



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 11 November 2020 at 5.00 pm .

County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Powderhill (Chair)

Councillor M Adams	Councillor S Belzak
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 L De Vet	Councillor M Diamond
Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Elliott
Councillor S Evans	Councillor S Evans
Councillor M Fidler Jones	Councillor M Forey
Councillor A Fox	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor E George	Councillor D Grehan
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor J Harries	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 W Owen
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 Webber
Councillor E Webster	Councillor D Williams
Councillor J Williams	Councillor T Williams
Councillor R Yeo	

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr G Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr P Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

43 Apologies

An apology of absence was received from County Borough Councillors J R Davies, A Davies-Jones, K Jones, L Jones, K Morgan, M Tegg, M Weaver, G D Williams and C Willis.

44 Introductions

Introductions were made by the Group Leaders present:-

County Borough Councillor M Webber (In the Group Leader's absence -Deputy Leader of the Labour Group)

County Borough Councillor P Jarman (Plaid Cymru Group)

County Borough Councillor M Powell (RCT Independent Group)

County Borough Councillor L Hooper (In the Group Leader's absence- Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group)

County Borough Councillor S Belzak (Independent Member)

45 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, a number of declarations were made later on in the meeting pertaining to the agenda as follows:-

In respect of Agenda Item 6 - Update in respect of the Coronavirus in Rhondda Cynon Taf

- County Borough Councillor R Lewis – “My partner works for the Public Health Wales Vaccination Team”
- County Borough Councillor R Lewis – “ I am a registered volunteer for the Merthyr Trussel Food Bank”
- County Borough Councillor S Powderhill – “My business may be eligible for a business grant”
- County Borough Councillor M Fidler Jones – “I was the lead on Tenovus Cancer Care's work highlighting the impact of lockdown on cancer diagnosis”
- County Borough Councillor G R Davies – “I have received a Covid-19 grant for my business
- County Borough Councillor G R Davies – “ I am a member of the Tennis Club which has also been in receipt of a Covid-19 grant”
- County Borough Councillor G R Davies – “I volunteer for the Rhondda Foodbank and I made an application for the café in the Chapel”
- County Borough Councillor A Chapman – “I have received a Covid-19 grant for my business, ‘The Wonder Stuff’ in Treorchy”
- County Borough Councillor W Owen – “I have received a Covid-19 grant for my Licensed Premises”
- County Borough Councillor G Jones – “ I am Chair of the Library”
- County Borough Councillor E George – “I am a registered volunteer for the Merthyr Trussel Food Bank”

46 Suspension to Standing Orders

The Deputy Leader made a statement in respect of moving the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 15.1 and advised that in order to facilitate the smooth running of the Council meeting through Zoom, Group Leaders have agreed in advance that where a vote is taken on any item, the individual Group Leader will exercise the vote on behalf of all their Members present for the item in question.

In order to implement the revised voting procedures the Deputy Leader moved the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 15.1, which states that a matter will be decided by a simple majority of those Members voting and present in the room at the time the question was put.

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

47 Minutes

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 23rd September 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

48 Members' Questions

Question from County Borough Councillor G Hughes to Cllr Powell, Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee:

“What considerations is the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee giving to the likely financial consequences of a potential no-deal Brexit later this year?”

Response from Councillor M Powell:

Councillor Powell advised that given the uncertainty of Brexit it is difficult to forecast the potential financial implications with any accuracy and the effects may not be felt immediately for example the cost of supplies may increase if we experience world trade organisation tariffs. The impact on this council is also difficult to assess as some suppliers may not pass the full cost of any tariffs to the council and consumers. There may be positive or negative fluctuations in the value of sterling which may be difficult to predict. There is a possibility that one cost may offset the other or there could be a double impact effect with tariffs being introduced and the value of sterling falling. As a result this could lead to a double digit increase in the cost of imported goods from the EU and could probably have an impact on low paid workers or families who pay the greatest proportion of their income on food and supplies.

The council keeps a close eye on all Brexit related matters and is a member of the WLGA's Brexit Working Group. The wider implications the council is communicating with as many businesses as possible to share clear guidance from WG and updated the council website.

Councillor Powell advised that he would share the detail of his statement and relevant hyperlinks. A social media campaign will also be launched this week and will focus on raising awareness for businesses and also the EU Settle Status Scheme. A report will also be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 17th November 2020 and will provide an update on the work that is being undertaken across the Council to prepare for Brexit”

Supplementary question from Councillor G Hughes:

“It is evident that in your role as Chair of the F&P Scrutiny Committee you see a considerable negative impact to RCT from a no deal Brexit. I share your concerns over the detrimental and damaging impacts a no deal Brexit could have on our economy. I wonder how you can reconcile your views as Chair of the F&P Scrutiny Committee with your role as Leader of the RCT Independent Group that includes a signed up member of the Brexit Party and another who is openly pro Brexit”

Response from Councillor Powell:

Councillor Powell stated that individuals are individuals and he would not dictate the views his members hold and there is a broad range of views within the Group. The Group has a good understanding of the effects that decisions will have upon residents in the Borough which is disseminated from the F&P Scrutiny Committee to members of the RCT Independent Group.

Councillor Powell referenced the impact of the Council tax following the outcome of Brexit, which amounts to 20% of the Council’s budget, with £49m being raised in the Taff Ely area, £27m in the Rhondda and approximately £26.5m in the Cynon. Councillor Powell queried how the council would be able to ask those residents to pay their council tax with the increases in the costs of living.

Question from County Borough Councillor J Brencher to the Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language County Borough Councillor G Hopkins:

“Could the council give an update on the progress of the extra care facility in Pontypridd?”

Response from Councillor G Hopkins:

Councillor Hopkins advised that work on the new, state of the art Cwrt Yr Orsaf 60 Apartment facility began during summer 2019 and the council continues to work closely with Link Cymru, the Housing Association and their contractor Jehu whilst adhering to Welsh Government’s and Construction Leadership guidance regarding social distancing measures. The construction has remained ongoing and the works have progressed well. Works to the concrete steel and lightweight steel framed superstructure works have been completed and the internal works are progressing well. Work is now concentrated internally and it is with some caution that the anticipated completion date will be August 2021 which will be re-evaluated regularly.”

Supplementary question from Councillor J Brencher:

“What will be the wider benefits to the community and residents of Pontypridd and the Graig?”

Response of Councillor G Hopkins:

“Councillor G Hopkins hoped that the Extra Care facilities will be seen as part of the community not stand alone facilities. He referred to the Extra Care models in Maesyffynnon and the more established site in Ty Heulog to see the wider community benefits that they both provide. The Maesyffynnon site offers a hair salon, café, therapy room, lounge, activity room, car park and garden area which

is maintained in partnership with the nearby Blaengwawr Primary School, which promotes interaction between the younger and older generations. Cwrt Yr Orsaf (Station Court) will include a number of similar facilities such as a hair salon, dining areas, communal kitchen and lounge areas and as always the focus will be on independence and supporting residents to be part of the community, not separate from it.”

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

"Would the leader make a statement on the Council's progress to repair or otherwise the White Bridge in Pontypridd please?"

Response from Councillor A Morgan:

“The Leader advised that 3 bridges in Pontypridd were damaged in Storm Dennis and he provided an update on progress of each bridge. The Ynysyngharad Park Bridge has been appointed to Centergrade and works have started and the bridge has been lifted off into the park and should be back in place at the end of January, beginning of February 2021. Castle Inn Bridge is badly damaged and may have to be demolished. It has been inspected by heritage engineers but it is highly likely that it will be removed. The White Bridge has been inspected and worked on by qualified engineers to assess whether it can be lifted and is safe enough to work on as 85% of the bridge support has been washed away in the storms. It is being monitored on a weekly basis. Prior to the storm, all the bridges were inspected on an annual basis and a principal bridge inspection every 6 years and in line with the guidance.”

Supplementary question from Councillor M Powell:

“Are there other reports which show what work has previously been done on the White Bridge in respect of the foundations and scouring which didn't happen just on one day? Many residents would like to see the bridge reopen as a pedestrian and cycle track only but at the same time there are issues on Berw Road, which are impacting the health & wellbeing of the residents in the area. Has the Leader considered the earlier plans from 2001 to put in place a cross valley link from Glyncoch to the A4070 or change the traffic system to make it a left turn only to reduce the volume of traffic (Councillor Powell thanked the Leader for arranging to have the speed cameras inserted)?”

Response from Councillor A Morgan:

“The Leader stated that there are no plans to explore the link road option due to the lack of funding available in the Capital Programme and the time available to undertake land purchasing and construction. The Council's preferred option would be to repair the bridge so that it can be reopened but failing that the council would look to insert a new structure, discussions are ongoing with WG around funding and profiling for repairs and replacement of bridges. The final heritage engineer's report will be forthcoming over the next 4-6 weeks after which Cabinet will be in a position to decide whether to progress with repairs or replacement and appoint civil contractors to commence the work. In conclusion the Leader confirmed that the 85% scouring occurred during Storm Dennis and there is no indication that damage happened before the Storm but the Leader agreed to provide further information to Councillor Powell”

Question from County Borough Councillor R K Turner to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

“Can the Council Leader please outline progress on the development of the Llanharan by pass?”

Response of Councillor A Morgan:

“Councillor Morgan stated that on the 24th September 2020 £1.1m was allocated in the Capital Programme taking the overall allocation to £2,775.000 which is a mixture of council funding and funding from the WG local transport fund and is one of the strategic projects to be progressed. The council is taking forward one section, the middle section is to be progressed by the Housing Developer on site. A planning application will be submitted by next spring and a pre planning consultation process will be carried out in advance. The bypass will be open to the public by 2025”.

Supplementary question from Councillor R Turner:

“Can the Leader provide confirmation regarding the middle leg of the bypass, which is to be built by the developers to coincide with the 801st house, is critical to the overall bypass project. Can you tell me what is being done to ensure to ensure this does not delay the bypass?”

Response from Councillor A Morgan:

“Councillor A Morgan advised that bringing forward the scheme as one continuous scheme would provide certainty on the timing and on the procurement process. The Council is currently looking at the legal arrangements with the Housing Developer which will give us certainty on a trigger point for the funding which will allow us to accelerate the scheme. By early spring we will have more definitive date and a planning application can be submitted.”

49 The Council Work Programme 2020/21

The Service Director Democratic Services provided an update in respect of the Council Work Programme 2020/21. He advised that it is proposed to hold the Leader's Annual Debate early in the New Year to afford the next meeting on the 25th November to consider a number of other important matters. Details of the Winter Planning session have been circulated in advance of the meeting. In conclusion, the Service Director confirmed that the Health Board would attend the December Council meeting on the 16th.

50 Update in Respect of the Coronavirus in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Leader advised that an update on Covid has been provided at every Council meeting for the past two and a half months. On the 25th November a further update will be provided. He confirmed that discussions are ongoing with WG regarding the possibility of mass testing to determine if it is a viable way forward. The local authority is in discussions with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board regarding a vaccination programme are also ongoing with military planners. The Leader confirmed that the local authority would provide whatever resources are necessary to set up vaccination centres and services would be changed or closed to enable a vaccination programme if it was decided to be the most viable way forward. This would be an absolute priority for the local authority to support the Military and Health Board.

The Leader emphasised the public health message which still needs to be followed following the two week firebreak period, wearing face masks, washing hands and social distancing and urged Members to use their influence through social media to remind residents to keep contact with others to a minimum, reduce their journeys and stay local. There has been a significant impact on the numbers of positive cases following the firebreak but potentially the numbers will rise again.

The Leader advised that regrettably he had to announce the passing of another member of staff due to covid-19 and on behalf of all members he extended his condolences to the family.

The Leader confirmed that the business support grants are continuing to be paid through the Council's finance section who have been issuing the grants as quickly as possible. £3m has been paid out to date although recently, there has been some confusion over which grants can be applied for. He urged local businesses to follow the guidance on the council website for the relevant information regarding the differences between the grants and which are relevant to them. Additional support has also been provided to the Food Banks over the firebreak period, to the value of £15,000 and the council has commissioned £10,000 to mental health support.

The Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services by means of a number of slides showed the lower super output areas which demonstrated the 'hot spots' of Coronavirus cases and also showed the location of the mobile testing units, located as close to the areas of greatest positivity rates to improve access and encourage testing if residents become unwell. The sites are regularly reviewed and relocated as appropriate.

Another slide demonstrated the daily new confirmed cases over the last 2 weeks in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area and broken down by the local authority areas. The slide showed a downward trend at the moment following the Firebreak period and in the past week, the number of new cases has started to flatten out and indicates a decline.

The next slide showed the positivity rates over the same period which represents the proportion of people who have a test which results in a positive result. The higher the positivity rate the more likely that there are more cases in the community. It has remained high in RCT and across the region but in the last few days there has been a reduction in the positivity rate and over the last 7 days it shows that the rolling positivity rate is 23.3%

The following slide showed the positivity rates by age group across the region and demonstrates that the highest number of test results in RCT are in the 40-49 age group but are evenly distributed across all the age groups. The Bridgend age profile is slightly different and shows there are higher numbers of positivity within the younger age groups.

The following slide demonstrated the weekly trend in Covid-19 related deaths in Cwm Taf Morgannwg throughout the Pandemic and published by O&S and is broken down by setting. This covers the period from March to the end of October, and the impact of the first wave of infection is evident and from July to the beginning of September there was a low number of covid related deaths but the impact is apparent from mid-September onwards. It is a lower number of

deaths compared to the first wave experienced but the greatest proportion of deaths in recent weeks has been in hospitals.

The final slide showed the 7 day rolling accumulative case rate of infections per 100,000 population. The period covered is the 15th September to the 8th November and shows the steady increase in case numbers followed by a sharp increase to the end of November and then followed by a gradual reduction in the case rate over the past few days. Recently the National Firebreak restrictions over the past 2 weeks which may show the impact of those measures. It is encouraging that this trend of decreasing case rates is being reproduced across Wales. The case rate today in RCT is 400 per 100,000 which is lower than it was a week ago.

In conclusion, the Director provided an overview of the activity of the Contract Tracing Team in RCT who are providing the service for the whole Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. Since June 2020 9,114 index cases came into the service which represents 23% of the Welsh total. 97% individuals have been successfully followed up by the team and 78% were followed up within 48 hours which compares favourably with the Welsh average of 75%. Over the same time period there were over 28,000 contacts associated with those 9,000 cases and 90% have been contacted successfully, 78% followed up within 48 hours which compares favourably with the Welsh average of 73%. The performance overall has been exceptional.

The opportunity was afforded to the Group Leaders to ask questions of the Director Public health, Protection and Community Services.

Councillor P Jarman – Group Leader Plaid Cymru

Councillor P Jarman paid credit to the Track and Trace Team. Councillor Jarman also expressed her disgust at the Covid deniers towards the family of three who recently lost their lives to Covid-19.

With regards to the cases Councillor Jarman stated that yesterday there were 55 new positive cases, today there have been 155 new positive cases so there are peaks and troughs with the numbers of new cases and difficult for the public to share the Director's optimism with regards to the rise in positive cases. The Councillor queried whether, if it transpires, the mass testing will be a local arrangement or a UK wide provision? In April the Abercynon testing station which was described as a mass testing centre only undertook 40 tests.

The Councillor asked whether the Director could provide clarification on the laws regarding the wearing of masks as the local arrangements have been replaced by national arrangements.

The Director confirmed that there is still a requirement to wear face coverings in certain public places and encouragement to wear them in some circumstances such as bus drivers although not a legal requirement and in work placements and high risk environments where PPE is essential. The Director confirmed that he would circulate the guidance on face coverings following the meeting.

The Leader advised that with regards to the figures as mentioned by Councillor Jarman, the important figure is the 7 day rolling average figure and the daily positivity rates. Today, the 7 day positivity rates show that RCT has a 30% positivity rate which has now dropped to 24% which is a 6% drop in positivity

rate. Following the Firebreak period it is anticipated that there will be a downward trend before the rates start to increase.

Councillor M Powell – Group Leader RCT Independent Group

From the graphs we have seen there are no dark areas indicating the high numbers of Covid-19 cases at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital which did not implement its 15 point plan. The Health Board are apportioning the deaths of residents catching or who have died of Coronavirus in hospital to their areas of residency.

Is the Council able to assist South Wales Police in apprehending those individuals who were involved in the Bonfire Night violence in Rhydfelin which resulted in the injury of a Police Officer?

Councillor Powell welcomed the mass testing to bring the virus under control.

Councillor L Hooper – Deputy Leader Conservative Group

Councillor Hooper thanked the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services for a comprehensive report and welcomed the opportunity to ask questions of the Health Board during their attendance at Council in December.

Councillor S Belzak – Independent Group

Councillor Belzak stated that the data on deaths across Cwm Taf Morgannwg area indicates that this disease is seasonal. There was a peak in deaths in April, declining to almost to zero in June, July and August and gradually increasing again. He added that we are in the season of respiratory illness and flu numbers have dropped by 98%. Councillor Belzak noted that the virus has become a seasonal illness and having extreme measures on the economy is not an appropriate response.

According to the UK wide data on the number of deaths at home, of which there is a significant number which can't be attributed to covid-19. Councillor Belzak stated that people are not now being treated for serious illnesses such as stroke or heart attack, which needs to be addressed.

Councillor W Owen asked whether the council has enough resources within its Licensing Department to address the growing issues of non-compliance within the Public Houses following the change to the regulations that up to 4 households can meet?

The Leader responded to a number of queries and confirmed that with regards to the Cwm Taf Health Board Royal Glamorgan Hospital outbreaks, additional bays have been implemented and segregating those with covid-19. He added that the number of hospital deaths is not recorded on the maps that were shown earlier but the total number of deaths in hospital equates to less than 3% of the overall total. The total number of cases in hospital is approximately 200 but to give that some context RCT recorded 300 cases in one day. The number of cases in the hospitals is not the driver and equates to 7%. All cases relating to schools only accounts to 15%. The Leader emphasised that community transmission remains the most likely way of contracting the virus.

The Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services confirmed that the deaths in hospitals are accounted back to the place of residence but the deaths recorded in hospitals are published by the Health Board and are associated to Covid-19 not necessarily directly due to Covid-19. Any of the individuals would have had a positive test result within a 28 day period prior to the death occurring.

In terms of enforcement, funding has been provided by WG to implement additional enforcement staff to work alongside the council's own enforcement staff who have been working very closely with South Wales Police throughout this period. The Police have also committed additional resources for enforcement activities. The additional resources are deployed to ensure the Licensing Trade is adhering to the requirements and where necessary the council has closed a number of premises and others are facing a review of their licences where they have not adhered to the rules.

A number of other queries were raised in respect of the vaccine such as the Council's role in supporting Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board with the roll out of the vaccine and whether any discussions have taken place in respect of those unable to have it such as MS patients.

The Deputy Leader reminded Council that the anti-social behaviour incident in her ward, as mentioned earlier in the meeting, has a confidentiality clause attached to it so would be respecting that.

The Leader and the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services responded to the queries relating to the roll out of the vaccine and confirmed that discussions with all the relevant agencies have been underway for some time. Consideration is being given to the use of council buildings, appropriate venues, transport links, staff and resources which will be required to support the roll out. The Leader advised that regular meetings are ongoing across Cwm Taf and further details would be circulated in due course to all Members.

51 Changes to Membership

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented his report to advise Members of the change to the RCT Independent Group representation on the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. He requested that Members note that County Borough Councillor L Walker is to be nominated in place of County Borough Councillor W Jones on the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee with immediate effect.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to note the change to the RCT Independent Group representation on the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee as previously set out.

This meeting closed at 6.30 pm

**Cllr S Powderhill
Chairman.**