



VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY,
28TH JANUARY 2021 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Chair: Councillor Mrs E. M. Aldworth
Vice Chair: Ms M. Jones (Parent Network)

Councillors:

K. Etheridge, R. W. Gough, Mrs T. Parry, Mrs E. Stenner, A. Whitcombe, L. G. Whittle and W. Williams.

Together with Representatives from:

The Voluntary Sector: GAVO, Parent Network, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly Care & Repair, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice, Home-start Cymru, Menter Iaith Sir Caerffili, Oakdale Community Centre and The Youth Centre Cefn Hengoed.

Compact Partners: Gwent Police.

Also in attendance:

P. Cooke (Senior Policy Officer), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), S. Foley (Policy Officer), D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services and Housing), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

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 J. Bevan, A. Collis, S. Cook, J. E. Fussell, D. C. Harse, A. G. Higgs and Mrs D. Price. Apologies for absence were also received from representatives of Cruse in Gwent and the Over 50 Forum.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 5TH DECEMBER 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meeting held on 5th December 2019 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2021/22 – VERBAL UPDATE

S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer) provided an update on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2021/22. The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee was informed that the 2021/22 Draft Budget Proposals were presented to Cabinet on the 13th January 2021 and are now subject to a period of consultation prior to a final decision being made in February 2021.

It was highlighted that, this year, due to the Covid-19 unprecedented situation details of the Welsh Government Provisional LG Financial Settlement, which are normally received in October each year, were not announced until the 22nd December 2020.

The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee was informed that the Provisional Financial Settlement included an average uplift of 4% in Welsh Government Funding for Local Government for the 2021/22 financial year. This does vary by Local Authority due to the funding formula used by Welsh Government and it was noted that for Caerphilly CBC the uplift is 3.1%, which equates to an additional £9m. Members were further informed that the Council also has savings in advance totalling £2.011m which can be used to support the budget for 2021/22 and the proposed council tax increase of 3.9% will generate additional receipts of £3.097m. This means that additional funding of £14.108m is available to set a balanced budget for the forthcoming year. Members were advised that the 3.1% uplift in the Provisional Financial Settlement along with the proposed increase in Council Tax of 3.9% will mean that there will be no requirement for any new savings to be identified to balance the budget for the 2021/22 financial year.

The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer emphasised that the Provisional Financial Settlement does not cover the financial implications of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, both in terms of the additional costs that continue to be incurred and income losses in a number of areas. These will continue to be funded through grants from the Welsh Government and the position will be kept under close review as we move into the new financial year.

Members of the Committee were advised that whilst the 3.1% uplift in the Financial Settlement is welcomed, the future funding situation for Local Government is likely to be challenging due to the unprecedented fiscal impact of Covid-19 and the strain that this will put on public finances for years to come. It was stressed that the UK Government comprehensive spending review is only focussed on 2021/22, so there are no details at this stage of what funding settlements may look like beyond 2022. However, in relation to the longer-term financial outlook, the report presented to Cabinet on the 13th January provided an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan which showed an indicative projected savings requirement of £20.7m for the four-year period 2022/23 to 2025/26. This is only one potential scenario which assumes an uplift in WG funding of 1% each year and an increase of 3.9% in Council Tax. It was highlighted that future financial forecasting is very sensitive to even minor changes in assumptions and a range of potential scenarios will be considered during the coming months.

The Committee was informed that the Council's Transformation Programme will be the key driver in ensuring that financial resilience is maintained in future years. The financial position will be regularly reviewed, and periodic updates will be provided for Members.

A Representative of Voluntary Sector asked for reassurance that Welsh Government will reimburse all the additional costs incurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was appreciated that there will be no requirement for any new savings to be identified to balance the budget for the 2021/22 financial year, however, concerns were raised regarding future funding for the Voluntary Sector. The Committee was informed that Welsh Government has worked very closely with local authorities throughout the pandemic and to date, in the current financial year, Caerphilly has received in excess of £12m to address additional costs and shortfalls in income. Officers are lobbying through the Society of Welsh Treasurers and with finance colleagues in Welsh Government to ensure that the funding does continue into the next financial year. It was highlighted that in the current year the UK government has allocated around £5b to the Welsh Government to deal with the response to Covid-19, however next year in the draft budget for Welsh Government there is only a commitment to provide £766m at this stage. The Committee was advised that it does present a risk, however, the way Welsh Government has responded to the situation and worked with the local authorities in the current year gives some reassurance moving forward.

A Representative of the Voluntary Sector sought clarification and further details on the Business Support Grants. The Committee was informed that an amount totalling in excess of £45m has been issued in the current year. In response to a Member's query it was confirmed that the money received from Welsh Government will reflect what has been paid out to eligible businesses and voluntary sector organisations. The Committee was also informed that the Welsh Government will be making an announcement regarding further funding in respect of business grants, these details will be shared with the Voluntary Sector as soon as they are available.

A Representative of the Voluntary Sector raised a query in relation to the budget consultation process and a request was made for the Voluntary Sector to be involved earlier on in the budget discussions next year. Assurances were given that Officers will make sure there is full engagement with the Voluntary Sector in the budget setting process.

In conclusion, the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee expressed their appreciation to the Finance department for the valuable work they have carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. CAERPHILLY CARES – PRESENTATION

D. Street (Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing) provided an overview of the Caerphilly Cares Service. The Committee was informed that at the start of the pandemic, at very short notice, a whole range of people across the UK received shielding letters from the government and local authorities had to respond very quickly to the needs of those people. It was highlighted that Caerphilly responded very quickly and early on in the process, and as a result a Caerphilly Buddy scheme was put in place.

T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager) delivered a presentation on the Caerphilly Cares Service. The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee was informed that the crisis has seen some people present themselves to the Council, many of whom for the very first time. Individuals have requested support directly due to COVID-19 but also people have been identified with unmet needs who have previously 'fallen through the net'. It was highlighted that the crisis has seen a level of resilience, both individually and at a community level. Local activities have been vital to supporting wellbeing, with new and existing local groups picking up the mantel. Support for these groups is crucial moving forward and should be seen, very much, as part of the offer of support. It was explained that Caerphilly Cares is a universal gateway model, to ensure people receive the right support, in the right place, and right time. It creates the conditions for community and voluntary groups to thrive, creating a balance between service and community support. The presentation also informed Members of the Committee of the progress to date and the long-term vision for Caerphilly Cares.

A Member suggested developing a community group engagement committee or a task and finish group so that elected members and representatives of the voluntary sector can support and help the Caerphilly Cares Service through communication, engagement, best practice and working together. The Officer thanked the Member for the suggestion and it was agreed for a discussion to take place outside of the meeting to explore the option further.

In response to concerns raised by a representative of the Voluntary Sector, assurances were given that it is not the intention for the Council to take over the role of the Voluntary Sector. The Officer explained that Caerphilly Cares will create the conditions for community and voluntary groups to thrive, creating a balance between service and community support. It is a partnership with voluntary and community groups to support them, moving forward, to deliver the services themselves.

A member of the Voluntary Sector acknowledged the number of relatives who have taken on the work of domestic care staff during the Covid-19 crisis, and it was pointed out that it cannot be expected to continue. The Officer explained that Day Centres have been closed since the initial outbreak and will remain closed for the foreseeable future. In all instances where families have found themselves without day care they have been offered support within the community, however not all families want the support due to concerns regarding Covid-19. Members of the Committee were informed that feedback received from people who have previously received Day Centre services are finding the services within the community more beneficial, thus giving an opportunity to look at the way those services are provided going forward.

6. THIRD SECTOR ACTIVITIES – PRESENTATION

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector gave a brief overview of some of the work that has been undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee received presentations from Menter Caerffili, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice, Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly Care and Repair, Oakdale Community Centre representing community buildings, Home-start Cymru and Caerphilly Buddy Scheme GAVO/CCBC.

7. ITEMS OF INTEREST CONCERNING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FROM COMPACT PARTNERS

The Committee received an update from GAVO. It was recognised how organisations and services have had to change and adapt due to the pandemic and it was expressed how enlightening it has been to see how the voluntary sector has responded. It was highlighted that there are a lot of young volunteers getting involved and making a real impact in their communities and it was hoped that this will continue. Members of the Committee was informed that GAVO is going to undertake an organisational restructure to be more area focussed in order to be more responsive in each area and move towards the local requirements.

The meeting closed at 12.16 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 18th March 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR