



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 20 January 2021 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 G Caple
Councillor A Chapman	Councillor A Cox
Councillor A Crimmings	Councillor J Cullwick
Councillor G Davies	Councillor J Davies
Councillor M Diamond	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor J Elliott	Councillor S Evans
Councillor S Evans	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 J James
Councillor P Jarman	Councillor G Jones
Councillor K Jones	Councillor L Jones
Councillor W Jones	Councillor R Lewis
Councillor W Lewis	Councillor C Leyshon
Councillor A Morgan	Councillor K Morgan
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor M Norris
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor W Owen
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 M Tegg	Councillor G Thomas
Councillor W Treeby	Councillor R Turner
Councillor L Walker	Councillor M Weaver
Councillor M Webber	Councillor E Webster
Councillor D Williams	Councillor J Williams
Councillor T Williams	Councillor C Willis
Councillor R Yeo	

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services

Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

80 Apologies

An apology of absence was received by County Borough Councillors A Calvert, A Davies-Jones, L De Vet, M Fidler Jones, G W Hughes, S Pickering.

81 Welcome & Introductions

Introductions were made by the Group Leaders present: -

County Borough Councillor A Morgan (Labour Group)
County Borough Councillor P Jarman (Plaid Cymru Group)
County Borough Councillor M Powell (RCT Independent Group)
County Borough Councillor J James (Conservative Group)

82 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations made pertaining to the agenda:

Agenda item 8 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- County Borough Councillor P Jarman referred to her dispensation granted by the Standards Committee on 29th November 2020 providing the Member with a “dispensation to speak and vote on all matters for the duration and adoption of the 2021-22 Budget process in her capacity as Leader of the Opposition”.
- County Borough Councillor E Stephens – “I work for the Department of Work and Pensions which is referred to within the report”

83 Minute's Silence

As a mark of respect for all those who had lost their lives to Covid-19, Members undertook a minute's silence.

84 Announcements

- The Leader announced the sad loss of a third member of Council staff through Covid and extended his sympathy to the families.
- County Borough Councillor P Jarman paid tribute to all the families who have lost loved ones during the Pandemic. She also paid tribute to the late former County Borough Councillor Terry Benney who represented Mountain Ash West and was elected to Council in shadow in 1995. In 1999 he was re-elected and became Cabinet Member for Housing and was successful in reviewing the remodelling of Penrhys in the Rhondda and Fern Hill in Mountain Ash.

- County Borough Councillor W Jones praised one of his residents, 11-year-old Seren Lewis-Dawe who, following cancer treatment to a family member, committed to raising £3,300 for Velindre by running 65 miles in all weather during December 2020. She has also been made a Junior Ambassador for Velindre.
- County Borough Councillor M Powell also paid his tribute to the former Councillor T Benney.
- Councillor Powell continued by acknowledging fellow Councillor P Howe who had won four first prizes for 'Best Comedy' entitled 'Bryn Coombes' and has been a finalist in another four awards.
- It was also announced that Mr Gio Isingrini, newly retired, received an OBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours list

85 Council Procedure Rule 15.1

The Deputy Leader moved the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 15.1 which states that a matter would be decided by a simple majority of those Members voting and present in the room at the time the question was put in order to facilitate the smooth running of the virtual meeting.

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

86 Minutes

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 11th November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting subject to reference to the A470 being corrected at Minute No.48 Members' Questions.

87 Statements

The Leader of the Council advised that the Council's new text alert system which will notify Members of any urgent or significant matters such as inclement weather or flooding, has been set up. He advised that this message has alerted Members of the recent bad weather warnings. He urged any Members who have yet to provide an up-to-date mobile number to do so through Members Services.

88 Members' Questions

Question from County Borough Councillor J. Brencher to the Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services, County Borough Councillor J. Rosser:

"What support is being provided to schools in RCT to enable and facilitate remote learning?"

Response from Councillor J Rosser:

“Councillor Rosser explained that the Council has supported all schools throughout the pandemic by encouraging them to access the Welsh Government Hwb platform which provides a comprehensive package of blended learning. Some examples of good practice have been identified by many RCT Schools such as Ysgol Garth Olwg and Ysgol Cwm Rhondda. The Director of Education convenes regular meetings with Head Teachers and Governor Bodies to provide developments. Presentations on blended learning have been provided to Head Teachers. Learning guidance was provided in preparation of the return of learners to school and guidance documentation for blended and professional learning have been provided by the Central South Consortium. Improvement partners have supported individual schools in brokering school to school support to develop processes to deliver online teaching. Councillor Rosser advised that in November 2020 RCT local authority underwent a Estyn review of the work in supporting learning communities in schools and has recently received a very positive Estyn Report which highlights the strong communication between service areas and the collaboration with other directorates and the drive and determination by schools and leaders to address the educational challenges during the pandemic”

There was no supplementary question.

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

“Can the Leader update on what representations are being made by this Local Authority and the WGLA to the UK Government regarding the forthcoming Budget in March?”

Response of Councillor A Morgan:

“The Leader of the Council stated that local government have played a critical role in the fight against covid through its positive and flexible staff responses and adaptation of services and therefore local government should be protected in future budget rounds. The Leader advised that the provisional settlement for the Welsh Government is 3.8% for this local authority which is a positive outcome. With regards to the Budget, which is being held on Wednesday, the 3rd March, a number of additional investments, other than core service investment into areas such as social care, have been set out in collaboration with the LGA. The Leader advised that discussions have been ongoing with Welsh Government and the LGA regarding a number of areas such as capital infrastructure and the need to consider another round of investment in this area, particularly coming out of lockdown, to stimulate the local economy. Another area of concern is the pay freeze, unless staff are in the lower pay scale where they will receive a £250 uplift, it will have an impact on staff who have made additional efforts during the lockdown. The local authority is making representations to the UK Government to fund a national pay rise.”

Supplementary Question from Councillor M Griffiths:

“With unemployment set to rise to 7.5% especially amongst young people and with the mis management of Brexit will ensure there can't be an export led

recovery, does the Leader agree that the UK Government needs to be hugely ambitious in investing in a low carbon recovery which would meet the challenge of climate change and help the economy to recover?"

Response of Councillor A Morgan:

"Councillor Morgan agreed that a low carbon, green economy would offer the best solution and would stimulate the economy going forward"

Question from County Borough Councillor J. Edwards to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

"Will the Leader please provide an update at the recent landslip at Wattstown Tip?"

Response from the Leader, County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

"Councillor A Morgan advised that on Saturday the 19th December 2020 tip RH87 at Wattstown which is privately owned, had a landslide with over 2,000 tonnes of material slid down the face of the slope. There had been a significant amount of rainfall in advance of the landslide which had caused the slip. There have been fortnightly inspections for a number of months beforehand and engineers will continue to monitor the site through sensors and drone helicopters. The Leader commented that there are around 500 tonnes of material on the upper right-hand side of the tip which is still vulnerable and could move. He confirmed that discussions are ongoing with a task group made up of partners such as NRW, the Coal Authority and the local authority at UK and Welsh Government level regarding the tips and discussions are also involving the Wattstown tip landowner and their agent."

No supplementary Question

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

"In what ways does the Council engage with residents to reinforce the key public health messages around Covid-19?"

Response of Councillor A Morgan:

"The Leader reported that throughout the pandemic there has been a concerning amount of false information regarding Covid, vaccinations or testing so there is a communication cell set up with Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board, neighbouring local authorities and South Wales Police to ensure key messages and information are consistent. False information on social media is monitored and addressed and the Council's Group Director for Children and Community Services has played a key role in terms of engagement and communications with the Local Health Board. The Leader stressed the importance of local knowledge with local members playing an important role in relaying information to residents. In conclusion, the Leader stressed the importance of sending out positive messages to residents during this difficult time".

No supplementary Question

Question from County Borough Councillor T. Williams to the Leader of the

Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

“Following the extension of the mass testing pilot to the lower Cynon Valley, will the Leader please make a statement on the outcomes and next steps?”

Response of Councillor A Morgan:

“The Council Leader advised that between the 5th and 22nd December 2020 a total of 15,274 lateral flow tests were carried out in the lower Cynon Valley, of which 372 were positive, 2.4% of those tested who were asymptomatic and did not display symptoms were asked to isolate to stop the spread. As part of the testing, pupils from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School pupils were tested, with parental consent, 476 pupils were tested of which only one positive test was returned which demonstrates that schools are in the main safe. The Leader confirmed that between 11th December 2020 and the 8th January 2021, 1506 home test kits were delivered to those on the shielding list, 673 were returned (45%) which was positive. In Merthyr Tydfil the return rate was only 36%.

The Leader stated that carrying out testing across the whole of the county borough would mean a huge demand on staff resources, potentially between 500-600 members of staff would be required, some of which will also be supporting the vaccination programme. Some discussions have been held around testing targeted and specific areas and Welsh Government is also considering undertaking further mass testing.”

No supplementary question.

Question from County Borough Councillor S Bradwick to the Deputy Leader, County Borough Councillor M Webber:

“Could the Deputy Leader make a statement on the progress of the Local Government Bill?”

Response of the Deputy Leader:

“The Deputy Leader reported that the Local Government Bill was introduced by the Minister for Local Government and Housing in November 2019 and agreed by the Senedd in November 2020. The Bill has a wide-ranging scope across a range of democratic matters such as extending the right to vote in elections by 16 and 17 year olds and foreign citizens legally residing in Wales, greater public participation, enhancing the role of Scrutiny and Audit. It was advised that the latter has already commenced with the Council’s Audit Committee. A greater direction in how the local authority works with and supports the Town and Community Councils. The Deputy Leader advised that work with the Town and Community Councils is already recognised through regular meetings of the Community Liaison Committee in supporting the community councils. The Community Liaison Committee works closely with the Clerks and there is continued support of elected members to town and community councils which includes training and advice and a willingness to participate in a number of partnership approaches.”

Supplementary Question from Councillor S Bradwick:

“How well placed is the Council to respond to the requirements for local authorities to increase public participation?”

Response of the Deputy Leader:

“The Deputy Leader responded by advising that the Bill not only requires the council to actively encourage residents to participate in local government but to also produce an engagement strategy. In 2019 the Council produced a Public Engagement Protocol which acts as a basis for this requirement. The Deputy Leader advised that the Council already actively promotes positive engagement around decisions made and ensures it engages with residents of all ages. It was reported that the Webcasting facilities in the Council Chamber will greatly enhance the flexibility around remote attendance for elected members which the Deputy Leader has seen first-hand with the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, Councillor M Diamond”

89 Council Work Programme 2020/21

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications provided an update in respect of the Council Work Programme 2020/21. He advised that an invitation had been extended to the UBI RCT to attend the February Council meeting and the State of the County Borough Debate will also be tabled, with further details to follow. Members were also advised that Trivallis have made representations to brief Members on their engagement arrangements through a pre council session in February or March 2021.

In response to a query in relation to the forthcoming council agendas, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications advised that there will be a need to report back to Council the nominations of the Freedom of the Borough together with a number of other recommendations.

He also confirmed that the Chief Executive of the Cardiff City Capital Region would bring forward a presentation to this council before the end of this Municipal Year as agreed in the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

90 Update in Respect of the Coronavirus In Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Group Director Children & Community Services presented an update in respect of the Coronavirus in RCT with the aid of a power point presentation which covered the following key information: -

- Confirmed Cases of Covid 19 per 100,000 population in the previous 7 days
- Confirmed Cases of Covid 19 per 100,000 population in the previous 7 days by Local Authority
- Trends in 7-day cumulative Covid infection rates per 100,00 in CTM
- Daily Test Positivity of Covid in CTM
- Covid Local Area Surveillance
- Welsh Government Delivery Expectations
- Priority Groups for Coronavirus (Covid 19) Vaccination
- Headlines: Progress to the 17th January 2021
- Operational Delivery Considerations
- Next 4 weeks through to Mid-February

Following the update, each of the Group Leaders were provided with the opportunity to ask questions.

Councillor A Morgan, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Labour Group

Councillor Morgan advised that there are mass vaccination centres in Abercynon and in the Rhondda with plans for another two to open by the end of January 2021. The mass vaccination programme is a huge undertaking to ensure residents receive two vaccinations and confirmed that the council would be offering its support to the GP surgeries with staff being trained as vaccinators. The Council is working to help identify suitable venues for the mass vaccination programme as some local surgeries are small and unable to accommodate larger numbers of residents and as such some GP surgeries are teaming up to work from a vaccination centres such as the Cynon Valleys Bowls Centre.

The Leader advised that the Health Board would be delivering 20,000 vaccines this week and following discussions with the Chief Executive of the NHS in Wales he could confirm that that all Adult Care Homes, staff and clients would be vaccinated by the end of January 2021. Furthermore, the plan to complete the vaccination of the priority Groups 1-4 by mid-February was on course.

Councillor P Jarman (Group Leader, Plaid Cymru Group)

Councillor Jarman extended her thanks to all the NHS staff and those in the care sector and council staff for their support and to all the volunteers who have volunteered their services to make a difference to people's lives. Councillor Jarman asked the following:-

How many deaths have there been from Covid-19 have been recorded in RCT so far in the Pandemic?

How is the vaccinee allocated to individual GP Practices, is it determined by Cwm Taf or Welsh Government? It appears that some surgeries are not receiving the level of vaccine based on the size of their patients' roll.

Who is responsible for the prioritising the patients, is it being done alphabetically?

Will the Bowls Centre in Mountain Ash be identified as a mass vaccination venue?

Councillor Jarman referred to the effects of Covid on the mental health and wellbeing and she felt there had not been a debate or discussion around this. Despite the hard work of the Director of Education, Teachers, and support staff to deliver online teaching, some schools are better resourced than others. Councillor Jarman commented that the burden of costs on families is becoming intolerable and data on many pay-as-you-go devices was never designed to cope with online teaching and some families will not be able to afford to buy more data. If distance learning is going to remain, what can we do as a council to seek to make amends to the issue that the poverty gap is widening.

Councillor M Powell, RCT Independent Group

Councillor Powell extended his gratitude to Teachers, Council staff and volunteers for their hard work.

Councillor Powell raised concern over the lack of a coordinated approach

throughout schools regarding online teaching and commented that these issues should have been addressed at the beginning of the first lockdown and the service we should be providing doesn't seem to be in place.

With regards to the vaccination programme, Councillor Powell commented that the three GP surgeries in Pontypridd shared 400 vaccines between them and pointed out that there are more suitable venues, facilities and unused office accommodation in and around the county borough that can support the vaccination programme other than the GP Surgeries. He asked what vaccine centres are being set up in the Taff Ely area and will the vaccination centres operate 24 hours, seven days a week?

Councillor J James, Group Leader of the Conservative Group

Councillor James added his thanks to the staff and volunteers who are assisting with the lockdown.

Councillor James asked what steps is the council taking to make sure the social distancing message hits home to ensure that residents continue to adhere to the rules?

The Group Director Children and Community Services responded to the queries as follows: -

- The Office of National Statistics is reporting 1,085 deaths associated with Covid 19 in RCT.
- Vaccines allocated to the GP's and Primary Care- The initial focus of the programme has been for patients over 80 years old but allocation to GP Practices is a matter for the Health Board. They have been reliant on the supply of the Oxford vaccine which has less rigorous storage requirements and therefore it has been more problematic with regards to its supply.
- The nine priority groups have been agreed nationally by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations with the greatest priority groups based on age and clinical vulnerability and the workforces in health and social care who are providing the support to those individuals.
- Cynon Valley Bowls Hall is being used to support the GP clusters for the vaccination programme.
- The merits of different vaccines -Pfizer has rigorous requirements around its storage, dilution and use within certain timescales hence its use in hospitals to vaccinate their own staff and through the mass vaccination centres where they can accommodate storage requirements.
- The vaccination centre lane capacity is being expanded at Ty Trevithick to 15 lanes to maximise the numbers per day and the working hours are 9-5pm at the moment but will be extended to operate 7 days a week.
- The measures should still be maintained despite the vaccination roll out. Self-isolation, hand washing and social distancing are all crucial messages which are being emphasised by the different teams within the council such as the communications team, public health and protection team, track and trace teams who emphasise the messages with every call and the joint enforcement teams, with South Wales Police, who are enforcing any breaches of the requirements.

The Director of Education responded to the queries raised by the Group Leaders regarding difficulties experienced by digitally excluded learners. She advised that

following an audit of the digitally excluded learners, 2,868 devices were provided by the council in the spring/summer term last year. An additional review has recently been undertaken which identified a further 2,635 learners as in need of devices; the council is also in the process of providing to those young learners.

The Director of Education commented on the connectivity issues in some family settings, Welsh Government did provide resources so the council could provide Wi-Fi devices to ensure the families were able to connect to Broadband at no expense.

The Director stressed that a comprehensive training package for distance/blended learning has been provided to all schools and all the available resources are on the website and the Central South Consortium provided an overview to Scrutiny of the services available. The Council has developed guidance materials for all schools and guidance for all parents and carers which will be disseminated shortly, which will offer them with the opportunity to provide feedback to the local authority of their own experiences of online learning with individual schools, by means of questionnaires. Detailed reviews of the work undertaken in the schools is ongoing and partners in the Improvement Services have a key role to play in reviewing the evidence of the individual offer by schools for families to ensure the quality of remote learning is available.

With regards to the wellbeing of pupils and learners, the Director referred to the support services for young people who are feeling isolated during this time. The Council's Inclusion Services remain available and accessible to the schools, parents, and carers and recently a presentation was provided to scrutiny outlining the services that are available to all young learners.

91 Council Revenue Budget 2021/22 - Provisional Local Government Settlement

The Director of Finance and Digital Services referred Members to his report which provided them with information in respect of the 2021/2022 Provisional Local Government Settlement, announced on the 22nd December 2020 and initial comments on its likely implications for the delivery of Council services.

The Director provided Members with the headline data from the settlement advising that the overall increase in Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) funding for 2021/22 (of unhypothecated funding) at an all Wales level, after adjusting for transfers is 3.8% (+£172M).

Members were advised that the settlement figures for 2021/22 amounts to an increase of **3.8%** which equates to the average all Wales increase. Settlement figures across Wales range from 2.0% to 5.6%. No 'floor' protection has been included for 2021/22.

Members were informed that the Council's base budget does not include the cost implications arising as a direct consequence of the pandemic which are currently and are anticipated to continue to be supported separately by Welsh Government.

The Director advised Members that the combined effects of the updates on the budget gap are shown in table 4 and the remaining budget gap of £4.057M. In conclusion, he reported that Cabinet will consider its draft budget strategy which will be consulted upon in the second phase of budget consultation before being

considered by Council in March.

Members welcomed the Provisional 2021/22 Local Government Settlement, announced by Welsh Government and following discussion whereby the Director responded to a number of queries such as the Council's new ways of working which do form part of the work to identify the efficiency requirements, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the Provisional 2021/22 Local Government Settlement, announced by the Minister for Housing and Local Government on the 22nd December 2020.
2. To note that the Final 2021/22 Local Government Settlement is expected during early March 2021: and
3. To note the approach to budget consultation for 2021/22 as already determined.

92 Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Director of Finance and Digital Services presented his report which fulfils the requirement to annually consider whether to revise or replace the Council's existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme ("CTRS") and the requirement to adopt a scheme by 31st January 2021.

The Director directed Members to the report which highlights the changes to the CTRS that were introduced in April 2013 the amendments proposed, the funding implications likely and documents the consultation outcomes allowing Members to consider the adoption of the Council's local CTRS for the 2021/22 financial year.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to agree the following recommendations: -

- a) Note and adopt the provisions of the Prescribed Requirements Regulations and the amendments made to those regulations by the Amendment Regulations (as approved by Welsh Government (WG) on 12th January 2021) as the Council's local CTRS for 2021/22, subject to the local discretions that the Council is able to exercise;
- b) Note the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken by the Council on the local discretions applicable to the CTRS for 2021/22; and
- c) Confirm the discretions applicable to the Council's local CTRS for 2021/22 as set out at paragraph 5.3 (Table 2) of this report.

93 Urgent Executive Decisions

In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 17.2(a), the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications reported on the urgent decisions that were taken forward through key delegated decision during the period October – December 2020 and it was **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report.

94 Notice of Motion

To consider the under-mentioned Notice of Motion standing in the names of: Councillors P. Jarman, H. Fychan, S. Rees-Owen, M. Weaver, K. Morgan, D. Grehan, E. Griffiths, J. Williams, A. Cox, J. Davies, J. Cullwick, G. Davies, E. Webster, S. Evans, A. Chapman, E. Stephens and L. Jones:-

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

1. Recognises the distressing fact that 30% of children in Wales live in poverty and yet just 13% are entitled to free school meals This is mainly because the remaining 17% of children live in low paid households that takes them just over the present eligibility criteria.
2. Notes that England and Scotland have universal infant FSMs with all Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 pupils eligible, which is not the case in Wales.
3. Calls on the Welsh Government to cost, budget and provide as a matter of urgency, the extension of FSMs to all children who live in poverty in Wales but are excluded from entitlement under the present eligibility criteria.
4. Agrees that no child should go hungry and that this should be a step towards the aim of rolling out universal FSMs to all children in Wales as called for by various groups in Wales, including Child Poverty Action Group and the People's Assembly

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Notice of Motion.

(**Note:** County Borough Councillor J James abstained from voting on the matter).

This meeting closed at 7.20 pm

**Cllr S Powderhill
Chairman.**