



COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER 2020 AT 5.00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C. Andrews - Mayor
Councillor J. Gale – Deputy Mayor

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, A.P. Angel, C. Bezzina, L.J. Binding, A. Collis, S. Cook, D. Cushing, C. Cuss, W. David, D.T. Davies, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, A. Gair, N. George, C. Gordon, L. Harding, D. Havard, A.G. Higgs, A. Hussey, M.P. James, V. James, L. Jeremiah, G. Johnston, S. Kent, G. Kirby, Mrs A. Leonard, Ms P. Leonard, C.P. Mann, P. Marsden, B. Miles, S. Morgan, B. Owen, Mrs T. Parry, D.V. Poole, Mrs D. Price, J. Pritchard, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Scriven, G. Simmonds, J. Simmonds, S. Skivens, Mrs E. Stenner, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, R. Whiting, L G. Whittle, T. Williams, B. Zaplatynski

Together with: -

C. Harray (Chief Executive), M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director of Communities), D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services and Housing), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), A. Southcombe (Financial Services), P. Warren (Education, Achievement and Inclusion) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

Also present:

G. Hawkins and B. Morris (Grant Thornton)

IN MEMOIRIUM

The Mayor paid tribute to former Councillor Dennis Bolter who had recently passed away and reflected on his many years' service as both a Community and County Borough Councillor, the support he provided to his ward and the wider community and the admiration with which he was held. Council was also advised of another sad loss; Mr Roy Oliver husband of Councillor Gaynor Oliver who had very recently lost his life to COVID 19. Sincere condolences were expressed to all those who had cherished Dennis and Roy.

The Leader of the Plaid Cymru group echoed the sentiments expressed and shared his own memories of Councillor Bolter and the fondness, respect and esteem for which he would be long remembered and to Councillor Oliver on the loss of her husband. The Independents Group Leader also expressed his condolences to the families and friends of Councillor Bolter and Mr Oliver at this sad time.

Council held a minute's silence as a mark of respect

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chief Executive 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 Councillors J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan. M. Davies, K. Dawson, J. Fussell, R. Gough, D. Hardacre, D. Harse, B. Jones, G.D. Oliver, L. Phipps, D.W.R. Preece, J. Ridgewell, M. Sargent and W. Williams

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

3. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR 2019/2020

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the External Auditor's Audit of Accounts report and sought Council approval for the 2019/20 Audited Financial Accounts. The impact that the pandemic had on statutory deadlines was explained and Members were asked to note that the report had been presented to the Audit Committee on the 16th November 2020 and they had unanimously recommended its approval to Council.

Members noted the exceptional circumstances surrounding the preparation of this year's accounts and the work undertaken in order to meet the statutory deadline.

Points of clarification were requested on various aspects of the Auditor's report and Mr B. Morris of Grant Thornton and Officers responded to the points raised. In relation to queries raised regarding historic debt balances, assurances were given by the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer that he was taking a project management approach to the recommendations in the Auditor's report including outstanding matters in respect of historical balances.

It was moved and seconded that for the reasons given in the Officer's report the recommendations contained therein be approved and by verbal confirmation and Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the comments of the Audit Committee on the External Auditor's Audit of Accounts Report be noted;
- (ii) the management responses to the Auditor's recommendations arising from the 2019/20 financial audit work be noted; and
- (iii) the 2019/20 Audited Financial Accounts attached at Appendix 2 of the Officer's report be approved.

4. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR 2019/2020

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the Annual Performance Report for 2019/2020. Council was asked to note the report which had been presented to and approved by Cabinet at its meeting on the 28th October 2020.

Members noted the progress made against the six Wellbeing Objectives as set out within the Corporate Plan and the shorter, more accessible format of this report highlighting the key impacts. Updates were given on the support being provided to get people back into work and the steps taken to stimulate jobs and economic growth. Queries were raised in relation to the number of empty business units within the borough and the Corporate Director for Communities agreed to circulate figures after the meeting. Members also queried specific benefits for the borough as a result of the City Deal programme and feedback was provided on the various business and investment initiatives, however, specific figures around jobs created and growth generated would be circulated after the meeting.

In relation to the WHQS Programme, Officers confirmed that a new deadline of December 2021 had been agreed with Welsh Government in order to mitigate the impact that the pandemic has had on improvement works. Assurances were given that completion could be achieved within this timeframe.

Members debated the provision of affordable housing and it was agreed that there was a need for new Council housing however many felt that any building development should not be at the expense of green wedges and open spaces. Concerns were also expressed that brownfield sites were not being explored by developers. Actions being taken to bring empty private sector homes in to use was discussed and the steps required in order to progress this initiative were detailed, it was noted that this would take a multi-disciplinary approach but there was some funding available to take forward.

Referring again to the performance report, a Member commented on his disappointment at the number of pupils leaving education without a qualification. The Cabinet Member for Education referenced the Shared Ambitions Strategy and the improvements already secured but confirmed there was a lot more to be done. Officers provided assurances that every pupil mattered, and clear processes were in place to support those not in education, employment or training. Members further considered barriers to educational attainment and acknowledged that improvement required long term commitment.

In concluding the debate, the Leader reflected on the great work undertaken over the past twelve months and the many initiatives undertaken and successes achieved.

RESOLVED that the Annual Performance Report for 2019/20 be noted.

The meeting closed at 18:55pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2021 they were signed by the Mayor.

MAYOR