

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2025

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held Hybrid in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB on Wednesday, 15 January 2025 at 10:00

Present

Councillor F D Bletsoe – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
A W Ulberini-Williams

HJ David

RM Granville

GH Haines

Present Virtually

S J Griffiths
AJ Williams

M L Hughes
E D Winstanley

RL Penhale-Thomas

T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Simon Griffiths and Councillor Martin Hughes gave their apologies that they would need to leave the meeting early.

Invitees

Councillor John Spanswick
Councillor Jane Gebbie
Councillor Hywel Williams
Councillor Melanie Evans
Councillor Neelo Farr

Leader
Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Social Services, Health and Wellbeing
Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance
Cabinet Member for Resources (Job Share)
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economic Development and Housing

Mark Shepherd
Carys Lord
Kelly Watson

Chief Executive
Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change
Chief Officer - Legal & Regulatory Services, HR & Corporate Policy

Deborah Exton
Martin Morgans
Eilish Thomas

Deputy Head of Finance
Head of Partnerships and Housing
Finance Manager – Social Services & Wellbeing / Chief Executive's Directorate

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.

Officers:

Meryl Lawrence
Jessica Mclellan

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Scrutiny Officer

Declarations of Interest

Cllr Elaine Winstanley – item 4 – Personal – as an employee of AWEN Cultural Trust which is mentioned in the report.

Cllr Ross Penhale-Thomas – item 4 – Personal – as he works in the housing sector.

Cllr Amanda Williams – item 4 – Personal – as Chair of Governors at Coety Primary School and Vice Chair of Governors at Brynteg Comprehensive School.

140. Approval of Minutes

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 16 December 2024 be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the following further context being provided regarding recommendation 6: This recommendation was made following discussions regarding Wellbeing Objective 3, a County Borough with thriving valleys communities, and that the Committee were content to start the process involving the 3 valleys and the 13 Councillors that represent those areas.
Date Decision Made	15 January 2025

141. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> Following consideration of the report and detailed discussion with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers, the Committee made the following recommendations and requests for additional information:
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	<u>Recommendations</u> 1. The Committee recommended: a. that all financial reports be accompanied by a glossary which is also made available on the Council's website in order to assist residents in their reading and understanding of the reports; b. that when reductions are referenced in the report that there is clarity about whether they are in net or real terms; c. that charts/graphics be included showing: i. the percentage increase in Council Tax over the period referred to; ii. the demographic growth in the borough; iii. the demographic growth compared to other Welsh local authorities and nationally; and iv. the reduction in use of agency staff. d. that comparison data be provided demonstrating the difference between the proposed increase to Council Tax and the average staff wage increase across the authority. 2. The Committee recommended piloting zero-based budgeting in a select area of Directorate to be determined by senior Officers. 3. The Committee recommended that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to Welsh Government and the UK Government regarding the following: a. expressing that national policy commitments resulting from legislative changes should be fully funded both in terms of capital funding and ongoing revenue funding including a commitment to fund employer national insurance payments for individuals employed by agencies who provide services to the Council which currently results in a £1.5m cost pressure; and b. expressing concern regarding the repeated lateness of the settlement and requesting a commitment to bring forward the settlement date and to request that consideration be given to providing indicative multi-year settlements. 4. The Committee recommended consideration be given to how invest to save models and further collaborative working and sharing of best practice across local authorities regarding ICT and use of artificial intelligence could expedite savings. 5. The Committee recommended that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to Welsh
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	Government and the Department for Work and Pensions strongly recommend that they implement auto-enrolment of individuals to all benefits to which they are eligible/entitled when they apply for another benefit. 6. The Committee recognised that the funding to the Council and schools was being disadvantaged by individuals not claiming all benefits to which they are entitled and recommended that Council-wide external communications be issued encouraging residents to claim all benefits to which they are entitled including Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Eligible Free School Meals and promoting the Council's auto-enrolment process. 7. With reference to the budget reduction proposal, CEX 6, the Committee recommended that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to the Police and Crime Commissioner to ascertain her reliance on the CCTV service created and managed by the Council and whether the Police and Crime Commission's contribution to CCTV has been cut and requesting a response prior to the next meeting of the Committee on 28 January 2025. 8. The Committee recommended that detailed discussions are held with town and community councils before suggestions are made in meetings that town and community councils may be able to assist when discussing funding gaps. 9. While the Committee recognised that there was a budget growth proposal for a Procurement Assistant (CEX 5) in central Procurement, they reflected that there appeared to be insufficient capacity, at times, within Directorates to provide timely contributions to the Procurement process and recommended that more urgency needed to be placed on procurement highlighting it was critical to a one-council approach. 10. The Committee expressed concern that all budget savings proposals within the Chief Executives Directorate and Council Wide were red and possibly difficult to achieve. The Committee were advised that the vast majority of the spend in these areas is on staffing and the savings would be subject to consultation and therefore would remain red until these were complete and were then likely achievable. The Committee recommended that the narrative in the budget savings proposals to reflect that position and its red status. <u>Additional Information</u> 11. The Committee requested Officer responses as to whether the population growth in the county
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	borough was creating more demand in specific areas, e.g. whether families with children with special needs were moving into the area to take up the offer of in-county special schools offer or whether older people were relocating to the area. 12. The Committee requested a copy of the report being presented to the Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee at the end of January 2025 to assist the Committee in identifying statutory and non-statutory services provided by Regulatory and Corporate Services. 13. The Committee requested a written response setting out: a. the value of the Council's borrowing liability benchmark; b. the Council's current level of borrowing; c. whether the Council can increase its borrowing to support capital projects; and d. clarification as to whether external borrowing below the liability benchmark indicates a borrowing requirement and whether external borrowing above the liability benchmark indicates an over-borrowed position. 14. <u>Budget Reduction Proposals - CEX 6</u> The Committee requested: a. a map of the CCTV locations; b. information regarding which service areas benefit from the CCTV, i.e. does it cover out of hours, alarm monitoring for Council buildings, RSLs, etc.; c. confirmation of other service areas who could benefit from use of the CCTV but do not yet do so; d. granular detail setting out what the sum of the saving of £444k entails; e. clarity on the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as to where the statutory responsibility for the CCTV lies and who are mandated partners including whether Town and Community Councils are considered statutory partners under the Act; f. that the narrative in the budget reduction proposal be amended to reflect whether the saving related to removal of the service or a review seeking contributions from statutory partners in order to maintain the CCTV service.
Date Decision Made	15 January 2025

142. Forward Work Programme Update

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> Following consideration of the report the Committee approved its Forward Work Programme (FWP) in Appendix A, noted the FWPs for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Appendix C, D and E, and noted the Recommendations Monitoring Action Sheet to track responses to the Committee's Recommendations made at previous meetings in Appendix B.
Date Decision Made	15 January 2025

143. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None.
Date Decision Made	15 January 2025

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#)

The meeting closed at 14:19.