



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 30 July 2020 at 3.00 pm

County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams (Chair)

Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor J Harries	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor E Stephens
Councillor L Walker	Councillor G Caple
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor W Jones	

Cabinet Members in attendance

Councillor M Webber – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business
Councillor R Lewis – Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services

Non-Committee Members in attendance

Councillor S Bradwick, Chair of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

Councillor R Yeo, Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Councillor S Rees-Owen, Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee
Councillor G Thomas, Vice Chair of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communications
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director - Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr P Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services
Mr G Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources

60 Declaration of Interest

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

- County Borough Councillor E. Stephens declared the following personal interest pertaining to Agenda items 4 and item 3 respectively: "I work for the Department for Work and Pensions and I sometimes work alongside members from the Communities for Work Team as part of my job".

61 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors A Cox and S Evans.

62 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 26th June 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

63 Discussion Update on Covid 19 Position in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication presented Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise, review and challenge the information in the report in respect of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, its recovery plan and the information within the Cabinet report dated the 28th July 2020. He advised the Committee that the Deputy Leader, Councillor M. Webber and the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services, Councillor R. Lewis, were both in attendance and would provide an update where appropriate.

Discussions continued and Councillor Webber informed Members that the Council recently opened the community recycling service on a phased approach and that schools have also recently opened to pupils to prepare students for the new academic year in September. It was noted that positive feedback has been received and that this was considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the 22nd June 2020. It was emphasised that despite the restrictions caused by Covid-19, the majority of Council services have continued to operate, albeit in a different way. It is hoped that the Council will continue to build upon this new way of working and will be able to deliver services more efficiently and effectively in the future. Members were informed that the Test, Trace, Protect system will be a key part of responding to services in the future and the service will be a key part of the Council's recovery strategy going forward. Councillor Webber thanked all Council staff for their diligence, hard work and dedication over the past four months and thanked the Council's Senior Leadership Team for the commitment and dedication that they have all shown.

Following an update from the Deputy Leader, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a further update from Councillor R. Lewis, Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services. It was noted that Council staff have been working hard to re-open libraries in a phased approach and that mobile libraries will re-open from the 20th August. In respect of pest control, staff have been supplied with the necessary PPE and services will re-commence from the 29th July and the animal warden service re-opened from the 29th June. In respect of the Registrars Service, marriages and civil ceremonies will re-commence from the 30th July, face to face birth registrations resumed from 13th July and the number of mourners at funeral services will increase to thirty from 3rd August.

Discussions continued and Councillor R. Lewis reminded Members that as the economy begins to recover from the pandemic, the Council will increase its employment support services and that this will be a key focus of the Council going forward. In respect of food safety inspections, under the direction of the Food Standards Agency, food inspection at premises has recommenced and taxi licencing inspections will recommence from the 13th July. Councillor Lewis thanked Officers and external partners for their dedication and hard work over the past four months and noted his admiration and gratitude for the sacrifices that they have all made during the pandemic.

The Deputy Chief Executive echoed these comments and also extended his

thanks to all Councillors and Cabinet Members. It was emphasised that the Council's aim is to move forward in a measured way and it is hoped that the Council will be able to re-commence all services over the coming months. Councillor Webber also extended her thanks to the voluntary service and to carers in the community.

Discussions continued and the Chair sought clarity in respect of the viability of RCT theatres in the future, particularly in light of social distancing restrictions. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services informed the Committee that the service is working very hard to make the necessary preparations that will allow RCT to open its theatre provisions in the future. It was emphasised that in the meantime, the service is working to provide an arts and culture service to its residents using online platforms.

A further query was raised by Councillor Stephens in respect of active travel. It was noted that people's behaviour has changed since Covid-19 and that people are walking and cycling more often. Councillor Stephens queried whether this would potentially change the Council's work in respect of climate change. Councillor Lewis referred Members to the Welsh Government's 'green recovery' plan and its focus on the environment and new ways of working. Councillor Lewis reassured Members that the Council will be using the opportunity of the recovery to look at green measures and how to build upon these new ways of working going forward.

Discussions continued and Councillor W. Jones thanked all Council staff for all their hard work during the pandemic. In respect of pest control, Councillor Jones noted that his ward has seen an increase in rodent activity inside and outside and he asked if this would be a priority for the Council in respect of its recovery plan. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services advised Members that the service has now been fully restored. He also encouraged Members to report any problems in their wards promptly and reassured Members that the Council does have a range of enforcement powers to deal with these issues.

Councillor Walker sought clarification as to whether the 'learning curve' centre at the bottom of Treforest Industrial Estate would be re-opening soon and queried the Council's plans for the future of the building. The Deputy Chief Executive informed Members that a decision has not yet been made, however, he emphasised that this is continually being reviewed and that safeguarding restrictions will need to be carefully managed, particularly given the vulnerability of the service group.

Councillor M. Griffiths referred the Committee to page 31 of the report and questioned whether the Council has the resources to meet a potential increase in demand in respect of domiciliary care as a result of Covid-19. The Deputy Chief Executive advised Members that the Council is beginning to re-introduce the 'Stay well at Home' service and reassured Members that the Council has a good track record of working collaboratively with external partners and that the Council is confident that this will continue to be the case going forward.

Discussions continued and Councillor W. Jones referred the Committee to a fallen tree incident in his ward during Storm Dennis this year and he queried whether the Council would be doing safety checks in all parks throughout the County Borough. The Group Director - Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services advised Members that the arrangements to review the condition of

trees is an on-going process and where any are identified as dangerous appropriate steps will be taken.

Councillor Brencher referred Members to the increase in anti-social behaviour and domestic violence and queried whether we have sufficient resources to deal with this. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services advised the Committee that following discussion with service providers an increase in demand has not come through yet in respect of incidents of domestic abuse, although this is anticipated once lockdown restrictions are lifted. Members were informed that the Welsh Government has made additional funding available at a regional level to support these services and to increase their capacity to deal with an anticipated increase in demand. In respect of anti-social behaviour, Members were advised that the Council has continued to provide a support network in this area and have continued to work closely with the police.

Members were reassured that there remains a good response to any issues of anti-social behaviour across the County Borough.

In respect of the Council's recovery plan, Councillor Caple sought clarification in respect of the Council's plan to increase the footfall in town centres and to support town centre regeneration, particularly in respect of staff returning to work in town centre offices. The Director of Human Resources advised the Committee that a staff survey had been rolled out and that over 80% of staff who responded said that they liked the concept of continuing to work from home. However, they also reflected that they would like the opportunity to come into the office on a part time basis as part of their well-being. The Director of Human Resources emphasised that they would want to do this on a structured basis, particularly in light of social distancing restrictions.

The Chair sought clarification in respect of the Authority's plan to deal with a potential second wave of the virus. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services advised Members that the Chief Medical Officer for Wales had recently advised Local Authorities to start preparing for the event of a second wave of infection and that partners will be working together to set out the actions needed in the event that infections start to increase. Members were reassured that the Council is in a strong position to deal with a potential second wave, particularly in light of the new Test, Trace, Protect system and also more robust surveillance information. The Council also has arrangements in place should there be cases identified in educational settings and care homes, and are in a stronger position to deal with any incidents should they arise. The Council is also doing work through the local resilience forums in respect of scenario planning and what they would need to do if there was a requirement for a local lockdown.

In respect of education, the Chair queried what arrangements are in place to ensure that a spread of infection is prevented. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services informed the Committee that Public Health Wales has issued specific guidance on this in recent weeks and advised Members that if there are two or more confirmed cases within a two week period this would trigger further investigations and action. Members were told that there are a number of measures that could be put in place, such as putting an incident management team in place or to take steps to self-isolate that particular group of children. Members were advised that each case would be dealt with on its individual merit. The Welsh Government has provided comprehensive guidance which provides advice on exactly what to do in these circumstances and this guidance has been shared by the Director of Education with all schools across the County Borough. The principle message is to maintain standards of hygiene and social distancing and that anyone who presents with symptoms of Covid-19

does not attend school settings. The Director of Human Resources agreed with these comments and emphasised the importance of Council staff continuing to work from home and that further updates in respect of education will be announced in the coming weeks.

Councillor Stephens queried how small an area could be locked down if the need arises, for example would it be the whole of RCT, a particular ward or even a single street. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services advised the Committee that it would relate to the specific circumstances and that in Wales so far the incidents have primarily been around individual premises, where the workforce has generally had a greater risk of infection within that location. It will depend on the individual circumstances and understanding what was the cause of the infection in the first place. Members were informed that the Test, Trace and Protect system will also pilot 'backward' contact tracing to try and identify more clearly where the cause of the infection has arisen from and where the individual has contracted it. This will give the Council more comprehensive information in respect of any local lockdown, however, the Director stressed that any lock down would be assessed on an individual basis.

The Chair queried how the Council could enforce a local lock down in the Rhondda when every community is interrelated. The Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services agreed that it may be practically difficult in the communities that we have in the valleys, that it would be a measure that would have to be considered as a last resort with any restrictions specific to the particular circumstances of the incident.

Discussions ensued and Councillor W. Jones stressed that if staff were to go back into work on a rota basis then Councillors should also lead by example and attend meetings on a percentage basis. The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications confirmed that once the Chamber has been upgraded then the Council will be in a position to look at integrating the webcasting technology with the virtual meeting technology and will potentially be able to roll out a hybrid approach.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED:-**

1. To acknowledge the contents of the information included in the report; and,
2. To request that the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications continues to report any relevant and further information to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, including any relevant and appropriate financial information.

N.B Connection issues prevented the Leader of the Opposition (Councillor P. Jarman) from completing her contribution to the meeting's discussions.

64 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT –31st March 2020 – YEAR END

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications presented Members with the Quarter 4 (Year-end) Council Performance Report to the 31st March 2020. It was emphasised that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is considering this matter as part of the temporary arrangements in place to progress and establish virtual committee meetings.

The Service Director, Finance & Improvement Services presented the report in further detail and it was noted that the year-end report is set within the context of Storm Dennis and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has inevitably caused adverse financial and performance implications during the 2019-20 financial year. The Service Director added that where appropriate these implications were referred to throughout the report and in the detailed appendices.

The report included information in respect of:-

- Revenue and capital budget performance;
- Treasury Management prudential indicators;
- Organisational Health information including staff turnover, sickness and Council strategic risks;
- Corporate Plan priority action plan updates; and
- Other national measures and target setting.

The Service Director, Finance & Improvement Services provided the Committee with an overview of the key information included within the report in respect of financial data and progress against the Council's Corporate Plan priorities. Members were also provided with information regarding exceptions highlighted within each of the detailed financial and performance sections of the report, and in conclusion the Service Director reported that out of 71 Corporate Plan performance indicators reported with a target at year-end, 46 were on target, 9 were within 5% of the target and 16 were not on target by more than 5%.

In response, Members raised a number of questions with the Service Director.

Councillor Brencher referred the Committee to the Storm Dennis response costs (Table 1 within the Executive Summary) and sought further information in respect of the level of Welsh Government funding received and the medium to long term financial impact on the Council. The Service Director, Finance & Improvement Services informed the Committee that the Council took timely action following Storm Dennis to register the unprecedented weather event under the Welsh Government's Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme and has received £1.697Million from Welsh Government to contribute to the short term response costs incurred. The Service Director went on to inform the Committee that work is on-going to assess the damage to the Council's infrastructure as a result of Storm Dennis and is engaging with both Welsh Government and the UK Government to pursue all options to secure the required additional funding. The Service Director added that this dialogue is currently on-going.

A further query was raised by Councillor Walker in respect of the projected revenue budget overspend for 'Safeguarding and Support (including Children Looked After)' on page 101 of the report. The Member noted that early intervention is a key priority and requested a breakdown of Children Looked After information on a ward-by-ward basis in order for the area to be reviewed in further detail. The Chair agreed with this request and noted that vulnerable adults need support as well as children looked after. The Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, Councillor R. Yeo, also noted that this matter had been discussed in a recent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board and that a recommendation was passed for it to be referred to the Children & Young

People Scrutiny Committee for review. The Chair and Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed with this recommendation.

Councillor Caple referred the Committee to page 92 of the report and the Council's investment into extra care facilities, and queried whether Covid-19 had caused delays to these projects. The Deputy Chief Executive informed Members that good progress had been made during quarter 4, in partnership with Linc Cymru, to enable the Maesffynnon extracare facility in Aberaman to open in May 2020. The Deputy Chief Executive went on to inform the Committee that progress continues to be made to deliver the extracare facility in Pontypridd, recognising that Covid-19 will have some impact in terms of progress, and that robust project management arrangements are in place to oversee the delivery of the scheme. The Deputy Chief Executive added that with regard to the development of an extracare facility in Porth, the process of considering options is currently on-going.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED** to note the Council's financial and operational performance position as at the 31st March 2020 (Quarter 4).

65 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee summarised the key points discussed and extended his thanks to Members and Officers for their attendance and for a constructive and challenging meeting.

This meeting closed at 4.23 pm

**Cllr M Adams
Chairman**