



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 8TH DECEMBER 2021 AT 10:30AM

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden (Leader) - Chair

Councillors:

S. Cook (Social Care and Housing), N. George (Waste, Public Protection and Street Scene), C. Gordon (Corporate Services), J. Pritchard (Infrastructure and Property), E. Stenner (Performance, Economy and Enterprise), A. Whitcombe (Sustainability, Planning and Fleet) and R. Whiting (Learning and Leisure).

Together with:

D. Street (Acting Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services), G. Jenkins (Acting Corporate Director Social Services) and M. S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), M. Headington (Green Spaces and Transport Services Manager), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), P. Hudson (Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), S. O'Donnell (Non-Domestic Rate Officer), M. Afzal (Committee Services Officer) and S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer).

And:

Councillor C. Mann.

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed 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 Mrs C. Harry (Chief Executive).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. CABINET – 24TH NOVEMBER 2021

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

4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet was provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports until the 23rd February 2022. 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.

5. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2032

Consideration was given to the report which presented the proposed Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 and sought Cabinet approval to submit to Welsh Government in January 2022 for publication and implementation by September 2022.

Cabinet noted that the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan outlined how the Council intends to work with the Welsh Government and a wide range of stakeholders to work towards delivering the Cymru 2050 ambition of 1 million Welsh speakers as well as the Programme for Government 2021-2026. The actions required to meet this target were detailed and were noted to include the building of a new primary school and the expansion of others to create the places. Members were asked to note the work of the Welsh Education Forum which included how the Council develops and promotes latecomer immersion provision as well as increased Welsh speaking workforce.

Reference was made to the consultation process which closed on the 5th December 2022 and Officers provided an update on the comments received.

Further information was sought on what plans are in place to increase the number of Welsh Medium teachers. In response, the Early Years Manager emphasised need to be working with young people in secondary schools to promote careers in education and childcare for Welsh speakers. A number of pathways including working with higher educational institutions to get a progressive journey and supporting vocational schemes to encourage Welsh speaking young people to enter the education and childcare workforce were highlighted.

Cabinet noted and welcomed the change in the Estyn categorisation for Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni.

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

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2023 be approved for submission to Welsh Government in January 2022.

6. COVID-19 – ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

Consideration was given to the report which provided Cabinet with an update on the economic recovery framework which comprises three distinct phases, the Restart phase, the Revive phase and the Renew phase.

Cabinet noted that the focus of this report was the Revive and Renew phases, following an initial 'Government led' restart phase that delivered financial and employer support at pace in response to the pandemic.

Members were advised that the Covid-19 Pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to communities and the local economy and in response the Council had prepared a framework for recovery which aimed to support the Council and the wider county borough to recover. The economic recovery framework, 'Delivering Prosperity after Covid' had been prepared to deliver the strategic objection of Supporting Business. Although the impact of the pandemic on the local economy is becoming clearer since the restart phase, with industries that rely on personal interactions suffering more than others, the longer term impacts on the structural changes to industry and service economy are still to be understood.

Members were referred to the various sections of the report that detailed each phase and the objectives contained therein. It was noted that the detailed actions to be undertaken over the period of the framework were detailed in the appendix to the report and a number of those actions would require financial support to deliver.

Cabinet welcomed the report and placed on record their thanks to Officers for all their hard work in supporting businesses throughout the pandemic and the exit from the European Union.

A number of queries were raised in relation to the employment of an International Trade Support Officer for a fixed period to work with businesses across the county borough to support their overseas trading requirements and aspiration. In response, the Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader advised that he is not aware of this post in any other local authority and he outlined the impact this role will have on local businesses. Cabinet was also provided with an update on the most recent development grants and it was noted that working in partnership with Welsh Government has progressed economic recovery.

The Leader placed on record her thanks to Officers for all the work that had gone into preparing the report for 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 strategic direction, objectives and action plan for the Revive and Renew Phases be agreed.

7. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2022-2023

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the Council Tax Base for 2022/23 for tax setting purposes and the collection percentage to be applied.

Cabinet noted that the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Wales) Regulations 1995 as amended set out the rules for the calculation of the Council Tax Base. The Council Tax Base is the measure of the relative taxable capacity of different areas within the County Borough and is calculated in accordance with prescribed rules.

Cabinet were referred to section 5.6 of the report and the table contained therein which detailed the Council Tax base for 2022/23.

The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer provided a brief summary and it was highlighted that the pandemic has presented many challenges in terms of collecting Council Tax, however it was noted that the authority actively pursues all Council Tax arrears so the collection rate of 97.5% is going to be maintained. Cabinet noted that the Council Tax Dwellings Return for 2022-23, appended to the report, has been submitted to Welsh Government and the data submitted by all local authorities will form an important part of the provisional settlement announcement on 21st December 2021.

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: -

1. The Council Tax collection rate be maintained at 97.50% for the 2022/23 financial year.
2. The Council Tax Base for 2022/23 be £61,062.71, with the Council Tax Base for each Community Council area being as outlined in paragraph 5.6 be approved.

8. IMPLEMENTATION OF A HYBRID MEETING SOLUTION

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval to procure and implement a hybrid meeting solution in Ty Penallta that will enable meeting attendees to fully and seamlessly participate in meeting proceedings either in person (physically) or from range of remote locations (virtually).

Cabinet noted that the vast majority of meetings carried out by Caerphilly Council have been held remotely. While this practice has now become fully embedded, it is inevitable that at some point in the future, greater numbers of Elected Members and Officers will choose to physically participate in meetings and some Members and Officers will chose to, or need to, engage in those same meetings remotely.

It was noted that Caerphilly's Members have also made it clear that when returning to the chamber in person, they wish to engage in the democratic process in the same way they were able to do so prior to the pandemic. This would mean standing, speaking to the room and voting as they have done previously, something that the current platform cannot offer at this time.

Cabinet emphasised that Welsh Government guidance is still to work from home wherever possible and that keeping everyone safe is key.

Cabinet noted how the proposals would positively impact on the Councils commitment to Diversity in Democracy by considering different ways of supporting Councillors with other commitments. It would provide a platform that would enable further participation in the democratic process for individuals who could not easily attend Council meetings in person.

Cabinet also noted the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which brings into lay the connect of 'multi-locational' meetings and the Council's responsibility to support both physical and virtual attendance. The Act also requires that Councils live stream public meetings along with the existing requirement to simultaneously translate meetings into Welsh, which is not something that the existing platform can currently provide.

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: -

1. The contract for the implementation of a Hybrid Meeting solution and associated hardware be awarded to Supplier B for an initial period of 3 years with an option to extend for up to a further period of 3 years be agreed.
2. The £124,899 one off capital costs of the solution and the associated electrical infrastructure upgrades of circa £7k be met from the Member Services Earmarked Reserve be agreed.
3. The total ongoing costs of £126,841 for the software platform and associated support and maintenance for the initial three-year term of the contract be met by establishing a specific earmarked reserve from the 2021/22 Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) budget be agreed.

9. GRASS CUTTING REGIMES

Consideration was given to the report which sought the views of Cabinet in relation to grass cutting regimes across the county borough and proposals to enhance and promote biodiversity following consultation with local members.

Cabinet noted that the report had been considered by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 26th October 2021.

Cabinet was advised that the national and local lockdowns had forced residents to interact with their surroundings in a new way. Whilst people worked from home where they could, the local environment became a source of appreciation, which benefitted residents with both their physical and mental wellbeing. Through the summer of 2021 a consultation exercise was undertaken with local members to identify suitable areas within their respective wards which could be allowed to flourish during the summer period. These spaces were marked with a wooden plaque thanking residents for allowing the dedicated area to grow into eco-friendly spaces.

Cabinet noted how the regimes would not only enhance the local environment but would assist in fulfilling the Councils statutory bio-diversity duty and assist in the Councils response to Climate Emergency.

A question was raised in relation to additional areas of land and Cabinet were advised that Officers will continue to work with local members to identify suitable areas as the programme is expanded. A Cabinet Member requested that local ward members are consulted if any other suitable areas are identified by Officers.

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

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

1. The approach adopted during the 2021 cutting season be adopted as the standard going forward in relation to our highway verges and by-pass routes where mowing is kept to a minimum.
2. That urban areas, such as housing estates, older person accommodation, cemeteries etc. are maintained at the current cutting frequencies.

3. That the list of areas nominated by both officers and local members within their respective wards, which could be allowed to flourish during the summer period be endorsed and Officers to continually work with local members to identify areas as the programme is expanded.

The meeting closed at 11.17 am.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 12th January 2022.

CHAIR