



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 23RD JUNE 2021 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden (Leader) - Chair

Councillors:

S. Cook (Social Care), N. George (Waste, Public Protection and Street Scene), C. Gordon (Corporate Services), L. Phipps (Housing), E. Stenner (Customer, Performance and Property Services) and R. Whiting (Learning and Leisure).

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services), D. Street (Corporate Director – Social Services and Housing), and M.S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment).

Also in Attendance:

A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), V. Camp (Transformation Manager), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services), S. Pugh (Communications Manager), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), M. Harris (Committee Services Support Officer/Chauffeur) and C. Evans-Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

Councillors C. Mann

Audit Wales – Gareth P. Jones and M. Jones.

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 A. Whitcombe (Sustainability, Planning and Fleet) and C. Harry (Chief Executive),

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer) declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10- Gwent Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plan as his wife works for the

Torfaen Track and Trace team but was able to remain in the meeting.

3. CABINET – 9TH JUNE 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet were provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports for 21st July 2021. 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. REGENERATION BOARD – PROJECT PROPOSALS

The report provided Cabinet with details of the allocation of £10,000 Licence to Innovate Funding towards the provision of A Feasibility Study for Accommodation at Llancaiach Fawr Manor and the allocation of a further £10,000 for a 12-month commercial training plan.

Cabinet noted that at the meeting on 30th May 2018, Cabinet agreed that a Regeneration Project Board would be set up with a cross-party political representation of Councillors plus key officers. This group is supported by a Regeneration Assessment Panel consisting of officers from a range of service areas. An initial sum of £300,000 was allocated to the Project Board.

The Regeneration Assessment Panel have met on numerous occasions to consider the prioritised list of capital projects, which have been identified by the Board to move to the Assessment Stage. Following subsequent Cabinet Approvals, since February 2019 numerous projects have been endorsed with financial assistance provided (where necessary) from the Regeneration Project Board Development Funds.

During January 2019 Cabinet resolved to release £1.2m of reserves for the Regeneration Board prioritised projects. This was further supplemented in April 2021 when the Cabinet resolved to allocate an additional £1m to the Development Fund budget bringing the total allocation to £2.5m. To date, £1,499,200 has been allocated towards prioritised capital regeneration schemes, across the County Borough.

Members were reminded that in December 2020 Cabinet resolved to allocate £50,000 seed money to the Regeneration Board for 2020/21 to progress concepts and ideas under the Licence to Innovate Initiative.

The report asked Cabinet to note the £10,000 Licence to Innovate Funding for a feasibility Study for accommodation at Llancaiach Fawr Manor and an allocation of £10,000 for a Commercial Training plan.

It was noted that the request would leave an active Licence to Innovate Fund of £9,311.

Cabinet thanked the Officer and Cabinet Member for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member, in noting the popularity of Llancaiach Fawr Manor for a wedding destination, and the proposal to provide accommodation at the site sought further information on the outcome of the proposal. Officers explained works are underway around a conclusion and it is anticipated that a report will be available within the next 6-months, which will be provided to cabinet.

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 Officers Report it be noted that £10,000 Licence to Innovate Funding has been allocated to prepare the feasibility study for accommodation at Llancaiach Fawr, and £10,000 has been allocated for the provision of a commercial training plan, as approved by the Regeneration Project Board.

6. CWM IFOR SOLAR FARM

The report outlined the recommendations made to Cabinet in the Regeneration Board at its meeting on the 30th March 2021 to allocate £434,000 development funding to the Cwm Ifor Solar Farm project. The report outlined in detail the progress on the proposal to date and identifies the next steps and investment required to take the project forward and sought Cabinet endorsement to proceed.

It was noted that the Cwm Ifor Solar Farm proposal is a significant project requiring additional investment to progress to the position where there is a full business case for approval. The investment sought will enable: the submission of a planning application, including all supplementary consultants work and reports and stakeholder engagement; procurement documentation and options for construction; and specific financial modelling to enable Cabinet to make a decision on the future construction of the solar farm in early 2022.

Cabinet thanked the Officer and Cabinet Member for the report and discussion ensued.

Members thanked the Officer for the extensive work undertaken to date on the proposal and sought further information on the impact to residents and properties. Officers reiterated that the report seeks Cabinet approval to progress to the next stage in which a planning consultant can be appointed, who will look at the land allocated and requirement and provide further information to residents on the size and scale of the project. Members were assured that significant consultation processes will be undertaken throughout the project.

A Member queried whether Local Ward Members had been consulted and if they were in support of the project. Officers explained that regular Local Ward Member Briefings have been underway, as well as site visits to ensure local members were happy with the proposal. Thus far, feedback has been positive, and ward members are in support of the proposal, but further consultation exercises will be undertaken should Cabinet approve the recommendation.

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 Officers Report it be agreed that funds totalling £434,000 are allocated in order that officers can progress the Cwm Ifor Solar Farm project to final business case, at which time a further report will be brought forward for Cabinet consideration.

7. **AUDIT WALES FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT – CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

The report presented Cabinet with the Audit Wales report on its latest financial sustainability assessment of Caerphilly CBC.

It was noted that Audit Wales has undertaken its assessment of financial sustainability as this continues to be a risk to councils putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources. A similar project was undertaken for 2019/20, before the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall conclusion of the 2019/20 review for Caerphilly CBC was that: -

The Council has a strong financial position, with an increasingly high level of usable reserves, a relatively stable level of borrowing, and significant budget underspends in recent years.

The Audit Wales 2020/21 assessment of councils' financial sustainability was in two phases. Phase 1 was a baseline assessment of the initial impact of COVID-19 on local councils' financial positions. This phase drew on the year-end position for 2019/20, the position at the end of quarter 1 for 2020/21, and projections for quarter 2 for 2020/21. Following Phase 1, in October 2020 Audit Wales published a national summary report – **Financial Sustainability of Local Government as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic**. This found that councils and the Welsh Government have worked well together to mitigate the impact of the pandemic to date, but the future sustainability of the sector is an ongoing challenge.

It was recognised that the pandemic has had an immediate and profound effect on public sector finances as a whole and, as a consequence, on councils' financial positions. The summary report set a high-level baseline position, including the reserves position of local councils before the pandemic. It also set out the initial financial implications of the pandemic for local councils and the scale of the anticipated challenge going forward.

The report which was attached at Appendix 1 of the Officers report has been produced by Audit Wales following the conclusion of Phase 2 of its financial sustainability assessment work during 2020/21. A report is being produced for each of the 22 principal councils in Wales.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and welcomed G. P. Jones and M. Jones from Audit Wales to the meeting, who provided details of a small number of minor amendments to the financial sustainability assessment report, which were noted by Cabinet.

Officers explained that the Council is in a strong financial position, with a number of key projects and frameworks in place, and that the proposals for improvement in the Audit Wales report align with the agreed outcomes for the ongoing Sustainable Financial Planning Corporate Review. In addition, Cabinet were assured that regular updates will be provided through the Committee cycle.

Officers from Audit Wales wished to thank the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer, Finance Manager, Chief Executive and the Cabinet for their support and cooperation.

Following consideration and discussion and in noting the minor amendments to the report, 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 Officers report: -

- i) The content of the Audit Wales Report be noted, including the minor amendments highlighted by Officers from Audit Wales;
- ii) That the Audit Wales proposals for improvement which have been accepted by

Officers and will be addressed as part of the Sustainable Financial Planning Corporate Review be noted.

8. PROVISIONAL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2020/21

The report provided information to Cabinet relating to the provisional capital outturn for the 2020/21 financial year.

The report provided details of actual capital expenditure for the 2020/21 financial year and slippage that has been requested to be carried forward into 2021/22.

Cabinet thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member sought further information around the slippage identified within the report and asked whether Covid-19 is a contributory factor. Officers explained that whilst the ongoing Pandemic has caused slippage in a number of areas such as the HRA, Home Repair Grants and WHQS programme, there are a number of other reasons for slippage such as delays in ongoing programmes of works, delays in contractual arrangements and the securing of external funding. Officers explained that a review of the Capital budgets and allocated spends will be underway in the coming months, with the aim being to provide a report to Cabinet in the Autumn.

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 Officers report the contend of the report be noted.

9. DELIVERING GOOD GOVERNANCE REVIEW: CAERPHILLY CBC

The report outlined the findings of the Delivering Good Governance Review: Caerphilly County Borough Council together with the Council's proposed action plan for addressing the matters for consideration raised within the review.

It was noted that in the Autumn of 2019, Audit Wales and Caerphilly CBC jointly agreed to carry out a review of the Councils Governance arrangements. The review was framed as a means of assessing whether the Council's existing arrangements were sufficiently well developed to support the ambitious TeamCaerphilly transformation journey.

The review was to include a self-evaluation by the Council's Corporate Governance Panel against the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework". The self-evaluation would then receive scrutiny and challenge from an external regulatory expert commissioned by the Council, before being subject to further review by Audit Wales.

It was noted that in March 2020, and with the self-evaluation still incomplete, the Council and Audit Wales agreed to pause the review as a result of the immediate need to focus Council resources on the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In June that year, Audit Wales announced their intention to deploy their staff to support and challenge recovery planning in real-time. This was a decision taken to provide "assurance that recovery takes due account of the multitude of risks, but also that it grasps the opportunities for a different and sustainable future".

Cabinet noted that by August, and with the pandemic response showing no signs of coming to an end, it was clear that the previously undertaken self-evaluation work was becoming less and less reflective of the governance arrangements supporting the Councils new operating environment.

The Council and Audit Wales, however, remained committed to use the self-evaluation work as a basis of describing some potential enhancements to the Council's arrangements.

It was noted that Appendix 2 of the report outlined several matters for consideration for the Council that have been identified by Audit Wales, while Appendix 3 included the Councils proposed action plan for addressing the matters raised.

Cabinet thanked the Officers for the report and welcomed G.P. Jones from Audit Wales who provided Cabinet with a summary of the review and findings as well as the road map and the 5 areas identified within the document as areas of improvement. Cabinet thanked the Officer and Audit Wales for their valued input and assurances were given that the Council will strive to meet the objectives.

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 Officers report: -

- i) The content of the Audit Wales Delivering Good Governance Review: Caerphilly County Borough Council be noted;
- ii) The action plan as attached at Appendix 3 of the Officers report be agreed.

10. GWENT COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PLAN

The report informed Cabinet of the health protection and control measures that are in place across Gwent to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19 in our communities.

The report sought Cabinet's endorsement of the updated Gwent Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plan.

It was noted that in July 2020 Welsh Government wrote to Local Authorities and Health Boards to ask that they prepare joint Local Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plans. The Guidance issued at that time has been revised and Welsh Government wrote to Local Authorities and Health Boards on 10th May 2021 requesting that Plans be updated. The updated Gwent Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plan was attached at Appendix A of the Officers report for Cabinet's consideration.

Cabinet thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

Cabinet expressed their gratitude to the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services, and his team for their continued dedication during the ongoing pandemic.

A Member, in noting the easing of lockdowns, queried whether there has been an increased pressure on Covid Enforcement and Public Protection Enforcement. Officers explained that this has presented a challenge and there has been a requirement to call upon staff outside of the Environment Health Team to aid Environmental Health Officers who have been allocated to the pandemic response. Members of staff from Trading Standards and Licensing have been called upon to provide support with the enforcement of Covid regulations, and there has been a need to second Environmental Health Officers from Health and Safety and Housing, as well as recruit a temporary Officer, in order to meet the demand. The Officer explained

that the additional staffing is being funded under the Covid-19 hardship fund, however Officers are lobbying Welsh Government to provide funding beyond September 2021, as it is envisaged that resources will be required for the remainder of the Financial year. Members noted however that the Contact Tracing funding has been extended to March 2022.

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 Officers report the updated Gwent Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plan be endorsed.

The meeting closed at 11.23 am

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 7th July 2021.

CHAIR