

Subject to approval at the next meeting of the Cabinet

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CABINET COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 22nd June, 2017 at 10:30am
at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale.

County Borough Councillors – Cabinet Members in attendance:-

A Morgan (Chair), M Norris

R Bevan R Lewis A Crimmings G Hopkins

J Rosser C Leyshon

Other County Borough Councillors in attendance

E Webster S Bradwick

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw – Chief Executive

Mr A Wilkins – Head of Legal & Democratic Services

Mr C Hanagan – Director, Cabinet & Public Relations (Secretary to the Cabinet)

Mr C Lee – Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services

Mr G Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children Services

Ms E Thomas – Temporary Director, Education & Lifelong Learning

Mr N Wheeler – Director, Highways & Streetcare Services

Mr P Mee – Service Director, Public Health & Protection

Mr T Wilkins – Director, Human Resources

Mr N Jones – Service Director, Operational Finance

Mr T Jones – Head of ICT

Ms R Edwards – Head of Customer Care

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 9th March, 2017 and 15th March, 2017 as accurate reflections of the meetings.

3. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Secretary to the Cabinet provided Cabinet Members with an update on the proposed list of matters requiring consideration by Cabinet over the 2017 – 18 Municipal Year, commenting that utilising the programme assists with openness and transparency of the decision making process within the Council and gives greater opportunity for Pre-Scrutiny. The Officer added that a recent report of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) had praised the efforts made by the Council to improve the Scrutiny process and that he and the Deputy Leader would attend future Committees.

Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report to consider the information set out in the work programme. Members were advised that the programme is a live document to allow for any additional / deletion of reports throughout the year.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- a) To approve the Work Programme for the 2017-18 Municipal Year and to receive a further update on a 3 monthly basis.

4. NON-DOMESTIC RATES – WALES HIGH STREET RATE RELIEF SCHEME 2017/18

The Service Director, Operational Finance provided Cabinet Members with information about a new scheme introduced by the Welsh Government (WG) to provide rate relief for certain types of businesses.

The Officer advised that the Wales High Street Rate Relief Scheme forms part of a package of Welsh Government measures available to support businesses. It was explained that the High Street Relief Scheme for 2017-18 sits alongside other schemes, such as the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme until March 2018 and the Transitional Relief scheme that was also reducing the impact of the 2017 revaluation for some adversely affected businesses.

It was explained that the “Wales High Street Relief Scheme” would operate for the 2017-18 financial year and would provide £10 million funding across Wales to help reduce rates bills for high street ratepayers i.e. retailers, food and drink premises.

The officer explained that the scheme would provide two tiers of non-domestic rates relief, of up to £500 (Tier 1) or £1,500 (Tier 2), to eligible high street retailers occupying premises with a rateable value of £50,000 or less in the financial year 2017-18, subject to certain criteria and State Aid limits. The Cabinet Members were referred to section 4.3 of the report where further details were set out.

The officer referred to guidance which had been issued by the Welsh Government in March, 2016, stating that the qualifying premises must be wholly or mainly being used as retail premises, within the “high street” and it was the intention that retail premises covers “shops, restaurants, cafes and drinking establishments”. The officer added that it was important to note that there was no definition of what constituted as ‘high street’ in the guidance, and therefore, the Council would be encouraged to take a flexible approach when determining which premises were considered to be located on the ‘high street’.

The officer referred Cabinet Members to section 6 of the report where the potential benefits to businesses within RCT were outlined. It was estimated that approximately 824 rate payers would qualify, with an estimated value of £645,000 funded by Welsh Government.

In respect of the operational side of the scheme, the officer explained that an agreement was reached with officers from Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend Councils to adopt a consistent approach in a wider geographical region. It was explained that following the adoption of the scheme, application forms would be sent to all identified ‘potential qualifiers’, where all applicants would be required to indicate that the award of the relief would not exceed the State Aid threshold. On receipt of an application form and supporting State Aid documentation, relief would be granted where the qualification criteria is met. The revised rate liability would be calculated and adjustment notices sent to all successful applicants. Information on the scheme and how to apply would also be available on the Council’s website.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services spoke positively of the scheme, commenting that it would help to regenerate the town centres of RCT, alongside other schemes such as town centre WIFI and the updated exterior of local shops. The Cabinet Member added that it was pleasing to see the estimations outlined within the report, which could potentially benefit a large number of businesses, should they qualify.

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

- a) To note the details of the “Wales High Street Rate Retail Relief Scheme “ (‘The Scheme’) set out in the report;
- b) That, unless properties are excepted under (c) below, Section 47(1) (a) Local Government Finance Act 1988 (‘The Act’) (relating to discretionary relief) will apply as regards the properties described in ‘The Scheme’ in accordance with the rules described in relation to those properties;
- c) That relief is not available under ‘The Scheme’ to those properties which are excepted from discretionary rate relief under Section 47 (9) of ‘The Act’ e.g. properties occupied by a local authority or a precepting authority, and
- d) That for the financial year 2017/18, ‘The Scheme’ shall apply to the types of premises described in this report and that the Group Director of Corporate & Frontline Services use his delegated powers to apply the relief to qualifying ratepayers.

5. COUNCIL’S DIGITAL STRATEGY 2017-18 – 2019-20

The Head of ICT presented the report which set out the Council’s Digital Strategy (‘Digital RCT – Our 2020 Digital Vision’) for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.

The Officer referred Members to Appendix 1 of the report where the three year Digital Strategy was set out. The Officer explained that the clear framework provided would support the Council in managing delivery, measuring performance and assessing outcomes.

The Cabinet Members were advised that there were five key Strategic delivery strands each with identified performance indicators:-

1. Digital Resident
2. Digital Skills
3. Digital Workplace
4. Digital Visitor
5. Digital Business

It was explained that the ambitious three year Digital Strategy shown before them, would be beneficial to residents of RCT by ensuring they are not left behind through digital exclusion.

The Leader of the Council took the opportunity to thank the officers for compiling the three year Strategy, commenting that it was pleasing to see that staff are embracing the digital opportunities available.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services added that the digital solution not only drives the efficiency agenda within the Council but makes for a more streamlined service for the staff and residents of RCT.

With the agreement of the Chairman, County Borough Councillor E Webster spoke on this item.

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

- a) To approve the Council's Digital Strategy 2020.
- b) To approve the establishment of a Digital Leadership Group whose role will be to :-
 - Champion, challenge and drive forward the Digital Strategy within the Council and through its partnership arrangements.
 - Monitor progress and ensure delivery of the Digital Strategy and its performance indicators.
 - Continue to update the Digital Strategy and wider strategy to reflect best practice and changing digital trends.
 - Identify any additional funding requirements to the delivery this strategy.

6. PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER

The Service Director, Public Health & Protection presented the report, informing Cabinet Members of the outcomes of the public consultation exercise taken in respect of the proposal to make a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to introduce dog controls in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Service Director explained that dog fouling remained a significant concern for the Council and that, despite considerable efforts to promote responsible dog ownership and to enforce the provisions of the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996, there still remained a minority of dog owners who do not clean up after their dogs or keep them under control.

The Officer went on to explain that the introduction of a PSPO would allow the Council to introduce a range of reasonable and proportionate restrictions on the use of publicly accessible land across the County Borough.

The Officer explained that the consultation had been a success with a variety of stakeholders such as the police expressing their support. Cabinet Members were referred to sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report where key feedback of the consultation process was outlined.

It was explained that 542 online responses were received and were summarised as follows:

- Over 90% of respondents supported the Council's proposed approach to dealing with dog fouling,

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- 91.2% of respondents said that they agreed that dog fouling should be prohibited,
- 86.8% of respondents agreed that dogs should be kept on leads in playgrounds,
- 94.2% of respondents agreed that dogs should be kept on leads in cemeteries,
- 97.6% of respondents agreed that dog owners should be required to carry bags or other suitable means for disposing of their dogs faeces,
- 93.1% of respondents agreed that authorised officers should give direction to dog owners if necessary,
- 85.3% of respondents said that dogs should be excluded from all schools,
- 80.7% of respondents agreed that dogs should be excluded from all marked sports pitches,
- 88.1% of respondents agreed with increasing the fixed penalty fine to £100.
- 59% of respondents agreed that the rules should be changed to allow dogs in cemeteries as long as they were on a lead

The Officer went on to summarise the key findings arising from the public engagement events:-

- 99% of respondents agree that dog fouling should be prohibited in all public places,
- 98% of respondents agree that dogs should be kept on leads in playgrounds and cemeteries owned and/or maintained by the Council,
- 100% of respondents agree that dog owners should be required to carry bags or other suitable means for disposing of their dog's faeces,
- 99% of respondents agree that authorised officers should be allowed to give a direction to dog owners to put and keep their dog on a lead if necessary,
- 90% of respondents agree that dogs should be excluded from all schools and marked sports pitches owned and/or maintained by the Council, and
- 91% of respondents agree that the fixed penalty fines be increased to the maximum permitted of £100.

The officer explained that although only 59% of online respondents were in favour of dogs being allowed in cemeteries providing they were on a lead, the percentage increased to 91% at the public engagement events, potentially due to greater discussions with officers present.

Cabinet Members were referred to section 5.7 of the report where it was explained that the consultation asked whether there should be a requirement that dogs be kept on leads in playgrounds. The Officer felt it was important for Members to note that many residents strongly felt that the current exclusion of

dogs from playgrounds should remain, stating that the playground should be an area for children to run freely.

The officer concluded the report by recommending that in order to implement the PSPO, the Enforcement Team within Highways & Streetcare Services may need to be increased to ten officers.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure took the opportunity to thank officers and residents for the successful consultation exercise, commenting that it was pleasing to see so many of the residents and stakeholders expressing their opinion on the issue.

The Cabinet Member expressed that she was in favour of dogs being allowed in cemeteries, providing they're on leads, as this would be beneficial to the elderly in particular.

The Member referred to section 5.6 of the report stated that in view of the response to the Consultation, a recommendation is considered to impose a prohibition in the Public Spaces Protection Order, excluding dogs from all playgrounds owned and/or maintained by the Council.

The Cabinet Member concluded by expressing the importance that any changes are clearly communicated to the residents, as stated at recommendation 2.6 of the report.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Prosperity and Wellbeing added that the issue of dog fouling was prominent in all wards of the Council and that it was pleasing to see the recommendations outlined to tackle it.

The Leader also praised officers and residents for their work during the consultation, commenting that the issue of dog fouling was frequently raised by residents and that the PSPO would benefit the community. He added that the fixed penalty fine increase would act as an incentive for dog owners to be more responsible.

The Leader explained that all penalty fines received from the new PSPO would be put back into the service to fund extra bags and bins.

The Leader agreed with the further recommendation to exclude dogs from playgrounds, commenting that there are plenty of mountainous areas within the Valleys where dogs are able to walk unrestricted.

Discussions ensued around the definition of a play area and whether MUGA's and sports pitches were included. The Service Director explained that should Cabinet Members wish to move the new recommendation, the policy could be amended to better define the area as 'recreational areas'.

The Leader also raised a query in respect of the new Enforcement Officers and their working hours. The Director, Highways & Streetcare Services advised that a shift system would be developed to ensure staff would be available seven days a week.

With the agreement of the Chairman, County Borough Councillors S Bradwick and E Webster spoke on this item.

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

- a) To note the overwhelming public support for the introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order to introduce prohibitions and requirements in relation to the control of dogs;
- b) To consider the responses to the public consultation and determine whether any amendments are required to the proposed prohibitions and requirements in relation to the control of dogs as detailed in Appendix 2
- c) To make a Public Spaces Protection Order for the control of dogs in Rhondda Cynon Taf as detailed in Appendix 2
- d) To give delegated authority to the Service Director, Public Health & Protection, in consultation with the Director of Highways and Streetcare Services, to produce the final Public Spaces Protection Order relating to Dog Controls and ensure its publication on the Council's website;
- e) To fund implementation of the Public Spaces Protection Order in 2017/18 through existing available resources, including, increasing the Enforcement Team within Highways & Streetcare Services to ten officers;
- f) In view of the response to the Consultation, to impose a prohibition in the Public Spaces Protection Order, excluding dogs from all playgrounds owned and/or maintained by the Council;
- g) To undertake a high profile awareness and marketing campaign prior to the proposed commencement date of the Public Spaces Protection Order on 1st October 2017.

7. FIRE SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING, SUPPORTED HOUSING, HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND COUNCIL OWNED BUILDINGS

In response to the tragic loss of life at the Grenfell Tower fire in London, the Service Director, Public Health & Protection presented a report, updating Cabinet Members on enquiries regarding fire safety and fire precautions at the properties of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and supported housing providers operating in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The officer explained that in Rhondda Cynon Taf, there were no high-rise blocks of flats and that accommodation provided by RSLs was typically self-contained flats within smaller lower rise blocks, no more than five storeys high.

The officer explained that responses had been received from four RSLs that provide the majority of social rented accommodation in Rhondda Cynon Taf and all had confirmed that they were taking their responsibilities seriously, had ensured that fire risk assessments and procedures are up to date and were actively seeking to reassure their tenants.

It was explained that the Council was still awaiting a response from supported housing providers and from the remaining RSLs that had fewer properties in Rhondda Cynon Taf but that the enquiries would be complete within the next few days.

With regard to the issue of external cladding, the officer assured Members that further checks to all large Council owned buildings and schools with external cladding systems were underway, with the Council's Building Control service also making further checks in respect of EWl systems installed elsewhere across the County Borough. It was added that RSLs were making further investigations into the safety of the products used on their properties to provide their tenants with re-assurance.

The officer concluded by explaining that the Council had introduced a HMO licensing scheme that was inclusive of all HMOs in the County Borough; including conditions that cover fire precautions with the properties being subject to regular inspection.

The Cabinet Members expressed their gratitude to the officers for reacting to the tragedy so quickly.

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Housing raised a query in respect of the tower block accommodation at the University of South Wales, Treforest Campus and whether checks would be carried out to ensure the safety of those currently housed there. The officer explained that although this was outside of Council regulations, enquiries would be made as soon as possible.

The Cabinet Member made reference to the value of scrutiny on such an important issue, suggesting a further recommendation to present the report to the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, and to include the engagement of tenant organisations, social housing providers, South Wales Fire & Rescue and other related organisations as part of the work. The Cabinet Member added that the feedback of Scrutiny should be reported back to the Executive to consider at a later date, to which the other Cabinet Members agreed.

The Leader commented that the local social housing providers had been quick to work with the Council on the matter, adding that Trivallis were in the process of offering free fire door upgrades to properties within blocks which had previously been sold, thus emphasising the safeguarding procedures within the block as a whole.

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It was **RESOLVED:**

- a) To note the contents of the report
- b) That the issue be considered by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, namely Public Services and to include the engagement of tenant organisations, social housing providers, South Wales Fire & Rescue and other related organisations as part of the work; and that the feedback of Scrutiny be reported to Cabinet and, if necessary, will include appropriate recommendations for the Executive to consider.
- c) That the Service Director for Public Health & Protection is to make any further enquiries that may be necessary to provide public reassurance.

The meeting closed at 11:10am

Cllr A Morgan

Chair