



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 26TH SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 2PM

PRESENT:

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair

Councillors:

J. Pritchard (Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration & Climate Change), C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education & Communities), N. George (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property), S. Cook (Cabinet Member for Housing), P. Leonard (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection) and C. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces), Cllr. J. Simmonds (Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation).

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Chief Executive), M. S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment) and R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services).

Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Kyte (Head of Planning and Regeneration), P. Hudson (Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording 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 E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care), and D. Street (Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing)

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. CABINET – 7TH SEPTEMBER 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2022 be 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 14th December 2022.

Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and thus subject to change. The Leader thanked Officers for populating the forward work programme so far in advance and Cabinet accepted that as a live document it would be 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.

5. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the recommendations from a joint meeting of the Environment and Sustainability and the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committees held on the 28th July 2022 on the findings of the Caerphilly County Borough Council Car Parks Task and Finish Group.

Cabinet noted that the Task and Finish Group reviewed the town centre car parking charges in view of the effects of the pandemic on the high street economy and concentrated on the 6 main town centres of Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Newbridge, Risca and Ystrad Mynach.

Options for future charging were referenced and the range of options reviewed noted along with the Groups overall recommendation. Cabinet referred to Section 10 of the Officers report and the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on the 28th July 2022.

The Leader referenced representations he had received from Blackwood Town Council, Councillor A. Farina-Childs and a Blackwood business in relation to the report and the findings of the Task and Finish Group. He asked Cabinet to note that 3 Independent Members were part of the Task and Finish membership which had included full cross-party representation and as such they would have contributed fully to the recommendations presented for consideration. Reference was then made to a request from Councillor K. Etheridge to speak at Cabinet on this report and Leader advised that Councillor Etheridge had previously spoken at the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting and his comments there had been fully noted.

Members noted that the Task and Finish Group, Joint Scrutiny Committee and now Cabinet would be considering what was best for all Town Centres as a whole and assurances were given that Cabinet had listened to the findings of the Task and Finish Group and the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Committee.

It was moved and seconded that subject to the inclusion of 2 additional recommendations at 3.5 and 3.6 of the Officers report to read that (1) the implementation of the new charges be delayed until Monday 2nd January 2023 to allow the 8 – 10 weeks for the charging machine and software amendments to be made, and that (2) the £150,000 lost income from the Highways budget for the 3 months from October 2022 to January 2023 be funded from the earmarked Covid Reserve the recommendations contained in the Officers report be approved and by way of verbal confirmation and Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. To reduce the initial hourly charge at Caerphilly County Borough Council car parks to the First hour at 40p with subsequent hours at the existing tariff be endorsed.
2. The continued suspension of car parking charges until the car park ticket machine software can be amended, and to allow sufficient time for this to be undertaken, to agree that the re-introduction of charges in accordance with above be implemented from January 2023 be endorsed.
3. Additional funding for the Highway Services budget to meet the shortfall as outlined in the Financial Implications based on the estimated annual income loss of £83k be endorsed.
4. An impact report be provided to Scrutiny 12 months after the implementation of the changes be approved.
5. The implementation of the new charges be delayed until Monday 2nd January 2023 to allow the 8-10 weeks for the charging machines and software amendments to be made be approved.
6. The £150,000 lost income from the Highways Budget for the 3 months from October 2022 to January 2023 be funded from the earmarked Covid Reserve.

With the approval of the Chair, Agenda Item No. 8 – Provisional Revenue Budget Outturn for 2021/22 report was brought forward for discussion.

8. PROVISIONAL REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN FOR 2021/22

Consideration was given to the report which sought to provide Cabinet with details of the provisional revenue budget outturn for the 2021/22 financial year prior to the completion of the annual external audit of the accounts by Audit Wales.

Cabinet noted that in advance of the 2021/22 Financial Statements audit being completed by Audit Wales and presented to Governance and Audit Committee and Council the report provided an overview of the Council's performance against the revenue budget for the 2021/22 financial year. The report also detailed a range of proposals for the use of surplus General Fund balances and the use of service reserves.

Cabinet was advised that the Authority continued to incur significant additional costs during the 2021/22 financial year due to the Covid 19 pandemic and has also lost income in several key areas. However Welsh Government continued to provide substantial funding to Local Authorities to offset additional costs and income losses through the Covid 19 Hardship Fund, which allocated £19.025m to Caerphilly County Borough Council during that financial year. In addition Welsh Government also provided specific grant funding to Local Authorities to assist with a range of other financial pressure that included £878k to help mitigate a reduction in Council Tax collection rates, £2.576m for Track, Trace and Protect, £4.036m for the Social Care Recovery Fund and £1.017m for Education and Life Long Learning.

As was the case in 2020/21 financial year, the level of underspends for 2021/22 was significantly higher than in previous years, reflecting the ongoing impact of the pandemic on changes in working practices and the scale of financial support provided, large elements of

which were not received until the latter part of the financial year. The more significant budget variation for each service area were detailed and noted.

Cabinet was referred to section 5.10 of the Officers report which detailed in the impact on the General Fund and to Appendix C which listed the use of reserves approved by Officers using delegated powers.

Reference was made to the in-year impact of the 2022/23 Pay Awards and the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer confirmed that the figure reflected the latest pay offer for National Joint Council Staff and Teaching Staff, with an increase of £1,925 on all pay points from April 2022, with teachers pay being increased by 5% from September 2022. This had resulted in an additional funding requirement of £6.860m for the current financial year.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft forms and verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. The provisional 2021/22 revenue budget outturn position be noted.
2. That the £878k Council Tax Collection grant received from the Welsh Government (WG) in 2021/22 be set aside in an earmarked reserve to help mitigate the financial impact of a potential further shortfall in Council Tax collection rates in the 2022/23 financial year be agreed.
3. A recommendation to Council to maintain the General Fund balance at £11.852m, representing 3% of the 2022/23 net revenue budget be endorsed.
4. The proposed use of the surplus General Fund balances totalling £14.333m as detailed in section 5.10 of the report, prior to consideration by Council on 4th October 2022 be endorsed.
5. The use of service reserves totally £2.414m that have been agreed by Officers using delegated powers as detailed in Appendix C be noted.
6. The proposed use of service reserves totalling £3.498m as set out in section 5.11 of the report be approved.

6. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH – RESPONSE TO THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update Cabinet on the work being undertaken in response of the cost-of-living crisis, to illustrate the range and extent of the support being provided. Cabinet agreement was also being sought on an initial response to assist communities and some of its most vulnerable residents in terms of the current cost-of-living crisis.

Cabinet noted that the concept of the Council assisting residents in financial difficulties is not new and with inflation at its highest level for over 30 years, energy prices rising at the fastest rate in living memory, there is no doubt that many people will be facing some hugely difficult choices when trying to care for themselves and their families as the winter progresses. At the same time in real terms earnings are falling, interest rates are rising, and these challenges will need to be responded to. As in the pandemic support will need to be prioritised and resourced utilising collaboration across services, strong networks and effective communication.

Current key support was outlined and the work done by Caerphilly Cares, Housing Rents, Supporting People, Council Tax, Catering Services, Housing Benefits and Education was detailed. Further proposals for targeted support were summarised and Cabinet noted that suggestions had been submitted by staff and Councillors.

Reference was made to section 5.12 of the Officer's report and the update on Welsh Government Cost of Living Support Scheme and the package of measures contained therein. Cabinet noted the significant demand this crisis would place on the authority particularly as there is no indication on the duration of the crisis or the extent of the severity likely to be experienced by most of the citizens of the county borough.

Clarification was sought as the kind of support that would be provided to food bank/food share initiatives and Officers confirmed that there was a wide range of support available both financially and via staffing support. Reference was made to food poverty grant funding, and it was noted that this funding could be accessed through a straightforward application process.

Cabinet noted the support already being provided by the Council and the Chief Executive provided an outline of the initiatives including Caerphilly Cares and how residents would be able to access everything that is available to aid them during the crisis, working with partners and streamlining and refining service provision would be vital going forward, but this would not completely negate the impact on individuals as the crisis deepens.

Clarification was then sought of the level of response to the Cost-of-Living Roadshows and the Officer confirmed that they were running everyday throughout September, using a variety of venues both in town centres and smaller community facilities. It was noted that the town centre venues had proven to be the best attended with 86 residents supported to date. The main concerns raised at the events were centred on energy bills, benefit entitlement and accessing food banks. Cabinet was advised that the roadshows would also be utilising a mobile set up to reach smaller communities and the upcoming Christmas Fairs would be used as an additional opportunity to engage with residents.

Cabinet was pleased to note that the webpage was up and running and that as much communication and engagement as possible with residents was taking place. The role of Councillors in terms of signposting and assisting resident to make contact was discussed and it was noted that all front-line staff were being trained to signpost and that this training could be made available to all Councillors.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. An amendment to the previously approved discretionary element of the WG Cost of Living Support Scheme which will allow Post Office vouchers to be issued to those households that have not registered for payments under the Main Scheme be approved.
2. The recommendation in the 2021/22 Provisional Revenue Budget Outturn Report to set aside one-off funding of £3m from surplus General Fund balances to create a Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund to support a range of initiatives that will assist our communities be noted.
3. Decisions with regard to the use of to the Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund be delegated to the Corporate Director for Social Services & Housing in conjunction with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Education and Communities.

7. UK GOVERNMENT SHARED PROSPERITY FUND – CAERPHILLY LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update Cabinet on the submission by Rhondda Cynon Taf of the Cardiff Capital Region Investment Plan to the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund as part of the UK Government's Levelling Up Programme. The report also sought the endorsement of Cabinet for the Local Investment Plan comprising an overview of the Caerphilly Specific Proposed SPF Interventions as detailed in Appendix 2 and 3 of the Officer's report.

Cabinet noted that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government's ambitious Levelling Up agenda and is a significant component of its support for places across the UK. It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment with all areas of the UK which was allocated from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition.

The Levelling Up objectives were outlined and Cabinet noted its primary goal was to build pride in a place and increase life chances across the UK. Cabinet was advised that Caerphilly County Borough had a conditional allocation of £28,272,298 and this funding would be used to invest in buildings, make digital improvements including Wi-Fi connectivity and offer support to local business via the Caerphilly Enterprise Fund. Town centre cleansing, better accessibility would also benefit as would the development of community, cultural and heritage venues to be more inclusive and accessible for all abilities and ages and this would inevitably increase footfall. Reference was made to the long-term aspirations for tackling unemployment and economic inactivity particularly around marginalised groups and Cabinet welcomed this vital opportunity for local positive interventions.

In relation to the event programme, Cabinet sought clarification as to what could be achieved and the Officer confirmed that this would be a great opportunity to launch an exciting events programme building on from recent successes, thinking creatively to capture a broad audience range and so reenergising the return to cultural, heritage, theatrical and creative activities.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the exciting possibilities of the programme, but was also mindful of the need to be realistic in terms of deliverability when set against the current cost-of-living crisis.

Members welcomed the opportunity to develop further retail and night-time economy and sought clarification on how this could be advanced. The Officer advised that business capacity would be a focus and explained the increased interest in utilising outdoor areas, that began during the pandemic, could now be taken forward to increase business which could be critical for business sustainability and the drive to increase footfall into town centre. However cultural activity should not just be a night-time consideration but ongoing throughout the day.

Cabinet noted the proposed investment for economically inactive people and sought further information in this regard. Officers confirmed that a lot of work was already happening within this space, the SPF would look at issues on a regional and well as local footprint and would enable work to be done with individuals to identify the barriers to sustainable employment and introduce timely and tailored interventions to secure positive outcomes. Whether this be in terms of skills support, mentoring or digital access, support would be streamlined to a programme that is fleet of foot in terms of its ability to respond to changing needs.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. The detail of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the opportunities for the Funds to contribute significantly to the Council's own Place Shaping, Community resilience, Transformation and Regeneration agendas be considered.
2. That the CCR Investment Plan has been submitted to UK Government for consideration by RCT be noted.
3. The Caerphilly Local Investment Plan comprising an overview of the Caerphilly Specific Proposed SPF interventions attached at Appendices 2 and 3 be considered and endorsed.

9. BRYN CARNO

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the current progress with securing funding for the failed external wall insulation scheme on 86 properties at the Bryn Carno estate Rhymney and also sought Cabinet approval for the match funding that Caerphilly would contribute towards the project costs from the Housing Revenue Account.

Cabinet welcomed the report and its recommendations that would assist the residents of Bryn Carno, particularly in term of their health and wellbeing and resolve issues with the defective wall insulation and the significant water ingress into their homes.

Clarification was sought as to a possible timeline for completion and Officers advised that given the nature of the works, in all probability completion would be in the latter quarter of 2025.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report:-

1. The business plan funding bid to Welsh Government be noted.
2. The revised scheme, costs, delivery timeline and match funding contribution from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in respect of Council owned properties, to deliver the tenure neutral scheme by Caerphilly Homes be approved.

10. TRANSITIONAL ACCOMMODATION CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the new Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme which provided funding to deliver the new draft Transitional Accommodation Strategy as set out by Welsh Government. The report also set out the projects and schemes which formed the bid to Welsh Government and the level of contribution required from the Housing Revenue Account to deliver this accommodation increasing the Caerphilly Homes housing stock.

Cabinet noted the need to provide transitional accommodation as a priority to enable people to move from temporary accommodation, including welcome centres and other short-term accommodation, while continuing to meet existing housing need.

Clarification was sought on Local Member involvement, should the bid be successful, and Officers confirmed that they would be involved as soon as possible with separate meetings organise with them to look at sites. However, Members needed to be mindful that there was still a lot of due diligence to take place, including statutory planning processes before any project would come to fruition.

Clarification was then sought as to the number of homes that would be provided and an further explanation on the structure and quality of the 'modular homes' outlined in the report. The Officer confirmed that it was anticipated that 75 homes would be generated across the total of the TACP proposals, again subject to Welsh Government and Planning approval and market opportunities. In terms of quality of the modular homes, Cabinet noted that they would be precision manufactured homes to the highest quality standard and would meeting the highest energy and performance requirements.

Cabinet welcomed this suite of provisions that sought to increase transitional accommodation and the ability to respond to the challenges of homelessness in a more agile way, whether that be through new build or converting existing properties.

Cabinet noted the pressures on housing lists and the forthcoming legislative changes that would place additional pressures on the private housing sector and potential impact that the cost-of-living crisis would have in terms of potential rent arrears, loss of tenancy and the numbers presenting as homeless.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report:-

1. The bids submitted under the TACP acknowledging the timelines for delivery be noted and the indicative level of contribution from the HRA be agreed. It be noted that none of the submissions have been formally agreed and could change.
2. That, if the funding bid is successful, that the block of commercial and residential accommodation at 1 to 6 The Grove, Fochriw, be refurbished and the residential brought back into use, rather than demolished, as previously agreed by Cabinet in 2018.
3. Delegation to the Corporate Director of Social Services and Housing and Head of Financial Services/S151 Officer in consultation with the lead Cabinet Member for Housing. As Welsh Government make decisions on existing submissions that may require variation and encourage additional bids under the fund this year and into next financial year, this enables autonomy of decision making acting quickly, up to a financial threshold, particularly where there are market opportunities be approved.
4. The total combined funding envelope and threshold for which the delegation may not exceed is £4,447,031 all be which comes from the Housing Revenue Account be approved.

The meeting closed at 15.04pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 19th October 2022.

CHAIR