

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 2021

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 2021 AT 09:30

Present

Councillors CA Green – Chairperson

SE Baldwin	JPD Blundell	N Clarke	J Gebbie
T Giffard	M Jones	RL Penhale-Thomas	KL Rowlands
RMI Shaw	JC Spanswick	T Thomas	

Officers:

Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Gill Lewis	Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Nigel Smith	Finance Manager
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

Invitees:

Councillor Huw David	Leader
Councillor Dhanisha Patel	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations
Councillor Charles Smith	Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration
Councillor Hywel Williams	Deputy Leader
Councillor Richard Young	Cabinet Member Communities

191. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

192. COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AGAINST ITS COMMITMENTS AT QUARTER 2 OF 2020-21

The Chief Executive presented a report that provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's performance in 2020-21, as at quarter 2. It compared performance against the commitments made to deliver the well-being objectives in the Corporate Plan 2018-22, reviewed for 2020-21.

Members asked the following:

A Member felt that in relation to point 4.1.5.1 that the target should not be changed as it was accepted that the year had been exceptional.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that the pandemic had impacted performance negatively on some indicators. This was an example where having more people working in an agile way, had a significant positive impact, particular on short term sickness, albeit long-term sickness had sometimes stayed the same or had gone up. In terms of the

targets, these were set, for the year, based on marginally below last year's actual. The Chief Executive was keen to achieve a forward and improved focus, moving downwards and gradually reducing the target year on year to the level wanted. The target should remain the same this year and it would be bettered, but there was a strong case for reviewing those targets going forward.

The Member asked if long-term sickness, underlying illnesses and disabilities contributed towards sickness, noted at point 6. In terms of the Equality Impact Assessment, it said there were no equality implications in the report.

In terms of the Equality Impact Assessment, the Chief Executive took the point and said he would be happy to revise it if Members felt those sorts of impacts should be included. This was a regular debate and noted if there were some specific impacts that had been identified, he would be happy to look at those.

A Member asked what was the amount of the Covid-19 reserve as indicated on page 8 of the report.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change explained that the reserve had been put aside at £3m, with £500k put into a specific fund for emergency Covid-19 issues. The Council had been successful in terms of the hardship grant which the Welsh Government (WG) had set aside, but would probably only get 75% - 80% costs back. Council tax was running near to 2% down on income, which gave a shortfall of £2m, and it was not known if this could be recovered by year-end.

A Member referred to point WBO1.2.4 on page 8 of the report and explained that it did not sit very well and could it be explained a bit more thoroughly.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change explained that this was about the bigger package for businesses and kick starting the economy and WG had endeavoured to support businesses with a series of grants. They could also apply for help from the economic resilience fund, but in terms of support and financial support, that was the offer at the moment.

The Chief Officer - Legal, HR & Regulatory Services explained, in relation to the foundational economy, there was a plan to do partnership, which had been delayed as a result of Covid-19. The project was back up and running and the Corporate Procurement Manager was preparing a report for Cabinet, to give an outline of where the Council was with the different projects.

The Leader made the point that at a certain stage the Council was hoping and planning for a potential recovery but he noted it now faced some of the darkest days. What had been progressed was the Kick-start Grant, which was in addition to funding available from UK Government and WG, and was from the Council's own resources. The Property Enhancement Fund had been rolled-out across the county borough as well.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that a tremendous amount of work had been done with the business community and retail sector throughout the whole pandemic, although there had been a slight delay in the Employment Hub Programme. Rent relief and reduced rents had taken place across units in the borough. There was also tremendous support for town centres. Work had taken place on advice leaflets, screens, hygiene and information leaflets. There had been a tremendous effort by the team to ensure that even through the pandemic and going forward, businesses were prioritised, as they were an essential part of economic recovery.

The Chairperson noted on page 9, in respect of DOPS25(a), percentage of births registered within 42 days, that there needed to be a move towards digital and not just registering in person.

The Chief Officer - Legal, HR & Regulatory Services explained that legislation had changed in relation to Death registrations, but there had been no change in legislation relating to in Birth registrations, so as the legalisation currently stood, this had to be done face to face. There was ongoing discussions at national level whether there was scope to change this, but at the moment, the Council's hands were tied.

A Member referred to Page 10, PAM/045 - number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use, queried the distribution of these, and asked what were the key factors preventing Empty Homes Grants in the Garw Valley. The Member asked to have a written response.

The Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Wellbeing confirmed she would provide a written response.

A Member referred to Page 11, CED17 - percentage of council tax arrears collected compared to arrears outstanding and asked if this could be explained in simple terms.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change explained that there were real difficulties in terms of arrears and council tax as it was set at a point in time and on any one day, it would be a different figure. The council tax figures were collected on a different basis and sometimes the figures mislead. What she had asked Council Tax to do was to set out a standard form of report that Bridgend acknowledged it needed, although acknowledged that regardless of what was indicated in Q2, the arrears were currently high and the arrears at Q3 were even higher. She would come back to Members once she had the template for going forward, which would clarify some of the figures. The reason it was green was because the figures had gone down.

The Member noted that it made it look rosy.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change said she would take this point away.

A Member referred to Page 11, CED34 a) noting the narrative stated that the pandemic had prevented the contractor from attending schools to complete the installations. He would have thought that during a period of low attendance, this was the optimum time to attend schools and asked if there was any particular reason why this continued to be an issue.

The Corporate Director – Education & Family Support expressed agreement stating that normally there would be ready access to schools when there were no pupils in. The challenge was getting some of the resources into classrooms when operating very tight bubbles with year groups within classes to reduce any risk of transmission. He acknowledged that this had been remedied somewhat going forward and there had been progress on it, but difficulties had still been encountered to meet with the health and safety requirements.

A Member referred to Pages 12 & 13, PSR002 (PAM/015) and PSR009a and stated that this had been raised last year and was simply not acceptable. It took a year for a disability grant from Adults and nearly two years for a disability grant to be approved for Children and asked how both of these categories could be improved.

A Member also agreed and explained that this particular target had come into its own. It was likely a large percentage of disabled people would be on the shielding list as well, so the stay at home message for disabled people was stronger than ever. Whilst

recognising that this was an issue for a number of local authorities and could see there had been some progress on Adults, he shared the Members concern.

A Member further agreed but acknowledged that there was a Cabinet report and asked the Cabinet Member to explain how this would improve the numbers going forward.

The Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Wellbeing explained that a Cabinet report that had been published on the 13 January 2021 and suggested Members should read the report. The proposal was to work with Neath Port Talbot Council to develop an in-house service to address this exact concern as currently the works were carried out by external agencies and the local authority had limited input into what was being delivered.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change couldn't disagree with the comments made by Members on this and noted that the Audit Committee were keeping a very close eye on it. In essence, there would be a series of reports going forward which would tackle each particular part of the system. The first part was to bring the agency in-house. This was incredibly important as nothing could be done about most complaints because they were not down to the Council. She hoped that when the Cabinet report went through Members would start to see some real action in terms of the Council taking control of its own destiny. If anyone wanted to have more detail, then she was happy to arrange a briefing.

A Member referred to Page 15, in relation to sickness broken down by service area and the sickness absence by reason. It clearly explained the imbalance but also the worrying trend of the impact of long-term sickness absence. What could be done to make things better for staff to reduce the incidents of long-term sickness in relation to stress, anxiety, depression and mental health, taking particular care in a pandemic?

The Chief Executive reassured Members that staff welfare and wellbeing was a main priority with the recognition that staff had been working incredibly hard for an awful long time in trying circumstances. There was still a relatively large number of staff with long-term sickness and there was recognition that working from home would be beneficial to some staff but not to all, and therefore wellbeing was a real issue. The Council had ensured it provided a package of support that was available to all staff and that Managers continued to be trained in remote management. This would continue to be a priority going forward.

The Leader was particularly mindful that some staff, for example, in social services, would have had to deal with the unexpected deaths of residents they had provided care for. This had, in some cases, been a traumatic experience and they continued to experience acute pressure in roles and the Council was continuing to assess how it could provide support to them in the immediate and long-term.

A Member referred to Page 19, DEFS29 - the percentage of completed Team Around the Family (TAF) support plans that close with a successful outcome. Whilst understanding it was green, why had the target been lowered as he did not feel it was challenging enough.

The Corporate Director – Education & Family Support stated that this was a fair comment and the narrative needed to be bolstered. What had happened with the TAF process this year was that some of the requirements within the process had been sharpened so the way things were done had changed? It would be worthwhile adding this to the narrative to explain this a bit better.

A Member referred to Page 23, the number of working days lost per FTE due to industrial injury and explained this showed a lot of red, which was very concerning. How was the Council working to minimise the risk and how realistic was the target zero.

The Corporate Director - Education & Family Support explained that the Council had set itself a very challenging target agreed by the Corporate Health and Safety Steering Group (CHSSG). This needed to be kept so there was close focus on this to make sure this was set at the forefront of all the Directorates' minds in terms of driving this down. One of the other things introduced alongside this, especially in schools, was an online reporting system. His view was that the zero be maintained, as this was a clear focus to the Council to drive down these absences because of industrial industry, although he expected the target to show red for the foreseeable future.

The Chief Executive noted that most of the health and safety targets were deliberately set at an incredibly challenging level, often at 100% or at 0% and this was a deliberate policy, even though it was recognised that this might mean occasionally coming out red. This could be reviewed but he was not comfortable with setting targets that were almost seen as setting a target for an accident. This approach had generally been taken across the board.

A Member referred to Page 30, PAM/035 - average number of days taken to clear fly tipping incidents and asked how the target was green when many calls had not been investigated.

The Chief Executive stated that he understood the Members point and that maybe the narrative could be bolstered. He understood that it had been measured slightly differently this year because there were certain calls that had to be closed but thought it was still worth pursuing and measuring for the purposes of keeping it in this year's document.

A Member referred to Page 31, WBO1.2.2 and noted the comment was all about Bridgend Town Centre when clearly there were more towns and other commercial centres.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration agreed with the Member and noted that Covid-19 has shown that there were other commercial centres which people perhaps valued even more. He would like to see the townscape heritage initiative grant opportunities expand out to the four town centres and be available in other places, which were seen as important.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that the text could have been amended to reflect the local authority's position. She acknowledged the Bridgend Town Centre masterplan but other centres across the borough were just as important, particularly during the pandemic, where shopping local was vital. She was keen to look at those local shopping parades and district centres that were vital for the economy and for the local community and look at improving the business offer there. She was very aware of this and wanted to get the message out that shopping local was the approach to economic recovery.

The Chairperson agreed with the sentiment and noted that everything needed to be appraised including the accessibility of footpaths.

A Member referred to Page 32, in regards to Town Centres and was concerned around the empty properties and empty premises that were going to rise as a result of Covid-19.

The Corporate Director – Communities agreed with the Member and felt that the figure would increase for vacant premises, as unfortunately businesses may not survive the pandemic. This needed to be baselined so that when the pandemic ended meaningful targets could be set and new business start-ups could be encouraged, to get the vitality and viability back. Town centres were more than just a retail destination but a destination for community, wellbeing and people getting together. There was a daytime and night-time economy and this was something to be mindful of when moving into the recovery phase.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration explained that the three large towns all had projects going on and those projects had continued through the pandemic, with difficulty, and with very careful safety measures. Maesteg Town Hall, The Bridgend Master plan and the ongoing plans for Porthcawl regeneration, were all going ahead.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the half-year Corporate Performance, subject to the comments made by Members.

193. **CORPORATE PLAN 2018-2023 REVIEWED FOR 2021-22**

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change presented a report that provided the Committee with the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2023 reviewed for 2021-22 for the Committee to consider.

The Chairperson thanked the Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change and stated that there were details not yet put into the Corporate Plan and therefore the Committee could only comment on what was available, at the present time, because of the timetabling.

Members asked the following:

A Member referred to Page 57, the 5 Ways of Working - to focus diminishing resources on communities and individuals with the greatest need but asked how the needs, both of communities and individuals, were assessed and resources allocated.

The Chief Executive stated that this was a complex process and it would be different for different services. It was an underlying principle to protect the most vulnerable in society in different ways and resources were directed to those people in most need. He felt this was a good principle and one that most Members would support, but did not think it was a single process, but a whole range of statistics and evidence and processes that would lead to that conclusion.

The Leader explained that local Members knew there were vulnerable individuals and people in need in all communities, whether those communities were described as affluent or disadvantaged. There were individuals with high levels of need in some of the most affluent communities and individuals with low levels of needs in some of the most disadvantaged communities and those needs were different across the different service areas. It was a complex picture that would vary, whether that was mental health services, education, housing etc., which reflected the complexity of the communities.

A Member referred to Page 61, and asked for clarification of the area covered by the Valleys Regional Park.

The Leader stated that the Valleys Regional Park covered the whole of the Garw, Ogmore and Lynfi Valleys Gateway area of Bridgend County Borough. Bryngarw Country Park and Parc Slip Nature Reserve were two of the flagship projects.

A Member referred to a comment on page 46, paragraph 4.1 where clearly those that were involved in planning the Corporate Plan recognised the current challenging environment and asked how agile and flexible would the plan remain and what opportunity would the Committee have to revisit it, when documented evidence of what impact the pandemic had, became available.

The Chief Executive stated that as had been done this year the Corporate Plan could be refreshed and reviewed based on circumstances. This was an important document and a statutory document and consequently if the impact of the pandemic meant it had to be refreshed and reviewed, then it would be done.

A Member referred to the success indicators on Page 61 under priority area: improve learner outcomes and asked if the success indicators on educational attainment were dependent on the success of the blended learning schemes, and would there be an opportunity to scrutinise the actual success of blended learning parallel to the report.

The Corporate Director - Education & Family Support stated that there were two issues. In respect of the success indicators, the final column was blank because the local authority had a directive from WG that comparative data in respect of learners, was not to be published. With regard to other matters there was constant communication around arrangements for assessment at primary school level and examinations at secondary level this year and CSC were pushing heavily for a response. As soon as an update and a firm position was received, the information would be circulated to Members.

In respect of blended learning this was something the local authority was very keen on. CSC undertook a review of blended learning approaches across the region in November 2020 and that had been shared with Schools. CSC were currently working with all schools looking at the efficacy of the blended learning approach and also to monitor outcomes. WG and Estyn were extremely interested in the blended learning offer and last week WG had introduced new guidance in respect of live streaming of lessons. The key thing was to have faith in the expertise of Headteachers and Teachers to deliver an independent offer that worked best for their settings and their learners. As soon as the information from Qualification Wales, Estyn and WG was received, it would be shared with Members.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration stated that this was obviously an important topic, which had great importance during Covid-19 and ongoing importance afterwards. One thing that had been discovered was that people had different expectations about the online element of blended learning and sometimes made assumptions, which were incorrect. He suggested there would be value in inviting colleagues from CSC to a pre-council session.

A Member referred to Page 66 in relation to success indicators, 'percentage of people presenting as homeless or potentially homeless, for whom the local authority had a final legal duty to secure suitable accommodation'. He asked if the 30% was a figure of those that the local authority were successful in finding suitable accommodation for. He also noted in respect of the 'number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use' that the local authority was off to a good start in 2019-20, but didn't seem to be setting overly ambitious targets for 2021-22. The idea of bringing empty properties back into proper use went hand in hand with preventing homelessness. People needed properties in which to live and was interested to learn why the target was so low.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change explained that the local authority could not necessarily dictate to private owners what they then did with the

property. The local authority had been complying with the new guidelines in terms of temporary accommodation and was stabilised at the moment at about 150 families who were housed in temporary accommodation. That wasn't going to last forever and a whole variety of accommodation had to be utilised to do that. At the same time, there had been extensive discussions with housing associations. There was now a joint housing protocol whereby the local authority could work to house as many homeless as possible. There was a whole spectrum of those that were homeless with some difficult to place.

At the same time the local authority had put forward a whole raft of bids to get Capital monies, which were still in the process of being scrutinised by the WG. The local authority played a conduit role but was part of the bid process putting suitable properties forward, and those were in the process of going through scrutiny and would then require planning permission. This was an ongoing problem and a huge pressure for those that were homeless and for the Council, in terms of the duty of care and also the financial resources needed to accommodate. She reassured Members that there were a number of different planks of attack on this and the local authority was doing as much as possible to get the temporary accommodation, that was suitable, and more importantly the permanent accommodation although not everyone wanted permanent accommodation and in some cases it was very difficult because they needed additional services. This wasn't a problem that could always be solved by just putting a house in place.

The Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Wellbeing stated in relation to the narrative to explain the 30% target, some of the indicators were national indicators and some local. She was not clear but felt this maybe a national indicator and that was why it was worded in such a way. She explained that she would take this away and have a look at it and if there was anything that could be done to clarify the wording then she would push for that. In terms of the success indicator, it was based on projections and the expansion of the duty and the target was based on the national average of Wales. In 2019-20, the target was the national average and the local authority achieved more than the target, so the target was always set on the national average. She noted the pandemic over the period of 2020-21 and didn't see that gravely changing for 2021-22 as the economy restarted so felt this figure was conservative, but that was where the figure had come from.

A Member noted that Scotland had removed the priority needs status resulting in making pretty much every one priority needs and wondered what sort of preparations were being put in place by the local authority, should WG go in this direction, which was recommended in their review in 2020.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change stated that she would have to come back on that as at present the WG hadn't declared this. There were two sets of guidelines this year. The second lot of guidelines were pretty all encompassing but they hadn't indicated that they would necessarily move down that route.

The Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Wellbeing stated that it was probably likely. She advised there was a rapid housing team with all the RSL's in place and which they were looking to be kept in place so that people could quickly be moved into accommodation and this was one of the things being considered.

A Member referred to Page 66/67 in relation to priority area: better health and well-being. It appeared quite strange that there was no reference to mental health, as one of the entry points into health services would be via the local authority, as well as partners. Had the local authority ever had a mental health indicator and was one needed now.

The Leader stated that the local authority would be developing a mental health strategy for children, young people and also for adults and this would be reflected in the Corporate Plan and planning process. It would be a multi-agency strategy and approach with a focus on early intervention and prevention and was particularly timely given the pressures and the role of the third sector and health, which would be critical to this as well, as would other partners including police and housing. That was why it was a strategy that potentially may go through the PSB and would need the support of partners in developing.

The Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that lead officers in SS&W had been identified to undertake the work and were working with colleagues in the Education & Family Support Directorate and other parts of the local authority, to drive those pieces of work forward. Reports had been taken to the PSB chairs and the joint partnership board, to agree the work was a priority and the governance arrangements for those. She emphasised the need to involve citizens in this work as well, and undertake a lot of engagement and consultation with children, young people and adults. This would inform the services to be developed in the future as well as part of the strategy.

A Member referred to Page 70 and supported the decarbonisation and environmental sustainability and asked, in relation to transforming the council's estate, were there sufficient staff to be able to cope.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that a key part of the 2030 agenda was about improving buildings and looking to reduce the net zero carbon but there needed to be some expedience set against the backdrop of the resources available. There needed to be a partnership for this, and it was not just about in-house resources delivering these initiatives because there wouldn't be enough capacity so this was where a partnership approach would be looked at. The local authority would also look at using experts in this field to come forward, especially with contracting out some of the work to move at pace. It would be progressed as effectively as it could but needed to be realistic as well.

The Member explained that he was talking about the whole, process, so this also included of disposing of or releasing surplus land and buildings. Therefore, he was referring about the need for in-departmental collaboration and the resources to make that expedient.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that the local authority did have a Corporate Landlord section but this did have some vacancies currently. However, the local authority was using disposal experts and bringing in, as and when required, surveyors, etc., to assist with some of the disposals and people who had the commercial know how e.g., E J Hales and Saville's, etc., on particular projects. It was right to bring in that expertise, as and when required to ensure getting best consideration for the lands and buildings, to be disposed of, responsibly.

The Cabinet Member – Communities explained that there were four areas within this strategy that were being looked at, not only land and buildings but energy, transport and also open spaces. It was a huge strategy and a massive challenge that was being undertaken that was all encompassing and no stone was being left unturned. At the end of the day the county borough was a leader in the community and should be leading on the climate change agenda.

A Member stated that he fully accepted within the MTFs that the local authority was looking to achieve a particular sum to reinvest in services but it also needed to consider the best consideration being around the value, rather than just being a cashable amount.

The Chief Executive stated that he agreed with the Member and explained that to an extent that was already happening. It was not always just about getting the maximum cash. It was about recognising commercial impact, sometimes about design, community impact, etc., and those were considerations taken into account.

The Corporate Director explained that the local authority wanted to set up a set of social values measure, because some of the schemes coming forward, especially the energy schemes, washed their face financially, but also had tremendous social value. In addition the net zero carbon agenda had enormous social value with the measure of some of those things being non-financial e.g., what is the carbon footprint, what is the carbon reduction, how many jobs have been created, if it is open space, wellbeing effect, etc. Those things were not financial, but just as important to measure going forward.

The Chief Officer - Legal, HR & Regulatory Services confirmed that that best consideration was set out in law and there was a substantial amount of case law around it. Unfortunately, the local authority's hands were tied in so far as what it could take into consideration but there were other ways social value and wider impact on the community, could be considered.

A Member referred to Page 72, in relation to success indicators on gas and electric consumption and was surprised there wasn't any historical baseline data. In respect of the decarbonisation areas he was pleased that the local authority was looking towards hydrogen energy and electric charging points but this was very ambitious and was not going to happen overnight. He also felt it would benefit from having a number of targets on fleet management, in relation to decarbonisation, just to show the direction travel that has been made and to what extent progress was being made in this area.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that part of the action plan, was outlining some timescales for delivery of things such as fleet replacement, a move over to electric vehicles. Electric was being used for smaller fleet and possibly looking at in the future whether hydrogen could be used in the HGV fleet. This would be within the action plan and once it was approved, it could be incorporated as a future target in the Corporate Plan.

With regard to some of the indicators, especially with the consumption piece, it had been a very strange year in that there hadn't been the energy consumption that would ordinarily be expected. The idea was to baseline it from April onwards, when hopefully, there would be a return to a new normal. This would be then used as a baseline to look at carbon reduction, rather than looking back at consumption.

The Chief Executive explained that he would build on what the Corporate Director – Communities had said and the key point was about the fact that this had been a unique year, not just in terms of energy consumption in buildings, but clearly, there had been less movement of vehicles and a whole range of things. That meant that actually using the energy consumption for the year before was probably now irrelevant to set a baseline on new ways of working. The data was available, but it probably needed to be put in a different context.

A Member referred to Page 72, and felt that in relation to the success indicators the local authority should sign up to Fields in Trust, which was set up to protect areas of open space for the public to use. It was something, perhaps a target, the local authority should be looking at. In relation to these targets, the Member felt these should be more ambitious and should also be worded differently so it was understood what was trying to be achieved.

The Chief Executive stated that in respect of the Member's point about Fields in Trust that this would need to be explored further. He reassured Members of the long-term ambition about green spaces but reminded all Members that one of the challenges in setting this year's Corporate Plan was that the main priorities remained around public health and the pandemic.

In terms of setting ambitious targets, discussions had taken place about setting more ambitious targets but realistically while priorities remained around public health, the roll out of the vaccine, protecting people, there were some things, though not unimportant, that for a short while, couldn't be prioritised. That was the challenge at the moment and one of the challenges of the second lockdown was that expectations were very different from the first, and the local authority had to act the way it had always run, plus these additional services, which was a huge challenge.

A Member referred to Pages 82, under the Wellbeing Assessment it stated 'the benefits of our tree planting programme' and noted that that the Valleys Regional Park did not cover the whole County Borough. He suggested the text be amended to show that the whole County Borough was being looked at, and not just the northern half.

The Member also referred to Pages 83, in relation to 'a Wales of cohesive communities'. He felt that in future Corporate Plans, the PSB's survey that was undertaken in August 2020 needed to be referenced, noting that 95% of people had said they would use green space more in the future.

The Chairperson felt that Members were all in agreement and that green spaces were very important and this pandemic had underpinned that fact.

A Member who was unable to stay to this point in the meeting asked in relation to Appendix B, section 3, should not there be an assessment for Children because of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and is the local authority meeting its legislative requirements?

The Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny confirmed that she would arrange for the question to be confirmed and forwarded to the Head of Children's Service and the Chief Officer - Legal, HR & Regulatory Services.

A Member stated that he knew that scrutiny was non-political but this was a very important document and he noticed that the Scrutiny Chair and Leader of the Conservative Group was no longer present. He suggested that if Members left the meeting, it should be announced, or at least they should say they are leaving. He noted there was silence from some people and this was a very important document and all parties should be taking part.

The Chairperson confirmed that the Member had indicated that his PC was shutting down, so presumably he had difficulty logging back in.

A Member stated that he felt that this was the most important Corporate Plan that the Council had ever put out in its history because it was how it now moved forward after Covid-19. He thought that one thing that needed to be asked was if the local authority was in a more robust position today to adapt to any new virus or pandemics that came down the line.

The Chairperson agreed and stated that this should be a future FWP item for all Scrutiny Committees to really examine, have we learned and have we adapted and have we improved.

The Chairperson thanked Officers for their attendance. She felt it was important to state at this stage that the Committee hadn't had the full Corporate Plan with MTFS information completed and that the Committee could only consider the recommendations and report with its current content.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the draft Corporate Plan 2018-2023 reviewed for 2021- 22 for onward consideration at Cabinet and Council in February 2021, subject to the comments made by Members..

194. **CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021-22 TO 2030-31**

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, that provided the Committee with the draft Capital Strategy 2021-22 to 2030-31, which included the Prudential Indicators against which the Council measures itself during the financial year.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance reminded Members the MTFS was a 4-year strategy and Capital Strategy was a 10-year strategy. Capital was governed heavily by legislation and from 2020, when CPFA published the new addition of the prudential code for capital financing, local authority's were required to have a Capital Strategy which needed to be approved by full Council. The strategy needed to demonstrate that all investment was sustainable and prudent and also that the prescribed prudential indicators, which were used to monitor this on a 3 year rolling period, made sure that the local authority kept within the limits and adhered to the desire to have prudent and sustainable investment.

The overarching principles were set out in paragraph 4.3 with a focus on the delivery of the wellbeing objectives and priorities to ensure that strong governance was in place over decision-making. The strategy set out a framework and also in detail the following areas:- Capital Expenditure and Investment Plans, the Prudential Indicators, the external debt and treasury management. She drew Members attention to 3 changes. At paragraph 4.5.1 accounting for leases. As a result of the pandemic, the implementation of that change had been delayed until 2022/23. Quite a significant one at 4.5.2 borrowing for commercial activities. She explained that the local authority was very careful about commercial opportunities and purchasing things perhaps, that some Council's may have gone into such as hotels and shopping centres, etc., for commercial gain. The Public Works Loans Board (PWL) had put a moratorium on borrowing for commercial activities. This was set out very clearly in 3.4 of the strategy and she encouraged Members to look at this because it placed a huge constraint on herself, as the S151 Officer and Members to confirm there was no intention to buy investment and assets, which would be used primarily for yields. At 4.5.3, following an internal audit review of capital expenditure and feasibility studies, the recommendation was to require a detailed feasibility assessment of capital projects with the need for a post project evaluation to learn from best practice.

Members asked the following:

A Member referred to Page 99, in respect of the Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP). He noted that it mentioned that this was a living document, subject to continual review and development. The Member noted that the one on the local authority website was published in September 2007 and asked if there was an updated version.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change explained that it was one of the things had she had emailed, just this morning about, to make sure that the

documents referred to in the report were on the website. She agreed to follow this up with the Interim Group Manager – Chief Accountant.

A Member asked, in relation to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) situation, if it precluded the local authority from other commercial borrowing, for commercial activities. Was it only from the PWLB that the local authority had to make assurances to?

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change stated that her understanding was that it was any borrowing.

The Member felt this was a real disincentive for authorities to try to be innovative and practical in the way they moved forward whilst trying to generate an income that actually bettered communities.

The Interim Group Manager – Chief Accountant confirmed that the guidance had changed in November 2020 from the PWLB and what they had said was that the S151 Officer had to confirm that for the current and future two financial years the Council did not intend to invest in commercial assets for gain/return. This was irrespective of where those assets were funded from. What that would do was preclude the local authority from being able to apply to the PWLB for borrowing. He noted in the Capital Programme significant schemes that needed to borrow for e.g., 21st Century Schools, highway improvements, vehicle purchases, so it would cause a particular issue. He reiterated that the local authority was precluded from borrowing from anywhere for commercial reasons, or investment through capital receipts, or any other means.

The Member asked in terms of the Capital Programme, how this impacted on the Mutual Investment Model (MIM)? He asked how this was being challenged because he felt as a democracy and as an elected body the fact that the local authority was being dictated to, should be challenged.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change explained that it didn't prevent the local authority from doing many things, including the Bridgend Heat Network, as in the first phase this was classified as regeneration. What it did was put severe constraint on those that perhaps were borrowing for commercial gain. The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change stated that she was in agreement with it.

The Deputy Leader explained that his understanding of this piece of guidance was that the local authority was not allowed to borrow for financial reward but obviously the local authority did invest for other rewards e.g., the heat network would have a social benefit so that that needed to be taken into account. All this precluded the local authority from doing was investing in a financial reward scheme.

The Member explained that he appreciated that the Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change, was in agreement with it, but he was not, but that was his personal view on things. He noted there was a difference between profit and reinvestment. If the local authority chose to buy a hotel, which was part of regenerating a town centre, or investing in building a hotel within a town centre, any profit that came from that building could be used for employment and training opportunities but also in relation to ongoing town centre redevelopment. That was commercial acumen but it was not profiteering, noting the opportunities the local authority could be missing out on.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change stated that every single scheme would be treated on its merit and social investment would be one of those things that would be taken into account. Treasury Advisors would help on all those things to make sure the local authority stayed on the right side of the line but it was primarily to protect against risk because there were a lot of local authorities who now

had empty hotels and a bill too. She didn't feel it would prevent the local authority doing all the things talked about in terms of social benefits but agreed with the Deputy Leader's point that the local authority couldn't, for example run an energy company for profit, as this would be prevented. It was a major constraint on the local authority but she saw it as a very necessary constraint on public finance.

A Member referred to Page 100, 3.4, in relation to 'the total value of Investment Properties of £4.635 million as at 31 March 2020. This would be expected to generate a rental income of £478,000 per annum excluding any vacant or rent-free periods' and asked if this figure was excluding any maintenance cost. In relation to the £1 million within the capital programme, agreed by Council back in 2014, he did not think the local authority should be looking at any portfolio investments in the County Borough, as there were many things that Members could spend the £480,000 in their wards as capital projects.

The Interim Group Manager – Chief Accountant stated that in regard to the net cost, he did not have that level of detail available and it would depend on the leases or arrangements that were put in place with each individual tenant. He stated that he could try and look and see if this could be identified.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change acknowledged that those comments could be taken into account in the Council debate about the Capital Programme.

A Member referred to Page 108 in relation to fully understanding what feasibility assessments were. He felt it needed to be understood that sometimes feasibility studies were to show how unsuccessful projects would have been and that a feasibility study did not mean that something was definitely going ahead. It was important for people to understand that the local authority didn't always know the situation and that was why a feasibility was undertaken. He asked if this could be made a bit more robust in the section, so that people understand that it was a 'could' but also maybe a 'not'.

The Interim Chief Officer - Finance, Performance and Change noted that this was a really important point raised by the Member as it was normally seen as an issue about an overspend on a scheme, particularly with diminishing resources.

The Chairperson thanked the invitees.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Capital Strategy 2021-22 to 2030-31 including the Prudential Indicators 2021-22 to 2023-24 and its associated Schedules, subject to the comments made by Members.

195. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny presented the report, beginning on page 117. She took Members to paragraph 4.6, which set out the next cycle of meetings which was the Combined Meeting of all Scrutiny Committees to look at the draft MTFs for Education & Family Support and Communities on Wednesday 20th and for Social Services & Wellbeing and the Chief Executives Directorate on Thursday 21st January. She stressed that all Members were welcome to attend both meetings, as agreed in the Scrutiny Chair's meeting.

The next meeting of COSC would be held on the 1st February, where the feedback from those two meetings, and the BREP report would be considered before being sent to the Cabinet for consideration.

Following that the next cycle of meetings, including COSC on the 3rd March, to consider the Budget Monitoring 2020-21 Q3 Revenue Forecast. Members would remember that at the December round of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, Corporate Directors presented updates to the respective Committees and SOSC1 proposed a report upon blended / hybrid / remote learning to be included in the FWP, for their next meetings after the MTFs, which had been raised in the meeting today.

SOSC 2 had decided to wait until the outcome of the MTFs or today's performance report before nominating for the next item on the work programme and SOSC 3 talked about having a further update from the Corporate Director – Communities, when the vaccine programme was being delivered, with a focus on how things are taken forward post pandemic. The Committee also agreed that the consideration of the MTFs and today's performance report could pose items to be looked at in the future meeting.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny also reminded Member of the Scrutiny Member Training that had taken place and that copy of the resources would be circulated to all Scrutiny Members.

Members proposed the following items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme:

- Stress Related Sickness Absence (COSC)
- Safeguarding (SOSC2)
- Future Waste Contract (SOSC3)
- Town Centre Masterplan (post consultation) COSC
- In the medium-term: the effect of the Pandemic upon the delivery of the Corporate Plan (Cross-Party Recovery Panel /COSC)
- In the long-term: Corporate Tender Contract and Procurement Policies / Procedures when appropriate. (COSC)

There were no requests to include specific information in the item for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee confirmed the proposed initial items for the Committee's Forward Work Programme set out in paragraph 4.6 of the report and the proposed new items above.

196. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.