



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden (Leader) - Chair

Councillors:

S. Cook (Social Care), N. George (Waste and Public Protection), C.J. Gordon (Corporate Services), S. Morgan (Economy and Enterprise), L. Phipps (Housing and Property), J. Ridgewell (Environment and Infrastructure), E. Stenner (Performance and Customer Services) and R. Whiting (Learning and Achievement).

Together with:

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

Also in Attendance:

M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager), S. Harris (Acting S151 Officer), Shaun Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), Paul Hudson (Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), K. Watkins (Communications & Tenant Engagement Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. CABINET – 9TH SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th September 2020 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 9th September 2020 to 28th October 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. LEASEHOLDER CHARGES

The report, which was considered by Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 17th September 2020 outlined a proposal to revise existing charges to leaseholders, so that Caerphilly Homes can recover the actual cost incurred for providing the service and the establishment of a leasehold buy back policy.

The report outlined Caerphilly Homes' proposal to increase the leaseholder management fee currently charged to reflect the actual costs incurred for providing the service, these costs are currently subsidised by tenants via the Housing Revenue Account.

Cabinet also noted the proposal to introduce charging for specific services that are recoverable under the terms set out in the various leases that are in place.

It was noted that currently the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) bears the burden of unrecovered costs incurred for providing services to leaseholders. However, Caerphilly Homes should neither subsidise the services received by leaseholders nor seek to make a surplus income from the levied charges. Therefore, it is important that Caerphilly Homes adopts a more robust and transparent charging policy in order to demonstrate fairness and value for money.

Cabinet noted that Officers recognise the financial impact the proposals contained within the report will have on leaseholders and therefore included, for information, the mechanisms in place to assist leaseholders in meeting the various costs incurred and proposals for introducing a leasehold property buy back policy.

Cabinet were asked to note an amendment in the report at 5.6, that the first increased payment would not be requested until September 2022 not 2021, as stated in the report.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Cabinet Member sought clarification on the deferral of the start date to September 2022 and whether this was as a direct result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Officers referred to the typing error in the report and explained that the bill for leaseholder charges often take up to 18 months to collate and send and therefore the charge date of September 2022 is as a result of service delivery and timeframes and not a direct impact of the Pandemic.

The Leader thanked the Officer for the report and was pleased to note that charges will be made on actual costs and welcomed the phased increase.

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

- i) The proposed increase in leaseholder management fees and the introduction of recharges for providing specific services be approved;
- ii) A phased increase of the leaseholder management fees as outlined in section 5.6, option 2 of the Officers report to become effective from April 1st, 2021, be approved;
- iii) To establish a Caerphilly Homes leasehold property 'buy back' policy, to be implemented in consultation with the Cabinet Member for housing and Property.

6. A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR RECOVERY

The report sought Cabinet agreement on a Strategic Framework for Recovery that will support the Council and the wider County Borough to recover whilst continuing to support the Wellbeing Objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2018-23.

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided an unprecedented set of challenges to Council's and the communities they serve since March 2020. During this time the Council's strategic focus has been to "protect people and place".

Cabinet received a report in June 2020 that provided an update on the significant work that had been undertaken by the Council and its staff to support these strategic aims. The same report was received by full Council on the 10th September 2020.

The events of late August and early September have revealed that the pandemic is still "live" and the growth in cases within the County Borough proves categorically that we remain with the response phase. Such occurrences can lead to reprioritisation of resources and disruption to routine work schedules as staff concentrate on an immediate emergency response. However, prior to these recent events, the council has been beginning to plan for and move to recovery. It is therefore important that a Framework for managing the recovery across Caerphilly is in place to guide next steps and a new strategic focus is adopted.

Cabinet noted that the report outlines a strategic aim for our Recovery, together with a set of underlying principles and values through which our recovery work will be guided.

The Chief Executive outlined that Caerphilly are currently in the Response mode of the plan, in which flexibility is critical in order to meet the needs of the borough and its residents. Members were reminded that the Pandemic is very much with us and could take a long time to recover, however the priority continues to protect our people and our place.

Cabinet noted the learning experiences which have been gained as a result of the current Pandemic and the positive relationships built with communities during this time. It was noted that this relationship is imperative as we move towards a recovery phase, in particular as work with the community will be required to reshape the organisation, and meet the social, economic and environment needs which will be presented.

The Chief Executive highlighted the links to the Wellbeing Objectives and provided Cabinet with a detailed outline of each of the 5 Strategic Principles within the report.

The Director for Education added the recovery work was paused as a result of the local lockdowns, and therefore some staff members have been redeployed in order to meet the current demands and Heads of Service have been asked to revise plans and consider the implications the second wave will have during the winter period.

A Cabinet Member, in noting the reference to the Wellbeing Objectives within the report sought assurances that the Corporate Review will reflect the principles of the Wellbeing of

Future Generations Act. Officers assured Cabinet that this will be considered throughout the process.

A Cabinet Member sought further information on the regional work to implement the Framework. Officers explained that in order to deliver on the Framework, there will be a partnership approach required. Work is underway with the PSB in order to embed the agenda, as well as G10 and Emergency Planning Platforms, in order to mitigate the impact of the Pandemic on communities and businesses alike. In addition, regular meetings are underway with partners on the Cardiff City Capital Region and partner agencies in Social Services in order to consider the approach to protecting care homes and the health sector during the winter period. Cabinet were asked to note that there will be an expectation from Welsh Government for a greater focus on partnership working moving forward.

A Cabinet Member thanked the Officers for the report and noted the exceptional work that has commenced since the beginning of the Pandemic and lockdowns in March, for the flexibility of the authority and for the rapid change in service delivery and thanked Officers for their commitment and efforts during this difficult time.

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 officer's report the Strategic Recovery Framework for Caerphilly be approved.

7. COVID 19 – ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

The report provided Cabinet with an overview of the economic recovery framework which comprises of three distinct phases:

- The Restart Phase;
- The Revive Phase;
- The Renew Phase

Cabinet noted that the Covid-19 pandemic is causing unprecedented disruption to our communities and the local economy. In response the Council has prepared a framework for recovery which aims to support the Council and the wider county borough to recover. The framework sets out 5 underlying principles, one of which includes “Business support”.

The County Borough faces immediate challenges as the effects of Covid-19 are impacting across all sectors, businesses and jobs. Business Partners face the urgent task of understanding the evolving implications of Covid-19 for their business and are struggling to understand how to respond. Therefore, the Council are trying to support businesses and people who are facing redundancy with the massive challenges that lie ahead. The Economic recovery framework supports the “Business support” principle and the report outlines the economic recovery framework in use, based on three distinct phases as outlined above.

The Officer explained that there are three phases within the programme, Restart, Revive and Review Phase. It was noted that works are underway within the Restart Phase of the Framework, and timescales are uncertain at this time, but significant works are underway to assist Businesses and Employees alike to mitigate the implications of the Pandemic on the Business environment. Communications are key throughout the process and as a result of a robust communications plan, several grants have been allocated to support local businesses during the lockdown phases.

Work with partners is underway to consider the implications of the end of the furlough scheme and redundancies that follow as a result of businesses downsizing. Links have been made to look at job matching and upskilling employees where possible to meet the demand for temporary and permanent employment, in particular in manufacturing.

Collaborative works have been underway with Licensing and Trading Standards to support the Hospitality Sector, in particular with furniture and accommodating outdoor space for service delivery, as well as utilising schemes such as the 'Eat out to help out' scheme.

It was noted that the Economic Plan will feed the Revival Phase, and a consultant has been employed to provide a preliminary report. There are a lot of uncertainties at this phase, such as the outcomes of Brexit and development of a suitable vaccine against the spread of Covid-19.

Cabinet noted that the Renewal Phase will link in with Masterplans, looking to accelerate some projects outlined within the plans, to encourage and aid recovery.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

The Leader thanked the Officer for the report and significant work undertaken by the Business Support Team and Finance to disseminate the grants. In addition, it was noted that staff within unionised businesses have access to Wales Learning Fund, in which training opportunities are available.

A Cabinet Member, in noting the comprehensive report, sought further information on the funding available for Creative Arts. Officers explained that there is funding of just under £60m available to businesses within the field of Creative Arts, which encompasses a number of areas, including Freelance. The grants will be administered by the Arts Council Wales, Welsh Government and Local Authorities, and information is available online in respect of the eligibility criteria. Officers agreed to provide the link to the criteria, for Members to disseminate.

A Cabinet Member sought further information around redundancies, in particular the support and job match opportunities in place for highly skilled engineers and utilisation of vacancies within businesses in the Cardiff Capital Region Areas. Officers explained that there are works under way to consider job match where possible and employment mentors and support from the Department of Works and Pensions are being utilised where possible. In addition, it was noted that there is a focus to support retraining, in particular in the manufacturing sector, where gaps have been identified and job matches may take place.

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 officer's report: -

- i) The significant government response and rapid roll out of financial and business support that has taken place in the Restart Phase be noted, to help businesses in the County Borough;
- ii) The research that is being undertaken during the Revive Phase to understand any longer lasting impacts of Covid and a potential no deal Brexit on the local economy be noted;
- iii) The Strategic Direction proposed for the Renew Phase be agreed.

The meeting closed at 11.35.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 14th October 2020.

CHAIR