



*\*Declaration made at commencement of agenda item.*

There were no declarations of any prohibited party whips.

### **3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)**

No public questions had been received.

### **4. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023/24**

[NOTE: Councillor A. Evans having declared an interest in this item remained in the meeting for its consideration and voting thereof.]

The Committee considered the Authority's Corporate Budget Monitoring Report and the Chief Executive's and Corporate Services departmental reports, which provided an update on the latest budgetary position as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2023 in respect of the 2023/24 financial year.

The report also included an appendix which detailed the Savings Monitoring report as at 31 December 2023.

Overall, the monitoring report forecast an overspend for the year at departmental level of £10,183k, with a forecast overspend on the Authority's net revenue budget of £4,782k.

Amongst the issues and queries raised on the report were the following:

- A query was raised regarding the progress made in respect of office downsizing and the relocation of staff, and the consequential impact on the Authority's efficiency savings. The Assistant Chief Executive appraised Committee of the Authority's hybrid working arrangements which enabled the Council to divest buildings in accordance with its asset management strategy and Welsh Government expectations. Concerns were conveyed to Officers in respect of the effect of home working on staff wellbeing and the importance of staff interaction within an office environment for new members of staff. In this regard, the Assistant Chief Executive provided an assurance that the hybrid working policy was closely monitored, with the wellbeing of staff being a key consideration.
- Concerns were raised by the Committee in respect of the adverse impact of the recruitment freeze on the workforce which could lead to increased staff sickness and longer-term cost implications for the Authority. Officers acknowledged the challenges of the ongoing recruitment freeze; however, it was considered that a pragmatic approach was being undertaken by the Authority to explore different ways of working within a challenging financial climate. An assurance was provided that the recruitment to business-critical vacancies would continue, and, in this regard, managers were required to provide feedback on any additional pressures faced by departments for consideration by the Corporate Management Team. It was also highlighted that in accordance with the Authority's duty of care,

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robust policies were in place in terms of absence management, workforce planning and staff wellbeing.

- In response to concerns raised regarding the disposal of assets, the Head of Regeneration, Policy and Digital duly appraised Committee of the Authority's Asset Management Strategy and emphasised the need to balance capital receipts with income generation.
- In considering the capital programme, a query was raised regarding the Authority's ability to deliver its projects and schemes given the slippage detailed within the report. The Head of Financial Services clarified that the budget construction for the capital programme required funding to be in place for capital expenditure; the nature of which required all Local Authorities take a prudent approach which inevitably resulted in an element of slippage between financial years. An assurance was provided that inflationary measures had been accounted for within the budget where appropriate.
- In response to a query regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) programme, the Head of Regeneration, Policy and Digital appraised Committee of the Authority's current position and confirmed that the funding had been allocated to individual projects who were required to deliver the schemes by 31 December 2023. An assurance was provided to the Committee that robust monitoring arrangements were in place, and it was expected that the projects would be delivered within timescales.
- It was queried whether there was scope for the Committee to receive current, up to date financial reports going forward to enable effective monitoring and the identification of solutions. The Leader, in acknowledging the historical nature of the reports, commented that the Committee could review the available data in terms of specific trends in over-expenditure or under-expenditure to identify areas for further consideration by the Committee. Furthermore, the Head of Financial Services clarified that the key issues in terms of emerging pressures remained constant and therefore it was considered that the reports provided an opportunity for the Committee to undertake its key role in holding the Cabinet and Council departments to account. The Head of Financial Services duly explained the budget report timescales to the Committee which was aligned with the democratic process.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.**

**5. 2023/24 QUARTER 3 - PERFORMANCE REPORT (01/04/23-31/12/23)  
RELEVANT TO THIS SCRUTINY**

The Committee considered a report for monitoring purposes, on Quarter 3 - 2023/24 of the Actions and Measures linked to the Authority's Corporate Strategy and the Well-Being Objectives.

Amongst the issues and queries raised on the report were the following:

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- Reference was made to the risk highlighted in terms of the financial sustainability of schools and it was queried whether grant funding had since been allocated to mitigate some pressure in this regard. The Head of Financial Services confirmed that whilst some additional funding had been received at the end of the financial year, the monies was not to the same scale as previous years and therefore, due to its fortuitous nature, the Authority could not rely upon grant funding for school budgets. The Head of Financial Services confirmed that the figure for the additional grant funding received for schools for 2023/24 would be circulated to the Committee.
- A discussion ensued on the People Management Core Business Enabler whereby the low response rate to the Annual Employee Engagement survey was highlighted. The Committee received an overview of the array of communication and promotion methods which would be taken prior to the next annual survey to reach more staff groups, and a timely response to the feedback would also be provided to respondents. An assurance was provided that the Annual Employee Engagement Survey was anonymous and therefore individual members of staff could not be identified.
- In response to a request, the Assistant Chief Executive agreed to report back to the Committee the response rate for the surveys referred to within the narrative of the report, in addition to a copy of the questions within the Annual Employee Engagement Survey. Following a comment, the Media and Marketing Manager agreed to explore the feasibility in amalgamating the regulatory and divisional surveys as a means of increasing survey response rates.
- Reference was made to the Authority's performance in respect of the generation of capital receipts to support the capital program. An assurance was provided to the Committee that despite being below target for the quarter, sales transactions had since increased, and it was expected that the overall target would be realised.
- The Head of Regeneration, Policy and Digital, in response to a query on the under-performance of non-housing repairs works, clarified that a dedicated resource was now responsible for actively pursuing contractors for any overdue works and therefore performance was expected to improve within this area going forward. It was agreed that queries would be made to ascertain whether any penalties had been exercised to the contractors for not meeting their obligations within specified timeframes and the information would be circulated to the Committee in due course.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:**

**5.1 the report be received.**

**5.2 the figure for the additional grant funding received for schools**

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for 2023/24 be circulated to the Committee.

- 5.3 the response rate for the surveys referred to within the narrative of the report, in addition to a copy of the questions within the annual staff engagement survey be circulated to the Committee.
- 5.4 Officers explore the feasibility in amalgamating regulatory and divisional surveys in an endeavour to increase survey response rates.
- 5.5 queries be made to ascertain whether any penalties had been exercised to the contractors for not meeting their obligations in respect of non-housing responsive repair works and the information be circulated to the Committee.

## 6. CARMARTHENSHIRE PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD (PSB) MINUTES - JANUARY 2024

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting of the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board [PSB] held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2024. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 required that a designated local government scrutiny committee was appointed to scrutinise the work of the PSB. In Carmarthenshire, the Council's Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Committee had been designated as the relevant scrutiny committee.

Amongst the issues and queries raised on the report were the following:

- The Leader referred to his attendance at a recent all-Wales learning event which reviewed the governance arrangements and engagement opportunities for Public Service Boards. The Committee agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would meet with the Leader to further explore this area with a view to introducing more meaningful reporting of Public Service Board activities, and enhanced consultation and engagement mechanisms to strengthen relationships with key stakeholders. Further discussions would then take place with relevant representatives from other member-led groups within the Council.
- In response to a query, the Leader reported that a further update on the task and finish group emanating from the Tackling Poverty Wellbeing objective would be provided to Committee in due course. It was commented that the Authority's Tackling Poverty Panel could potentially positively contribute to the task and finish group and further discussions may be held in this regard.

### UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 6.1 the minutes of the Public Service Board meeting held on the 23 January 2024 be received.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

6.2 the Chair and Vice Chair to meet with the Leader to further explore opportunities to introduce more meaningful reporting of Public Service Board activities, with enhanced consultation and engagement mechanisms to strengthen relationships with key stakeholders. Further discussions may then take place with relevant representatives from other member-led groups within the Council.

6.3 a further update on the task and finish group emanating from the Tackling Poverty Wellbeing objective be provided to Committee in due course.

## 7. SCRUTINY ACTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which detailed the progress achieved in relation to requests or referrals emerging from previous meetings of the Corporate Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the report detailing progress in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous scrutiny meetings be noted.

## 8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Chair advised that in view of the limited number of business items scheduled for the next meeting on 29 May 2024, the agenda would be kept under review and a decision would be made in due course as to whether the meeting would proceed.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting be received.

## 9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 1ST MARCH 2024

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 be signed as a correct record.

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CHAIR

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.