



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 15 December 2021 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Powderhill (Chair)

Councillor S Trask	Councillor R Williams
Councillor G Hughes	Councillor M Powell
Councillor H Boggis	Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor S Bradwick	Councillor R Bevan
Councillor A Calvert	Councillor T Williams
Councillor A Crimmings	Councillor D Williams
Councillor G Davies	Councillor L De Vet
Councillor S Rees	Councillor J Elliott
Councillor S Evans	Councillor S Evans
Councillor M Forey	Councillor A Fox
Councillor M Norris	Councillor E Webster
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor A Roberts
Councillor G Holmes	Councillor L Walker
Councillor G Hopkins	Councillor P Howe
Councillor R Yeo	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor R Turner	Councillor G Thomas
Councillor A Morgan	Councillor M Adams
Councillor J Rosser	Councillor R Lewis
Councillor C Leyshon	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor W Owen	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor E Stephens	Councillor W Lewis
Councillor G Jones	Councillor W Treeby
Councillor W Jones	Councillor L Jones
Councillor L Hooper	Councillor J Harries
Councillor D Grehan	Councillor E George
Councillor H Fychan	Councillor J Williams
Councillor A Davies-Jones	Councillor J Davies
Councillor J Cullwick	Councillor A Cox
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor G Caple
Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Barton

Officers in attendance

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

94 Welcome & Apologies

The Presiding Officer welcomed everyone to the first hybrid Council meeting and announced those Councillors present in the Council Chamber as County Borough Councillors A Morgan, A Crimmings, G Caple, S Bradwick, R Williams, L M Adams, L Walker, J Davies, S Trask and L Hooper.

The following Officers were also present, Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive, Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services, Mr P Nicholls, Service Director Legal Services and Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services & Communications.

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Belzak, A Chapman, J James MS, K Jones, M Fidler Jones, K Morgan, D Owen-Jones, S Pickering, S M Powell, S Rees-Owen, G Stacey, M Tegg, M Weaver and M Webber.

95 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, a number of declarations of personal interests were made later during the meeting pertaining to the agenda (Minute Number 103 refers – Notice of Motion).

96 Announcements

- Cllr S Powderhill and Cllr C Leyshon paid tribute to Melissa Foster and Christina Prewitt on their pledge to litter pick for 365 days, starting on New Year's Eve 2020 and culminating on New Year's Eve 2021. It was announced that to date they have litter picked in many local areas such as Trallwn, Treforest, Hawthorn, Beddau, Glyntaff, Cilfynydd, Radyr, Castell Coch and Ogmere as well as locations further afield such as Windermere and Kendall. A request was made that a letter from the Mayor is sent to both Melissa and Christina to acknowledge their huge efforts.
- Cllr Sera Evans announced that Parc Primary School in Cwmparc has been awarded with the Foundation of Community Engagement's 'Heart of the Community award' and is the first school in Wales to achieve the accolade. The school has been supporting its students, families and community with activities such as baby massage classes, family and toddler sessions, community eco projects, visiting the local dementia group twice monthly, offering training opportunities as well as running community workshops and providing much needed food parcels. The School's Family Engagement Officer, Leanne Gough was awarded the 'Exceptional Community Champion' award which acknowledge her passion for the wellbeing of her pupils and families in Cwmparc. A request was made that a letter from the Mayor is sent to acknowledge the School's achievement.
- Councillor A Cox announced that the 'House of Hansen' based in Hannah Street, Porth has won 'Beauty Salon of the Year 2021' in the Welsh Hair and Beauty awards. It is a stalwart of Porth having traded for over 10 years and the business is also a training academy for

beauticians. Councillor Cox requested a letter be sent from the Mayor to the salon and to Stacey Hansen to acknowledge the award.

97 Minutes

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 24th November (3.30pm) as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

98 Statements

The Leader provided an update on the latest developments regarding Covid at a national and local level. He advised that a record number of cases, a total of 78,600 cases, had been recorded across the UK. A more stable situation had been recorded in Rhondda Cynon Taf over the last 7 days, although this would likely change over the coming weeks with a rapid increase in case numbers, particularly with the emergence of the new variant Omicron. To date there have been 3 confirmed cases of Omicron in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

The Leader formally thanked those officers from the local authority team for their involvement with the vaccine roll out programme, he added that the target of administering 50,000 vaccines per week has been supported by 105 council staff, a figure which would increase to between 140 and 150 staff in due course to support the NHS in view of new targets set by Welsh Governments.

The Leader reiterated the message to all those who have not yet received their first or second vaccine, that they can attend a Vaccine Centre without an appointment. With regards to the Booster vaccine, he stressed the importance of attending the allocated appointments as a large number of council staff have had to be redeployed to deal with the increased volume of calls from residents wishing to change/query their appointments. The Leader urged everyone to use the online facility where possible and in the case of all housebound residents, local GPs are organising house visits and so it is not an issue for the Council's call centre.

In conclusion, the Leader stressed that the new variant will lead to a large number of infections and could impact on staff shortages, particularly in the social care sector, which is always challenging. He added that further updates would be provided in due course.

99 Members' Questions

Members were advised that apologies of absence had been received from Councillors G Stacey and M Webber, Deputy Leader of the Council. The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications confirmed that question 6 would not be put to the Cabinet Member and written responses would be provided in relation to questions 5, 14 and 23.

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

"What preparations are CBS RCT making for the proposed introduction of Free School Meals for all primary pupils in Wales?"

Response from County Borough Councillor J Rosser:

Councillor Rosser advised that RCT catering services are currently reviewing the existing meal provision in each of the Council's primary and special schools by assessing the kitchen equipment and storage facilities in order to estimate the increase in meal numbers and the additional requirements for staff, equipment, storage and dining hall space. Councillor Rosser added that the Council has met with other Local Authorities, suppliers and Welsh Government representatives to discuss the challenges faced across Wales and is currently waiting for the detailed proposals, funding arrangements and timescales to be confirmed by Welsh Government in order for implementation work to begin.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor A Cox:

"Is the Council looking at the funding formulas internally and assessing whether it is the right funding for the service and assessing the benefits for the schools? Will the Cabinet Member join me in congratulating the work of campaigners who have fought long and hard for this to be adopted and to Plaid Cymru who have insisted on this as part of the agreement with Labour despite it being voted down in the Senedd?"

Response from County Borough Councillor J Rosser:

Councillor Rosser responded that the Council is waiting to receive further information regarding funding arrangements but gave assurance that everything would be assessed appropriately and in good time. She added that everyone is pleased with the result but added that without any guarantee of funding from UK Government it was the right decision to wait for the comprehensive spending review before making a commitment.

Councillor Rosser reminded Council that the Motion from Plaid Cymru called for *all* children, including those in private schools, to be given Free School Meals and it also called for all families in receipt of Universal Credit to be eligible but, it was completely un-costed and gave no recommendation of where the funding would come from. In conclusion, Councillor Rosser advised that this is an instance where, instead of looking to score political points, it represents a celebration of co-operation in Welsh politics and the positive changes it is making.

Question from County Borough Councillor G. Holmes to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

"The Welsh Government has announced that families on low income and qualifying benefits will receive £100 to help them with their utility bills this winter. Can the Council Leader provide further information on this and how many householders do we think will benefit from this in RCT?"

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader advised that the Winter Fuel Scheme went live on the Council's website on Monday this week and the scheme is for relevant benefit claimants to apply for £100 to help them with the cost of their utility bills this winter. He explained that the Council has written to around 15,400 households who currently claim support through the RCT Council Tax Reduction Scheme

(CTRS). There are also a number of other eligible households that claim a qualifying benefit but do not claim or qualify for CTRS and they too have the option to make a claim via the Council's website. Potentially it is currently estimated that there could be up to a further 15,800 households that will benefit from this support which means there are potentially 31,200 households in RCT who will be eligible for this payment, meaning £3.12m going directly to the poorest families in the County this winter.

The Leader reported that Officers are currently undertaking an exercise to try and better understand and identify who these households are so that the messaging from the Council can focus on them. In conclusion, the Leader urged Members encourage households to sign up for this support.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor G Holmes:

"There are many pensioners who live alone, finding life a struggle due to rising prices, could we lobby Welsh Government to get them further assistance?"

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

Councillor Morgan confirmed that this outside the scope of the fund but advised that currently Older Persons households are entitled to a Winter Fuel Allowance and those over 80 years old are entitled to a further uplift from Welsh Government. The Leader confirmed that he would raise this with Welsh Government Ministers as soon as possible.

Question from County Borough Councillor R. Williams to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A. Crimmings:

"Can the Cabinet Member update on recycling figures so far this year and confirm whether we are still on course to meet the Welsh Government targets?"

Response from County Borough Councillor A Crimmings:

Councillor Crimmings confirmed that the Council has statutory targets for recycling set by Welsh Government and this year's target is again 64% and failure to meet this can result in a fine of £200 for every tonne that the target is missed by. Councillor Crimmings added that the increased challenge over last 18 months has been delivering services during the pandemic and she wished to thank the staff for their dedication and commitment. Councillor Crimmings confirmed that the recycling performance for the year to date (April-October) was just over 69% (69.11%) which has exceeded the Welsh Government target, a considerable achievement by both the Council and RCT residents during the Pandemic.

Councillor Crimmings advised that last year's figures were the highest ever achieved by this Council and to have come so close to them during restrictions is testament to the resilience of staff and the collection processes. She advised that the next target for this Council is the 2024/2025 target of 70%, which, if it can be maintained and improved upon slightly, it will put the Council on course to continue to work towards meeting its aspiration of 80%. The impact of restrictions and severity of lockdown measures has mainly been managed by changing operational practices to meet the rules and guidelines to ensure services have been delivered safely both for staff and residents.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor R Williams:

“What more can be done to achieve the Council’s target of 80% in terms of communication with residents?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Crimmings:

Councillor Crimmings responded that despite excellent progress and efforts of residents, the Council is ambitious to achieve more. Recently, the festive recycling posts have been sent out on the Council’s social media accounts. Successful campaigns have also been run over recent years, both locally and as part of the regional “Be Mighty” campaign with other South East Wales Local Authorities. Councillor Crimmings advised that the Council plans to launch an awareness raising interactive campaign in 2022 to reinforce the need for residents to recycle as much as possible. In conclusion, the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services confirmed that the Authority continues to look at ways to reduce its carbon footprint, two recent examples include the new green waste sacks and recent trial of electric collection vehicle.

Question from County Borough Councillor G. Caple to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

“Will the Leader please make a statement on how this Council is working with Trivallis and other social housing providers to deliver environmental improvements?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader confirmed that the Council has worked closely with Trivallis over a number of years to identify adopted footways on their estates and other infrastructure improvements. In recent years the Council has received financial support from Trivallis which has been matched by Council funding to carry out improvements to estates in Penywaun, Cwmbach, Maerdy, Dinas, Cymmer, Trebanog and Tonyrefail. In addition, there has been close working on play area investment on Trivallis sites. The Council currently has an Enforcement/Awareness Warden (funded by Trivallis under an SLA) who deals with Environmental problems/crimes on their estates.

The Leader advised that the Council has additional Cleansing staff (2 FTE) undertaking additional cleaning on a number of Trivallis’ problematic estates. In addition, the Council regularly works with Trivallis to identify issues (particularly waste/fly tipping/etc) and coordinate resources to undertake clean-ups and respond to problems.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor G Caple:

“Can you expand on the financial benefits to both the Council and Trivallis with the resulting visible improvements for tenants and residents of former Council Estates, e.g. highways improvements on Rhiw Garn Estate, Trebanog?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader advised that it is important to maximise the benefits where the Council can work closely with Trivallis and he gave an example of when this has happened with improvements to the access of flats. In some cases, the Council has undertaken work which has fallen within the remit of Trivallis for environmental improvements but by adding them to the Council contracts when

it is already on site maximises the efficiencies for both the Council and Trivallis.

The Leader confirmed that he has undertaken site visits with Trivallis and Officers from the Local Authority to consider next year's programme of work. With regards to flooding improvements, the Leader advised that Trivallis has made financial contributions to improve flood assets to provide additional resilience to their properties. In addition to Trivallis, the Leader confirmed that close working continues with other Housing Providers.

Question from County Borough Councillor G. P. Thomas to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

"Can the Council Leader outline what bids have been and are planned to be made to the Welsh Government for upgrading culverts and flood alleviation schemes?"

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader advised that the Council's Flood Risk Management team is currently developing bids for numerous projects, and phases of major projects which will feed into the Welsh Government's timetable for grant applications for the 2022/23 financial year. Members were informed that the bids for these were submitted by the 10th December 2021. The team is looking at national pipeline schemes and have submitted schemes for the next three years. Years two and three will have further schemes added to them over time.

The Leader reported that significant funding has been received through the small-scale projects which includes projects up to £150K with many schemes already approved. A number of bids have been submitted for next year with further information being reported by Feb/March 2022 for the approvals, although all the bids submitted to date have been approved by WG.

With regards to the Resilient Roads Fund, which includes mainly highways drainage schemes, the Leader advised that many culverts have caused flooding on highways and also affect residential properties have been subject to individual grant bids totalling £8M of investment next year.

Following further flooding the Council continues to accelerate already challenging programme of FRM projects with a further 9 Small Scale Works bids submitted to Welsh Government. These were approved in November 2021 for 2021/22, generating another £480k of investment. This brings the current portfolio of FRM projects to 70 being delivered or developed in 2021/22. In conclusion, the Leader explained that these projects are likely to continue over the next 5-10 years.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor G Thomas:

"In relation to the recent Natural Resources Wales press release, urging people to check their flood risk, can you advise further should we receive requests from residents?"

The Leader explained that the recent NRW press release on the Council's website promoted the dedicated postcode checker on Natural Resources Wales's website where residents can check to see if they are at risk of particular types of flooding. From the Council's point of view, Cabinet

recently agreed to a Flood Enforcement Team and Flood Awareness and Support Officer who will engage with residents to advise them on mitigation issues in respect of flooding.

100 Council Work Programme 2021/22

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications confirmed that there were no changes regarding the adopted and published Council Work Programme 2021/22.

101 Diversity in Democracy

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented his report which sought Council's approval of the 'Diversity Declaration' as the formal pledge of the Council to becoming a Diverse Council. He reminded Members that at the Extra Ordinary Council meeting on the 26th May, 2021, Members took a decision to become a Diverse Council following consideration of a series of recommendations from the WLGA, supported by all Political Groups. RCT became the first Council in Wales to make the pledge.

The Service Director advised that Welsh Government has placed great focus on the diversity agenda and a number of recommendations have since arisen from the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy work which are being addressed through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Details were provided by the Service Director in respect of the Working Group established by the Democratic Services Committee to progress the matter and in the context of promoting participation and engagement in advance of the 2022 local government elections. In recognition of the work undertaken, it is proposed that the diversity declaration is adopted in recognition of the work and of the ongoing priorities as set out in the attached report.

Following consideration of the report and associated appendices it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Adopt the attached 'Diversity Declaration' subject to inclusion of the additional following point "to encourage participation in the Local Government Pension Scheme by all Members to assist in protecting them in their retirement" and take forward the declaration as the formal pledge of the Council to becoming a Diverse Council.

102 Annual Reports 2020/21

Through his report, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented the Annual Reports of the Democratic Services Committee and Audit Committee for the 202/21 Municipal Year. He added that both annual reports had been formerly approved by their respective Committees for presentation to Full Council.

Following comments by both the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee County Borough Councillor L Hooper and the Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr C Jones, it was **RESOLVED** to note the Annual Reports for the Democratic Services Committee and Audit Committee for the 2020/21 Municipal Year (subject to a typographical error being corrected on page 3 of the Democratic Services Annual report).

The following Notice of Motion was received standing in the names of: S. Bradwick, M. Forey, L. M. Adams, J. Barton, D. R. Bevan, H. Boggis, J. Bonetto, J. Brencher, A. Calvert, G. Caple, A. Crimmings, A. Davies-Jones, L. De- Vet, J. Edwards, J. Elliott, S. Evans, G. Jones, M. Fidler Jones, A. Fox, E. George, M. Griffiths, J. Harries, G. Holmes, G. Hopkins, R. Lewis, W. Lewis, C. Leyshon, A. Morgan, S. Morgans, M. A. Norris, D. Owen-Jones, S. Pickering, S. Powell, S. Rees, A. Roberts, J. Rosser, G. Stacey, M. Tegg, G. Thomas, W. Treeby, R. K. Turner, M. Webber, D. Williams, R. Williams, T. Williams, R. Yeo

Banks should be an essential service in our communities, giving residents convenient access to their finances and allowing them to take care of their affairs. They are often situated in the heart of our town centres, in close proximity to other vital facilities and shops.

The notice that Barclays are intending to close their branch at Victoria Square in Aberdare in March 2022 is the latest (potential) withdrawal of financial services from communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf and, should the plans go ahead, will have a detrimental impact, not just to our residents in accessing facilities, but also to the vibrancy of our town centres. The Council has worked hard to make our town centres attractive and welcoming hubs of the communities they serve, especially after the exceptional difficulties faced by local traders over the past 18 months.

Aberdare has already seen NatWest and HSBC withdraw their services from the town, whilst Treforest, Treorchy, Porth and Mountain Ash are among the other areas to have also seen banks close over recent years.

The assurances provided by Barclays that Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypridd are the closest services will be scant consolation to many, with both journeys taking between 40 and 50 minutes each way.

This Council wishes to record its opposition to the closure of Barclays Bank in Aberdare and resolves to:

- Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Head of Corporate Relations Wales and West and the Chief Executive of Barclays Bank to call for the plans to be reconsidered.
- Requests that the Council seeks to ensure that the social benefits of maintaining a local banking presence in our communities forms part of our future relationships with the banking sector.

At the meeting the Chair announced that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.4.1 the following amendment to the Notice of Motion had been received from County Borough Councillors P. Jarman, A. Cox, J. Williams, D. Grehan, G. Davies, J. Davies, J. Cullwick, K. Morgan, L. Jones, E. Stephens, S. Rees-Owen, M. Weaver, E. Webster, A. Chapman, S. Evans, H. Fychan and E. Griffiths.

The amended motion read:

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affairs. They are often situated in the heart of our town centres, in close proximity to other vital facilities and shops.

The notice that Barclays are intending to close their branch at Victoria Square in Aberdare in March 2022 is the latest (potential) withdrawal of financial services from communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf and, should the plans go ahead, will have a detrimental impact, not just to our residents in accessing facilities, but also to the vibrancy of our town centres. The Council has worked hard to make our town centres attractive and welcoming hubs of the communities they serve, especially after the exceptional difficulties faced by local traders over the past 18 months.

Aberdare has already seen NatWest, The Co-operative Bank and HSBC withdraw their services from the town, whilst Treforest, Treorchy, Porth and Mountain Ash are among the other areas to have also seen banks close over recent years.

The assurances provided by Barclays that Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypridd are the closest services will be scant consolation to many, with both journeys taking between 40 and 50 minutes each way.

This Council wishes to record its opposition to the closure of Barclays Bank in Aberdare and resolves to:

- Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Head of Corporate Relations Wales and West and the Chief Executive of Barclays Bank to call for the plans to be reconsidered.
- Requests that a joint report from the Chief Executive, the 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer be brought forward to Council addressing all matters relating to consideration of an option of changing our Bankers from Barclays.
- Requests that the Council seeks to ensure that the social benefits of maintaining a local banking presence in our communities forms part of our future relationships with the banking sector.
- To note the Welsh Government's announcement to develop and launch a new Community Bank of Wales headquartered in Wales, This Council further calls on Welsh Government to accelerate the establishment and roll out of Banc Cambria which aims to open High Street Branches in towns throughout Wales.

(Note: At this point during the proceedings and in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following personal declarations were made pertaining to the Notice of Motion:

- County Borough Councillor A Morgan: "I bank with Barclays Bank"
- County Borough Councillor G P Thomas: "I bank with at the Aberdare branch of Barclays Bank"
- County Borough Councillor G Hughes: "I bank with Barclays Bank"
- County Borough Councillor Sheryl Evans: "I bank with Barclays Bank"
- County Borough Councillor E George: "I bank with Barclays Bank"
- County Borough Councillor D Grehan: "I bank with Barclays Bank"

- County Borough Councillor G R Davies: “I bank with Barclays Bank”
- County Borough Councillor G Jones: “I bank with Barclays Bank”
- County Borough Councillor J Bonetto: “I bank with Barclays Bank”
- County Borough Councillor D R Bevan: “I bank with Barclays Bank”
- County Borough Councillor G Caple: “I bank with Barclays Bank”
- County Borough Councillor P Howe: “I bank with Barclays Bank”
- County Borough Councillor A Crimmings: “I bank with Barclays Bank”)

During discussions, and in respect of the amendment to the Notice of Motion, the Leader of the Council read the following statement in response to a query regarding the Council’s procurement processes in relation to Barclays Bank:

“We have a contractual relationship with Barclays to provide corporate banking services to the Council. The Contract does not include any provisions associated with mandating local branches.

- It would not be lawful to terminate a contract taking matters into account that are not directly linked with the contract. Only in the event of specific issues, for example the performance of the contractor, can termination clauses be instigated.
- There are currently no issues in respect of delivering this Contract that could instigate these events.
- The Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules mandate that Contracting Authorities conduct their procurement processes with openness, fairness and transparency. In the event that the Council tenders this contract in the future, it would not be lawful to blacklist or be seen to influence a contractual relationship on grounds and matters which are outside of the contractual provisions / services.
- Any future review of the Council’s banker will need to be undertaken with openness, fairness and transparency, and in compliance with the principles provided within the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules”.

There followed further discussion and in accordance with the Council’s Rules of Procedure 12.7, a vote was taken in respect of the amendment to the Notice of Motion and it was **RESOLVED** not to adopt the amendment.

(Note: The Plaid Cymru Group present wished to have it recorded as voting in favour of the amendment to the Notice of Motion: County Borough Councillors P Jarman, A Cox, J Cullwick, G R Davies, S Evans, H Fychan, D Grehan, E Griffiths, L Jones, E Webster and J Williams).

Following discussion in respect of the substantive motion and in accordance with the Council Rules of Procedure 12.7, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the substantive motion.

This meeting closed at 6.50 pm

**Cllr S Powderhill
Chairman.**

