



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 21 December 2020 at 5.00 pm via a Virtual meeting.

County Borough Councillors - Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Powell (Chair)

Councillor G Thomas	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor R Yeo	Councillor J Williams
Councillor J Cullwick	Councillor G Caple
Councillor A Fox	Councillor S Evans
Councillor S Rees	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor W Owen	

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr I Christopher, Strategic Manager
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams - Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Others in attendance:-

Mr Fish – Voting Parent / Governor Representative

22 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor T Williams.

23 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

- County Borough Councillor W Owen – Agenda item 5 “I have been in receipt of a business grant during the covid pandemic”
- County Borough Councillor J Edwards – Agenda Item 5 “I previously worked in Ynysangharad War Memorial Park”

24 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 16th November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting, subject to the inclusion of County Borough Councillor S Evans attendance being recorded at the meeting.

25 MATTERS ARISING

The Service Director Finance & Improvement Services provided Members with the following updates in relation to queries highlighted during Members discussion at the previous meeting:

Minute 18 – Medium Term Financial Plan:

- a) Reimbursement to schools for additional expenditure incurred as a result of COVID 19 – Members were advised that £330k had been received from Welsh Government for school expenditure incurred up to September 2020, with £43k paid to schools and £290k in the process of being actioned. In relation to the October 2020 expenditure claim, the Service Director advised that the Council would distribute the payments to schools in the New Year further to receipt of the funding from Welsh Government. The Co-opted Member queried when the £290k would be paid to schools and the Service Director advised that arrangements were currently being progressed for the payments to be processed.
- b) Central approach to the provision of agency cover where school-based staff are required to self-isolate – The Service Director advised that the Council's Procurement Service had engaged with the National Procurement Service and a framework was available for Schools to utilise, with access to around 20 agency providers. The Service Director went on to indicate that there have been periods during the on-going pandemic where demand has outweighed supply, with this position also applying to other local authority areas. The Service Director added that Council officers are continuing to work closely with schools in this area.

Minute 19 - 2021/22 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation

- c) Setting of the Police and Crime Commissioner Budget – Members were advised that an online consultation had been undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales which ended on the 8th December 2020. Going forward the Service Director advised that, where possible, notification would be provided to Members of any future budget consultations by the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales.
- d) Council Tax information by Community Area – The Service Director advised that due to the need to prioritise resources as a result of the on-going COVID 19 pandemic, this information had not yet been collated. The Service Director indicated that the information would be compiled and circulated in due course.

26 CONSULTATION LINKS

The Chair referenced the consultation links, which were available through the 'RCT Scrutiny' website. Members were reminded that information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the Committee, which are circulated on a monthly basis.

27 REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND DIGITAL SERVICES

The Service Director- Finance and Improvement Services provided Members with the Quarter 2 Council Performance Report (to 30th September 2020).

The Service Director referred Members to Appendix 1 of the report which contained the Council's Quarter 2 Performance Report that was presented to Cabinet on the 17th of November 2020.

Members were reminded that as reported during scrutiny of the Quarter 1 Performance Report, the COVID 19 pandemic has caused unprecedented and widespread challenges in the delivery of Council Services alongside significant additional cost and income losses that have, to date, been funded by Welsh Government.

The Service Director continued his report by advising on the revenue and capital budget performance; treasury Management prudential indicators; Organisational Health information including staff turnover, sickness and Council strategic risks; and Corporate Plan priority action plan updates including investment updates.

Following the overview by the Service Director, Members scrutinised the report and put forward their questions.

The Vice Chair paid compliments to Council Services for their work and maintaining performance during these extraordinary times and referenced the forecasted additional expenditure and loss of income associated with COVID 19 for the current year of £37million as set out in the report. The Vice Chair also took the opportunity to thank Welsh Government for the financial support received to date and queried whether there was indication that this support would continue beyond the current financial year.

The Service Director referenced the UK Government's Spending Review announced in November 2020 that indicated additional resources for the Welsh Government 2021/22 budget of £1.3Billion, comprising of core funding and also funding in relation to COVID 19. The Officer went on to indicate that the Council works closely with Welsh Government as part of the Hardship Fund claims process, to ensure all additional COVID 19 expenditure and income losses incurred by the Council are claimed for, and Welsh Government will confirm the position for 2021/22 as part of its budget setting arrangements.

County Borough Councillor S Evans took the opportunity to reference the reduction in staff turnover, as contained within the report, and commented that this is a positive direction of travel.

Mr J Fish, Co-opted Member drew Members attention to Risk Item 25 within the Strategic Risk Register and enquired whether the financial implications associated with COVID 19 should be included within this risk area. The Service Director referred Members to the 'Living Within Our Means' risk within the Strategy Risk Register and indicated that the financial monitoring and claim arrangements associated with COVID 19 are set out within this area. The Service Director added that this can also be referenced under Risk Item 25 to provide a more complete picture of risk and the arrangements in place to manage this area.

County Borough Councillor S Bradwick referenced the ongoing work by the Council's grass cutting service and also took the opportunity to place on record his thanks to those staff that have been re-purposed to assist Track Trace Protect arrangements. The Service Director added that in respect of grass cutting, the Council uses a yellow butterfly logo to identify the areas which are being left uncut / cut less frequently for biodiversity.

The Chair commented on the work of those staff working behind the scenes and, on behalf of the Committee, the Chair asked for thanks to be paid to such staff.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to

1. Endorse the Council's financial and operational performance position as at 30th September 2020 (Quarter 2).

28 DRAFT RCT TOURISM STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director of Prosperity and Development provided Members with an update in respect of the draft Tourism Strategy in light of the recent COVID 19 pandemic.

Members were reminded of the scrutiny undertaken by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee in July 2019, where the Committee supported the proposed direction of the draft Strategy. The Director advised that in March 2020 a Delegated Decision was taken to pass the draft Tourism Strategy for public consultation. However, it was included that any form of consultation would only commence when it was deemed appropriate in light of the situation posed by COVID 19. The Director commented that throughout the pandemic the tourism and hospitality sector was one of the worst to be hit, with partners within the tourism sector holding a pessimistic view on the future of the industry and it had been assessed that it would be beneficial to delay any consultation until perceptions improve to avoid a negative bias response.

Going forward, the Director provided an update in relation to attractions within the County Borough, highlighting the improvements within Dare Valley Country Park (DVCP) and Ynysangharad War Memorial Park. Members were also advised of the work to date with the Zip World Tower site and accommodation across the County Borough.

To conclude his update Members were advised of the joint working of the Regeneration and Tourism Services during the COVID 19 pandemic, providing businesses with regular and up-to-date information, advice and guidance on a variety of national and local funding opportunities available to them.

County Borough Councillor Bradwick sought further clarity on the rollercoaster attraction at the Zip World Tower Site to which the Director responded advising of the unique features of the attraction including the renovation of the 'Lamp Room' which formed part of the attraction.

County Borough Councillor Caple raised concerns in respect of the availability of accommodation across the County Borough and queried whether current businesses were being supported during the pandemic and also queried on the long term proposals in respect of phases 3 and 4, working with the Brecon Beacons and heritage links with the Coal Industry to maintain, protect and

expand on the attractions within the County Borough and nearing areas.

The Director agreed with the Members comments and commented on the two key features to the success of the tourism industry within the County Borough, highlighting the need to ensure the suitability and number of local attractions to attract visitors and to ensure suitable accommodation provision, through existing and future business adventures, which in turn would lead to spend being brought back into the local economy. Members were advised of work undertaken with the development of a toolkit and bringing vacant spaces back into use, with an example provided of vacant rooms above public houses. Members were also advised of the discussions taken forward with DWP in respect of future roadshows to assist businesses and entrepreneurs coming forward in this area.

The Vice Chair also commented on the need to maximise on the attractions available and ensuring the competitiveness of local accommodation in the County Borough with those accommodations outside of the area. The Strategic Manager, Prosperity & Development responded to the Members by advising of the 'bedstock' survey that was to be undertaken at an appropriate time due to the COVID 19 restrictions.

Mr Fish, Co-opted Member spoke in respect of the significant support and scheme of administration with the COVID 19 support, querying the number of businesses that were unable to access the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) from Welsh Government. The Director spoke of the latest funding provided and advised that applications were currently being processed. In respect of the firebreak lockdown grants had been processed and the Director was unaware of any issues in this area. In respect of the ERF the Director advised that payments were made on a piecemeal approach due the unprecedented time. The Director advised that he would review this information and provide an update as appropriate.

County Borough Councillor J Cullwick commented on the lack of suitable accommodation in certain areas of the Authority and commented on the need for potential camping sites. The Strategic Manager, Prosperity & Development advised that the 'bedstock' survey would provide valuable information on the current accommodation provision which the service could then build into the strategy.

County Borough Councillor S Rees spoke of the lessons learnt from the 'stay home, stay local' message during the pandemic and the local attractions discovered by local residents and the appreciation of what is available on a local setting. The Member queried officers on the mechanics of the creation of the Board and queried the involvement of the 3rd sector in such arrangements. The Director spoke of the creation of a Strategic Board and the importance of ensuring the correct membership to drive forward the tourism agenda. The Strategic Manager advised of the creation of 'tourism hubs' to feed into the strategic board with the membership of such utilising the skills and knowledge of 3rd sector providers.

County Borough Councillor J Edwards commented on the need to engage with the 3rd sector at a strategic level to ensure the success of the tourism industry commenting on the critical part the 3rd sector provide.

The Chair concluded scrutiny on the strategy by also speaking to the accommodation provision across the County Borough, which at present did not

support the need or future need. The Chair referenced issues seen in other Authorities who were unable to accommodate tourists and saw revenue being taken out of the locality. The Chair also referenced the work taken forward by Members in respect of local features within their ward and queried why such information was not captured within the strategy as again, this would only furnish the provisions and attractions available to tourists. The Chairman concluded on the need for an integrated transport system across the County Borough to ensure there was not a negative impact on the road network.

Following detailed discussions, it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the update on the Tourism Strategy and the COVID 19-19 implications on the undertaking of parts of the strategy.
- (2) To approve a later than planned consultation process with partners, due to restrictions imposed in the Delegated Decision and the negative perceptions that currently exist within the tourism sector due to COVID 19.
- (3) To approve an early 2021 start to the process of establishing the RCT Strategic Board (who will help deliver the Strategy), when it is hoped a more positive outlook on tourism will be realised.

(N.B During consideration of this item County Borough Councillors W Owen and J Edwards declared personal interests which minute 23 reflects.)

29 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair thanked Members for attending and for their contributions during the meeting. The Chair wished all Members a safe and happy Christmas.

This meeting closed at 6.04 pm

**CLLR M. POWELL
CHAIR.**