



COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN THE CHAMBER PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 17TH JANUARY 2023 AT 5.00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor E.M. Aldworth - Mayor
Councillor M.A. Adams - Deputy Mayor

Councillors:

C. Andrews, A. Angel, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, S. Cook, D. Cushing, C. Cuss, D.T. Davies MBE, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, G. Enright, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, E. Forehead, J. E. Fussell, A. Gair, N. George, C. Gordon, D. Harse, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, M. James, L. Jeremiah, G. Johnston, J. Jones, S. Kent, A. Leonard, P. Leonard, C. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Miles, C. Morgan, S. Morgan, T. Parry, L. Phipps, M. Powell, D.W.R. Preece, D. Price, H. Pritchard, J. Pritchard, J.A. Pritchard, J. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Scriven, S. Skivens, E. Stenner, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, L. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, K. Woodland, C. Wright

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Chief Executive), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services), D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services and Housing), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), J. Williams (Deputy Director Social Services, Adult Services), A. Southcombe (Finance Manager), D. Beecham (Electoral Services Manager), N. Roberts (Principal Group Accountant), S. Pugh (Head of Communications), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett (Minute Taker)

Also present:

M. Jones (Audit Wales)

IN MEMORIUM

The Mayor referred to the recent passing of Mrs Carol Sadler, former county councillor and past Mayor, and wife of Councillor Jim Sadler. Council stood for a moment's silence as a mark of respect and extended their condolences to Councillor Sadler at this sad time.

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chief Executive reminded those present the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). She advised that decisions would be made by Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Ead, B. Owen, J. Rao, J. Reed, J. Sadler and J. Simmonds.

2. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor referred to the engagements and events she had attended since the last meeting of Council and advised Members that she recently had the pleasure of meeting pupils from Bryn School, who visited the Council Chamber to learn more about local democracy. The Mayor also referred to the Council's Operation Santa Appeal which was once again a resounding success, and she had been delighted to visit numerous businesses to collect the presents that had been donated to Operation Santa, praising the overwhelming generosity and response to the appeal from people across the entire county borough.

3. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 28(3)

It was confirmed that there were no petitions to be presented on this occasion.

4. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Shared Lives Awards

The Cabinet Member for Social Care was delighted to announce that the Shared Lives Team were recently honoured at three prestigious award ceremonies. At the Ajuda Mental Health and Wellbeing Wales Awards (10th October 2022), Pat Roberts and Maggs Evans were nominated as finalists for the Inspiring Individual Awards, and Shared Lives as finalists for Best Mental Health Service during a Pandemic. Clint Attard won the Inspiring Individual Gold Award, and the Shared Lives team won the Best Wellbeing Service Silver Award. At the Shared Lives Plus UK Awards (13th October 2022), the team won the Shared Lives award for scheme innovation and Cliff Attard was highly commended in the Outstanding Shared Lives carer award category.

At the Wales Care Awards (21st October 2022), Michaela Stone won the Exceptional Newcomer award, Jill and Neil Powell won the Excellence in Learning Disability and Mental Health Services award, Cynthia and Morton Webber won the Supported Living or Small Group Community Living Care Practitioner award, and Trevor and Kate Badley won the Excellence in Dementia Care award. Cynthia and Morton Webber received the Spirit of Care Gold Award.

Representatives from the Shared Lives Team came forward and were congratulated by the Mayor and Council on their fantastic achievements.

Welsh Housing Awards

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the award to the Communications Team and the Caerphilly Homes Team who during the pandemic worked flexibly and creatively to communicate with the large and diverse tenant base, including social media, printed newsletters, local press, web and e-bulletins to communicate key information to tenants. Caerphilly Homes also went a step above by undertaking assurance calls to every council-owned home.

In November 2022 this approach was recognised at the prestigious Welsh Housing Awards, where Caerphilly Council won the 'Communications in a Crisis' category.

Representatives from both teams came forward and were congratulated by the Mayor and Council on their success.

Youth Service Award

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities was pleased to announce that the Council's Youth Service had recently been awarded the Bronze Level Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales, which is awarded for demonstrating leadership and governance, appropriate and effective monitoring and evaluation processes, safeguarding of young people, acting within relevant legal and policy framework, and providing a welcoming and safe environment for young people who can access trusted and skilled staff and volunteers.

Staff from the Youth Service came forward to be congratulated by the Mayor and Council on their impressive success.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the start or during the course of the meeting.

6. COUNCIL HELD ON 24TH NOVEMBER 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of Council held on 24th November 2022 (minute nos. 1-13) be approved as a correct record.

7. TO RECEIVE AND TO ANSWER QUESTIONS RECEIVED UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 10(2)

Question from Councillor A. McConnell to the Leader of Council, Councillor S. Morgan.

Could the Leader of Council please provide an update on the Welsh Government Settlement set within the context of the current inflation and service pressures?

Response from the Leader of Council to Councillor A. McConnell

Firstly, I would like to applaud the Welsh Government for what is a much better than expected settlement for the Council. But I must stress that this is by no means a good settlement in the current economic climate, with inflation at its highest level in 40 years, just recently sitting at 11.1%. It does not address the significant challenges we face. The Welsh Government itself has limited resources at its disposal due to the ongoing erosion of investment in public services by the UK Government, as can be seen in the huge rise in industrial action from public service workers across this nation. We have endured over ten years of austerity with budget cuts, wage freezes and a shift in burden to those who can least afford it. We are reeling from the impact of Brexit, a global pandemic, rising energy prices, a cost of living crisis and a UK Government that has, in my opinion, abandoned its responsibilities towards public services.

Tomorrow the Cabinet will be considering a draft budget report, prior to a period of public consultation and I would urge all members of the public to consider taking part in the consultation. While the report clearly outlines the significant service pressures we are

seeing, we are, thankfully, in a strong position to face those pressures due to sound financial management over recent years. One of the key proposals in the report is a one-off use of council reserves totalling over £15 million. Caerphilly has healthy reserves, some of which can be used, as in this case for a 'rainy day', but the majority of reserves are ear-marked for specific schemes. But we are going to have to look at each and every one of those schemes in light of the unprecedented inflation, which is eroding the value, and eroding the purchasing power of those reserves as each day passes. As an example, a new school build that was set to cost approximately £10 million, now due to super high inflation, that same school could cost £13 million. The one-off use of reserves and temporary savings will buy us time to reshape our services to address the significant financial challenges that lie ahead, with anticipated savings of circa £48m needing to be found over the next three years.

So, the short answer to the question is, while the Welsh Government settlement was better than we could have expected given the shortfall in funding they have from central government, it only goes a small way to helping the increasing service and inflationary pressures we face, and we are going to have to make significant changes to the way in which this Council operates in order for us to deliver our services to residents.

8. TO RECEIVE AND TO ANSWER QUESTIONS RECEIVED UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 10(4)

Question from Councillor K. Woodland to the Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change, Councillor J. Pritchard

Will the Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change provide Council with an update on how many events were in the programme for 2022 and were they successful?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change to Councillor K. Woodland

Can I firstly take the opportunity to offer some words of thanks to the fantastic Events Team. Without our hard-working team, the success of the events programme would not have been possible. The team are full of positivity and a pleasure to work with. I would like to thank all those businesses who embraced the events and worked with us to generate footfall in the towns, the town and community councils who played their part in funding some of the events, and last but certainly not least, the general public who came out in great numbers.

The events that took place between April and December of last year in chronological order were:

- A Dog Trail with Snoopy;
- Caerphilly Food Festival;
- Caerphilly 10K;
- Risca Beach Party;
- Little Cheese Festival;
- Ystrad Mynach Winter Food and Craft Fair;
- River of Light Lantern Making Workshops;
- Caerphilly Winter Food and Craft Fair;
- River Of Light Lantern Parade;
- Bargoed Roller Skating Rink;
- Bargoed Winter Food and Craft Fair.

Turning to some of the numbers from events across the borough, nearly 5,000 visitors flocked to Risca as the town held its first ever 'Beach Party'. The Little Cheese Festival

welcomed 33,000 visitors through Castle Court Shopping Centre and over 10,000 people through the town centre. The event hosted three live music areas along with a main stage in the Twyn Car Park, bringing a new lease of life to the town for the weekend. Over 34,500 people attended the Food and Craft Fairs and the River of Light Lantern Parade in total, and with record high footfall for a winter event achieved in Ystrad Mynach and Bargoed. The busiest days in the town centres of Ystrad Mynach, Blackwood and Bargoed occurred at the winter fairs.

So, those are the figures, but what did the traders have to say?

Tara Holloway, from We Connect Coffee Shop said: *“The beach day was fabulous and the amount of people enjoying the park was wonderful to see We ended up staying open two hours past our usual closing time due to the number of people coming through the door”*.

Aviary’s Calvin Evans said: *“We were delighted to be at the first ever Little Cheese Festival in Caerphilly and wow, what a hit!! It was great to see all the local and remote companies and traders pulling together.”*

Alex at Hancox’s Pies commented: *“The Bargoed event for us was, as with all other events, perfect. It was cheerful, with lots of customers – especially when the entertainers stopped in front of our stall!*

Louise Berry at Andrew Berry Jewellery, commented: *“Here at Andrew Berry Jewellery we had a great day Saturday at the Winter Fair in Ystrad Mynach - it was great to see the village so full and busy!”*

Huw Edwards of Tidal’s Stores Ltd commented regarding the Blackwood Winter Fair: *“We need these events as they bring people into town, and it’s become a staple of the Christmas calendar. It’s lovely to see the high street busy and show what Blackwood has to offer.”*

We cannot underestimate the success of the events programme, as evidenced by the comments from the business community. There is ample evidence that residents will support our town centres if we continue to positively make the case with an extensive programme. We’re looking forward to the year ahead.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

9. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR 2021/22

The Mayor welcomed Mr Mark Jones from Audit Wales to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report, which presented Council with the Audit Wales ‘Audit of Accounts Report’ for the 2021/22 financial year and sought Council approval of the 2021/22 Audited Financial Accounts to ensure that these can be certified by the Auditor General in accordance with Welsh Government (WG) guidelines. The report had also been considered by the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 10th January 2023.

Due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19, WG wrote to all Councils extending the statutory deadline for the submission of the draft accounts to 31st August 2022, for them to be audited and certified by 30th November 2022. WG recently moved the 2021/22 deadline for

Councils further back to 31st January 2023 to enable all Councils to consider their adoption of new temporary accounting arrangements for infrastructure (road) assets.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to announce that it was the Auditor General's intention to issue an unqualified audit opinion on the 2021/22 financial accounts, and she placed on record her thanks to the Council's Finance staff and to the team from Audit Wales for their hard work and professionalism throughout the audit process.

Council noted Appendix 3 of the Auditor's report which provided details of the misstatements identified during the audit process, which have subsequently been corrected by management. There was one uncorrected non-trivial misstatement highlighted in the 'Audit of Accounts Report' relating to expenditure that had been incorrectly classified as revenue expenditure. Officers have decided not to correct the misstatement because it is not material, and the adjustment will instead be made in the 2022/23 financial year.

At its meeting on 10th January 2023, the Governance and Audit Committee considered the Audit Wales report and the 2021/22 Financial Accounts, and following due consideration, including a number of questions being raised by Members, the Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendation to Council that the 2021/22 audited financial accounts should be approved.

Council thanked the Finance Team and Audit Wales for their hard work in the preparation of the reports, and in response to a query on the meaning of the term "unqualified audit opinion" Mr Mark Jones (Audit Wales) explained that this term is used under the international auditing standards for the public and private sector to give a positive opinion on the accounts.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 54 for, 3 against and 3 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the Audit Wales 'Audit of Accounts Report' be received and commented on;
- (ii) the 2021/22 Audited Financial Accounts be approved;
- (iii) it be noted that an 'Audit of Accounts Addendum Report' will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 18 April 2023, setting out details of Audit Wales' recommendations arising from the audit of the Council's 2021/22 Financial Accounts and the associated management responses.

10. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/24

Consideration was given to the report, which sought Council approval of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the 2023/24 financial year. Council is required annually to adopt a Council Tax Reduction Scheme and local discretions. The report recommended that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme should continue for the 2023/24 financial year along with the previously agreed local discretions.

Council were advised that the Draft Regulations in relation to 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Schemes had been presented to the Senedd earlier that day and will come into force on 19th January 2023. Welsh Government had advised that 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Schemes can be considered and approved by Councils prior to Senedd approval, as no changes to the Draft Regulations were anticipated. It was noted that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme currently provides vital support to 15,999 households, which represents

19.89% of all households in the county borough, and furthermore 8253 of these households receive a 100% reduction in their council tax payments.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 60 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme should continue for the 2023/24 financial year along with the previously agreed local discretions.

11. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING 2021-22

Consideration was given to the report which had been presented to the Social Services Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22nd October 2022. The report provided Council with the key messages that have been identified in the preparation of the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services and Housing for 2021/22.

Mr Dave Street (Corporate Director Social Services and Housing) presented an overview of the report, with it noted that it is a requirement of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 for Directors of Social Services in Wales to publish an annual report about the exercise of the local authority's social services functions. The Annual Report for 2021/22 recognises the significant backlog of requests for assessments/services as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic that now needs to be addressed. One of the key challenges that has emerged for both the Council and independent sector partners is the difficulty in recruiting and retaining care staff and replacing care vacancies in adequate numbers, which will be a key priority for the Council moving forward.

Despite a significant number of challenges, the Directorate's performance has been strong throughout the financial year and the report set out how the Council has addressed key priorities for 2021/22, together with the priorities for 2022/23. The key achievements for 2021/22 (listed at Section 5.7 of the Officer's covering report) included the expansion of the Home First ethos to include Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr Tydfil, with funding also secured to include the Grange University Hospital, together with implementation of the nationally agreed 6 pathways in respect of Discharge to Assess and Recover to improve outcomes for individuals. The Council embedded the new All Wales Safeguarding Procedures and introduced a Corporate Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool for all Council Service areas in order to support the Council's safeguarding policies and practices.

The key priorities for 2022/23 were set out at Section 5.8 of the report, and include work with the Health Board to increase capacity in the community, particularly in light of the current and continuing pressures being faced by the NHS and the subsequent impact on social care. The Council will continue to support the National Transfer Scheme by offering accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. A record number of staff have also been seconded to undertake the Social Work Degree which will hopefully address some of the recruitment issues being faced by the Council. The Council has also embedded the Caerphilly Cares service, which has been very much at the centre of the Authority's response to the cost-of-living crisis.

Mr Street placed on record his gratitude and thanks to all staff across Social Services, whether employed by the local authority, the independent sector or third sector, for stepping up and meeting the challenges that the Directorate have experienced over the last year and will continue to face in the future.

Council discussed the report and in response to a Member's query around staff from independent care providers being brought in from further afield (such as Birmingham) to meet staffing shortfalls/pressures across the sector, Mr Street confirmed that he was not

aware of any such instances but offered to discuss the query with the Member further following the meeting. In response to another query, Mr Street confirmed that the pressures across the social care sector are being felt on a UK-wide basis, and particularly across Wales, although the 5 Gwent authorities working in partnership are comparing their position on an almost daily basis, and Caerphilly Council is in a more favourable position in terms of health and social care performance when compared to many other local authorities across Wales.

A Member asked whether the recent increase in domiciliary care fee payments had led to a noticeable impact in terms of retention/recruitment. Mr Street confirmed that a greater impact had been seen in terms of retention, as the payments include an improved mileage allowance, and Welsh Government funding has also been made available to enable all providers to ensure their staff are in receipt of the Real Living Wage. However the Council is still facing challenges in terms of recruitment and their ability to compete with vacancies across the hospitality and retail sector. In response to a query on whether there will be an increase in demand and use of the private sector rather than use of the Council's in-house service, Mr Street explained the position across Caerphilly has improved and currently around 30% of the service is internal, with the remaining 70% commissioned either from the independent sector or the voluntary sector. Mr Street referenced a number of providers who have left the care service and explained that Caerphilly have been able to recruit these staff into their own workforce, and so at the current time, Caerphilly now has a larger proportion of in-house workforce than has ever been the case previously. Mr Street emphasised that the Council are not complacent about the situation as this could change very quickly but explained that the Council are in a strong position with their in-house staff, and that when difficult circumstances arise, it will be far easier to deploy their own resources than engage resources from the private sector.

Members expressed their thanks to staff across the health and social care sector and acknowledged the hard work being carried out in Caerphilly with regards to the recruitment and retention of care staff.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's covering report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 59 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the report be endorsed and adopted and submitted to Welsh Government, Care Inspectorate Wales and published to the Authority's website.

12. REVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Consideration was given to the report, which advised Members of the Council's duty under the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 to keep its communities under review and report to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) on how it keeps its communities under review. To achieve this the Council has approached the Commission to carry out a review of communities and electoral arrangements in Caerphilly on its' behalf. The report recommended that the Council carries out a Section 25 review of community boundaries commencing in February 2023, with a working group comprising of cross-party membership being established to oversee the review, and that the Council Size Policy outlined in the report be adopted for this and future reviews.

Members were advised that it is the Council's statutory duty to keep its community boundaries under review, and this is very much the start of the process which will begin in February 2023 and be completed in April 2024, and which will see a series of further reports presented to Council containing draft and final proposals arising from the review.

In response to a query on the reorganisation of community council boundaries when compared to county boundaries, Mr Dave Beecham (Electoral Services Manager) confirmed that the Council has the power to move community council boundary wards, but that this could have a consequential effect on the county boundary, and that this would be subject to a review carried out by the Boundary Commission.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 59 for, 1 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The Section 25 review of community boundaries commence in February 2023;
- (ii) A working group comprising of the following members be established:
 - Leader of the Council
 - Leader of the Plaid Cymru Group
 - Leader of the Independent Group
 - 2 additional members from the Labour group
 - 1 additional member from the Plaid Cymru Group
- (iii) That the Council Size Policy outlined in the body of the report be adopted for this and future reviews.

13. STANDARDS COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT OF TWO INDEPENDENT LAY MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY COUNCILLOR MEMBER

Consideration was given to the report, which set out the process undertaken to fill the current vacancies that have arisen on the Council's Standards Committee. The report recommended that Council accept the recommendations of the Appointments Panel in relation to the filling of the two independent lay member vacancies; the appointment of the community council representative and the appointment of three independent lay member reserves to the Standards Committee. Full details of the process and the names of the recommended members and reserves were set out in Section 5 of the report.

Council placed on record their thanks to the outgoing members of the Standards Committee, Mrs G. Davies, Mr D. Lewis and Mr C. Finn, for their service and dedication to the committee, and also thanked the Community Council for providing a suitable nomination and the Appointments Panel for their deliberations and recommendations of the two independent lay representatives and the reserve members.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 55 for, 1 against and 4 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) Community Councillor Anne Gray be appointed as the Community Council representative on the Standards Committee, until the next Community/Town Council election in May 2027;
- (ii) Lisa Jay and Vik Yadh be appointed for a period of six years from 17th January 2023 as Independent Lay Members of the Standards Committee;

- (iii) a reserve list of Independent Lay Members be established, and that Maeve Williams, Robert Butcher and David Williams be invited to remain on that list for a period of twelve months from 17th January 2023.

The meeting closed at 6.21 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2023 they were signed by the Mayor.

MAYOR