



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 9 February 2022 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor G Hughes - Chair

	Councillor M Adams
Councillor J Barton	Councillor S Belzak
Councillor R Bevan	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor G Caple	Councillor A Cox
Councillor A Crimmings	Councillor J Cullwick
Councillor G Davies	Councillor L De Vet
Councillor S Evans	Councillor M Forey
Councillor A Fox	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor E George	Councillor D Grehan
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor J Harries
Councillor L Hooper	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 W Owen
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor M Powell
Councillor S Powell	Councillor S Rees
Councillor S. Rees-Owen	Councillor A Roberts
Councillor J Rosser	Councillor G Stacey
Councillor E Stephens	Councillor G Thomas
Councillor S Trask	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 R Williams
Councillor T Williams	Councillor R Yeo

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital 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 A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

121 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the hybrid meeting of the Council and apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A Chapman, J Davies, A-Davies Jones, J Edwards, J Elliott, S Evans, M Fidler Jones, M Griffiths, G Holmes, G Hopkins, S Pickering, S Powderhill.

The following Councillors and officers were present in the Council Chamber: County Borough Councillors A Morgan, R Bevan, A Crimmings, G Caple, W Lewis, C Leyshon, M Norris, S Rees, R Williams, M Powell, L Walker, E Stephens, S Trask and L Hooper.

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive, Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services, Mr A Wilkins, Director Legal Services and Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services & Communications.

122 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations made pertaining to the agenda were declared later in the meeting (Minutes 128 and 129 refer):

AGENDA ITEM 6 -STATE OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH DEBATE

County Borough Councillor S Trask - Personal – “My wife is employed by the NHS in Wales”.

County Borough Councillor J Barton - Personal – “I am a Chair of Governor of two schools in the County Borough”.

AGENDA ITEM 7 -MEMBER'S MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

County Borough Councillor A Morgan – Personal – “I have been leading some of the discussions as WLGA Leader”.

123 Announcements

Minute's Silence

The Deputy Presiding Officer led the Minute's silence in memory of former County Borough Councillor John Watts and the former Deputy Chief Executive Mr Steve Merritt, both of whom had recently passed away.

In memory of Mr Steve Merritt:

- The Leader paid tribute to Mr Steve Merritt through his role as former Chief Executive helping to shape and steer the Council through a difficult period and in his role as Finance Officer. The Leader described Steve as a true gentleman who had maintained his friendships following his retirement from the Council. On behalf of the Labour Group, he extended his condolences to Steve's family and colleagues on their loss.

- County Borough Councillor P Jarman recounted her memories of working with Steve Merritt who had worked his way up the ranks to senior management as Corporate Services Director until 2014 and Chief Executive until 2015. On behalf of the Plaid Cymru Group, Councillor Jarman wished to send her sincere condolences to Steve's family and friends.
- County Borough Councillor M Powell paid tribute to Steve Merritt and wished to pass on his condolences to Steve's family and friends.

In memory of former County Borough Councillor John Watts:

- The Leader of the Council remembered John Watt's passion for the Rhondda and his local community and mourned his loss to as a former County Borough Councillor who worked hard for the local residents. The Leader also paid tribute to a good friend and colleague, and he passed his condolences to John's family and friends.
- County Borough Councillor P Jarman remembered John's time as Mayor for the Council, chairing council meetings. On behalf of the Plaid Cymru Group, Councillor Jarman wished to pass on her condolences to John's family and friends.
- County Borough Councillor M Powell acknowledged John's professionalism as councillor and on behalf of the RCT Independent Group extended his condolences to John's family at this sad time.

Resignation of County Borough Councillor M Tegg:

- The Deputy Presiding Officer announced the resignation of County Borough Councillor Margaret Tegg due to ill health. He led the tributes to her followed by all the Group Leaders who paid tribute to Councillor Tegg individually. Councillor Tegg had served as a member of the authority from 2008 representing the Cymmer ward and was Mayor, representing the County Borough for the 2017 – 2018 Municipal Year. On behalf of all the political groups, the Group Leaders sent their best wishes to Councillor Margaret Tegg for her retirement.

Councillor W Treeby, Mayor for Rhondda Cynon Taf also paid tribute to Councillor Tegg, particularly in her role as former Mayor. Councillor Treeby wished Councillor Tegg a very happy retirement.

- County Borough Councillor L Walker announced that Ysgol Ty Coch, Tonteg had become overall winners for Secondary Schools, Safer Internet Day Film Competition 2022, run by Welsh Government. Whilst making their choice, the judges commented that "The film was full of fun, very engaging with a strong message" Councillor Walker requested a letter of congratulations is sent to the school from the Mayor.
- County Borough Councillor H Fychan wished to submit two petitions for the Pontypridd ward. The first, signed by 150 residents relating to a number of issues within Graigwen, Pontypridd, the second, signed by 109 residents calling on the Council to urgently address several issues affecting Berw Road, both historically and since the 2020 floods.

Councillor Fychan hoped the Council would work with residents to address these issues raised.

- County Borough Councillor J Harries, in his role as Reserve Forces and Cadets Representative for the Local Authority, announced that the combined cadet forces of Treorchy Comprehensive School, named Team Treorchy have set themselves the challenge to fundraise £16,000 for Wellchild by running the London Marathon in October 2022. The team consists of 11 members of the Treorchy Comprehensive School staff and others from the local community. The team will be led by Second Lieutenant Woodhouse and Second Lieutenant Wild and Lieutenant Morgan. Councillor Harries wished to send all Members the link to the fundraising page.

124 Minutes

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 19th January 2022 as an accurate reflection of the virtual meeting.

125 Statements

The Deputy Leader, County Borough Councillor M Webber announced that the Council has secured a post for a Heritage and Memorials Officer with interviews taking place next week. Councillor Webber referenced a book that was written by the children of Hawthorn School following the discovery of a plaque in St Mary's Church containing the names of those who had lost their lives in the First World War, 1914-18. It demonstrated the importance of recording the information that may otherwise have been lost.

Councillor Webber advised that the Council is supporting the installation of a new information lectern in the Cynon War Memorial Gardens, new flagpoles in Ynysyngharad war memorial park with the intention to do further work there with Heritage Lottery Funding. There are plans to do further cleaning work at Abercynon War Memorial and the Deputy Leader announced that in the Penrhiwceiber War Memorial, a specialist company from Derby reinstated the memorial clock.

Councillor Webber commented on the importance of the new appointment which will help to ensure the heritage sites, memorials and plaques are valued for the communities across RCT.

126 Members' Questions

Members were advised that due to the absence of County Borough Councillor S Rees-Owen, Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, question 4 would not be asked by County Borough Councillor G P Thomas.

Question from County Borough Councillor L. Walker to the Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services County Borough Councillor J. Bonetto:

"In view of the fact that Welsh Secondary schools are 25% under capacity, would the education department consider using this spare space for children

with special education needs in order to alleviate the overcrowding in special schools, as other local authorities in Wales run satellite classes in mainstream schools”.

Response from Councillor J Bonetto:

The Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services, Councillor Bonetto responded that in accordance with the outgoing SEN system and the new ALN legislation, the local authority continuously reviews the sufficiency of its SEN / ALN provision so that learners can access specialist placements appropriate to their needs without delay. She added that there are currently 44 Learning Support Classes across the County Borough, from Foundation Phase up to end of Key Stage 4, 4 special schools and 2 pupil referral units. All provisions are subject to regular review based on the analysis of current and projected needs of learners.

Councillor Bonetto advised that the Council responds proactively to any changing demand for learning support class placements by reconfiguring its Learning Support Class provision on a regular basis and, when necessary, seeks Cabinet approval to enhance the offer. Within the last few months, Cabinet has approved a proposal to consult on opening an additional LSC for Welsh medium learners with a significant ALN at Ysgol Garth Olwg in September 2022.

Councillor Bonetto commented that robust data analysis relating to trends in demand for placements in its special schools is also undertaken to ensure there is sufficient supply. Recent developments to enhance the capacity and improve the learning environments within our special schools include:

- Ty Coch has benefitted from **over £350k** to remodel and extend areas of the school to provide 2 additional classrooms, in addition, there was an investment of £550k for another large classroom. Planning permission has recently been approved to create two additional modular teaching spaces at Ysgol Ty Coch’s satellite base in Buarth Y Capel site and work on the site is due to commence shortly.
- Maesgwyn has recently received an investment of £600k to deliver internal and external improvements.
- Park Lane has received over £500k for refurbishment and maintenance works, as well as the creation of a larger teaching space which was completed last summer.
- Hen Felin has also benefitted from £200k for a classroom extension – which was completed last month – while internal works continue to deliver additional learning areas. New additional external storage room that has since been remodelled to a wellbeing hub at the school.

Supplementary question from County Borough Councillor L Walker:

“An 18-year-old wheelchair bound student in Ysgol Ty Coch, cannot access classes where he is being taught and is in classes with 4- and 5-year-olds. Does the Cabinet Member for Education find this acceptable in 2022 and what is she going to do about it?”

Response from County Borough Councillor J Bonetto:

The Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services advised that a written response would be provided following the meeting.

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

“Can the Leader please provide an update on how the Council is supporting colleagues in Health in the fight against the Omicron variant?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader responded by placing on record his thanks to Council staff in a number of departments who have been providing support to the NHS. Some working in the call centre dealing with a high call volume, taking bookings and reorganising appointments. Council staff have been working at the vaccination sites to meet and greet residents and signpost and to reassure people. Corporate Estates teams have been working across the three vaccination sites in RCT to adapt buildings internally and more recently assisting with outdoor marquees to protect residents queuing outside.

The Leader advised that staff from Leisure have gone over and above to support the pandemic, originally supporting the delivery of food parcels, helping with the community testing sites and training to become vaccinators to support the roll out of the booster programme. Across the board, many Council staff have supported the NHS to provide additional security for the vaccination sites and deal with anti-vaxxers.

The Leader confirmed that discussions will be held with the Leaders of Bridgend and Merthyr Councils together with their respective Chief Executives regarding the longer-term plans around whether further boosters will be required and whether the current vaccination sites can return to their former use. The Leader provided assurance that the support will continue to be provided to the Health Board where necessary although he hoped that the steady improvement would continue with far fewer positive cases and deaths being recorded and returning to common sense approach rather than restrictions.

No Supplementary Question

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

“Whilst Aberdare has been fortunate to get funding from RCT for a BMX track and Gravity Family Bike Park would the Cabinet Member say what RCTCBC has done to date to provide similar facilities in Pontypridd please?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Crimmings:

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A. Crimmings acknowledged that Councillor Powell had previously raised and confirmed that the Ynysangharad War Memorial Cabinet Committee have considered this previously. Councillor Crimmings advised that the area proposed by Councillor Powell, namely the site of the former day centre, was considered unsuitable for the type of activity and there were further safety concerns regarding its close proximity to the riverbank and she understood that Officers are awaiting detailed proposals from Councillor Powell, having supplied him with the necessary considerations in taking this forward.

Councillor Crimmings commented that the Council is not aware of any local demand for such a facility, as there was in Tonyrefail and Aberdare, however confirmed that Pontypridd has benefitted from a brand new, Council-owned leisure facility at Llys Cadwyn and has invested significantly to improve Ynysangharad War Memorial Park – firstly through the Valleys Regional Park programme funding, which saw footpaths and lighting upgrades which has been welcomed by local residents. Recently, work has started on the £1.9m Heritage Lottery Fund project, which will see improvements such as the Bandstand and Sunken Gardens. In addition to this, the Council has recently invested in outdoor fitness equipment and some of this is sited at YWMP.

With regard to the National Lido of Wales, which has seen a tremendous amount of work and investment, Councillor Crimmings advised that it has just enjoyed its most successful season since re-opening, despite the difficulties of the last two years.

Supplementary Question from County Borough Councillor M Powell:

“Why is Pontypridd being treated differently to other areas in the County Borough?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Crimmings:

Councillor Crimmings advised that Ynysangharad Park and Pontypridd in general has received significant investment, in the region of £10 million within Ynysangharad Park. She suggested that the Councillor meet with the groups he referred to earlier, to bring forward their ideas and suggestions as many other councillors have done, to discuss the proposals with the Council Officers.

Question from County Borough Councillor D. Williams to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

“How is the Council supporting low-income households to meet the pressures of increasing household fuel costs during the winter?”

Response from County Borough Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader commented that this is a timely question. The suggested impact on families as the Energy crisis continues means the average energy bill will rise by £693 annually after a 54% increase to the price cap. The changes will take effect in April and impact around 22 million households across the UK. He advised that these price rises come hand-in-hand with other rises in the cost of living, through

higher taxation and rising costs of food and other essential items with a further potential increase expected in utility bills in October this year.

The Leader advised that the Council has promoted social media campaigns to encourage residents to sign up to the Welsh Government's Winter Fuel Payment Scheme originally launched as a payment of £100 and Welsh Government announced that the one-off payments were doubling to £200. It is estimated that £3million has been paid out to date, helping the local economy. There are more families to reach who qualify for the payment and the Leader urged residents to apply.

The Leader referred to the recent announcement by UK Government regarding the £175m, which had been followed by a statement from UK Government Treasury. He explained that the amount is offset by cuts to Welsh Government budget at end of year spending which means that there is no additional funding available to Wales.

No Supplementary Question

Question from County Borough Councillor H. Boggis to the Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, County Borough Councillor M. Powell:

"Can the Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee please make a statement on the priorities of the Committee?"

Response from County Borough Councillor M. Powell:

Councillor Powell commented that, as Chair, the key priority is to provide members of the committee with the opportunity to drill down on various aspects of the financial performance of the authority. He added that the committee has the advantage of having the Chairs of all the Scrutiny Committees as members of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee which does bring with it some crossover into the remit of other scrutiny committees. Councillor Powell concluded that the priorities are a matter of public record for the portfolio of the Scrutiny Committee.

No Supplementary Question

127 The Council Work Programme 2021/22

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications advised that the subsequent meeting of the Council would be the last scheduled meeting in advance of the Local Government Elections 2022. The business will include the Budget Strategy and the setting of Council Tax, the Revised LDP the Council's Pay Policy and there will be opportunity for Members to place on record their thanks to those Members not seeking re-election in May 2022.

128 STATE OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH DEBATE

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13.2 the Deputy Presiding Officer stated that he had allocated 45 minutes for the item and would invite the Leader to address Council following which the Leader would respond to Members'

comments on his Annual Report.

The Leader advised that each year his annual summary is delivered to full Council outlining what the Council has achieved over the last year and sets out what it wants to achieve moving forward.

The Leader advised that once again, this year's update is shaped by the effects and restraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, as previously mentioned in the meeting and services that have had to adapt and have gone above and beyond their roles such as Leisure Services and Finance staff who have paid out tens of millions in business support grants and supporting families. He added that as Members will be aware, that the vast majority of council services have continued to operate, albeit in a different guise and the Capital Investment has continued where investment is evident across the county borough.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

The Leader advised that this is the one area where there is growing and increased demand and the service which requires significant sums of investment by the local authority, in-year and in the forthcoming budget but has also been well supported by Welsh Government. The Leader referred to the Welsh Government £50m in-year funding to support the pressures in Social Care. The Leader stated the number of new cases opened over the last 12 months amounts to almost 7,000, from residents asking for support. The Leader expressed his thanks to all staff within this and the independent sector and he acknowledged the real team effort within this sector to ensure that the appropriate care has been on hand at all times, at times from across all sectors supporting colleagues isolating with covid-19. He added that at times it has been difficult for staff to always manage the pressures within the social care sector and some need has been unmet, as with all local authorities, but he assured all Members that the teams have and are working exceptionally hard for long hours and are doing their very best to meet the needs of residents.

The Leader referred to the support available to enable residents to remain in their own homes through services such as Care and Repair and Disabled Facilities Grants which have continued to be delivered through working with private sector business and builders to ensure that access to homes has continued safely.

With regards to Extra Care/Supported Accommodation, the Leader advised that the Council is continuing to make good progress in modernising the care system provided for older residents in the County; Cwrt yr Orsaf Extra Care Housing scheme in Pontypridd has been completed and the new Extra Care Housing scheme in Porth has now commenced.

Overall, the investment to develop further Extra Care will be a priority for the Council moving forward as the local authority looks to provide a model of care which can respond to the needs and aspirations of future older generations. The Leader referred to the Stay Well @ Home service which continues to help people remain in their own homes and leave hospital as soon as possible, with the biggest efforts preventing people entering hospital in the first place with the right support in place.

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Leader advised that Children's Services is a service area under significant pressure which has, and continues to be a priority and has received additional funding from Welsh Government across Wales of £21M. Staff have continued to work exceptionally hard, maintaining their face-to-face work with the most vulnerable families throughout the pandemic. This support often goes unnoticed, but this area of service delivery is one of the most important we provide, an area which will always be prioritised and supported. The Leader referred to the Resilient Families service which continues to provide support for families.

Likewise, the Leader referred to the YEPS Service which have been delivering street-based youth work across RCT to ensure young people have access to information advice and support. In the last 12 months they have undertaken 570 evening sessions resulting in 15,577 contacts. Two youth service vehicles have been introduced this year, supporting the delivery of mobile youth provision and youth work activities and interventions in community settings. A third vehicle is due to be on the road by the end of the financial year which has been well received by young people as a place to access Wi-Fi and speak to staff in confidence.

Work continues to embed new roles and responsibilities and the YOS has recruited 4 new youth justice workers to enhance service provision. Current priorities include responding to increased levels of complexity regarding children's needs, including those affected by early years trauma and to create stronger links with other services such as YEPS and Youth Services. A restorative justice session is carried out with 131 referrals between April and December 2021.

COMMUNITY HUBS

The Leader acknowledged the earlier success of the Community Resilience Hubs which continue to provide a focal point for resident support. This continues to be supported by the Community Support Steering Group established during the Lockdown with the delivery of prescriptions, food, dog walking services and supporting those residents isolating. Significant levels of support have been provided to the four main Trussell Trust Foodbanks in RCT including £22,000 in cash funding, £6,000 in bulk buying stock via RCTCBC procurement, volunteer recruitment, help with local deliveries & 2 venues provided including support to FastTrack relocation of Pontypridd Foodbank into a surplus Council establishment.

LEISURE

The Leader advised of the transfer of Hawthorn School Swimming Pool back to Leisure Operations and discussions are taking place regarding the Maerdy/Ferndale Community School in re-opening its swimming pool. The investment in outdoor fitness equipment currently sited at Ynysangharad War Memorial Park and Dare Country Park. The Leader also announced plans for a 14th 3G pitch to be constructed on the Baglan Field in Treherbert – completion of this scheme will mean residents have access to a 3G facility within a 3-mile radius of wherever they live.

PARKS & PLAY AREAS

The Council has continued to improve children's play areas right across the county borough and by the end of this financial year, 164 projects will have been upgraded or renewed, with 20 projects in the current year. At Ynysyngharad Park in Pontypridd, Valleys Regional Park investment of £1.2 M has successfully been delivered to upgrade paths and lighting and install a changing places facility at the Lido Visitor Centre. This is being closely followed with a further £2M investment supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund which will deliver a new community training hub and upgrade key features such as the Bandstand area and Sunken Garden

RECYCLING/WASTE SERVICES

The Leader announced that the Council recorded its best ever recycling figures for the Festive period, with over 2,500 tonnes collected – including over 600 tonnes of food waste and nearly 5,000 Christmas trees were collected.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Leader advised that 105 Solar Panel arrays have been installed across Schools and Corporate Buildings, as the council continues to address its carbon footprint. The Council has 21 Hydrogen Fuel Cells throughout RCT installed in a leisure centre, schools and offices. He added that reducing the Council's energy consumption and looking at green energy options will be a priority in this year's budget with a further £500K revenue allocation in addition to the £1.5M capital allocation.

STORM DENNIS UPDATE

The Leader advised that significant progress has been made and by the end of this financial year over 100 schemes will have been delivered across the county borough, many are first phase schemes, to be followed by second and third phases. Completion of Flood Resilience works to the A4059, completion of culvert upgrade to Bronallt Terrace, Abercwmboi, completion of Highway Drainage upgrade to Pentre Road, Pentre, completion of Flood Alleviation works to Canal Road, Cwmbach and in Rhigos Road.

In terms of storm damage to bridges, the Leader provided an update on the design of major repairs such as the replacement to Castle Inn complete with scheme and currently out to tender with works due to commence late Spring 2022. The Feeder Pipe Bridge, Abercynon completed with replacement scheduled for Summer 2023.

With regards to Coal Tip safety, the Leader advised that Tylorstown Tip Phase 4 application planning consultation commenced and is due to be completed later in February with studies ongoing to assist in the longer-term consideration of Standard Colliery and National Tips, using new equipment provided by Welsh Government. The Leader referred to the approved establishment of a dedicated Coal Tip Safety team consisting of 6 new posts; together with £200k revenue budget for maintenance which means an overall investment of almost £0.5m per

year. The Leader commented on the major capital investment work which has been carried out will give residents more confidence with more work needed to ensure the ordinary water courses will reduce the amount of flooding.

With regards to river flooding, the Leader advised that NRW continues to work closely with the local authority, to discuss progress following Storm Dennis with remodelling work being carried out on the River Cynon, Taff and Rhondda to assess what interventions can be made.

TOWN CENTRES/ENTERPRISE

The Leader paid tribute to the RCT officers who have made payments of over £80M in Emergency Business Support Grants provided by WG and Business Wales during periods of Covid lockdown and restrictions to business trading, often working extended hours to ensure that the payments reach businesses as quickly as possible. This includes a further £7m under the current round of funding which is underway.

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

The Leader extended his thanks to the teaching staff and school-based staff for their support and commitment during this time in continuing to provide safe and continued learning environments for RCT children. Schools have continued to drive strategic improvements despite the obvious challenges of the pandemic. Positive feedback was provided by Estyn in a recent meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive.

The Group Leaders each responded to the Leaders debate, all paying tribute to the NHS, Council staff, School and Childcare staff, retail and voluntary sectors and many more for their hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic.

Councillor Jarman referred to the last 12 months which has been difficult time for many families with the increase in the cost of living, families who are already living in food, fuel and water poverty. With the rising cost of domestic fuel, the lower take-home pay caused by the increase in National Insurance in April and the present rising cost of inflation and staple food, Councillor Jarman feared that the situation would be catastrophic for many families but she considered that the Free School Meals for all Primary children which was part of the budget agreement made by Plaid Cymru in agreement with WG, as part of the co-operation agreement, would help the fight against child poverty to some extent.

Each of the Group Leaders proposed questions to the Leader on the following to which the Leader responded.

Tip Categories list released by WG– The Leader responded that WG is hoping to publish the list by the summer but emphasised the importance of fully evaluating the risks from the tips important to understand whether there are properties, highways and is there any risk to life, based on the modelling and assessments. WG want to make sure the information is worthwhile for residents.

Emergency Cost of Living Action Plan – The Leader gave an absolute assurance that, while he remains Leader of the Council, that there should be a cross party agreement to support this going forward.

Pontypridd is to lose its Sixth Form provision when other areas are to retain

theirs and there seems to be a lack of direction from council officers in this area, despite Pontypridd providing the largest contribution to the Council Tax – The Leader spoke of five Sports Centres in the former Taff Ely area compared with only two in the Cynon Valley and three in the Rhondda and added that Council Tax is a collective contribution. He advised that investment is fair across the whole of the county borough and is allocated on the basis of need. The town centre investment in Pontypridd is significant, the feedback from traders is positive, the indoor market is thriving, and discussions are ongoing regarding further investment and development. The Leader referred to Ynysangharad Park as the jewel in the town's crown.

Updated timescales regarding the Metro project–The Leader provided an update on the Metro, with completion 9-12 months later than planned due to Covid-19. He advised that work is currently ongoing in the Mountain Ash area and will be starting on the stations this year in the Rhondda and work to the stations is also ongoing with all the contracts let. He advised that the trains are being manufactured with no delays to this part of the work. He advised that an announcement is due within the next 4-6 weeks on some significant acceleration to the work.

A4119 Dualling – The Leader confirmed that funding has been made available to accelerate the work in this area. With the private sector and potential funding from City Deal there will be expansions to the Coed Ely Industrial Estate where one modern Business Unit is already occupying the premises and will employ more than 30 people at the site.

Junction 34 roundabout is a barrier to investment in that part of the Rhondda and Pontypridd – The Leader advised that this comes under the jurisdiction of the Trunk Roads Agency but there is a study underway to consider the M4 to reduce some of the pressures along that route.

The Presiding Officer opened up questions to all Members and advised that he would take three questions at a time.

What will be the biggest challenge for the local authority after May and for whoever is the Leader of this authority – The Leader advised that the priority for the Council would be to address the potential for increases in child poverty through the community for work teams who support residents looking for employment which is key to helping people out of poverty. Paying staff well is also crucial hence all of the Council's contracted adult independent social care workers, as well as all direct payment recipients, have been paid at least the Real Living Wage by December 2021. More recently, the Council agreed to pay a minimum rate of pay above the Real Living Wage – increasing this level to £10 per hour from April 1, 2022. Tackling Climate Change is also key as the Council is mindful how it can reduce its carbon footprint. The Leader commented that RCT is a great area for starter businesses but there is a need to encourage them to grow and create jobs.

Dropped kerbs for disabled residents and those who use scooters across the county borough– The Leader confirmed that the budget is approximately £40k but he asked all Members with these queries to provide information for the specific situation in their respective wards.

How can this local authority, working with WG and UK Government support the poorest communities who are being affected by the cost-of-living crisis? – The

Leader explained that the Council has now exceeded this administration's ambition to create 150 apprenticeship and graduate programme positions. We currently stand at 187 and we are currently recruiting 21 Graduates – taking the total to over 200 by the end of this term. Continuing work through job clubs and communities for work to support residents. The Leader referred to the numerous community groups such as the Paddling Pool Group in Penrhiwceiber, who can help the communities around them.

Scheme in Penrhys – The Leader advised that it is for Trivallis, as the Estate owner, to confirm their position but the Council has given a capital commitment to build a new school on the estate. The estate is not sustainable long term.

The Council's engagement – Recently the Council carried out online consultation on the pre planning application for stage 4 Tylorstown Tip, on the national cycling networks and on the parking and traffic orders in place of face-to-face consultations. The Leader urged all Members to engage with the Budget consultation process as the online process provides the opportunity to provide their views.

Cycling route in the Rhondda Fawr - The Leader advised that there is no safe way to provide an off-highway route through the Rhondda Fawr but there are potential bids to WG for this financial year, in the Treorchy area, Ystrad Park and bidding for additional funding for Brook St. Bridge. He encouraged the local member to engage with Council Officers.

UK/Wales specific Covid Inquiry –The Leader advised that he would be unsure as to how a UK covid enquiry would appear from a Welsh perspective but added that as WLGA Leader he would be expected to give evidence on behalf of Wales. He added that much information has already been shared and regular updates were provided by the Health Board regarding hospital infections. He stressed the importance that the terms of reference for any inquiry needs to answer the points raised by the public.

Footpaths – The Leader agreed that improving the access is crucial and looking at the periphery links. He asked the local Member to send in the specific of the query.

Credit to the Leader/Cabinet and Council Officers – The Leader confirmed the high level of capital investment in schools, improving highways, Extra Care facilities also benefits the local economy. The spend in RCT was praised by the Bevan Foundation as it's spend benefits not only the local residents but also the region and the county.

Longer term funding for Schools- The Leader confirmed the Freedom of the County Borough free events in Rhondda, Cynon and Taff to celebrate the efforts of key workers and to reflect on the effects the pandemic has had on the county borough.

Activities for Young people in Pontypridd – The Leader confirmed that the Youth Service has been using Ynysangharad Park and Pontypridd Rugby Club and the YEPS hub vehicle attends regularly in Pontypridd to engage with young people.

Section 19 Reports – The Leader explained that the Section 19 reports set out the statutory roles, in terms of the river flooding this comes back to the modelling. He advised the need to await all three models, (approximately

another 18 months) which need to be considered together. He explained that this is being done far quicker than ever before and the modelling is addressed is far improved.

What areas have been deprioritised in the last year? –The Leader explained that no area has been deprioritised, but the Council has maintained the core capital budget. He added that it is a balance and investments are prioritised according to competing demands and needs.

Investment in Children’s Play areas – The Leader explained that every play area has a play value according to a rag rating with a red, amber and green status. The service is trying to eliminate as many red and amber play areas as possible.

A465 Dualling – The Leader requested that the local Member contact him following the meeting so that it can be pursued with WG officials.

In conclusion, the Leader wished to acknowledge all council staff for their efforts over the last 12 months and their continued efforts to maintain the social care provision, in ensuring that care homes are staffed, that children’s homes are staffed and that the efforts of all our staff continue to be recognised.

The Presiding Officer thanked the Leader for his debate and responses to Members.

129 Member's Memorandum of Understanding

The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications presented his report which sought to provide Council with a draft Member's Memorandum of Understanding, developed by the Democratic Services Committee, for endorsement and adoption. The Memorandum seeks to support the ambitions of the Council to promote diversity in democracy, promote high standards of behaviour and mutual respect between Members.

The Council's Standards Committee considered and supported the draft MOU at its November meeting and were supportive of the principles included and its intended benefits. It's considered its adoption would strengthen standards and ethical arrangements within the Council and would support and sit alongside the Council's Code of Conduct for Members, the Standards of Conduct Expected by Members Local Resolution Policy and Member-Officer Protocol.

The Service Director advised that the MOU would, subject to Council's agreement, form the basis of the 'Become a Councillor' activities and events to be held on the 2nd and 3rd March 2022.

With regards to the Fair & Respectful Election Campaign Pledge, the Service Director advised that all Members are asked to support a statement of principle with the content of the RCT specific pledge to be agreed by the Democratic Services Committee at its subsequent meeting (with invitation to be extended to Groups Leaders or their nominated representatives). It is proposed that the pledge would then form part of material provided to successfully nominated candidates by the Council's Electoral Services department and also promoted by the Council.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To adopt the draft 'Memorandum of Understanding' ('MOU'), developed by the Democratic Services Committee and attached at Appendix A, following commendation by the Council's Standards Committee in order to encourage further mutual respect and a show of working together by Members for the benefit of their communities; and
- (ii) That as part of adopting this MOU, Council commits to supporting a Fair & Respectful Election Campaign Pledge, and delegates responsibility to the Democratic Services Committee to agree its content.

This meeting closed at 7.28 pm

**Cllr G Hughes
Chairman.**