



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CABINET

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 21 May 2020 at 3.30 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Cabinet Members in attendance:-

Councillor A Morgan (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor R Bevan
Councillor A Crimmings	Councillor M Norris
Councillor J Rosser	Councillor R Lewis
Councillor C Leyshon	Councillor G Hopkins

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr G Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr P Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services

Others in attendance

Councillor M Adams
Councillor P Jarman

121 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor R. Lewis declared the following personal interest in Item 3 of the agenda: "My partner works for Public Health Wales".

122 Minutes

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 13th and 20th February 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meetings.

123 The Council's Response to COVID-19

The Chief Executive introduced the report, which sought to provide the Cabinet with an update of the action taken by the Council as a result of the COVID 19 national emergency; along with an opportunity to discuss the reopening of services in the future, when social-distancing and self-isolation become the new normal. In turn, each officer from the Senior Leadership Team provided the

Cabinet with a comprehensive update in respect of the work undertaken within their service area in response to the pandemic.

The Group Director, Community and Children's Services took the opportunity to thank staff, who had been remarkable in supporting the vulnerable people of RCT and were continuing to work with internal and external partners. The Group Director advised that the position had stabilised slightly but highlighted the pressure on Children's Services due to an increase in Children Looked After numbers and the potential pressures of coming out of lockdown, when many staff are self-isolating or shielding. In respect of PPE and testing, the Group Director advised that the Council continued to provide support to all providers, which was working well. Prior to concluding, the Group Director was pleased to announce that the new Maesyffynnon Extra Care Facility had recently opened despite the current circumstances.

The Director, Education and Inclusion Services took the opportunity to thank the headteachers and school staff for working together during the unprecedented time. It was advised that there had been an increase in vulnerable learners accessing the HUB settings. Members learned that the previous week, 420 children accessed the Emergency Childcare Provision, 120 of which were vulnerable learners. It was explained that the Hubs were open seven days a week and would be open during bank holidays and the half term break to meet the demand for essential workers. The Director announced that on 1st June 2020, an additional 12 hubs would be opened due to the rise in demand, taking the total to 25 hubs. In respect of Free School Meal provision, the Director advised that all of the 9300 eligible children were accessing direct payments. Furthermore, the Director spoke of the Community Meals services for the elderly, which saw 635 people accessing daily meals at their homes and a further 413 frozen meals delivered each week to shielded vulnerable individuals who are unable to cook for themselves.

The Director, Prosperity and Development spoke of the restructured highways and cleansing maintenance regime, which has allowed the Council to rise to the high level of waste and recycling produced across the Borough, whilst continuing to respond to the repercussions of February's floods. The Director went on to speak of the business support available, which was outlined within the 'Prosperity' section of the report. He continued by emphasising that the safety of the public remains paramount, but that there was an opportunity to build upon the 'shop locally' slogan and for more manufacturing to take place in the UK and more local.

The Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services informed the Cabinet that approximately 11,000 residents of RCT were currently on the shielding list and that 1300 of them had been registered to be in receipt of Welsh Government food parcels. Furthermore, additional support was being provided to residents through the Council's food distribution centre and the Community Meals service. The Director took the opportunity to praise staff and community volunteers, who had helped residents in need of support varying from dog walking to food shopping and retrieving prescriptions from the pharmacy. In respect of contact tracing, the Director informed Members that a number of teams were being set up within the region to help support the initiative and prevent further transmission of the virus.

The Director, Finance and Digital Services paid thanks to the IT and Digital Teams for their rapid response in ensuring that over 3000 staff had been digitally

equipped to work from home during the pandemic, which meant that much of the Council's key back office work had been uninterrupted. The Director advised that Council Tax support had been awarded to an additional 900 households since the end of March, along with Free School Meal entitlement to over 400 additional pupils and £38M support in the form of business grants to over 3000 businesses. It was stated that the estimated financial impact of the pandemic was costing the Local Authority approximately £4.5M per month, but that a detailed update would be provided to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication provided the Cabinet with an update on the use of virtual meetings for the Committee meetings of the Council. The Cabinet were informed that although this was the first formal meeting to take place virtually, informal meetings had taken place between the Group Leaders, Chairs and Vice-Chairs, along with an informal Planning Committee briefing, all of which had been a success. The Service Director advised that the intention was to hold the first formal meeting of the Planning Committee on 4th June 2020 via the Zoom application, followed by formal meetings of Scrutiny. The Service Director stressed that the incremental approach was supported by Members as it provides experience in using the application.

The Chief Executive concluded the update and stated that lessons had been learned from the past few months and that staff views were being sought to inform discussions in respect of future Council services and working arrangements.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank staff across all of the Council services and was pleased to note that the incremental roll out of virtual meetings had been well received by Elected Members and was confident in moving forward.

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development and Housing thanked officers for supporting businesses across RCT during the difficult time and questioned what measures had been put in place in readiness for the future opening of the town centres. The Cabinet Member was informed that a plan had been developed to ensure an increased number of shoppers would be able to undertake social distancing measures when visiting the town centres; that guidance would be placed within town centres; and that benches would be temporarily blocked or removed to discourage people congregating.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services was pleased to note that the Council's Community Recycling Centres would be reopening the following day, along with the two additional pop-up sites and asked what measures had been put in place to ensure Council staff are safe at the sites. The Cabinet Member was informed that each site would have two additional members of staff, one of which would be an Enforcement Officer; there would also be Civil Parking Officers at two of the sites; and there would be additional signage and social media posts to encourage residents to be respectful.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services and the Welsh Language acknowledged the dedication and commitment of staff to helping the most vulnerable in the community during such a difficult time. The Cabinet Member questioned what preparations were being made by the Council in the event of a second peak and rise in the number of cases in RCT. In response, the Group

Director advised that the Council has its own flexible resources, as well as good relations with providers and as such, following discussions were able to procure visors for staff in advance of the shift away from goggles.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services praised the staff within Children's Services for their rapid response and commitment to the children and young people within the Council's care and asked how the Council is utilising the hubs and working with schools to identify the young people most in need of support. The Cabinet Member was informed that a robust approach had been developed by Children's Services in conjunction with Education and Inclusion to ensure the vulnerable children had been prioritised. The Council were providing taxis for those who have an allocated social worker and support provided to those without allocated social workers where teachers had raised concerns for their wellbeing. In addition, approximately 3000 learners had been identified as 'digitally excluded' and as such, were being provided with suitable IT equipment in order to access the online learning.

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and Cultural Services thanked the Community Services staff, along with the vast amount of volunteers for their support in helping the most vulnerable in RCT. The Cabinet Member requested further information on the future reopening of the Council's libraries and the progression of the Track and Trace programme. The Cabinet Member was informed that the library service recovery plan included investment in self-service devices, along with proposals in respect of click and collect services and expanding the at home library service to help maintain the safety of the residents. In respect of Contact Tracing, the Director advised that the aim for going 'live' was the end of May and that the challenge for the coming week would be to train the redeployed staff with the guidance issued by Public Health Wales.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services wished to place on record his thanks to the IT staff for the quick delivery of equipment and training to over 3000 staff to ensure home working during the pandemic. The Cabinet Member questioned whether this was an opportunity for the Council to be more digitally led in the future. It was advised that the positive culture shift would be included in the Council's Digital Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services praised the staff in the quick delivery of the hubs, the additional Free School Meal payments and the recommissioning of IT equipment for the digitally excluded pupils. The Cabinet Member referred to Welsh Government's recent statement and questioned whether there were plans in place for the phased reopening of schools. The Director informed the Member that any phased reopening of schools would be steered by Welsh Government, however two recovery groups had been established to prepare the local approach to ensure the safety of both the staff and children and would be updated in line with the wider recovery plan.

The Leader wished to place on record his thanks to officers and in particular, the frontline staff for their continuous work during the February floods and the onset of Covid-19. The Leader spoke of the roll out of grants and informed the Cabinet that RCT had been praised by the Federation of Small Businesses for the quick turnaround. It was also stated that the Bevan Foundation had also praised the Council for the quick delivery of weekly BACS payments for those eligible for Free School Meals. The Leader went on to speak of staff working in a social care setting and how they had gone over and above to support vulnerable

residents under such stressful circumstances. Furthermore, he spoke positive of the quick establishment of the Emergency Childcare Provision, Emergency Hubs and the support of teaching staff to help key workers remain in work.

In respect of the financial position, the Leader advised that a significant amount of money had been set aside by Welsh Government to support Local Authorities but stressed that loss of income was a huge issue.

The Leader thanked officers for their work on the Test and Trace provision, commenting that it will be vital going forward. In respect of the 'R' (rate of infection) Number, it was suggested that it could be close to 1 in RCT and therefore, the Leader voiced his support to the cautious approach taken by Welsh Government to easing the lockdown.

With the agreement of the Leader, County Borough Councillors P. Jarman and M. Adams spoke on the item.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the action taken by the Council to date in response to the Covid 19 pandemic;
2. To request that a report estimating the potential financial impact of the Council's response to the pandemic is presented to the next Cabinet meeting; and
3. To request that further reports that set out how the Council plans to reopen key services and public areas such as town centres and transport hubs are presented to future Cabinet meetings.

124 The Leader's Scheme of Delegation

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication updated Members with the changes to the Leader's Scheme of Delegation and it was **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the contents of the Leader's Scheme of Delegation; and
2. To note that the Leader of the Council is able to amend the Scheme of Delegation relating to executive functions at any time during the year; and that an update of the 3A will be presented to Members at the next meeting of the Cabinet.

This meeting closed at 4.30 pm

**Cllr A Morgan
Chairman.**