



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 24 January 2024 at 2.00 pm.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

**County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present:**

Councillor A Morgan (Chair)

Councillor M Webber    Councillor A Crimmings  
Councillor R Lewis    Councillor C Leyshon  
Councillor M Norris    Councillor B Harris

**Officers in attendance**

Mr P Mee, Chief Executive  
Mr B Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services  
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services  
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Ms L Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services  
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources  
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development  
Mr S Williams, Director for Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services  
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services  
Mr N Elliott, Director of Social Services  
Ms L Howell, 21st Century School Organisation and Business Manager  
Ms L Kidner, Business Manager, Catering

**95 Welcome and Apology**

The Leader welcomed attendees to the Cabinet meeting and an apology for absence was received from the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care.

**96 Declaration of Interest**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, the following personal declarations were made in respect of Item 8 of the agenda - Review of the Welsh Church Act Fund:

- Leader - "A number of organisations I'm involved with have benefited from the Fund";
- Deputy Leader – "The group I chair has been a recipient of the Fund";
- Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure - "A group I am involved with is a recipient of the Fund";
- Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity - "A group I am involved with is a recipient of the Fund"; and
- Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language -

"I am a Governor at YGG Abercynon".

**97 Minutes**

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

**98 Pre-Scrutiny Committee Feedback**

For information, the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication provided Cabinet with the feedback and comments of the items that were pre-scrutinised by the Council's thematic Scrutiny Committee's following its last Committee cycle.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the comments and observations of the Scrutiny Committees following pre-scrutiny of the items listed within section 5 of the report.

**99 Continuation of free Breakfast Club provision in Primary and Special Schools with the introduction of a charge for the additional childcare element**

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised Cabinet on the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of a proposal to introduce a charge for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision in primary and special schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, noting eligible Free School Meal (eFSM) pupils would be exempt from any charge.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language thanked the officers for the report and thanked the respondents to the consultation.

The Cabinet Member recognised that the Cabinet were considering the proposal because of the significant financial challenges faced by the Council. The Cabinet Member noted that the proposals before the Committee would maintain access to a free breakfast for all pupils; and that any additional income to be generated would be ring fenced and reinvested back into school budgets as part of the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to note that eFSM pupils would be exempt from the proposed charge and emphasised that the most vulnerable in the community would be protected if Cabinet were to agree to the recommendations. The Cabinet Member also welcomed the recommendation in response to the consultation to agree a further category of concession whereby parents/carers would only pay for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision.

In respect of the consultation responses, the Cabinet Member noted the strong feedback in respect of many parents/carers' circumstances, whereby they may wish to access the childcare element, pre-the school day, for part of the working week only. The Cabinet Member questioned if it would be feasible to introduce a second option as part of the proposal, which would be a second charge for up to three days only. The Cabinet Member sought advice from the Director and if feasible, stated that he would be minded to propose an addition is made to

recommendation 2.2, subject to comments of other Cabinet Members. The Director echoed the Cabinet Member's comment that this was an emerging theme from the consultation responses and advised that the suggestion could be explored if Members were in agreement.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for its comments and feedback in respect of the proposals. In terms of the consultation, the Deputy Leader recognised the concerns expressed by parents through the consultation process, in respect of the additional financial cost that the proposal would introduce. The Deputy Leader explained that this was an area of support provided above what was originally intended, when free school breakfasts were introduced, and an area where a charge is already applied by a number of Local Authorities. It was noted that other Local Authorities, due to the decrease in Public Sector funding, were also currently consulting upon such proposals. The Deputy Leader was of the view that in comparison to the charges for child care, the cost proposed was reasonable.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure acknowledged the difficult decision faced by the Cabinet but stated that it was necessary in the current financial circumstances. The Cabinet Member questioned how the Council would ensure consistency as part of any implementation and access to the same level, or time, or childcare for the £1 charge.

The Director advised that officers would work with schools and partners due to the variations within the current breakfast clubs offer, in terms of the start and finish times. The Director recognised that, if approved by Cabinet, the offer would need to be equitable across the system.

The Leader commented that the consultation had demonstrated that the price cap for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision, was the correct way forward. Similarly, the Leader noted that those eligible for FSM under the old criteria would be exempt from the charge was also welcomed in the consultation.

In terms of the amendment to recommendation 2.2 as proposed by the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language, the Leader was in support of a two-tiered charging system and suggested an option for parents/carers to access the provision for up to three days per week only at a term time fee of £40. The Leader acknowledged that it would be too difficult to offer a daily charge but felt the two-tiered approach would be fairer in response to the consultation feedback.

Members were content with the amendment to recommendation 2.2 of the report and the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication confirmed the following wording:

- ***2.2 - To the preferred fee of £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision, to be implemented from the start of the spring term 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter; and to confirm the ability to access this provision for up to three days per week only, at a term time fee of £40.***

The Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the information contained within the attached Consultation Report, which includes feedback received from the online surveys,

emails and letters, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and the frequently asked questions posted on the Council's website;

2. To the preferred fee of £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision, to be implemented from the start of the spring term 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter; and to confirm the ability to access this provision for up to three days per week only, at a term time fee of £40;
3. That eFSM pupils should be exempt from the proposed charge and agree a further category of concession whereby parents/carers would only pay for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision;
4. That the additional income to be generated is ring fenced and reinvested back into school budgets as part of the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy; and
5. To delegate authority to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to undertake and conclude the necessary actions to implement the decision of Cabinet.

#### **100 Proposal to develop a new Special School in Rhondda Cynon Taf**

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised Members of the outcome of the recent publication of a Statutory Notice in respect of the proposal to open a new 3 to 19 special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language was pleased to note that there were no objections to the proposed new 3 to 19 special school and the introduction of catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the acute pressures faced by the Local Authority with regard to special school placements and welcomed the proposals before Members. The Cabinet Member concluded by stating that he looked forward to receiving a future Treasury Management report to the Council and the outcome of the bid for Welsh Government funding.

The Deputy Leader echoed the Cabinet Member's comments and welcomed the next steps in the process.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note that no objections or comments were received in response to the publication of the Statutory Notice to progress the proposal;
2. To implement the proposal with no amendments; and
3. That an update to the Council's borrowing envelope is included in a future Treasury Management report to Council when costs are known and Welsh Government funding is secured.

#### **101 Council Fees and Charges Proposals 2024-2025**

The Service Director of Finance and Improvement Services set out:

- The proposed revisions to Council fees and charges levels for the 2024/25 financial year to be consulted on as part of phase 2 of the 2024/25 budget consultation process (with the proposed revisions to be effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter);
- Details of fees and charges decisions previously approved and to be included in the 2024/25 proposed Budget Strategy; and
- A proposed update to the Council's Street Trade License Scheme and proposed arrangements around the implementation of future changes to the maximum level of weekly charge for non-residential care services, as determined by Welsh Government.

The Leader thanked the Service Director for the report and commented that the proposed fees and charges detailed before the Committee were relatively fair. The Leader explained that in some areas, they had sought to ensure the full cost was not passed on. As an example, the Leader noted that the approximate 14% general increase in food costs would see the current cost of school dinners increase by around 30-35p, but the proposed increase was 15p. In respect of car parking costs, the Leader advised that there had been lobbying from the public for the Council to introduce card payments, but in order to balance the cost of the new offer, a small increase of 10p had been proposed. In relation the proposed 25p Lido booking fee, the Leader advised that with each booking, there is a transactional fee for the Council but when thousands of individuals book and fail to attend, the Council were incurring a charge. The Leader advised that the 25p fee would offset the charge going forward.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services was pleased to note that 82.3% of respondents to phase one of the consultation were in agreement with the approach the Council takes to introducing fees. The Cabinet Member was pleased with the balanced approach to fees and charges, which she was of the view, took into consideration the financial situation of residents.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider proposed revisions to Council fees and charges for the 2024/25 financial year along with new proposed charges;
2. For the fees and charges proposals (as set out at paragraphs 5.3.1 to 5.3.21 of the report) to be consulted on through phase 2 of the Council's 2024/25 Budget Consultation process and reported back to Cabinet for consideration as part of formulating a recommended Budget Strategy for 2024/25;
3. To note the fees and charges decisions previously approved and to be included in the 2024/25 proposed Budget Strategy (paragraph 5.10 / Table 2 of the report);
4. To note the proposed update to the Council's Street Trade License Scheme to be considered by the Council's Licensing Committee on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and, subject to the Committee's approval, for the estimated additional income generated to be incorporated within the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy; and
5. To note Welsh Government's responsibility in setting the maximum level of weekly charge for non-residential care services and approve that future revisions to maximum weekly charge levels are implemented by the Council in line with Welsh Government guidance.

**102 Change to the Agenda order**

The Leader agreed to change the order of the agenda due to a technical issue.

**103 Review of the Welsh Church Act Fund**

The Director of Prosperity and Development sought approval to amend the criteria and financial thresholds of the Welsh Church Act Fund in order to ensure a greater positive impact for local communities and maximise take up of the Fund.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity spoke positive of the content of the report and of having the opportunity to revise the current threshold. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the fund already provided support to many local community groups and was of the view that the proposals would build upon that support, by making it more flexible.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To the revised criteria outlined in paragraphs 7.2 – 7.4 of the report for formal consultation with Bridgend and Merthyr Councils; and
2. That subject to no objections from Bridgend and Merthyr Councils, the new arrangements are implemented.

**104 The Council's 2024-2025 Revenue Budget**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services provided Cabinet with information in respect of the 2024/25 local government settlement and the outcomes of the budget consultation phase 1 exercise, to assist with its deliberations in formulating the revenue budget strategy for the financial year 2024/25, which it will recommend to Council, for approval.

The Leader thanked the Group Director for the report and admitted that the budget round has been the most difficult since he had been Council Leader in terms of pressures on services, high utility costs and cost of living pressures. The Leader felt that the budget proposed to Members was reasonable given the aforementioned difficulties faced by both the Council and households. It was noted that all statutory services had been maintained, and in many cases, well above the provision.

Whilst acknowledging that a rise in council tax was not ideal, the Leader was of the view that the proposal was reasonable in order to maintain valuable social care and education provision within the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services echoed the Leader's comments and felt that the consultation had highlighted that the majority of the public recognised the financial pressures placed upon the Council.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank the consultation respondents and noted that 75.6% agreed to protecting services at current levels with a reasonable increase in council tax. The Deputy Leader also noted the proposed council tax increase would still make RCT one of the lowest in Wales.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note that the procedures relating to revenue budget construction, the budget consultation process, and reporting to Council, are set out in the “Budget and Policy Framework” within the Council’s Constitution;
2. To note and consider the outcomes of the budget consultation phase 1 process;
3. To review and consider the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy;
4. To consider and determine the level of Council Tax increase for 2024/25 which it would wish to build into the strategy to form the basis upon which a second phase of consultation will take place;
5. The draft timetable for setting the 2024/25 revenue budget as set out at Appendix A2 of the report;
6. To receive feedback from the second phase of budget consultation in order to consider and determine the final budget strategy for submission to Council; and
7. That the Council continues to support the medium term financial strategy aimed at maximising ongoing efficiency in service delivery, targeted service transformation and other changes that maintain the financial integrity of the Council whilst still aiming as much as possible to protect jobs and key services.

#### **105 The adoption of the Authority’s revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan**

The Head of Flood Risk Management and Strategic Projects advised members on the outcome of the statutory public consultation on the revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and Action Plan (formerly known as a Flood Risk Management Plan), as required under Section 10 of the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010.

The Leader acknowledged that a huge amount of work had been put into developing the revised strategy and action plan. The Leader commended the detailed plan and advised that it would put the Local Authority in a good position going forward with regards to future bids and capital funding from Welsh Government. However, the Leader explained that the plan clearly demonstrated that RCT is at the highest risk of surface flooding in Wales and as such, there was a need to continue to invest in flood resilience and to work with households and businesses.

The Director of Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services wished to place on record his thanks to the team for the work undertaken in producing the documents before Members. The Director commented that he felt the investment had started to pay dividends and that the team were undertaking a risk based approach.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication for the [letter to Cabinet](#), which outlined the comments of the Council’s Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee following consideration of the Authority’s Revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan at its meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The Deputy Leader also extended her gratitude to the officers for their work in putting together the revised strategy and action plan before Members.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure welcomed the report and the comments made by the Scrutiny Committee. The Cabinet Member agreed that a glossary of terms and abbreviations would be beneficial going forward.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the results and the review of the statutory public consultation on the draft LFRMS and Action Plan, which was presented to the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 as per the programme of work which was agreed by Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023;
2. To note the feedback from the Climate and Frontline Services Committee which met on [18th January 2024](#), which will be provided by the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication;
3. That the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan is adopted by the Authority; and
4. That the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, and accompanying environmental assessment, are submitted to the Welsh Government for Ministerial approval.

**This meeting closed at 2.55 pm**

**Councillor A Morgan  
Chair.**