



## COMMUNITY COUNCIL LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON 20TH NOVEMBER 2019 AT 6.00PM

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PRESENT:

Councillor J. Ridgewell - Chair  
Community Councillor J. Rao - Vice Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, A. Gair, V. James, L. Jeremiah, Mrs T. Parry, J. Ridgewell, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, R. Whiting, B. Zaplatynski

Cabinet Member for Social Care and Wellbeing - Councillor C. Cuss

Community/Town Council Representatives

Aber Valley	-
Argoed	- J. Moore
Bargoed	- H. Llewellyn, R. Carrol, Mrs. H. Williams (Clerk)
Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen	-
Blackwood	-
Caerphilly	-
Darran Valley	-
Draethen, Waterloo and Rudry	- K. Stanworth, J. Garland, V. Steel (Clerk)
Gelligaer	- J.A. Pritchard, Ms. C. Mortimer (Clerk)
Llanbradach	- Ms. C. Mortimer (Clerk)
Maesycwmmmer	- Ms. J. Rao (Vice Chair), Ms. R. Kedward (Clerk)
Nelson	- Mrs. G. Davies, Mr. T. White (Clerk)
New Tredegar	-
Penyrheol, Trecenydd and Energlyn	-
Rhymney	-
Risca East	-
Risca Town	-
Van	-

Together with:-

C. Harrhy (Interim Chief Executive), S. Harris (Interim Head of Business Improvement and Section 151 Officer) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Angel, A. Farina-Childs, A.G. Higgs, P. Leonard, M. James, M.E. Sargent.

Community Councillors A. Bedlasi, P. Yandle, J. Moore, C. Morgan, A. McDonnell, J. Hibbert, P. Roberts, R. Chapman, A. Reed, B. Gingell, B. Allen, D.T. Williams, J. Blackburn, B. Hancock, J. Leek, T. Graham.

and Clerks S. Hughes (Aber Valley), G. James (Argoed), J. Hold (Blackwood), P. Davy (Caerphilly), G. Williams (Darren Valley & Rhymney), D. Gronow (New Tredegar), H. Treherne (Penyrheol, Trecenydd & Energlyn), G. James (Risca East) and M. Jones (Van).

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Declarations of interest were received at the start of the meeting as follows; full details are minuted with the respective item. Agenda Item No. 5 – Draft Budget Proposals 2020/21 Councillors R. Whiting, V. James, T. Parry and C. Councillor J.A. Pritchard declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest in relation to proposals for Community Centres. Agenda Item No. 7 – Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report 2020-21 - Councillors R. Whiting, V. James, C. Andrews, A. Gair, A. Whitcombe, C. Thomas, L. Jeremiah and T Parry declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest as the matter referred to Members Payments and Allowances. As the interests declared were personal only the aforementioned Members remained in the meeting and took part in the debate.

## **3. MINUTES – 10TH JULY 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2019 (a copy had been sent to each member) were received and noted.

## **4. MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

## **5. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21**

Councillor R. Whiting declared a personal interest as Community Centres will be affected by the draft budget proposals and he was a Trustee of Channel View Community Centre in Risca.

Councillor V. James also declared a personal interest in that he is Chair of Maesycwmmer Community Centre Management Committee.

Councillor T. Parry likewise declared a personal interest in that she is on the Management Committee of her local Community Centre.

Community Councillor J.A. Pritchard declared a personal interest in that she is Treasurer of Hengoed Community Centre.

The Interim Head of Business Improvement and Section 151 Officer presented the Draft Budget Proposals for 2020/21 as part of the formal consultation process.

The Officer confirmed that the Caerphilly County Borough Council budget was derived from £211.105m from Welsh Government Revenue Support Grant, £57.509 share of Business Rates, also from Welsh Government and £69.131m from Council Tax, which provided only

20% of the overall income. This clearly demonstrated how sensitive budgets are to changes to Welsh Government funding. To provide further context to the budget position, Members were advised that the Education Directorate received £130m (39%) of the funding, Social Services and Housing £92m (27%), Corporate Services £20m (6%) and Miscellaneous Finance costs of £47m (14%).

Due to the ongoing programme of austerity savings totalling £103m have already been delivered across the Council for the period 2008/09 to 2019/20 to ensure that balanced budgets have been set for each financial year. These savings have been required due to a combination of reduced Welsh Government funding, inflationary pressures and increasing demand on services, in particular Social Services.

The Officer advised that the Council was facing an expected position this year in that the authority would normally receive details of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement in early October. However, due to a combination of factors, including the continued uncertainty around Brexit and the forthcoming General Election the announcement of the Provisional Settlement for 2020/21 has been delayed until the 16th December 2019. Therefore the draft budget before Members has been based on the latest information available and a range of assumptions, which includes proposed savings of £8.485m. To ensure that a balanced budget can be achieved there is also a proposed increase of 6.95% in Council Tax.

In terms of the key areas in the 2020/21 Draft Budget Proposals report Members were advised that whole-authority cost pressures included £4.792, for APTC and Teachers, £0.065m for the Foundation Living Wage, £3.315m Employer Pension Contributions, £2.506m Non-pay inflation at 1.7% and £0.549m for other school service pressures. Members were referred to section 5.2.20 and 5.2.26 of the Officer's report which detailed the inescapable services pressures facing the Council totally £3.446m.

In referring to the draft savings proposals for 2020/21, the Officer confirmed that these were detailed against 6 categories; 'Being More Efficient', 'Doing Things Differently', 'Service Reductions/Cuts', 'Team Caerphilly Transformation Strategy', 'Temporary Reduction in Debt Charges Budget' and '2019/20 Savings in Advance'. Members were referred to Appendix 2 of the report which provided the detail.

The Officer confirmed that an 8 week consultation process will now start including drop-in sessions at locations across the county borough, surveys, the Council's website and Social Media and engagement with key stakeholder groups. Special Scrutiny Committee meetings have also been scheduled throughout December for Elected Members to review the savings proposals in detail.

The Liaison Committee were asked to encourage Town and Community Council Colleagues to take part in the consultation process and advised that any specific comments can be sent to the Community Council Liaison Officer directly, by the questionnaire or via social media or drop-in sessions and assurances were given that any comments made would be included in the report on the outcome of the consultation process.

In concluding the presentation, the Officer advised that final confirmation of the funding we will receive for the 2020/21 financial year will be received on the 19th December 2019 and final budget proposals would then be presented to both Cabinet and Council in February 2020 and this would include feedback on the extensive consultation process undertaken. The Liaison Committee were advised that it was currently anticipated that further savings of £27m would be required for the four year period 2021/22 to 2024/25 and the current approach of salami slicing budgets cannot continue which is why the Caerphilly has developed a new Transformation Strategy "Team Caerphilly – Better Together" which would be the key new operating model for the future service delivery.

The Interim Chief Executive outlined the ethos behind the Team Caerphilly, Better Together Transformation Strategy and explained that it was fundamentally about three simple things, improving the way we work, enhancing relationships with our communities and partners and developing proud and trusted staff.

The Liaison Committee were advised that with continuing austerity the Council is faced with the reality of communities that require more services for more complex needs with less money. Caerphilly has benefited from sound financial decision making which has given it greater resilience than many other local authorities. However with further savings to be made over the next four years it is impossible for the Council to continue to deliver every service in the same way it has previously done. Where possible budget proposals have sought to minimise the impact on front line services and Officers have looked internally at ways of delivering more efficiently and effectively the 800 services that the Council provides everyday.

Partnership working will be a vital element of the transformation process and this includes the 8500 staff, 73 Elected Members, 18 Community Councils, 181,000 Residents, Statutory Partners and Businesses, in fact anyone with a stake in Caerphilly. The strategy will look first at improving the way the Council works by conducting service reviews, this will ensure that we are serving communities in the best possible way and that provision is adapted to suit individual needs. Digital technology will be a vital component going forward and the Council has invested in two digital platforms 'Abavus' and 'Thoughtonomy' which would be used to automate repetitive administrative tasks such as data entry, allow staff to be retrained and redeployed into other service areas.

Secondly the strategy will look at how the Council can enhance its relationships with Communities and Partners and Community Councils will be a key partner relationship. Reference was made to the recent consultation on the Local Toilet Strategy and the closure of Public Toilets it was accepted that the consultation process could have been done better from a lessons learned prospective, however the way in which different organisations have taken that particular service forward has illustrated how services valued by a community can be protected and provided by that community and the Interim Chief Executive welcomed the opportunity to have a conversation with Community Councils on similar opportunities and how a mature and purposeful relationship can be developed.

The Interim Chief Executive accepted that this was a massive cultural change however with Council Tax making up only 20% of the overall budget and continued cuts to the Local Government Settlement expectation that the Principal Authority can continue to provide all services is no longer realistic.

Reference was made to the way in which Communities responded to the 'Beast from the East' coming together to help each other and how well the public had responded the 'sin bin' campaign in relation to recycling. By implementing an easy to use system coupled with a comprehensive engagement process recycling targets have been exceeded. It is this spirit that the new transformation strategy will embrace and drive forward into new ways of working

Finally the Interim Chief Executive explained the strategy's focus on 'Proud and Trusted' Staff and how they would be empowered through re-training and development opportunities to seek new challenges and develop new skills. It was noted that roadshows had been used to engage with groups of staff on what the strategy means for them and how they can engage with it.

In conclusion Members were advised that Public and Partner engagement on the strategy would begin in April 2020.

The Liaison Committee thanked the Interim Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer for their presentation and questions and comments on the budget proposals were invited.

Clarification was sought in relation to Council Tax recovery rates and whether the proposed increase could be reduced if a greater level of recovery was achieved. The Section 151 Officer confirmed that over 97% of Council Tax charges are achieved due to a robust arrears recovery process.

The Liaison Committee expressed concern in relation to the reduction of funding to the Voluntary Sector and particular reference was made to GAVO and CAB organisations. Concern was expressed that any cut to their grant funding would see Town and Community Councils stepping in with funding in order to retain valuable community services such as these.

Further concerns were also expressed in relation to proposed cuts to funding for Community Centres, Members felt that usage should be looked at as part of the decision making process as this proposal could cause many to close and given the positive impact they had on community wellbeing this issue deserved further discussion.

Reference was then made to saving proposal B08, Closure of Trehir Household Waste Recycling Centre; the Member felt that more information was need on the health and safety issues that would need to be addressed in order to maintain the services from the site. Although the expansion of the Penallta site was welcomed the Member was of the opinion that the nature and cost of the issues at Trehir needed to be fully detailed before a decision on its future should be made.

As raised in previous years, Members would not support any increase in charges for rat treatments, the Member felt that given the public health risks from rats this proposal should be removed.

Clarification was sought in relation to how the noting of Members comments and concerns would be incorporated in to the consultation process, it was confirmed that the minutes of the meeting would be a part of the final report to Council in February. Members were also encouraged to submit comments either through the Liaison Officer or to the Section 151 Officer.

The Interim Chief Executive reiterated that all comments would be welcomed and she would be more than happy to enter into a dialogue with Community Councils on what else could be brought in to replace what they felt to be unacceptable proposals.

Members welcomed the comment of the Interim Chief Executive in relation to the consultation on the Local Toilet Strategy.

In relation to the saving proposals regarding the reduction in the Highways Infrastructure budget and felt that given the current condition of roads that this be reconsidered. Concerns were also expressed in relation to the removal of CCTV cameras, the increases proposed for School Dinner and Meals on Wheels provision. With regard to the Council Tax increase, the Member recalled several years where there had been no increase and queried if this had been a good idea, given the steep increases the public were now facing. It was also felt that the Council Tax increase would negatively impact already struggling families. The Member also requested that paper copies of the questionnaire be made available for those not online and asked that Nelson be one of the locations for a drop-in session.

The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that she would welcome discussions with Community Councils as to how they could help to retain the services that they value and reemphasised that the Principal Authority was not in a position where it continue to provide all the services it previously did. The continue provision of the CCTV Camera service would certainly provide an opportunity for partnership working with Community Councils.

Concerns were expressed in relation to the impact on children's health and wellbeing that the reduction in the Children's Play Area maintenance budget would have. It was noted that for each proposal an Equalities Impact Assessments had been undertaken and these would be available with the agenda papers for each of the Special Scrutiny Committee meetings.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services confirmed that Glan-y-Nant Community Centre was not in CCBC ownership the proposal would be to remove a subsidy currently being paid to them and advised that Children's Play areas would not be lost; the proposal sought to reduce the current maintenance schedule. With regard to previous Council Tax freezers the Cabinet Member agreed that this had created a 'catch up' situation however this decision had been taken by a previous administration so it would be inappropriate for him to comment further.

Clarification was sought in relation to the proposed removal of the rail link bus between Blackwood and Ystrad Mynach and how much would be saved by its withdrawal. The Member was not surprised to see this particular proposal as it hardly seemed to be used. The Section 151 Officer confirmed that a saving of £80k would be made.

The Cabinet Member encouraged all present to take part in the consultation process, this would allow the Council to identify the strength of feeling with regard to specific proposals and should the final settlement allow, take those feelings into account when making final decisions.

In conclusion the Liaison Committee were encouraged to be positive and proactive in their responses and try to offer alternatives or collaborative suggestions and were asked to note that the closing date for the consultation was the 13th January 2020.

The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that she would be meeting with Blackwood Town Council shortly and would be keen to engage with all the Community Councils in this way.

## **TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL LIAISON COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to the following items raised by the Town and Community Council Liaison Committee

### **6. COMMUNITY COUNCIL REPRESENTATION ON THE CAERPHILLY PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD – UPDATE**

The Community Council Liaison Officer confirmed that a permanent seat plus one alternate had been offered to Town and Community Councils on the Caerphilly Public Services Board on the understanding that the nominees would represent the sector as a whole rather than an individual community or town and that they would provide also provide feedback to the sector.

It was agreed that Community Councillor Judith Pritchard would be the main representative with Community Councillor Gill Davies as alternate and Community Councillor Jo Rao in reserve.

Further to this it was agreed that a standing item would now be placed on the Community Council Liaison Committee agenda so that an update on the Caerphilly Public Services Board could be provided at each meeting.

### **7. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

Councillors L. Jeremiah, R. Whiting, T. Parry, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, A. Gair, C. Andrews and V. James declared a personal interest as the report related directly to the payment of

salaries and allowances for Councillors. It was noted that as there was no decision to be made on this matter only comments being sought as part of the consultation process there was no need for Members to leave the meeting. Furthermore it was noted that a dispensation had been previously granted by the Standards Committee in relation to this matter.

The Community Council Liaison Officer referred Members to the document attached at page 29 of the agenda pack and highlighted the key areas that related to Town and Community Councils.

The Officer highlighted determination 13.11 as it related to Members in receipt of Band 1 or Band 2 Senior Salary from a Principal Council cannot receive any payment from any community or town council and determination 13.13 which mandated a payment of £150 be made for Members of all community and town councils which seemed to be in direct conflict with 13.11. The Committee were advised that this had already been highlighted to the IRP as part of the consultation process.

Members noted that there was no mention of HMRC within the report and advised that they were awaiting further advice regarding the tax implications for those that claim the allowances and if and how they should be reported.

The Officer reminded Members that the IRP were also keen to receive positive responses with regard to the various determinations in order to ensure that they remained in the final report.

Clarification was sought in relation to the deadline for responses and this was confirmed as the 10th December 2019.

The meeting closed at 19:30pm.