



***ENVIRONMENT, REGENERATION AND
STREETSCENE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE***

10.00 AM FRIDAY, 31 JANUARY 2025

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

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PART A

1. Chair's Announcements
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 38*)
For the Committee to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 04/11/24.

Part 1

4. To Consider items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme
 - (a) Economic Development CRM System - Contract Renewal (*Pages 39 -56*)

Part 2

5. To consider items from the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Part 3

6. Performance Monitoring

Part 4

7. Selections of items for future scrutiny (*Pages 57 - 62*)
 - Cabinet Forward Work Programme
<https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/documents/s104099/PublicCabinetFWP15thJanuary2025.docx.pdf>
 - Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme
8. 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).

F.O'Brien
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

24 January 2025

Committee Membership:

Chairperson: **Councillor S.Pursey**

Vice
Chairperson: **Councillor T.Bowen**

Councillors: C.James, L.Williams, A.Dacey, R.Davies,
R.W.Wood, J.Jones, C.Clement-Williams,
G.Rice, B.Woolford and H.C.Clarke

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.*

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Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny Committee

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

Members Present:

4 November 2024

Chairperson: Councillor S.Pursey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: C.James, R.Davies, R.W.Wood, C.Clement-Williams, G.Rice and B.Woolford

Officers In Attendance D.Griffiths, C.Morris, N.Pearce, M.Roberts, M.Shaw, A.Thomas, T.Rees, A.Havard, J.Davies, T.Davies, H.Jones, N.Jones and G. Powell and T.Rees

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hurley and S.Jones

1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair noted that the Members of the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to scrutinise the following item 3a, 3b, 9a and 9b from the Cabinet Forward work Programme.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none. Cllr J. Hurley declared a personal interest in Item 9b. Rheola Estate.

3. **To Consider items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme**

3(a) Budget Report

David Griffiths Head of Engineering and Transport gave a brief overview of the ENV-A proposal which is Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Approval Body (SAB) and Highway development control. Members were advised that it relates to some small fees that

will be added to SAB assessments undertaken by officers including responding to solicitors' letters. Officers would introduce a small fee for responding to those letters and a small increase in fees and charges to deal with the Section 278 and 38 agreements. These have been benchmarked against other local authorities and are nominal increases.

Members asked why the calculations haven't been included in the report as it would be helpful to have when members of the public ask them about increases.

Officers advised that they didn't have the breakdown of the £11,000 savings listed but explained that they are small fees because there are multiple applications across the portfolio. Officers advised that they tried to focus on areas which will have the least impact in terms of the budget savings. The director of Environment Nicola Pearce advised that they are finding it very difficult to achieve the target set for all directors of 5% savings.

The Director reminded members that over the last few years, officers have made cuts to all low hanging fruit and now they must make some difficult decisions in terms of proposals as those easier cuts have all been made. Officers have benchmarked all fees and charges against neighbouring authorities to try and ensure when increasing charges and fees so that the authority is not an outlier.

Officers advised that they could provide a list of the fees and charges to scrutiny members after the meeting if they want that level of detail.

The Cabinet member for Climate Change and Economic Growth Commented that the value for money that the authority gives and the expertise it has got, not just in the SAB department but in many of the other departments is great and if you had to go privately for the services then it would cost probably two or three times as much.

David Griffiths gave members an overview of ENVB budget line on the transport support, which is a reduction in council revenue spent on local bus support and utilising Welsh Government grants only to support the bus network. He explained that in terms of local bus support, it's currently made-up of three funding mechanisms.

The first is Welsh Government supplied Bus Services Support Grant, which is £25 million across the whole of Wales, of which NPT gets £5.1 million.

There was also the bus emergency scheme during COVID which has now ended and there is a new bus network grant of £2.77 million and the council puts its own revenue in of £791K.

Members were also advised that the Authority also gets concessionary fares allocations of circa £1.6 million, and a further £113,000 for administration.

The total for concessionary fares received by the authority is approximately £2.3 million of support.

The cut officers are proposing relates to the Council's own revenue funding.

The grants are currently being reviewed by Welsh Government and are likely to get amalgamated in future years into a single grant. Members were advised that if the values remain the same, then removing the £75,000 would be manageable.

Officers noted that there may be some criticism of the authority because the Welsh Government have been putting in additional funds, but because of the authority's budget reposition, the council will be putting in less itself.

Members were advised that in real terms the bus franchising and the bus network is stable and is funded without this requirement of the Councils £75,000 revenue at present.

Officers explained that it does mean that if an operator hands back a public bus service, then the council won't be in the same position as before where the council has been able to step in and maintain the transport provision.

Officers believe it is manageable and they think the grants will remain stable over the next 12 months into next year and throughout 2025/26 financial years before they get into bus franchising currently planned for implementation in 2026/27.

The chair asked if it was correct that there is not going to be a direct and immediate impact on any services because of that £75,000 cut.

Officers confirmed that there will be no immediate impact because of this change in the revenue budget but advised that this would be reducing the authority's resilience to respond in future years but advised that the bus network is in a good position at the moment and is stable with officers hoping to see some enhancements.

Officers advised that they will still have some money available, as this isn't the whole of the available budget and that they would still be able to award contracts on a de minimis basis and provided examples of those where new bus routes that were introduced on an estate that were removed by the operator, for example in the Baglan area, and officers had been able to do a de minimis award and reinstate those services.

Similarly, in recent weeks officers introduced some de minimis support to bus journeys from Rhos up to Pontardawe particularly where home to school transport was adversely affected. In closing officers advised that they would still be able to step in and provide small amounts of service re-instatement which should be manageable for the authority next year. Members found that reassuring.

For ENV-C, Dave Griffiths gave an update on the Community services transport unit, which relates to cutting the on-call rota which will save £10,000.

It was explained that as part of the Council's resilience, when there is an emergency, there are in house drivers who are available on a standby rota which costs in the region of £10,000 per annum. Officers have spoken to the bus operators that work for the authority and they will be available to respond should the authority need to evacuate residents from a locality. This will mean that only when the services are used will it be paid for as opposed to having to pay for officers on a standby rota.

For Env- D officers gave an outline on increasing charges to external organisations using the council's fleet repair services. Members were advised that the authority provides services to a number of organisations, and they pay inspection fees and service fees associated with the councils fleet and garage operations. These are small nominal charges on each of those inspections.

The Chair asked if they were benchmarking these fees against other private operations.

Officers explained that these ones aren't benchmarked because they are actual fleet internal charges, however the MOT services where they charge externally are benchmarked against local garages that provide MOT services. Officers explained that the £6200 would be charged across approximately 250 vehicles. But these are small

increases on the inspections right across the fleet which is a nominal increase.

For ENV-E which relates to transport maintenance and additional external income. Members were advised that the charges would be to South Wales Trunk Road Agency, Tai Tarian and the external people that the council have Service Level Agreements for maintenance of their vehicles. Officers reiterated that this was a nominal amount.

In relation to ENV-F which covered Road Safety, and involved increase in charges on training courses provided to external organisations, members were advised that this would be relating to the driver training that the road safety team provide. Officers explained that it is likely that next year Swansea Council will be entering into an arrangement for NPTCC to do some of the training on their behalf. Officers think they are comfortable in being able to recover an additional £14,000 of external income.

Officers explained that they were torn by having to put forward proposal ENV-G which related to maintenance and bridges. Members were advised that officers have very limited budgets that they have not got scope to make cuts anywhere else within the service budgets.

Officers advised that the authority has a statutory duty to inspect the council's bridge assets and retaining structures. Officers will continue to inspect all the bridges and all bridges will have a general inspection over a 2 year period and principal inspections every six years for large span bridges over 10 metres.

It was explained that the proposal will mean that if the authority does come up against some difficulties, it would either result in officers putting weight restrictions on some of the bridges or in the worst-case scenario close certain bridges.

Officers explained that it is a little bit counterproductive and if they do face emergencies, then they would need to turn to the Council's capital programme for emergency funding if they needed to respond.

Officers stated that it is not easy, but they will manage the situation. Members were advised that if there is a failure the authority won't be exposed to the risk, and officers will still inspect and identify those risks. If there are serious concerns, then those will be highlighted. Officers advised that if there are some smaller remedial works needed then they would need to turn to the Council's capital programme to maintain those structures.

Members expressed their disagreement with the methodology of a blanket 5% approach to cuts across the directorate and felt that cutting from a maintenance budget, especially a structural budget can risk lives.

Members felt that this budget suggestion, even though it was not the biggest on a monetary basis, possibly puts residents at greatest risk of all the budget lines that are in the report.

Members were surprised to see the cut suggested but understood the pressure that officers are on to find the cuts with a 5% blanket cut.

Members hoped that in the future that it would be removed from the list of proposed cuts.

The director for Environment advised that last year they took a slightly different approach by trying to be strategic and tried to deliver transformational change within each of the departments to avoid 'salami slicing' the budgets as had been done historically.

Members were advised that unfortunately, despite the best efforts of staff, they couldn't achieve the amount of savings required to fill that budget gap and then very late in the financial year, officers had to achieve another 2% saving on top of the strategic savings.

Officers explained that this is why they think corporately the authority has gone for the 5% cut across each of the directorates.

The director advised that it has been tough, and the Environment directorate didn't achieve the 5% target despite going back many times to look for additional savings. Officers believe that they are about £91,000 short of a £2.35 million target.

Members were advised that getting that close demonstrates that officers had to look in these areas to try and find those savings and they haven't been easy and they're not necessarily ones they would have ideally put forward for members to consider.

The Chair noted that there were savings being put forward that officers clearly are not particularly comfortable with bringing forward and noted that the Environment Directorate has taken a significant hit in previous years as an area that has a lot of non-statutory services in, which makes it even more difficult to find that 5%.

Members asked how often officers are inspecting bridges per year and are they keeping an eye on any bridges in particular?

Officers explained that there are 456 bridges in the asset portfolio and every bridge will have an inspection in a 2-year period. The structures that are over 10 metres have a general inspection every six years.

Members were advised that the more complex structures can cost up to £30,000 to do the inspection and were advised that expenses can include things such as scaffolding and divers to look at the foundations in the riverbeds as well as plant equipment and cranes.

Officers stated that every bridge gets that inspection and on average about 230 bridges a year get inspected by the team. Officers confirmed that they do keep an eye on some of the bridges. and used Cymer as one of interest due to the weight restrictions there and because it is in a poor condition. Officers have mitigation schemes there and that in the 1990s the authority did a lot of strengthening work as part of the 40-tonne vehicle new load requirements. That strengthening work means that a lot of the assets meet that standard.

Officers have more concern with retaining structures than they have with bridges because they are not able to inspect all of those. Officers gave an estimate of 1800 retaining structures on the network and explained that they tend to be operating on a reactive basis in terms of those assets.

The Chair clarified that there is not going to be a reduction in the interval in inspecting bridges as part of this budget line and that it is mainly going to affect the small-scale maintenance that would arise because of the inspections.

Officers confirmed that was correct and that it is just any remedial works from inspections that will be managed and will be responded to in a slower way.

Members asked for a spreadsheet to show roughly what stage the inspections are at, if they are every two years or six years. Officers confirmed that they will provide information to members on this.

In relation to ENV-H which related to savings to the pension scheme of the city and County of Swansea, the director advised that there is no impact because it is an actuarial adjustment. It is the amount of money the authority pays in for previous employees who are in the pension scheme and that changes every couple of years.

The Chair felt this was reassuring.

For budget line ENV-I relating to reducing the asset surveys budget, for highways assets. Mike Roberts Head of Streetcare explained that in relation to the 5% savings across the directorate, the savings required for Streetcare is approximately £1.6 million.

Officers explained that the first part of ENV-I related to reducing the asset surveys budget by approximately 10%, which means there will be less money to do surveys. Members were advised that roads are surveyed every year, the footways every two years and safety fences every three years.

Members were informed that all main asset groups covered by the highway asset management plan are covered by surveys, some at different times. This proposal will mean that officers will have to review some of the frequency surveys are done and officers might not have as much up to date information on which to base their decision making.

The Chair noted that the difference between this budget line and the one relating to Bridges is that officers will be looking to review the intervals of inspections to realise the saving. The chair felt that the risk is that the council could perhaps use that maintenance budget in a less effective way and asked if that is something officers are concerned about by implementing the saving.

Officers advised that it is a needs-based process and that apart from 2 years at the end of COVID, the budget has been squeezed since 2008.

The Chair appreciated the officer's point and noted that the challenge of this proposal is a relatively small saving of £11,000 and asked if officers could lose £11,000 worth of value in the spending programme by not having the data to spend that money effectively. The chair felt that it was probably a question for cabinet members and officers to consider in terms of the value for money of the saving because in a road maintenance scheme, £11,000 is a very small amount of money, and could potentially be wasted or spent inefficiently if officers don't have the up-to-date asset condition data.

Officers explained that in relation to budget line ENV-J which relates to the reactive maintenance budget and looking at reducing the number of drainage repair teams from 2 down to 1. Members were advised that this essentially reverses a decision made to grow the teams from 1 to 2 in 2021/22. Officers explained that with the

continuing squeeze on the budgets, officers are unable to sustain that additional effort as much as they would like to.

Members noted that the council declared a climate emergency back in 2022 and felt that to now be making this decision, seemed to be madness and highlighted the flooding situation in Spain to show what goes wrong when things are not done properly.

Members advised that they regularly have to call on the drainage teams help in their wards and believe that the problem is getting worse along with drainage and stated that there is more surface water which is a terrible problem.

Members were concerned that especially in autumn the leaves block the drains and to be going down to one team would be counterproductive.

The Chair highlighted the recent flooding in the county and the issue of areas flooding in his ward where it has never happened before. The chair was concerned that they are getting increasing challenges from extreme weather and extreme rainfall events.

The director clarified that the drainage gang proposed to be withdrawn is not in relation to general cleansing of gullies and drainage networks and that cleansing will continue. The gang referenced makes repairs to drainage and they dig up the roads and around the covers to repair any drainage pipe or a culvert that has been damaged.

Members were advised that this means that the day-to-day cleansing of the drainage infrastructure will continue, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to prepare for extreme weather events and to respond to them because the countries drainage infrastructure is so old and the volume of water that it can accommodate is very restricted.

Officers warned that extreme weather is becoming more common with significant volumes of waterfall in a very short period and flooding the public has experience has increased. Members were advised that the proposed cut is to deal with any damage and repair it.

The chair felt that it is probably more critical given the aging infrastructure that it is in good working and functional order.

Members asked the director what would happen if one of the drains or one of the pipes collapses and what mitigation is in place that team is removed and how much is that likely to cost?

Officers advised that it just has to wait until the remaining gang can get around to fix it. This would be an increase in the time to respond to the incident and perhaps there may be more infrastructure awaiting repair at any one time.

Scott Jones the cabinet member for Streetscene advised that the drainage team as part of these proposals is a new drainage team that the current administration implemented two years ago so this would mean going back to the previous position. The cabinet member advised that it could be an opportunity that some of the budget cut suggestions are taken out of the budget. But that will be dependent on what money comes from UK Government, which the authority has got an idea of, but equally it will depend on how much money comes from Welsh Government as well.

The Cabinet member stated that crucifying the budget suggestions was all well and good and he advised that nobody has done that more than him, but alternatives need to be found and asked that if Councillors or anybody else who's got other alternatives of where else other than the drainage section savings can be taken from, then to write to him or the director.

The Chair advised that context is important and felt everyone is hopeful that if the authority does have a more favourable settlement than expected, then some of these items can be removed but noted that part of the scrutiny process is weeding out the proposals that are least palatable in order for the cabinet members to make those decisions over what is removed and in that context it is important that the committee scrutinises these proposals as they are.

Members noted how tough these decisions are for the administration but felt that this budget saving was a scary one. Members felt that the authority needs to weigh up if drains aren't being mended as quickly as possible, then will it in the long run end up being a false economy if drains collapse and felt that sometimes you need to speculate to accumulate. Members wished to see this cut to be removed.

The Chair noted that this would be a loss of resilience and asked if the possibility of other teams in the council being able to step in in certain circumstances to carry out some of this reactive work had been considered to try maintain some resilience.

Officers advised that with all areas being cut, they do have staff who were focused on capital work who would have the skills to do that but they are unfunded in terms of doing day-to-day activity and if they are not actually working on a capital scheme, then their work is unfunded. The Head of service advised that, that team won't sit around if they had nothing to do and officers could utilise them, but their focus is on working on capital works which has been reduced.

Officers advised that there are 4 gangs which is half the number of gangs and capital that the authority had 20 years ago. There is now limited capacity to achieve that as well.

Members asked what the percentage of drains the council owns to the percentage of what Welsh Water own, or what the authority is responsible for in terms of drainage on main roads?

Officers didn't have that figure to hand and advised that there are a lot of combined sewers and drains and officers would need to do a calculation on that and work that out.

Members asked about Column 5 which showed the reduction of the drainage teams as £130,000 saving and column seven shows £210,000 in savings.

Officers advised that the second part of the savings is to reduce the reactive maintenance budget by £80,000 and there is a certain amount of money built into the budget every year for things like gritting and responding to severe weather, but that can vary every year. As well as the reactive Highway budget which is in accordance with good practise, Officers have a winter maintenance reserve and a severe weather reserve.

Members were advised that if the authority is under budget then it means the authority has got some money to do extra maintenance within a year or pay into the reserve. If the authority is over budget then they call on the reserve. The idea is that over a 10-year cycle it should balance out, but it helps to cushion the authority from shocks when severe weather hits such as a 'whiteout', when they have to go to 24-hour gritting and snow ploughing which can rack up a lot of costs very quickly.

Officers advised that they have the reserve they can draw on in the bad years and then pay in during the good years. By reducing the money in the reactive budget, they are more likely to have to call on the reserve than they are now.

The Chair asked if the reserve is in a good place, could the authority manage that for a period of time?

Officers advised that it is approximately £600,000 but there is a lot of churn in the reserve. Officers explained that if they aren't using it to purchase grit, they are potentially dealing with flooding incidents and as the climate is changing, there is less snow and ice, but there are more flooding issues so officers will utilise it for those purposes as well.

The Chair noted that the buffer is there and if there was something severe it isn't going to cause a problem.

Scott Jones the cabinet member thanked members for their comments regarding the difficult decisions that the Cabinet faces and noted that the scrutiny committee had made some well-made points and that he had received assurances from officers that if the council need to deal with emergencies that it will be in a position to pull out all the stops should it be needed and because the council has got a good track record in the previous administration and in this current administration as well.

The Cabinet member advised that nobody wants to be looking at doing away with any type of teams, never mind a small drainage team but noted that if this budget cut does come off the table, alternatives need to be found which means that he needs the scrutiny committee to work with him.

Cabinet member Councillor Hurley advised that there is basically nothing left to speculate with which is why officers are making these hard decisions regarding flooding as well. He noted that officers had in previous meetings provided members with details of the many schemes that are ready for flood prevention and flood damage, but these are funded by Welsh Government and the authority is waiting for them to be put into operation, but they can't do them because they aren't being funded by Welsh Government.

Officers gave an overview of ENV-K which relates to areas such as tarmac, bridleways and fees and charges for use of the highway and the day-to-day works budget and the consultancy support budget. Officers advised that the first part relates to an allocation in the highway budget to tarmac bridleways which has been done historically before the council was formed.

Officers advised that bridleways are not really core business in terms of maintaining the highways and if they have unmade bridle ways like

most bridleways are, it would release some funds. Members were told that other councils are looking at bridleways under unclassified roads, for example, whether they can return those to unmade materials.

The other parts of the budget suggestions are increasing the fees and charges by 10% or in line with Swansea, whichever is bigger to increase income by £50,000.

The next budget suggestion related to reducing the day-to-day works budget which is a 5% slice off the signs and road markings budget and £100,000 reversal of growth in the budget in 2022/23. Officers said that it is unfortunately an area where they will look to do better financially and are unable to sustain that level of increase.

The last suggestion within this line is reduction in the consultancy support budget. This was an area identified as needing additional support and officers are having to cut back on that support by 50% of what went in 22/23. This would reduce the opportunity to help the council with bids for funding and analysing the more difficult developer submissions, for example, where officers need specialist support.

Members agreed with not tarmacking bridleways and said that once they start breaking up, then the council can do away with them.

The Chair noted the £25,000 saving in the consultancy support budget might cause the council to lose access to grant funding or be able to do larger pieces of work and felt it was a red flag.

The chair asked if it is going to be a good value for money saving to achieve from the revenue budget if the authority is going to miss out on significant investment particularly if the council is spending day-to-day revenue on maintaining and repairing ageing assets that the council are not able to replace with capital funding.

Members were concerned about the speed cushions in Sandfields which are faulty resulting in damaging cars. Members felt that the council is exposed to spending more money than it would have to, if they inspect the speed cushion and the quality of the current speed cushions instead.

The Chair asked if officers had considered looking at spend-to-save reserves in terms of drainage feasibility work in the context of being able to spend money on consultancy fees to apply for grant funding to reduce the maintenance liability in the revenue budget.

Officers clarified that they have got consultancy fees across the board. Where officers haven't got the internal specialist experience that they would need to feed into grant applications, they can buy that service. The pot in relation to the highways maintenance is being shrunk under this budget saving.

Members were informed that the reduction to consultancy fees is featured in many of the heads of service budget proposals.

Officers advised that historically over the last few years the council has cut away at those budgets because there is nowhere else to go.

For ENV-L which related to lighting services. Officers advised that there are two items within this proposal relating to dimming and trimming.

Officers explained that energy prices have been increasing and they are trying to bring forward a big solar scheme that generates as much power as it uses on streetlights to try and de-link the council from energy pressures. They hope that when the cost of energy goes up, council income for energy will to.

In relation to the savings, officers explained that there is currently dimming of lights and this dimming is happening in a large part of the county borough already, as part of previous savings strategies. Members were advised that instead of dimming at 1am in the morning, they can dim it at 10 pm.

Officers advised that it should be more noticeable for people out and about, but that is an area where the council could make some savings.

Officers explained that the Trimming aspect means that the lights come on and off with a certain lux level. Officers can adjust the settings on the cells that are on the streetlights so that they will come on a little bit later and go off a little bit earlier with the lux levels. This would be a little saving and is estimated that the lights would be off 10 to 20 minutes a day less than they are now.

Officers can do that through the central management system, and they can adjust that from the office.

Members asked what percentage of dimming, officers were talking about.

Officers advised that the current dimming goes down to 42% in a lot of the residential areas and it will be at 10:00pm instead of 1:00am in the morning this will be happening in the majority of the of the county

borough, but not the main arterial routes and main vehicle and pedestrian conflict areas. Officers estimate that it will be 14,000 of the 17,000 streetlights subject to dimming which is essentially all the residential areas.

Members asked if this applies to just the LED lamps. Officers explained that a lot of the fluorescent lights are already dimmed, but they're dimmed from 1am, not 10 pm. So it would apply to some of those as well.

Members raised concerns around the safety of people walking home at pub closing time. And asked if there would be exceptions for areas where people will be walking home from pubs?

Officers explained that there is always the potential to turn the wick back up in response to localised issues. But the more that happens then the less savings the authority will make. Members were advised that the current proposal is a blanket approach across the county other than the arterial roads but they will be responsive if there were particular concerns.

Members asked how many other lights are now LED and would it be a good investment to increase the number of LED lights? Members asked would that make more savings in the long run and are LED's cheaper to run?

Officers advised that everywhere where there is a business case to change the lights they have already done it using Salix funding, which is basically 0% interest money to do it. There are still a number of the fluorescent lights in use, but they are actually very good in terms of energy usage. Manufacturers have stopped making those now which means that every year officers are slowly turning those over to LEDs and then cannibalising the ones that they take out to use to keep the other fluorescents going.

For budget suggestion ENV-M, relating to Neighbourhood Management Services, was split into a number of items including litter, fast roads team, seasonal staff and the Grime Busters.

Officers noted that the 5% cut across street care totalling £1.6 million inevitably extends to all areas of the division and enabled services. Officers explained that they were talking about reduction of six employees, full time employees, a reduction of 6 seasonal staff and the reduction of a couple of staff on the Fast Road teams and the Grime Buster vehicle. Officers explained that they are talking about not staffing that permanently and instead just using it when they need

it. This would mean two people would go there and in all the total savings are £379,000.

Members asked about seasonal staff and felt that through the summer some of the seasonal staff are not up to standard and had observed on a regular basis some seasonal staff not doing what they are supposed to be doing. Members suggested that better management and better recruitment is needed when officers are employing seasonal staff. Members felt that those staff should be given a time scale of reaching a standard. If they miss that standard, then they should be released from the contract.

Officers explained that a lot of training is required for seasonal staff, because the council has a duty to do that. Officers stated that a lot of seasonal staff are very good, and they come back every year, but by the nature of taking on seasonal staff, some turn out to be not as good as hoped in the appointment process and managing supervisors will work on those staff to get them up to standard. Officers will monitor the seasonal staff just like all staff are monitored.

Members were advised that the difficulty this year is that there had been a very good group of seasonal staff that they have taken on and there are some vacancies, but officers can't put them into those jobs on a permanent basis because the council is cutting them as part of the other proposals within neighbourhood budget. Officers also confirmed that they manage seasonal staff closely with supervisors and if they aren't up to the mark then officers can release those staff during the probationary period.

Members stated that they don't like seeing anybody losing their jobs but feel that if a staff member is having to do twice as much work as another person, then it's not fair on that particular person, although they will have a better chance of being taken on full time.

Officers explained that sometimes they end up finishing with less seasonal staff than they took on due to releasing those who aren't capable.

Members asked what the total number of redundancies that will occur in relation to this proposed budget line?

Officers confirmed that it is 10 permanent full-time posts.

A member advised that they are setting up a volunteer group to clear pathways and bridle ways in their ward and noted that there is a scheme running within Neath Port Talbot now which offers time

credits to volunteers. Members asked if the authority are using that option or can use it moving forward?

Members asked if the authority uses the probation service and asked how much the council engages in that? Members suggested that with the current changes in the penal system, that the council could consider approaching Welsh Government and getting some kind of agreement that the authority could use these people who are doing community service as their punishments and employ them to do the more basic, non-skilled tasks such as emptying bins which could mean that staff could be redeployed when required in other areas.

Officers confirmed that they work with a number of friends groups at the moment and there is an officer who works with them and with the community coordinators at how the council can engage volunteers more widely. Officers also confirmed that they do use the probation service and they provide them with a vehicle and that's an area that officers protected over all the years since 2008 because it is worthwhile, but also, they can do work in unadopted areas and in areas of unknown ownership where the council can't do that, but the probationary service can and do good things for the community. Officers wondered whether that could be expanded or not.

Officers further emphasised that they do a lot of work with a lot of volunteer groups and it's something they look into coordinating across the whole council as there is a number of different service areas that do work with volunteers and they feel that the probation team are a fantastic asset.

In terms of using the Probation service, all the authority have to contribute towards it is a list of jobs and to pay for a vehicle. They feel that the Probation Service do some really good work. Officers felt that it is something they could explore in terms of extending it, but it would just require additional vehicles because it's not something that the probation service can provide.

Members were glad to see that officers were doing that and felt that getting involved now with a new penal system on a national basis could allow the authority to trail blaze to take this forward and put the idea to the Welsh Government to let the skilled workers be redeployed and save the authority money elsewhere.

Members noted that between three to six years ago, community councils used to be given a small precept to cut grass within the

areas and asked why wasn't this viable and is it possible that this is something that can be reintroduced?

Officers explained that only half the county borough is covered by community councils and as such they felt that if they wanted to do something it needs to be consistent, and this would be difficult under the current situation. Members were advised that there are now many duties in terms of health and safety and monitoring and training that is much more difficult to deliver piece meal. Officers also stated that if the authority is paying, it would still have a duty to monitor and make sure that all work is being done correctly.

Officers explained that health and safety has changed greatly and rules and legislation is much tighter than they used to be.

The director advised that a number of community councils didn't get a precept, but they did make a contribution towards undertaking work on behalf of the local authority in their areas. An example was given of a number of community councils and town councils who had a sum of money that they utilised to clean clear public rights of way. Officers explained that there were agreements in place with a number of community and town councils at that time, but as austerity progressed, a number of those community council withdrew because it was becoming more and more difficult for them to undertake those works. Community councils were paying for it out of their budget. The director explained that the community councils get a precept from the council already as part of the council tax settlement so they were utilising that money together with any grant funding they may have secured from elsewhere to undertake that role in their communities historically, but this has reduced over time.

The Chair asked about the proposals that refer to digitisation of the service realising some efficiencies that would offset the impact and asked what officers meant by that and how that might for example, offset the impact of losing some litter pickers or some of the fast road teams.

Officers explained that once you've digitised, officers will know where everything is, and you can do route optimization. This will be about releasing resources in one area to compensate in another area.

Officers have identified a need to improve asset management within the neighbourhood services team and felt that digitisation goes hand in hand. Officers explained that once they have got that asset data in

a digital format, it will allow them to change things and do transformation programmes a lot quicker.

Officers have gone through an establishment change with the team to set up the resource that they require to take that forward quickly. Officers explained that the cut in the 10 permanent vacancies and taking on seasonal staff during the summer means that they can't accommodate for that total loss, but they are hoping to improve the efficiency of the service through the digitisation of assets.

The Chair noted that if the authority went from a three to four weekly cycle of grass cutting to a five to six weekly cycle, there would be an immediately noticeable impact in many areas.

The chair asked if officers had considered looking at some of the activities that the biodiversity team promote, like edge-cutting footpaths and highways, rather than cutting a whole section of grass to try save a little bit of time and resource but still allow the council to keep areas of the county looking tidy or in some cases keeping footpaths accessible.

The director explained that there are biodiversity areas throughout the county borough where there is a different management regime and that doesn't just apply to the number of times that the grass is cut. It is also in relation to collecting the cuttings and utilising them elsewhere. Officers have got those schemes already running and they try to minimise the amount of money spent on verges without compromising highway safety. Staff cut-in the edge of the verge nearest the highway. On complicated junctions, they do more cutting. The director advised that the operational side of things will still rest with Mike Roberts team in conjunction with the advice and guidance from the ecologists who work in Ceri Morris' team, to ensure they are doing the right thing.

The Chair noted that the difficulty of getting the site changed in terms of different grass cutting management can mean the need for different equipment etc but asked if they could borrow the edge cutting methodology to allow the authority to keep parts of the county tidy and if the authority is going to reduce the frequency of cutting to a five to six weekly frequency, not adopt diversity management but maintain a more regular edge cut. This would be quicker to try and balance the need to keep the county tidy versus getting fully into changing the management and having to get more cut and collect vehicles.

Officers noted that the chair was suggesting doing a swathe of grass adjacent to the road and leaving the rest of the grass behind longer and felt that some of that is already being done as part of the Bee friendly regime.

Officers confirmed that the countryside team and the neighbourhood services team meet every month to review the sites that are managed slightly differently to improve biodiversity and enhance wildlife. Officers advised that the three to four weekly and the five to six weekly cutting regime is an estimate and is not an exact science. This will come to fruition as they start the growing season next year.

Officers are looking at how many of these sites they can hand over to biodiversity and asked that members help officers suggest any sites they think are suitable based on their local knowledge or if an area is not used, if it is suitable to be cut less often, if so the areas that will still be receiving a regular cut will hopefully be able to be done on around a four-week basis rather than five to six.

For budget lines ENV-N/ENV-O the chair decided to look at these together and they related to refuse and recycling collection. The chair noted that a report on the proposals was going to the scrutiny committee on Friday so the chair asked that the committee keep the questions to the budgetary implications, if possible, so that they can get into the more detailed scrutiny on Friday during that report item.

Michael Roberts agreed that there would be a lot more detail in the report members were considering on Friday in terms of three-weekly refuse collections. Officers have been looking at this for a while now and been out to public consultation and have considered the consultation process. Members were advised that what has changed since they started looking at the waste collections is that now officers are being asked to make the 5% saving.

Members were advised that waste services are the largest individual budget in the directorate and a 5% saving is £739,000. The council needs to invest to improve recycling if it is going to exceed the 70% recycling target, but it also needs to now make 5% contribution savings.

Officers advised that for both the savings, (three weekly collections or the green waste) are of the same order of magnitude and is within a budget estimation because officers don't know until it actually happens, exactly how many people will sign up to a charging regime for Green waste or the extra diversion they would get.

Members were told that these budget lines are looking at the savings from moving to the three weekly collections manifesting itself in savings and collections and savings in the disposal budget with more waste being diverted to recycling.

Members noted that when the committee looked at the waste strategy last year, three weekly bin collections came up and members noted that the measure was not to save money but to increase recycling performance. Members noted that now it is very much a budget saving measure. Members asked whether that's merely a change of emphasis and it always was going to save the council money, but that wasn't the important thing. Whereas now the important thing is it's saving money as well.

Members noted that it is roughly a 50/50 split between the charges from green waste and the saving from the three weekly bin collection and asked if there was any more detail members could have on the numbers involved.

Officers explained that it could be viewed that things have changed over time and that the council is now wanting to invest to improve and to deliver savings. Members were advised that if you do both, you could take one or the other because they are both of a similar order.

In relation to the green waste option, if there is a charging regime which releases the money the council's spending on that, then the savings would be on an income line rather than those two saving lines.

At the moment officers have to wait to see what lines members want to allocate the savings to. Whether it is the green waste as the savings as an enhanced income or if members are taking the three weekly collections as a savings and use the green waste to invest.

There is little between the two options, but the suggestion is to do 2 options to invest to improve and deliver savings to return a 5% saving to the corporate centre.

Officers don't know what members will recommend or support when the report goes to cabinet.

Members felt that due to the complexity they would be better off looking at this in detail when the full report goes to the committee on Friday.

Members advised that they were very surprised to see these options in the budget proposals and stated that the coalition cabinet had said

that they were not going to three weekly collections. Members also advised that the leader had reassured members the council weren't going to three weekly collections and asked what this means now that the three weekly collections are proposed in the budget.

The director clarified that the budget proposals within this report are recommended by officers and these are what officers are suggesting members consider in order to balance the budget next year.

Members were advised that these have not been signed off politically and they will go through cabinet at some point in time in the future and are officers' recommendations at the moment.

Members were informed that this recommendation will enable the authority to save money, which is important given the budget gap that the council potentially is facing going forward, but it will also enable the council to achieve the Welsh Governments 70% recycling requirement.

The Chair clarified that the waste strategy that had been endorsed by the cabinet and includes the three weekly bin collections as an option. The chair felt that element is not an officer recommendation but at this stage the members don't know what has changed from that point in time to the report that will be going to the committee on Friday. The chair felt that there is definitely some changes in the detail to realise a saving of £740,000, which he didn't think was there when the waste strategy was looked at last.

The budget proposal ENV-P/R related to cemeteries fees and charges, officers advised that it is to bring the fees and charges in line with neighbouring authorities.

The ENV-S relates to the development management planning budget line was introduced by Ceri Morris Head of Planning and Public Protection. He advised that ENV-S is looking to trim a couple of budget lines in terms of statutory advertising and other advertising and also the bulk of the proposal comes from a reduction of the professional fees budget.

Members were reminded that planning is a complex process and sometimes with a myriad of variables in terms of any particular proposal, this sometimes requires engaging with professional and council opinion on certain issues and this proposal reduces the councils ability to commission external advice, where officers need specialist input in terms of particular cases. The total savings are approximately £16,000.

The Chair asked how the council is proposing to reduce the budget for statutory advertising and asked if it was 5% of the overall consultancy budget being proposed or is it a significant part of that consultancy budget to realise the saving?

The chair felt it was a bit concerning if it may lead to the council being open to challenge or appeals if the council didn't have that professional advice as on a number of occasions the planning committee had to have external input to correctly make a determination on a planning application.

Officers advised in relation to advertising, the saving is around available headroom that they have within the budget lines and while there is a requirement to advertise within the press, given circulation lists have reduced over time, there is identified headroom so this proposal is not increasing the risk of not covering a statutory duty.

In relation to the professional fees budget line, the figure is not actually 5% of that particular budget and is more that £16,000 is 5% of the development budget as a whole and it is just a proportion of that particular professional fees budget that has contributed to the overall 5%.

The Chair asked is there still a sufficient Professional fees budget there? And also asked if officers feel they can deal without the level of professional advice or do officers feel like the council might be making tougher decisions on some applications not to take that professional advice?

Officers advised that they don't think this proposal prevents the council from getting that advice in the future. Officers felt that if they were to continue to trim that budget line then that would increase the risk and possibly leave the council open to not getting that specialist advice where its needed.

The Chair felt that it is a little bit reassuring, but they are getting quite close to the line on how much the council can manage in terms of those savings.

Members asked about the need to advertise in newspapers due to their decreasing popularity and asked if the fee to advertise the application is passed on to the applicant or it is something the council must meet and what was the fee to do that?

Officers advised that they didn't have the figure to hand but they can provide that later. Members were informed that the cost of advertising

isn't passed on directly to the applicant, but officers do have budget lines that cover that requirement.

The director explained that the council has to pay by the column length and over the years officers have been trying to reduce font size and length of the columns to the minimum legal requirement, to try and save money.

The director asked members if they can help to lobby Welsh Government about this advertising requirement because the amount of readers who are looking at notices and adverts in the newspapers is diminishing and there are alternative advertising means such as social media which would probably get a bigger reach, in terms of making more people aware of these applications than by newspaper advertising.

Officers feel that Welsh Government are trying to protect the media rather than local government by maintaining this requirement.

Officers asked members to help get this message across every time there is a new minister appointed because it is not just planning that advertises notices in the press. The whole authority advertises things because of statutory requirements and that is cumulatively quite significant.

The chair agreed that it would be worth members taking that message on board.

Members wanted to ensure that all departments paid the same for the advertising and the director stated that it was not in the council's interest for different departments to negotiate the individual contracts with the newspapers. And given the fact that there is only one outlet that the authority uses, the departments do work collectively to ensure value for money for the public, for all the notices published.

ENV-T related to the trimming of professional fees budget line, members were advised that it related particularly to the Local Development Plan (LDP) team. Members were told that this is not the first time that this budget had been reduced and advised members that the LDP is supported by an extensive evidence base. Officers advised that sometimes they don't have the expertise in house to deliver those studies, so quite often the council must commission bespoke studies that help that evidence base. This proposal does reduce a little bit further the team's ability to Commission those studies.

Officers also explained that a spinoff of this particular proposal is that it does increase the pressure in house, in terms of the team which are already stretched producing the Replacement LDP work programme.

The Chair noted that in relation to the LDP that previously the council has put aside some money in reserves to deal with peaks of work and asked if this is something that the council had some capacity to draw on reserves to deal with if there was an absolute necessity.

Officers confirmed that there is an LDP reserve that is quite often used for such issues but that LDP reserve needs to cover the entire process, including any examination in public where the authority have to incur costs of any inspector/s that is appointed.

Officers noted that there is a spend profile associated with the reserve. Officers explained that quite often they just need to keep track of that because they need to plan for the entire work programme, not just the evidence based elements.

ENV-U related to the countryside arm of the service and included items such as statutory orders, fees, advertising budget and other services. Ceri Morris advised that officers have tried to think differently this time with the countryside budget because in previous years the public rights way maintenance budget has been trimmed as it is an obvious place to look, but there is only so far that budget can be trimmed given the extensive network that the team have got to maintain.

This time officers have been looking to increase annulment of fees in terms of statutory orders, reducing the advertising budget, which like the planning advertising budget has a little bit of headroom.

Members were advised that the other services budget is a little bit miscellaneous as it can be used for a number of things.

Members were reminded that in recent years for example, Natural Resources Wales grant monies of £15,000 are received for the Wales Coast Path. The way that grant is structured is that NRW provides 75% with a 25% contribution from the council. The council uses this type of budgets to meet its end of the bargain. This Budget proposal does potentially reduce the council's ability to maintain those structures along the Wales Coast path or other areas of the network.

Officers feel that the spinoff of this, is that the authority will need to be a little bit more creative in terms of what pots they dip into and get grant monies from. Officers feel that it is potentially manageable and

certainly a preference this year than to look again at the public rights away maintenance budget.

Members felt that it can't get any worse than it already is and noted that the course of the path has just cut through the town. Members felt that the maintenance is non-existent and there is a concrete barrier by the Quays.

Members felt that if money is cut and the coast path is left in that state, it will be leaving a lot of people disappointed. Members highlighted that men's mental health walking groups like to use these paths when they are maintained and are very useful and very good for men's health.

Members felt that the council can't say 'visit the dramatic heart of Port Talbot and the coastal path' because they feel that the coast path is virtually non-existent.

The Chair suggested that it was odd that the coast path was coming out of the Environment directorate's budget as the coast path is a key piece of the tourism infrastructure in the county as well as being part of a nationally recognised visitor attraction and felt that another directorate may be able to chip in to help, given that it is a relatively modest amount of money and because the council has prioritised tourism, visitor attractions and facilities.

The director advised that the concrete barrier on the coast path is there for health and safety reasons, because there is subsidence problems in that area which the council has tried to deal with in the past. This is where tidal water is effectively washing away the material beneath the path and the path therefore is sinking, this is a recurring problem. Members were advised that because it is immediately next to a tidal river, there is probably no way of the authority dealing with it apart from a big capital project that may well cost significant sums of money that the authority doesn't have.

The Coast Path has been diverted into the energy park as a relatively minor deviation from the previous route and allows people to still enjoy the path but it is not as attractive a route.

The director advised that in terms of the budget, there is a new Head of Leisure, Tourism and Culture who has taken on responsibility for that area, however the budget has not necessarily been transferred with that responsibility and it is still a council problem, whether it rests in the Environment Directorate or whether it rests in in the Educational Directorate.

The chair felt that the authority needs to consistently apply its priorities and felt that there could be a footnote in the budget that it is a bigger priority for Tourism and others to look at those at those elements.

The Chair also felt that the deviation from the route was larger than a minor deviation.

Officers explained that over a number of years, they have used grant money to try and address the issue on the path, but it is the tidal flow that is affecting and undermining the path that is causing the subsidence. Unless a big scheme comes along and is designed to solve the problem once and for all, there will be a continued need, every two to three years to spend the same amount of money just to resolve the problem on a temporary basis. Officers are liaising currently with Welsh Government and NRW to try and see whether there is a permanent solution to the issue.

Members stated that the rights of way are not cut back enough because a lack of staff and asked if the probation service can be used to cut back these areas.

Officers advised that they currently only have one team in at any one time from the probation service, which includes one vehicle which the council provides. This would cause some difficulties, but officers can have conversations internally about using them.

The ENV-V budget line related to biodiversity. Officers explained that the total saving is £14,500 and is proposed to be achieved via an increased income generation target, which officers feel can be achieved. This will also be done with a reduction in a general expenditure budget, which is often used just for equipment and items needed to conduct various tasks in the countryside and various wildlife corridors. The saving does have potential implications in terms of staff not necessarily having the equipment that they need to do the jobs daily.

The Chair stated that members were concerned by the undermining of the ability of staff to work safely but as officers had said about the continual cuts and this not being cut previously, it is probably something that's not an immediate concern, but as this budget is paying for some specialist equipment like PPE, safety boots etc. members asked for reassurance.

Officers confirmed that it has not been cut previously and certainly wouldn't be something that they want to cut year on year because it would ultimately result in potential health and safety issues for staff.

ENV-W relates to Building Control. Members were advised that the proposal is to be delivered through a removal of the out of hours dangerous structure service. There are potential implications in withdrawing that, because quite often dangerous structures become apparent out of hours and at night.

Members were told that the implications would be that the authority would have to rely on services like the police and the fire service who would attend in the first instance. Council staff would attend the first working day thereafter, instead of out of hours. Officers explained that there is no statutory duty to provide the service and not all local authorities across Wales do provide an out-of-hours service.

Officers also explained that the total proposal is also made-up of a slight reduction in the works in default budget. That budget is generally adequate because officers can attempt to recover costs, but there are occasions where the owner of the building or structure hasn't been established so that means there's no means to recover those costs.

Members were informed that a potential impact of this proposal is that the council have to draw on any central resilience budgets by reducing the budget that the building control service has available.

The Chair felt this was a little bit alarming in terms of the dangerous structures cover. And noted that while the other two budget lines are a lot less concerning and appreciated that it is not a statutory requirement, he felt that the council has got to assess the risk and what the appetite to that is.

The director advised that thankfully the council doesn't get called out of hours very often but do get called out in terms of the building control section because of their structural engineering expertise. Members were advised that if the authority withdraw out-of-hours services it doesn't necessarily mean that the risk to the public is greater because the police and the fire authority attend these places when there is a problem and they will maintain a presence until officers can be sure that that building is safe or the risk is mitigated.

The Chair asked for more information on this so that members can understand what that risk maybe, to be provided outside of the meeting.

Budget line ENV-A/A related to Civic buildings; the Director advised that it is a saving of £150,000. Members were informed that officers had reconfigured the use of the Quays and condensed the occupation of the floor plates to try and work smarter to ensure maximisation of the use of the floor space for alternative purposes.

Members were advised that South Wales Trunk Road agency moved onto one of the floors which the authority is receiving a rental income for and believe that will continue for 2 years.

Officers are also looking at a digital solution to replace the concierge service. This will enable them to undertake the work that they were originally intending to do rather than be stuck behind a desk. The combination of these two actions will help deliver a £150,000 saving.

Members asked how achievable is that income target in terms of letting the floor space and also asked how much floor space is required to be let out in order to hit the target?

Officers advised that because the layouts are slightly different to the floor plate on different floors they wouldn't be able to give an exact figure but officers will try to associate with any interested parties to maximise the amount of income that they secure and that will change over time.

Members were advised that the council had invested Welsh Government and council money into delivering the electric charging in the Quays. Part of the deal offered to the South Wales Trunk Road agency (SWTRA) was to offer them electric vehicle charging infrastructure but the money that SWTRA were going to spend on putting in their own infrastructure will be used to deliver additional improvements in the councils building as well.

Officers explained that it was not just about the rent being received from organisations but also getting access to improved infrastructure for use by everyone. Officers are confident they can achieve that target.

Officers gave an overview of budget line ENV-AB relating to the metal box building. Members were advised that in terms of security arrangements officers want to use a security company with cameras monitoring 24/7 that can send an emergency response straight away if they see anything on camera. This means that they won't be diluting the level of protection and moving in line with how other council buildings security is arranged.

Officers also hope, subject to securing the capital required, to propose to subdivide the metal box to enable businesses to move into that building. In time the operational costs associated with that building will move from the council onto the businesses that are occupying that floor space and the authorities' costs will decrease further.

Members asked if there was a serious metal theft at the metal box in which security guards were threatened.

Officers weren't sure if the security guards had been threatened or not but confirmed that there was a theft of cabling whilst the property was being converted and wasn't fully occupied at the time, officers believed that it was opportunist thieves.

The chair advised that budget lines ELLLH relates to home to school transport and was transferred from the Education Scrutiny Committee and this item potentially crosses over the two committees. The chair felt it was right to discuss the item today. Members asked about the performance of the Edge Consultants in home to school transport and asked if there is a performance report on how they are doing and if so when will members see it.

Head of Engineering and Transport explained that there was an education transformational programme and in 2022 education officers identified there were opportunities to improve performance and fundamentally transform and modernise the service to offer alternative travel solutions. In 2023, he was asked to facilitate the appointment of Edge Consultants to help the council as officers didn't have sufficient capacity in house to be able to deliver the programme on the scale required.

Members were advised that it was an end-to-end review of passenger's transport services and it effects both departments in that education colleagues need to establish eligibility and entitlement to transport and then the transport team organise the transport on behalf of education officers once the need is set.

Officers explained that Edge was appointed for a three-year contract to deliver annual efficiencies of £1.269 million over the term of the contract, including £800,000 of re-procurement and retendering of services and £150,000 of cost avoidance.

Officers advised that currently it is year 1, and the targeted savings are £350,000 with a net return of £52,000.

Officers are currently in discussions with the consultant over some of the milestones and monitoring performance, the details of which can't be discussed publicly. Officers did confirm that the in year saving for 23/24 has not been delivered which means discussions are being had and they are reviewing the 17 milestones which are specific activities to drive those savings and transformational change.

Officers explained that they can't talk about the detail of that until they establish that the savings are still deliverable and how they need to potentially be re-profiled.

Officers explained that it may be recoverable in year, but it could mean that the £500,000 that Directorate of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning have got in their plan for next year may need to change.

Officers advised that they would bring back a full report to scrutiny to possibly a joint scrutiny committee as it sits across both Education and Environments portfolio. Which they hope to bring that back early in December.

The Chair advised that he would be happy to facilitate a joint scrutiny meeting to deal with the matter and will have a discussion with Democratic Services around exactly where all the governance and responsibility lies and how best to approach that and who will need to attend the meeting.

The chair advised that work will be done in the background and then bring that back to members in due course.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report and the suggestions and views put forward by the committee.

3(b) Arboriculture Management Plan

Officers advised that the report is part of a service review that officers have undertaken, and they have identified a need to formalise a tree inspection plan. Officers have amalgamated that new document with the existing Arboriculture management plan which went through in 2021.

Members asked how secure is the budget for this plan in terms of funding?

Officers advised that as part of the establishment change there are now 6 operational staff, one tree inspector and 1 arboriculture

management officer. Officers explained that when it comes to Arboriculture management, the issue is the initial inspection that's required to get the authority into a position where it is in line with the tree inspection policy.

There are some capital monies available that officers can utilise for that. Once they get to that position, the inspection programme will be a three and a five-year cyclical programme which officers will be able to run with the resources they currently have.

The issue around the resources is when it comes to any works that can identify through those inspections that are required, they will need some capital investment, this means that as long as nothing further is cut then then it's OK.

Officers also advised that the initial money is secure and officers will be bringing a further report back to members. If there is a question of public safety, officers would have to reprioritise some capital for that.

The chair noted that once that initial survey is done officers will have a better understanding of the state of all the green infrastructure. Members felt this was positive as it is an investment in understanding of all those risks and how to manage them.

The director advised that most years officers bring forward reports to corporate directors' group with in-year pressures that the individual directorates are experiencing and explained that for multiple years, officers brought forward a pressure relating to Ash die back and they were allocated additional money to deal with that issue. Officers explained that if something occurred which hadn't been factored in, they could identify it as an in-year pressure. That doesn't necessarily mean it will get supported, but it is an avenue available to them.

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendation outlined in the draft Cabinet report.

4. **To consider items from the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Members of the Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

5. **Performance Monitoring**

There were no Performance Monitoring reports for consideration.

6. **Selections of items for future scrutiny**

Members agreed to add the following item to the Forward Work Programme:

- Corporate Plan Annual Report 6th December 2024
- Updating Side waste Policy 6th December 2024
- Use of Containers on Safari Collections 6th December 2024
- Report on HWRC Feasibility 6th December 2024
- Electric Vehicle On-Street Home Charging 14th March 2025

Members noted the Forward Work Programme.

7. **Urgent Items**

There was none.

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. **Scrutiny of Private Items**

Members considered the private items.

(a) **Viva Port Talbot Bid Renewal Ballot 2024**

Following Scrutiny members recommended a Yes vote in the Ballot.

(b) **Rheola Estate**

Following scrutiny, members supported the recommendation outlined in the draft Cabinet report.

CHAIRPERSON

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Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny Committee

31st January 2025

Report of the Head of Property and Regeneration - Simon Brennan

MATTER FOR: Decision.

Wards Affected:

All wards.

Economic Development CRM System – Contract Renewal

Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to seek Members agreement to enter a new three-year contract with Alcium Software Ltd on a direct award basis for the continued delivery of the Economic Development Teams bespoke Client Relationship Management (CRM) system.

Background

The scrutiny committee have selected this item for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of presentation to Cabinet on the 5th February 2025 for decision.

Financial Impact

Not applicable.

Integrated Impact Assessment

Not applicable.

Valleys Communities Impacts

Not applicable.

Workforce Impacts

Not applicable.

Legal Impacts

Not applicable.

Risk Management Impacts

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder Impacts

Not applicable.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Impacts

Not applicable.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the constitution for consultation on this item.

Recommendations

Following scrutiny, it is recommended that Members support the recommendation outlined in the draft cabinet report.

Appendices

Economic Development CRM System – Contract Renewal

Officer Contract

Julie Davies

Business Support & Economic Development Lead

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Mr Tom Rees – Scrutiny Officer

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

Wednesday 5th February 2025

**Report of the Head of Property & Regeneration –
Simon Brennan**

Matter for Decision.

Wards Affected:

All wards.

**Economic Development CRM System – Contract
Renewal**

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to seek Members agreement to enter a new three-year contract with Alcium Software Ltd on a direct award basis for the continued delivery of the Economic Development Team's bespoke Client Relationship Management (CRM) system.

Executive Summary

In March 2023, the Economic Development Team procured a Client Relationship Management system called Evolutive to support the delivery of its Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) business support project. The contract at the time was for two years with the option to extend for a further year.

However, the needs of the service require the use of the system over a longer-time period to:

- Deliver current and planned activity including the Tata grant funds.
- Respond to audit requests or challenges relating to externally funded programmes.
- Retain the data held to comply with subsidy control and General Data Protection Regulations.

There are funds available in the Team's SPF budget that can cover the costs of a new three-year contract if this is completed by February 2025.

However, the quotes provided fall outside the agreed variations under the Contract Procedure Rules and therefore, Cabinet approval is needed to proceed.

Background

During Covid, the Economic Development team delivered ten rounds of Welsh Government Grant support, processing 1,874 applications to a value of £2.5m over an 18-month period. For the majority of these, the various processes from application submission to grant payment were handled manually. Similarly, all reporting to Welsh Government was collated manually.

During this time, through regular meetings with Economic Development colleagues from across Wales it became clear that many were using digital systems to support these processes. At that time, the Economic Development Team was using a CRM system that had been developed in-house on a piecemeal basis over 15 years. Due to the pressures of Covid, the IT Team did not have the

resources to redevelop the system to support the delivery of the grant funds required.

Based on this experience and the fact that the current CRM system no longer met the Team's needs, it was clear that a new system was essential. Further, there was the opportunity to develop and deliver a business support project through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and this provided the impetus to look at the options.

The Team approached their Economic Development colleagues across Wales to identify who was using digital systems and whether these had been developed in-house or were procured. We were particularly interested to know where these were used to deliver grant programmes. A number of Council's were using a system called Evolutive and we met with colleagues from three of these to discuss the system and were given demonstrations on how they used it.

With a clear idea of the activities to be delivered through our proposed Shared Prosperity Fund project, we arranged a demonstration of the system with supplier Alcium Software. This drew upon the experiences of many Council's across the UK who use the system and it was clear that it could support the delivery of our project as well as our ongoing Economic Development activities.

A meeting was held with IT to discuss Evolutive and whether a new system offering the same options could be developed in-house. Whilst there was the capability to do this, unfortunately, it did not have the resources to do this in the timeframes being worked to. The development of a new system had been budgeted for in our required to support the delivery of the SPF project and therefore we received approval to procure the system.

Current Position

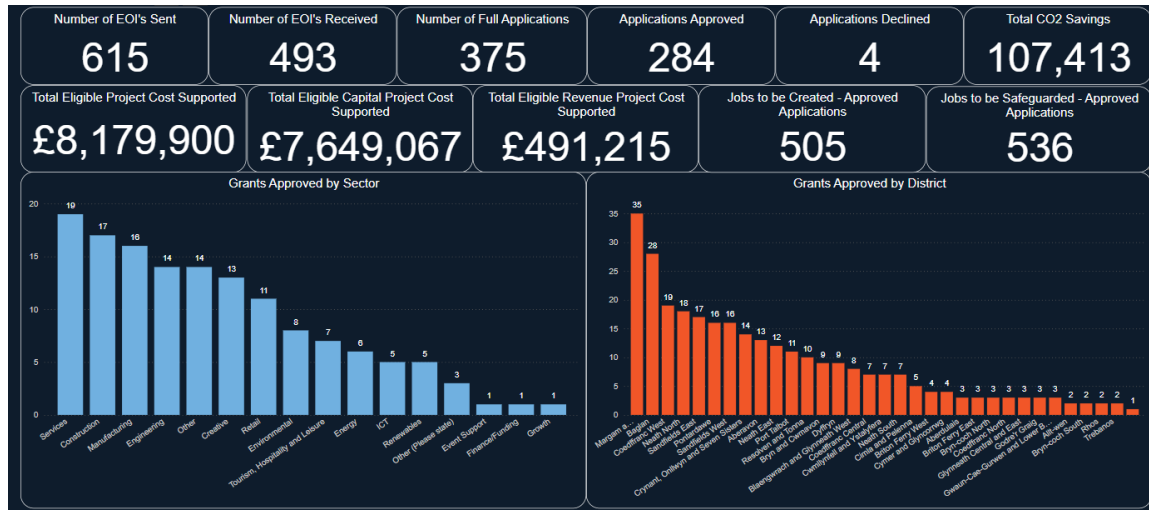
Our SPF Business Anchor Project received approval in December 2022. However, the procurement of Evolutive was not completed until March 2023. Further, the development of the system ran alongside emerging requirements from UK Government.

The grant fund was central to our SPF Project and the processes for this would be mirrored by other project activities. Thus, it was key that the grant processes were established initially.

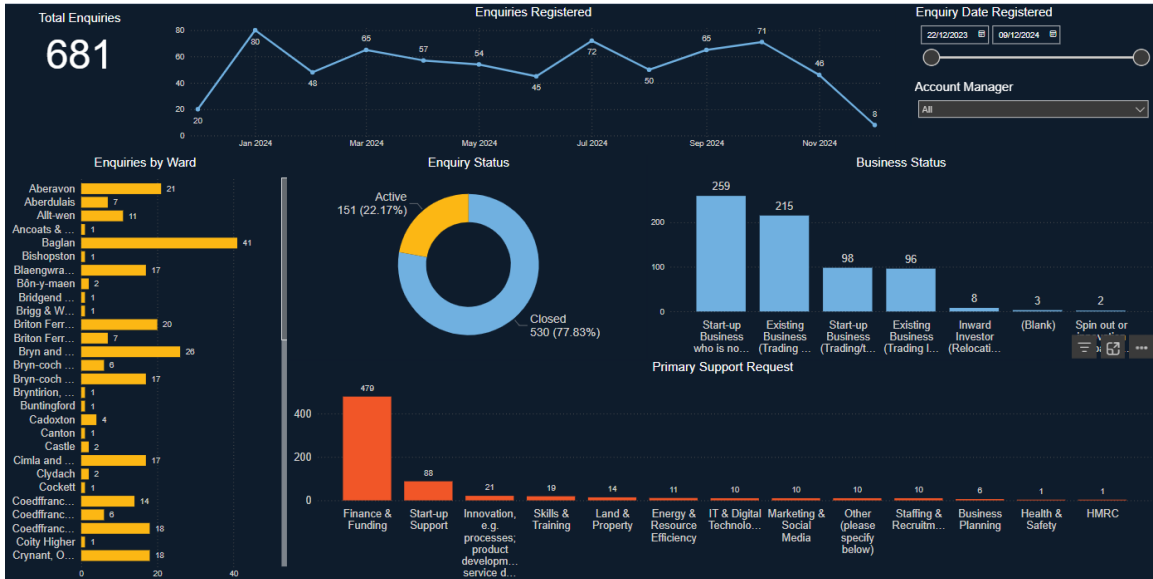
The first grant applications were trialled through the system in May. As expected, as we became more familiar working with the system and based on client experiences, various teething issues led to further developments and changes being made. In addition, new requirements from and changes made by UK Government added to this.

New activities were then added and processes for the collection and reporting of the key project outputs and outcomes established. The following illustrations provide a summary of these for different activities.

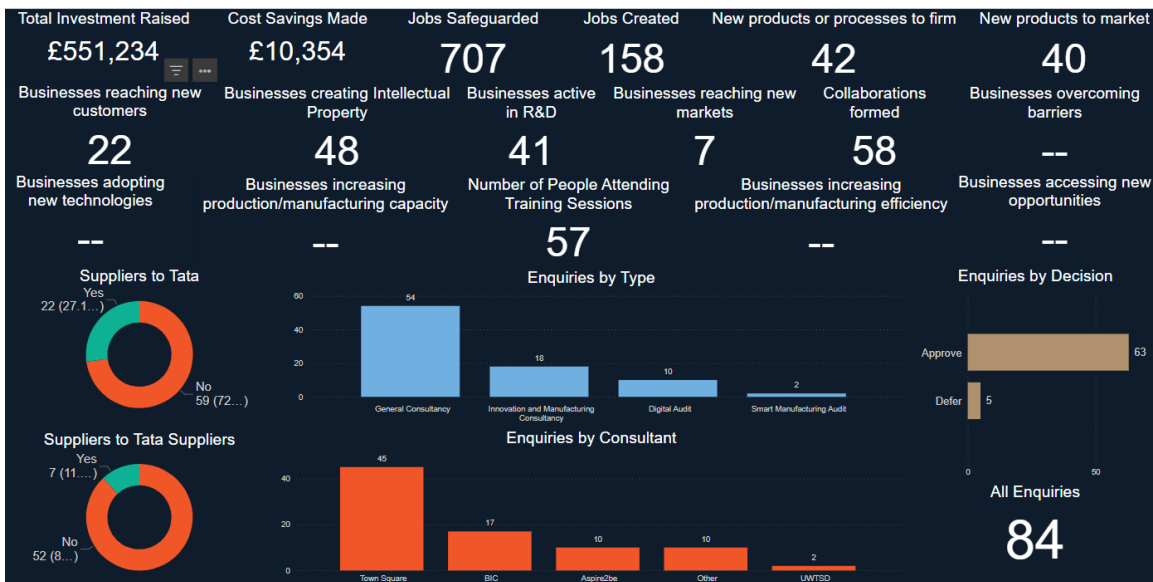
1. Grant Fund



2. Enquiries



3. Specialist Support



Overall, it has been challenging developing the new CRM system whilst simultaneously delivering the SPF project. However, the capability of Evolute to support this has been proven. Further, the information held in the system has enabled us to identify demand

from businesses for particular support, and with the flexibility of our SPF project we have been able to respond to this.

With greater familiarity with the system, there are thus opportunities to identify demand for new and enhanced services and to develop processes to support new activities more quickly. Further, its capability in terms of reporting options has yet to be fully explored.

The Economic Development Team has recently been tasked with delivering a range of grant funds on behalf of UK Government to support businesses impacted by the Tata transition. This will continue through to March 2026 with a further option to extend until March 2027. Evolutive is to be used to support the application and claims processes for these. The total value of the funds to be delivered is in excess of £20m.

Further, UK Government has announced funding from April 2025-March 2026 as an interim measure pending its expected announcement in the spring of 2025 of its replacement for the SPF Programme. Whilst details are unknown, it is anticipated that this would provide funding for projects to run for a three-year period.

The local design and delivery of projects through the SPF Programme enabled activities to be developed under each theme that directly met local needs. This has worked well and has been widely fed back to UK Government through various consultations. If this approach is adopted for the delivery of the new programme, then there could be the opportunity to develop a new package of support for businesses and new business start-ups from April 2026 to March 2029.

As with many public funded programmes, there is a requirement that the data is held for a period beyond the closure of the project to respond to audit requirements, any challenges raised and to meet the General Data Protection Regulations.

Based on the foregoing, the Economic Development Team is seeking Member approval to enter a new contract with Alcium Software for its Evolutive CRM system for the next three years from April 2025-March 2028.

Financial Impact

There will be no cost to the Council for the new contract as explained below.

The initial contract for Evolutive was a call off from the G-Cloud 13 framework for two years with the option to extend for a further year from 13th March 2025-13th March 2026. This was funded through the Economic Development Team's SPF project. The upfront cost of £21,390 has covered all the development work needed for the project to date, training, and 17 user licenses.

The cost to take up the extension offered under the current contract to March 2026 would be £13,490 + VAT with all new development work at an additional cost.

However, due to the operational needs of the service, the continued use of Evolutive will be required beyond that date and based on the quotes below, do not fall within the accepted variations under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Hence, the need to seek approval to proceed. The quote from Alciem Software is as follows:

Direct award:

18 Fixed User Licence system @ £10,660 for 3 years = £31,980 less 5% discount for payment up front = £30,381 + VAT

G-Cloud 13 Framework:

System price @ £5330 + VAT + 17 additional Fixed User @ £480 + VAT per User = £8160 + £5330 = £13490 + VAT per year. Thus £40,470 + VAT for the three years

Development costs are additional in both cases.

As Evolutive will be used to deliver activities in the transition year the above costs will be met out of the current SPF budget and therefore at no cost to the Council. Further, as the development work for the Tata funds will provide the template to support these activities, these costs are also being met through the current SPF budget.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The first stage assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

The continued delivery of the Economic Development Team's bespoke Client Relationship Management (CRM) system supports the delivery of business support projects that aim to make a real difference to our Valley communities, i.e. delivering services to local businesses to create wealth and help improve employment opportunities which is one of the key themes of the Council's Corporate Plan.

Workforce Impacts

No implications.

Legal Impacts

The contract is below the relevant threshold under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and so they do not apply.

As such it is the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPR's) that apply.

Authority is being sought to exclude the CPR's in accordance with the CPR's and so this is compliant. Therefore, there is no legal risk of challenge.

Risk Management Impacts

No issues anticipated due to past service performance of using the vendor to develop and implement the current Client Relationship

Management System as no concerns with reliability; policies to protect data; incompatibility and migration of data, downtime of the system or unexpected costs have been experienced.

Consultation:

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

It is recommended, that having had due regard to the integrated impact assessment, that Members approve a new three-year contract by direct award with Alcium Software Limited for the continued provision of their Evolutive CRM system.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

The reasons for the recommendation are as follows.

- The CRM system is integral to the delivery of current and planned activity including externally funded programmes.
- Delivery timeframes e.g. Tata grant funds, do not allow for an alternative system to be considered and procured.
- External funding is available to cover the costs if completed by February 2025.

Implementation of Decision

‘The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period’ (note: this is the default option and is expected to be the option that is used in most reports.) Please note that you should not implement recommendations until the three day call-in period has elapsed.

Appendices

None.

List of Background Papers

None.

Officer Contact

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Mob: 07977 396683

XImpact Assessment - First Stage

1. Details of the initiative

Initiative description and summary: Proposal to extend and renew the contract for the delivery of the Economic Development Team's bespoke CRM system supplied by Alcium Software Ltd.
Service Area: Economic Development
Directorate: Environment

2. Does the initiative affect:

	Yes	No
Service users	X	
Staff	X	
Wider community	X	
Internal administrative process only		X

3. Does the initiative impact on people because of their:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't Know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence)/How might it impact?
Age		X				Evolute is a bespoke CRM system that supports the delivery of project specific activities by the Economic Development Team. It is used primarily by staff, and externally, by businesses and individuals making on-line grant applications. Assistance is provided on a one-to-one basis should it be needed.
Disability		X				As above.
Gender Reassignment		X				As above.
Marriage/Civil Partnership		X				As above.

Pregnancy/Maternity		X				As above.
Race		X				As above.
Religion/Belief		X				As above.
Sex		X				As above.
Sexual orientation		X				As above.

4. Does the initiative impact on:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence used) / How might it impact?
People's opportunities to use the Welsh language		X				The Economic Development team has Welsh speaking officers.
Treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English		X				As above.

5. Does the initiative impact on biodiversity:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence) / How might it impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity		X				N/A
To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment,		X				N/A

such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.						
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6. Does the initiative embrace the sustainable development principle (5 ways of working):

	Yes	No	Details
Long term - how the initiative supports the long term well-being of people	X		The CRM will support the administration and delivery of Funds (grants) such as those allocated by UK Government, and endorsed by the Tata Transition Board, to help businesses impacted by the transition of the Port Talbot works and/or individuals considering self-employment. The anticipated outputs/outcomes of this work will support the Council's Corporate Plan – Recover, Reset, Renew as interventions will encourage: our :- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communities to thrive and be sustainable</i> • <i>The creation/safeguarding of jobs and upskilling of local people and businesses.</i>
Integration - how the initiative impacts upon our wellbeing objectives	X		As above.
Involvement - how people have been involved in developing the initiative	X		As above
Collaboration - how we have worked with other services/organisations to find shared sustainable solutions	X		As above.

Prevention - how the initiative will prevent problems occurring or getting worse	X		As above.
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7. Declaration - based on above assessment (tick as appropriate):

A full impact assessment (second stage) is not required	X
Reasons for this conclusion	
<p>The CRM will support the Council as the appointed Accountable Body for the administration, approval and distribution of financial aid (grants) proposed by UK Government to support individuals, businesses and communities impacted by the Tata Transition plans at the Port Talbot works.</p> <p>The renewal of the contract will meet the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.</p>	

	Name	Position	Date
Completed by	Julie Davies	Business Support & Economic Development Lead	13.01.2025.
Signed off by	Simon Brennan	Head of Property & Regeneration	13.01.2025

Environment, Regeneration & Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee

(All starting 10am unless otherwise stated)

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Contact Officer
2024		
19th July	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Part Night Street Lighting Pilots Report (For Decision)	Mike Roberts
	Flood Risk Management Plan (For Decision)	Mike Roberts/ Steve Owen
20th September	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2023 – Neath Port Talbot Active Travel Delivery Plan (2024 – 2029) (For Decision)	Amanda Phillips David W. Griffiths
4th November 2pm-4pm	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	

	Rheola Estate (For Decision)	Simon Brenan
	Arboriculture Management Plan (For Decision) (Moved from September Meeting)	James Davies
	Budget Report (For Decision)	Huw Jones
	Viva Port Talbot Bid Renewal Ballot 2024 (For Decision) (Moved from September meeting)	Andrew Collins
8th November	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	

	Disposal of Off Street Pay and Display Car Parks (Capacity and Utilization Review) (For Decision) (Moved from September Meeting)	Dave Griffiths/ Ian Rees
	Improving recycling performance and Budget Delivery (For Decision)	Mike Roberts
	Pilot of Access Approach to Formal Parks and Gardens (For Decision)	James Davies
6th December	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Corporate Plan Annual Report 23/24 (For Decision)	Noelwyn Daniel
	Corporate Plan 6 monthly update Q1/Q2 (Monitoring)	Noelwyn Daniel
2025		
17th Jan	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Budget report	Huw Jones
31st Jan	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	

	Use of Containers on Safari Collections	Mike Roberts
	Economic Development CRM System – Contract Renewal (For Decision)	Sarah Fowler
14th February	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Regeneration Strategy (For Decision)	Andrew Collins
14th March	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Electric Vehicle On-Street Home Charging (For Decision)	Paul Thomas
	Report on HWRC Feasibility (For Decision)	Mike Roberts
	Fleet and Heavy Plant Renewals (For Decision)	Kevin Lewis

4th April	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Highways and Engineering Works Programme	Mike Roberts
2nd May	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	
	Selected from Cabinet Forward Work Programme	

Site Visit – Transfer Station - For March 12th.

Reports to come back

- **No Side Waste Policy review report** - to be included with the '**missed collections policy**'. - Mike Roberts (Around June?)
- **Officers to explore options to gather occupancy data to be reported back to the scrutiny committee.**' – Ian Rees/ Dave Griffiths

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