



## **SPECIAL CABINET**

### **MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2024 AT 1PM**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair

#### **Councillors:**

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

#### **Together with:**

D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director of Economy and Environment) and G. Jenkins (Interim Director of Social Services).

#### **Also in Attendance:**

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), K. Denman (Housing Solutions Manager), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and Deputy Section 151 Officer), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), G. Mumford (Environmental Team Leader - Senior Environmental Health Officer), A. Bolter (Visitor Economy and Destinations Manager), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), N. Barrett (Safeguarding and Review, Service Manager) and B. Winstanley (Head of Land and Property) and J. Thomas (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 Councillors E. Forehead, C. Andrews, E. Stenner and C. Harry (Chief Executive).

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None received.

### **3. WELSH GOVERNMENT LEASING SCHEME WALES.**

Cabinet noted that this report had been considered at the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

Consideration was given to the report which informed Cabinet of a change of approach with regards to Leasing Scheme Wales. Following a request from Welsh Government for those Local Authorities who have not yet opted in to deliver Leasing Scheme Wales (LSW), it outlined how it can now help support CCBC in meeting the homeless duty under Part 2 of the Housing Wales Act 2014.

Cabinet noted that if CCBC were to agree to adopt and deliver the scheme then it would be the intention of the Housing Solutions Service to run the LSW scheme alongside the existing Private Rented Scheme that the service provides via Caerphilly Keys.

Cabinet queried whether there would be sufficient staff to survey all of the properties that were entered into the leasing scheme. The Head of Housing advised Members that they did not foresee the scheme generating a significant amount of interest in the outset. Therefore, surveys on the properties would initially be carried out in house, by the Environmental Health Officers within the Housing Team. However, it is hoped that the scheme will become more popular in the future and at that time staffing numbers will be reviewed.

Cabinet noted that there is a sum of money available to those who enter into the leasing scheme, which will be utilised going into the scheme. The Officer clarified that the money was being made available from Welsh Government.

In response to a query raised the Officer clarified that that minimum mandatory standard for a property to be included in the scheme it must meet the HHS rating system.

Cabinet was pleased to note that this scheme would act as a resource for the Local Authorities Homeless Team, allowing tenants within temporary accommodation to be discharged from the statutory functions for homeless households.

The Housing Solutions Manager confirmed that going forward it is the intention for this scheme to form part of the Empty Homes Package. The Officer advised Cabinet that there is additional incentives within the Leasing Scheme, where empty property landlords can also obtain an additional grant for renovation works to bring the property back into use.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons within the Officers report:

1. Consideration was given to the report and the adoption of the Leasing Scheme Wales as part of our overall offer to the private rented sector, under the Caerphilly Keys brand, to support the Local Authority in the discharge of Homelessness duties be approved.
2. The Leasing Scheme Wales (LSW) and take this forward in accordance with WG LSW guidance be adopted.
3. The LSW scheme would run alongside the existing Caerphilly Keys Scheme which offers a landlord/tenant matching service with tenant/landlord support be endorsed.
4. The LSW model under the following terms be adopted:
  - 5-year lease arrangement

- £5,000 renovation grant (funded by WG) to bring a property up to standard or EPC rating “C”.
- A grant of up to £9,999 for Empty Homes being bought onto the scheme.
- Financial support for staffing costs of £36,000 per year of the 5-year leasing scheme period to help deliver the scheme.
- 10% of the LHA rate will be used as a management fee per property to support with costs toward the maintenance of the property.
- Plus, an additional revenue of £58 per property claimed from Welsh Government.
- Existing Caerphilly Keys team will run the scheme in the initial phases, and this will be reviewed as and when the scheme develops with additional staffing being considered when required. Funding for this would be drawn from the staffing costs allocation under the scheme and additional support can be drawn from Housing Support Grant contributions.
- Caerphilly Homes Private Sector Housing team and the Assets, Maintenance and Repairs team will support with initial surveys/schedule of works and confirmation of satisfactory completion of grant aided work.
- The maintenance and any out of hours maintenance of the properties will be undertaken by Caerphilly Homes with a view of then billing the Housing Solutions team for said works/maintenance, and this will be paid from the management fees claimed.
- It is considered that the level of repairs and property maintenance within the first year or so should be minimal given the properties will be new to scheme and would have to been bought up to relevant standard.
- Therefore, the management fee claimed will be held and used across the property portfolio as and when associated costs accrue over the term of the leasing scheme cycle of five years.

#### **4. ANNUAL CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING REPORTS FOR 2023-2024.**

Cabinet noted the report had been considered at the Education and Social Services Scrutiny committee meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

Consideration was given to the report, which offered Cabinet valuable assurance in relation to the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements and provided an update on the progress made in implementing the Forward Work the Cabinet were also provided with the Key Safeguarding activity data.

Cabinet requested further information on how partnership working within and outside the Council is key to ensuring there's a robust approach to safeguarding.

The Interim Director for Social Services advised Cabinet that partnership work is a fundamental base for successful safeguarding. Therefore, all the Council's procedures and practises are based on good partnership working which is important internally and externally.

The Interim Director explained that within the Authority Social Services and Education were the lead service areas for safeguarding and both services areas have Designated

Safeguarding Officers who have direct access to the Safeguarding and Review Team, and to the Information, Advice and Assistance service. This provides Officers with support and advice whenever required.

The Interim Director also confirmed that there is eternal key partnership one of which is the Police with whom the Council cohosts the West Safeguarding Hub. There is also the Regional Safeguarding Board which incorporates all key authorities.

Cabinet noted that contained within the report there was reference to good progress in safeguarding recruitment and retraining packages supported via Peoples Services. Cabinet sought clarification on when this training would be taking place.

The Interim Director confirmed the Council is 100 percent compliant with safeguarding recruitment. Presently this is with HR supporting recruiting managers. However, it is the intention to roll out the formalised training programme to all officers who are involved in recruitment.

Cabinet sought further information on how the Gwent region work with the rest of the South Wales regions with regards sharing information. The Interim Director explained that each Safeguarding Board has a business manager, who regularly meet to discuss issues and share good practice. There is also a National Independent Safeguarding Board for Wales.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report the content of the three reports and the progress made in implementing the Forward Work Programme be noted.

## **5. PROVISIONAL REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN FOR 2023/24.**

Consideration was given to the report that provided Cabinet with details of the provisional revenue budget outturn for the 2023/24 financial year prior to the completion of the annual external audit of the accounts by Audit Wales.

The report also sought Cabinet endorsement of proposals for the use of surplus General Fund balances prior to consideration by Council.

Cabinet sought further information on what support is given to schools to manage their budgets. The Head of Financial Services & Section 151 Officer advised that within the finance department there is an Education Finance Team that is dedicated to supporting schools on a daily basis. The Officer explained that where schools are facing potential deficits, the level of support provided will be increased. The Team also agrees financial recovery plans when required and these schools will be closely monitored. The Officer also confirmed Cabinet that because of reducing school fund balances it is anticipated that there will be significant financial challenges ahead. Therefore, the Education Finance Team is seeking additional fixed-term staffing capacity to help deal with the anticipated additional support that schools will require.

Clarification was sought on exactly how much of the 2023/24 underspend is attributed to the Mobilising Team Carefully transformation programme, and whether there are opportunities for ongoing savings. The Head of Financial Services & Section 151 Officer advised Members that although it is difficult to identify a firm figure, there is evidence that the cultural shift within the organisation due to spend control measures introduced through Mobilising Team Caerphilly is having a positive financial impact. The Officer also advised that further work will be undertaken to review underspends across all service areas to establish if some of these can be recurring savings moving forward.

Cabinet noted there had been an overspend within Children's Services of £1.6million due to increasing demand. Further information was sought on the cost pressures within Children's Services and how it is planned to mitigate the cost pressures moving forward. The Interim Director for Social Services confirmed that the overspend relates to increased complexity and challenges of children particularly children who become looked after, and that these challenges are being faced by all Local Authorities. The Interim Director highlighted that the overspend was largely offset by underspends across other parts of the service area. He also explained that demand pressures will continue to be an issue, however there are plans in place to expand in-house residential care which may not make significant savings, but the quality of care provided will be better. There is ongoing recruitment of Foster Carers and there is a lot of work underway to move children out of care into extended families' placements wherever possible.

Cabinet was concerned with the £1.4 million overspend on Home to School Transport and queried whether budgetary growth would need to be provided in the next Medium-Term Financial Plan. The Head of Financial Services & Section 151 Officer explained that the overspend was due to increased pressure on the service especially in relation to children with additional learning needs. However, Cabinet was informed that this is an area that is currently being reviewed under Mobilising Team Caerphilly, with new eligibility assessment criteria for the provision of transport being introduced and statutory distances will also be subject to review. The Officer explained that it is his expectation that the overspend is brought under control.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officers report:

1. The provisional 2023/24 revenue budget outturn position be noted.
2. A recommendation to Council to maintain the General Fund balance at £13.476m, representing 3% of the 2024/25 net revenue budget be endorsed.
3. The proposed use of surplus General Fund balances totalling £8.246m as detailed in section 5.10 of the report, prior to consideration by Council on 24 July 2024 be endorsed.
4. The proposal that delegated authority on the use of the proposed MTFP Contingency Reserve of £5.266m be granted to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, relevant Cabinet Member and Section 151 Officer be endorsed.

## **6. PROPOSED INCREASED CHARGES FOR KENNELING STRAY DOGS.**

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval to increase charges for owners to retrieve impounded stray dogs.

Responding to a query raised by Cabinet the Senior Environmental Health Officer advised Members that last year around 81 dogs were picked up but there were around 200 service requests for dogs on the street. The team endeavours to get the dogs back with their owners by scanning them immediately and using social media is also an effective method of reuniting the dogs with their owners.

Cabinet sought clarification on whether there was a payment plan in place for owners who are struggling to pay fines when their dogs have ended up spending time in kennels. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised Members that it is difficult to release a dog back to owners prior to receiving the full payment as if they subsequently do not

pay that will be a cost that will fall back to the Authority. If dogs are not reclaimed, then they are passed on to rehoming charities. The Officer assured Members that there is only a small number of cases that will be euthanised. This would be where the dogs are not suitable for rehoming due to their health or behavioural issues.

The Officer also confirmed that that these fines do not make the service cost neutral as this is a statutory duty therefore costs for stray dogs that are not reclaimed need to be included within the budget.

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained within the Officer report:

1. An increase in the daily kennel charge to £18 per dog (08:00 – 17:00) kennel charge is approved; and that any dog taken to the kennels outside these hours will incur an additional charge of £50 with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 be approved.
2. The introduction of a Release Fee of £90 with a £20 discount if the dog is micro-chipped with correct keepership details, in addition to the recurring £18 daily fee with effect from 1st August 2024 be approved.
3. Any future revisions to these charges as a result of changes to costs charged to the Authority by the kennelling provider are agreed by the Director or Head of Service in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member be approved.

**7. PUBLIC INTEREST TEST – CWMCARN FOREST DRIVE COLLABORATION WITH NATURAL RESOURCES WALES – MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.**

Members considered the Public Interest Test and concluded that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interests in disclosing the information and it was: -

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 12 and 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**8. PUBLIC INTEREST TEST – ACQUISITION OF 75 TO 77 TREDEGAR STREET, RISCA.**

Members considered the Public Interest Test and concluded that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interests in disclosing the information and it was: -

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**9. TOURISM REVIEW: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING IN RESPECT OF CWMCARN FOREST WITH NATURAL RESOURCES WALES**

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the

recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for reasons contained with the Officers report recommendations 3.1.1 to 3.1.3 be approved.

**10. ACQUISITION OF 75 TO 77 TREDEGAR STREET RISCA**

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

RESOLVED that for reasons contained with the Officers report recommendations 3.1 and 3.2 be agreed.

The meeting closed at 14:04.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

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Chair