



COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATION MEETING HELD IN THE CHAMBER PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 4TH OCTOBER 2022 AT 5.00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor E.M. Aldworth – Mayor

Councillors:

C. Andrews, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, S. Cook, D. Cushing, C. Cuss, T.D. Davies MBE, G. Ead, C. Elsbury, G. Enright, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, E. Forehead, J. E. Fussell, A. Gair, N. George, C. Gordon, D. Harse, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, M. James, L. Jeremiah, J. Jones, S. Kent, P. Leonard, C. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Miles, C. Morgan, S. Morgan, T. Parry, L. Phipps, M. Powell, D.W.R. Preece, D. Price, H. Pritchard, J. Pritchard, J. Reed, J. Roberts, J. Sadler, J. Simmonds, E. Stenner, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, L. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, K. Woodland, C. Wright.

Together with:-

C. Harrhy (Chief Executive), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), D. Lucas (Team Leader, Strategic Planning), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Thomas (Planning Services Manager), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), S. Issacs (Rents Manager), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy), G. Jenkins (Deputy Director Social Services, Children's Services), S. Pugh (Head of Communications), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

Also Attending: -

- A. Boulter, C. Jones, A. Goss and
- B. J. Hallett and P. Woods (Ysgol Bro Sannan and Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Baroged)

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chief Executive reminded those present the meeting was being live streamed, and 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 Councillors M. Adams, A. Angel, N. Dix, K. Etheridge, C. Forehead, G. Johnston, A. Leonard, B. Owen, J. Pritchard, R. Saralis, A. Whitcombe.

2. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor referred to the engagement and events she had attended since the last meeting of Council and made specific reference to her invitation to a service of remembrance for Queen Elizabeth II and to meet King Charles III.

3. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 28(3)

There were no petitions.

4. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Young Enterprise Volunteer of the Year 2022

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities expressed her pleasure in announcing that Antony Bolter had been named Young Enterprise Volunteer of the Year 2022.

Members were advised that Young Enterprise is the UK charitable arm of Junior Achievement Worldwide and would celebrate its 60th Anniversary 2023. The Company and Teams Programmes are designed to give young people the opportunity to learn and practice skills which prepare them for the world of work.

Council noted that Antony first became involved with the Young Enterprise in 2003 as a Business Adviser for students at Heolddu Comprehensive School. He had since a number of voluntary roles, including Business Advisor for Trinity Fields and Coleg Gwent, Link Teacher at Fast Forward, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Board Member, Young Enterprise in Wales Board Member and most recently, Leader of the Volunteer Team in South and Mid Wales.

As there are over 7500 Young Enterprise Volunteers across the UK, the Cabinet Member was sure that Council would agree that this award demonstrates the hard work and dedication shown by Antony.

The Mayor welcomed Antony Bolter to Council and asked Members to join her in congratulating him on this fantastic achievement.

Gwent Association of Voluntary Sector Achievement Awards

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities expressed her pride in introducing Carl Jones an Emergency Medical Technician who had been nominated for an award at the Gwent Association of Voluntary Sector Achievement Awards evening to be held later this month.

Members were advised that while off duty, Carl happened to be passing a street in Bargoed where there was a house fire. Carl proceeded to raise the alarm and rescued 3 families so that the emergency services could rescue the gentleman in a fourth property.

The Mayor welcomed Carl Jones to Council and asked Member to join her in recognising this incredible act of bravery which helped to save lives and prevented further damage to neighbouring properties.

Gold Member Experience Award (Retention People)

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces expressed his pleasure in announcing that Caerphilly's Sport and Leisure Centres had recently been awarded the prestigious Gold Member Experience Award administered by the Retention People.

Council noted that this was a true testament to the hard work and dedication of the Council's Leisure Centre Staff, who had delivered an exceptional Member experience in what has been another challenging year. To achieve this celebrated award, service users were invited to offer feedback on their experience and whether they would recommend our Leisure Centres to others. Utilising externally accredited Net Promoter Score process which ranks organisations across the United Kingdom they achieved the Gold Award for delivering exceptional quality.

The Mayor welcomed Ann Goss, on behalf of Leisure Services, to Council and asked Members to join her in recognising the outstanding work and dedication of our Leisure Centre staff.

Collection Crew of the Year

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces expressed his pleasure in being able to take a moment to remember all the Council's refuse collection staff who worked throughout the recent pandemic, coping superbly with the introduction of additional safety measures including using convoy vehicles to ensure we followed the government rules during lockdown, and dealt with the huge uplift of waste as people took the opportunity to clear out lofts, garages and sheds.

Council noted that three such staff, Russell Hurley, Duncan Mazurczak and Ross Mazurczak worked together as Refuse Round 1 for over 18 years and, throughout that time received commendations and letters of thanks from members of the public. This exceptional team was nominated for the Collection Crew of the Year Award and, although they were unsuccessful, the Cabinet Member shared one incident that demonstrated their willingness to go above and beyond.

In February 22, the crew came across a man covered in blood, carrying a large kitchen knife. Clearly disorientated and a danger to himself and possibly others, the crew calmed him, called the emergency services and stayed with him whilst waiting for assistance. Despite being delayed for about an hour dealing with this traumatic situation, they stayed on to complete their collection round. For his part Darren, Mazurczak received a letter for thanks for his composure, bravery and public service from the Chief Superintendent of Gwent Police.

Although the Team were unable to be present in person the Mayor advised Council that she had met personally all the Members of the Team and had thanked them for their bravery and compassion.

Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Fargoed and Ysgol Bro Sannan

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities expressed her pleasure in recognising the fantastic work of Mr Jamie Hallett as Executive Headteacher and Mrs Patricia Wood, Chair of Governors of Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Fargoed and Ysgol Bro Sannan.

Council noted that in October 2019 Ysgol Bro Sannan and Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Fargoed had been inspected and judged by ESTYN to require significant improvement. Mr Hallett was appointed as the Executive Headteacher for both schools and by June 2022 the schools had received successful inspection reports and were removed from the statutory category.

Members were advised that Mr Hallett had been an inspirational Leader and he and his staff have continued to make good progress across all ESTYN recommendations. Staff morale is high and both schools are valued by pupils, their families, and their communities. Mrs Wood was nominated by the Local Authority to be the Chair of Governors in both schools, and she had been extremely committed to her voluntary role, giving much time to both schools to ensure that governance has been strengthened.

The Mayor welcomed Jamie Hallet and Patricia Wood to Council and asked Members to join her in expressing their gratitude and appreciation for the efforts made by all involved.

2022 Examination Results

The Leader of Council expressed his pride and admiration for all Caerphilly Learners on their outstanding examination results in 2022. Having faced the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic, he felt it only right and proper that Council acknowledged and showed their appreciation for the efforts of pupils and staff. The Mayor asked Council to join her in showing their appreciation for the pupils and staff of all Caerphilly schools and congratulated them on their examination success.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

6. MINUTES - COUNCIL – 19TH JULY 2022

Subject to an amendment in that Councillor A. Broughton-Pettit had been incorrectly recorded as Councillor A. Pettit-Broughton in the list of attendees it was

RESOLVED that the minutes of Council held on 19th July 2022 (minute nos. 1-10) be approved as a correct record.

7. TO RECEIVE AND TO ANSWER QUESTIONS RECEIVED UNDER RULE OF PROCEDURE 10(4)

Question to the Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces, Councillor C. Morgan from Councillor A. Leonard.

Please can the Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces explain what the Council is doing to preserve our natural wildflowers and insect biodiversity as well as the introduction of a friendlier grass cutting regime?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces to Councillor A. Leonard.

Public Authorities in Wales are already required to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity. Caerphilly County Council makes a significant contribution, notably through the management of land and for the benefit of diversity, including our country parks, our national and local nature reserves and other conservation land. As a Member of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership, we have worked collaboratively to develop green infrastructure enhancement projects at a regional scale, including contributing to the Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy, Access Projects, Biodiversity Projects such as Nature Isn't Neat and Urban Biodiversity Invasive and Non-native Species Management, the preparation of the Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan and habitat enhancement along the Ebbw, Rhymney and Sirhowy Rivers. Another example of strategic tree planting projects, tree planting was undertaken at Ynys Howell Farm and adjacent to the the Sirhowy Valley Country Park delivered a significant wildlife corridor between the Graig Goch Local Nature Reserve and Natural Resources Wales woodland and Sirhowy River. A dedicated volunteer field was planted with some 4500 trees by volunteers working in partnership with GAVO, Groundwork Wales, Keep Wales Tidy and Natural Resources Wales. The strategic tree planting schemes provided benefits to mental and physical health and well-being, with further benefit occurring in the medium and long term by providing space for volunteers, residents and visitors to visit and relax and enjoy the woodland now and in the future.

The pausing of grass cutting services during periods of lockdown had a welcome effect on our environment, a study undertaken in 2021 identified a wide range and variant of verge habitats. Site specific recommendations to enhance biodiversity were made for section of roadside verge and a series of more general measures produced for verges across the county borough. The most important of these were to leave verges and cut through the spring and early summer to allow plants to flower and set seeds and to remove grass cuttings to reduce the dominance of coarse grasses. In addition, the consultation undertaken with Local Members and a number of other locations were identified where the grass would be allowed to flourish and grow. All these changes to our approach to grass cutting were approved by Cabinet in November 2021 and have been implemented over the growing season this year.

Our education role and working with residents and Members are as important as the initiatives as we need their support for managing other areas such as Commons, we aim to adopt a whole ecosystem management approach, where we undertake initiatives for both habitats and species through protection and creation. Grass cutting is just one aspect of how we can maintain and enhance biodiversity. A Members Seminar has been arranged for the 24th October 2022 where there will be an opportunity for Members to learn about biodiversity and the Nature Isn't Neat campaign and also see examples of how our new approach to grass cutting is promoting biodiversity. A further report on grass cutting is scheduled for Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in February and March next year respectively with a view to implementing any further developments in time for the next year's growing season.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

8. LOWER EBBW AND SIRHOWY VALLEY MASTERPLAN

Consideration was given to the report that sought to advise Members on the main issues identified by respondents during the public consultation exercise carried out between the 19th of January 2022 and the 2nd of March 2022 on the draft Lower Ebbw and Sirhowy Valleys Masterplan.

Council noted that during the consultation period 27 representation were received and were referred to Appendix 1 of the report and the Report of Public Consultation (ROC) considered the issues raised, provides Officer's responses, and makes recommendations. Members noted the main issues raised in the consultation centred on the potential for tourism beyond Cwmcarn Forest Drive, making town centres safer for people walking, wheeling, or cycling, promotion of the area's industrial heritage, reusing empty buildings and the protection of natural and semi-natural environments.

The Lower Ebbw and Sirhowy Valleys Masterplan is one of five masterplans that cover the county borough and provide a more detailed outline of the regeneration opportunities in their respective areas. The masterplan's employment base and tourist economy present real opportunities for economic renewal and growth and seeks to integrate the strong employment, retail, tourism and recreational base to realise added benefit for economic recovery and growth.

It was noted that most of the respondents supported the vision, strategic objectives and the development strategy with many of the proposals support, however there were also some suggested changes and additional projects.

A Member welcomed this version of the masterplan and was pleased to note that observations had been listened to and reference was made to local bus services. The Member confirmed that working with Officers and Stagecoach they had secured a commitment for a half hourly service and hoped that the approval of the Masterplan would see

this formalised. The Member referred to page 72 of the plan and the Well-being Objective contained therein and the fact that there was no reference made to the construction of a waste processing plant at Nine Mile Point or the lorries running through the adjacent villages. The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that as this related to a specific planning application it would be inappropriate for her to comment on the points raised.

Reference was then made to the Ynys Howell Country Park and its removal from the masterplan and what if anything could be done to enhance or improve the site. Clarification was then sought on the building known as 'the Full Moon Warden's Office' which was currently vacant and whether this could be included within the masterplan.

Officers confirmed that in respect of Ynys Howell it is currently in private ownership, however the Countryside Team were working with the owners and proprietors to improve and enhance the site and to embed it further into the Country Park as a whole. Council noted that the purpose of the Masterplan is to provide a basis for bidding in terms of regeneration projects and so it focused on the country park as a whole rather than its individual parts which is why the empty building isn't listed. The Officer confirmed that is included within the park and would be part of the proposal to enhance the area. As its in private ownership the Council's bidding process wouldn't take account of it, and the empty building forms part of the wider proposal for the Country Park as a whole.

Members were asked to keep in mind that the Masterplan does not go into specific project details, that would happen when projects are prepared to move forward in the bidding process.

By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation and in noting there were 48 For, 0 Against and 5 Abstentions the recommendations contained in the Officers report were approved.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The representations received as part of the public consultation exercise be considered and the Officer recommendations set out in the ROC be endorsed.
2. The Lower Ebbw and Sirhowy Valleys Masterplan as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Adopted Caerphilly County Borough Local Development Plan and as a tool for guiding regeneration activity in the Lower Ebbw and Sirhowy Valleys be approved.

9. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UP TO 2021 ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT (INCLUDING THE ANNUAL COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY REPORT)

Consideration was given to the report seeking Council approval for the Caerphilly County Borough Council Local Development Plan 2022 Annual Monitoring Report and for its submission to Welsh Government by the 31st October 2022, in order to satisfy the Council's statutory requirements.

Council noted that the monitoring data for the 2022 Annual Monitoring Report provided an interesting insight into the implementation of the LDP over the monitoring period and Members were referred to Section 2.2 of the Officer's report and the information contained therein.

Members were advised that Planning Policy SP15 (Affordable Housing Target) was not being delivered and required intervention, as well as Objective 9, which seeks to ensure an adequate and appropriate range of housing sites are available in the most suitable locations. Whilst SP14 (Total Housing Requirement) is being met as it is assessed against a low annual

build rate, the number of completions realised in 2022 remains deficient when assessed against the annual requirement set out in the housing trajectory. SP3 (Development in the Southern Connections Corridor) is also failing as it measures the percentage of development taking place on brownfield land.

In terms of Objective 17, which addresses Caerphilly's role as a commercial and employment centre and Objective 18, which concerns the provision and protection of employment land, they had also been identified as not delivering as required on the grounds of minimal take up and the low level of permissions granted during the monitoring period.

A Member referenced the struggle for young working couples to get on to the property ladder as first-time buyers and the stress and anxiety that this is causing and queried what could be done to improve affordable housing targets.

The Officer explained that the figures presented in the Annual Monitoring Report reflected just one element of the affordable housing target, which is those delivered through the planning system as part of planning applications, and these would generally be in accordance with the wider market and housing development. As a point of clarification, he explained that the policy when referring to affordable housing relates to housing that is socially rented, low-cost home ownership etc., it does not reference market housing as such. It was noted that 334 affordable housing units had been delivered through the planning system during the plan period against a target of 964, however the planning system delivery of affordable housing was a small percentage of the overall delivery of affordable housing, which is also delivered through Social Landlords and now potentially through Caerphilly Homes.

By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation and in noting there were 50 For, 0 Against and 4 Abstention the recommendations contained in the Officers report were approved.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The 2022 Annual Monitoring Report be approved, and its findings be considered and noted.
2. That the 2022 Annual Monitoring Report (including the Annual Community Infrastructure Levy Report) be submitted to the Welsh Government before the deadline of 31 October 2022.

10. PROVISIONAL REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN FOR 2021/22

Council noted that the report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on the 26th September 2022 and the recommendations in paragraphs 3.1.3 to 3.1.6 had been unanimously agreed. Members were advised that decisions in respect of General Fund Reserve were a matter for Council and so the report was now presented for Council's consideration.

Consideration was given to the report that provided 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.

Council was advised that the Authority continued to incur significant additional costs during the 2021/22 financial year due to the Covid 19 pandemic and had 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. However, this fund ceased on the 31st March 2022, with Local Authorities now having to manage any ongoing financial impacts of the pandemic from existing budgets.

Members were referred to Appendix A of the report which summarised the outturn position, and its net underspend of £37.815m. This included an underspend of £5.2m for schools and an underspend of £7.342m on the Housing Revenue Account. The schools underspend of £5.923m is ring fenced and as a consequence schools balances have increased from £11.3m to £17.2m as at the 31st March 2022. It was noted that the underspends for schools was greater than initially anticipated due to the receipt of additional grant funding from Welsh Government in the latter part of the financial year.

Council was advised that the HRA underspends would be carried forward to assist in future uses such as increasing the housing supply and maintain the Welsh Housing Quality Standard on existing properties.

Council noted that 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.

Council 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. In terms of the cost-of-living crisis, the significant impact on communities and Council budgets was acknowledged, however the underspend for 2021/22 does present some targeted one-off investment opportunities to provide some much-needed support, albeit that the financial outlook moving forward would be extremely challenging.

Clarification was sought in relation to Education underspends and if this funding would be given back to schools to support learners coming through the Covid Generation who had lost out considerably in terms of face-to-face teaching to fund, for example, additional teaching assistants to support the Covid generation of learners who had been so disadvantaged. The Member also sought assurance that Early Years underspends would also be used to support families and employ more staff rather than bolstering further reserves.

The Section 151 Officer confirmed that normally schools were required to produce an action plan of how they would use their surplus balance, and this would usually be over a period of one year, mindful that these balances are higher than usual, Finance Officers were working with schools, to look at this over a 2-year period but these plans would be a matter for Headteachers and Governing Bodies. In terms of the Early Years Team, it was confirmed that this sits within the General Fund and currently 50% of underspends are clawed back into the general fund balance with the remaining 50% being retained by the service areas, this is a matter of policy and the reason why 50% of the Early Years underspends will be taken back into general fund balances.

Via the meeting chat a Member raised a question in relation to pay awards and the Section 151 Officer advised that the overall cost of the pay award was around 7% on the budget, in February a 3% increase was funded, so the £6.8m based on the latest pay offer would need to be found from within general fund balances as individual service area budgets could not meet this at this time. Members were made aware that this position would need to be funded year-on-year, so when moving into 23/24, the Council would already be in a position where it would have to meet this £7m before any pay awards, awarded in the 23/24 financial year could be looked at.

Reference was made to section 5.1.1 of the Officers report and the loss income in several key areas, clarification was sought as to what specific areas had lost income. The Section 151 Officer highlighted areas such leisure services who had lost income due to various closures and restrictions around social distancing, and tourism services had also experienced a large loss of income. The Officer confirmed that he would provide a detailed summary to the Member following the meeting.

Clarification was then sought in relation to 5.2.7 of the report and the £290k underspend in psychology services and school-based counselling being partly due to with delays in recruitment and if this fund would be retained for later recruitment. The Officer confirmed that there are a number of areas as detailed within the report where the Council has experienced recruitment problems and the base budget in all those areas would still be available in the 23/24 financial year.

The Member then referenced section 5.3.5 and the significant underspend detailed for Business Support, The Section 151 Officer confirmed that this was just the way in which some of the grants that came in from Welsh Government were accounted for. The Member then sought clarification as to what the term 'miscellaneous finance' meant. The Officer advised that this covers several areas like housing benefits, levies on the Council from the Police and Fire Service, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and debt management. Council noted that a detailed report on these matters was presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee throughout the year.

Reference was made as to Council Tax collection deficit and if collection rates were improving. The Section 151 Officer advised that rates were recovering to pre-pandemic levels and would be reviewed at the end of the financial year, if the funds earmarked for the potential deficit are not called on then it would be released into the general fund at that point.

The Member went on to query the £1.5m underspend on the Infrastructure Budget and if this could be used to refund some neglected smaller service areas such increasing the frequency of bus shelter cleansing, cleaning dirty road signs to improve visibility etc. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment confirmed that there was probably more that the Council could be doing in the areas identified however there were a combination of factors as to why services in certain areas had reduced, budgetary factors, the impact of the Covid19 Pandemic and the impact of the current labour shortages in many service areas where there were ongoing difficulties in recruitment including recruiting to manual labour. The Corporate Director advised Members that if there had any specific ward issues to contact either him or his secretary and he would make sure that they are resolved.

Clarification was sought in relation to the Small School Grant from Welsh Government and its withdrawal and if Education underspends could be used to make up this shortfall. The Section 151 Officer advised that this was a Welsh Government grant and so unfortunately it was in their gift to continue or withdraw. The grant did go to 4 small schools in the borough, and he believed that the schools in question were given an extra 12 months' notice by Welsh Government that the grant was going to be withdrawn. In terms of using Education underspends to assist these smaller schools that would be a matter for Members.

A Member expressed the concern that the Council was 'hoarding' millions of pounds and queried why these sums were not being spent, while asking Caerphilly residents to pay more in Council Tax every year. When considering the impact on recruitment and retention should these reserves be better utilised to pay staff more, to make vacant post more lucrative and attract applicants. Given the rising cost of gas, electric and fuel the Council should be paying their employees more rather than accumulating substantial levels of reserves.

In responding to the points raised the Cabinet Member confirmed that a report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee later this year on reserves and Members would have the opportunity to fully scrutinise and comment then. Regarding the level of reserves, the Cabinet Members advised that with inflation soaring, hikes in interest rates and the cost-of-living crisis there are serious challenges hurtling towards us and residents will be facing unprecedented situations and thankfully due to the sound financial management of this authority and its level of reserves the organisation was in a strong and stable financial position to meet these challenges and help.

The Member welcomed the comments of the Cabinet Member and queried that given the crisis and the level of reserves would consideration be given to not increasing Council Tax charges next year. The Cabinet Member confirmed that when the Medium-Term Financial Plan is reviewed all possible options and what can be done to help residents would be explored.

The Leader of Council explained how reserves had been used as a basis for match-funding leveraging in close to £95m, and emphasised that these reserves meant that Caerphilly was in a stable financial position well placed to help the people of the borough, whether this is through Social Services, Education or the 600 other services provided.

A Member queried the level of funding available to assist residents with the cost-of-living crisis and was referred to section 5.10.2 of the report and the table contained therein and confirmation was given that £3m had been allocated for the Cost of Living Hardship Fund and £2.098m for the Cost of Living Crisis Contingency.

In conclusion Members were assured all options possible would be considered and presented for Members consideration as the budget setting process commences.

Following full consideration and discussion it was moved and seconded that each recommendation be the subject of an individual vote, by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation, in relation to Recommendation 1.3(i) there were 45 For, 4 Against and 2 Abstentions and in relation to Recommendation 1.3 (ii) there were 35 For, 10 Against and 7 Abstentions both the recommendations contained in the Officers report were approved.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The recommendation of the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer to maintain the General Fund balance at £11.852m, representing 3% of the 2022/23 net revenue budget be approved.
2. The proposed use of surplus General Fund balances totalling £14.333m as detailed in Section 5.10 of the attached report be considered and approved.

11. AUDIT WALES ENQUIRIES RETURN 2021/22

Consideration was given to the that presented Council with responses to Audit Wales in relation to enquiries around management processes relating to the prevention and detection of fraud, and compliance with laws and regulations in respect of disclosures in the 2021/22 Financial Statements.

Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the Officer's report which detailed the Council's response to the questions raised by Audit Wales. It was noted that these questions are standard for all local authorities and are not specific to Caerphilly County Borough Council

By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation and in noting there were 51 For, 0 Against and 1 Abstention the recommendations contained in the Officers report were approved.

RESOLVED that the response appended to the Officer's report be endorsed.

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

Council noted that the report has been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on the 26th September 22. Cabinet had agreed the initial response from Caerphilly County Borough Council to assist communities and its most vulnerable residents with the cost-of-living crisis and is now presented to Council for information and noting.

Members noted the decision made by Cabinet and consideration was given to the report which provided an update on the work already being undertaken and illustrated the range and extent of the support currently being provided. Members were advised that the concept of the Council assisting residents financially is not new, with inflation at its highest level for over 30 years, energy prices rising at the fastest rate in living memory and fuel costs escalating many people will be unable to find the money for these increases and will face some hugely difficult choices.

Council was advised of the key support areas and acknowledged the wider social and health impacts of the crisis and noted that £3m had been set aside for the Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund that would support a range of initiatives that would assist communities and £2.098m had been set aside for the Cost-of-Living Crisis Fund from the General Fund balances which would assist with anticipated budgetary pressures.

Members welcomed the report and the proposals and suggestions contained therein, and clarification was sought in relation to food banks and food donations. The Member advised that donations to food banks was decreasing so much so that they were now purchasing food to distribute and asked in any of the funding detailed would be set aside for food banks.

Officers confirmed that support would be provided to foodbanks and food share initiatives primarily through Welsh Government grants but one of the areas being looked was enhancing those grants through the £3m set aside to enable them to have additional support.

With regards to the £3m set aside for the Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund and the £2.098m for the Cost-of-Living Crisis Fund, a Member queried whether this amount would be adequate and would like to see it increased to £10m. The Member congratulated Officers on the work already underway.

Council noted that the earmarked funding represented and initial allocation and that work in this area was continual, with Officers working to identify the best ways of providing support across several areas as outlined in the report, with budgets kept under constant review.

Officers confirmed that an extensive level of support had already been provided over the last few months with over 4000 residents already directly supported, 2000 of which were self-referrals through Caerphilly Cares. It was noted that this included administering the winter fuel payment, payments to unpaid carers, Council Tax Reduction Scheme etc. already providing millions of pounds of support to our residents. Council were advised that £3.2m of additional income had already been generated for residents and Officer has already been working with the Citizens Advice Bureau on providing fuel vouchers and pre-payment top-up for residents in fuel poverty. It was further noted that over 12,000 applications had already been received for the winter fuel payments. Resources have been prioritised to expand and enhance community support for those most in need but there was still some work needed internally to remove duplication and complexity, streamlining access so that residents know exactly where to go to access support. The Officer confirmed that another area being reviewed was the development of customer intelligence as this would help the Council to identify exactly who to support and ideally what support is needed before people go into crisis.

The Officer outlined the cost-of-living events that had been run over the last month and confirmed that 142 referrals had been made to various services as a result. All the data collected from the roadshows has been collected and the main areas of concern were predominately food and fuel poverty and access to benefit, eligibility and understanding of

how to access support. Members were advised that the overwhelming theme coming out of the events was the level of anxiety that people were feeling now.

The Chief Executive advised that although the Council was already doing a lot of work in this space, it was just one agency working with a variety of partners and so streamlining and the avoidance of duplication was key. Members were reminded that whilst the Council will do all it can to support its residents it can not cover it all which means there will be some tough choices ahead. It was explained that the role of Local Ward Members would be vital in identifying communities needs and a special edition of the Caerphilly Newline will be launched that would concentrate on the cost-of-living crisis and the Council's response.

A Member placed on record her thanks to Caerphilly Officers for their assistance with foodbanks specifically for the work of Sharon Peters and Rebecca Owen and to Tina Machaon and her Team for all the support provided.

Clarification was sought in relation to the £150 payment to eligible households and if this payment was available to unoccupied households. The Section 151 Officer advised that this was part of the Discretionary Scheme, and he would be happy to share the detail following the meeting.

A Member applauded the report and what can be achieved when all partners worked together however he was concerned that the Council needed to acknowledge the vital support of volunteer groups, large and small and ensure that essential funding makes it way to them so that they can continue to support communities. The Member also asked colleagues to continue to highlight the Community Empowerment Fund and look at the little things and the little adjustment that the organisation can make that will have a big impact on individuals.

The Member referenced difficulties being experienced by anxious individuals trying to make initial contact the Council and how a small improvement in an area like this can make a huge difference. The Chief Executive shared the Members passion for small changes that make a big impact and acknowledged that there had been issues with back-office telephony technology and reassured Members that Officers were actively working on improvements.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

To note the following report which was considered as an urgent item by Cabinet: -

13. EXTERNALLY COMMISSIONED DOMICILIARY CARE

Consideration was given to the report which had been considered as an urgent item by Cabinet on the 27th July 2022.

The constitution requires that any decision taken as a matter of urgency must be reported to the next available meeting of Council, giving the reason for its urgency. There the report was presented to Council for Members' information.

A Members expressed how essential it was that the Council has an adequate domiciliary care provision both in house and in private sector to facilitate timely hospital discharge, releasing ambulances and alleviating pressures placed on families. The Member questioned whether the £1 increase would be sufficient and queried how this had been calculated.

The Assistant Director for Social Services advised that he did not have that detail but would be able to provide the information following the meeting.

A Member referenced the care being received by a close family member and praised the support workers as community heroes and heroines. He emphasised the vital role they played and that the Council must ensure that they are paid accordingly.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care advised that the £1 increase has been agreed on a Pan Gwent approach across all local authorities and was please to note the positive experience of the Member in terms of the care received.

Clarification was then sought on how the Council could be assured that the £1 was being passed on to employees and the Section 151 Officer advised that Providers had to demonstrate this through their audited accounts.

Members noted the reasons for the urgency and the decision taken by Cabinet

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

To note the following report which was considered as an urgent and exempt item by Cabinet: -

14. WITHDRAWAL FORM TY PONTGWINDY, UNIT 7 DE CLARE COURT, PONTYGWINDY INDUSTRIAL ESTATE.

Consideration was given to the report which had been considered as an urgent item and exempt item by Cabinet on the 27th July 2022.

The constitution requires that any decision taken as a matter of urgency must be reported to the next available meeting of Council, giving the reason for its urgency. There the report was presented to Council for Members' information.

RESOLVED that they report be noted.

The meeting closed at 19:33 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2022 they were signed by the Mayor.

MAYOR