance was set and an additional 2% pay award that allowances that fall over 4%. These budgets will be used to allocate the costs back to service directorates and schools to ensure that pay awards are fully funded.

Members queried who was commissioned to review the Home to School Transport and what was the cost of this. Officers confirmed that Edge Public Consulting were commissioned, and it cost £900,000 over three years. Officers confirmed that a report outlining the detail of this work has been brought to Cabinet previously.

In relation to Social Services strategies coming forward, the Director confirmed that more detail would be presented to Cabinet in the New Year.

With regards to Income Generation, page 33, officers confirmed that £1.5m revenue reserves has been repurposed to fund longer term investment proposals. There is a need to repurpose revenue reserves to deliver longer term transformation proposals while still maintaining, within capital programme, an annual income generation budget to support it.

The red item indicated on Page 42 which refers to the saving in Gnoll Country Park is unable to be delivered due to the proposed work which is being carried out through the levelling up fund. Therefore, the saving is unable to be delivered during this financial year.

Officers confirmed that with regards to events at The Gnoll, this will go through an appropriate procurement process to ensure that the Council has best value for money on these events. It is hoped that the work that is being carried out will encourage visitors to the Gnoll.

Members raised general concerns about the level of scrutiny that can be given to items when the papers for agendas are very lengthy. Whilst members acknowledged that papers were published within the legal timeframe, members were concerned by the number of items on an agenda. The Chief Executive reminded members of the ongoing scrutiny review. It was suggested that, until this review is concluded, more meetings are set up to ensure that all business will still be conducted but with shorter agendas.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

### **Treasury Management Mid Year Review - 2023/24**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members noted there were a number of acronyms throughout the report. Members asked if officers could explain the acronyms in subsequent reports. Further, if training could be provided around financial items.

Officers advised that the training element could be considered at the member development programme which falls under the remit of the Democratic Services Committee.

Officers further advised that there is a statutory requirement for members to be adequately trained in treasury management. Officers will arrange this training in due course. Further, general training will also be arranged as required.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

## **Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members noted the decline in Welsh speakers and a decline in the number of employees who report as learners and an increase in the number of employees who don't want to say. Members queried the underlying cause of this. Members also queried the decline in starters and increase in long term leavers and if this was related to the first point.

Officers advised that Council have approved the Welsh Promotional Strategy which identifies an action plan to increase the use of Welsh language within the authority.

With regards to leavers, the data is the comparison of the same six month period the previous year, and it only shows an increase in 36 leavers.

Members queried if there has been an increase in minor data breaches? Officers confirmed that the authority records anything that is an actual data breach or anything that could result in a data breach. Detailed training is provided in relation to data protection and it is an ongoing programme for employees.

The breaches recorded are low level breaches. It was confirmed that the Breach Panel, which considers serious breaches, has only met once during the past year.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

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

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

### 6. **Urgent Items**

There were none.

7. **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.

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

**Commissioning of a Regional Parent Peer Advocacy and Support Service (Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Local Bus Tendering - De Minimis Subsidy Award (Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Pontardawe Arts Centre (Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Funding to Enhance the Homelessness and Strategic Housing Function (Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the amended recommendation provided by officers at the meeting, was supported to Cabinet.

**Adult Services Strategic Investment (Exempt under Paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the amended recommendation provided by officers at the meeting, was supported to Cabinet.

**CHAIRPERSON**

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## Cabinet Scrutiny Committee - Actions and Referrals Update – 2023-24

<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Minuted Action / Referral / Request</u>	<u>Progress Update</u>	<u>Officer</u>	<u>Target / Completion Date</u>	<u>Completed / On-going</u>
Page 17	Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review - Organisational Response	Members questioned when an update on the timeline would be available and whether the current economic climate was having an impact on the Digital Strategy work. Officers advised members that the delivery plan is available to be published so can be shared with members.	Officer to confirm this has been done.	Chris Owen	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2024 – All Member Seminar on this item to take place.	Completed.
		Members suggested a Digital seminar to explore projects in more detail. The Chair agreed a future seminar would be arranged.	Officer to confirm this has been done.	Chris Owen		
	Corporate Plan “Reset, Review, Recover” 2022-2027 Annual Report Period: 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023	Members questioned the cost of the external company and stated that insufficient exit surveys are carried out. The Director of Strategy and Corporate Services advised that the cost was not available at today’s meeting but can be feedback to members.	Officer to confirm this has been done.	Noelwyn Daniel		
13.12.2023	Quarter 2 - Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24	To circulate previous Home to School Transport Report that has gone to Cabinet.	Officer to confirm this has been done.	Andrew Thomas		

Agenda Item 5

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

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
14 <sup>th</sup> February		
21 <sup>st</sup> February		
28 <sup>th</sup> February		
6 <sup>th</sup> March		
27 <sup>th</sup> March		
17 <sup>th</sup> April		
26 <sup>th</sup> April	PSB – Wellbeing Plan (Training Session)	Vanessa Dale
9 <sup>th</sup> May	PSB – Wellbeing Plan	Vanessa Dale
29 <sup>th</sup> May		

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