



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 23RD MARCH 2022 AT 10:30A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden (Leader) - Chair

Councillors:

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:

C. Harry (Chief Executive), D. Street (Corporate Director, Social Services and Housing), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services) and S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant - Housing), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), E. Pryce (Assistant Director, Education Achievement Service - Policy and Strategy), N. Williams (Head of Housing), K. Watkins (Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer), S. Jones (Supporting People Manager, Adult Services), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), M. Harris (Committee Support Officer/Chauffer) and M. Afzal (Committee Services Officer).

And

Cllr. C.P. 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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr S. Cook (Social Care and Housing) and M.S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment) and D. Hartevelde (Education Achievement Service).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. CABINET – 9TH MARCH 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 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.

The Chief Executive updated Members on the Cabinet Forward Work Programme. Members were advised that the next meeting of Cabinet has been scheduled to consider urgent matters as it falls within the pre-election period.

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. PUBLICATION OF GENDER PAY GAP DATA 2021 – EQUALITY ACT 2010 (SPECIFIC DUTIES AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES) REGULATIONS 2017

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval for the publication of the Authority's Gender Pay Gap Written Statement 2021 to the Council's and Government's website by 30th March 2022.

Cabinet was advised that under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, all organizations listed at Schedule 2 to the regulations that employ over 250 employees are required to report annually on their gender pay gap from 2017. However, the provisions under these Regulations only apply to employees directly appointed and managed by the Council. Employees who are appointed and managed by school head teachers/Governing Bodies are not required to be included within the scope of the Council's Gender Pay Gap Data.

The Head of People Services confirmed that the Gender Pay Gap Statement provided a snapshot of data from a point in time and is based on data as of the 31st March 2021. The Officer assured Cabinet that it was not an indication that there was an equal pay issue within the Council in terms of pay, or that males and females were paid differently for the same or similar types of work, it is based on the choice that employees have made in terms of the roles they take. Cabinet was asked to note that this was something that the council should acknowledge and welcome that as an organisation we offer these opportunities to staff to work flexibly in different types of roles.

The Leader thanked the Officer for the explanation and echoed the need to recognise the myriad of opportunities for all workers within the Council that this snapshot of data evidenced.

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 written report statement attached at Appendix 1 detailing gender pay gap data for publication on the Council's website and the Government website online using the gender pay gap reporting service be agreed.

6. EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE (EAS) BUSINESS PLAN 2022-2025

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval on the final Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2022-2025 following a regional consultation process, including consideration by CMT and the Education Scrutiny Committee on 15th February 2022. The plan laid out EAS' main priorities, following robust self-evaluation processes which EAS believes will be relevant to focus upon in the next iteration of the regional Business Plan for 2022-2025.

The Assistant Director for Policy and Strategy at the EAS updated Cabinet on the Business Plan and explained the consultation process and how the EAS had listened and adapted the plan to ensure that the needs of Caerphilly learners and Caerphilly Schools were met.

Members thanked the EAS for working in collaboration with Caerphilly and for their efforts in amending the plan in light of the Authority's comments. It was felt that the plan had been strengthened through collaborative work with the Authority. Members and Officers placed on record their appreciation for the EAS in engaging with the Authority, especially through the consultation process, which had brought many of the plan's recommendations to life and allowed the Authority to shape many of the key areas.

The Chief Education Officer and Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services echoed the comments made and welcomed the renewed and refreshed commitment to working in partnership with the EAS.

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. It be ensured that the Business Plan enables appropriate support and challenge for schools and that it addresses the areas for improvement that have been identified within Caerphilly County Borough Council's Education Strategic Plans.
2. The EAS Business Plan 2022-2025 be approved.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

Consideration was given to the report which asked Members to consider and approve the 2022/23 Housing Business Plan and its submission to Welsh Government by 31 March 2022 on an ongoing, annual basis, following its presentation to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 15th March 2022. Members were asked to consider the views of the Scrutiny Committee and approve the submission of the report to Council to request an extension on the HRA borrowing cap to £90m to allow the new build programme to progress.

The Head of Housing highlighted some of the plan's key areas. It was noted that plan covered a 30-year period for managing the Authority's assets, finances, and necessary investments. However, it was felt that the Authority would benefit from focusing on the initial 3-5-year period where Officer could have more confidence in core assumptions and interest rates and rent increases.

Cabinet was advised that the volatility in the market, for example labour cost, materials etc, is likely to affect the plan in the coming years and that any change to an assumption or sensitivity would have a significant impact, so while it is important to plan for 30 years the focus now should be on the initial few years.

Reference was made to existing borrowing levels which stood at £75 million. It was confirmed that £45 million of this capital would be allocated to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard Scheme and £30 million would be invested in the increased housing supply. However, it was noted that the level of borrowing is likely to increase as the New Build Programme progresses, hence, with approval from Council, the Authority were looking to borrow the additional amount.

The Head of Housing drew Members' attention to the Business Plan Narrative Document which sets out how the Housing Revenue Account operates, together with the challenges and targets of the Service going forward. It was noted that the document must be demonstrated in the Business Plan. Members were advised that the document is being refined and would be completed for consideration by Council. In respect of the increased borrowing, it was advised that it would not be required until the next financial year.

Members welcomed the report and were supportive of its recommendations. Overall, it was felt that the additional borrowing was required to deliver the ambitious New Build Programme.

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 2022/23 Housing Business Plan and its submission to Welsh Government by the 31st March 2022, and annual on an ongoing basis be approved.

RECOMMENDED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report the report goes onto Council to request an extension on the HRA borrowing cap to £90m to allow the new build programme to progress.

8. COAL TIP CONDITION STATUS AND INSPECTION REGIME

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet endorsement of the continued use of Caerphilly's policy and procedures for managing tip inspections and maintenance programme, continued collaborative working with Welsh Government and the Coal Authority and continued exploration of options for addressing maintenance requirements for privately owned spoil tips.

Cabinet was advised that the report had been considered by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22nd March 2022. The outcome of these discussions was fed back to Cabinet Members.

It was confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee had unanimously supported the recommendations. However, it was noted that current legislation did not allow local authorities to enter private land unless it was deemed an emergency. Thus, members of the Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Authority negotiates with owners to agree access to the land should work on the private tips be required.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee acknowledged that majority of the tips within the County Borough fell within private land and felt that for officers and experts to enter the land with ease, stronger legislation was required.

Cabinet noted that Welsh Government were in the process of developing new legislation and the Law Commission had been instructed to investigate the matter. It was anticipated that a new Supervisory Board would be set up to oversee the registration, classification, and management of tips across Wales and it was hoped that this would result in consistency across the board.

Members were assured that the tips within the County Borough had been thoroughly inspected and there were no issues of concern. In respect of the private tips, it was noted that Officers were working with the Coal Authority to manage and identify issues of concern. It was highlighted that one private tip had recorded some movement; however, Members were assured that it did not give any cause for concern at this time, the tip was being closely monitored and Officers were working with the landowner to resolve the issue.

Cabinet was advised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken in the management and maintenance of tips. Over £1,000,000 had been spent on tip work last financial year (2021/22) and it was anticipated that a considerable amount of work would be undertaken this financial year (2022/23).

Moreover, the Officer updated Members on the information that had just been received in respect of the Law Commission. It was confirmed that the Law Commission work would be published on 24th March 2022 and contained 36 recommendations which would need to be reviewed and considered and a further report brought back to Members in this regard.

In relation to the ongoing discussions between the UK Government and Welsh Government regarding funding, Members were assured that tips would be managed in a robust and methodical way, and it was stressed that there were no immediate concerns in relation to tips 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: -

1. The continued use of Caerphilly's policy and procedures for managing tip inspections and maintenance programme which was originally supported by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 02-04-2013 be endorsed.
2. Continued collaborative working with Welsh Government and the Coal Authority be endorsed.
3. Continued exploration of options for addressing maintenance requirements for privately owned spoil tips be endorsed.

9. HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME STRATEGY

Consideration was given to the report which advised Members of the current Housing Support Programme Strategy for the period 2022-2026 as required by Welsh Government every four years. The report also outlined the single strategic view of Caerphilly's approach to Homelessness Prevention and Housing Support Services.

The Officer summarised the key strategic priorities and advised that the priorities could only be delivered through collaborative work with colleagues in health, probation and housing services. Furthermore, it was highlighted that individuals with first-hand experience of support services were of particular importance.

It was noted that the cohort of people requiring support services was continuously changing and this presented a significant challenge when developing a strategy covering an extended period of time. However, it was confirmed that the priorities within the strategy would remain as they were based on evidence to date and the needs of current and future service users. Furthermore, Members were assured that the priorities would be reviewed, and the costs deriving from the service were in-line with the Welsh Government Grant.

Members thanked the Officer for outlining the priorities as well as the complexities surrounding the strategy and were particularly appreciative of the adjustments the service were able to make should users require them.

Clarification on the training programme for Officers working with the homeless was sought. The Officer confirmed that there was extensive mandatory training in place to ensure long-term and sustainable accommodation for service users. Training areas included health and safety, housing legislation and homelessness legislation, with many of the courses being accredited through the Financial Conduct Authority. Cabinet noted that there was also extensive Officer training on key issues such as suicide prevention, substance misuse and individuals fleeing violence and domestic abuse and everyone that comes into homelessness services has a degree of psychologically informed environment and trauma informed training to ensure there is an understanding of why individuals come into the services in the beginning and helping to break the cycle of homelessness.

A comment pertaining to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) was put forward by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services who felt that the Planning and Housing service area ought to work earlier and more extensively with Local Members and residents to identify and raise awareness on HMOs, especially on private HMOs. The Member's concerns were acknowledged, and it was noted that a private application for an HMO did not require consultation with Housing Services and very often it is only on contact from the Local Ward Members or Residents that the service becomes aware of the proposal, and this situation was far from ideal. The Corporate Director assured Cabinet that Officers were doing the best they could in a very complex environment.

Clarification was sought as to the priority for ending rough sleeping and whether any individuals assisted into long-term accommodation had returned to living on the streets. It was confirmed that due to the active outreach team and the training and support that was being offered to service users, the return rate was significantly low. Officers and Members were pleased with the progress that had been made.

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 strategy be considered and its single strategic direction for housing related support and homelessness prevention be agreed.

The meeting closed at 11:15A.M.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 6th April 2022.

CHAIR