RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Monday, 15 March 2021 at 5.00 pm

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

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

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams - Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Others in attendance:-

Mr Fish – Voting Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Mr S Gale - Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr I Christopher- Strategic Manager, Prosperity & Development
Mr T Jones, Service Director – ICT & Digital Services

38   Chair

In the absence of the Chair, County Borough Councillor M Powell, the Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor G Thomas took the meeting.

39   Apologies

An apology was received from County Borough Councillors S Rees-Owen and M Powell (Chair).

40   Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

41   Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 4th February 2021 as an

accurate reflection of the meeting.

Matters Arising

The Service Director Performance and Improvement provided an update on two specific areas where feedback had been requested at the previous meeting: -

The uptake on Meals on Wheels –
2018/19 – The average mid-week number of meals provided per day was 500
2019/20 – The average mid-week number of meals provided per day was 477
2020/21 – The average mid-week number of meals provided per day, to date, is 503

At the start of the pandemic, 600 meals per day were being provided which demonstrates a slight reduction during the pandemic.

Car Parking Charges: -
The Council has a budget of £640,000 for the two car parking areas of Aberdare & Pontypridd – there is a temporary freeze on car parking charges during the pandemic, the approximate split between the two areas is 48% Aberdare and 52% Pontypridd which equates to £307,000 – Aberdare, £333, 000 – Pontypridd. An assessment will be undertaken to identify the income budget going forward.

42   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.

43   The Role of Digitalisation in Supporting Transformation During Covid

The Service Director - Digital & ICT introduced the power point presentation to members on the role of digitalisation in supporting transformation during Covid.

He highlighted the following areas for Members in the presentation:

- Background & Context

The Service Director Digital & ICT described the focus of the service area which has been to respond to the recent unprecedented events, the Pandemic and Storm Dennis flooding through the delivery of digital service to the communities of RCT. Staff within the service have delivered well to ensure the best services as possible during a difficult time.

The Service Director alluded to the Digital Strategy 2017/20 which Members had previously endorsed had set the foundations to enable the rapid response. A willingness to embrace new ways of working and adopt new opportunities has transformed how the council delivers digital for the future.

- Supporting Officers, Schools & Members

The Service Director Digital & ICT stressed that the key focus of the service has been to ensure the ongoing support and to enable service continuity and recovery. Technology was deployed in a short period of time to enable staff to

work from home, to make this new solution a more sustainable and resilient one through tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, transitioning staff to laptops and equipping them with monitors and other equipment. This included the completion of the new data centre in the Rhondda Fach.

The Service Director advised that the Hwb Schools Transformation has also been supported, refreshing the school's infrastructure and delivering new platforms, with all being completed by May 2021. Supporting digitally excluded learners has also delivered approximately 5,500 devices.

- Supporting Citizens

Digital has been supporting the local communities to enable residents to access a range of support packages and digital processes such as the establishment of the Community Resilience Centres, providing tablets to the elderly and children's homes to help maintain contact and supporting service recovery such as the Library click and collect service.

- Regional Collaborative Working

The Service Director acknowledged the alignment within Cwm Taf Morgannwg and in some instances the wider close working relationship with Powys Council which have enabled an effective support to key services such as Track, Trace and Protect and mass testing and vaccination programmes through the deployment of digital infrastructure. The Council's Contact Centre has remained at the heart of providing guidance and support to residents and remain at the forefront of the vaccination programme and bookings across Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

The Service Director advised that the Service Area has successfully bid for a digital transformation grant from Welsh Government.

- Digital – The Next Steps

The Service Director advised that a new Digital Strategy for 2021 would be brought before the Finance & Performance Committee in due course.

The Service Director invited general questions from the Committee.

A large number of positive comments were made by Members in respect of the support provided to Elected Members by the Council's ICT & Digital Service, specifically the support in relation to the roll out of virtual meetings. Committee also acknowledged the support packages provided across the Council to schools and officers at the beginning of the pandemic by ICT & Digital Services in quick response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to the ongoing virtual support to elected members.

In response to a query as to whether the opportunity to undertake training on the Zoom platform had been afforded to all Members, the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications advised that in June and July 2020 all Members were offered training via open door sessions and 'mock' meetings, in addition to the smaller sessions and follow up one to one sessions which were tailored specifically to the needs of individual members with the support of the

ICT & Digital teams. He advised that further training would be undertaken in the new municipal year when the live webcasting facility is rolled out on an incremental basis to allow for experience to be gained with the live system operations.

Members discussed the compatibility of their current devices with the webcasting functionality and the requirements of Chairs and Vice Chairs when hosting meetings, this was an area to be reviewed in due course to ensure they are fit for purpose and suitable for Members' needs. The Service Director ICT & Digital Services wished to formally recognise the collaboration between the Council's ICT & Digital Services and Democratic Services and Human Resources which enabled the packages of training and support to be provided to all Elected Members during the pandemic and the initial roll out of the Zoom platform.

The co-opted Member present asked for clarification regarding the HWB platform which is hosted by Welsh Government, specifically about the local resilience and future long-term plan for Hwb. The Service Director ICT & Digital Services clarified that the Hwb is hosted and managed by Welsh Government which the local authority is able to plug into, but it is for the local authority to ensure the infrastructure is resilient and fit for purpose for local schools and across the local authority. The Service Director agreed that Hwb has been a very successful digital platform for schools throughout the pandemic and advised that he is working in collaboration with the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to develop a digital strategy for education and schools across the county borough which will set out the long term vision.

A query was raised in respect of the unsatisfactory quality and content of the food parcels distributed to elderly and vulnerable residents, as referred to in the presentation as part of the support packages to residents and businesses. The Director of Legal Services pointed out the differences between the Welsh Government food parcels and the initial problems encountered with their content as they were distributed by a third party and those delivered by the council which have been undertaken in coordination with the service users. He spoke of the shopping that had also been provided for those elderly and vulnerable residents as part of the support packages offered by the council.

The Chair thanked the Service Director ICT & Digital Services for his presentation and acknowledged that there would be future presentations to the scrutiny committee with further progress updates.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the information within the presentation which outlined the improving, delivering and supporting services over the last 12 months by the ICT & Digital Services.

44   **Tourism Strategy Update**

The Director of Prosperity & Development provided a verbal update on the status of the draft Tourism Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and since the last report to committee in December 2020.

The Director advised that due to Covid-19 restrictions, the consultation process has been delayed but assured Members that at the earliest convenience the consultation would commence. The Director outlined some of the key projects which have been developed such as the RCT Tourism Hub, established for any group or organisation invested in the visitor economy in RCT to sign up to, free

of charge, to receive updates on training, guidance, opportunities for funding, best practice approaches and will provide an opportunity for all involved to share views and communicate. A Strategic Steering Group is being set up with the key players from the tourism industry such as Zip World, Penderyn Whiskey Distillery, Edwards Coaches to use their expertise and knowledge and to get feedback from the visitors to RCT to be able to identify the successes and those areas requiring further development.

The Director advised that consultants are currently running a 'bed stock' survey amongst the 65 major accommodation providers, the results of which will be shared with the scrutiny committee in the future. There has been an increase in the numbers of planning applications for a range of accommodation developments such as glamping which demonstrates the 'buy in' to the tourism strategy. Further to other queries, the Director confirmed that further information around the detail of the bed stock survey would be provided to committee at a future date.

The Director of Prosperity & Development was pleased to announce that Zip World Tower is ready to open as soon as Welsh Government announce that it is safe to do so. He also referred to Dare Valley Country Park where work on the Gravity Family Bike Park is nearing completion and the new look Café is completed. In conclusion, committee was advised that material for the marketing of RCT as a destination and when the time is appropriate will be ready to promote and progress.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions of the Director in relation to the issues raised.

The co-opted member asked what measures RCT has in place to track the queries on social media regarding accommodation around the Zip World attraction and direct them appropriately. He also raised a query regarding the location of the electric charging points across RCT to encourage visitors to the area.

The Director advised that electric charging points across RCT is a subject of a separate report outlining a strategy for delivering the electric charging points for both visitors and residents in RCT. With regards to the promotion of accommodation across the county borough, the Strategic Manager, Prosperity & Development explained that work is ongoing to contact all 65 of the key accommodation providers and plans are in place to set up an accommodation sector working group within RCT to drive forward future provision.

Following a query as to whether there are appropriate sites available in the area to attract the large hotel chains and private hospitality businesses, the Director confirmed that the council is exploring the opportunity and feasibility for a future hotel development on the former Bingo Hall site in Pontypridd, and that Officers are currently engaging the commercial sector in relation to this aspiration. With regards to existing attractions, such as Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, it was reported that with Heritage Lottery Funding and Valleys Regional Park Funding, work to upgrade the park has been ongoing to improve the accessibility of toilets, improve the bandstand area, progress the community facilities and repair the Marks and Spencer's Bridge, soon to be completed. The Director acknowledged the volume of work that the Council's Planning and Development Department is receiving through applications and developments as an encouraging sign for the local economy. He assured committee that measures

and resources are well placed to manage the volume of applications.

Following the discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to note the verbal update as delivered by the Director of Prosperity & Development and Strategic Manager, Prosperity & Development and that a future progress would be reported to committee at a future date.

45   **Chair's Review and Close**

The Vice Chair thanked Members for their attendance and summarised the key points raised during the meeting.

Members were advised that the next Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee would be held on the 13th April 2021 and the items to be considered at the meeting were announced in line with the forward work programme.

This meeting closed at 18.07   **Cllr G Thomas
                                                                    Chairman.**