



JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 5.00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston (Chair)

Councillors:

M. Adams, E. M. Aldworth, A. Angel, C. Bishop, C. Bissex-Foster, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, D. Cushing, D.T. Davies, E. Davies, N. Dix, G. Ead, C. Elsbury, G. Enright, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, J. Fussell, A. Gair, C. Gordon, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, S. Kent, A. Leonard, C. Mann, B. Miles, B. Owen, T. Parry, L. Phipps, M. Powell, D. Preece, H. Pritchard, J.A. Pritchard, J. Rao, R. Saralis, L. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, K. Woodland, and C. Wright.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors: S. Morgan (Leader of Council), C. Andrews (Education and Communities), S. Cook (Housing), E. Forehead (Social Care), N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), J. Pritchard (Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change) and E. Stenner (Finance and Performance).

Together with: -

Officers: D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive, R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), J. Williams (Assistant Director Adult Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Democratic Service Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer) K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), H. Lancaster (Transformation Manager – Engagement), T. McMahon (Caerphilly Cares Manager), M. Lewis (Principal Officer Catering), H. Bowen (Inclusion Officer), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), P. Hudson (Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader), N. Chapman (HR Service Manager), S. Pugh (Communications Manager), S. Ford (Communications Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and A. Jones (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

L. Dallimore (Unison Branch Secretary), Ms A. Smith (Speaker for relative of a service user of Meals Direct), Mr G. Jones (Speaker for the Friends of Llancaiach Fawr Manor).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken verbally.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: C. Cuss, G. Ead, A. Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, D. Harse, M. James, L. Jeremiah, J. Jones, A. McConnell, J. Reed, J. Roberts, J. Scriven, J. Simmonds, S. Skivens, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, and A. Whitcombe

Officers: M. S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were declarations of interest from the following Members.

Cllr D. T. Davies declared a personal and prejudicial interest on **Agenda Item No 5 Mobilising Team Caerphilly Future Provision of Meals Direct and The Hive Café, Ty Penallta** in that he received meals direct, as such he left the meeting when the item was discussed and took no part in the debate or vote.

Cllr D. Ingram-Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest on **Agenda Item No 5 Mobilising Team Caerphilly Future Provision of Meals Direct and The Hive Café, Ty Penallta** in that both her parents receive meals direct, as such she left the meeting when the item was discussed and took no part in the debate or vote

Cllr B. Miles declared a personal and prejudicial interest on **Agenda Item No 5 Mobilising Team Caerphilly Future Provision of Meals Direct and The Hive Café, Ty Penallta** in that she has a relative that receives meals direct, as such she left the meeting when the item was discussed and took no part in the debate or vote

3. JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 8TH JULY 2024

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2024 be approved as a correct record, By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 34 for, 0 against, and 2 abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 8th July 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

4. JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 18TH JULY 2024

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2024 be approved as a correct record, By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 33 for, 0 against, and 3 abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 18th July 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 7) be approved as a correct record.

The Chair invited the Leader to address the Committee before the reports were presented.

The Leader thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the committee and he highlighted the current position the Council finds itself in with having to make savings of £45 million. Members were advised of the pressures the Authority was already under across services such as Social Services, Education, Leisure, and Infrastructure which makes up 78% of the Council's spend. Members were advised that difficult decisions were required to ensure the sustainability of the Council for all residents, and he asked Members to take this into consideration when making decisions on the reports presented.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

5. MOBILISING TEAM CAERPHILLY – FUTURE PROVISION OF MEALS DIRECT AND THE HIVE CAFÉ, TY PENALLTA

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities presented the report that provided an update to Members on the outcome of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) consultation on the future provision of Meals Direct and the catering offer at Ty Penallta, known as the Hive Café, and to present a Business Case and set of recommendations for consideration.

The Member provided an overview of the points contained within the summary of the report and advised the Committee that the report would be determined at Cabinet on the 25th September 2024 and that officers would provide a verbal update on the discussions from Joint Scrutiny during the Cabinet meeting.

The Chair invited Lianne Dallimore (Unison Branch Secretary) to address the Committee.

The Unison Branch Secretary thanked the Chair, addressed the Committee, and advised that following Consultation on the proposal to close the Meals Direct Service and the Hive Restaurant which had now closed the results were clear that the Residents of the borough wanted these services to remain, as did the Trade Unions.

Members heard how crucial the Meals Direct Service was to the most vulnerable residents of the borough and how removing the service would affect their mental health and leave them isolated as some had no other support available to them. It was felt that the removal of the service would add pressures on other vital services such as domiciliary care, residential care, nursing care, and could lead to an increase in hospital admissions. The Branch Secretary referred to paragraph 2.1 of the report which referred to the pressures on the health service. A one-night hospital stay in the UK costs on average £400 and she stated that this was much more than the cost of a hot meal.

Referring to the Hive Restaurant Members were informed that it was linked to the Meals Direct Service. The Hive restaurant was also the emergency kitchen within the Council's Emergency Plan. Kitchen and van staff also helped with schools in emergency situations, and it was where every free school meal was prepared during the Covid pandemic. Members were advised that there was scope within both Service areas to increase income and reduce expenditure and Members were asked to endorse further discussions taking place.

The Chair invited Ms Alison Smith who wanted to address the Committee as the daughter of a resident that uses the Meals Direct Service.

Ms Smith provided the Committee with background information on how her Mum became a service user and explained how valuable the service was to her Mum's independence, enabling her to remain in her home and how her Mum and the whole family were concerned about the proposal under consideration.

Members were advised that the Meals Direct Team provided an invaluable service to Ms Smith's Mum as she has mobility issues. The Team had also aided Ms Smith's Mum by raising concerns regarding her health to the family.

Ms Smith highlighted the Council's Website which stated that the Welsh Local Authority Caterers Association had awarded the Meals on Wheels team the prestigious title of specialist Catering Team due to the service they provided.

Ms Smith stated that her Mum's ability to remain in her home without this service would be in doubt and asked that the decision be reconsidered.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

A Member stated that following the Leader's comments about making unpopular decisions and listening to the speakers, certain exceptions had to be made, and he moved option 2 of the recommendations within the report. To cease the provision at the Hive Café, Ty Penallta, and ask Officers to develop a range of further options to make the delivery of Meals Direct sustainable over the long-term. This was seconded by another Member of the Committee.

A Committee Member referred to paragraph 2.2 of the report regarding the savings of £20million and stated that whilst attending a Mobilising Team Caerphilly meeting a few weeks ago he had requested a breakdown of actual costs identified but had yet to receive this information.

In reference to point 6.1 in the report the Member advised that he would have liked to have seen more information on the alternative providers, costs, and a full business case. He also queried if the staff would be transferred over. Reference was also made to point 7.2 and questions were asked on whether obligations would be met under Equality legislation for disabled and vulnerable residents.

Members fully debated and supported Option 2 and all stated that we must protect our vulnerable and disabled residents and the Meals Direct Service.

Clarification was sought on Option 2 in terms of whether or not it meant that the Meals Direct Service would cease at the end of November. It was confirmed by officers that this option would mean that the Meals Direct Service would continue, and officers would develop a range of further options to make the delivery of the service more sustainable over the long-term.

A Member stated that the Council had approximately £185 million reserves which is more than most Councils in Wales and stated that managers should look at other ways to make savings. The Member suggested that the function of the Caerphilly Cares Team was a duplication of the work already being carried out by Voluntary Sector.

In relation to the £20 million savings the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer confirmed that these were permanent savings agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and that full details could be found in the Budget report that was approved by Council on the 27th February.

In relation to the reserves Members heard how the balance at the end of the last financial year was just over £192 million. The officer advised that some reserves had been released to balance the budget, however the majority of the reserves were ring-fenced for a specific purpose. It was confirmed that £26 million of the reserves had been used but that this was unsustainable moving forwards as £45 million needed to be found.

The Deputy Chief Executive commented on the Member's suggestion of making savings within the Caerphilly Cares Team and outlined how the service provided was not a duplication of work carried out by the Voluntary Sector and had been welcomed by Citizens Advice.

One Member queried if Meals Direct Service meals could be prepared by a local external provider but still delivered by CCBC staff. The Member also asked about the plans if the Hive were to close. In particular would vending machines still be provided for the staff, would they be able to still use the space to eat their lunch and socialise during lunch breaks, and the Member also sought clarification on what would happen with the kitchen area and all of the equipment. It was confirmed that if Option 2 was agreed by Cabinet the questions raised would form part of the potential options for sustainability for the service going forward. In terms of the Hive Members were advised that this area would still be available for staff to use in addition to the breakout areas which had microwave ovens and vending machines.

A Member addressed the Committee to say that they would be supporting Option 2 as Meals Direct was a vital service and that further options must be explored. The Member suggested setting up working parties and exploring the better use of volunteers.

Comments were made on how there was already an overwhelming amount of pressure on Social Services and how cutting vital services to vulnerable and disabled residents would only add to these pressures. It was outlined how isolation was a major issue for vulnerable people and that the Covid pandemic showed how it reduces the cognitive ability and the life expectancy of those who are vulnerable.

A Member observed that the Council had a moral obligation to the residents of Caerphilly to ensure that the elderly are looked after.

A Member moved Option 3 in the recommendations which would be to continue with the existing provision at the Hive Café and the existing approach to Meals Direct and that Officers looked for efficiencies within the service provision with the aim of significantly reducing the current subsidy level, and he asked if anyone would second this. This was not supported.

One Member commented that the highest costs for the Meals Direct Service was transport, the meals provided were reasonably priced and many residents would probably pay more and enquired if the Council were promoting the service enough in order to attract new customers.

Officers confirmed that the service was being promoted but that the numbers receiving the service had remained static. In terms of the highest costs for the Meals Direct service officers clarified that the highest costs were for staffing and not transport. The cost of meals provided would be one of the considerations explored following a decision from Cabinet.

Clarification was sought on why there was only costings provided for Option 1 and not for Options 2 and 3. It was confirmed that the authors prioritised the option which allowed the Council to reduce costs to zero as swiftly as possible as this was what the business cases supported.

A Member sought confirmation on what would happen to the Authority if the cuts were not made. Members were advised that in England several Councils were served with statutory 114 notices which meant that they are unable to deliver a balanced budget. Members heard how in England Councils which are unable to present a financial plan, the Government would either give emergency financial assistance or send in a Commissioner to look at the financial position of the Council and come up with a recovery plan. It was suggested that if this happened in Wales a similar process would be followed.

As there were no further questions the Chair confirmed that when the Member had moved Option 3 this was not supported by anyone therefore the vote would be on Option 2. The Chair thanked the Committee and moved to the recommendations.

Members of the Joint Scrutiny Committee considered the Business Case, the Consultation Report, and the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) set out within the report, asked questions, and provided comments as appropriate. It was moved and seconded, that one of the three recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 39 for, 0 against, and 1 abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED Option 2 to Cabinet that the provision at the Hive Café, Ty Penallta be ceased, but Officers develop a range of further options to make the delivery of meals direct sustainable over the long-term.

6. MOBILISING TEAM CAERPHILLY – FUTURE PROVISION OF LLANCAIACH FAWR MANOR

The Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change presented the report to update Members on the outcome of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) consultation on the future provision of Llancaiach Fawr Manor and to present a Business Case and set of recommendations for consideration.

The Chair invited Lianne Dallimore (Unison Branch Secretary) to address the Committee.

The Unison Branch Secretary thanked the Chair and observed that if the proposals were implemented it would see the closure of a unique building and the loss of 34 jobs. Members heard that if the Manor was mothballed it would have a detrimental impact on tourism and culture in Caerphilly borough.

It was suggested by the union official that alternatives should have been explored before plans to close Llancaiach Fawr were proposed, and she suggested that the approach taken to secure the future of Cwmcarn Fforest Drive could have been taken instead. This approach could have potentially prevented the closure of the venue and protected the jobs of all the staff.

Ms Dallimore observed that the cost of keeping safe and preserving Llancaiach Fawr, a Grade 1 Listed building, and the storage of all artifacts would not be cheap if mothballed and that these costs should have been made available at the start of the proposals.

The Chair thanked The Unison Branch Secretary and invited Mr Jones Speaker for the Friends of Llancaiach Fawr Manor to address the Committee.

Members were advised of supportive comments that had been received from a number of public and professional bodies such as The British Museum, The Horniman Museum, and from a former Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, all expressing the importance of Llancaiach Fawr and expressed views to protect it.

Referring to the costs of £30,000 allocated for maintenance and security in the event of it being mothballed, Mr Jones believed that this would not be sufficient and that the actual figure would be much higher.

The Committee were advised that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 highlighted the importance of cultural well-being and if Llancaiach Fawr was to close this would be against the Act. Members were also informed that the Manor acts as a Hub for volunteering events, workshops, and various other activities. All of which would be affected by the closure.

The Chair thanked Mr Jones and invited questions from the Members.

A Member sought clarification on Option 2 and asked if it would mean that everything would remain open until someone else was found to take over running it. The Officer confirmed that if Option 2 was voted on the services would continue until alternative options were presented.

One Member moved Option 2 and provided the Committee with a brief history of the building's acquisition from when he was a Councillor for Rhymney Valley District Council. The motion was seconded.

Disappointment was expressed by a Member on the number of options that were up for discussion and queried whether other organisations had been approached such as CADW and the National Trust. Officers confirmed that several organisations have expressed an interest in investing at the Manor, but CADW and the National Trust were not on this list.

A Member observed that the aim of the report was not to close the facility it was to keep it open, and he fully supported this ambition but had concerns over the costs of mothballing the building.

One Member doubted that the report's Assumptions would come to fruition as it would be difficult to find someone to take over the commercial side of the Manor and also run the Museum.

Clarification was sought on the running costs for the shop. The Member queried why staffing costs had doubled in a year. The Regeneration Services Manager advised that due to understaffing at the shop it was decided to return to the staffing levels of previous years. Further data on the running costs would be passed to the Member outside of the meeting.

The Member also commented that the report showed that the revenue from wedding functions and catering made £324,000 and therefore the Manor should be promoted more as a venue.

One Member sought clarification on whether pursuing commercial options would end if it was decided to retain Llancaiach Fawr Manor was retained by the Council. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services advised that the final decision rested with the Cabinet, but if Option 2 was followed the Council would continue to incur costs until such time as an alternative provider is found.

The Chair sought clarification on the costs of maintaining and securing the mothballed building as Members had concerns that £30,000 did not seem enough to cover these costs. It was confirmed that ongoing discussions were taking place with the Council's Property Services Department.

A Member queried if weddings and functions already booked would need to be reimbursed if the Manor was mothballed. The Member also asked if the Museum would need to be subsidised in the future. Officers confirmed that those who had organised events had been contacted and updated on the current position and no future dates have been booked. It was outlined that some refunding had taken place. In relation to subsidising the Museum, Members heard that if no party was interested in running it then a small subsidy would be required, and further discussions would be needed.

Clarification was sought on the possible revenue if buildings were sold. Officers confirmed that disposal was not necessarily selling the buildings off. It could mean entering into long-term lease arrangements which would generate a rental income with the tenants taking on the responsibility for maintenance of the buildings. It was stressed to Members that no valuations had been undertaken at this stage.

As there were no further questions the Chair thanked the Committee and moved to the recommendations.

Members of the Joint Scrutiny Committee considered the Business Case, the Consultation Report, and the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) set out within the report, asked questions, and provided comments as appropriate. It was moved and seconded, that one of the three recommendations contained in the Officer's report be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 32 for, 4 against, and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED Option 2 to Cabinet that Officers develop a range of further options to make the delivery of Llancaiach Fawr Manor sustainable over the long-term.

The meeting closed at 19:24pm

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2024.

CHAIR