



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council held on Wednesday, 1 July 2020 at
3.00 pm

County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Powderhill (Chair)

Councillor M Adams	Councillor S Belzak
Councillor R Bevan	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor G Caple	Councillor A Chapman
Councillor A Cox	Councillor A Crimmings
Councillor J Cullwick	Councillor A Davies-Jones
Councillor G Davies	Councillor J Davies
Councillor L De Vet	Councillor M Diamond
Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Elliott
Councillor S Evans	Councillor M Forey
Councillor A Fox	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor E George	Councillor D Grehan
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor J Harries	Councillor G Holmes
Councillor L Hooper	Councillor G Hopkins
Councillor P Howe	Councillor G Hughes
Councillor J James	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor G Jones	Councillor K Jones
Councillor L Jones	Councillor W Jones
Councillor R Lewis	Councillor W Lewis
Councillor C Leyshon	Councillor A Morgan
Councillor K Morgan	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor M Norris	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor W Owen	Councillor S Pickering
Councillor M Powell	Councillor S Powell
Councillor S. Rees-Owen	Councillor S Rees
Councillor A Roberts	Councillor J Rosser
Councillor G Stacey	Councillor E Stephens
Councillor M Tegg	Councillor G Thomas
Councillor W Treeby	Councillor R Turner
Councillor M Weaver	Councillor M Webber
Councillor E Webster	Councillor D Williams
Councillor J Williams	Councillor T Williams
Councillor R Yeo	

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Mr G Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

153 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillor M Tegg, C Willis, M Fidler Jones, S Evans, L Walker and G D Williams.

154 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations of Personal Interests were made pertaining to the agenda:

In respect of Item 3 – The Council's response to Covid-19

- County Borough Councillor P Jarman referred to her dispensation granted by the Standards Committee on 29th November 2019 providing the member "dispensation to speak and vote on all matters for the duration and adoption of the 2020-21 Budget process in her capacity as Leader of the Opposition"
- County Borough Councillor J Brencher – "I am a Director on the YMCA"
- County Borough Councillor H Fychan – "Cyn aelod o fwrdd y Muni ac aelod o fwrdd Artis"

In respect of Item 4 – Urgent Executive Decisions

- County Borough Councillor A Crimmings – "I am a Trustee for the Friends of Aberdare Park"
- County Borough Councillor S Rees – "I am a Trustee for the Friends of Aberdare Park"
- County Borough Councillor G Jones – "I am a member of the Friends of Aberdare Park"

(Note: A further three declarations of Personal Interests were made later in the meeting by County Borough Councillors J Davies, S Evans and R Lewis (Minute No's 158 and 160 respectively).

155 Introductions

Introductions were made by the Group Leaders present:-

County Borough Councillor A Morgan (Labour Group)
County Borough Councillor P Jarman (Plaid Cymru Group)
County Borough Councillor M Powell (Alliance Group)
County Borough Councillor M Diamond (Independent Group)
County Borough Councillor J James (Conservative Group)

156 Moments Silence

A moments silence was held for all those who have lost their lives during lockdown

157 Suspension to Standing Orders

The Deputy Leader made a statement in respect of moving the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 15.1 and advised that in order to facilitate the smooth running of the Council meeting through Zoom, Group Leaders have agreed in advance that where a vote is taken on any item, the individual Group Leader will exercise the vote on behalf of all their Members present for the item in question.

In order to implement the revised voting procedures the Deputy Leader moved the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 15.1, which states that a matter will be decided by a simple majority of those Members voting and present in the room at the time the question was put.

Following consideration of the matter it was **RESOLVED** to suspend Council Procedure Rule 15.1

158 Amended Council Work Programme

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented his report which provided Members with the opportunity to agree the amended Council Work Programme for the 2019/20 Municipal Year (extended for the specific period July-September 2020). The extension reflects the changes necessary following the deferment of the Council's Annual General Meeting from May 2020 to the 16th September 2020.

In line with the Welsh Government Regulations, the Service Director advised that the current terms of office have been extended until the AGM in September. He emphasised the need for Members to adopt an element of flexibility whilst operating virtually which requires a different approach and brings with it a number of unique challenges as well as a limited availability of resources.

The Leader of the Opposition Group proposed an amendment to the resolution at 2.3 as follows:-

2.3 "The amended Council Work Programme is agreed [add] "***subject to the inclusion of a report on the principle of Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal becoming a partner to the Western Gateway Initiative to the July Council meeting and to the same meeting the inclusion of an item of business whereby the Chair and Acting Chief Officer of Cwm Taf attend virtually to give us a progress update on issues relating to Maternity, Pediatrics and A&E Services*** [end] in accordance with the reasons identified within section 4 of the report and subject to its approval the relevant Committee work programmes are amended to reflect the extended three month period;

The Leader of the Council confirmed that Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board would attend a future Special Council meeting to enable engagement with Members on issues such as Maternity Services, A&E and the wider Health Board issues. He also reminded Council Members that the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal meeting papers are available to view on its website and has in place a CCRC Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee across the ten

Local Authorities which scrutinises the decisions and work streams of the CCRCD.

Following a vote taken by the Group Leaders it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the amendment to resolution 2.3.

Further to consideration of the report and to the amended resolution set out at 2.3 the Group Leaders **RESOLVED**:-

1. To acknowledge that in accordance with the Local Authorities (Coronavirus)(Meetings)(Wales) Regulations 2020 and the decision taken by the Council's Presiding Officer the Council's Annual General Meeting 2020 will be held on 16th September 2020;
2. To acknowledge the continuation of the terms of the office of the Council appointees agreed by the Annual General Meeting (as set out in paragraph 6 of the report);
3. That the amended Council Work Programme is agreed subject to the inclusion of a report on the principle of Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal becoming a partner to the Western Gateway Initiative to the July Council meeting and to the same meeting the inclusion of an item of business whereby the Chair and Acting Chief Officer of Cwm Taf attend virtually to give us a progress update on issues relating to Maternity, Pediatrics and A&E Services in accordance with the reasons identified within section 4 of the report and subject to its approval the relevant Committee work programmes are amended to reflect the extended three month period;
4. That the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications reports an update to the Council Work Programme in conclusion of the extended three month period.

(Note: In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations of Personal Interests were made:-

County Borough Councillor J Davies – "I work for Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board and therefore I will abstain from voting on the matter"

County Borough Councillor S Evans – "I work for Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board and therefore I will abstain from voting on the matter"

159 **Announcements**

- County Borough Councillor A Morgan, Leader of the Council, welcomed the recent decision by Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board for the Royal Glamorgan Hospital A&E Service to remain a 24hr consultant led service and attributed the decision to the consistent cross-party support demonstrated throughout. He added that there had been a number of specific concerns in respect of turning the emergency department into a full-time minor injuries unit (MIU), how other hospitals would cope with the influx of patients and how transport to the other hospitals would be managed (particularly in the event that mountain roads in the Rhondda are closed during the winter months). The Leader stated that a united response which had been maintained for the last 6 years had sent a positive message and a strong argument against the closure.

- County Borough Councillor P Jarman announced that a year ago today Mountain Ash Comprehensive School was mourning the sad death of its pupil, Christopher Kapessa. For that reason, her announcement today was bitter-sweet as she announced that Alysa Neads would receive the Diana Award, which is the most prestigious accolade a young person aged 9-25 years can receive for their social action or humanitarian work. There have only been 189 recipients across 35 countries and Alysa is one of only 8 winners in Wales and the youngest ever recipient for her hard work and fund raising commitments within the community of Penrhiwceiber. Councillor Jarman stated that the fortunes of a community can be turned around with the right focus, investment and determination. It was noted that in recognition of the award, the Mayor would send a letter of congratulations to Alysa.
- County Borough Councillor A S Fox echoed the sentiments of County Borough Councillor P Jarman and paid tribute to the very prestigious award for Alysa's contribution to Penrhiwceiber.

160 Council's Response to COVID-19

The Chief Executive set out the Council's response to COVID-19 which in Rhondda Cynon Taf has seen 16,000 confirmed cases of the virus and has been the cause of nearly 300 deaths (equating to 1% of the population) according to the Office of National Statistics. He stated that this has been a difficult time for many families across the County Borough.

In response to the National Pandemic the Council provided significant assistance to the Health Board and responded quickly to its own changing circumstances by closing offices and equipping staff with the necessary IT equipment to work from home. It has provided housing for the homeless, continued to provide waste collections, ensured that business grants were paid; provided emergency childcare via schools, provided those families in receipt of Free School Meals with cash payments; identified 1,500 shielding and vulnerable residents each week who received support such as food parcels, community meals and services such as dog walking.

The Chief Executive extended his thanks to all staff especially the social care staff contracted to work in both Care and Residential Homes who provided an additional level of care. He also praised the Council's Procurement Service who ensured sufficient levels of PPE were available through innovative approaches with local businesses. New product lines have been created with local manufacturing companies which has formed a new resilience for the future.

The Chief Executive referred to the links to a number of reports that set out the Council's position in respect of Covid-19 which have been considered by the Council's Cabinet, with particular reference to the report which sets out the preparations for the future re-opening of non-essential supplies and services within town centres and safer buildings as the lockdown is lifted. As lockdown eases it was confirmed that further reports will be considered by Cabinet.

The Chief Executive stated that whilst communities return to work and schools and colleges resume, monitoring the infection rate is crucial and the Council is playing a leading role on Contract Tracing, Welsh Government's Test, Trace

Protect Programme (TTP) across Cwm Taf Morgannwg. The Council has recently been supporting Merthyr Tydfil with its recent outbreak by stepping in to reduce the risk of further transmission. As part of the recovery phase consideration is being given to re-opening services safely by incorporating social distancing measures and adopting personal hygiene measures. Recovery plans have supported the re-opening of the Community Recycling Centres, public areas, libraries (drop and collect services) and the return to school to enable all learners to “check in, catch up and prepare for the summer and September 2020”. Members were informed that the Council’s Cabinet will consider the summary of recovery plans in July.

The virus has impacted in many ways, how the Council delivers services and has reduced its carbon footprint. Moving forward, it is important to find the right balance and recognise that a vaccine may not be forthcoming and as such many residents will continue to require support.

The Chief Executive advised that the financial impact of the Council’s response to the pandemic has been on average £4.5 million per month, the majority of the expenditure is expected to be funded by Welsh Government. The Council will need to review and re set its 2020/21 budget in September. The financial impact has also taken its toll on local businesses, particularly those in the town centre which have struggled to maintain a profitable business. There has been a particular impact on the hospitality and tourism industry specifically upon food suppliers and the young people who are in the majority employed in this sector. The Council intend to support those hardest hit by the virus such as younger adults, through working alongside businesses, Welsh Government and partners and will also seek to employ over 100 Graduates this year.

The Chief Executive concluded that it had been a challenging few months reacting to changes but with a focus on doing the right thing for residents and staff and taking decisions based on information available at the time. He added that there is now a need to retain this agility and speed of action to help the community find its feet and he welcomed discussions and ideas around how this can be achieved.

The Leader of the Council concurred with the sentiments of the Chief Executive and praised all Council staff particularly those within the social care sector who have managed an emotionally difficult situation. Mobilising staff to work from home meant that many staff could resume their duties such as those in the Finance sector who were able to deal with issuing grants to local businesses, subsequently praised by the Federation of small businesses. The fast acting staff from both the back office and frontline services sustained business and kept people employed.

The Leader acknowledged the 300 redeployed staff who supported social care staff to provide services for those vulnerable and shielding residents. Implementing the service was a huge undertaking and with very little notice. He also thanked the thousand plus volunteers who worked alongside the Council.

Keeping Elected Members informed has been crucial throughout and Members were reminded of the notifications sent on behalf of the Chief Executive and the daily updates issued by Members Services as well as information from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

The Leader advised that it would be crucial to learn from what has happened

and maintain discussions with other Leaders in Wales on how local authorities can support the local economy as confidence in the private sector may be damaged. It was confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Treasury in Central Government, on behalf of all Leaders in Wales, calling on capital to be devolved to the Region. The Council's capital programme is also an important contributor to the local economy providing a valuable work programme to local building and highways contractors.

A number of funding packages were announced such as almost £2m secured to take forward a number of rail projects across the County Borough and £3.1m received for infrastructure affected by Storm Dennis. The Leader advised that discussions were taking place around further investment in Social Housing with Social Housing Providers and that every opportunity to access capital funding would be pursued.

In conclusion, the Leader thanked Members for their support.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor P Jarman commended the Council staff during this period for providing key services in a timely manner. She welcomed the increase in the 'shop local' initiative regarding food retailers in villages and towns and the reliance on the local manufacturing locally which opens up many new opportunities. Councillor Jarman raised concerns regarding one local manufacturer involved in the production of hand sanitisers and visors and the potential increased use of plastics.

Councillor Jarman praised the buying local initiative and the use of local manufacturers together with the employment of a number of graduates as a positive start to the recovery process and re energising the local economy ahead of Brexit in December.

Councillor Jarman also raised the following points:-

- Council staff may need a break from homeworking;
- Can further information be provided on how care homes can be supported to be financially viable;
- Can an update be provided on whether there is an increased number of children entering the care sector during Covid 19 outbreak?;
- Fly tipping is now unacceptable and the local community are now prepared to name and shame those that are guilty of this activity.

Councillors M Powell, M Diamond and J James commended council staff and volunteers throughout this period and during redeployment and supported the measures in place to ease the lockdown and boost the local economy.

Councillor Powell queried whether the Field Hospital in Abercynon would be retained in the event of a second wave of Coronavirus. He also suggested that information to arise from discussions in the Group Leaders meeting with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council should be relayed to other members of the Council.

(Note : County Borough Councillor R Lewis declared a personal interest – "My partner works for Public Health Wales")

Councillor Lewis stated that he was looking forward to re-establishing the Climate Change Committee at this time.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to the following points which received responses from the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive:-

Independent Care Sector –A package of £40m made available by Welsh Government to support the Independent sector care homes and the Council is working to pay additional costs which covers agency staff costs and PPE costs (Local Authorities in Wales have been providing independent sector care homes with PPE free of charge);

Funerals – There have been limits on the number of families able to attend funerals. Initially up to 10 family members have been allowed to attend which has now increased to 15 family members.

Memorial – The Council will consider a memorial when the time is right, to recognise NHS, and local authority key workers and individuals who have lost loved ones.

Municipal Building – Recently £14,000 has been approved to progress feasibility work.

Flood Works – Staff have continued to work in the background despite the Covid-19 priorities and staff are working from home to progress flooding schemes, bids and feasibility studies:-

- The bid for the Pentre Culvert has been approved with Welsh Government and work will commence within the next 6-7 weeks;
- Work in Bryn Ivor will also start soon;
- Funding for £400,000 has been approved for a scheme in in Cwmbach;
- Funding of £400,000 is available for Park Lane School following damage caused by both Storm Callum and Dennis;
- Approximately 20-25 schemes are currently being considered/progressed;
- £30,000 has recently been approved for a study to be undertaken around flooding issues in Treorchy

Libraries –Three libraries are open at the moment across the County Borough Council and the intention is to open a further three libraries over the next few weeks. Currently, residents have access to the home service and the click and collect service within the libraries.

Taxis – All existing licences are being rolled over however, any new applications for new vehicle licences are on hold until a proper medical assessment can be sought.

Online Services – More services are opening up where residents will be able to access information by telephone not just online. However it was confirmed that the 'One for All Centres' would not be able to open under the current restrictions.

The Chief Executive concluded that the Council is in the process of working jointly with a company to investigate how we use the plastic from milk bottles so they can be 100% plastic free. He advised that further details in

relation to the numbers of children entering the care sector under Covid-19 would be provided following the meeting. He added that a high level of the testing is taking place in the Abercynon Testing Centre and the Council is proactively testing in Care/Residential Homes and also high risk businesses.

With regards to agile/homeworking over the past few months a recent staff survey showed that 83% of staff confirmed that they are content with the current home working arrangements although the Council recognises that a balance needs to be struck in the future whereby staff do receive face to face support that will build upon the existing well-being support mechanisms in place to ensure their well-being going forward.

The Leader of the Council addressed the following issues:-

Cycle Route - One of the priority areas is the Maerdy to Pontygwaith cycle route bid which has been submitted this year, the feasibility testing is ongoing regarding the structures and bridges and once the landslip in the area has been dealt with, progress regarding the cycle route will continue. There have been a number of active travel bids submitted to Welsh Government, some relating to the Rhondda Fawr. Responses to the bids are forthcoming and subject to approval the schemes will progress in the Rhondda Fawr and other areas.

Landslip - In respect of the landslip, work has commenced this week (the Council is underwriting the cost of £2.5m). A number of high level meetings have been undertaken between the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive, Welsh Government, the Secretary of State and other Ministers and it is a council priority. This would not have progressed as quickly without the dedication and hard work of staff. The work has started this week and once completed the next phase (4) of the mountain work for next year will commence.

RESOLVED:-

1. To note the action taken by the Council to date in response to the Covid 19 pandemic; and
2. That further reports are presented to each Council meeting for the next six months as the UK and Welsh Governments relax the lockdown, reopen key services and public areas, and allow greater freedom of movement, locally, nationally and internationally.

161 Urgent Executive Decisions

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented for Members' information an overview of the Urgent Decisions taken forward by the Cabinet Committee, as set in section 5 of the report and the Urgent Key Officer Delegated Decisions taken forward outside of the Cabinet Committee as set out in section 6 of the report, for the period January – June 2020.

Members were provided with an update on the emergency use of Ty Trevithick to provide immediate support to the response of the Local Health Board to the Covid-19 pandemic which has subsequently been

returned to Council ownership.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report.

162 Virtual Meetings

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications provided an update on the progress the Council has made to date, to enable Members to participate in virtual committee meetings.

Discussions were held with Group Leaders, Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs on 18th May 2020 to gain a consensus of opinion on the best approach to be taken forward. As a result the Cabinet, Planning & Development Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee were prioritised in the first phase of committee functions to be rolled out virtually.

The next phase of meetings will prioritise the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee followed by the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. Following discussions it has been agreed that in the interim the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will take an overarching approach. It is proposed that other committees such as the Democratic Services Committee will be held before the Council Annual General Meeting (AGM) to meet the Council's reporting requirements. Through continued discussions with the Group Leaders it is proposed that following the AGM a full committee calendar will be formulated with the continued need for specific business critical matters to form the basis of any future calendar.

In response to a number of queries the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications clarified that a virtual meeting of the Licensing Committee would be held in due course. It was also confirmed that the August recess would be protected although virtual meetings of the Planning & Development Committee would be held throughout the recess.

RESOLVED to:-

1. Acknowledge the progress made to date in the initial phase of virtual meeting;
2. Agree the timeline of virtual meetings as set out in the report; and
3. Request that the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication provides regular updates on progress of the Council's virtual meetings.

This meeting closed at 5.40 pm

**Cllr S Powderhill
Chairman.**