

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

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

Members Present:

28 November 2023

Chairperson: Councillor P.Rogers

Vice Chairperson: Councillor C.Jordan

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

**Officers In
Attendance** K.Jones, A.Thomas, C.Griffiths, H.Jones,
N.Daniel, S.Davies, C.Furlow-Harris, H.Lewis,
L.McAndrew, A.Thomas, K.Warren and L.Willis

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

1. Chairs Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interests

None received.

3. Pre-decision Scrutiny

Setting Council Tax Base 2024/25 (Pages 11 - 16)

Members asked for clarification regarding the setting of Council Tax Base for 2024/25.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that every council in Wales provides Welsh Government with their Council Tax Base as at 31st October. All houses in Council Tax bands A-I are counted and converted to a band D equivalent, the estimated amount of new build properties are added to give a Council Tax Base.

The Welsh Government Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) will evaluate how much the council needs to spend to provide services, the amount of income that's generated by council tax is deducted and a formula is used to work out the amount of the Revenue Support Grant.

Members asked if changes to the current banding system would affect the formula.

Officers confirmed that 85% of properties in Neath Port Talbot fall within bands A-C which decreases the equivalent band D figure. It was noted that the Welsh Government proposals around changes to the council tax system would be reported to Cabinet for consideration of the proposed options.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review - Organisational Response (Pages 17 - 66)

Members referred to the transformational reserve of £1.2m mentioned in the report and questioned the absence of a timeline.

The Chief Digital Officer advised that at the time of the Audit Wales review the accompanying delivery plan to the councils Digital Data and Technology Strategy was being developed. The review noted the council's robust arrangements to deliver the plan. The strategy is now live and there is a full process around prioritisation of demands to digital services. Once demands are prioritised through the Digital Transformation Board they are locked into a digital pipeline and fully monitored and reported back to Corporate Directors on a quarterly basis and an annual review is taken to Cabinet (Policy & Resources) Sub Committee.

Members questioned what projects were already in the Pipeline Tracker and their progress and asked how an assessment can be made to identify what is achievable with the £1.2m reserve. Members also asked how a long term strategy for digitalisation can be put in place considering the fast pace of changes in this field and requested Digital Strategy be added to the Forward Work Programme.

Officers confirmed that no timeline had been set for the strategy due to the speed at which digital technology is changing. The strategic statements in the strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis against the programmes of work locked into the delivery plan, the overarching objectives in the corporate plan and directorate priorities. In terms of the transformation fund, work is already underway to explore how this can support the resourcing of the biggest transformation projects. Care will be taken to ensure the right projects are prioritised for the council and that will be reported for full scrutiny and review.

Members questioned when an update on the timeline would be available and whether the current economic climate was having an impact on the Digital Strategy work.

Officers advised members that the delivery plan is available to be published so can be shared with members. Each of the work programmes within the digital pipeline are categorised across directorates, with financial implications being reviewed as part of the transformation board process. There are around 30/40 different programmes of work in the pipeline, once agreed they are fully resourced with a start and end date with a benefits realisation statements against them - this will be shared with members. Officers confirmed that the financial efficiency savings that these programmes could generate is under review with the service areas. Digital is a way to transform services and resources have to be managed carefully to support the transformation in other service areas. There are areas of focus such as Artificial Intelligence and automation which have started to make net gains in saving officer time.

Members noted that some investments could provide financial benefits in the long term.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that over the last 3 years, the Digital Services budget had been increased by £400k to create additional capacity. Transformation initiatives will be presented to Cabinet in December, proposing using reserves now to deliver longer term ongoing revenue savings.

Members suggested a Digital seminar to explore projects in more detail. The Chair agreed a future seminar would be arranged.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

Corporate Plan “Reset, Review, Recover” 2022-2027 Annual Report Period: 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 (Pages 67 - 128)

Members referred to page 68, item 6 of the report and questioned how much of the Corporate Plan would be based on the results of the Lets Keep Talking campaign and whether there was a sufficient number of responses.

The Director for Strategy and Corporate Services advised members that the Let's Keep Talking campaign was only one of the factors that will be taken into consideration when reviewing the Corporate Plan. There will be opportunities via the Budget consultation which commences in December with regards to the budget and delivery priorities for 2024/25. The council has engaged with Opinion Research Services an independent social research company, who will present the findings of the Lets Keep Talking survey and give an in depth understanding of the methodology used and the qualitative and quantitative data captured as part of the survey.

Members were unhappy with the number of responses received to the Lets Keep Talking survey and questioned how much weighting is applied to the survey rather than other elements.

The Director for Strategy and Corporate Services confirmed that the survey is not weighted to any one particular element. It is important to ensure that views are gathered from residents, members, businesses, 3rd sector and partners including

trade unions. Members will have opportunities to feed into the discussions around the Corporate Plan priorities for 2024/25

The Chief Executive stated it was difficult to obtain insight from all the different sections of the community but gave assurances that it is the full council who decide the wellbeing objectives and agrees the actions. When gathering information it is important to understand whose views have been gathered and that no one data set will provide a perfect set of priorities due to people's individual priorities.

Members questioned whether appointing an outside body in the current financial climate was appropriate. Members noted that there should be more canvassing of the public and staff to gather data.

The Director for Strategy and Corporate Services confirmed that the external company was appointed to provide capacity to carry out the work. In future, capacity is being built into Digital Services to move forward to channel the information.

Members questioned the cost of the external company and stated that insufficient exit surveys are carried out.

The Director of Strategy and Corporate Services advised that the cost was not available at today's meeting but can be feedback to members. Work will be undertaken to gather Service User Perspective as the Corporate Plan 2024/25 is developed, this will include staff feedback.

Members noted that the Chief Executive was proactive in obtaining resident and staff views but consultation fatigue can be an issue for some people.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that consultation fatigue can be an issue but pointed out that the council has a legal duty to consult. Recent changes in legislation in relation to the Participation Strategy duties brings a more extensive obligation to consult before proposals are formulated and at frequent points during the decision making process, which will involve people in monitoring and evaluation.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

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

Members asked that an update on the Digital Strategy be added to the Forward Work Programme.

To note the Forward Work Programme with above addition.

5. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

6. **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.

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

UK Shared Prosperity Fund Skills and Multiply Round 2 (Exempt under Paragraph 14) (Pages 205 - 234)

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

**Cllr. P Rogers
CHAIRPERSON**

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