



SPECIAL COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 27TH MARCH 2024 AT 5.00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor M. Adams - Mayor
Councillor J. Simmonds - Deputy Mayor

Councillors:

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

Together with:

D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), M. S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. O'Donnell (Principal Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rate Officer), F. Wilkins (Housing Services Manager), J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

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

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Cushing, N. Dix, G. Ead, K. Etheridge, A. Farina-Childs, J.E. Fussell, A. Gair, S. Kent, A. Leonard, S. Morgan, D. Price, S. Skivens, and C. Wright, together with C. Harry (Chief Executive) and R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J.A. Pritchard declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 – Consultation Outcome – Proposals to Implement Council Tax Premiums on Long-Term Empty Properties and Second Homes, as her son owns a second home in the Caerphilly Borough.

Councillor A. Broughton-Pettit declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 – Consultation Outcome – Proposals to Implement Council Tax Premiums on Long-Term Empty Properties and Second Homes, as she owns a second home in the Caerphilly Borough.

As these were personal interests only there was no requirement for those Members to leave the meeting and they could take full part in the debate and vote. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

3. AUDIT WALES ENQUIRIES RETURN 2022/23.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which presented Council with responses to Audit Wales in relation to enquiries around our management processes relating to the prevention and detection of fraud, and compliance with laws and regulations in respect of disclosures in the 2022/23 Financial Statements.

Consideration was given to the report which asked Council to endorse the response appended to the report. It was noted that, as part of their audit planning and to comply with International Auditing Standards, Audit Wales needs to gain an understanding of how the Council gains assurance over management processes and arrangements in relation to the detection and prevention of fraud and compliance with relevant laws and regulations in the preparation of the Financial Statements.

A Member requested further information in relation to a fraud investigation within CCBC. Members were advised that as this was an ongoing Police investigation, no further details could be provided to Members at this time. The Member sought clarification on the level of fraud involved, and whether it involved a member of staff or a contractor for CCBC. Members were assured that it did not involve a significant amount of money, and if the prosecution were successful, this would then be publicised by CCBC. A Member wished to comment that on a positive note, this incident had been highlighted and was being dealt with.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendation contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 46 For, 0 Against, and 1 Abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

1. Council endorsed the response appended to the report.

4. CONSULTATION OUTCOME – PROPOSALS TO IMPLEMENT COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS ON LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES AND SECOND HOMES.

Councillor J.A. Pritchard declared a personal interest as her son owns a second home in the Caerphilly Borough. Councillor A. Broughton-Pettit declared a personal interest as she owns a second home in the Caerphilly Borough. As these were personal interests only there was no requirement for them to leave the meeting and they took full part in the debate and vote.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which provided Council with the results of the public consultation undertaken on the proposed introduction of council tax premiums on long-term empty properties and second homes in the County Borough.

Consideration was given to the report which also sought Council approval to implement premiums from April 2025.

A Member noted that approximately £1.2 million could potentially be raised if the proposals were approved, and queried whether these additional funds would go towards future house

building by CCBC including social housing. The Member also clarified that 66% of residents that had responded to the consultation were against the proposals. Members were advised that some of the revenue raised would be set aside for staff in the Empty Property Team to be made permanent, as they were currently on fixed term contracts, and additional resources would also be required within the Council Tax team to process the payments if approved. Members were advised that going forward, a report could be brought back to Council to deal with the possible options available for housing with the additional revenue.

A Member sought clarification on a response received in the consultation. Members were advised that 137 respondents agreed that measures should be put in place, and the other part of their response was specific to the Council Tax premiums.

A Member queried the current number of second homes and sought clarification on whether they were 'holiday homes' or 'second homes' owned by individuals due to family circumstances. The Member wished to note that some owners of second homes were unable to get their property 'fit for purpose' due to their financial circumstances, and believed that other owners who had received grants, were not having the required work completed. The Member queried what action could be taken against these owners. Members were advised that a 'second home' under Council Tax legislation would not be a person's sole or main residence but would be substantially furnished. With regards to the grants, owners would be able to apply for a repayable loan from CCBC, and National Empty Homes grants are currently available, and landlords are also offered support with various loans, depending on whether they are intending to rent or sell the property.

In response to a Member query, Officers clarified that if an empty house were up for sale, it would be exempt from any charge for up to 12 months. Members were also advised that the proposed premiums would start from April 2025, and in determining the length of time a dwelling has been empty, no account can be taken of any period before 1st April 2016. A Member queried if there were any properties that had been empty for over 5 years, and whether probate issues were considered with regards to exemptions. Members were advised that there are currently 264 properties that have been empty for longer than 5 years, and that empty properties that are exempt from charges, whilst awaiting probate, would remain exempt until probate was granted.

A Member queried whether the scheme was still in existence, whereby CCBC, in partnership with the property owner, brought the property back to a rental condition. Members were advised that there are a number of schemes and grants available to property owners, and Members were referred to the 'Caerphilly Keys' scheme, whereby prospective tenants are matched with appropriate landlords who are then both supported by CCBC.

A Member sought clarification on how second home properties are valued. Members were advised that where exemptions from premiums apply, when a property is up for sale, the property is expected to be advertised for a reasonable price. Members were also advised that where premiums apply to empty properties, this should act as an incentive for owners to sell their properties if they did not wish to pay the premiums charged and would therefore be advertised at a reasonable price in order to sell as quickly as possible.

A Member queried whether property owners had options to appeal against any premiums charged. Members were advised there is no automatic right of appeal within the legislation, however owners would be offered advice and any support available from CCBC.

Following consideration of the report, 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 52 For, 0 Against, and 2 Abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

1. Council reviewed and considered the consultation feedback attached at Appendix A of the report; and
2. approved the implementation of the following premiums from 01 April 2025: -

Class of dwelling	Premium
Second Homes	100%
Long-Term Empty Properties: -	
Empty longer than 2 years	100%
Empty longer than 3 years	200%
Empty longer than 5 years	300%

The meeting closed at 5.48 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 24th July 2024 they were signed by the Presiding Member.

PRESIDING MEMBER