

**Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee**  
**(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams)**

**Members Present:**

**19 September 2024**

**Chairperson:** Councillor C.Galsworthy

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor H.C.Clarke

**Councillors:** H.Davies, O.S.Davies, S.E.Freeguard, J.Jones, A.R.Lockyer, P.D.Richards, D.Whitelock and C.Williams

**Officers In Attendance** R.Davies, C.Howard, A.Thomas, S.Coe, V.Smith, M.Potts, C.Griffiths, S.Griffiths and P.Chivers

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors A.Llewelyn, S.Harris and J.Hale

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1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2024 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

#### 4. **To consider items from the Cabinet FWP**

Members considered items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme

##### (a) Disabled Facilities Grant Options Appraisal

The Chair thanked officers for the detailed and interesting report.

The Head of Housing and Communities provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Officers provided members with additional information that was not included in the report. The change to the discretionary element of the grant has driven a change in behaviours with an increase in applications for vertical lifts due to the reduced cost in comparison to extensions. However, this approach does not provide an appropriate long-term solution.

The Chair raised a concern about potential safety risks for some residents using vertical lifts.

Members questioned how lifetime property charges were applied for social housing.

Officers confirmed that discretionary funding would only be available for private and privately rented properties. It was likely that any discretionary funding would be re-paid at some point from private or privately rented properties, but this did not apply to social housing.

Members enquired whether private landlords were required to co-sign any funding agreement.

Officers confirmed that landlord permission must be granted before any work can be carried out on a privately rented property and landlords are made aware of the funding conditions.

Members asked if hospital patients who were awaiting property adaptations were prioritised and whether the Health Board contributed financially.

Officers confirmed that the previously available Hospital Discharge Grant is no longer offered and Occupational Therapists must prioritise need. When a priority need is identified, the application would be

moved as far as possible on the waiting list, depending on the current state of spend. It was noted that there are already commitments for next year's budget.

Members questioned whether more funding is required from the health board and queried why the Hospital Discharge Funding Grant is no longer available.

Officers confirmed that efforts have been made to obtain extra funding from the health board, but this has not been forthcoming. There was a change to the Western Bay Grants, and approval was stopped. It was noted that many people on the waiting list are of equal priority and there are difficulties in prioritising with the limited resources available. In some cases, Occupational Therapists put forward priority pieces of work with the remainder of the works being carried out at a later date.

The Head of Adult Services gave assurances that hospital patients awaiting adaptations would not remain in hospital for extended periods but would be moved into an extended care placement in a residential bed, at a cost to the council.

Members enquired, should the proposal be implemented, how quickly would the current backlog clear.

Officers confirmed that if Cabinet approval were granted, changes would be required to the policy tools and legal document, with the aim for the change to be implemented by the start of the next financial year. There are currently 274 on the waiting list but it is anticipated that some people may leave the list if means testing was reintroduced. People on the waiting list will be notified if means testing was re-introduced.

Members requested to see a copy of the means test and suggested that the council should have some discretionary powers.

Officers advised members that there would be no discretion over large grants where means testing was in place. It was noted that the small/medium grants have been taken out to create a new discretionary grant and discretionary powers have been used to not means test them.

Members welcomed a means test system. Members questioned if deficit monies would be clawed back from Welsh Government and if Western Bay could attend committee to provide clarity over grants.

The Head of Housing and Communities confirmed that Welsh Government provided an extra £90k funding, to help with the increased demand from removing the means test, and some funding will also be available from Western Bay in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's). There has been a change in relation to capital monies which has impacted how much money is available to use towards DFG's. The West Glamorgan Capital Group are in conversation with Welsh Government around the ability to use more of the money that the Welsh Government provide under these grants for DFG's.

The Director of Social Services, Health & Housing confirmed that the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board can be invited to a future scrutiny committee meeting. The Director reminded members that the board is Chaired by the Leader of Council, and the director was also a board member. The director reiterated the change to regional funding that comes through the regional partnership board, there is more focus on transformation and using capital monies to support transformation programmes. This has impacted on available funding for DFG's. In previous years some in year underspend has gone towards DFG's.

Members requested clarity over how much the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board can provide to the council for grants and requested further information in relation to the Welsh Government funding of £90k and the £1m+ deficit mentioned in the report.

Officers confirmed that the amount of £90k was calculated by Welsh Government. However, the figure did not consider the amount of people who cancelled or did not apply because of the means test.

The Director of Social Services, Health & Housing confirmed that the council was not funding an additional £1m; the current lack of means testing has resulted in an increased demand for services. If all requests were delivered it would result in an additional £1m spend over Welsh Government funding.

Members enquired about the timescale for the re-introduction of means testing.

The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing confirmed that there would be a need for consultation and policy change before any change could be made. It is hoped that by the start of the next financial year, arrangements could be in place and rolled out. It was noted that Welsh Government may not approve of the change, but officers considered it a necessary step to ensure those most in need are accessing the required services.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services and Health enquired how the cost of vertical lifts compared to stairlifts.

Officers confirmed that vertical lifts are more expensive than stairlifts and could cost in the region of £20k.

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

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

There were no items selected from the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.

6. **Performance Monitoring**

The Chair advised committee that Quarter 1 & Quarter 2 performance reports were added to the forward work programme for 12th December, with quarterly performance reports being received for future meetings.

There were no performance monitoring reports for consideration.

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

Officers advised members of new items that had been added to the Cabinet Forward Work Programme and changes to the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme; members were given the opportunity to request further items for consideration.

The Chair reminded officers of the need for a description of the purpose of the report on the Cabinet Forward Work Programme to aid scrutiny members when selecting items for scrutiny.

Members noted the Forward Work Programmes.

8. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

9. **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.

10. **Scrutiny of Private Items**

Members considered the private item.

11. **Initial Business Case for the Development of a Triage Centre (Exempt under paragraph 14)**

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet

**Cllr. C Galsworthy  
CHAIRPERSON**