



SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 23RD JUNE 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard - Chair
Councillor G. Kirby - Vice Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs E. M. Aldworth, C. Cuss, Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, L. Harding, G. Johnston, C. P. Mann, R. Saralis, G. Simmonds, J. Taylor and L. G. Whittle.

Cabinet Members:

Cllr. C. Gordon (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services), Cllr. L Phipps (Cabinet Member for Housing) and Cllr. Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Customer, Performance and Property Services).

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), H. Lancaster (Senior Communications Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

A. Hubbard (Wales Strategic Migration Partnership), C. Hennigan (Home Office) and S. Lakey (Clear Springs Ready Homes).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairperson reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and 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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Miles and Mrs M. E. Sargent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL - PROPOSALS FOR ASYLUM DISPERSAL AND AFGHAN RELOCATION

The Cabinet Member for Customer, Performance and Property Services presented the report to seek the views of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee prior to a report to Cabinet on 7th July 2021 on the local authority's participation in the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Scheme and to seek the Committee's views on the relocation of Afghan Nationals. Members were informed that of the twenty-two local authorities in Wales five are Asylum Dispersal Areas (ADA): Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Wrexham and Conwy. A recent approach has been made by the Home Office, working with the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, and through Welsh Government, for more local authorities to participate in the scheme to alleviate pressures in the asylum system and share the role across other local authorities in Wales. It was explained that the report considered the implications of the authority becoming an ADA and makes a number of recommendations to manage the implementation of the scheme, proposing a gradual start and a review after 12 months.

The Corporate Policy Manager provided background information to the report and Members received a context presentation on the Journey of Asylum Seekers in Wales (2001-2021) from the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership Officer.

Points of clarification was requested on various aspects of the report and Officers responded to the points raised.

The Scrutiny Committee was very supportive of and sympathetic to the plight of asylum seekers and the importance of providing support to people who have suffered very difficult lives and experiences. Clarification was sought on whether the Council will receive additional funding to support the families and Members were advised that the financial section of the report sets out that the Council will not receive any additional funding. However, the Home Office has contracts in place to manage the housing allocation issues and support for asylum seekers through providers such as Clearsprings Ready Homes and Migrant Help. In addition, Welsh Government funds a number of Asylum Seeker Refuge Support Contracts which the Council can assist with referrals into. Concerns were raised regarding the funding element, particularly in relation to the increased cost in social care. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that regular meetings are being held between Welsh Government and the Home Office and that conversations around the need for more funding from the Home Office are taking place.

Members felt it was very important to ensure the public understand that refugees have experienced terrible situations and highlighted the need to counter misleading social media assertions. In response to a query, Members were assured housing will be sought through the private rented sector. A Member suggested providing more detail on the plight of asylum seekers, such as pen portraits. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that there are plans in place to develop a list of frequently asked questions for the website and an offer was received from the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership to assist with this.

A query was raised regarding the availability of support for families and access to services. Members were advised that the benefit of starting small with a few families will allow this scheme to develop. Members were further advised that, in terms of access to services, the

location of the property will be suitable for the individuals being dispersed there and it will be ensured that support can be accessed.

The Scrutiny Committee heard a personal account from one Member who has visited Afghanistan and saw first-hand the work carried out by Afghan interpreters supporting the British Armed Forces. Members asked that Cabinet closely monitor the situation for Afghans who need to relocate and wished to express their support as there is a debt owed to people who have provided support to our troops. Members were advised that although there is currently a 4-month financial support package for this scheme representations have been made to extend this further. Members also heard from one Member about the work done in the Aber Valley to welcome and assist Vietnamese refugees following the Vietnam war and how important it was to provide that support.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee provided their views on the local authority's participation in the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Scheme and considered the options proposed.

It was moved and seconded that the recommendation to begin with a smaller number (5) family properties and evaluate the success after 12 months be approved. By way of electronic voting and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 13 for, 1 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

Option 2 - to begin with a smaller number (5) family properties and evaluate the success after 12 months.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee provided their views on the relocation of Afghan Nationals, which will be reflected in the consultation section of the report to Cabinet.

4. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FUND

The Cabinet Member for Customer, Performance and Property Services presented the report to seek comments and endorsement on the proposed funding criteria and grant management arrangements for the Community Empowerment Fund from the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee prior to it being considered by Cabinet and to seek views on appropriate support required to enable Elected Members to effectively champion the Community Empowerment Fund across their communities. Members were advised that in the Council's recent far-reaching resident survey 'The Caerphilly Conversation', 78% of respondents to that survey felt it was a positive suggestion to make a community budget available to residents, to enable them to do more things for themselves in future. 89% of respondents also agreed that offering incentives to communities would likely encourage them to take greater pride in their area.

The Senior Communications Officer provided an overview of how the Community Empowerment Fund will work and advised Members that it is planned to review the procedures after 12 months.

Members sought clarification and further information on the area forum budget. In response, the Scrutiny Officer agreed to forward the query on to the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer and provide a response to Members via e-mail.

The Scrutiny Committee sought further clarification on eligibility and sought views on what the Community Empowerment Fund could be spent on. Members were informed that the recent residents survey sought views of what the Community Empowerment Fund could be spent on with seven priority areas emerging from the feedback. It was highlighted that funding would be utilised to support communities to become more sustainable and resilient. Members were advised that Ward Members will have a pivotal role in considering what projects they will

endorse to ensure they keep within the allocated funding for their area. Members sought advice on how they would prioritise when there are a number of potential projects and limited funding. It was highlighted that in wards where there is more than one Elected Member, Members are encouraged to work alongside other Ward Members and local organisations, and also consult with their communities to see which projects have most support.

The Scrutiny Committee sought advice on potential conflicts of interest and Members were advised of the Declaration of Interest process, whereby any Member can declare their interest when endorsing a bid. Members were also advised that if there is more than one Elected Member in their ward they could ask a ward colleague to endorse the bid as it is the expectation that Members will work together for the benefit of the whole community.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations contained within be approved. By way of electronic voting and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 13 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) Endorsed the proposed approach to the delivery of the Community Empowerment Fund and commented on and endorsed the funding criteria and grant management arrangements for the fund, prior to it being considered by Cabinet.
- (ii) Offered their views on appropriate support required to enable Elected Members to effectively champion the Community Empowerment Fund across their communities.
- (iii) Supported a review of the Community Empowerment Fund after 12 months in order to review take up of the fund to date and to identify and mitigate against any emerging barriers to the scheme.

The meeting closed at 7.15 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR