



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CABINET**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 28 January 2021 at 10.30 am.

### **County Borough Councillors - Cabinet Members in attendance:-**

Councillor A Morgan (Chair)

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

### **Officers in attendance**

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive  
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services  
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services  
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources  
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates  
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development  
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services  
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services  
Ms L Davies, Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services  
Ms A Richards – Temporary Director, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Transformation

### **Others in attendance**

Councillor S Bradwick  
Councillor H Fychan  
Councillor J Harries  
Councillor S Morgans

## **51 Declaration of Interest**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations made pertaining to the agenda:

- The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being & Cultural Services declared a personal interest in Item 4 of the agenda, Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Annual Update 2020: 'I am Chair of Governors at YGG Abercynon, which is referenced within the report',
- County Borough Councillor J Harries declared a personal interest in Item 5 of the agenda, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme - Proposals to Improve Education Provision for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llyn-Y-Forwyn: 'I am a former pupil of Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llyn-Y-Forwyn, I have family members who are pupils at the school and I am a Member of the Governing Body.'; and

- County Borough Councillor S Morgans declared a personal interest in Item 5 of the agenda, 21st Century Schools Programme - Proposals to Improve Education Provision for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llyn-Y-Forwyn: 'I have a close relationship and personal interest in Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llyn-Y-Forwyn.'

## 52 Minutes

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

## 53 Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group Recommendations

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication provided the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which met on the 16th November 2020, to consider reports on Nature's Assets, the Strategic and Local Development Plans and Energy Generation.

The Service Director drew Members' attention to Section 4 of the report, which detailed the comments and subsequent recommendations made by the Steering Group in respect of each of the reports considered.

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being & Cultural Services and Chair of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group was pleased to note that the Steering Group continued to work well and recognised that climate change was the challenge of the age. The Cabinet Member highlighted the key recommendation of the Group, which was for the Council to consider the most suitable land for peatbog restoration and water sequestration and how, along with the use of green spaces and electrical vehicle charging points, it can link into the Council's Local Development Plan.

The Cabinet Member continued and spoke of Energy Generation and the reference to the Taffs Well Thermal Spring Project, which was currently underway and when completed would make use of renewable geo-thermal/underground energy using water from the River Taff. The Cabinet Member extended his thanks to the Director of Corporate Estates for the amount of work undertaken to develop such projects and looked forward to further updates in the future.

The Leader echoed the Cabinet Member's thanks to the Director and commented that in addition to the work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, a plethora of work had been undertaken over a number of years in terms of energy generation.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the content of the three reports considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020, which are attached to the report;
2. To note the feedback and discussion of the Steering Group and;
3. The recommendation of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in respect of the Nature's Assets report:
  - I. That the Director, Corporate Estates and the Council's Ecologist undertake a review of the publicly owned land, to identify those sites which are most suitable for peatbog restoration and the cost implications; with a report presented back to the Steering Group

for its consideration.

## **54 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Annual Update 2020**

The Director, Education and Inclusion Services provided the Cabinet with an update on the actions outlined in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for the period between 2017 and 2020 as approved by the Welsh Government on the 15th of March 2018. It was noted that the previous 2019 to 2020 annual update was due to be the last annual update for this WESP, however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this WESP had been extended to cover the period between 2020 to 2021.

Members were informed that Welsh Government had changed some of the regulations relating to the WESP, including the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (Wales) Regulations 2019 and the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020. The two key changes in relation to the regulations were highlighted to Members:

- The extension of the duration of the WESP from its current three year implementation cycle to a ten year implementation cycle (2022 to 2032); and
- The removal of the current duty on Local Authorities to plan their provision of Welsh medium education based on demand with the requirement that Local Authorities achieve targets set by the WG, which aim to increase the percentage of year one learners in Welsh medium education over the duration of the WESP.

The Director drew Members' attention to the table at Section 5.2 of the report, which outlined the total percentage of statutory school aged learners who access their learning through Welsh Medium Primary, Middle and Secondary Schools and noted that RCTCBC had the highest percentage across each of the five Local Authority areas that comprise the CSC JES for the previous three academic years.

The Director advised that the majority of the Welsh medium primary schools in the County Borough of RCT currently have surplus places, which was currently 28.1% in Welsh medium primary schools. The Director went on to speak of the small capacity pressures within the Welsh medium primary schools and advised that the actions taken to address the issues were outlined at Section 5.7 of the report. An example of this was the Council's commitment to invest £3.69 million at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar to provide a further 48 places. Furthermore, the Council had invested a further £4 million on increasing the quality and availability of early years Welsh medium provision co-located on primary school sites.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services thanked the Director for the Annual Report, which had been challenged by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The Cabinet Member was pleased to note the many investments made by the Council and in particular, the commitment made to early years Welsh medium provision, which enables progression onto Welsh medium primary schools.

The Cabinet Member was of the view that report clearly evidenced the Local Authority's commitment to support the actions outlined within the WESP and to contribute to Welsh Government's vision of one million people in Wales being Welsh speakers by 2050.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services & Welsh Language

welcomed the report and emphasised the importance of the WESP as a strategic document for the Local Authority and community alike. The Cabinet Member spoke of the recent announcement to postpone the National Eisteddfod, in light of the continuing effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the restrictions in place on the hosting of public events and social gatherings. The Cabinet Member looked forward to welcoming the prestigious event to RCT in 2024.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services reiterated previous comments and was pleased to note the substantial funding to increase Welsh medium school capacity, in addition to the millions already invested in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.

With the permission of the Chair, County Borough Councillor H Fychan and Ms K Hadley (Public Speaker) spoke on this item.

The Leader acknowledged the comments made and the concerns raised about the impact the virus was having on children on non-Welsh speaking families. The Leader advised that he would be discussing support catch up with Ministers through the WLGA later that day, and hoped that through the budget setting, additional funding would be made to schools, including Welsh medium schools.

In terms of a point made about the need for the Council to engage with individuals on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, the Leader confirmed that he and the Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services had committed to meet with parents to discuss future plans to alleviate any concerns.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the contents of this report; and
2. To consider and agree the annual update provided within this report.

## **55 21st Century Schools Programme - Proposals to Improve Education Provision for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llyn-y-Forwyn**

The Temporary Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation presented the report, which sought Cabinet approval to begin the relevant and required statutory consultation for the proposal to carry out a regulated alteration to Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llyn-y-Forwyn ("YGG Llyn-y-Forwyn"), by way of transferring the school to a new building on a new site.

The Service Director explained that YGG Llyn-y-Forwyn was one of the Council's poorest buildings, with a building condition grading of 'D' and a maintenance backlog in excess of £1.01Million. It was explained that the building was not accessible and as such not compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, the opportunities for outdoor play were limited, with no external green spaces available and all of the hard play areas affected by the sloping topography.

In order to address the issues, the Service Director proposed a new Welsh medium primary school be created on a new site, with an investment in the region of £8.5Million to improve and expand facilities. The investment would include:

- modern, flexible learning environments for all learners, a hall/dining area, and a multi-purpose learning resource area;
- accessible internal and external facilities for wider community use;
- enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities, including an outdoor classroom and a 'forest schools' area; and,
- improved traffic management including on site pupil bus drop off, and on site staff parking.

The Service Director advised that the catchment area of YGG Llyn-y-Forwyn would not be altered and the proposal would create additional Welsh medium capacity within the Rhondda Fach area of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Furthermore, it was explained that 65% of pupils that attend YGG Llyn-y-Forwyn use Home to School Transport and that the current site lacked drop off facilities with vehicles utilising the neighbouring streets for drop off and pick up at the beginning and end of the school day. Members were informed that the new school site would have dedicated on-site drop off and pick up facilities making the process safer, less disruptive for the community, and more manageable for staff at the school.

The Service Director advised that following a site appraisal of 11 areas, all located within the Rhondda Fach, the new school building was proposed to be built on the land north side of Highfield, Ferndale, CF43 4AD, known locally as the former 'Chubb Factory'.

The Service Director concluded by stating that, if agreed by Cabinet, a consultation in respect of the matter would run from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services praised the report, commenting that, if approved, one of the poorest buildings within the education portfolio would be replaced with a new and modern learning environment for pupils with additional capacity for Welsh medium provision.

With the permission of the Chair, County Borough Councillors S Morgans and J Harries spoke on this item.

The Leader noted comments made in respect of highway implications and advised that a full Transport Impact Assessment would be undertaken, and that any safe walking routes would be developed as part of the development. The Leader assured the Local Members that they would be consulted as part of the process.

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development and Housing welcomed the report and the proposed new site for the school. The Cabinet Member spoke of the outstanding Planning consent at the site for a mixture of residential and industrial units and questioned how this could be overcome. The Director, Prosperity and Development advised that he was working closely with colleagues in Corporate Estates in terms of the current planning situation. The Director advised that the evidence gathered for industrial and commercial demand in the area would feed into the Local Development Plan and that there was potential to include the site as a candidate site for education.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the content of the report;
2. To give formal approval to commence consultation with relevant

stakeholders on the proposal to transfer the current YGG Llyn-y-Forwyn to a new building on a new site whilst maintaining the existing catchment area for the school;

3. To note any proposal, should it be approved following completion of the required statutory processes, would be implemented by March 2024; and
4. To give delegated authority to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to make any minor changes that are required to the proposed consultation document (attached at Appendix B to the report) prior to its publication and the consultation commencing.

## **56 The Council's 2021/2022 Revenue Budget**

The Director, Finance and Digital Services provided the Cabinet with information in respect of the 2021/22 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 2021/22, which it will recommend to Council, for approval.

The Director referred the Cabinet to the discussion paper prepared by the Senior Leadership Team in response to the 2021/22 local government settlement, which was attached at Appendix A to the report.

The Director reported that the Council's General Fund Balances currently amounted to £8.709M and remained of the view that the Council should hold a minimum of £10M as General Fund Balances. The Director noted that during the last financial year, the reserves were used to support residents and businesses in the immediate aftermath of Storm Dennis, which is the appropriate purpose; and was satisfied that plans had been put in place to replenish General Fund Reserves to the minimum level over the period of our Medium Term Financial Plan (at £0.5M per year for the next 3 years). The Director went on to speak of the Council's Transition Funding Reserve, which currently stood at £4.330M, and for many years, had been used sensibly as part of the balanced budget strategy.

The Director referred the Cabinet to Section 3 of the report and informed Members of the key points of the 2021/22 Provisional 2021/22 Local Government Settlement, which was announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020.

In respect of setting the level of Council Tax, the Director spoke of targeting adequate funding towards the delivery of key services whilst, at the same time, ensuring that the resultant Council Tax levied next year is reasonable and can be justified to residents. Members noted that the original modelled proposal was to increase Council Tax in 2021/2022 by 2.85%, but it was proposed that Council Tax be increased by 2.65% instead, which would increase the remaining budget gap by £182,000.

In respect of the Schools Budget, the Director proposed an increase of £2.2M from £161.6M to £163.8M to cover, in full, all inflationary and pupil number pressures, including NDR increased costs.

The Director provided detail into the following proposals detailed at Section 9 of the report, which would seek to protect front line services and to prioritise or

reallocate resources to areas of priority:

- NDR Local Relief Scheme
- Car Park Charges
- Climate Change and Carbon Reduction
- Graduates
- Wellbeing Support
- Fees and Charges
- Public Health and Protection Services – Additional Resources
- Flood Prevention Support
- Overgrowth Team

The Director continued by informing the Cabinet of the feedback from Phase 1 of the consultation process, which sought the views of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, the School Budget Forum, residents and stakeholders and concluded by informing the Cabinet that should they be minded to approve the proposals before them, Phase 2 of the consultation would commence with immediate effect. The draft Budget Strategy would be presented to Cabinet for approval on 25th February 2021 and then to Council for ratification on 10th March 2021.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank the Senior Leadership Team, finance officers and service managers for the robust report and a budget with no cuts and potentially the lowest Council Tax increase in Wales. Referring to the Phase 1 consultation feedback, the Leader advised that there had been significant support from residents in terms of the investment priorities and that 77% had supported the initial proposed Council Tax increase of 2.85%.

The Leader spoke of the various investment priorities detailed within the report for key areas such as public health, wellbeing and flood prevention support, along with the proposed freeze of charges on Leisure for Life, Car Park fees, Summer and Winter Playing Fees, school meals, bereavement fees and the Lido and Rhondda Heritage Park.

The Deputy Leader commended officers for the positive report and acknowledged that efficiency savings become more difficult year on year, particularly given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and Storm Dennis.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services agreed with the Director that it had been essential to use a portion of the General Fund Reserves and was pleased to note that there was a plan to replenish it over the next three years. The Cabinet Member also agreed with the continued and sensible use of the Council's Transition Fund Reserve, which he felt complimented the hard work of all departments in making efficiency savings.

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being & Cultural Services welcomed the additional investment included within the proposed budget in respect of Climate Change and Carbon Reduction, which evidenced the Council's commitment to tackling climate change and becoming a carbon neutral Authority by 2030.

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. The draft 2021/22 Revenue Budget Strategy, detailed in the attached Discussion Paper 'Appendix A', as the basis upon which a second phase of consultation will take place;
4. The draft timetable for setting the 2021/22 revenue budget as set out at Appendix A2;
5. 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
6. 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.

**57      Leader's Scheme of Delegation - 3A**

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to note the updated Leader's Scheme of Delegation following changes to the Senior Leadership Team.

**This meeting closed at 11.25 am**

**Cllr A Morgan  
Chairman.**