

## Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

**Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at on Monday, 21st November, 2022 at 10.00 am**

### **Councillors Present**

County Councillor Alistair Neill, (Chairman)  
County Councillor Tony Kear (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Ian Chandler, ,  
Paul Pavia, Peter Strong, Laura Wright,  
Sue Riley, Rachael Buckler

Also in attendance County Councillors: R. Garrick,  
Cabinet Member for Resources

### **Officers in Attendance**

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager  
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer  
Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief  
Officer, Resources  
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and  
Place  
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young  
People  
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care,  
Safeguarding and Health  
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance  
Ian Saunders, Chief Operating Officer, MonLife  
Mark Hand, Head of Place-making, Housing,  
Highways and Flood  
Scott James, Strategic Procurement Manager  
Craig O'Connor, Head of Planning  
Philip Thomas, Development Services Manager  
Steve Robinson, Head of Procurement  
Cath Fallon, Head of Economy and Enterprise  
Stacey Jones, Senior Accountant  
Dave Loder, Finance Manager  
Tyrone Stokes, Accountant  
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager

**APOLOGIES:** Janice Watkins and County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy

### **1. Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **2. Public Open Forum**

No submissions were received.

### **3. Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy:**

Scott James and Steve Robinson presented the report and answered the members' questions with Cabinet Member Rachel Garrick.

**Challenge:**

*On p1, Chepstow is missing from the list of the 6 main settlements?*

Apologies, that is a typo: Chepstow should be included.

*Regarding the Top 10 spend categories, would showing percentages also not be useful?*

The chart is there in a 'holding position', so we will take on board the comments about the percentages.

*Could we have further detail about the measures and delivery targets?*

There will be a lot of small steps in terms of progress to deliver e.g. carbon, which is a significant challenge in all authorities. We are looking at the practical steps that we can take to support delivery. The delivery plan is mature now in its main contents but the key thing to agree is the additional support we can get from across the authorities – there is still a limited amount of resource. The key activities to pursue are fairly well-defined but those elements are still to be worked through. Fair work is a key area of focus for the new Social Partnership & Public Procurement bill. Work is ongoing; some of our officers are working with Welsh Government on developing the social clauses that will be required to go into contracts. The main point coming through is the importance of following up through contract management to ensure that those clauses are being complied with.

*Is there a difference between the proposed legislation in UK and Wales? The UK legislation won't have an impact on Wales?*

The UK government legislation will apply to Wales. Welsh Government, in consultation with the Welsh public sector, took the decision that rather than developing its own regulations, it would work with the UK Government. Work on the development of the Welsh legislation concerning the Social Partnership & Public Procurement bill is being done in tandem, so that the two pieces of legislation are complementary.

*Does this strategy include or encompass schools and school purchasing?*

Schools purchasing isn't excluded from the strategy.

*Is the delivery plan different for each local authority or will a common paper be rebranded for each?*

3 strategies have been developed in conjunction with each other. The initial draft of the strategy and delivery plan has been informed by Cardiff, and vice-versa – that is the benefit of the collaboration. We are often trying to achieve the same things but are at different levels of maturity i.e. where Cardiff is advanced in an area we can bring that learning to the benefit of Monmouthshire and Torfaen.

*What mechanisms are in place for the monitoring and enforcement of contract compliance? The 7 objectives seem to be in separate silos – how are they being integrated, to be put into practice?*

One piece of work has been to look at governance process key controls; several pieces of work are ongoing. We have a robust governance approach in Cardiff so are picking elements that Monmouthshire would benefit from and looking at how to bring them in, which will be linked to the delivery of training and development of documentation and processes. Delivery of the strategy will involve the development of new tools and education. We would look to draw elements together e.g. opportunities around carbon reduction, inclusion of social value within tenders, etc. contract management is a key area – we have clear thoughts on how to implement some of that in Monmouthshire.

*Back to the relationship between Cardiff, Torfaen and Monmouthshire – would it be more transparent to be branded as a joint purchasing consortium strategy?*

We have had that discussion. Under the new Social Partnership and Procurement Bill, it will be a requirement for an authority to have a procurement strategy. They aren't opposed to multiple authorities having a shared one but we opted for 3 separate strategies – the authorities have appreciated having a clear focus for themselves. But we can look at it for future revisions. Something to bear in mind though, is that a shared strategy is reliant on the 3 authorities all wanting one.

*In the breakdown of local spending, where has the source data come from? Is it available for viewing?*

We have improved the quality of our spend data and its analysis over the last 10 years, and we have started to bring our experience to bear on Monmouthshire's spend data. The local spend data is based on postcode information, with the analysis carried out by the Cardiff resource that looks after Cardiff's data.

*Will it be reviewed on a quarterly basis?*

We will look to improve the quality, reliability and access to data. We use a tool called Power BI to present a lot of the spend data, and have presented the first iteration to the strategic leadership team in Monmouthshire. We will refine and improve that over the next year.

*How does the £98m annual spend compare to previous years?*

This is fairly consistent over the last 2-3 years – approximately £100m.

*Regarding the high turnover of staff and mix of skills, is there a shortfall? A need to invest in staff? What is the current picture in terms of staff turnover?*

Recruitment and retention of procurement officers in Welsh local government is one of the most challenging issues. Typically, people can earn £10-20k more outside local government. In Cardiff, we have proactively run a placement programme with University of South Wales to bring 2 students through on their gap year to come and work with us. This means we've been able to recruit, on the basis of 'growing our own.' If we go out to the open market we will not be able to recruit people to the required standard. It is certainly a challenge. We are out for 4 new category managers currently.

With regard to the mix of skills, it is incumbent on all of us in the collaboration over the coming years to work on people's skill basis. For example, we all need training on carbon capture and conversations with industries about carbon reduction plans. We are more than mindful of the need for additional training. Our budget holders need to understand the market in which they are procuring.

*One of the key objectives of the contract with Atebion was the benefit of that knowledge and capacity in the short-term, and over the long-term, 'growing our own' and developing our own capacity and capability. Will the delivery plan touch on that development, or be in a separate paper?*

We are actively out to recruitment at the moment, working with the local university to provide a pipeline of talent into the team. In terms of the wider authority, Monmouthshire has a devolved procurement resource. We have had a number of discussions about the best way that we can support it. There is a training session this week to support the development of Monmouthshire officers who are regularly involved in procurement activity, and we are looking for their feedback

about whether we are hitting the right information that they need. We also have an initiative called Buying Responsibly that we would like to develop across the 3 authorities.

*Has there been any coproduction or feedback in terms of the SMEs (small to medium-sized enterprises) and third sector from our authority in the shaping of the strategy?*

We've not involved organisations directly in the strategy's development. For local businesses we have focussed on improving accessibility and visibility of opportunities, trying to make the process easier, and them working with other organisations such as Business Wales. As part of the delivery plan we've set out specific actions aimed at finding out from SMEs where they need support. For example, with Cwmpas we are going to do a survey across small businesses and third sector (in Cardiff, initially) to understand what the key barriers are for doing business with Cardiff. We would then like to do that work with Monmouthshire and Torfaen.

*In the breakdown of local spend, 57% is within Monmouthshire/Gwent region – where is the other 43%?*

We have the information as to where spend is not being retained in Wales. One piece of work in the delivery plan is to look at where spend is going outside Wales, whether there are authorities that are retaining more of that spend, and why. Where we recognise that spend consistently goes out of Wales we are keen to see what opportunities there might be working with our economic development colleagues and the CCR to see where there are opportunities to develop some of that capacity in Wales as well.

*Regarding the Foundation economy, what is our thinking in terms of growing that commissioning market locally, or looking at balancing more provision in-house, long-term?*

We have had discussions already in Monmouthshire about food, for example, recognising it as a priority area. Concerning in-house provision, there is currently a big focus on in-sourcing. How we develop our workforces to meet the need going forward is a key challenge, and something that we have been focussed on in recent years.

*Some things in the report could be clarified: 'long-term impact' – meaning a negative impact; avoiding unnecessary jargon for the sake of accessibility for residents; mentioning 'climate and nature crises', though only the climate crisis has been formalised by the council.*

We will pick up these points.

*Of the £98m, £70m is on human resources – can you unpack that?*

HR is a broad category that includes spending on agency staff, different contracts for a range of professional services, etc. The category structure is called 'ProClass', used by Atamis, the Welsh Government sponsored national spend analysis system – the data goes from Monmouthshire into Atamis, and back to us. We need to consider whether HR is being described in the most useful way.

*Concerning the collaborative work since 2021 with Cardiff and Torfaen: has enough time passed yet to be able to point to successes? Is there something that can be communicated to residents?*

Things haven't progressed as quickly as we would have liked. We have needed to build in improvements from the bottom up to get basic operating models progressed. We have focussed on progressing the development of the strategy, improving the visibility and reporting of spend data, training, etc. We had hoped to link some of that in with technology developments, particularly regarding the underpinning processes, but some of that work has been delayed. Much has been progressing and will come to fruition in the next 6 months. Supporting delivery

around the contract pipeline has also been important; the ongoing recruitment process should put us in a strong position going into next year. The learning that we have done is to the benefit of all 3 authorities. Carbon is an area where we are all struggling but in terms of our thinking, focus and acquired knowledge we are in as strong a position as anywhere across the public sector in south Wales. The challenge is turning our intention and planning for where we want to go into reality.

**Chair's Summary:**

Officers should bear in mind that the residents of Monmouthshire want to know why we've done things and what the benefits are – they might want to ask what role Procurement has in that Procurement Performance will come to the committee on 17<sup>th</sup> January – officers will be able to further clarify the team's thoughts and successes then.

The committee agreed to move the report.

**4. Planning Annual Performance Report:**

Phil Thomas delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions with Craig O'Connor and Mark Hand.

**Challenge:**

*Repetitive reference to the 5 actions could be consolidated and made more concise and easier to read e.g. on one page. Perhaps targets could be made more realistic and achievable with regard to available resources. There might be more creative ways to achieve these actions given the resources e.g. in Action 1, rather than being concerned about the resource to implement the preservation order work data, the action could be to update now and retrospectively fill in when possible.*

We note these points and agree in particular to make the report more concise in future.

*Regarding 4.9.4, Wonastow Road, as an example of big developments: there is no pavement from that development to the town centre and active travel routes are still not in place – so is that development 'completed'?*

Yes, a development is considered complete once housing construction is complete. The legal agreement associated with the development has enhancements and improvements to deliver the service as well, which are done alongside. There is a pedestrian link from Wonastow Road and the Active Travel link is currently under construction.

*How is the wider function then reflected in the Performance Report?*

The information about Wonastow Road is a summary concerning the LDP monitoring of sites i.e. how many houses have been built on a particular development, rather than the more subtle issues around infrastructure provision. Social infrastructure often comes later than the point at which people begin living there, as the developer will need to sell some houses first in order to fund elements of a scheme. The sustainability element isn't part of Welsh Government's 12 ranked indicators, for the purposes of a performance report.

*Is the action point on enforcement robust enough to address its current under-performance? Is there more detail to address the poor performance and perception of it amongst residents?*

There are two 'reds' in relation to enforcement, as needing improvement. We are very aware of that. The pandemic, in particular, affected our service delivery last year, especially in that a number of colleagues with children were off for certain periods, which was difficult. We have

already seen an improvement in enforcement performance to 'fair', and are now at full capacity, so hopefully there can be confidence that we are improving and there will be a much stronger showing in next year's report.

*The report focusses on Systems Thinking, highlighting the customer as the planning applicant – but should our primary customer not be the community?*

This is a very good point. When we talk about customers in Planning, we talk about the applicant, developer, community, town councillors, local residents and neighbours (there are detailed discussions with them), county councillors, etc., so assure members that everyone who engages in Planning is treated equally, and we will continue to work that way.

*Where we do see a planning breach but decide not to take further action – how transparent are the criteria, and how rigid, so that there can be no accusations of favouritism?*

In these cases, a full report is taken to a panel made up of the Planning Committee Chair and 2 committee members, and a decision is made in collaboration with officers. It is documented and minuted so that there is robustness in the decision-making process.

*There are no voices of residents or applicants in the report and the lessons learned don't seem to have been fed in. How do we have confidence that the Planning function is the best it can be?*

The Planning Officer Society for Wales does a piece of work involving Data Cymru in which questionnaire surveys to customers as to how the Planning service functions are reviewed. We have been involved in picking that work up again, so we can report back later on how that has gone. We also did customer questionnaires previously on the back of applications – perhaps we could reinstate those, we will take that into consideration.

*Do we undertake exit interviews, in order to understand the rationale for staff moving on, and how they feel that the department functions?*

Staff turnover isn't just an issue for MCC, but across the Planning service generally. The staff who left last year went for promotions in management and leadership roles. It means there is a shortage of planning officers across the region and everyone is in competition for recruiting to their teams. We aren't aware of negative feedback, relating to exit interviews. Some of the older staff members who thrived on team interactions decided to retire once there was a change to working away from the office during the pandemic.

*The portal has improved but is highlighted as an area for further improvement – has the cost of that been considered yet?*

Costings haven't been done yet. There is expertise in the team for improving the website, so we will look to use that rather than use external providers.

*Reiterating about enforcement, it is so important that it is effective and equitable.*

We fully agree. Now that there is a fully resourced team, more action will be taken in a speedier manner as we can better react and monitor, as will be shown in the significant improvements already in evidence, as mentioned earlier i.e. the July/September figures.

*With the proposed large housing settlements in the LDP, what engagement is planned with residents and when does it start?*

A paper goes to full council on 1<sup>st</sup> December asking for Council to go out to public consultation on the preferred strategy: this will be an 8-week consultation with local communities, going to village halls in the primary settlement areas, doing virtual events with town and community councils, etc. We will try to engage and capture as many opinions as possible over that period.

Once we get to the Deposit Plan stage we will also go out for full consultation, looking at the planning policy framework and the actual sites that we will go for.

*What measures will prospective planning applications have to take to account for water quality and to mitigate the phosphates problem?*

Since the introduction of the new water quality regulations, NRW has brought out further guidance in which developers need to evidence nutrient neutrality, that their development will not create a net increase in phosphates. Any development proposal that comes to us will need to heed to this, and we will consult with biodiversity colleagues internally as well as do a Habitats Regulations assessment on the development proposal and potentially consult NRW. In terms of our preferred strategy moving forward, we aren't looking to allocate land for new development in the Wye catchment area because there isn't a strategic phosphate solution at this stage. However, in the Usk catchment, there seems to be a solution coming forward for the Llanfoist Waste Water treatment system, so the Usk catchment could take another development, but nothing is defined as such in the Monmouth area at present. We also sit on the Wye Nutrient Management Board and the Usk Catchment Partnership Board, looking at solutions including land management.

*How is a lack of water i.e. water supply, factored in for the larger developments?*

We consult with Welsh Water and environmental colleagues on major developments but it hasn't been a significant issue so far. We will keep an eye on it, and statutory consultees will make us aware if something does arise.

*Regarding 2.13, 2.14 and 2.16: The number of young adults is decreasing, there is a higher level of 85+yr olds and rising, 40% of economically active residents out-commute, etc. How are you ensuring that we connect these points and the underlying data with services so that we can take advantage of opportunities and address the built-in challenges?*

These points are all highly strategic and is where the RLDP comes in: this document will be key to ensuring that we address those issues. The paper going to council on 1<sup>st</sup> December will be vital for that; the strategy that the council is putting forward seeks to address those issues dramatically by balancing our demographic, ensuring that we have the right development in the right places, with well-connected and affordable housing-led schemes. Members need to focus on that document, ensuring that it is fit for addressing those strategic issues.

*In 2.6, there is a comment about responding to ageing population with affordable housing, but is AH not directed more at the younger population?*

There are policies in the development plan to secure affordable housing schemes, and a proportion of AH on the larger strategic sites. We work closely with colleagues in Housing who are fully aware of the housing need that we have. When we negotiate for schemes, it is on the basis of input from the Housing team, so the mix of AH we put together reflects that housing need, so that we can cater for younger and more mature households. There are sites where we have allowed bungalows in order to accommodate the older population or those with disabilities; ground-floor flats are appropriate for the older community too. We are trying to create balanced communities, rather than AH schemes that only cater for younger residents.

*Does the report require an Integrated Impact Assessment?*

There wasn't one for this report as officers were reporting on performance, rather than a policy change. One will therefore be done for the RLDP. Nevertheless, **officers will doublecheck if there is a requirement to provide an IIA for each report.**

*Is it possible to have Enforcement training so that Councillors understand what is and isn't an enforcement issue?*

We are happy to provide training to all members.

*In terms of customer feedback: of the 21 complaints, none were deemed to be justified – what is the process for dismissing those?*

Stage 1 is an internal investigation, which is quick. Many complaints are from individuals who aren't happy with the decisions we've made, but the majority accepts our explanations why. Stage 2 is the next level, looked at by an independent officer in the council with whom we don't work closely – for an impartial and independent investigation. Note, this is the whole Authority complaints process, not something bespoke to Planning.

**Chair's Summary:**

The accessibility of documents for residents is very important. Duplication and excessive lengths could be made more succinct and key points drawn out more clearly in the future, which officers have agreed to. But there is also excellent and useful information, so thank you to officers, especially given the difficulties over the last few years. Members wished to thank officers for their support and the effectiveness of the officer-member relationship.

Perhaps there could be an automated form after an application is completed, in order to acquire customer feedback and allow for objectivity. It might be worth having a neighbouring authority's service reviewing how our complaints are handled, to inject a level of external objectivity.

The committee agreed to move the report.

## **5. Month 6 Budget Monitoring Report**

Cabinet Member Rachel Garrick and Jonathan Davies presented the report and answered the members' questions with Tyrone Stokes and Will Mclean.

**Challenge:**

*As we end this financial year what element of the planned reserves is usable? Is it £16.6m? Are reserves the principal tool being applied to deal with the currently forecast cost overspend? Is that really 'robust'?*

The replenishment of reserves over the last two financial years was due principally to the funding provided by Welsh Government: they identified budget risks that authorities would face coming into this year, notably around social care income losses, and remaining pandemic effects. We always had an expectation that reserves would be used to cover expenditures this year. We didn't build that into our budget setting because how those risks would manifest was very uncertain in timing and the amount. To clarify the reserves section in the report, and the level at the end of this year: if we utilised reserves as outlined in the budget recovery plan it would leave revenue reserves at £21.6m. We tried to show in the chart the further projection and risk if no corrective action were taken – it is a reasonable assumption to make that we would need further support if we didn't take steps to address that position.

*Just under £2.2m of savings will come from a reduction or redesign of services – are they mainly unfilled vacancies? Is more significant redesign not therefore required?*

While there is a degree of continuing with vacancies in the workforce it isn't a significant part of the recovery plan: the majority would be where services have identified alternative or flexible ways to generate income, whether through grants or agreements with joint partners. We have



started conversations with services about the medium-term picture of their service models, given the onward budget deficit, but they need to be developed quickly.

*What are the current projected plans for council tax increases next year?*

Cabinet has not considered council tax levels for next year. We are going through the budget process currently, with lots of uncertainties about funding and cost pressures for next year; notably, the Autumn statement will have implications for funding next year, and the Welsh Government budget that is due to be published in December will provide further clarity. So, while we can make planning assumptions about council tax levels, those things need to come together for us to garner what the rate might be next year.

We are in a position where a number of risks have been realised; unfortunately, last year we chose a 2.9% increase, when the administration started the budget planning process, knowing that inflation was around 5.1% and that it climbed to 7% by the time they set that budget. We need to appreciate the scale: the problem won't be fixed by a rise in council tax e.g. a 1% increase in council tax will only generate £700k. What we therefore need to discuss is funding, and the harder decisions that we will need to make. But that is more for the budget discussion, rather than Month 6.

*But council tax is the main thing that residents look to the council for a clear understanding of?*

Councillors need to take on the responsibility to discuss truthfully for residents what council tax can and can't accomplish.

*To clarify, the previous administration fixed the council tax increase in March when inflation was at 7%*

Yes, that is the Consumer Price Index figure for March.

*At the last People committee, the head of Children's Services indicated that the service would continue to operate as it has been. Bearing in mind the huge overspend, should this be reconsidered and factored into your future plans?*

We have been in discussions with the Chief Officer for Social Care, looking at the forward structure given our budgetary constraints over the medium term. Some of those things will take a lot longer to turn around than others. There are immediate steps that we can take to gain efficiencies or cost moderations but the demands are complex and increasing in this area, so to make those changes in that landscape is very challenging. We have opened conversations about increasing our preventative measures or working with regional partners to explore other opportunities to reduce costs.

The biggest cost drivers in terms of the outturn is high cost and complex placements for children, and the use of agency staff to cover vacancies. The recovery plan has been consulted widely in Children's Services, driven by the Chief Officer. Some of the immediate things we can look at are negotiations with ABHB around continuing healthcare, and funding and service delivery for those high-cost placements – whether we can take some out-of-county placements or boost some of the provision to try to bring forward some of the work that has already been planned, and accelerate it in-year. We need to be mindful that there are 4 months left in the financial year.

*Can we better understand the capacity challenge in chasing grant funding?*

Internally, we provide finance support where we can too allow services, where possible, to maximise funding streams. Capacity restraints vary significantly across the authority. We are in

active discussion with Welsh Government about our specific grant funding and the potential to move some into core funding, so we can mitigate wider cost issues.

*What is the contract negotiation with providers looking like?*

The commissioning team engages with providers before the financial year. During the budget setting for this financial year we put a cost estimate of £1.9m; this year we have done well to retain that figure but we now have a number of providers approaching the authority for early indications as to next year, especially with the increase in the real living wage which is going up by £1 next year. There is also the drain on energy costs, and care home providers have an increase in insurance premiums of 200-300%. This year, we feel confident that we can maintain the £1.9m but next year looks to be more challenging and we are pushing back on providers where they need to look at any possible costs themselves that can be lowered.

*Why is the Disability facilities grant underspend so significant?*

This relates particularly to the Capital budget. The pressure there is offset significantly by the potential release in budget for DFGs. This can be explained by the Covid period – the Capital Budget for DFGs was slipped forward during Covid. The service has taken analysis of the current demand and identified that the amount of budget that has accumulated over the past 2-3 years is more than is required given the current demand.

*What is our message for schools regarding their investment strategies? How will deficits be funded?*

There have been discussions with headteachers in recent weeks regarding the budget position, they are fully aware of it for next year and the medium term. The overall message is that it's wise to emphasise restraint and look at the sustainability of their ongoing staffing structures, especially where there are inherent budget deficits in some schools. To address those, budget recovery plans will be agreed with the Cabinet Member, focussing on cost moderation or looking at sustainable staffing structures, noting that a very high proportion of school costs is staffing. It won't be a quick fix: recovery plans will look to bring the schools into a sustainable position over a number of years.

*Where schools have identified investment needs in their recovery plans, what is the potential impact of them not spending that now?*

Directly linked to improvement activity, investment in additional staff will be required at some times; very often linked to grant funding. Given how school HR works there are defined periods of time through the year when conversations around staffing decisions can take place. Some schools have made plans to make capital investments in the school body and fabric: we have schools that wanted to provide greater levels of outdoor learning environments – those are the right sort of things to stop and discuss, which we are doing. So the type of investment informs the conversation that takes place. If it's funded by grant or additional monies then it will carry on, where there is capital investment we are saying to pause and think about how to use the funds in the future.

*Regarding the running theme of staffing problems, how heavily do we rely on goodwill? Is there data showing a reliance on untaken TOIL (Time Off In Lieu)?*

Yes, we have those figures. It's very much up to Heads of Service to look at the local factors playing into their service, and deal with any goodwill that is being used, which isn't sustainable. The policy in place allows managers to manage TOIL, as there is a maximum that can be

accumulated, and come up with a sustainable way forward to reduce them down in line with service requirements. As there is a maximum we would not rely on goodwill.

*High-cost placements tend to be staff-intensive, so how are they affected by the current recruitment and retention difficulties?*

The picture varies by service so an overall answer is difficult.

*Because the figure for Children's Services is so large the breakdown isn't very helpful for scrutiny.*

Yes, we will break down these figures further in the future. The biggest driver of the Children's Services overspend is high cost residential placements. Their complex nature drives up the cost. External placements can cost upwards of £1m per child, annually, based on the social care assessed need and where there is a clinical need, in conjunction with ABHB. The supply in the market is low but the demand is very high, which is a national issue. Agency staffing is another cost driver as agency staff cost more than the staff on our payroll.

*Table 5, Section 7.2, forecast budget savings for next year: how do we hold confidence in those given the current position and overspend?*

For the service budget recovery plans it is up to chief officers to come up with proposals for meeting their targets. Cost moderation is the most difficult to achieve in the current environment but there are opportunities for further funding and working with joint partners. It's useful to note that over £1.5m of proposals were identified as low-risk so there is some confidence that directorates are maintaining pressure on those. The key paragraph is the use of 'at least' £2.18m – there is scope to increase that, which we hope to see. Finance teams will support directorates in identifying further areas to increase income or generate cost going forward.

*In the Month 4 report there were 2000 hours of unmet social care need each week in the county. Do we need to do more to be realistic with our residents about that situation and look for more community engagement where that is possible, and do more to support prevention?*

These factors are playing into the ongoing conversations with Social Care as to how the service might look. There is community engagement as part of the budget setting process. The unmet need is multi-faceted as to how it has occurred e.g. hospital discharge comes to social care to fill the void, and there is a recruitment and retention crisis in social care, so there is a difficulty to get care packages. We already have strong community links e.g. the Community Connections project that looks at prevention but that can only go so far: the demand is outstripping the service that we have, hence the unmet need hours. However, there might be indirect support in some of those cases.

### **Chair's Summary:**

The Chair thanked officers for their work, and Cabinet Member Rachel Garrick for attending today to address the committee. Councillor Garrick emphasised that she has an open-door policy should any Councillor wish to discuss matters pertaining to the budget further. The Chair congratulated Jonathan Davies on his appointment as Head of Finance.

Peter Davies noted that Finance will look at the timing for Month 9 to make sure that it comes forward on as timely a basis as possible.

Officers agreed to take back the comments about how they report i.e. to give a more detailed breakdown of the Social Care spend in the future.

The committee agreed to move the report.

**6. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

A Special meeting is to be scheduled to scrutinise the budget proposals. Members will be emailed with suggested dates after the meeting.

**7. Cabinet and Council Work Plan**

**8. To confirm the minutes of previous meetings:**

The minutes were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

**9. Next Meeting: 15th December 2022**

Councillor Bond will be unavailable.

The meeting ended at **1.08 pm**