

## **Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

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

**Members Present:**

**8 November 2023**

**Chairperson:** Councillor P.Rogers

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor C.Jordan

**Councillors:** T.Bowen, H.C.Clarke, C.Galsworthy, J.Henton, J.Jones, S.Paddison, R.Phillips, S.Purse, S.H.Reynolds and A.J.Richards

**Officers In Attendance** A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, S.Rees, N.Daniel, A.Thomas, T.Davies, L.McAndrew, R.Crowhurst, C.Morris, L.Beynon, L.Doyle, D.Griffiths and C.Furlow-Harris

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

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### **1. Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Members were advised that Item 7 from the Cabinet Agenda had been withdrawn due to an administrative error on the report and will be brought back to the meeting scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 8, 10, 11 and 14.

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

Cllr S Freeguard

Item 11

Personal, Family Member works at TATA Steel

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **Safeguarding**

Members noted the report.

5. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

**Biodiversity Duty Plan (2023-2026)**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members noted that planning applications are considered on an individual basis and asked how will the Biodiversity Duty affect the council achieving more much needed development applications. Officers confirmed that biodiversity was a material consideration in the planning decision making process. It was noted that nationally important sites such as Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are protected by national planning policy with some designations subject to Habitat Regulation Assessment. The LDP policy outlines that any sites of importance should be avoided but this has to be balanced with the need for economic growth. Economic, environmental, social and cultural factors are taken into account. If overriding reasons to build are present, mitigation and/or compensation requirements is factored in. The Ecology Team look for innovative ways to boost biodiversity.

The Head of Planning and Public Protection confirmed this plan was more than the planning process, but how the council more broadly responds to the duty and demonstrates compliance.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**2022/23 – Treasury Management Outturn Report**

Members considered the report as circulated within the agenda pack.

Members referenced the Local Authority loans table on page 197 and asked for further information relating to the £10m loan listed at the end of March. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the short-term loan was needed to cover liquidity and cash flow at the end of the financial year for the period 20 March - 12 April 2023. The interest cost was £28k which is covered by the Treasury Management Budget and the loan was repaid in full on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Members questioned whether this shortfall could have been taken from reserves in this instance. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the authority had £53m invested in fixed term investments which generated interest of £1.5m.

Members questioned if this circumstance had arisen in any previous year. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that short/long term borrowing to cover cash flow was standard procedure for all local authorities as part of treasury arrangements. On this occasion the borrowing had spanned the end of year period. It was noted that any borrowing from the government can only be for the period of a year, short term needs are met by inter local authority borrowing.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

### 2023/24 Risk Register Monitoring

Members referred to SR14, SR18 and SR19 from the Risk Register, and questioned if the impact on the local economy of steel not being produced locally had been considered, particularly in relation to the Celtic Freeport and the potential of losing prime customers. It was noted that a closure would cause a significant impact on the economy, unemployment and social services. Members asked what support the council can put in place to support Tata steel workers, is there an Action Plan and what lobbying can be undertaken.

In terms of the new strategic risk identified against developments at Tata, the Chief Executive acknowledged advised that no announcement has been made by the company as to its proposed transition plan. Informal discussions are taking place between the company and their recognised trade unions.

Following the first meeting of the Transition Board, two multi-agency planning sessions have been held, to look at potential immediate responses. Chief officers are working alongside other agencies to ensure that the council is ready to respond once plans and

timescales are known. A specification of work has been developed to support the Transition Board's decision to commission a local economic action plan. This will analyse the local economic impact of any transition proposed whilst also identifying options for creating alternative jobs in the short, medium and long term. Members were referred to the existing regeneration programme developed by the Council where there are a range of projects that could assist in creating new employment. For example, the proposal to develop Port Talbot Docks and the associated Freeport programme. The work would also enable other ideas to be brought forward.

It was noted that the Tata steel site is a key strategic site situated next to Associated British Ports' land holdings. The council would expect the company and the governments to be clear about potential alternative uses for any parts of the site that might become available.

Members agreed Tata Steel needs to be tracked on the risk register and expressed disappointment and concern that the original understanding that the heavy end would not close appears to have been changed. Members need to support and lobby to try to help this situation move forward.

The Chief Executive reiterated that the council are not accountable or responsible for the decisions taken by Tata Steel, but do have a role to play in helping and supporting local communities.

The Leader of Council thanked the Chief Executive for the comprehensive and detailed response. The Cabinet gave assurances that the whole council with officers would work together to ensure that support is provided.

Members referenced SR05 - Safeguarding, and questioned why the training and transitional safeguarding pathway wasn't currently in place? The Director for Social Services confirmed the training was in place but further development is required. The transitional safeguarding pathway is a separate training issue that is being rolled out, to adult services, in particular. Basic safeguarding training is provided every 3 years but monitoring improvements need to be made. A report around safeguarding training will be brought back to Social Services Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee. In reference to SR07, members questioned why extra Occupational Health staff were being employed.

The Head of People and Organisational Development provided clarification around the Occupational Health and Safety Team and advised the team are not additional resources and are council employees. The Occupational Health & Safety Manager and Team have put in place a Health and Safety framework to mitigate the health and safety risk across the council.

Members questioned whether the safeguarding rolling programme for taxi drivers is still in place. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the training programme is embedded in our practices in respect of Licensing and the aim is to roll out the programme to different areas.

Members referenced SR01- Bridges and Structures, and asked for progression details of the rolling programme of inspections for Bridges and Structures? The Director of Environment confirmed that 20 principal inspections for the longest spanned structures operate on a 6 year cycle and this target is achievable. 250 general inspections are planned annually on a two year cycle and this is on target to achieve.

With reference to the Property Asset Management Plan, members asked if there were adequate staff resource available to carry out recommencement of conditions surveys of council buildings. The Director for Environment confirmed that a report is being brought back towards the end of this month/early December to identify the condition of all council buildings. It was confirmed that due to internal resource pressure, there has been a delay in updating the plan.

Members referred to SR18 and requested background information as to why the levelling up risk has been de-escalated from the corporate risk register. The Director of Environment confirmed that levelling up funding was secured for projects within the Neath valley area, part of the funding was for a project at waterfall country, Pontneddfechan. Following approval, difficulties arose in relation to the use of land within private ownership. The project delivery timescale did not allow for a compulsory land purchase to be processed and there was a high risk of the project not being delivered. Subsequently, the UK government, allowed extra time for the compulsory land purchase order to be followed and the risk was de-escalated. Currently pursuing that process in conjunction with trying to secure a negotiated position.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

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

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

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**

Passenger Transport Review - Appointment of Consultants (Exempt under Paragraph 14)

Following scrutiny,

Amendment to recommendation:

To put a time-limit in place and a parallel action to look at enhancing skills of the team and growing the team.

The recommendation was supported to Cabinet with above amendment.

**CHAIRPERSON**