



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 24TH MARCH 2021 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden (Leader) - Chair

Councillors:

S. Cook (Social Care), N. George (Waste and Public Protection), C. Gordon (Corporate Services), L. Phipps (Homes and Places), 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) and M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities).

Also in Attendance:

A. Cullinane (Senior Policy Officer - Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), K. Watkins (Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), M. Harris (Committee Services Support Officer/Chauffeur) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Councillor K. Etheridge (Blackwood Ward Member)

Observing – Councillor C. Mann

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed, unless the meeting moved into exempt session, but would not be live streamed, however a recording would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here To View](#). She advised that decisions would be made by Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor S. Morgan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. CABINET – 17TH FEBRAURY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4. CABINET – 24TH FEBRUARY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

5. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet were provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports from 24th March 2021 to 21st April 2021. Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and therefore subject to change.

Cabinet discussed the Cabinet Forward Programme and highlighted some amendments, which Officers agreed to update.

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 subject to the aforementioned amendments, the Cabinet Forward Work Programme be noted.

EXECUTIVE DECISIONS THAT ARE NOT SUBJECT TO CALL-IN

6. EXEMPT MATTER

Members considered the public interest test certificate from the Proper Officer and concluded that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and it was

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting whilst the item is considered because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as identified in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

7. WELSH GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC SITES PROGRAMME – OPPORTUNITIES FOR NESS TAR, CAERPHILLY. (NOT RECORDED)

The report afforded Cabinet the opportunity to consider Welsh Government's loan offer and requirements.

Cabinet were reminded that this item has been deemed an urgent item, with agreement from the Mayor, and therefore is not subject to Call-in.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report, the recommendations at paragraphs 3.1, be approved.

Recording of the meeting resumed.

8. WELSH GOVERNMENT RETAIL, LEISURE & HOSPITALITY RATE RELIEF SCHEME 2021/2022

The report provided Cabinet with details of the Welsh Government (WG) announcement that a new temporary business rate relief scheme, the 'Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief Scheme' will be made available for the financial year 2021/22 only.

It was noted that relief granted by the Authority under this new scheme is to be reimbursed by WG by way of a specific cash-limited grant but, before any relief is awarded, the Authority must consider and adopt the new scheme.

The report recommended that the Council endorses the new relief scheme in accordance with the WG guidance set out in Appendix 1.

Cabinet noted that the adoption of the scheme, as set out at Appendix 1 is obligatory because WG has prescribed the details for the scheme. The Authority must formally adopt the new scheme set out in the guidance at Appendix 1 in order to obtain the WG grant funding.

Cabinet were reminded that this item has been deemed an urgent item, with agreement from the Mayor, and therefore is not subject to Call-in.

Cabinet thanked the Officer and Cabinet Member for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member raised concerns for the team, who have worked tirelessly administering business grants and sought clarification on whether there was sufficient capacity to administer the additional monies proposed, so as not to increase pressure on the service. The Officer assured Cabinet that whilst the team have been working exceptionally hard to administer the grants, should the recommendations be endorsed, the monies will be administered as part of the automatic process, which is the reason for the urgency of the report, and will reduce pressure on staff.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's Report: -

- i) The 'Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief Scheme 2021-22' (the 2021/22 Scheme), be agreed in accordance with the guidance set out at Appendix 1 of the Officers Report and the provisions of section 47(1) (a) and section 47(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988;
- ii) That the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer will use delegated powers to award the relief be noted;
- iii) The proposal set out in paragraph 5.6 be supported in order to maximise take-up by ratepayers and minimise administration costs for the Authority, the rate relief will be applied directly to eligible ratepayers' bills based on records already held by the Council's Business Rates Team;
- iv) That Officers of the Authority will make the business community aware of the 2021/22 Scheme through its usual channels, including its website and social media be noted. In addition, it be agreed that where a business is not granted relief through the process set out in paragraph 5.6, they will be asked to submit an email explaining how they satisfy the scheme criteria to enable the Business Rates Team to determine their eligibility or otherwise.

EXECUTIVE DECISIONS THAT ARE SUBJECT TO CALL-IN

9. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING AND IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2019-2020

The report informed Cabinet of the progress made during the financial year 2019-2020 against targets in the Council's current Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020, and for Cabinet to approve for publication on the Council's website.

It was noted that the Council has a statutory duty to produce an annual monitoring report on Equalities issues under current legislation. The requirements are very detailed as to what relevant information must be included in the annual monitoring and improvement report (attached in full as an appendix).

The amount of information presented is therefore in order to ensure that the regulatory body involved (the Equality and Human Rights Commission) are provided with full evidence of the Council's compliance and commitment to those statutory duties.

The Strategic Equality Plan – Annual Monitoring and Improvement Report must be published by the 31st March the following year.

In addition, the Officer wished it noted that 5.4 of the report should read "The report demonstrates the Council's progress during the financial year 2019-2020 against targets in the Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020".

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Members discussed the report at length and raised several queries around the data and information within including the impact of the pandemic on services and service users and clarification on data around discriminatory incidents in schools. Officers explained that work is underway as part of the Covid recovery plans to ensure that services are accessible to all members of the borough and further clarification would be sought from Education around the discriminatory incidents in school's data and circulated to Cabinet.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's Report the annual monitoring and improvement report be approved for publication on the Council's website by the 31st March deadline.

10. REVIEW OF CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY AND UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY

The report which was considered by the Audit Committee on 19th March 2021 sought Cabinet endorsement on the model Concerns and Complaints Policy at Appendix 1 of the report which is based on the model document issued by the Ombudsman together with the associated Statement of Principles attached at Appendix 2. These principles underpin the complaints handling process.

In light of the introduction of the new Model policy it is felt timely to ask Cabinet to review and endorse the provisions of the existing Policy for dealing with Unacceptable, Persistent or Unreasonable actions by Complainants. Cabinet were also asked to support the mechanisms for reporting, as set out in paragraph 5.11 of the Officers report.

The Officer provided Cabinet with the views and comments from the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 19th March 2021, which were noted by Cabinet.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Members discussed the report at length and raised queries around the response to complaints during the pandemic and the format of the response. It was noted that there have been some delays in which the complainant has not had a response within the stated 10 days, however, they were kept up to date with the process and notified of the reasons for any delay. Members were assured that all correspondence to complaints are provided in the same format in which they were received.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

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

- i) The views of the Audit Committee be considered and the model Concerns and Complaints Policy at Appendix 1 of the Officers Report, the Statement of Principles at Appendix 2 and the Unreasonable Persistent or Unreasonable actions by Complainants Policy at Appendix 3 be agreed;
- ii) The reporting mechanisms be agreed so that Cabinet will receive reports twice yearly.

11. WHITE PAPER ON RE-BALANCING CARE AND SUPPORT – PRESENTATION.

Following discussion and for the reasons outlined at the meeting, it was agreed that the item would be deferred to a later date and rescheduled on the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

12. PEN MARCH WIND FARM – MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The report sought Cabinet approval to enter into a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with RWE, a renewable energy company, for a proposed wind farm development at land above Rhymney.

It was noted that initial discussions have been held between the Council and RWE as to the possibility of a shared ownership wind farm development on privately owned land north of Rhymney.

RWE are keen to proceed with this development and require the Council to sign up to the MoU to give them the comfort to allocate resources to modelling the shared ownership options for consideration.

It was noted that if a model is developed which is attractive to both parties, the Council would look to take a 'stake' in the development. Simplistically, it is likely that this will consist of a percentage of the build cost. The Council would then receive the same percentage return on the revenue generated by the project. The Council will also use the MoU to explore maximising the community benefits attributed to the project.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

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

- i) The signing of the non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding (MuO) be approved;
- ii) It be approved that Officers work with RWE and the Welsh Government Energy Service to amend the MoU so it reflects the councils aspirations for the scheme.
- iii) It be approved that Officers work with RWE to explore shared ownership models; and
- iv) It be approved that shared ownership model options be presented to Cabinet at a future date for further discussion.

13. CAR PARKING CHARGES.

The report provided Cabinet with an update on the latest position with the Economic impact on town centres caused by the coronavirus pandemic and to recommend a further period of free car parking to support the local economy.

It was noted that many businesses within the County Borough have faced significant challenges as a result of Covid-19 and the lockdown and/or trading restrictions that have resulted. This included many town centre businesses and particularly the town centre hospitality sector.

Supporting town centres is a key feature of the Council's over-arching regeneration strategy (A Foundation for Success) and the Area Regeneration Masterplans that sit under the over-arching strategy.

The length of Welsh Government lockdown periods and the resultant restrictions on the retail and hospitality sector have placed significant pressure on the high street and businesses within our town centres. This continues to make the economic position extremely challenging for our town centre businesses.

It was noted that on 17th June 2020 the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, Cabinet Members and Acting Section 151 Officer took a delegated powers decision to temporarily suspend car parking charges until 31st December 2020 as part of the Covid economic recovery plan. On 9th December 2020 Cabinet took a further decision to extend the suspension of car parking charges until 31st March 2021.

In light of the continued economic challenges and continued imposition of trading restrictions this report therefore seeks Cabinet approval to further extend the temporary suspension of car parking charges until 30th September 2021.

Cabinet welcomed Councillor K. Etheridge - Blackwood Ward Member, who wished to thank Cabinet and Officers for the proposal to further defer Car Parking Charges in Town Centres to September, but asked whether it would be possible for this to be deferred to April 2022, in order for businesses to take advantage of the Autumn and Christmas period and encourage more visitors to the town centres. In addition, Councillor Etheridge asked Cabinet to consider the removal of charges on a permanent basis, using Welsh Government funding for Town Centres, which is being utilised in other Local Authorities.

Cabinet thanked the Councillor for the comments and the Officer provided a response to the points. It was noted that the car parking charges will be reviewed in September, however Members were asked to consider the financial implications for the permanent removal of charges. In addition, Cabinet were assured that the Welsh government loan funding referred

to by Cllr Etheridge has been awarded to the Local Authority, however the funding is to be generally utilised for one-off expenditure as part of a regeneration and placeshaping agenda and is not intended as a long term replacement for revenue funding streams such as car park charging income.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued and assurances were given that the Car Parking Charges will be reviewed in September.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

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

- i) A further extension of the temporary suspension of car parking charges until 30 September 2021 be approved, subject to further review at that time;
- ii) It be agreed that the estimated income shortfall of circa £324k be funded from the £2.713m Covid-19 Earmarked Reserve approved by Council at its meeting on 10th September 2020.

The meeting closed at 11.09am

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 7th April 2021.

CHAIR