



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH MARCH 2022 AT 10:30A.M.

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), Mrs E. Stenner (Performance, Economy and Enterprise), R. Whiting (Learning and Leisure) and A. Whitcombe (Sustainability, Planning and Fleet).

Together with:

D. Street (Corporate Director, Social Services and Housing), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment), and S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director, Head of Children's Services), J. Pearce (Performance Management Officer), A. Cullinane (Senior Policy Officer), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning Communities), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), P. Griffiths (Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager), D. Thomas (Countryside Planning Assistant), M. Harris (Committee Support Officer/Chauffer) and M. Afzal (Committee Services Officer).

And

Cllr. 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

An apology for absence was received from 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 – 23rd FEBRUARY 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd February 2022 were 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 6th of April 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. COMMUNITY LEARNING AND SUPPORT HUB AT RHYMNEY LIBRARY

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval on match funding for an application submitted to the Welsh Government Transformation Capital Grants Programme in respect of the creation of a learning/community hub at Rhymney Town Library.

Cabinet Members were asked to note the intention for the Library Service to work with Gwent Police to strengthen community engagement through the use of informal settings such as Rhymney Library, Risca Library and Caerphilly Library. The project would include the preservation and display of the Idris Davies Collection, a redesigned layout to both floors, upgraded lift, meeting spaces, community rooms, digital training, video conferencing facilities, Wi-Fi upgrade, public laptop lounge and new Children's Space, Welsh Language Space and access to multiple Council services. There would also be opportunities for partner agenda use, including Gwent Police, a space for refreshments and the project would also further the Council's carbon neutrality aims with the installation of an electric vehicle charging points in the car park.

Members welcomed the investment and noted the intention for the Library Service to work with Gwent Police, as this would strength links with the community and with other stakeholders. It was stated that the allocation of funding was 'very much needed' and it was hoped that residents would welcome the redevelopment at Rhymney Town Library.

The collaborative work with Gwent Police and stakeholders was regarded as pivotal and it was hoped that this work would strengthen links with the wider community. Moreover, the collaborative approach was described as the way forward in terms of how the buildings are used.

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: -

1. An allocation of £109k from the council's place-shaping earmarked reserve be agreed to ensure that the proposed scheme can progress, subject to confirmation of

Welsh Government funding which is expected during the week beginning the 21st of March 2022.

2. The intention for the Library Service to work with Gwent Police to strengthen community engagement through the use of informal settings at Rhymney Library, Risca Library and Caerphilly Library be noted.

6. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SIX MONTH UPDATE 2021

Consideration was given to the report which provided an update on the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) which is part of the Council's Performance Framework, following its presentation to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 22nd February 2022.

It was noted that each directorate's performance has been presented to each Scrutiny Committee and have been thoroughly scrutinised. The Assessments provide a summary of information and analysis for the period from April 2021 to September 2021. Cabinet were advised that the comments from the Scrutiny Committees were fed into the Corporate Performance Assessments and reference was made to discussions at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee where discussions had concentrated on sickness levels, well-being and the impact of Covid.

Members of the Corporate Management Team updated Cabinet on their respective service areas.

The Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing highlighted the progress his service area had made in terms of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). It was confirmed that good progress had been made and as a result, the Team were able to report the completion of the WHQS programme towards end of December 2021.

The Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing drew Member's attention to the challenges in terms of homelessness and the pressure that increasing levels were placing on systems, however Officers were working actively in this area and particularly with those people who were presenting themselves as voluntarily homeless where a large amount of work was taking place. A key area of this work was noted to be primarily the accessing of grants and benefits that people might not have been aware of and reference was made to the £1.4 million which had been sourced by the rents section to help people with household financial burdens particularly for low-income families. Furthermore, it was confirmed that this £1.4 million would increase to £3 million by the end of the financial year and this would make a significant impact.

From a Social Services perspective, the significant pressures in terms of Domiciliary Care were highlighted, with the number of referrals and assessments remaining fairly flat and it was noted that 74 people were currently waiting for care packages. The Corporate Director explained that this figure was slightly higher over the Christmas period, but the efforts of the team had brought the numbers down.

In terms of Children's Services, Cabinet was advised that although the statistics hadn't increased, the complexity of the cases and the costs associated with those cases were becoming more and more challenging as more young people were presenting with far more complex needs.

The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment Directorate outlined the progress that had been made in terms of his service area and staff were praised for seamlessly maintaining frontline services throughout the pandemic. The staff under the most pressure in terms of the pandemic in Environmental Health, Public Protection and Trading Standards that had been at the heart of controlling the pandemic were praised for their efforts when dealing with the control of the pandemic and enforcement. The challenges in terms of decarbonisation, particularly as energy prices increased, the rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure were highlighted.

It was noted that recruitment and retention of key technical staff continued to be a challenge however this was noted to be a national challenge.

The challenges in terms of waste targets were also highlighted. It was confirmed that the pandemic had resulted in significantly more waste arising which was one of the factors which had affected targets, but Members were assured that the Service was looking at the waste strategy, and how it might be adapted going forward and that a number of key decisions would need to be made by the council in the second half of 2022.

The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services drew Members' attention to the progress that had been made in terms of his service area. Discussions centred around the revised Education Strategy. The Corporate Director explained that the strategy had laid some fantastic foundations for the field of education despite the challenges of the pandemic. Cabinet was advised that the team were working with stakeholders to develop a replacement strategy as the current strategy is due to expire in 2022. It was confirmed that the replacement strategy would take the impact of COVID-19 into consideration, and it was hoped that the strategy would be presented to Cabinet in the coming months.

The Corporate Director highlighted the significant levels of staff and pupil sickness absences throughout this period, schools remained open, and the Corporate Director praised Headteachers for their efforts in keeping things moving during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Corporate Director drew Members' attention to the Inclusion Compendium, which focuses heavily on the impact of exclusions. It was noted that more work in relation to this was required.

Libraries were commended for their work since their reopening in April 2021 and recognition was given to the work to facilitate e-loans and click and collect services and this data was being collated to feed into future provision.

In terms of Freedom of Information, an update was provided on performance targets, although responses had improved over quarters 1 and 2, it was expected that these would be increased and surpassed with the addition of 2 further appointments to this team.

The challenges in terms of the recruitment of critical posts was also highlighted and work was being done to analyse and identify the underlying reasons for these issues.

Cabinet acknowledged the outstanding work done by each Directorate and shared the concerns in relation to recruitment and retention challenges. The Leader confirmed that this issue had been taken forward and welcomed the level of monitoring from the CPA in order to demonstrate progress, where improvements were necessary and how the Council was working for its residents.

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 attached document (Appendix 1) be reviewed and discussed, and the information contained within it be challenged and scrutinised.

7. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

Consideration was given to the report which provided an update on the Council's progress during the financial year 2020-2021 against the actions in the Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024. Members were called on to approve the report for publication on the Council's website.

It was noted that the report was developed to demonstrate the Council's commitment in meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty. The report outlined how the Council would meet its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty to advance equality and inclusion for all protected groups under the Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, it was stated that the report was required to demonstrate the Council's compliance with regulatory bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Cabinet Members were reminded of the 31st March publication deadline.

It was noted that the report highlighted the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and set out how vulnerable residents were supported through the Buddy Scheme and the delivery of key services such as Social Services, Housing and Childcare Hubs.

It was noted that the report provided an overview on the consultation and engagement exercises that were undertaken in 2021 in respect of the 2020-2024 Strategic Equality Plan. The Cabinet Member highlighted the challenges that were brought to the forefront as of the pandemic and explained that the Authority was required to use alternative methods to engage residents. The Cabinet Member also highlighted significant annual calendar dates that were used to celebrate and educate, including Mental Health Awareness Week and Black History Month. Cabinet welcomed the awareness that was raised through annual calendar dates and called for the promotion of equality across the board. The continued recognition of equality issues was welcomed by Cabinet and Members thanked Officers for their hard work in relation to the events that were marked and celebrated.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the Buddy Scheme, statistics, and the feedback the Authority had received from residents. It was noted that 590 members of staff came forward to support over 1550 residents who had expressed interest in the Scheme. It was acknowledged that the feedback was extremely positive with satisfaction response rate levels at 97.3%. Cabinet expressed their pride in how volunteers had stepped in to support vulnerable people during a critical time.

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 31 March deadline.

8. FIVE YEAR WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2022-2027

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval on the Five-Year Welsh Language Strategy 2022-2027, as required by Standards 145 and 146 Welsh Language Standards (No1) Regulations 2015.

Cabinet was advised that the Authority is required to develop a five-year strategy that sets out how it proposes to promote the Welsh language and facilitate the use of the Welsh language in the County Borough. The strategy must include a target for increasing or maintaining the numbers of Welsh speakers and a statement setting out how the target is intended to be reached. Moreover, the strategy must be reviewed and revised on a five-yearly cycle and progress must be reported at the end of each five-year period.

It was noted that the strategy was developed in consultation and engagement with key stakeholders. Part of the consultation and engagement process all Council Service Areas were contacted and the Cabinet Member emphasised the importance that all Services Areas take on board the actions in this strategy and work to ensure that all citizens can engage naturally with

the Welsh language. Members were advised that stakeholders were listed in the Action Plan and were referred to in the Engagement Report for further details.

Reference was made to how this strategy would also link in with the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

Members welcomed the strategy and recognised the significance of promoting the Welsh language in the County Borough.

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 Five-Year Welsh Language Strategy 2022-2027 be approved for publication on the Council's website.

9. DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIPURPOSE VISITOR CENTRE AT PARC PENALLTA

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval for a Multi-Purpose Visitor Centre and Parc Penallta by accepting the Substitution Grant offered by Welsh Government for the sum of £903,000 subject to anticipated grant condition(s). The report also advised Cabinet of the anticipated residual funding shortfall for the scheme and recommended that this be funded from the Corporate Projects capital budget.

The long-term vision of the Council to develop a Multipurpose Visitor Centre at Parc Penallta was set out, and Members were advised that public support for the development had increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with Parc Penallta seeing an increase in use by local people and visitors alike.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the cost of the project was expected to come in at a premium due to the design concepts and additional costs associated with the pandemic and Brexit which were not included in the initial appraisal. It was confirmed that Welsh Government had continued to support the project by offering Caerphilly County Borough Council a substitution grant to the sum of £903,000 in the 2021-22 financial year. Cabinet noted that the project had been tendered some 7 months ago and the lowest tender returned totalled over 2 million. However, the tenders had now expired and if the project was due to progress, then the tender exercise would need to be repeated.

Officers were working to secure additional funding but based on the last tender exercise there was a shortfall of £1,078,000 as the current secured grants and reserved Countryside capital allocations amounted to £1,059,000. It was confirmed that a funding shortfall totalling £1,268,000, including a 10% contingency of £190,000, needed to be secured if the scheme is to progress.

Cabinet Members welcomed the significant investment in the Council's outdoor leisure centres, which have all seen a growth as a result of the pandemic and the construction of the centre on most sustainability methodology it provided an opportunity to set an example in reducing carbon emissions.

Members acknowledged the difficulties around the tender process and were appreciative of the efforts of Officers in bringing this project forward and placed on record their thanks to those involved.

In terms of promoting tourism and well-being, Cabinet expressed their confidence that this project would prove to be a valuable community asset and would encourage greater use of the outdoor environment by residents and visitors to the County Borough.

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 Substitution Grant offered by Welsh Government for the sum of £903,000 be approved and the multipurpose visitor centre be delivered in the 2022-23 financial year, as per anticipated grant condition(s).
2. £1,268,000 be set aside from the Corporate Projects capital budget in order to ensure delivery of the project subject to the detailed terms of the grant variation letter from Welsh Government.

10. REGENERATION BOARD – PROJECT PROPOSALS

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval for the allocation of £24,950 Licence to Innovate funding for Caerphilly Music Service to offer two new innovative projects to schools in the Borough, and the further allocation of £16,000 from the same Licence to Innovate funding for the Caerphilly Statutory Team, who are working with Digital Services to offer IT cubes in 2 schools as a pilot. The report also sought Cabinet approval for the allocation of £136,200 from the Regeneration Board Development Budget towards the overall cost of £906,000 to build a fifth employment unit at Ty Du Employment Park, Nelson.

It was noted that an additional project had been considered by the Regeneration Board for funding but due to its complexity and commercially sensitive content, it would be presented to Cabinet separately. It was anticipated that exemptions would apply to the report.

The Cabinet Member confirmed cross-party political support for the Board and the allocation of funding was highlighted. It was confirmed that £3.75 million had been allocated to the Board and Licence to Innovate Scheme.

Members welcomed the projects and drew attention to the vital role of Caerphilly Music Service in terms of inclusivity and re-engaging children in the world of education.

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. £24,950 Licence to Innovate funding be approved and allocated to Caerphilly Music Service for 2 innovative projects.
2. £16,000 Licence to Innovate funding to be approved and allocated to Caerphilly Statutory Team for the introduction of two IT Cubes.
3. The allocation of £136,000 from the Regeneration Project Board Budget for the delivery of an additional employment unit at Ty Du, Nelson be approved.

4. The further request being made to the Regeneration Board development fund as set out in an exempt cabinet report be noted.

11. PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

Members considered the Public Interest Test 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 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

12. CAERPHILLY 2035 - ACQUISITION FUND

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

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report the recommendations at 3.1 (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v) be approved.

The meeting closed at 11.49 A.M.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 23rd March 2022.

CHAIR