



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 24TH JUNE 2020 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden (Leader) - Chair

Councillors:

C. Cuss (Social Care and Wellbeing), N. George (Environment and Neighbourhood Services), C.J. Gordon (Corporate Services), B. Jones (Education and Achievement), S. Morgan (Regeneration, Transportation and Sustainability), L. Phipps (Homes, Places and Tourism), and E. Stenner (Finance, Performance and Planning).

Together with:

C. Harry (Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services), D. Street (Corporate Director – Social Services and Housing), M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities).

Also in Attendance:

K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), A. Cullinane (Senior Policy Officer - Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation) S. Harris (Acting S151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER

The Leader introduced the first remote meeting of Cabinet since the Coronavirus pandemic and, on behalf of the Council, expressed her deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost their lives due to the coronavirus and held a minute silence in their memory.

The Leader, in discussing the Pandemic explained that it has had a significant impact on us all, creating a national emergency, which has resulted in significant changes to service delivery and ways of working for the whole workforce. Cabinet were asked to note however, that Team Caerphilly has risen to this new challenge in their response to the crisis and their willingness to adapt and support the community at this critical time. Whilst further information on the response to the Pandemic will be discussed in more detail later in the agenda, it was felt it would be remiss not to refer to the outstanding workforce and their efforts during this time.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

3. CABINET – 11TH MARCH 2020

RESOLVED that subject to an amendment in relation to Minute number 5 – Education Achievement Services (EAS) Business Plan (2020-2021) and Local Authority Annex 2020-2021, paragraph 8, which should state “Delegation rates to schools has increased by 94% whilst the EAS staff profile has reduced by 48% since 2012”, the minutes were approved as a correct record.

4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet were provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports from 24th June 2020 to 23rd September 2020. Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and therefore subject to change.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Forward Work Programme be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme be noted.

MATTERS ON WHICH EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WERE REQUIRED

5. WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

The report sought Cabinet endorsement of the progress made during the financial year 2019-2020 against four specific areas of Welsh Language work, as required under the regulatory framework for implementing the Welsh Language Standards. Following this, the report will then be published online by the deadline of 30th June 2020, as required by Welsh Language Standard 158.

Cabinet noted that the Council has a statutory duty to produce an annual monitoring report on implementing Welsh Language issues under current legislation and in compliance with Standard 158.

It was noted that the information required for 2019-2020 covers four required key areas- Complaints from the Public; Staff Language Skills; Welsh Medium Training Provision and Recruiting to Empty Posts.

The report provided an update to Members on the Council's current position in relation to the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 statutory requirements, and outlined the good progress made by service areas in embedding arrangements for delivering services through the medium of Welsh and increasing the Welsh Language skills capacity of the workforce.

The report content evidenced that the work done to date is moving in the right direction. The good progress and momentum will be maintained by continuing to work with partners and

responding to help, advice and best practice from the Welsh Language Commissioner and other regional and national bodies.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Cabinet Member, in noting that 1 formal complaint has been received in relation to a Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Response letter, sought confirmation that the complaint was due to the letter being sent out in English only and the reason for this. The Officer confirmed that the letter was sent to all residents of the Caerphilly County Borough as a matter of urgency in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Community Support. However, since this time, all further correspondence has been sent out bilingually, including letters, emails and social media updates. In addition, Officers wished it noted that the report states that the complaint was responded to within corporate deadlines and upheld and wished to amend the wording to clearly outline that the breach was recognised.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the report be approved. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report: -

- i) The content of the annual report be noted;
- ii) The publication of the information be agreed as a record of progress towards, and compliance with, the relevant Welsh Language Standards.

6. THE COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The Leader introduced the report and wished it noted that the Council's primary role is to protect its people and place and with the exemplary work of staff across the Authority, this has been possible. The delivery of services has changed, but the quality of service has continued to a high standard and staff have gone above and beyond with huge logistical challenges, working from home, or redeployed to other roles, to ensure the provision and delivery of services and protection of the vulnerable. Whilst it was noted that the total cost of the Virus is yet to be determined, it was felt that residents could be assured they were in good hands.

The Chief Executive outlined the key points within the report which provided Cabinet with an overview of the Council's response to the coronavirus pandemic to date and an overview of the approach taken to identify, mitigate and manage strategic risks in response to Covid-19.

The Chief Executive highlighted the current medium level risks the Council is managing and reaffirms the policy principles of "TeamCaerphilly – Better Together" transformation plans and the key principles upon which services will be provided.

Cabinet noted that the emergence of the Coronavirus across the world and more recently across the UK has posed a significant and unprecedented challenge to the way of life and service provision. In response to the Coronavirus pandemic and lock-down, and over several days, priorities and ways of working were refocussed, repurposed and reshaped to ensure the Council is best placed and equipped to respond to the immediate needs of communities. The report presented an overview of the far reaching "TeamCaerphilly" response to date and outlined the next steps.

Members noted that the primary purpose throughout the pandemic has been to "to protect our people and place". Cabinet were assured that the much-needed service provision continued to the people of the borough and work continued to protect our place. The important and essential role as a civic leader has been brought to the forefront over recent weeks; reassuring and protecting communities and staff.

It was noted that staff have been exemplary, and a debt of gratitude is owed to so many of them. The ethos of “TeamCaerphilly – Better Together” has been demonstrated on so many levels, each day, and Senior Management are all so very proud to be part of and privileged to serve our communities.

It was outlined that the virus will remain with us for some time yet and the resilience of the organisation and communities must be ensured and protected throughout and it is this primary objective we will continue to focus upon over the forthcoming months.

Cabinet thanked the officer for report and discussion ensued.

Cabinet were asked to note that from the beginning the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board region has been a hotspot for the virus, which has thankfully changed during recent weeks. However, at the beginning of lockdown the Council was required to close services quickly, implement emergency management procedures, change services and ways of working in order to maintain service delivery, protect our people and place.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the majority of the 500+ services have continued, albeit working differently, such as from home or in redeployed roles. A number of frontline staff, such as Leisure Centre staff were redeployed into roles such as the delivery of Free School Meals, for which 343,000 meals have been delivered to date and the Free School Meal take up has increased. Staff in Finance have been responsible for the administration of Welsh Government Grants to small businesses, which has totalled over £30m to date. Housing staff continue to support tenants across the county borough. Many teaching staff have been redeployed to provide support for Key Workers with childcare provision in Hubs across the county borough and Care Home staff have provided a safe environment for our residents and provided over 80,000 hours of home care. The scale of support has been exceptional; however, it is feared that the virus will be with us for some time and work should continue to change the R rate. In addition, it was noted that contact tracing work has commenced, with a number of staff being redeployed to this area.

Cabinet thanked the Chief Executive for the detailed report and exceptional work that has been provided by Team Caerphilly and it was noted that several questions were posed by Councillor K. Etheridge in relation to the report. The Leader requested that the Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer address the questions.

1. *In relation to recommendation 3.1.4 “Reaffirm the policy principles of “TeamCaerphilly – Better Together” transformation plans and the key principles upon which services will be provided” and whether this Policy would need to be presented to Council.*

The Monitoring Officer explained that this would not require a Council decision as this policy was a cabinet function and the recommendation requests that Cabinet reaffirm the policy.

2. *In relation to recommendation 3.1.6 “Request a further report is presented to Cabinet, estimating the potential financial impact of the Council’s response to the Pandemic”*

The Monitoring Officer explained that this decision may require a decision of Council, depending on the funding source identified and having consideration for financial procedure rules of the council.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the response and discussion ensued.

The Cabinet Member for Education wished to note her gratitude to the staff within Education who has risen to the challenge posed by Covid-19 and met the needs of learners across the borough. The Cabinet Member also queried what work has been undertaken in the Hubs and how this has helped shape the preparations for schools returning. Officers explained that over 1500 staff have been working within the Hubs under the stewardship of 20 Head Teachers to

provide childcare to over 800 children of Key Workers. As a result of this, a number of key safety measures have been implemented and tested. Full risk assessments have been conducted, and reduced capacity has been tested as a result. Signage, routines, social distancing, cleaning routines, personal hygiene and pupil and staff wellbeing practices have all been tested and shared. In addition, it was noted that Idris Davies 3-18 School has provided a tour on Social Media to demonstrate the safety measures in place prior to pupils returning.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Planning expressed her thanks to the organisation for all their hard work during this time and sought the current position on Business Grants. The Acting S151 Officer explained that the Business Rates Team is effectively acting as an agent for the Welsh Government and has made 2,781 payments, totalling £32.4m. This puts Caerphilly CBC in the top quartile of Welsh Local Authorities in terms of the percentage of allocated funding that has been distributed to businesses and other eligible organisations. Members were asked to note that the deadline for applications is 30th June, and extensive work has been underway to contact those businesses and eligible organisations yet to apply. Correspondence has been sent via letter and email, as well as posts on Social Media. It has proved successful in that a further 89 grants have been approved in just the last 2 days totalling £920k.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing expressed his thanks to the staff in Social Services who have risen to the challenge and continued to provide exceptional service to the most vulnerable across the Borough, in particular following the early issues experienced around PPE and testing and welcomed the announcement from Welsh Government for a payment of £500 to frontline workers. The Cabinet Member sought further information on future plans for Health, taking into account recent experiences and the possibility of a second spike. Officers explained that the preparation is 2-fold, in that preparations are being made on a corporate level, and in partnership with other Local Authorities across Gwent, and the Aneurin Bevan Health Board in order to develop an emergency plan. It was noted that partnership working plays a significant role in the preparatory works and the challenges and experiences gained to date will be learned from. Members noted that the Grange Hospital has opened in order to assist with hospital admissions due to the virus, which hasn't been required to date, but is there if required.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services thanked all staff for the continued support and efforts and, in noting that the Authority was changed overnight, sought clarification whether it would ever go back? Officers agreed that the transformation was indeed overnight and wouldn't have been possible without the unprecedented effort from Customer and Digital Services. In referring to the report, it was noted that over 500 laptops and nearly 3000 Office 365 and Microsoft Teams Licences were issued in order for staff to remain connected. Many staff or Members had not had the use of Teams previously, which has been a learning curve, and with support and training, the challenge has been overcome and services continue to be delivered. In addition, the Officer explained that as a result of the Pandemic, it is clear that work is something you do and not a place you go, and with the prospect of social distancing being around for some time it is anticipated that the building will be used very differently and is unlikely to return to the previous working practices, with a blend of agile and office based working.

The Cabinet Member for Homes, Places and Tourism echoed the messages of thanks to staff and sought further information on the impact the pandemic has had on construction projects and how this has been managed. The Officer explained that there has been a fantastic effort from services such as waste, parks and leisure to ensure the continuation of services. In terms of construction, it was noted that Central Government had never stopped construction projects, provided safe social distancing measures could be in place. However, it was decided that all construction projects would be suspended during lockdown and since this time, a safety matrix has been developed, in which each of the projects undergo a risk assessment and provided they meet the requirements, are unlocked and the works continue.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Neighbourhood Services thanked all staff for their response during the Pandemic and queried whether the tonnage of waste collected has increased with more people working from home. Officers explained that with the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) closed during the lockdown and the collection of bulky items also suspended, there has been a 15% increase in tonnage. The refuse collection services have maintained a seamless service throughout the pandemic, continuing to collect food, green, household and recycling waste from homes in the same manner as before the lockdown commenced. In addition, it was noted that the Community has recognised the efforts of the waste department, providing praise for their work, which is greatly appreciated.

The Cabinet Member, in noting that the Leisure Centres have closed during the Pandemic, sought further information on the work of the staff during this time. Officers explained that many of the staff have been redeployed into different roles, such as assistance with business grant administration, delivery of Free School Meals and part of the buddy scheme, providing services to vulnerable residents for example collecting prescriptions or shopping. In addition it was noted that the National Exercise Referral Scheme has continued to provide a service to those in need. Online classes have been made available to users and for those unable to access the internet, exercise DVDs have been developed and provided to users.

The Chief Executive thanked the gratitude noted to the staff, and in addition to the Cabinet for their strong leadership, commitment, flexibility and the excellent working relationship with Officers, which has enabled these efforts to take place so seamlessly, and our people and place have continued to be protected. It was added that the TeamCaerphilly Mantra, be bold, be brave, be brilliant has been done collectively.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report: -

- i) the scale of the Council response to the Coronavirus pandemic to date be noted;
- ii) the approach taken to identify, mitigate and manage strategic risks in response to Covid-19 be noted;
- iii) the current medium level risk the Council is managing be noted;
- iv) the Policy principles of "TeamCaerphilly –Better Together" transformation plans and key principles upon which services will be provided be reaffirmed;
- v) the "trade-off" between the need to preserve life and stop the spread of the virus and the achievement of the goals set out within the Corporate Plan be recognised and noted;
- vi) a further report be presented to Cabinet, estimating the potential financial impact of the Council's response to the pandemic;
- vii) further progress reports be presented to future Cabinet meetings;
- viii) the overall approach taken by the Council in response to the Coronavirus pandemic be approved.

7. COVID-19 DECISION-MAKING ARRANGEMENT

The report provided Cabinet with the changes that had to be introduced to ensure decisions could continue to be made during the period of lockdown, as well as setting out the plans for a return to elected member led decision-making in accordance with the new Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) regulations 2020.

It was noted that on 23rd March 2020, UK Government introduced a period of national lockdown which restricted the free movement of the public and sought to shield and protect the vulnerable in our community.

With the movements of staff and elected members restricted and elected members unable to meet and make decisions, the council's constitution provides for decision-making powers to be delegated to the Chief Executive.

The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 were passed by Welsh Government on 22nd April 2020 and made a series of amendments to local government legislation that pave the way for a return to political decision-making for Council's across Wales.

The report outlined the changes that were made, explains some of the key changes to decision-making that the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 have introduced and provides a timescale for the reintroduction of the political decision-making and scrutiny committee structures.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report, and it was noted that several questions were posed by Councillor K. Etheridge in relation to the report and the Leader requested that the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services address the questions.

1. *A timetable for Scrutiny Committee meeting with dates to recommence – surely this will be before the AGM in September, and can Cabinet actively consider commencement in August.*

The Director outlined that the focus over the summer is for all 73 elected members to receive the necessary equipment and training to ensure the AGM runs well. It is anticipated that Scrutiny Committee meetings will recommence in late September.

2. *When do you envisage emergency delegated powers on all major decisions will revert to Scrutiny, Full Council and Cabinet?*

The Director outlined that now that Cabinet has resumed, the powers delegated to the Chief Executive while elected members could not meet, fall away. Council will meet for the first time in September and it is anticipated that Scrutiny Committees will begin meeting again from the end of September. In the absence of Scrutiny Committee meetings, Scrutiny Chairs and Scrutiny Vice Chairs will be consulted on reports that will subsequently be considered by Cabinet.

3. *An update on the IT so all elected members can participate as Team Caerphilly.*

The Director explained that Members of the Planning Committee and Cabinet have now received the necessary equipment and training to participate in Remote Meetings, and the facilities are available to a small number of other members.

The programme of equipping and training Members will now focus on the remaining members with a view to securing the opportunity to fully participate in the AGM on the 3rd September.

4. *In regard to 5.2.5 of the Officers Report, the guide for Councillors refers to Chairs remaining in post until May 2021, and surely this is only Guidance (can the Monitoring Officer confirm this is guidance only and not mandatory). Can the following proposal be considered?*

“Confirmation that all Chairs of Scrutiny are elected/ nominations at the proposed AGM scheduled for September 2020, and not remain in post until May 2021”, and if amendment is required to standing orders, it be considered.

The Director explained that the AGM in September will elect the Chairs of Scrutiny as is usually the case. Of course, if the Chairs that are ultimately elected are Chairs currently in post, then they will of course continue until May 2021.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the response and discussion ensued.

A Member, in noting the questions wished it noted that the Leader has invited each of the Leaders of the opposition parties to have regular meetings during the current crisis and lockdown, which has been taken up by the Leader of the Plaid Group via Microsoft Teams, but despite a number of requests, the Independent Group Leader had declined to participate.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers Report: -

- i) the decisions made by the Chief Executive under delegated powers be noted;
- ii) the implications of the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 on decision-making be noted;
- iii) the timetable and approach for the reintroduction of elected member led decision making be endorsed;
- iv) it be noted that in the first instance the actual cost of providing members with the necessary IT equipment to participate in remote decision-making meeting will be claimed against the Welsh Government (WG) Covid Grant;
- v) it be agreed that if the costs are not deemed as eligible expenditure from the WG grant then they be funded from the Member Services Reserve, which currently has a balance of £202k.

The meeting closed at 11.47am.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 22nd July 2020.

CHAIR