



CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.00 pm WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2024

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

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Part 1

1. Chairs Announcements
2. Declarations of Interests
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 16*)
 - 20 December 2023
 - 22 January 2024
 - 21 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).

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Thursday, 22 February 2024

Committee Membership:

Chairperson: **Councillor P.Rogers**

Vice **Councillor C.Jordan**
Chairperson:

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:

20 December 2023

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: T.Bowen, H.C.Clarke, C.Clement-Williams,
J.Henton, J.Jones, S.Paddison, S.Pursey,
S.H.Reynolds and A.J.Richards

Officers In Attendance K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.D.Thomas, N.Pearce,
C.Griffiths, H.Jones, N.Daniel, C.Furlow,
A.James, C.Howard, N.Blackmore,
L.McAndrew, T.Davies and A.Thomas

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

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr S Reynolds, Cabinet Agenda Item 6 – Trustee of Canolfan Maerdry – Personal, Prejudicial (will leave the room when this item is discussed)

Cllr J Henton – Cabinet Agenda Item 6 – Chair of Dyffryn, Clydach and Bryncoch Historical Society, Personal. Dispensation to speak and vote on this item.

Cllr S Pursey – Cabinet Agenda Item – Trustee of Taibach Community Library, Personal. Dispensation to speak and vote on this item.

3. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Budget 2024/25

Members considered the report as circulated within the Cabinet agenda pack.

The Chief Executive outlined the challenging budget position for 2024/25. An extensive exercise has been carried out for increasing income and decreasing expenditure for the year, whilst maintaining jobs and services within the Council. It was noted that Welsh Government have published the provisional settlement prior to the meeting. The proposed settlement for 2024/25 is going to worsen the budget position beyond what is detailed within the report. The intention is for officers to carry out an assessment in readiness for January to formally report on the analysis undertaken on the impact of the provisional budget. Further, how the Council can further bridge the increased gap in the Council's resources for 2024/25.

Members queried why the request for permission to consult has been considered late in December and why it was not sought earlier so that consultation could begin sooner? Officers confirmed that they have been working to ensure that all income generation and expenditure proposals were fully explored before consultation begins.

Officers have consulted on some specific proposals within the report. Officers outlined which items have been out to public consultation. Where things, have been able to go out to consultation earlier, this has been done.

Members queried items in the budget which indicate covering core expenditure from grants, and if this would have a knock-on effect in delivering front line services. Officers advised that it was for individual consideration by directorates and about ensuring that the grant was maximised for full use within the budget.

Members raised the current inflation and pay award ongoing concerns and queried if the 4% provision in the budget was sufficient. Officers advised that the 4% has been benchmarked with the other 21 local authorities in Wales and it is consistent with others forecast. Officers were confident that this would be sufficient.

Page 2 of the report which indicates that the budget supports local policy initiatives prioritised by the Rainbow Coalition. These initiatives

are referring to those that have been agreed within the Corporate Plan.

Page 4 outlines a £3.5m gap. Officers advised that this is the £3.5m which was used to balance the 23/24 budget which now needs to be placed within this year's budget.

Page 11 refers to delivering local and Welsh Government policies. Members queried if there are there any policies planned to come from Welsh Government that we know are not going to be funded. Officers advised that they were not aware of any at the moment. However, it was noted that the overall settlement doesn't fund what we currently require.

Officers confirmed that the 7.5% increase in income receipts, assumes that each income line with have a 7.5% increase, however it would be up to individual directorates to determine how they achieve this. For example, it could be a mixture of increased charges and increase in volume.

Members queried, based on the change in the revenue grant indicated by Welsh Government 0.3%, members queried what this looked like for the gap created and an indication with regards to what council tax would need to be to close that gap. Officers confirmed that the decrease would present a gap of an additional £870,000, based on the model presented.

Members queried how much of the revenue budget is contingency budget. Officers outlined the contingency in relation to the pay award and energy efficient budget. However indicated that there is an overall contingency of £700,000.

Members queried the amount in general reserves about the recommended amount. It was indicated that there could be approximately £1m however due to the overspend in year currently projected, officers advised that there would unlikely be any contingency in general reserves.

Members noted that there is a broad objective indicated to reduce civic centres from three to two. A large saving could be made through the reduction of energy costs. Officers advised that this was still broadly the objective and it is the intention that a report will be brought back in the new year with options for members to consider.

In relation to Env 12/13 it notes the termination of public access and rights agreement and the termination of license agreement in reference to Neath canal, members queried what was meant by this. Officers advised that currently there is a license agreement with the owner of the canal to enable use for leisure purposes of a section of the canal north of Resolven and also a public access agreement to the Southern end of the canal going through Briton Ferry to enable access to the tow path. The cost of the two licenses is £135,000 per year. Officers confirmed that NPT have extensive rights of way along the tow path however there are gaps. NPT officers will need to establish whether or not they can demonstrate in the gap that there is a right of way argument to put forward to the owner to secure that status or whether NPT could just have a public access agreement. Therefore, instead of paying the owner of the canal to maintain the area, this is incorporated as part of NPT's maintenance schedule.

Members suggested there is a risk that public access right could be lost along the active travel route established in Briton Ferry. Officers advised that there are a number of routes which have permissive active rights. Officers will explore all options to try and ensure that those routes are maintained.

In relation to street lighting, the Chief Executive confirmed that this would be a separate consultation to the budget consultation.

Members outlined their concerns with regards Celtic Leisure and the postponement of bringing the service inhouse. Further, that a business plan has not yet been explored and put forward in relation to this item. The Leader outlined the steps that had been taken to liaise with staff on the decision to defer the date to bring the service back in house. The Cabinet Member confirmed that a business case was drawn up however due to a number of items changing that fell outside the control of the Council, for example rising energy costs, it was unable to proceed.

Officers referred to page 26 of the report, specifically L4, which sets out over the lifespan of the medium term financial plan a proposal to reduce the running costs of Celtic Leisure to a total sum of £660,000. In terms of fixed costs, officers confirmed that when the service is insourced, there will be associated additional costs of £1.3m, relating to rates and staff costs.

Officers confirmed the business plan was worked on last year, when the timeframe indicated that Celtic Leisure would be insourced 1st April 2023. When the decision was taken to delay the insourcing, the business plan was deferred. It was confirmed that when the Council is ready to insource, the business plan will be brought forward.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Third Sector Grant Funding - Award of Grants for 2024 – 2025

Officers confirmed that since the report was published it has been confirmed that a number of organisations have submitted the same bids for funding into several funding pots. The NPT scheme is a pot of last resort not first resort. All bids for funding should be accessing other pots first. The outcomes of other bids need to be determined before this award is considered. Only two of the organisations listed will be recommended for award.

Members queried why there were two options presented and the background for the rationale behind this. Officers confirmed due to the general funding position there was an over subscription to the fund. The options outlined the choices to members.

The Chair confirmed the officer amended recommendation 'that the granting (identified in Appendix 1 to the circulated report) to Canolfan Maerdy and Ystalyfera Development Trust, be approved, and it be noted that the additional requests for grants be brought to a future meeting of Cabinet in January 2024 for determination by Members.'

Following scrutiny, the amended recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

4. Urgent Items

There were none.

CHAIRPERSON

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Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

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

Members Present:

22 January 2024

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

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

**Officers In
Attendance** K.Jones, A.Jarrett, N.Pearce, H.Jones, S.Rees,
N.Daniel, N.Blackmore, R.Crowhurst, T.Davies,
C.Furlow-Harris, C.Howard, A.James, C.Jones,
L.McAndrew, C.Owen, J.Stevens and
A.Thomas

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.K.Hunt,
J.Hurley, N.Jenkins, S.Jones, 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 11 from the Cabinet agenda.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2023, were
approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Self-Assessment 2022-2023

Officers gave an overview of the Self-Assessment 2022-2023 report contained within the Cabinet Agenda pack.

Members referred to page 29 of the report (Summary of Performance) and expressed disappointment in the amount of completed areas. Members questioned the delay in the completion of SA22 (refine the councils approach to the Self-Assessment strategy) and SA3 (set up recruitment taskforce) and expressed concern over the length of time taken to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants, leavers within the Local Authority and the timings around planning applications. Members expressed disappointment that percentage figures did not include full data, as previously requested, which made scrutinising and recommendation to Cabinet difficult.

Officers confirmed that reference SA22 could not be completed in 2022/2023 due to capacity issues but it is hoped that this will be completed for the 2023/2024 self-assessment. Officers apologised for the lack of corresponding figures in the report in respect of the percentages and confirmed this will be included before the document is published.

The Head of People and Organisational Development confirmed that the recruitment taskforce has been set up, but work is ongoing as there are still a number of hard to fill jobs across the council. Work is ongoing to bring forward more detailed leavers data and leaver reason categories have been improved. The data provided reflects 2022/23 and more detailed information will be available as time progresses.

Members stated it would have been clearer if the report had stated that the recruitment taskforce has been set up and continues ongoing work.

Members referred to page 20 of the report and asked for clarification of the approach adopted this year, and why other reports weren't aligned as has happened in other authorities.

Officers confirmed that research was undertaken to establish the best approach for the self-assessment as guidance was limited. It was noted that this was only the second self-assessment that has been

completed and member's feedback will be taken on board in relation to the completion of the third self-assessment. The toolkit will be able to demonstrate the progress made over time and consideration will be given to ensure there is no duplication and that the assessment adds value.

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Update Report on Settlement Position

The Chief Finance Officer advised the committee that this is an information report for Cabinet, which sets out the worsening financial position as a result of the reduced provisional settlement. The report also details three specific grants where there has been significant cuts across Wales.

Members requested further information regarding the implications of any loss of grants.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the council received details of the specific grant reductions at the same time as the provisional settlement was announced on 20th December 2023.

The Director of Social Services, Health & Housing confirmed that when any grant is cut, firstly the service looks at whether there are opportunities to cut what the grant is spent on. In relation to the Social Care Workforce Grant, Welsh Government encouraged the grants to be used to provide support to external domiciliary care providers in relation to domiciliary care recruitment. This work needs to continue resulting in a £500k pressure on the Social Service budget. Work is ongoing to bring the budget into balance.

Members thanked the Director for providing clarity, and questioned whether the shortfall would be identified from the Social Services budget or whether it would be spread across directorates.

The Director confirmed that this pressure would be taken from the Social Services budget and work is ongoing to finalise this.

Members considered the report as circulated within the supplement pack.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

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

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

6. **Committee Action Log**

The Committee Action Log was noted.

7. **Urgent Items**

There was one urgent item:

APSE Wales Chair – Housing, Homelessness and Community Support

Members did not scrutinise this item.

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**

Home Office Consultation on Safe and Legal Routes (Exempt under Paragraph 14)

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

CHAIRPERSON

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

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

Members Present:

21 February 2024

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

Councillors: T.Bowen, J.Henton, R.G.Jones, S.Paddison,
R.Phillips and S.Pursey

**Officers In
Attendance** K.Jones, N.Pearce, C.Griffiths, H.Jones and
N.Daniel, T.Davies and A.Thomas

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

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest received.

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

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

4. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

5. **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.

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

Members considered the private report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

CHAIRPERSON

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

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Contact Officer
28 th February		
6 th March		
27 th March		
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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