



SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 21ST JANUARY 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. A. Adams, Mrs E. M. Aldworth, L. Harding, G. Johnston, B. Miles, R. Saralis, M. Sargent, J. Taylor and L. G. Whittle

Cabinet Members:

C. Gordon (Corporate Services), Mrs E. Stenner (Finance, Performance and Customer Services), Mrs L. Phipps (Housing and Property)

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), L. Dallimore (Unison Branch Secretary), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer)

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair 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](#). He advised that decisions would be made by Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, Mrs D. Price, C. P. Mann, G. Simmonds.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. FLEXIBLE WORKING UPDATE REPORT

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the progress with the Flexible Working Corporate Review following the previous report presented to Scrutiny Committee on 29th September 2020.

It was noted that because of the speed and nature of the COVID-19 lockdown, the Council was required to equip and train a significant proportion of its workforce to work and to provide services remotely from their usual places of work and, in many cases, from home. Whilst Agile Working Principles were in place prior to the pandemic, they were mainly being used on an ad hoc basis.

While the transformation to this new model of service delivery happened at a significant pace, the technology platforms that have formed the foundations of remote working have proven to be intuitive and stable.

Some sections of the workforce have been operating remotely and very effectively since the beginning of lockdown and, over time, further services have been enabled and brought back online with much less of a reliance on buildings, premises and travel.

It was noted that this has enabled many services to the public to be delivered safely and continuously and for the Council's employees to manage multiple aspects of their professional and personal lives in a way that has brought about a much greater work-life balance than was possible previously.

The Flexible Working Corporate Review Group has been formed and are considering the changes and effects of moving to a more flexible working model approach and an update on the progress of the review over the last 3 months is included within this report as requested by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 29th September.

Whilst the focus of the report related to staff who have primarily worked from buildings, it was noted that opportunities for flexible working is available in front line services, which support employees' career choices and also personal circumstances, via part time working, shift patterns, for example.

The report embraces the TeamCaerphilly transformation strategy, echoing the mantra - *A new "whole-authority" operating model to ensure a resilient Caerphilly County Borough for the future.*

The Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Members discussed the report at length and raised queries and concerns around staff Mental Health and Well-being, Domestic Abuse, tax relief and the additional costs associated with working from home.

Officers provided detailed responses to the queries from members, offering assurances that regular meetings are being undertaken with staff and managers in order to discuss any issues they may have, as well as information being provided by Care First. In discussing Domestic Abuse, Officers assured Members that there is a policy in place, which would be circulated to the Committee and provision would be made for an individual to work outside of the home, in order to keep them safe and reduce their risk of harm.

Discussions took place around an additional staff survey, which will include Well-being monitoring, as well as source information around the Tax Relief scheme offered by HMRC. Members were asked to note that the categorisation would be undertaken prior to the sourcing

of furniture to accommodate home/ agile working, and staff will be offered the equipment they need, should they require it, to undertake their roles.

Discussions took place around Town Centres and the loss of several businesses prior to the Pandemic, and concerns that this will be exacerbated following the pandemic. Members were concerned for the decrease in footfall and Officers explained that detailed impact assessments would be undertaken, consultation exercises and Scrutiny and Cabinet considered prior to any building closure decisions.

Following consideration and discussion and with the inclusion of an additional recommendation at *vii*) which was unanimously agreed, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of electronic voting this was by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers Report and including the additional recommendation at *viii*): -

- i) The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee provided comments on the work done to date and recommended to Cabinet that: -
- ii) the proposed flexible working employee categorisation identified within section 5.15 of the report be formally adopted;
- iii) the proposal to consider different approaches to the supply of equipment to individuals based on their circumstances in relation to the provision of furniture to allow more flexible/home working where appropriate be supported;
- iv) the continued work to consider the impacts of any property portfolio rationalisation as a result of changes in office requirements be supported;
- v) the review of how the local communities may be affected and how effective and constructive future engagement can be undertaken be supported;
- vi) the formally identified workstreams in the Flexible Working Corporate Review Dashboard (Appendix 1) be noted.
- vii) *A further staff survey be undertaken.*

The meeting closed at 6.33 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 23rd February 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR