



## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held virtually on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 at 5.00 pm

### County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Powderhill (Chair)

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 G Davies
Councillor J Davies	Councillor L De Vet
Councillor M Diamond	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor J Elliott	Councillor S Evans
Councillor M Fidler Jones	Councillor M Forey
Councillor A Fox	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor E George	Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor G Holmes	Councillor L Hooper
Councillor G Hopkins	Councillor P Howe
Councillor G Hughes	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor G Jones	Councillor L Jones
Councillor W Jones	Councillor R Lewis
Councillor W Lewis	Councillor C Leyshon
Councillor A Morgan	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor M Norris	Councillor D Owen-Jones
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 G Thomas
Councillor W Treeby	Councillor R Turner
Councillor L Walker	Councillor M Weaver
Councillor M Webber	Councillor E Webster
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  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources  
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services  
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services  
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

## **96      Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L.M. Adams, S. Belzak, A. Davies-Jones, S. Evans, D. Grehan, M. Griffiths, J. Harries, J. James, K.L. Jones, K. Morgan, W. Owen, M. Tegg, G. Williams, D Williams and C. Willis.

## **97      Declaration of Interest**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations were made:

- County Borough Councillor G. Davies declared a personal interest in respect of Item 6 of the agenda, Members' Questions – 'In relation to question 2, I work at a Food Bank';
- County Borough Councillor E. Stephens declared a personal interest in respect of Item 9 of the agenda, Notices of Motion- 'I work for the Department for Work and Pensions, which provides Universal Credit, which is the subject of one of proposals. I won't be taking part in the discussion and will be abstaining';
- County Borough Councillor R. Lewis declared a personal interest in respect of Item 6 of the agenda, Members' Questions – 'In relation to question 2, I am a volunteer with Merthyr Cynon Foodbank'; and
- County Borough Councillor E. George declared a personal interest in respect of Item 6 of the agenda, Members' Questions – 'In relation to question 2, I am a volunteer with Merthyr Cynon Foodbank'.

## **98      Universal Basic Income**

The Council received a verbal update from Mr J Williams (UBI Lab Wales) and Mr S Thomas (UBI Lab RCT), who sought to provide Members with information on the work undertaken in relation to Universal Basic Income from both a local and a Wales-wide perspective.

Prior to the presentation, the representative took the opportunity to thank RCT Council for supporting and adopting the Notice of Motion in respect of Universal Basic Income at its meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

Members were informed that UBI Wales was essentially a hub for the Borough labs and that the ambition was for other Local Authorities to follow RCT's lead in supporting Universal Basic Income. In order to achieve its goal and drive the conversation in respect of Universal Basic Income, UBI Wales were founding labs across Wales and working in partnership with the Future Generations Commissioner to establish what Universal Basic Income could look like in Wales.

During the presentation, the representatives provided Members with detailed information on the following:

- The definition of Universal Basic Income and why UBI Lab Wales considered it to be the right policy to meet the challenges of the 21st century;
- The previous trials and outcomes;
- UBI Lab Wales' ideal pilot; and
- Potential funding opportunities and the possibility of it running parallel with the Green Industrial Revolution over the next decade.

The Leader of the Council took the opportunity to thank the individuals for the informative update. The Leader acknowledged the deprivation experienced within the Borough, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic and commented that should funding be made available from UK or Welsh Government, RCT would be supportive of trialling a pilot in respect of Universal Basic Income. The Leader emphasised that the trial could indicate that Universal Basic Income may not necessarily be the best way forward but was happy to support its trial.

County Borough Councillor P Jarman referenced UBI Lab Wales' statement that only 8% of people knew what Universal Basic Income was and questioned how the pilot would be communicated with the local communities. The representative advised that, along with the use of social media and newspapers, the Borough labs would seek to engage face to face with the local communities, subject to future Covid-19 regulations.

County Borough Councillor M Powell spoke of similar case studies and was happy to support a pilot within RCT. The Member suggested that the pilot target the most deprived communities and felt that it would need to be carried out over a prolonged period of time, in order to establish any benefits that might arise from it.

**99**

## Announcements

1. County Borough Councillor P Jarman advised Members of the Centenarian Mrs Eva Cotter who turned 100 last year and who has just had her covid vaccination, the first 100 year old patient in her GP surgery in Penrhiwceiber. Councillor Jarman commented on Mrs Cotters admiration for all those who had developed the vaccine as she has lived through an era when TB, Smallpox, Measles, rubella and mumps were in communities before those vaccines were available. Councillor Jarman added that Mrs Cotter was an inspiration to many and requested that a letter be sent from the Mayor on behalf of the Council.
2. County Borough Councillor P Jarman took the opportunity to recognise the achievements and kindness of Amy MacKintosh, a year 9 pupil at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School who had won £1,000 in the first 'Give help from Home' competition on behalf of Leigh Gardens Pool in Penrhiwceiber. Members were advised that Amy had undertaken her project under the Religious Studies blended learning programme with the guidance of her teacher, Mr Dave Church. Working with Julie Cooke, BEM, community champion at the Asda Aberdare store Amy delivered afternoon tea and essential items to 9 elderly neighbours. Councillor Jarman commented that Amy had done the comprehensive school and Leigh Gardens Pool Committee proud and requested a letter be sent to Amy from the Mayor, acknowledging this achievement.

3. County Borough Councillor S Rees Owen provided her congratulations and commented on the success of local RCT actor Callum Scott Howells in the new Russell T Davies Drama 'It's a Sin'. Councillor Rees Owen spoke of the character played by Callum, who touched, moved and filled viewers with hope. The Member spoke of the performances of Callum in the Parc and Dare Theatre over the years, referencing performances with only boys aloud and Treorchy Comprehensive school, to which Callum was head boy. Members were advised that Callum had paid thanks to the local arts scene for the opportunities and platforms that had been made available to him, to help him learn and grow. Councillor Rees Owen commented on the bright and exciting future for Callum and wished him all the best for the future.

**100 Council Procedure Rule 15.1**

The Deputy Leader moved the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 15.1 which states that a matter would be decided by a simple majority of those Members voting and present in the room at the time the question was put in order to facilitate the smooth running of the virtual meeting.

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

**101 Minutes**

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meetings.

**102 Statements**

**Statement from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business.**

The Deputy Leader advised Members of the Council's virtual careers fair that had taken place earlier in the day, advising Members that this was the first virtual careers fair held in Wales. The Careers fair involved over 30 employers with a total of 525 vaccines available. The virtual fair was made up of 30 webinars which included details of the council's apprenticeship and graduate schemes.

Members were informed that 1604 people had registered for the event with 274 people logging on in the first 20 minutes and 660 people in the first 2 hours. The event had received over 6000 views.

The Deputy Leader thanked staff within HR for the work undertaken to host the event which provided residents with the opportunity to view, participate and apply for good quality jobs across the County Borough.

\*\*\*

**Statement from the Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development and Housing**

The Cabinet Member advised Members of a meeting he attended on the 29<sup>th</sup> January with Mick Antoniw (AM), Alex Davies Jones (MP) and a Member from

the Pontypridd BID, who met with representatives from HSBC. Members were advised of the proposal by HSBC of closing both the Pontypridd and Talbot Green HSBC branch and the rationale including data on footfall had been presented. The Cabinet Member spoke of the requests by Members to retain the branches or take forward a reduced hours / mobile scheme within the branches, but both proposals were rejected. The Cabinet Member commented that if the branches were to close then no HSBC branch would be available within RCT. Representatives of the bank had advised upon alternative arrangements being discussed with utilising the local post offices and account management being taken forward at the Caerphilly and Cowbridge branches respectively. Members at the meeting voiced their concern over the accessibility of the proposed alternative branches and the impact on vulnerable residents. HSBC representatives confirmed that contact had already been made to such residents.

The Cabinet Member concluded by advising that the contact details for senior UK management officers within the bank had been requested although nothing had been received to date.

### **103      Members' Questions**

#### **Question from County Borough Councillor M. Forey to the Deputy Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor M Webber:**

"Will the Deputy Leader please outline what plans are being developed to facilitate hybrid meetings in the future when restrictions allow?"

#### **Response from the Deputy Leader County Borough Councillor M Webber**

The Deputy Leader advised Members that once restrictions allowed, Democratic Services would look to implement a hybrid approach for meetings. This will be progressed incrementally, in a similar way to how the Council approached the rollout of virtual meetings last year. She stated that this would provide a certain amount of flexibility to operate meetings face-to-face in the near future whilst allowing for social distancing practices to be maintained. She added that participation in this approach should be at Members' discretion.

#### **Supplementary question from Councillor Forey**

"How could this be built upon for the future?"

The Deputy Leader responded that Council's wider aspiration will be to embed this approach, to enable Member's participation in the most flexible way for their circumstances and that this ability is now provided to Local Authorities through the new Local Government Act. She added that building on our experiences to date we will want to maximise the capability of our new webcasting facilities and hoped this approach would also support and promote greater diversity in the future and enable better engagement and participation for both Members and

residents.

**Question from County Borough Councillor H Boggis to the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being & Cultural Services, County Borough Councillor Cllr R Lewis:**

“How is the Council continuing to support local food banks?”

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services replied that a named officer keeps in touch with the main foodbanks on a regular basis so that the Authority are able to provide timely support when required. He added that this included:

- Providing them with food products that may be in short supply from the Food Distribution Centre at Llantwit Fardre
- Ensuring that there is cover over the holiday period to meet any demands for emergency food parcels (only 2 were required over the Christmas holidays);
- Ensuring there is support for deliveries if required (none has been requested so far); and
- Providing access to Council buildings for use as storage space (for example, Taff Ely Foodbank is using Gilfach Goch Day Centre for storage of food items at present).

The bulk buying ability of the Council had been identified of particular value by the foodbanks and they have indicated that this provides them with reassurance when they are experiencing a reduction in their supplies.

The RCT Food Support Grant established through the contribution of £10,000 from the Council and £10,000 from Trivallis provides resources to foodbanks & food support projects in RCT. So far 14 applications for grants of £500 each have been approved.

**Supplementary question from Councillor H Boggis**

“What are the Council doing to address the wider issues associated with food poverty?”

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Cultural Services and Wellbeing replied that two particular schemes where Council is working to address this issue were The Sustainable Food Places scheme and Healthy Start. Council has successfully applied for short-term development grants under The Sustainable Food Places (SFP) scheme.

This scheme aims to create a Food Prosperity Network and a Food Response Pathway in the County focussed on establishing healthier, more sustainable food system at a County level. The next step is to test out the best approaches and models for food partnerships and programmes in RCT. This will include online workshops with other grant recipients facilitated by the SFP team.

Grant recipients are expected to work closely with the SFP UK team and their national partners and the scheme involves a partnership approach between Local Authorities, public health bodies and other institutions working together with a range of partners, businesses and communities.

Healthy Start is a means-tested programme designed to improve the health of low income pregnant women and families on benefits and tax credits. Eligible claimants and children between 1 and 4 to have 1 voucher worth £3.10 each week to help buy some basic foods. Children under 1 can get 2 vouchers each week (£6.20). Cow's milk, fresh/frozen/tinned fruit and veg, and infant formula milk amongst eligible items. He added that most recent data indicates that around 77% of those eligible in RCT are taking up this offer and Officers are working with Resilient Families to address this.

**Question from County Borough Councillor J Brencher to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A. Crimmings:**

"Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the work at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park?"

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services advised that Council announced shortly prior to Christmas that a significant package of funding had been secured from both the Welsh Government, through the Valleys Regional Park programme, and also the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Work to deliver the Valleys Regional Park element of the works is already underway, and excellent progress was being made. The focus of this branch is on upgrading the footpaths of the central routes through and around the Park with the objective of making it a safer and more attractive place to visit.

This work, she added, would also entail a new pathway to improve the link from the Lido to the Mock Rock Outcrop, Bandstand, War Memorial and new training centre - that forms part of the £1.9 million National Lottery Heritage Fund Project. In addition, the lighting along the paths will also be upgraded in keeping with the heritage of the Park, with the added bonus of being more energy efficient. Later this year, work will also commence on the Connecting Communities Project, which stems from a total of £1.9m of funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Welsh Government and the Council.

She stated that this was a really exciting project which would see a host of new and improved features, including:

- The construction of a new learning and wellbeing centre
- Accessibility and biodiversity improvements
- Restoration of key features, such as the Bandstand, sunken garden and mock rock outcrop.

**Supplementary question from Councillor J. Brencher**

"Please can you provide an update on the progress in repairing the Ynysangharad Park Footbridge"

The Cabinet Member Cultural Services, Leisure and Cultural Services advised that the bridge had been lifted into place by Centregreat, the main contractor. Further repairs and replacement to cable stay to be undertaken on the cables and bridge mast, along with reinstatement works to the area surrounding the bridge. She added that Council were expecting the contractor to be finished in around 4 weeks' time, although it is dependent on weather conditions for some of the reinstatement works in the Park; Temperatures affecting painting and delivery of a new cable stay.

**Question from County Borough Councillor M Powell to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A Morgan:**

"Will Cllr. Morgan give Members an update on where the Council is with regards the repair or demolition of the Berw Rd Bridge please?"

**Response from Councillor A Morgan**

The Leader advised that monitoring of the bridge continues by Redstart. Discussions were ongoing with Cadw and Heritage (CARE) engineer consultancy, Mann Williams, in respect of repairs. All utilities have been removed from the bridge - apart from Wales and West, who were working on their solution as it has significant implications.

The Leader advised the following:

- Scour inspection and assessment undertaken by specialist contractors
- Proposals for scour repairs prepared and quotes had been sought from specialist contractors. (estimate £80-100k)
- Listed Building Consent to be applied for scour repairs.
- Discussions currently ongoing with NRW regarding timing of works. (potentially as early as April if allowed but could be held back until mid-May if NRW insist on embargo)
- Otter surveys to be undertaken.
- Temporary FRAP to be submitted and approved by the successful contractor.
- Once scour repairs are complete and the inspection undertaken on the bridge, then subject to the inspection findings, the bridge can be re-opened to traffic
- RCT are currently working with consultants WSP, Mann Williams and concrete repair specialist CRL on undertaking trial repairs to bridge (bridge can remain open whilst these works are ongoing). This again will need Listed Building Consent and will take place later in summer.

- Subject to findings of the trial repairs, then if successful, these can be developed into a full refurbishment / repair project which will require Listed Building Consent.
- Anticipated repair works commencing on site late spring / summer 2022, subject to approvals and these will require the bridge to be closed.

**Question from County Borough Councillor M. Griffiths to the Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development and Housing, County Borough Councillor D R Bevan:**

"Has the planning policy of RCTCBC been adapted to respond to the challenges of climate change and, in particular, does the Council have a policy relating to the replacement of trees which are removed to make way for development?"

**Response from Councillor D R Bevan**

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development and Housing responded and stated that planning decisions taken by the Council have regard to both local and national planning policies – and at both levels it is reflective of the pressing need to address climate change. Members will be aware that the Council is currently undertaking a full review of its LDP and the "new" LDP will have to demonstrate that it at least complies with the ambitious climate change targets identified by the Welsh Government. He added that this will be scrutinised by an independent inspector. The role that trees and 'Green Infrastructure' as a whole can play in helping address climate change is recognised both at local and national level. He added that last year, Mark Drakeford MS, unveiled plans for a National Forest running the length and breadth of Wales.

He informed members that trees and woods/forests are clearly part of the solution to tackling global climate change. It is recognised that trees drawdown and lock away carbon, reduce social and ecosystem vulnerability in a changing climate and contribute to human well-being. They also play important role in benefiting local communities and protecting nature and addressing biodiversity loss across our county borough.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Council does not have a specific tree replacement policy. The policy within the Council's current LDP does require the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. Any loss of trees as a consequence of new development is regrettable, and whenever possible, a builder/developer is encouraged to retain trees. He added that in cases where existing trees are lost, the Council would seek, wherever possible, to ensure the provision of new landscaping as a suitable replacement. It is important however, to recognise that the planning system only has limited powers and is unable to control all cases of tree removal

**104 State of the County Borough Debate**

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13.2 the Presiding Officer stated that

he would invite the Leader to address Council following which the Leader would respond to Members' comments on his Annual Report.

The Leader opened his address by commenting on the uniqueness of the situations the Council had faced over the year commenting on both the devastating flooding of February 2020 and also the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has transformed the lives of all and had a monumental impact on the communities the Council serves.

The Leader put on record his thanks to all of the Council staff who have provided vital services to the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf, highlighting the work of frontline social care providers, finance staff, test trace and protect staff who are now supporting the mass vaccination programme and all of those staff who have continued to provide the everyday services that residents rely on. The Leader added that despite the challenges presented with the Council have continued to deliver on its ambitions for the benefit of the entire County Borough. Before providing specific service area updates the Leader concluded his opening address by commenting that the effects of the pandemic especially are set to shape the future over the remainder of the Council term and beyond, adding that the Council will continue to build upon the strong foundations already in place to create the right opportunities to secure an ambitious future for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

### **Adults and Children's Social Care (People)**

The Leader provided a detailed update in respect of the Adults and Children's Social Care Services advising of the services provided over 2019/20

- 235 Disabled Facilities Grants
- 820 people supported through the Council's ENABLE fund of £316k
- 352 people supported through the Council's Handyperson scheme at a cost of £58,400.
- Delivery of 71 Maintenance Repair Assistance Grants

The Leader continued by advising of the good progress made in modernising the care system provided for older residents in the County with reference made to extra care schemes across the County Borough.

The Leader highlighted the success of the award winning Stay Well @ Home programme and suggested that detailed information surrounding this should be provided to Members.

The Leader concluded this aspect of his update by advising of the Resilient Families Service, which continues to provide support for with 733 referrals made this year and Children's Services, informing Members that the service had received contacts in relation to 1,000 more children than last year, with the potential that this demand may well increase in the months ahead. He raised concerns that over the 17% reduction in the rate of children becoming looked after that had been witnessed over these difficult times and the potential that problems may be missed.

## **Community Hubs**

The Leader advised of the position of Community Hubs informing Members that the Community Hub model was further expanded to provide a co-ordinated local response throughout the pandemic, with the Council coordinating a multi-partnership approach to supporting residents through its 7 resilience centres.

Residents on the Shielded Patients List were supported as follows:

- 10,544 pro-active calls were made to see whether they needed support;
- 1,128 residents asked for on-going friendly phone calls;
- 1,698 residents had no family, friends or community support to access food and they were registered for free weekly WG food parcels;
- Meals on Wheels provision organised for 182 residents who could not prepare their own meals;
- 697 received emergency food parcels from the Council's Food Distribution Centre as they had less than 3 days' supply of food available;

The Leader added that in addition to the above 4,030 vulnerable residents contacted the Council to request support and the Leader extended his thanks to the Resilience Volunteers and many other volunteers and 3rd sector organisations for the work and support they provided to many residents across the County Borough.

## **Leisure**

The Leader informed Members that despite the pandemic the Council had continued to invest in Leisure facilities and provided details of the investments undertaken with reference to the athletics tracks now available across the County Borough.

## **Parks & Play Areas**

The Leader highlighted that significant investment had been taken forward across parks and play areas and advised that the Council would continue to commit to this investment going forward.

## **Recycling/Environment/Climate Change**

The Leader was delighted to advise of the Council's positive recycling figures recorded for the Festive period, with over 2,770 tonnes collected – including over 400 tonnes of food waste. The Leader advised that the Council were close to hitting the Welsh Government 70% target going forward.

## **Highways (Place) & Transportation (Prosperity)**

The Leader commented upon the Tylorstown Tip landslide remediation project in respect of the phases already completed and those to be taken forward.

In respect of Infrastructure the Leader provided detail in respect of Ynysangharad Park footbridge, Demolition of Feeder Pipe Bridge, Abercynon and various emergency repairs undertaken to various bridges, footbridges, retaining walls and culverts throughout the County Borough following Storm Dennis.

The Leader added that a major programme of short, medium and long term flood alleviation measures had been delivered across the County Borough with £3.1M grant funded programme of Resilient Roads Projects undertaken to alleviate the impact of flood events on the highway network.

In respect of Capital Programme Members were informed that the council had continued with the programme of transport investment via annual capital programme and 3-year £23.5m programme and the Leader listed some of the major schemes completed and major projects such as the Cross Valley Link, A4119 and Llanharan Bypass.

Members were advised that work would be commencing in the summer with the Metro Porth Interchange.

### **Town Centres/Enterprise**

The Leader thanked the regeneration team and finance team for their immediate support to town centre businesses affected by the Storm Dennis floods through practical support, advice and hardship grants totalling £226,000.

The Leader continued by highlighting the commitments delivered upon across Town Centres referencing free wifi, the Porth Town Centre Regeneration Strategy and the acquired the former Bingo Hall building in Pontypridd as the first stage in the redevelopment of this prominent gateway site.

### **Education and Inclusion Services**

The Leader commented on the work and support of teaching and support staff across all schools within the County Borough over the pandemic advising of the 25 emergency childcare hubs in operation in mainstream, special schools and PRU settings during the first lockdown, with a total of 787 children regularly accessing this provision. The Leader again thanked all teaching staff for the work undertaken over the pandemic commenting that the dedication and hard work of all school staff involved helped keep the country moving during the pandemic. The Leader also referenced the blended learning approaches and support for Digitally Excluded Learners through provision of devices.

In respect of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme the Leader highlighted the opening of the new Hirwaun Primary School building, and discussed the progression with the new builds for Pontyclun, Penygawsi and Llanilltud Faerdref Primaries. The Leader also welcomed the proposal which was out for consultation on the building of a new £8.5m school on a new site for YGG Llyn y Forwyn.

### **Employment.**

In respect of employment the Leader spoke positively of the graduate and apprentice scheme and the investment being taken forward with the schemes and the very first virtual career's fair hosted by the Council.

### **Governance**

The Leader commented on the Governance of the Council and advised that the Council were one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Welsh Councils to establish virtual meetings. He also took the opportunity to thank scrutiny for their critical challenge in supporting service delivery and informed key decisions taken by Council in respect of Residential Care, Budget and Storm Dennis. The Leader also advised of the future intention to commence hybrid meetings when restrictions allow, through the investment undertaking with the enhanced technology within the Chamber and the long term approach that needed to be taken forward.

The Leader ended his address by commenting that after a very difficult year there were lots of positives that had come through and that the Council should be proud of the achievements and delivery of services. The Leader concluded by thanking Welsh Government for the funding that had been received which assisted the Council in delivering services for the benefit of its residents.

The Group Leaders each responded to the Leaders debate, all paying tribute to the NHS, Council staff, School and Childcare staff, retail and voluntary sectors and many more for their hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic.

Reference was made by Councillor Jarman to the cross party collaboration taken forward through a number of notices of motion over the year and the support of all the opposition parties with the efforts of the Council in respect of the pandemic, over what has been a difficult 12 months for the Council. Each of the Group Leaders proposed questions to the Leader on the following to which the Leader responded.

- The long term intention for Council staff currently furloughed if the Furlough system does not extend past April 2021 – The Leader confirmed that staff would be paid regardless if the furlough scheme ended in April adding that provision for this had been included within the proposed Budget that was to come forward to Cabinet.
- Would the Council continue to support the paddling pool support provisions previously offered by the Council, if paddling pools were to open in the Summer holidays subject to Covid restrictions? - If restrictions were to be lifted the Leader advised that further support would be provided to assist with the opening of paddling pools, however the Leader spoke of the need to gain formal advice from Welsh Government, Public Health and the Council's director on the viability of such openings due to Covid.
- What are the Council's plan in respect of education to ensure future generations are given all the opportunities available to them to ensure they succeed in the World? - The Leader referenced the uplift within the proposed budget for Schools and Education and also referenced the discussions held with the Education Minister in respect of the 'catch-up' provisions needed to be taken forward, highlighting also the Welsh Language needs for Welsh medium education provision.
- What discussion have the Council had with Transport for Wales following

the recent announcement of delays to the South Wales Metro scheme which will impact communities across RCT? - The Leader advised of discussions held with the Chief Executive of TfW and informed members that the delay referenced was only a marginal delay to the scheme and spoke of the work already undertaken to progress the Metro scheme.

- What impact has Covid had on major infrastructure programme, with special reference to highways across RCT? – Members were advised that the pandemic had caused only minor slippage to the schemes and gave an update on the position of some of the schemes being taken forward across the County Borough.

The Presiding Officer opened up questions to all Members and advised that if some Members were unable to put their question forward due to time constraints they would be able to contact the Leader directly for a response.

- A4119 – The Leader provided information about the timescales the Council were working to with regards to completion of the scheme, advising of the intention to be on site with construction commencing in 12months time, following the planning permission stages and completion was aimed for 2024.
- South Wales Metro Scheme – The Leader spoke of the positives of the scheme for the County Borough, commenting that the metro would provide a greener transport scheme going forward.
- Tourism – The Leader responded to the specific reference made to ‘zipworld’ and spoke of the positives this would bring to RCT, advising of the employment benefits, adding that this would not just be a seasonal attraction. The Leader added on the need to develop on the accommodation needs across the County Borough to ensure tourists remained within the County Borough.
- Schools and transportation - The Leader advised that the development of schools across the County Borough was based on the locality needs and referenced communities where smaller schools were created rather than 3-16 schools. The Leader spoke of the new school builds across the Authority and the greener and more efficient buildings that had been built. The Leader concluded by advising upon the green agenda in respect of home to school transport, advising Members that there had not been a huge rise in home to school transport adding that in some cases there had been an overall reduction.
- Special Education – The Leader advised that a review had been undertaken in respect of special schools and informed that a report would be coming forward to Cabinet on the outcomes of the review.
- Flood relief scheme, Cwmbach – The Leader provided an update on

the £450k flood scheme that had been progressed following the flooding of business in this area from Storm Callum and later Storm Dennis. The Leader also referenced discussions with Welsh Government regarding future flood retention schemes.

- Responsive Services – The Leader advised of over 650 Council services provided and agility of staff to enable provision. The Leader referenced the digital support provisions made available to staff to accommodate home working and spoke of the small number of areas where services were no longer being provided due to safety of staff and residents.

The Presiding Officer thanked the Leader for his debate and responses to Members.

**105      Council Work Programme 2020/21**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented an update regarding the Council Work Programme advising that the Director of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and the Chair of the Regional Economic Growth Partnership (REGP) would attend the March Council meeting.

**106      Update in Respect of the Coronavirus in Rhondda Cynon Taf**

The Group Director Children & Community Services presented an update in respect of the Coronavirus in RCT with the aid of a power point presentation which covered the following key information: -

- Confirmed Cases of Covid 19 per 100,000 population in the previous 7 days
- Confirmed Cases of Covid 19 per 100,000 population in the previous 7 days by Local Authority in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM)
- Trends in 7-day cumulative Covid infection rates per 100,000 in CTM
- Daily Test Positivity of Covid in CTM
- Covid Local Area Surveillance
- Weekly trends in Covid deaths by location
- Number of vaccines administered in CTM region
- The commencement of Phase 2 on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Following the update, each of the Group Leaders were provided with the opportunity to ask questions.

**Councillor A Morgan, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Labour Group**

The Leader wished to place on record his thanks to all staff supporting the programme with the Health Board. He advised that there will be more information available very soon on further vaccination centres that would be opening. Undoubtedly, this will impact on certain facilities when restrictions are lifted, such as where leisure centres that are now vaccination centres but supporting the delivery of the vaccination programme has to remain a priority at this time and hoped that this would be fully supported by members and residents. The Leader advised that there is an online form that people can complete if they are in category 1-4 and had not yet received the vaccine. He urged members if they were aware of anyone in these categories to direct and support them to book their vaccine via the form. The Heath Board are also planning very soon to supply a phone number for booking where people are unable to access online facilities.

The Leader continued that foundation phase children will be returning to school in two weeks' time and discussions were currently ongoing with Ministers and unions on how secondary schools are able to safely return. He added that a statement in his name would be issued by the WLGA later this evening to state that the priority for all 22 Local Authorities is for all children to safely return to school before any other shops, pubs, restaurants are allowed to open. He stated that any headroom available should be used for children returning to education and they would await for guidance from the chief medical officer as to when this is possible

**Councillor P Jarman (Group Leader, Plaid Cymru Group)**

Councillor Jarman stated it would only be when we could collect the data, post COVID inquiry will we get a better understanding of why the number of deaths in the RCT area are so high. She was troubled at the rate of infection in certain wards, Tylorstown being one, but throughout the Borough and would be interested to learn from the data if this could be down to people who are asked to self-isolate who are in employment cannot afford to self-isolate as they do not qualify for benefits available if they do not work.

Councillor Jarman asked the Group Director Children and Community Services if the Level two vaccine programme targeted 60-70 year old people only?

The Group Director Children and Community Services advised that where clusters of infection had been identified by the Contact tracing Teams the incident management team considers the causes and identifies any measures that can be applied. He added that the team undertake "backward contact tracing" which is enhanced contact tracing that goes back further. They will do this with any new cases that come in to identify the source of exposure to understand why the particular area has been problematic. It is also undertaken by workplaces and occupations.

In terms of the vaccination programme the Group Director informed members that groups 1-4 would be concluded by 14<sup>th</sup> February and the second phase (4-9) which is everyone over the age of 50 would be vaccinated by the end of May.

**Councillor M Powell, RCT Independent Group**

Councillor Powell referred to the data being provided to members and was concerned that the information was not clear enough so it was difficult to see which wards were the most adversely affected. He added that he would have

benefitted from having sight of the data before the meeting. He continued that the data still does not state the infection of hospital transmission and was concerned that where a person contracts the virus in hospital, the data is allocated to their home address, therefore an accurate picture is not provided for in hospital transmission. He asked for clarification on vaccination centres relocating and also if the priority groups included essential workers such as social care workers and teachers.

The Group Director Children and Community Services responded that much of the data is publically available and he could provide the links to the information for Members to see at their leisure. He apologised that he did not have the data to show at ward level.

In terms of the data for in hospital acquired transmissions he advised that the infection rates were reducing but there were still outbreaks in some hospitals but were all significantly improving. In relation to the data relating to the place of residence and hospital acquired transmissions he advised that the numbers are so low that they would have no bearing on the information provided in the presentation so hoped this would give members confidence that what was presented to members reflects an accurate representation for those wards

He confirmed that the vaccination centres are reliable on the supply of vaccines coming through and as the Pfizer vaccine was limited these were prioritised for second dose vaccines, the impact of this means that some of the vaccinations centres would be closed temporarily but would reopen once the Pfizer vaccine supply was restored and phase two starts

The Group Director confirmed that the priority groups 5-9 cover residents over the age of 50 through to 65 and included those that have underlying health conditions which were publically listed. The focus of the priority groups was focussed on preventing mortality which principally related to age.

#### **Councillor A Morgan, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Labour Group**

The Leader added that a further update will be published tomorrow on the mass vaccination centres about them relocating to get ready for the next phase of the programme.

He reassured members that the supply issue with the Pfizer vaccine was not an RCT issue and was a nationwide issue. He advised that whilst the Local Authority and Health Board could open many more vaccination centres, they are reliant on the supply of vaccines coming through to them and these are distributed by population numbers. He added that the vaccination centres were also focussing on the delivery of the second dose of the vaccines and more information would be published in due course.

#### **107 Notices of Motion**

- A. The following Notice of Motion standing in the name of County Borough Councillors M. Forey, J. Bonetto, L. M. Adams, D. R. Bevan, H Boggis, S. Bradwick, J. Brencher, A Calvert, G. Caple, A. Crimmings, A. Davies-Jones, L De- Vet, J. Edwards, J Elliott, S. Evans, M Fidler Jones, , A. Fox, E. George,

M. Griffiths, J. Harries G. Holmes, G. Hopkins, G. Jones, R. Lewis, W Lewis, C. Leyshon, A. Morgan, S. Morgans, M. A. Norris, D. Owen Jones, S Pickering, S.M. Powell, S. Rees, A. Roberts, J. Rosser, G Stacey, M Tegg, G Thomas, W Treeby, R K Turner, M. Webber, D. Williams, T. Williams, C. J. Willis and R. Yeo was received:

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities, businesses and families across the country are significant and have been discussed in a number of forums and across a spectrum of platforms. Millions of people have suffered from financial loss through job losses or collapsed trade, whilst lengthy periods of restrictions have been placed on their daily lives.

At the start of the pandemic, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer claimed they would “put their arms around” everyone at a time of national emergency, and introduced a number of state support packages. One of these measures was to increase the amount of Universal Credit by £20 per week, benefiting almost six million claimants across the UK either on low incomes or out of work. This provided significant relief to those in the most need of support during these unprecedented times, with charities and organisations calling the rise “a lifeline” and some of those in receipt of the Universal Credit saying it meant they went from “having to go without to having barely enough.”

Now, almost a year on – with the pandemic still very much dominating daily life, the Conservative UK Government are said to be reviewing the increase with the Prime Minister alleged to be minded to remove it. The potential withdrawal of such support highlights once again that the Westminster Government put families second at a time when the picture has, in fact, worsened for many with further job losses coming by the day as the effects of the pandemic continue.

In Rhondda Cynon Taf alone, approximately 17,000 people (as of December 2020) claim Universal Credit and the removal of the weekly payment will only serve to hit many in our communities at a time when state support is so vital.

This Council notes:

- That the extra £20 per-week payment to Universal Credit is an essential boost for millions that should not be removed during the pandemic. The removal would hit hardest on communities such as Rhondda Cynon Taf

and **resolves**:

- For the Council Leader to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister ahead of the March 3rd Budget to outline this Council’s opposition to the proposed removal of the £20 per-week increase in Universal Credit whilst the pandemic is still ongoing

At the meeting and in accordance with the Council’s Rules of Procedure 12.7 the mover of the substantive motion moved an alteration to the substantive Motion to delete reference to pandemic.

The altered Motion therefore read:

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities, businesses and families across the country are significant and have been discussed in a number of forums and across a spectrum of platforms. Millions of people have suffered from financial loss through job losses or collapsed trade, whilst lengthy periods of restrictions have been placed on their daily lives.

At the start of the pandemic, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer claimed they would “put their arms around” everyone at a time of national emergency, and introduced a number of state support packages. One of these measures was to increase the amount of Universal Credit by £20 per week, benefiting almost six million claimants across the UK either on low incomes or out of work. This provided significant relief to those in the most need of support during these unprecedented times, with charities and organisations calling the rise “a lifeline” and some of those in receipt of the Universal Credit saying it meant they went from “having to go without to having barely enough.”

Now, almost a year on – with the pandemic still very much dominating daily life, the Conservative UK Government are said to be reviewing the increase with the Prime Minister alleged to be minded to remove it. The potential withdrawal of such support highlights once again that the Westminster Government put families second at a time when the picture has, in fact, worsened for many with further job losses coming by the day as the effects of the pandemic continue.

In Rhondda Cynon Taf alone, approximately 21,000 people (as of December 2020) claim Universal Credit and the removal of the weekly payment will only serve to hit many in our communities at a time when state support is so vital.

This Council notes:

- That the extra £20 per-week payment to Universal Credit is an essential boost for millions that should not be removed. The removal would hit hardest on communities such as Rhondda Cynon Taf

and **resolves**:

- For the Council Leader to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister ahead of the March 3rd Budget to outline this Council’s opposition to the proposed removal of the £20 per-week increase in Universal Credit.

At the meeting the Presiding Member announced that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.4.1 an amendment to the original Notice of Motion had been received from County Borough Councillors P Jarman, H Fychan, E Webster, G Davies, A Chapman, S Evans, L Jones, E Stephens, S Rees Owen, M Weaver, J Williams, A Cox, D Grehan, E Griffiths, K Morgan, J Cullwick and J Davies.

In light of the proposed alteration to the substantive Notice of Motion County Borough Councillor P Jarman withdrew the amendment submitted by the Plaid Cymru group prior to it being formally moved.

Following discussions on the altered substantive Notice of motion, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the altered substantive Notice of Motion in accordance with the Council’s Rules of Procedure 12.7.

\*\*\*

- B.** The following Notice of Motion standing in the names of County Borough Councillors M Powell, L Walker, P Howe, G Williams, M Diamond, K Jones, W Jones and W Owen was received.

This Council requests that an Officer report is presented to a meeting of the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee, setting out the following proposal for consideration:

That any Members questions submitted for answering at Council that the answers to are readily available on the Council's website or have been included in information supplied by membership services to members in the previous six months shall be rejected. And the member directed to the relevant and easily available information.

At the meeting the Presiding Member announced that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.4.1 an amendment to the original Notice of Motion had been received from County Borough Councillors P Jarman, H Fychan, E Webster, G Davies, A Chapman, S Evans, L Jones, E Stephens, S Rees Owen, M Weaver, J Williams, A Cox, D Grehan, E Griffiths, K Morgan, J Cullwick and J Davies.

The amended Motion read:

The Council requests that an Officer report is presented to a meeting of the Corporate Governance & Constitution Committee setting out the following proposals for consideration:

This Council presumes this motion is tabled as a consequence of the unanswered question tabled on the 11th November 2020 relating to question arrangements.

This Council requests that an officer report is presented setting out proposals for a protocol relating to the tabling and answering of Members Questions. This report to include the appropriateness or not of rejecting a question by applying a 6 month rule which is part of the protocol relied on in procedure rule 14.1 and 14.2 for disallowing lost motions or to rescind a previous Council decision.

There are already rules which provide for more productive question and answer sessions which should eliminate duplication and repetition but are generally not observed.

These are set out in this Council's Rule of procedure 9.5 relating to answering questions which may take the form of (b) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication. Such an answer will suffice but is never relied on. Instead lengthy responses relying on previously published information are common. This in turn also reduces the opportunity of more tabled questions being asked in the 20-minute slot set aside for Members Questions.

So that there is no doubt insofar as to the application of rule 9.6 relating to

supplementary questions, there is an automatic right to ask such a question according to the Constitution subject to the first question being asked and answered.

The sense and purpose of the motion is to streamline and maximize the opportunities for Members to scrutinise Cabinet Members and Chairs of Committees, by questioning them on matters of detail or updates on issues that they may have responsibility and accountability for but have not been made known generally or publicly.

This is the rationale of asking that an Officer report is presented to the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee to review and refresh, if appropriate, the rules relating to Members' Questions.

Following a discussion on this matter, the vote was taken in respect of the amendment to the Notice of Motion and it was **RESOLVED** not to adopt the amendment.

Following further discussions on the original motion it was **RESOLVED** not to adopt the Notice of Motion.

**N.B**

- During the discussion Members **RESOLVED** to continue the meeting in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8, to allow consideration of the remaining agenda items and continuation of Council business.

**This meeting closed at 8.10 pm**

**Cllr S Powderhill  
Chairman.**