

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Wednesday, 28 October 2015 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor B.Stephens – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

(Mrs) T.A.Bates	A.S.Fox	S.Rees-Owen
D.R.Bevan	M.Griffiths	(Mrs) A.Roberts
H.Boggis	P.Griffiths	J.Rosser
J.Bonetto	(Mrs) E.Hanagan	G.Smith
S.A.Bradwick	G.Holmes	R.W.Smith
J.Bunnage	G.E.Hopkins	G.Stacey
(Mrs) A.Calvert	J.S.James	R.K.Turner
P.Cannon,QPM	P.Jarman	G.P.Thomas
S.L.Carter	(Mrs) S.J.Jones	L.G.Walker
A.Crimmings	(Mrs) C.Leyshon	(Mrs) J.S.Ward
W.J.David	S.Lloyd	P.Wasley
A.L.Davies,MBE	R.B.McDonald	M.J.Watts
C.Davies	C.J.Middle	M.O.Weaver
G.R.Davies	K.Montague	M.Webber
(Mrs) M.E.Davies	A.Morgan	E.Webster
(Mrs) L.De Vet	B.Morgan	D.H.Williams
J.Elliott	M.A.Norris	C.J.Willis
S.Evans	S.Pickering	R.A.Yeo
S.M.Evans-Fear	M.J.Powell	
M.Forey	S.Rees	

Officers in Attendance

Mr.C.Bradshaw – Chief Executive

Mr.C.Lee – Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services

Mr.G.Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children's Services

Mr.T.Wilkins – Director, Human Resources

Mr.C.B.Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services

Mr.C.Hanagan – Service Director, Cabinet Office & Public Relations

53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L.M.Adams, P.Baccara, (Mrs) J.Cass, (Mrs) A.Davies, J.Davies, P.Howe, W.L.Langford, R.Lewis, K.Morgan, I.Pearce, S.Powderhill, K.A.Privett, (Mrs) M.Tegg, W.D.Weeks, C.J.Williams and T.Williams.

54 PETITIONS

- (1) The Mayor announced that he had received a Petition from Pontypridd Friends of the Earth `urging the Council to say no to fracking in Rhondda Cynon Taf due to the potential problems associated with the process including water contamination, air pollution, health problems, increased lorry traffic, decreased house prices and increased climate change emissions and requesting the Council to declare itself a frack free local authority`.
- (2) County Borough Councillor G.Stacey presented the Mayor with a Petition containing 740 signatures requesting the Council to consider installing a four-way pedestrian crossing at the traffic lights by Fagins, Church Village (B4595). Councillor Stacey also made reference to a second on-line petition containing 579 names regarding this request which had previously been brought to the attention of the Council Leader.
- (3) County Borough Councillor R.Yeo presented a Petition to the Mayor on behalf of residents of Castell Y Mynach Road, Beddau drawing attention to `the safety hazard that occurs as a result of through traffic to Llwynrwn School and requesting the Council to given urgent consideration to the introduction of speed reduction and safety measures along this road`.

55 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) County Borough Councillor G.Holmes announced that a Concert would be held in Llantrisant on 13 November 2015 to raise funds for the Llantrisant War Memorial Campaign and he asked Members to support the event.
- (2) County Borough Councillor (Mrs) J.S.Ward was pleased to announce that she had raised over £500 towards the `Gurkhas` Appeal` and she thanked all Members who had supported the cause.

56 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 30 September 2015.

OPEN GOVERNMENT

57 STATEMENTS

There were no statements from the Council Leader or Cabinet Portfolio Holders on this occasion.

58 MEMBERS` QUESTIONS

- (1) **From County Borough Councillor P.Jarman to the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, Tackling Poverty and Community Engagement (County Borough Councillor K.Montague)**

Will you make a statement on Child Poverty in the County Borough?

Response from County Borough Councillor K.Montague

The Council is committed to tackling Child Poverty and all forms of poverty. We recognise this has been increasingly difficult in times of austerity forced by the Westminster Government.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor Jarman

I was recently concerned but not surprised to hear the Prime Minister make an announcement that legislation will be brought forward that would enable local authorities to deduct unpaid fixed penalty notices relating to school attendance directly from the families child benefit. As you know child benefit as a welfare benefit is not devolved. Do you agree with me that the only effect of this action is to take food out of the mouths of children, many of whom are living in struggling households and such action will do nothing to solve the attendance issue. Can you guarantee today, as Anti-Poverty Champion, that you will never authorise depriving children by such callous methods?

Response from County Borough Councillor K.Montague

I think that when it comes to tackling Child Poverty most of the Members in this Chamber agree on working together to tackle poverty. I can make a statement today that it is within the gift of the Welsh Government and Councils not to go down that line and we will not be doing so.

(2) From County Borough Councillor (Mrs) C.Leyshon to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Culture and Leisure (County Borough Councillor A.Crimmings)

How is the Council seeking to improve and invest in play and park areas?

Response from County Borough Councillor A.Crimmings

Over recent years our parks and play areas have continued to receive investment each year. We recognise the positive impact access to good quality parks and play areas has on residents, particularly young people, and this is why we have allocated an additional £0.5 million to be invested in improving play areas across the County Borough.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor C.Leyshon

I am sure Members and myself welcome that but unfortunately, we have another problem which is recurring - dog mess - especially on access ways to our parks, what can we do to prevent that?

Response from County Borough Councillor A.Crimmings

You are right, this is a problem right through the County Borough and there are irresponsible dog owners. We have to try and educate these people to recognise the health implications of their actions. We have had complaints and we have now invested in providing 1,000 bins throughout RCT and putting up new signage. You may have seen the 'Don't Do It Campaign' – this is a sign that we will not tolerate this sort of behaviour and it has been supported and we have had positive feedback.

(3) From County Borough Councillor G.Smith to the Leader of the Council (County Borough Councillor A.Morgan)

Will the Leader make a statement on the highways infrastructure of the County Borough?

Response from the Council Leader:

Since 2012 we have invested £35 million in highway infrastructure and will continue to invest as much as we possibly can. This investment has ensured our highways continue to be maintained to a high standard. We do face challenges, particularly in relation to some of our bridges, which is why we have allocated an additional £3.8 million which will further enhance the work we are doing.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor Smith:

Given the importance of good quality highway infrastructure, how can the Authority mitigate the impact of austerity?

Response from the Council Leader:

We are looking to invest a further £3.8 million over the next 18 months or so. We are looking to address main roads, bridges, footways, etc. to reduce the number of accidents which ultimately can reduce the number of claims. It is better to spend money on roads rather than on insurance claims.

(4) From County Borough Councillor R.B.McDonald to the Cabinet Member for Council Business (County Borough Councillor M.Webber)

How can the Council tackle youth unemployment created by the UK Government?

Response from County Borough Councillor M.Webber:

Our Apprenticeship Scheme continues to go from strength to strength and we have recently taken on another group of apprentices, bringing the total number employed since 2012, up to 90.

As part of the investment proposals, we are setting aside £350,000 to support the continuation of the Apprenticeship Scheme which continues to provide excellent opportunities for employment and training for young people across the County Borough.

As well as this Apprenticeship Scheme, we continue to invest in employment schemes which provide opportunities for care leavers and graduates. We have a team who work closely with schools to promote the Positive Achievement Award which seeks to develop the skills young people will need when entering the workplace. We are also working collaboratively as part of the West Wales and the Valleys Regional ESF Youth Employment and Attainments Programme on the Inspire to Work programme which will benefit thousands of young people across the region.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor McDonald:

This investment is great news. The number of young people benefitting from these schemes is impressive. Aside from this, I know via our procurement process that we include community benefits so as to ensure local people can access jobs. Can we provide opportunities for young people in the same way?

Response from County Borough Councillor Webber:

Yes, our procurement contracts for construction projects do require this.

(5) From County Borough Councillor S.Evans to the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, Tackling Poverty and Community Engagement (County Borough Councillor K.Montague)

How can the Council stimulate housing development and regeneration further in our County Borough?

Response from County Borough Councillor Montague:

Earlier this year, the Cabinet adopted a policy on utilising Council owned land. It is a scheme that will offer land out for development. It will see housing development moving into areas where currently there is no development. It will help with the overall regeneration of those communities.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor S.Evans:

This is a good use of land which is otherwise lying dormant. How can we have similar influence over land in private ownership?

Response from County Borough Councillor Montague:

By the Council bringing forward its own land for housing development, it will stimulate the economy in those areas and this will move into other parcels of land and hopefully, developers will move. Also, the Council is looking to support discussions between owners to bring things together. Also, investment in infrastructure will make things more feasible. We are looking particularly in the Northern area of the County Borough and creating demand and pump-priming that market.

59 WALES AUDIT OFFICE – ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2014-15 RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Mr. Colin Davies of the Wales Audit Officer presented the Council with its Annual Improvement Report 2014-15.

During his presentation, Mr. Davies highlighted the fact that the Council had generally robust financial management arrangements and was strengthening its data quality arrangements but there was scope to further develop performance report and scrutiny arrangements as well as strengthen links between service and financial planning.

Mr. Davies informed Members that the Auditor General believed that the Council was likely to comply with the requirements of the Measure during 2015-16 and based his conclusion on the following:

- The Council had generally robust financial management arrangements;
- Elected Members and Senior Officers had demonstrated a clear commitment to taking difficult decisions to improve education provision
- The Council had put in place financial planning to meet current and future budgetary pressures in social services and advances had been made in reshaping service provision in adult services
- In 2014-15, the Council discharged its improvement planning and reporting duties under The Measure.

Members noted from the report that a key challenge for the Council was to continue to ensure that its financial management, performance management and governance arrangements remained fit for purpose in the context of reducing resources. During 2015-16 the work of the Wales Audit Office includes a financial management review that will look forward to 2016-17 budget setting and savings proposals as well as reviews of Council's decision making arrangements relating to its service change proposals and arrangements and arrangements for strategic asset management.

Members also noted the summary of key findings of the work undertaken by the Wales Audit Officers and other regulators in 2014-15 and recommendations in respect of:

- Performance
- Use of resources

- Governance
- Improvement planning and reporting audits
- Audit of accounts

Following his presentation, Mr.Davies responded to Members' questions.

The Mayor then thanked Mr.Davies for his attendance and he left the meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to note and accept the Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report for 2014-15.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE & FRONTLINE SERVICES

60 FINANCING OF HAWTHORN POOL REPAIRS USING PRUDENTIAL BORROWING

In his report, the Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services sought the Council's approval for the repairs required to Hawthorn Pool to be part funded through borrowing using powers available under the Prudential Code.

The Council was informed that the Cabinet, at its meeting on 22 October 2015) had agreed the recommendation before Members for consideration and following a discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to agree that costs of £0.520M are funded through borrowing, using the Council's powers under the Prudential Code, with the annual revenue cost of £0.040M being met from savings from the transfer of the operational management of the facility to the Governing Body of Hawthorn High School.

REPORT OF THE CABINET

61 COUNCIL INVESTMENT PRIORITIES – MID YEAR REVIEW

The Council considered the Report of the Cabinet setting out the conclusions of a review of Council's Reserves and outlining a number of Investment Priorities following the finalisation and audit of the accounts for the financial year 2014/15 as reported to the Council on 30 September 2015.

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 22 October 2015, had agreed the recommendations set out in the report subject to approval by the Council.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED –**

- (1) To release the reserves as detailed in paragraph 4 (Table 1) of the report.
- (2) That the reserves released are used to fund the investment priorities as detailed in paragraph 5 (Table 2) which will be incorporated into the Capital Programme and Revenue Budget as appropriate.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

62 WELSH GOVERNMENT – CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – DRAFT DIRECTIONS TO THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES

Pursuant to Minute No.47 (Council, 30 September 2015) the Director, Legal & Democratic Services, in his report, advised Members of the comments of both the Cabinet Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the Welsh Government's Consultation Document – Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

The Council was asked to consider the comments put forward together with any additional views it wished to submit to the Welsh Government by the deadline of 9th November 2015.

Following consideration of the matter, it was **RESOLVED** that in addition to the submission of the comments of both the Cabinet Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Welsh Government be advised that the Council's view is that there should be a ratio of 1 Councillor : 2,500 Population and not Electorate in responding to the Consultation Document – Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

63 STATE OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH DEBATE

In accordance with paragraph 13.2 of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, the Council noted the form of the State of the County Borough Debate, as decided by the Council Leader in consultation with the Mayor.

The Mayor stated that he would invite the Leader to address Council and following that, the Leader would respond to Members' comments on his Annual Report.

The Leader opened his address by referring to the reasons why the State of the County Borough Debate had lost continuity over the past few years. He stated that he, along with the Chief Executive, were keen to establish a greater challenge around how the Council performs and to be more aspiring in setting clear targets and goals. A new Corporate Plan would soon be published which will set out the key goals and priorities for the Authority in moving forward.

The Leader further stated that the Council faced massive financial challenges now and into the foreseeable future owing to a significant shortage of funding coming forward and increased pressures. The Leader recognised the Council had not always got things right in the past and in this regard, referred to the decision taken to close the Muni Theatre. At the time, there seemed to be no alternative but to close this facility but the Leader stated that with hindsight and forward thinking, a different approach could have been taken. He pointed out that there was now a new way of thinking and as an example, a year ago, the Council was looking to close Leisure Centres but now, it was

investing in them following consultation and suggestions to do so. The RCT Together approach had been developed which focused on better engagement to communicate more effectively the rationale for taking difficult decisions. Difficult decisions had been made over the last twelve months but through extensive consultation, the Leader stated that he and his Cabinet had responded to concerns and views expressed during the consultation process.

The Leader stated that despite difficult times, his and his Cabinet were moving forward on political priorities such as the introduction of the 'Living Wage'. He stated that he was pleased to have worked closely with the Trade Unions on this and pointed out that relevant Council employees would receive the benefits from 1st November 2015 onwards.

The Leader then spoke about the 'Investment Review' and the report considered earlier in the meeting which despite austere times, highlighted how, as a result of strong financial management, the Council could invest in its priorities and deliver upon the majority of the pledges made to the electorate at the 2012 Elections. However, some pledges had not been achievable owing to the severity of cuts to the Council's budget over the last few years.

The Leader highlighted the fact that efficiency savings amounting to over £60M had been achieved by being more competitive in tendering and making better use of technology.

The Leader then commented on the successful delivery of a number of significant commitments, i.e.

- The Lido, Pontypridd which has proved to be very successful and has received approximately 30,000 visitors since its opening
- The new Aberdare Community School providing a state of the art 21st Century School for the young people of the northern Cynon Valley.
- Proposals to transform the delivery of education in the Rhondda Valley and Tonyrefail with the largest ever a 21st Century School Investment Programme
- Progress in respect of educational attainment where all key stages are improving faster than the Welsh average
- Improvements in Primary School Attendance to 94.7% from 92.3% in 2010/11 and Secondary School Attendance is at 93.6% compared to 90.6% in 2011/12
- Investment in the new Aberdare Leisure Centre and the upgrade of facilities at Hawthorn Leisure Centre
- Investments planned shortly at Bronwydd Pool, Ystrad Sports Centre and Abercynon Sports Centre.
- Recycling rate of over 60% resulting in the Council being one of the fastest improving Councils in Wales.
- New Community Recycling Facilities to open in Llantrisant and Treherbert

- The success in securing Welsh Government funding to purchase the leasehold of the Taff Vale site, Pontypridd which will enable the Council to move forward the marketing and development of this strategic site
- The Apprenticeship Scheme – out of 90 apprentices - 75% have gone on to secure employment with the remaining 25% deciding to pursue further education opportunities
- £35 million has been invested via the Highways Investment Scheme launched in 2012 and by the end of the financial year, resurfacing works will have been carried out in over 650 streets, footways will have been renewed in over 200 streets, over 70 drainage improvements schemes will have been carried out, 14 Bridges strengthened or replaced and over 600 lighting columns will have been replaced.

As well as the many things achieved over the last twelve months, the Leader acknowledged that there were areas where the Council could do better and he outlined examples of areas for improvement.

The Leader then thanked the Corporate Leadership Team for all their support in moving things forward and helping overcome the challenges faced by the Council. He made reference to the fact that over the last 12-18 months, there had been an overall reduction in Senior Management costs by £1.7 million.

On the matter of Governance, the Leader welcomed the new scrutiny arrangements now in place within the Authority and he hoped that all Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committee felt more empowered and enabled to target areas of work for future scrutiny including pre-scrutiny.

In closing the Leader reminded Members that in dealing with the difficult times ahead, all 75 Councillors have responsibilities around setting the Council's Budget and moving forward as an Authority as a whole.

The Leader then responded to a variety of questions from Members arising from his Report during which time, the following points of interest were highlighted for Members' information:

- The Cabinet would shortly be considering a detailed Capital Programme Report which would include a proposal to secure via Compulsory Purchase Orders, 13 parcels of land required to build the Cynon Valley Cross Valley Link Road and discussions were currently underway with Welsh Government on this matter. Also, within that Report would be other significant investment proposals including improvements at Stag Square, Treorchy.
- Making better use of digital technology was being looked at throughout the Authority.
- Job opportunities for residents of the County Borough were being investigated as part of the 'City Deal' with Cardiff City Council.
- In tackling the Dog Fouling problems that exist within the County Borough, dedicated Council staff would be targeting playing fields and play areas and there were Enforcement Officers patrolling. An

additional 150 Dog Bins along with appropriate signage were also being provided at locations throughout the County Borough.

- A funding bid for the feasibility and design of a cycleway in the Rhondda would be re-submitted next year
- Ways and means of better engagement in the future with young people in the County Borough were being investigated

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the Leader's Annual Report.

**B.STEPHENS
MAYOR**

The meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.