



## SPECIAL CABINET

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2025 AT 2PM

Councillors:

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

Together with:

D. Street (Interim Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director of Economy and Environment)

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. Harris (Head of Legal Services and Section 151 Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and Deputy S151 Officer), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), J. Reynolds (Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager), Dr. P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), S. Pugh (Head of Communications), K. Pugh (Senior Manager, Libraries), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), H. Lancaster (Transformation Manager, Engagement), T. McMahon (Caerphilly Cares Manager), A. Griffiths (Service Delivery Manager) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

#### **RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS.**

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

An apology for absence was received from G. Jenkins (Interim Corporate Director Social Services).

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

Councillor C. Andrews declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to [Agenda Item No. 4 – Consultation on the proposed closure of Bedwas Leisure Centre, Cefn Fforest Leisure](#)

Centre and New Tredegar Leisure Centre in that her husband works at Cefn Fforest Leisure Centre, as such she would leave the meeting when the item was discussed and take no part in the debate or vote.

Councillor E. Stenner declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 3 – To Report on the First Phase Consultation on the Draft Strategic Vision for Library Services and Agree Next Steps in that she is an unpaid Director of the White Rose Resource Centre in which New Tredegar Library is housed, as this was a personal interest only she would remain in the meeting and take full part in the debate and vote.

## **5. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2025/26.**

With the approval of the Chair this item was brought forward on the agenda.

Consideration was given to the report which presented Cabinet with details of the draft budget proposals for the 2025/26 financial year to allow for a period of consultation prior to a final decision by Council on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

Cabinet noted that the report provided details of a range of cost and service pressures that required funding, details of proposed savings and the use of reserves, along with a proposed increase of 7.9% in Council Tax to enable the Council to set a balanced budget for the 2025/26 financial year. It was noted that an updated indicative Medium-Term Financial Plan was appended to the report showing a residual savings requirement of £16.815m for the two-year period 2026/27 to 2027/28, after allowing for savings targets for 'in-flight' projects under the Council's Mobilising Team Caerphilly Transformation Programme.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Performance advised Cabinet that details of the 2025/26 Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement were released on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2024. The Provisional Settlement includes a number of adjustments to the baseline in respect of funding allocated during the 2024/25 financial year to address cost pressures in relation to pay and pension costs, and there have also been some transfers of grants into the Settlement. After building in these adjustments the revised baseline has been uplifted by an average of 4.3% on an All-Wales basis.

Cabinet were reminded that level of increase for individual Local Authorities is determined by changes in datasets that drive the funding formula and for Caerphilly CBC there is a cash uplift of 4.6%. This uplift, along with the adjustments to the baseline provide the Council with additional funding of £25.116m. Whilst this is of course welcomed, the increase needs to be considered in the context of the financial challenge being faced by the Council, with cost pressures totalling £65.897m for 2025/26 alone.

In terms of the draft proposals within the report, they include savings proposals of £21.394m as summarised in Table 6 and detailed in Appendix 2. It was noted that the permanent savings proposals include an in-year savings target of £5.3m for the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme. This will be delivered through projects that were currently 'in flight' and assurances were given that there was an expectation that further significant savings would be delivered in subsequent years once projects have been prioritised for development.

In relation to Council Tax the Cabinet Member confirmed that even with the 7.9% proposed increase for 2025/26, Caerphilly CBC was still likely to have the lowest level of Council Tax in Wales. For a Band D property this would see an increase from £1,446.37 to £1,560.63 giving an annual increase of £114.26 or a weekly increase of £2.20.

Responding to a query in relation to the use of reserves the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer confirmed that £26m had already been used to balance budgets in the last two financial years, and in order to achieve a balanced budget for 2025/26 it would be

necessary for a further call on reserves totalling £4.312m. He emphasised to Cabinet that the use of reserves in this way was not financially sustainable, and the vast majority of reserves were earmarked for projects.

Clarification was sought as to whether projects like school builds would be at risk if the use of reserves as one-off savings was not avoided. The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer confirmed that this could well be the case.

Responding to a query on usable reserve balances the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer advised that this was £189.591m as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, and confirmed that an update on reserves would be reported to the Joint Scrutiny Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025. It was noted that the forecast balance of reserves as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 is £133.497, which is a significant reduction. The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer emphasised his recommendation that a minimum balance on the General Fund Reserve of 3% of Net Revenue Budget should be maintained.

It was noted that the Council held only £16m in reserves as a contingency to meet unavoidable costs and that this sum would only fund services for a period of 10 days.

Cabinet then highlighted the more creative ways in which the Council were working to relieve the pressure on the core budget by accessing alternative funding streams. The Cabinet Member highlighted how grant funding had been used to stimulate economic growth and town centre improvements, including the maintaining and improving of the events programme, funding for posts that will support engagement with local businesses, and an increase in grants to businesses via the Caerphilly Enterprise Fund. A grant has also been secured to support the running costs of the Blackwood Miners Institute whilst alternative delivery models are further explored for the future operation of the venue. The Cabinet Member also highlighted the success of Coffi Vista which now has a new tenant that means that the deficit previously funded by the council has been removed and income is now being generated to support the budget.

In response to a query in relation to unmet pressures the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer confirmed that over the next 3 years the savings requirement is estimated to be £47.456m.

In response to a query in relation to temporary accommodation the Interim Chief Executive confirmed that whilst the budget for this was £4.8m the actual projected spend was £6.3m and could be more by the end of the financial year. Cabinet noted the work being done in relation to voids and bringing empty properties into use and the Cabinet Member expressed his thanks to the Caerphilly Homes Team for all their hard work and highlighted some of the key outcomes achieved. The pressures on private rental accommodation were also emphasised and the consequential pressure on social services was explained.

Regarding Social Services pressures the Interim Chief Executive detailed how the complexity of cases being presented within Children's Services were changing with multi-agency support and multiple interventions being required at a much younger age and therefore for a significant period of time. Within Adult Services, the ageing population demographic and how this impacts on service provision was explained. The impact of pressures within the NHS and the consequential impact on social care provision was also outlined and the financial implications of this were noted. Cabinet was advised that all local authorities across Wales were facing these pressures not just Caerphilly CBC.

Cabinet acknowledged that the draft budget proposals included some difficult decisions and that there would be more difficult and unpalatable budget savings to come, which was why the public consultation process was so important, and the Leader urged everyone to take part.

Following due consideration and for the reasons given in the Officer's report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained therein be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously approved.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The 2025/26 draft budget proposals, including the proposed permanent and temporary savings proposals totalling £21.394m as detailed in Appendix 2 be endorsed.
2. The proposed use of reserves totalling £4.312m as a one-off measure to balance the budget for the 2025/26 financial year be endorsed.
3. The proposed 20% increase in charges for Caerphilly Adventures & Positive Futures as detailed in paragraph 5.4.5. be endorsed.
4. That 100% of any 2024/25 Service Directorate revenue budget underspends will be transferred into the General Fund Reserve as outlined in paragraph 5.5.3 be agreed.
5. The proposal to increase Council Tax by 7.9% for the 2025/26 financial year to ensure that a balanced budget is achieved (Council Tax Band D being set at £1,560.63, which equates to a weekly increase of £2.20 for a Band D property) be supported.
6. The draft budget proposals now be subject to consultation prior to final 2025/26 budget proposals being presented to Cabinet and Council on 27 February 2025 be agreed.
7. The indicative Mobilising Team Caerphilly savings targets of £5.5m and £3.4m for 2026/27 and 2027/28 respectively be noted.
8. The indicative residual savings requirement of £16.815m for the two-year period 2026/27 to 2027/28 be noted.

**3. TO REPORT ON THE FIRST PHASE CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT STRATEGIC VISION FOR LIBRARY SERVICES AND AGREE NEXT STEPS.**

Consideration was given to the report that sought to update Cabinet on the outcome of the first phase consultation on the Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028. The report also sought to inform Cabinet of consequential changes to the original proposals and the reasons for them and sought Cabinet's approval to commence the second phase consultation to understand, in more detail, the implications of potentially closing any community libraries and developing Community Hubs.

Cabinet noted that the 'Draft Library Service Strategic Vision' had first been considered by the Joint Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and the views of the committee were provided within the report.

Cabinet acknowledged the huge value that communities placed on their libraries and sought clarification as to how the service would continue a 'Hub' model over fewer sites. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services confirmed that the existing geographical spread of libraries meant that staff were spread too thinly. The move to the Hub model would ensure a better focus of services, improved resilience and provided a 'front door' to other Council Services, the Third Sector and Community Groups.

Cabinet noted that a different approach was being proposed at New Tredegar and Newbridge Library and further clarification was sought on this. The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services confirmed that there were 2 main reasons for the change of approach at these sites. Firstly, as the Council was the anchor tenant at these sites the removal of the rental release paid to the Management Committee would threaten the sustainability of the wider building and the other services housed within it and secondly, the outcome of the first phase of the consultation had highlighted the strength of feeling that the closure of these libraries would be significantly detrimental to the nearby communities.

Responding to a query in relation to the 'human' impact of the 'Hub' model, the Caerphilly Cares Manager outlined examples of how individuals were assisted to maximise income, access tenancy support, contact social housing landlords preventing the risk of homelessness for one individual, and how by having access to services in one place and providing face to face support was improving outcomes. The Officer also outlined how staff had responded to the new working model and had seen the difference that this made to more timely outcomes for service users in a single visit. The role of the Third Sector within the 'Hub' model was also detailed, and Cabinet were advised that since its opening Rhymney Library now hosted over 40 Partners.

Clarification was then sought as to the impact that the 'Hub' model had on footfall and Officers confirmed that in terms of the Rhymney Hub in 2022 footfall had been 16,379 in 2024 this had risen to 34,355.

Responding to a query as to the difference between Tier 1 and Tier 2 Hubs, the Caerphilly Cares Manager confirmed that Tier 2 Hubs had less space to offer all the services provided by a Tier 1 but would still look to replicate the community benefits and provide a front door to services. Tier 1 Hubs would follow the Rhymney Library model. Cabinet noted that provision would be based on extensive consultation with communities to identify their specific needs.

Cabinet, given the strength of public feeling about libraries, welcomed the fact that these proposals would be subject to a seven-week period of consultation. Clarification was then sought as to what support would be provided to Community Groups should they wish to provide a book lending service. The Caerphilly Cares Manager advised that the operation of an independent community library or community book lending service would be very different from a Council run library however support could be given to Community Groups who expressed an interest in terms of Community Asset Transfer or advice and guidance at set up.

Following due consideration and for the reasons given in the Officer's report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained therein be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously approved.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The outcome of the first phase consultation on the draft Strategic Vision for the Library Service 2024-2028 and the development of the review be noted.
2. Proceed to a second phase consultation that will focus on the proposed development of the Community Hubs which will house library services, and the potential closure of some library locations be agreed. This seven-week consultation to begin on the 22nd of January.
3. Newbridge Library, located in the Memorial Hall, will remain as a library and be developed as a Tier 2 Hub, along with Ystrad Mynach Library be agreed.
4. New Tredegar Library, located in the White Rose Centre, will remain open, to be reviewed after three years, and that work will begin with the Management Committee to model the library service to be delivered over that period be agreed.

#### **4. CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF BEDWAS LEISURE CENTRE, CEFN FFOREST LEISURE CENTRE AND NEW TREDEGAR LEISURE CENTRE.**

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval to undertake a consultation exercise on a proposal to close Bedwas Leisure Centre, Cefn Fforest Leisure Centre and New Tredegar Leisure Centre.

Cabinet noted that Caerphilly Council operates more leisure centres than any other Local Authority in Wales. Cabinet further noted that Sport and Leisure Services had been identified within the Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) programme for formal review with the aim of delivering a more financially sustainable future offer through a programme of facility rationalisation. To this end and utilising the tools and process associated with the MTC project approach consideration be given to the closure of Bedwas, New Tredegar and Cefn Fforest Leisure Centres.

Cabinet welcomed the fact that these proposals were again subject to a seven-week consultation process and in relation to this assurances were sought that there would be 3 separate sections within the consultation one for each of the Leisure Centres and it was confirmed that this would be the case and that the outcome of the consultation process would also be reported separately in order to give Members the best view possible of each individual centre.

Further information was then sought regarding the Integrated Impact Assessment that would be written for each of the centres and the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised that the Council had obligations and duties under the Wellbeing of Future Generations, across public sector duties, equalities and Welsh language duties, socio economic duties and the way that all those considerations were brought together was through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and these considerations need to be kept in the forefront of Members minds when making decisions. Reference was made to the links within the report to the integrated impact assessment for the 3 centres and it was noted that some potential negative impacts had been identified including increased travelling times to alternative sites, however the alternative provision across the county borough were within a short travelling distance with the vast majority of the communities within a 5 miles radius of the 4 of the strategic leisure centres identified in the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy. These 4 strategic leisure centres have a longer range of opening hours and a wider range of facilities than the 3 leisure centres under consideration in the Officer's report. Reassurances were given that as responses were received from stakeholder and communities the IIA would be updated to reflect these and would be used to inform future reports.

In response to query in relation to the progress of the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy an update was provided in terms of 3G Pitches, the development of the Hockey and Athletics Hub, Fitness Suites, Aquatic Provision and it was confirmed that currently there were a number of projects in development including additional 3G pitches and a new facility opening in Abercarn for community use. The Officer felt that it should be highlighted that the strategy did not concentrate just on leisure centres and emphasised there had been improvements and investment on other recreational opportunities such as the joggers' path at Blackwood and tennis court provision across the county borough including developments which supported ease of access. Collaborative working opportunities arising from the strategy were outlined and these included working with local schools to ensure that their facilities were available to benefit the wider community and working with local groups on opportunities for Community Asset Transfer

Cabinet congratulated the Sport and Leisure and Team for all their efforts and successes to date and that this had been accomplished under ever shrinking budgets was applauded. It was again emphasised that the strategy was not just about leisure centres, but included playing fields, parks, 3G facilities, school facilities being opened to communities in the

evenings and weekends. Special mention was made of Jared Lougher and his fantastic work in obtaining grant funding.

In response to question in relation to the cost of leisure provision the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services confirmed that the current net budget was £4.2m. The financial pressures on the Council were outlined and the impact that this had on non-statutory service provision was emphasised.

Following due consideration and for the reasons given in the Officer's report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained therein be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously approved.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report a consultation exercise regarding the proposal that Bedwas Leisure Centre, Cefn Fforest Leisure Centre, and New Tredegar Leisure Centre close on the 31st of July 2025 be approved.

The meeting closed at 15.06 p.m.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

---

Chair