

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, 15 January 2014 at 5.00 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor A.Crimmings – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

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

Officers in Attendance

Mr.K.Griffiths – Chief Executive
Mr.S.Merritt – Group Director, Corporate Services
Mr.G.Jones – Group Director, Environmental Services
Mr.C.Bradshaw – Director, Education & Lifelong Learning
Mr.P.Lucas – Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mr.T.Wilkins – Director, Human Resources
Mr.N.Elliott – Service Director, Direct Services, Business & Housing
Mr.C.Hanagan – Head of Strategy, Public Relations & Tourism

97 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L.M.Adams, P.Baccara, A.Christopher, J.Davies, P.Howe, J.S.James, W.L.Langford, S.Pickering, M.J.Powell, S.Rees-Owen, B.Stephens, R.K.Turner, G.Thomas and T.Williams.

98 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared in matters pertaining to the agenda.

99 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Mayor announced the sad news that Mrs.Enid Jones, who had worked for the Authority as a Committee Services Officer prior to her retirement, had passed away and on receiving the news, the Council stood in silence as a mark of respect.
- (2) That Mayor wished to place on record her thanks to all Members who had made donations to her Charities, all of which had been gratefully received and would be put to good use.
- (3) The Chief Executive was congratulated by the Council on being awarded a "CBE" in the New Year's Honours List.

100 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 27 November 2013.

101 OPEN GOVERNMENT - STATEMENTS

There were no statements from the Deputy Leader of the Council or Cabinet Portfolion Holders on this occasion.

102 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

- (1) **From County Borough Councillor K.Montague to the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee (County Borough Councillor P.Jarman)**

"Will you as Chair of Democratic Services Committee make a statement on the priorities of that Committee?"

Response from County Borough Councillor P.Jarman:

“The Democratic Services Committee’s priority is to discharge the Democratic Services function.”

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor K.Montague:

“As Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, do you think you do this role and your role as Leader of the Opposition, a disservice by criticising all proposals made by the Executive to balance our budget. At the same time you yourself are proposing cuts that would result in less than £100,000 slightly more than 1% of the savings we are being forced to make.”

Response from County Borough Councillor P.Jarman:

“I will answer as Chair of Democratic Services and say that the Democratic Services Committee has been formally assigned with overall responsibility for deciding what should be regarded as reasonable training and development opportunities as part of its function of providing support to Members to carry out their functions. The Committee aims to ensure that Members of the Council have the skills, knowledge and capacity they need to discharge their responsibilities and to be effective.

I am sure Councillor, that if you speak to the relevant Cabinet Member, she will be able to arrange training to assist you in that endeavour”.

(2) From County Borough Councillor M.J.Watts to the Chair of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee (County Borough Councillor G.R.Davies)

“Will you as Chair, make a statement on the priorities of your Committee?”

Response from County Borough Councillor G.R.Davies:

“Effective scrutiny is a priority for my Committee to ensure that the Executive is kept to account of Members but more importantly to the residents of RCT.”

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor M.J.Watts:

“I note you failed to mention dealing with the impact of the UK Governments’ Austerity Measures.

As a Chairman of a very important committee I would hope that you fully understand and appreciate the severity of the £70M Budget Gap which the Council faces.

It could appear that you do not offer any alternatives because you know this will make you unpopular with some sections of the public, therefore, as someone who has opposed all of the Cabinet's Budget Savings Measures, will you publicly state this evening how you would save £7M, which is the value of the current decisions you have spoken against? If you are unable to offer such alternatives, do you think you set the correct example as a Committee Chair?"

Response from County Borough Councillor G.R.Davies:

"To be honest, in the Scrutiny Committee we often deal with very small subjects and we spend a lot of time on them. I think it is regrettable that the Scrutiny Committee has not been used to do bigger things especially scrutinise proposals that we have seen before us in the last few weeks. We have seen massive reductions in services, wholesale closures of libraries, sports centres, etc. and yet that has not come to Scrutiny. I would like to see the Scrutiny Committee do far more 'pre-scrutiny' before final decisions are made. Evidence would be scrutinised by that Committee and, therefore, better decisions would be made. By doing that, once decisions are made they are set in stone and it is very difficult to change them. If people could keep an open mind, we could have better decisions by having pre-scrutiny."

(3) From County Borough Councillor R.Lewis to the Cabinet Member for Council Business and Public Relations (County Borough Councillor M.Webber)

"Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on the Council's Events Programme?"

Response from County Borough Councillor M.Webber:

"The Council delivers a wide ranging events programme to promote the County Borough and to also support our local economy. The Council was delighted to learn last week that our bid to host the Commonwealth Baton as part of the Aberdare Festival was successful."

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor R.Lewis:

"I am particularly delighted to hear that the Commonwealth Baton will visit the Cynon Valley and thank the Council in making this bid.

I am aware that Rhondda Cynon Taf Currently offers one of most wide ranging events programmes which in turn supports our local economy in Wales. With this in mind, can the Cabinet Member make a statement on how the UK Government's austerity measures will affect our programmes?"

Response from County Borough Councillor M.Webber:

"You are correct Councillor Lewis, tough choices will also be necessary in this area. We continue to point out, savings in this area will not be instead of the difficult decisions we are consulting upon but in addition to these decisions."

(4) From County Borough Councillor J.Bonetto to the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, Leisure and Tourism (County Borough Councillor D.R.Bevan)

"Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on the Council's Tourism priorities?"

Response from County Borough Councillor D.R.Bevan:

"The Council is committed to promoting the County Borough as a visitor destination to support our local economy. We are preparing a Destination Management Strategy which will shortly be presented to Cabinet which details our priorities in this area".

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor J.Bonetto:

"I am aware of the strategic importance the Welsh Government will place on the Council's Destination Management Plan for attracting external funding. As you will know, the community of Taffs Well and I are hugely excited by the potential of the Taffs Well Springs' Project which has to date received significant attention. Will you ensure that this scheme is given the necessary prominence within the Destination Management Strategy?"

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Councillor Bevan for his continued support of this project."

Response from County Borough Councillor D.R.Bevan:

"Thank you very much. I can assure you that it is our intention to highlight the potential of the Taffs Well Springs' Project. I know the scheme has already received significant support from the Tourism Department and I know thanks to your enthusiasm the scheme is attracting interest from not

just the Council but our partners. I congratulate you and your colleagues in the Community Council and the residents of Taffs Well in developing this project and I know the Tourism Department is working closely with Taffs Well in bringing the scheme to fruition. The project has huge potential not just for Taffs Well but to reinforce the significance of RCT as a visitor destination.”

(5) From County Borough Councillor C.J.Williams to the Deputy Leader of the Council (County Borough Councillor P.Cannon,QPM)

“Will you provide an update on the Council’s 2014/15 budget strategy?”

Response from County Borough Councillor P.Cannon,QPM

“I think recent events have shown we are totally committed to delivering a balanced budget. We are prepared to take tough decisions and I am totally confident we will achieve our objectives despite opposition from our opposition colleagues.”

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor C.J.Williams:

“Would you not agree with me that the approach adopted by the majority of Opposition Members, whereby they object to every tough proposal yet fail to bring forward any alternatives to the same value, is totally irresponsible?”

Response from County Borough Councillor P.Cannon,QPM:

“I certainly agree with you. Every member be they a member of the Executive, Ruling Group or the Opposition have a responsibility to set a legal, balanced budget. Through no other motivation than to score cheap political points, we have seen the main Opposition Group object to every tough and very necessary decision we have been forced to consider without producing any costed alternatives to the same value. We are not phased by that, we are used to it.

They do so because they realise that by providing an alternative, they will offend some element of service users or residents in the process. We have heard the political platitudes and rhetoric around our allowances but they have to acknowledge that these kinds of savings amount to little and no opposition can be taken seriously when this is all they bring to the table.

You are completely correct that this is opposition for opposition sake, they will need to bring forward alternatives to the same value as that we are

proposing and they will have to acknowledge that in all probability, those proposals would be in addition to and not instead of what the Cabinet is considering. We have a £70M budget gap to address and at present opposition party proposals are missing at least three zeroes more from what we are proposing. What we have had from the Opposition is lamentable.”

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES

103 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

In his report, the Group Director, Corporate Services set out details of changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme introduced in April 2013 and recommended the adoption of the Council’s local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the 2014/15 financial year as outlined.

The main changes made by Welsh Government since the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was introduced were also outlined for Members’ consideration together with details of the consultation outcomes and funding implications for the Council.

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

- (1) Note the making of the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013 -”the Prescribed Requirements Regulations” by the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) on 26th November 2013.
- (2) Note that proposed amendments to ”the Prescribed Requirements Regulations” by the draft Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (“the Amendment Regulations”) are due to be considered by the NAfW on the 14th January 2014.
- (3) Note the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken by the Council on the local discretions applicable to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2014/15.
- (4) Adopt the provisions of “the Prescribed Requirements Regulations” and subject to 2.1(vi) below any amendments made to those regulations made by “the Amendment Regulations”, as the Council’s local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2014/15, subject to the local discretions that the Council is able to exercise as set out in 5 below:

- (5) Confirm the following as local discretions as provided for within Part 5 of ‘the Prescribed Requirements Regulations’:

Discretion	Recommended Discretion to be adopted
The ability to increase the standard extended reduction period of 4 weeks given to persons who have ceased to receive qualifying benefits after they return to work, where they have previously been receiving a Council Tax reduction that is to end as a result of their return to work.	<p><u>Pensioners:</u> The standard period of 4 weeks specified in paragraph 33, Schedule 1 will apply, and</p> <p><u>Non- Pensioners:</u> The standard period of 4 weeks specified in paragraphs 35 and 40, Schedule 6 will apply</p>
The ability to backdate the application of Council Tax reduction for periods longer than the new standard period of 3 months before the claim is made.	<p><u>Pensioners:</u> The standard period of 3 months specified in paragraph 3, Schedule 13 will apply,</p> <p><u>Non-Pensioners:</u> The standard period of 3 months specified in paragraph 4, Schedule 13 will apply,</p>
Discretion to disregard more than the statutory weekly £10 of income received in respect of War Disablement Pensions and War Widow’s Pensions (disregarded when calculating income of the applicant);	<p><u>Pensioners:</u> The total value of any pension specified in paragraphs 1, Schedule 4 will be disregarded.</p> <p><u>Non-Pensioners:</u> The total value of any pension specified in paragraphs 20, Schedule 9 will be disregarded.</p>

- (6) To delegate to the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Leader) authority to consider, approve and/or deal with as necessary any amendments which may be made to the “Amendment Regulations” as defined in 2.1(ii) following consideration by the NafW on the 14th January 2014.

(Note: In accordance with the Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor S.Lloyd declared a personal interest in the above-mentioned matter – “I am a War Pensioner and will not be voting on this matter”.)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

104 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION – THE FAMILY ABSENCE FOR MEMBERS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES (WALES) REGULATIONS 2013

In his report, the Director, Legal & Democratic Services sought Members' agreement that the amendments to be made to various parts of the Council's Constitution to take account of The Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013, which came into force in December 2013, be considered by the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee and the recommendations arising be reported back to the Council for approval.

Following consideration of the matter, it was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee be requested to consider the proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution to take account of The Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013, prior to submission to Council for approval.

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

105 REVIEW OF THE CURRENT MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS FORM – TRAINING UPDATE AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

In his report, the Monitoring Officer provided Members with feedback on the results of the training sessions held in November 2013 in respect of declarations of interests at meetings and he set out further recommendations from the Standards Committee in relation to the introduction of the revised form.

The Monitoring Officer pointed out a correction to the report in that 37 Members had attended the training sessions and not one-third of the Council as originally stated. He thanked those Members who had attended and stated that the sessions had been very helpful and interactive. The key themes and ideas arising from the sessions were outlined.

Following consideration of the comments of the Monitoring Officer on the way forward in this matter, it was **RESOLVED** –

- (1) To note that 37 Members of the Council had attended the training sessions held prior to the Development Control Committee meetings in November 2013.

- (2) To note that a further final training session will be held in January 2014.
- (3) To note that following the final training session, the declarations of interest at meetings form will be revised by the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the chair of the Standards Committee) taking into account the feedback received at all the training sessions and be introduced from 1st February 2014.
- (4) To note that a copy of the revised form and case-study considered by Members at the training sessions (together with model answers) will be circulated to all Members and a copy placed on the Council Intranet ahead of 1st February 2014.

106 NOTICE OF MOTION

The following Notice of Motion standing in the names of County Borough Councillors L.Walker, P.Howe and P.Wasley was presented:

“Will this Council make it a policy that from 31 March 2014 all County Borough Councillors duly elected to this Council undergo an enhanced check by the “Disclosure and De-Barring Service”

but in the absence of the seconder (County Borough Councillor P.Howe) the motion was treated as “withdrawn” in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.6.

(Note: County Borough Councillors C.Davies, G.R.Davies, S.M.Evans-Fear, P.Jarman, K.Mogan, I.Pearce, S.Rees-Owen, M.Weaver, E.Webster, L.Walker and P.Wasley voted in favour of the following lost motion:

“To suspend Council Procedure Rules to allow the motion on notice to be formally seconded by Councillor P.Wasley in the absence of Councillor P.Howe and put forward for debate by the Council”).

**A.CRIMMINGS
MAYOR**

The meeting terminated at 5.50 p.m.