



## COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 24<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2024 AT 5.00PM

#### PRESENT:

Councillor C. Gordon – Presiding Member  
Councillor E. M. Aldworth – Deputy Presiding Member

#### Councillors:

M. Adams, E.M. Aldworth, C. Andrews, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, S. Cook, D. Cushing, C. Cuss, E. Davies, D.T. Davies MBE, K. Etheridge, G. Ead, C. Elsbury, G. Enright, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, E. Forehead, J. E. Fussell, A. Gair, N. George, C. Gordon, D. Harse, T. Heron, A. Hussey, M. James, L. Jeremiah, G. Johnston, J. Jones, S. Kent, A. Leonard, P. Leonard, C. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Miles, C. Morgan, S. 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, J. Simmonds, 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), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), G. Jenkins (Corporate Director Social Services), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), R. Thomas (Head of Planning), D. Lucas (Team Leader, Strategic Planning), L. James (Principal Planner), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), S. Pugh (Head of Communications) A. Jones (Committee Services Officer), and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer).

#### Also present to receive presentation of awards:

L. Cox, L. Pinney and H. Hotchkiss (Caerphilly Land Charges Team). C. Millington, T. Parker, A. Matthews, J. Powell, R. Howells and the Online Literacy Reading Group (Caerphilly Adult Community Learning).

### RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Presiding Member 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](#). He advised that decisions would be made by Microsoft Forms.

#### 1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Angel, D. Ingram-Jones, N. Dix, S. Skivens, C. Wright

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

## **3. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS**

### **Excellence Awards for Local Land Charges**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection was pleased to announce that Caerphilly Land Charges Team ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> best of the migrated authorities and best in Wales at the Excellence Awards for Local Land Charges held by Land Data. The award was based on key performance criteria which included time taken to register new charges, completeness and accuracy of entries and the time taken to correct errors.

The Infrastructure Act 2015 included provisions to allow HM Land Registry to provide a single, digital Land Charges Service. Council was informed that the Caerphilly Land Charges Team started working with HMLR in 2022 which resulted in approximately 100,000 records being transferred to the new Land Charges Register, thousands of which had to be verified with accuracy by a small team of staff. They met their deadline and transferred the Register to HM Land Registry in July 2023. The Cabinet Member expressed how very proud she was of the work undertaken by the Land Charges Team and that to place 3<sup>rd</sup> is a testament to their dedication as a team.

Not everyone from the team who helped with the migration project were able to attend Council, however L. Cox, whose invaluable knowledge and experience of Land Charges, along with L. Pinney and H. Hotchkiss, who provided spatial and technical expertise for the project, were called forward by the Presiding Member so that Members could recognise the incredible work undertaken.

### **Gwent Adult Learning Partnership Awards**

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities was pleased to announce that Caerphilly's Adult Community Award Winners were A. Matthews (Learner of the Year), R. Howells and J. Powell (Tutors of the Year) and the Online Literacy Reading Group (Learner Group of the Year). Council was informed that Caerphilly Adult Community Learning forms part of the Greater Gwent Adult Learning Partnership, which is led by Coleg Gwent. Every year the Partnership holds an award ceremony to recognise the hard work carried out by staff and learners.

The Cabinet Member also announced that Caerphilly Adult Community Learning were also awarded the Best Performing Unitary Authority out of the 5 Local Authorities that make up the Partnership, which was huge achievement and thoroughly deserved.

The Presiding Member called forward C. Millington, T. Parker, A. Matthews, J. Powell, R. Howells and the Online Literacy Reading Group so that Members could recognise their incredible achievements.

## **4. SPECIAL COUNCIL HELD ON 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2024**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the special meeting of Council held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**5. COUNCIL HELD ON 18<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2024**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**6. ANNUAL MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 9<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2024**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the annual meeting of Council held on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**7. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH 2ND REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UP TO 31 MARCH 2035 - RE-ENGAGING THE LDP PROCESS**

Consideration was given to the report which outlined the findings of the Regional Study on Growth and Migration undertaken for the Cardiff Capital Region, to address one of the conformity objections raised by Welsh Government in respect of the Preferred Strategy for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Local Development Plan up to 2035 (2RLDP). Council agreement was sought on the appropriate way to move forward with the 2RLDP and to consult on a Draft Revised Delivery Agreement for the 2RLDP.

Members were reminded that work on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement LDP had been halted until a regional study on growth and migration had been undertaken. A Consultant Consortium was appointed in November 2023 by the South-East Wales Planning Officers' Society in conjunction with the South-East Wales Strategic Planning Group to undertake the work. Members were asked to note that the overall findings of the regional study compared favourably with the Preferred Strategy and therefore no significant changes needed to be made to it. The 3 conformity issues raised by Welsh Government were outlined, and it was felt that with the deletion of the Maesycwmmmer Strategic Site from the Preferred Strategy and the other 2 issues addressed through the completion of the Regional Study on Growth and migration and the preparation of the Green Infrastructure Background Paper, work could now recommence on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement LDP.

Members were advised that Welsh Government supported the principle of revisiting the Preferred Strategy subject to a second Pre-Deposit Consultation in respect of the modified Preferred Strategy. It was noted that as part of the reengaging plan process a revised Delivery Agreement would also need to be prepared and would be subject to targeted consultation with specific consultation bodies before being reported back to Council for approval prior to its submission to Welsh Government. Members were asked to note that due to the General Election pre-election period which led to the cancellation of the last Council meeting the consultation period for the Draft Delivery Agreement would need to be amended from 6 weeks to 3 weeks if respective timelines were to be met.

Members expressed their disappointment that the Maesycwmmmer site would not be taken forward as it brought several advantages such as a new relief road which would greatly alleviate current traffic issues in that area and clarification was sought as to whether there was any possibility of challenging this decision or amending the proposal to bring it back into the Preferred Strategy.

Officers confirmed that there had been numerous discussions with Welsh Government on the proposed site. However Welsh Government maintained their objections to the site, and this would cause significant problems for the Council should it continue with its inclusion in the 2RLDP. However, there would be an opportunity for the Consortium to pursue the development site through the CJC Strategic Development Plan (SDP), as one of the objections from Welsh Government was that this was a strategic site and should be dealt with at a strategic level and would therefore be appropriate for the SDP. Further clarification

was then sought on the timeline for an approved SDP and Officer confirmed that this could take approximately 5-7 years.

A Member queried if alternate sites had been identified for housing to replace the Maesycwmmer site and whether these potential areas of development were on 'green field' or 'brown field' sites. The Officer confirmed that additional sites would need to be identified. In terms of location there were several prospective sites however, the availability of 'brown field' sites within borough was very limited. This meant that the Council would be looking at a more dispersed pattern of sites on the borders of existing settlements and would involve the use of some green field areas.

Further clarification was sought as to whether the plan would look to identify investment in the North of the Borough. The Officer confirmed that they would welcome investment in the North of the Borough, however he advised that there were viability issues with development in that area but that did not mean that the Council would not investigate development proposals here, even if they were viewed as aspirational.

A Member expressed concern that highways infrastructure was not being developed in line with building development. Officers outlined Welsh Government (WG) Road Review policy and confirmed that as a part of their review WG were looking at pulling back in respect of road improvements. The Officer advised that there were several criteria within the road review that the Council would need to satisfy and one of these was to ensure that any improvements made did not increase capacity on the roads but targeted modal shift to active travel and sustainable transport so that the number of cars on the road did not increase. Therefore, any improvements must be carefully looked at in the context of the review criteria.

Members were reminded that the Council was now 3 years out of its local development plan period and the Officer highlighted the importance of taking the reengagement process forward at this time and emphasised how having a development plan in place drove development forward.

Clarification was sought in relation to coalescence of communities and ensuring that local services such as NHS GPs could meet and increased demand and how the plan would safeguard this. The Officer assured Members that discussions had taken place with the NHS on the plan. In terms of coalescence, it was one of the aspects taken into consideration within the plan, and although there was a need to safeguard individual community identities, sometimes the merging of two settlements through building development brought greater sustainability for both.

Members were reminded that specific sites would be looked at as part of the Pre-Deposit Plan process and assurances were given that seminars would be held with all Ward members to discuss proposals in the early to mid-part of next year.

Reference was made to the consultation process and a Member made a plea for easier access to printed copies for those who were digitally excluded. Officers confirmed that paper copies would be made available on request and assured the Member that all available means of consultation would be utilised to garner as many responses as possible.

A Member referred to the costs associated with developing and submitting the Local Development Plan and asked Officers to emphasise the implications of these costs to Welsh Government. Reassurances were given that Officers were working with the Planning Inspectorate in relation to reducing potential costs.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that subject to an amendment to recommendation 3.3 to read 'a three-week targeted consultation with the Specific Consultation Bodies' the recommendations contained in the Officer's report be

approved. By way of show of hands (and in noting there were 55 for, 1 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The outcomes of the Regional Study on Growth and Migration be noted.
2. The Preferred Strategy of the 2RLDP be revised to address the conformity objections raised by Welsh Government with the aim of undertaking a second Pre-Deposit Consultation on the amended plan.
3. The Draft Delivery Agreement for the purposes of a three-week targeted consultation with the Specific Consultation Bodies be agreed

## **8. PROVISIONAL REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN FOR 2023/24**

Consideration was given to the report which provided Council with details of the provisional revenue budget outturn for the 2023/24 financial year and sought Council approval of proposals for the use of surplus General Fund balances.

Council noted that in a change from previous years 100% of the net projected underspend on the Council's 2023/24 revenue budget would be transferred into General Fund balances. This change was agreed in recognition of the ongoing challenging financial position facing the Council and the requirement to use reserves as a temporary measure to balance the budget. It was noted that the 2023/24 outturn position would result in £13.546m being transferred into General Fund balances and £1.313m into the HRA working balances reserve. However, £6.007m would be drawn down from schools' balances to cover the schools overspend and £0.018m would be drawn down from the Winter Maintenance reserve to cover the in-year overspend on this budget.

Members were advised that although the £13.546m transfer into General Fund balances an increase of £8.648m was welcomed it must be considered in the wider context of the extremely challenging financial position facing the Council. Furthermore, some of the 2023/24 underspends had already been included as savings in the 2024/25 approved budget. Members further noted that the positive outturn position was in part due to Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation projects what focused on improved financial management and spend control. There had also been a strong focus on vacancy management throughout 2023/24 and increased scrutiny and accountability of third party spend.

The Cabinet Member emphasised that the scale of the financial challenge facing the Council required new approaches to service delivery and it was vital that required changes are developed at pace and that key decision are taken early to ensure that the projected savings requirement for 2025/26 to 2026/27 can be delivered.

A Member expressed his surprise in relation to the number of underspends and voiced his concerns regarding the financial pressures facing schools and the implications for pupil attainment particularly those with additional learning needs and in his opinion, Education should be a primary budgetary consideration. Officers explained that the level of underspend of £8m was similar to last year but it was important to note that they had come down significantly in comparison to the previous 2 financial years and emphasised that the underspend was one off money so would not be available year-on-year and the report details proposals where these moneys could be allocated and in terms any areas of growth, this would a matter for all Members to decide when the Draft Budget Proposals came forward to Council next year.

Reference was made to section 5.7 of the Officer's report in relation to Council Tax Collection and clarification was sought as to what happened to those who refused or were unable to pay. Officer explained the action taken to recover Council Tax arrears including referrals to a collection agent and assurances were given that every avenue to recover funds was always fully explored.

A Member made referred to tourism venues within the County Borough and whether valuable assets like the Blackwood Miners Institute and Llanciach Fawr would be safeguarded. The Cabinet Member advised that given the huge financial pressures facing the Council all avenues for potential savings would be explored including tourism venues.

Reference to direct public services such as leisure services and park maintenance and expressed the opinion that it seemed that not enough funding had been allocated to these budgets in the first place and clarification was sought as to whether these budgets would be reviewed to ensure that they were adequately resourced.

Officers confirmed that all areas of significant overspend were being looked at through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly Programme and they would review these areas to understand the reasons for the overspends, ascertain any mitigating factors for the overspend. Furthermore, where there were significant underspends these would also be to identify any possible savings in order to address the £45m financial challenge going forward.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of show of hands (and in noting there were 54 for, 0 against and 3 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The provisional 2023/24 revenue budget outturn position be noted.
2. The recommendation to maintain the General Fund balance at £13.476m, representing 3% of the 2024/25 net revenue budget be noted.
3. The proposed use of surplus General Fund balances totalling £8.246m as detailed in section 5.10 of the report be approved.
4. The proposal that delegated authority on the use of the proposed MTFP Contingency Reserve of £5.266m be granted to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, relevant Cabinet Member and Section 151 Officer be approved.

**9. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR**

The Mayor's and Deputy Mayor's announcements were noted.

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

There were no petitions received.

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

Question received from Councillor R. Saralis to the Leader of Council, Councillor S. Morgan.

Can the Leader provide an update on the Councils' Transformation Programme?

Response from the Leader of Council, Councillor S. Morgan, to Councillor Saralis.

The Mobilising Team Caerphilly Programme has now been running in earnest for around 12 months and has covered significant ground in that time, and the organisation is incrementally becoming more agile, and efficient in the way that it operates.

The Programme, as Members will know, is seeking not just to reduce the cost of delivering services, but also to improve the overall customer experience. We recognise that through transformation, the Council will be smaller in the future which will require us to focus on meeting the 'needs' of our residents rather than the 'wants'.

The Council has prioritized 12 initial projects to form the backbone of the programme, but every single aspect of Council business will need to travel through the programme, to become more efficient, more economic and more customer focused. We simply cannot keep doing things the way we've always done them.

So, things are going well across the programme as a whole, but just as a snapshot, let me tell you about the current position of Transformation in Fleet.

Twelve months ago, our Fleet Service was rated as a red risk and was operating at a significant overspend, because of difficulties with recruitment, the Council was overly reliant on private companies to carry out maintenance, and at high costs. The Service became part of the MTC Transformation Programme and the change in the service is incredible. The Fleet Service now has a full complement of workshop staff, with two highly experienced leaders, with significant private sector experience, who are driving tangible improvements. The overspend is reducing, the length of time vehicles are in the workshop has greatly reduced, and MOT pass rates have risen.

For Fleet, the transformation programme has resulted in lower costs, improved productivity and a change on the risk register from red to amber, with motivated, high calibre staff, taking pride in, and enjoying their work for the Council. Fleet also now have a Vehicle Replacement Strategy which will again, help the Council deliver savings, both in financial and carbon terms.

In the Autumn, Cabinet will need to make decisions on the Outline Business Cases for Catering and Tourism, as well as our future approach to Leisure, Libraries and Home to School Transport later in the financial year.

The budget challenges facing the public sector at present are crippling and show no sign of improvement. Members will no doubt have seen the recent article on Cardiff which acknowledges a £50m deficit likely for the next financial year alone, while other Local Authorities are beginning to signal significant overspend positions, and this is likely to become public over coming months. The pressure is real and cannot be ignored.

Members have received the Outturn report this evening highlighting the Council's underspend at year end. As mentioned previously, this is a clear sign that the ethos of Mobilising Team Caerphilly is beginning to bear fruit as staff begin to 'tighten their belts' through improved management of financial controls and vacancy management.

It is also important to note that the Mobilising Team Caerphilly programme does not make this Chamber immune from having to make tough decisions over coming years, but the approach we are taking means we are making those decisions on our terms. We're doing this by focusing on our corporate priorities and seeking to transform services with the customer very much at the centre, I think this approach sets us apart and I'm grateful to Members for their continued support through the challenging times ahead.

**12. TO RECEIVE AND TO ANSWER QUESTIONS RECEIVED UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 10(3)**

Question from Councillor L. Whittle to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways, Councillor N. George.

Can the Cabinet Member responsible for personnel please give a list of the number of NDA issued during the last 3 years and by what departments please?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways, Councillor N. George, to Councillor L. Whittle.

The Council does not use non-disclosure agreements, but it does use settlement agreements.

100 settlement agreements have been processed during the previous 3 financial years across the Council, including schools. The disclosure of any further detail could lead to information relating to individual payments being identified, which would be subject to a personal data exemption under FOI, as individuals are likely to be identified by this data.

**13. TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 10(12) FOR WHICH A WRITTEN RESPONSE WILL BE PROVIDED.**

There were no questions received to be answered in writing.

**14. ACQUISITION OF 75 TO 77 TREDEGAR STREET, RISCA.**

RESOLVED that the recommendations of the report and the Cabinet decision be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.25 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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 they were signed by the Presiding Member.

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PRESIDING MEMBER