

Notes



OF AN INFORMAL MEETING OF

Scrutiny Committee Members

HELD ON MONDAY 12 OCTOBER AT 6.00 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING

The meeting was live streamed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEJBxvYNhKI>

Present:

Nathan Boyd (Chair), Ron Batstone (Vice Chair), Jerry Avery, Eric De La Harpe, David Grant, Diana Lugova, Ben Mabbett, Patrick O'Leary and Max Thompson.

Officers:

Adrian Duffield, Paula Fox, Simon Hewings, Candida Mckelvey, Adrianna Partridge, Tracy Smith and Richard Spraggett.

Also present:

Cabinet members: Councillors Andrew Crawford and Bethia Thomas.

AGENDA ITEMS

1 Apologies for absence

Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne sent her apologies. Councillor Diana Lugova attended as substitute.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Urgent business and chair's announcements

Chair ran through meeting housekeeping.

Chair requested an update from Vale's CEAC Chair, Councillor David Grant. At their last meeting, the CEAC reviewed the Joint Scrutiny task and finish group report on retrofitting. Scrutiny Chair clarified that CEAC could recommend further action to Cabinet, in their support of the report. Firstly, Joint Scrutiny required officers to work on costings and feasibility, before it could be passed onto Cabinet.

Resolved:

Chair of Vale CEAC shall ask officers for costings and feasibility, before CEAC provide recommendations to Cabinet.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record, and the Chair will sign them as such.

5 Public participation

None.

6 Work schedule and dates for all South scrutiny meetings

Chair reminded the committee that they could provide recommendations for the work programme.

7. Planning appeals

Cabinet member for Community Engagement, Councillor Bethia Thomas, introduced the report.

The report contained explanation of different types of appeal and the costs involved. It contained a summary of hearings taken place and the outcomes. In comparison with the national average and other local authorities, Vale's performance was strong. The Cabinet member felt that the report showed a strong performance with a diligent planning committee and officers.

Chair reminded committee that they were to look at overall performance and not individual applications.

The committee asked questions of the Cabinet member, supported by Planning officers, Paula Fox (Development Manager) and Tracy Smith (Principal Planning Appeals Officer).

Committee discussed types of appeals, which weren't generally broken into categories. There was a very low appeal rate against non-determination, which was a very good result, therefore keeping decision making local. Appeals against condition occurred more,

so lessons could be learned on this area. No distinct patterns had emerged as the rate was too low. Future training will be developed upon the lessons learned.

Officer confirmed that officer time was not measured on appeals, so it would be hard to quantify the council's costs, but the costings were available for legal costs.

Committee discussed the government metrics the council were measured against, this would likely be revised in the future.

Officer explained that Covid-19 altered how we work, but that virtual meetings did work well, to aid participation. Lockdowns saw a rise in individual homeowner applications. Workload may change back to normal but there were many cases still in the system from this period.

A member asked what we could learn from affordable housing provision and viability. Officer responded that if councillors on planning committee had a concern over the affordable housing viability of an application, which was a complex subject, it might be worth considering deferral in order to take advice, before risking an appeal.

Future training for councillors was flagged as an area to be considered.

There was a pause, due to Covid-19, in production of the appeals data from central government, so the planning team included all the data for 18 months so that the most up to date information was provided, hence it was a long report.

Officers, Cabinet member and the planning committee were thanked for their hard work.

Resolved:

Committee noted the report on planning appeals.

8. Financial Outturn 2020-21

Cabinet member for Finance and Corporate Assets, Councillor Andrew Crawford, introduced the report, with Simon Hewings (Section 151 officer) and Richard Spraggett (Senior Finance Business Partner) supporting.

The outturn for 2020-21 was a period affected by Covid-19. It covered revenue and capital budgets. Mid-year, we revised the budget to consider the potential impact of the pandemic, due to loss of income and added costs, which may not have been compensated for through central government. Also considered was underspend, for example, from paused projects, where staff were diverted to Covid-19 related work.

Committee asked questions to the Cabinet member and officers regarding details within the report.

Officers were praised for continuing their budgeting work under the difficult circumstances. Officer confirmed that assumptions and estimates had to be made, and the business grants do not feature in this, because the council acted as an agent to administer the central government funded business grants.

Praise given for the clarity of the report.

A request was made for excel spreadsheets more some of the data tables. Finance to work with Democratic Services to look at a solution. The Modgov system, where agendas were created and published, only processed documents into PDF files.

Resolved:

Committee noted the Financial Outturn report 20/21.

Meeting closed at 19:09