

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

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

Members Present:

20 September 2023

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

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

**Officers In
Attendance** K.Jones, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, N.Pearce,
C.Griffiths, H.Jones, S.Rees, J.Woodman-
Ralph, N.Daniel, N.Blackmore, C.Furlow,
S.Davies, L.McAndrew, C.Saunders,
S.Brennan, K.Davies, D.Lewis and A.Thomas

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

1. Chairs Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7, 9,
10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20.

2. Declarations of Interests

Cllr J.Henton, Item 10 (Cabinet) - Personal, Volunteer with Friends of
Neath Abbey Ironworks

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 19th April 2023 and 28th June
2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **Annual Report**

Members considered the Annual Report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members agreed that the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee note and endorse the annual Report 2022/2023 attached at Appendix 1 and commend to Council.

5. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

Outlook

Members considered the report as circulated within the supplement pack.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the purpose of the report is to provide a detailed picture of the current position of the Council, in terms of funding and the increase on demand in services of the authority.

Members were updated with the inflation figures, which reflects how volatile the current financial situation across the country is. Whilst current financial planning takes into account a range of possible scenarios, the authority are currently working with a 3.1% settlement figure. However, this is subject to change.

The proposed Panel will operate in addition to the other mechanisms that take place. It will be used to assist in the shaping and development of the authority's policies and services moving forward.

Officers confirmed due to the limited time at the end of the budget setting process, and the size of the budget gap that the authority will be facing, it is likely that proposals which will require policy change or service decisions will be brought forward earlier. This will mean that the scrutiny committees will have sight of proposals earlier and allow for a contribution when proposals for the ensuing year are being shaped.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet.

Remembrance Parades - Neath and Port Talbot

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members queried the breakdown of the cost for the events. Officers confirmed the majority of the costs are related to the closure of the highway, together with some costs for first aid provision and marshalling of the event. Moving forward, officers confirmed that authority staff would be trained in traffic management plans this would assist with reducing future costs of the event.

Members expressed their concern that the funding was allocated for the events at the two towns and the valley communities were not included within this item. Members asked for wider consideration for future events. Officers advised that the reason for the focus on the two towns related to the feedback that was received last year when the parades were unable to take place. The veteran's communities, particularly in these areas, were distressed by being unable to march last year. The authority are not aware of any other parade that are struggling.

The Chief Executive confirmed that she has requested a review of events and festivals across the borough.

It was confirmed that the costs for 2023 would be coming from general reserves.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet.

Culture and Destination Strategies

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack and the strategies circulated within the supplement pack.

Members considered the culture strategy in relation to sport and were pleased to see that that the strategy identified commissioning a sport facilities needs assessment. This should include the tenure of sports facilities and also the sustainability of the facilities.

Members queried how many members of staff would be required to deliver the strategies, and if they are dependent on grant funding.

There are currently a couple of staff employed using grant funding who will assist with the delivery of both strategies presented. Officers are currently trying to obtain further grant funding.

Officers were keen to outline that whilst the documents are Council led, the delivery of the strategy relies on a partnership approach.

Members looked at the consultation responses and asked officers to consider what could be done to engage with the age group that did not provide a response. Officers stressed the importance of a culture partnership, for younger people moving forward.

Members queried the value of the consultants and if they were value for money in terms of the outcomes of the reports. Officers commended the thorough work of the consultants in relation to this item.

Members raised issues with transport and the need to ensure that the strategies link in with the wider strategies of the Council. Officers recognised the importance of transport in the strategies and in general across the Borough.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet.

Heritage Strategy

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack and the strategy circulated within the supplement pack.

It was noted that this item is a draft strategy for authorisation to go out to consultation.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet.

Quarter 1 - Revenue Budget Monitoring

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack and the strategies circulated within the supplement pack.

On page 266, a projected overspend of £2.867million is indicated. It was confirmed, this is the projected overspend after £3.5m has been

drawn down from general reserves which was agreed by Cabinet/Council when the budget was originally set.

The effect of proposed pay award NJC green book staff is still not agreed, therefore the figures presented are a positional point in time. The overspend may be subject to change. The report assumes that members are agreeable to using the pay contingency that was set aside to fund the additional cost of the pay award.

Any cost savings and income generation measures, that fall within existing measures and policies will be considered during the year to try and reduce the overspend.

With regards to home to school transport and the in-year overspend, it was confirmed that this is a result of routes which existed previously however had to be retendered therefore resulted in an additional cost. To try and mitigate future costs, officers intended to engage with external officers to try and drive down future costs, without affecting the entitlement of home to school transport.

Members queried what work was being done with regards to the accommodation strategy. Officers confirmed that the work is being undertaken. The buildings that are able to be repurposed are subject to current discussion in relation to capital investment to determine what is required for them to be utilised. Additional buildings are being considered and what they can be used for in order to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and ongoing operating costs. This will take time, to ensure that the Council is able to continue to provide an efficient service and retain staff that are working within the Council.

Members highlighted the underspend on the council tax reduction scheme and queried what was being done to promote this, given the ongoing cost of living crisis. Further has then been any impact from the expansion of the Welfare Rights Service. Officers were unable to comment if the increase had had any tangible effect on take up of council tax support. It was noted that the number of people claiming council tax support had reduced since 2020.

The Chief Executive outlined some points with regards to work that has been undertaken in response to Welfare Rights support. This includes the roll out of the free school meals. In addition, some of the shared prosperity fund money has been used on the low income family tracker, which targets and assists people who may not be accessing their full benefit entitlement. Officers advised that a list of

support available would be circulated to members via email following the meeting.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet.

Quarter 1 - Capital Budget Monitoring

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members queried if the cost of living crisis is affecting capital budgets and if suitable contingencies have been accounted for within the budgets. It was noted that the cost of inflation is having an effect on the amount of things that can be delivered within existing budgets. The increased cost of borrowing is having an effect on capital financing costs.

Officers outlined what is currently being done to try and ensure that budgets are maintained and that the high cost of materials is not impeding on projects of the Council.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet.

Quarter 1 - Performance Indicators - 23/24

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Officers outlined the new format that the information is being presented in. Training on performance scrutiny is scheduled for October 2023.

Members raised the indicator in relation to customer services and the length of time to answer the calls. Members queried if this was a suitable indicator or if there was another indicator that would better reflect the performance of customer services. Officers confirmed that a Customer Services manager has been appointed and they had been scoping the review of customer services. The performance indicator will be a feature of the review itself and it is hoped that an indicator can be identified which is better reflective of the quality of service delivered. Officers confirmed that elected members will be involved as part of the review.

Members raised the number of staff that are exiting the authority which is instigated by the employee. Officers confirmed that included in those figures are experienced members of staff. Data reflects that the number of people recruiting to the organisation has increased year on year and generally the number of starters is outstripping the number of leavers. However, it is recognised in parts of the Council, recruitment remains difficult.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2022-2023

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Whilst members recognised that the feedback from the public was of paramount importance, members queried if the authority notes when individual members compliment services. Officers confirmed that when compliments from members are received, they are included as part of the reports.

Members queried if there was a breakdown in complaints to differentiate between complaints about the service and complaints about staff. Officers confirmed this information was outlined within the Complaints Annual Report.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

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

Members noted the Forward Work Programme.

7. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

8. **Access to Meetings**

Resolved: to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the

relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

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

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Exempt under Paragraph 14)

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

CHAIRPERSON