



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 19 January 2022 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Powderhill (Chair)

Councillor G Hughes	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 Chapman
Councillor A Cox	Councillor A Crimmings
Councillor J Cullwick	Councillor G Davies
Councillor L De Vet	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor J Elliott	Councillor S Evans
Councillor S Evans	Councillor M Forey
Councillor A Fox	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor E George	Councillor D Grehan
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor J Harries	Councillor G Holmes
Councillor L Hooper	Councillor P Howe
Councillor J James	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor K Jones	Councillor L Jones
Councillor W Jones	Councillor R Lewis
Councillor W Lewis	Councillor C Leyshon
Councillor A Morgan	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor M Norris	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor M Powell	Councillor S Rees
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
Mr R Waters, Service Director – Frontline Services

104 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A Davies-Jones, J Davies, M Fidler Jones, G Jones, G Hopkins, K Morgan, S Pickering, S Powell, S Rees-Owen, W Owen and M Tegg.

105 Declaration of Interest

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

Agenda Item 4 – Public Speaker

County Borough Councillor M Powell – “Ynysangharad Park is in my ward and I've been pushing for a skateboard park publicly”.

Agenda Item 8 - Council Revenue Budget 2022/23 - Provisional Local Government Settlement

County Borough Councillor P Jarman – “I've been granted dispensation by the Standards Committee to speak and vote on matters relating to the present and proposed budget for 2022-23”.

County Borough Councillor M Powell – “My wife is an employee of the authority”.

County Borough Councillor J Harries – “My Dad is employed by the local authority”.

A further declaration of personal interest was later declared (Minute No. 113 refers) by County Borough Councillor L Walker – “I declare an interest in that I am a member of Llantwit Fardre Community Council”

Agenda Item 10 - Welsh Church Act Fund Annual Report 2020/2021

County Borough Councillor R Bevan declared a personal and prejudicial interest – “I have Cabinet responsibility for administering funds”.

County Borough Councillor M Norris- “I am on the board of a community group, the Cambrian Village Trust, that is referred to within the report”

County Borough Councillor R Lewis – “The Cynon Valley Museum Trust is referenced in the report, and I am a friend of the Museum”.

County Borough Councillor A Crimmings – “I am a trustee of Friends of Aberdare Park who received funding from the Welsh Church Act”.

County Borough Councillor S Rees – “I am a trustee of Friends of Aberdare Park, and I am also a Friend of Aberdare Museum”.

County Borough Councillor G R Davies – “I am Secretary for Blaencwm in

Treherbert and I am also on the committee for the Tennis Club in the Rhondda, who have received funding from the fund”.

County Borough Councillor J Barton – “I am a trustee Beddau & Tynant Community Library which has in the past received a grant from the Welsh Church Act”

County Borough Councillor J Cullwick – “I am a member of the Methodist Church in Wales”

County Borough Councillor S Bradwick – “I am the Secretary of Maesyffynnon allotments in Aberdare and we received money from the Welsh Church Act a few years ago”.

Agenda item 12 - Overview & Scrutiny Working Group Report - The Development of Future Transportation Infrastructure in Rhondda Cynon Taf

A further declaration of personal interest was later declared (Minute No. 117 refers) by County Borough Councillor J James – “I have been working with the Rhondda Tunnel Society as part of my Senedd duties”

Agenda Item 13 – Notices of Motion

A further declaration of personal interest was later declared (Minute No. 118 refers) by County Borough Councillor M Powell – “I have 40 plus years of experience of working in the heating and plumbing industry”.

106 Announcements

Councillor J Bonetto was saddened to announce the end of her time served as Mayor and she advised that information regarding her charities and money raised would be published shortly. She eagerly anticipated her new role as Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services, building on the strong legacy of improvement and investment established by Councillor Rosser. Councillor Bonetto thanked the Leader for giving her the opportunity to take up this position.

Councillor S Bradwick announced that for Autism Week at the end of February, he would be walking to Pen Y Fan for the charity and to support this worthy cause.

Councillor P Jarman announced the passing of the former Chief Executive Cynon Valley Borough Council, Mr Tony Bessent Roberts OBE and paid tribute to him by sharing some of his many achievements such as receiving a non-directorship of Tower in recognition of his role in the Tower story. Councillor Jarman wished to send her condolences to his family for their loss.

Councillor Sheryl Evans wished to acknowledge and pay special thanks to the Council refuse workers and volunteer litter pickers on behalf of her constituents.

107 Minutes

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the virtual meeting held on

the 24th November 2021 at 5pm and of the hybrid meeting held on the 15th December 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meetings.

108 Public Questions

Members were advised that in the absence of Mr Marshmann, author of the public question, a written response would be provided to him from the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A Crimmings.

109 Statements

As previously announced, the Leader advised that changes to the Cabinet membership under the Leader Scheme of Delegation would take effect from the 20th January 2022. The Leader was pleased to announce that Councillor J Bonetto and G Caple would be joining his Cabinet. He paid tribute to both Councillors G Hopkins and J Rosser for their hard work and dedication to the Cabinet and he wished Cllr Rosser the very best with her retirement following her announcement.

He acknowledged their hard work as part of the Cabinet, Councillor Rosser in driving forward significant investment in education services such as the 21st Century Schools projects, engagement with other partners over a 7-year period. Councillor Hopkins in playing a key role in the transformation of social services and bringing forward the development of Extra Care in RCT, the biggest investment in over a generation, as well as the support he has shown for the social care staff, managers and service users throughout the pandemic (as has Councillor Rosser).

The Leader announced that the Leader's Scheme of Delegation will be updated and circulated to all Members in due course.

110 Members' Questions

Members were advised that apologies of absence had been received from Councillor G Jones and that question 6 would not be put to the Chair of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.

1. Question from County Borough Councillor J. Edwards to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

"Can the Leader please give an update on the improvement works to the culverts in Ynyshir, particularly above Heath Terrace?"

Response from the Leader:

The Leader advised that following a survey of the culvert, open watercourse and the enclosed culvert lines, there did show significant damage above Standard View. Over £110,000 worth of structural lining work has been carried out in the summer of 2021. Additional manholes were also installed. Work to the two watercourses above Heath Terrace commenced in late Autumn but inclement weather delayed the work. The Leader confirmed that the work would be

completed by March 2022. A current programme shows investment in the region of between £175,000-£200,000 to rectify the problems in the area which has been fully funded by Welsh Government following Storm Dennis.

There was no supplementary question

2. Question from County Borough Councillor L. Walker to the Cabinet member for Education & Inclusion Services, County Borough Councillor J. Rosser:

“Can the Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services outline the progress made in the proposed site for the new Special school provision in RCT and what steps have been taken, if any, as regards funding and eventually building it given the chronic overcapacity in special schools”

Response from Councillor J Rosser:

Councillor Rosser commented that this would be her last question as Cabinet Member and she is proud of her record in delivering investment in special school facilities and in securing funding for a new school site to be developed. Band B of the Council’s 21st Century Schools Strategic Outline Programme has been approved by Welsh Government and a new special school is part of that programme and funding is included within the current wave of investment subject to the necessary business case approval process and scrutiny by Welsh Government. Councillor Rosser confirmed that the Council is at feasibility stage and progress is in line with current Band B investment programme timescales.

Supplementary question from County Borough Councillor L Walker:

“Can the Cabinet Member give any indications where we are with timescales and what consultations have taken place with the school staff regarding this new building?”

Response from Councillor J Rosser:

Councillor Rosser advised that Officers within the Education Directorate are managing demand for school places, in line with the School Admissions Code 2013 and the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Wales Act 2018 and Officers work closely with all the Head Teachers in this regard. Projects to increase accommodation are in progress in two schools, Ysgol Hen Felin and Ysgol Ty Coch and internal modifications were recently completed in Ysgol Ty Coch and Park Lane Special School to manage known, current and forecasted placements. Councillor Rosser confirmed there is no chronic over subscriptions within the Council’s special schools and the Council continually promotes high educational standards locally to ensure fair access to education as demonstrated by the level of investments earmarked for the new and exciting school proposals.

3. Question from County Borough Councillor R. Turner to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

“Will the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways please give an update on the latest position with regards to the Llanharan Footbridge?”

Response from the Leader:

The Leader advised that the bridge was closed in September 2021 due to identified safety defects. It was planned to remove the pedestrian footbridge over the Christmas holiday period; however, the crane broke down on site and Network Rail had to recover it. The work to advance this scheme has continued and the Leader announced that the crane will be set up on site tomorrow night and using Sunday night closure, the bridge will be lifted overnight, moved to the land adjacent, dismantled and broken down. The Leader advised that a new contractor has been appointed to take forward the new bridge which is due to be in place and completed by July 2022 depending on a number of critical factors.

There was no supplementary question

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

“Can the Leader provide an overview of the works completed to date to help protect residents of Bronallt Terrace in Abercwmboi from flooding, and can the Leader also outline whether further measures can be taken?”

Response from the Leader:

The Leader confirmed that 42 properties in Bronallt Terrace have been offered property flood resistance measures e.g. flood gates, sandbags and emergency flood sacks. Of the 42 properties, 24 accepted in full and Officers are now in the process of discussing the options with other residents as some may be concerned with the impact on their properties. The Leader advised that work to the upper debris catcher on the one main culvert has cost £40,000, work in Bronallt Terrace has been carried out to enlarge the culvert inlet and renew the underground pipe which cost £160,000, work is due to start on the inlet at Mostyn Terrace at the cost of between £95-100,000 and work is ongoing to identify further schemes for the area.

There was no supplementary question

5. Question from County Borough Councillor H. Boggis to the Deputy Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor M. Webber:

“Will the Deputy Leader provide an update on the progress to implement a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Armed Forces Veterans, following the decision of Cabinet?”

Response of the Deputy Leader:

The Deputy Leader advised that Cabinet gave its approval to progress and implement the guaranteed interview scheme at its meeting on the 4th October 2021. From the 1st January 2022 the scheme is fully implementational for reservists and veterans. The additional commitment demonstrates the Council's support for the Armed Forces community and honours the spirit of the Armed Forces covenant of which the Council is a signatory. The Council also holds the Gold Standard Award for the level of work and continued commitment with the Armed Forces.

The Deputy Leader explained that the guaranteed interview scheme ensures

that where veterans and reservists meet the essential criteria of an advertised job, they are guaranteed an interview. It has been recognised that members of the Armed Forces can bring valuable, transferrable skills and qualities to the workforce. In addition to the guaranteed interview scheme, the Council has committed to advertise relevant jobs to the Armed Forces Community through the Career Transition Partnership which is in addition to the normal advertising process. In conclusion, the Deputy Leader gave assurance that the Local Authority is committed to the Armed Forces covenant and will continue its work with Armed Forces families throughout the whole of the county borough.

There was no supplementary question

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

“Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the Blaenrhondda Park Pavilion”

Response of Councillor A Crimmings:

Councillor Crimmings responded that the Blaenrhondda Park Pavilion is in poor condition and acknowledged the value of the pavilion to the community. The replacement pavilion was approved through the 2021 Parks Capital Programme but due to the limited access, the original plan to put the demountable in place had to be abandoned. Councillor Crimmings gave assurances that this will be a priority subject to approval for the Capital Investment Programme for 2022/23.

Supplementary question from County Borough Councillor W Jones:

“Replacing this facility is important to the community as it is for other places such as Darren Park. It’s not the community’s fault that access to the park is limited so can you give a date as to when work will be completed as its not only used for sport but also for bowls, the community and old aged pensioners”

Response of Councillor A Crimmings:

Councillor Crimmings acknowledged the value of the park to the residents and advised that regular updates would be provided to the community however, she was unable to provide a date for completion at this stage. Councillor Crimmings gave assurances that the Council continues to work closely with sports clubs across the county borough and acknowledged their importance.

7. Question from County Borough Councillor W. Treeby to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, County Borough Councillor C. Leyshon:

“Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the Santa Appeal and the huge generosity shown by residents and businesses?”

Response from Councillor C Leyshon:

Councillor Leyshon advised that the Santa Appeal timescales were extended in December due to the challenges associated with the Covid Pandemic, to maximise the time for people to pledge and drop off gifts. As a result, every child

on the list was allocated a present for Christmas. Due to the pandemic a number of organisations missed out on donating to the appeal such as the University of Glamorgan, South Wales Students Union who had collected and distributed over 1,500 presents in the last ten years. This year 50 bags of presents were collected from them. There were approximately 1,862 pledges and some of the larger donors included the Welsh Blood Service, Bethel Bush Church, Royal Mint, The International Baccalaureate, The Network Recruitment for Wales, Coleg Y Cymoedd, HM Prison & Probation Services, Hirwaun Primary School, Cardiff & Vale UHB and Pontypridd Town AFC for Girls.

Councillor Leyshon thanked the staff from across the local authority and from all services and all those that took part and helped the appeal in particular the individual residents and families from RCT for their donations who, during the Covid-19 pandemic, were often struggling themselves.

111 Council Work Programme 2021-2022

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications confirmed that there were no changes regarding the adopted and published Council Work Programme 2021/22. Details regarding the arrangements for the Leader's Annual Debate would be circulated in advance of the meeting and it was advised that the Council meeting on the 2nd March 2022 would be removed from the calendar.

112 Audit Wales - Annual Audit Summary 2021 (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council)

The Performance Audit Manager, Audit Wales, presented the Annual Audit Summary 2020/21 for RCT and confirmed that updates have been considered by the Council's Governance & Audit Committee.

Other areas of work undertaken by Audit Wales in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic included Test, Trace and Protect in Wales, supply of PPE and a report on the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Wales. Recovery planning across the local authorities, as included within the report, has brought regular meetings with officers to understand their responses and their individual recovery plans will be an ongoing matter. In conclusion, an overview of the ongoing work and planned future work of Audit Wales was provided such as a National study around Carbon reduction, town centre regeneration and a high-level governance review relating to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Partnership.

In response to a query regarding comparative data in relation to the useable financial reserves of other local authorities, it was confirmed that Audit Wales would collate and provide this data following the meeting.

Following discussion in relation to the RCT Annual Audit Summary Report 2020/21, it was **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report.

113 Council Revenue Budget 2022/23 - Provisional Local Government Settlement

Through his report, the Director of Finance and Digital Services provided information in respect of the 2022/2023 Provisional Local Government Settlement, announced on the 21st December 2021 and initial comments on its likely implications for the delivery of Council services.

The Director provided Members with the headline data from the settlement as set out at section 4 advising of an all Wales increase of 9.4% (+£437M) with this Council's resources set to increase by 8.4% Provisional indicative settlement levels are also included for the following 2 years at 3.5% and 2.4% respectively, which points to more challenging times ahead. A number of transfers into the settlement are also set out at section 4 and a reduction in the Council's capital funding of £2.165 m

The settlement is more positive than that modelled in the Council's latest medium term financial plan and it is also reflective of the Council's significantly increasing cost base and service pressures. Welsh Government have also brought the Hardship Fund to an end which reimburses local government for costs and income losses as a direct result of the pandemic. The projection for the level of support for this year from the fund is £30m, some of which will be key financial risks to be managed into next financial year and beyond.

The increased budget requirements are set out which includes funding to cover increases in a number of areas such as to employer NI contributions linked to the UK Govt Health & SC Levy, payment of the Foundation Living Wage to social care providers across RCT which has increased from £9.50 to £9.90 per hour, additional costs associated with the ALNET ACT, council wide inflationary and supply chain pressures including employee costs, ongoing pandemic related costs e.g waste services and specialist placement costs within social care, all of which are set out at table 2 within the report amounting to a net increased budget requirement of £11.7M for next year.

The Director advised that the combined impact of the provisional settlement and the updated base budget requirements are set out at table 3, against a budget gap of £9.2M at the medium-term financial planning stage, assuming a 4% settlement, the additional budget requirement when offset against the additional resources provided at the provisional settlement results in a remaining budget gap of £229,000.

Following his summary, the Director reported that Cabinet will consider its draft budget strategy for next year to include any efficiencies, Council Tax levels, resources for schools and other council services. The Council's medium term financial planning arrangements will continue to be as important as ever going forward.

In conclusion, the Director advised that the final settlement is due to be released in early March and it will be for Council to agree its final proposals and Council Tax levels for next year.

Members welcomed the Provisional 2022/23 Local Government Settlement, announced by Welsh Government and following discussion the Director responded to a number of queries such as the provision of a specific grant for Free School Meals to Primary Learners agreed as part of the Plaid Corporation Agreement, £40M for 2022/23, £70m for 2023/24 and £90m for 2024/25.

RESOLVED to:

1. Note the Provisional 2022/23 Local Government Settlement, announced by the Minister for Finance and Local Government on the 21st December

2021;

2. Note that the Final 2022/23 Local Government Settlement is expected during early March 2022; and
3. Note the approach to budget consultation for 2022/23 as already determined.

(Note: County Borough Councillor L Walker declared the following personal interest– “I declare an interest in that I am a member of Llantwit Fardre Community Council”

114 Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Director of Finance & Digital Services presented his report which set out the requirement to annually consider whether to revise or replace the Council's existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme (“CTRS”) and the requirement to adopt a scheme by 31st January 2022.

The Director confirmed there are no changes proposed to the current scheme and local discretions; and Welsh government have updated their regulations to reflect upratings consequential to wider and national benefit changes. These amendment regulations were considered and agreed by Welsh Government yesterday.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note and adopt the provisions of the Prescribed Requirements Regulations and the amendments made to those regulations by the Amendment Regulations as the Council's local CTRS for 2022/23, subject to the local discretions that the Council is able to exercise;
2. Note the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken by the Council on the local discretions applicable to the CTRS for 2022/23; and
3. Confirm the discretions applicable to the Council's local CTRS for 2022/23 as set out at paragraph 5.3 (Table 2) of the report.

115 Welsh Church Act Fund Annual Report 2020/2021

In his report, the Director of Finance and Digital Services sought the approval of Members of the Statement of Accounts for the Welsh Church Act Fund for the financial year ended 31st March, 2021; following the completion of the audit process with an unqualified audit opinion; and it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To approve and note the Welsh Church Act Fund Annual Report and Financial Statements for the financial year 2020/2021 (Appendix 1);
2. To approve and note the Letter of Representation relating to the Welsh

Church Act Fund (Appendix 2); and

3. To note the External Auditor report (Appendix 3).

116 Urgent Executive Decisions

In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 17.2(a), the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication presented an overview of the Urgent Decisions taken forward by the Cabinet Committee and Urgent Key Officer Delegated Decisions taken forward outside of the Cabinet Committee during the period October – December 2021.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to note the information contained within the report.

117 Overview & Scrutiny Working Group Report - The development of future transportation infrastructure in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented the findings and recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Working Group which was established to deal with 'The development of future transportation infrastructure in Rhondda Cynon Taf' following the Notice of Motion considered by Council at its meeting held on the [18th September 2019](#). The Service Director advised that the report and recommendations had been agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 9th December 2021.

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications commented that progress had been delayed by the Covid-19 Pandemic following the inaugural meeting in 2019 and having sought submissions from local Members and stakeholders. Upon re convening the Working Group, Members acknowledged that much had changed across the integrated transport map and direction set by Welsh Government which has been reflected in the final report. In conclusion, the Service Director thanked the Director, Frontline Services, for his support to the Scrutiny Working Group.

In response to a query regarding the Welsh Government Moratorium, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications commented that in the majority, the Working Group agreed that where there is an economic benefit the road schemes remained important.

The Director, Frontline Services confirmed that the reopening of the Rhondda Tunnel is currently being considered, he also added that a report would be presented to Cabinet before the end of the financial year in respect of the extension of the rail line from Treherbert to Tynwydd as part of a wider study looking at improved transport links to/from the Mid Valleys areas. The Director also advised that following the moratorium announced by Welsh Government a panel has been established to review road building across Wales and a report will be produced shortly from the deputy minister, outlining those more mature road schemes that have undergone the Weltag process. He added that the Rhondda Fach Relief Road will not be included in that review but will form part of the LDP as a credible plan with prospects of delivery (and will be tested again for inclusion in a future plans). In conclusion, the Director, Frontline Services confirmed that the Tylorstown tip will not prejudice the Rhondda Fach Relief Road, the consultation on the pre-planning application will commence soon and it will be for the local authority to demonstrate that the scheme is viable.

Following additional comments from the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee regarding the issues raised, it was **RESOLVED** to note the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group as set out at paragraph 6 and as ratified by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

(**Note:** County Borough Councillor J James declared a personal declaration – “I have been working with the Rhondda Tunnel Society as part of my Senedd duties”).

118 Notices of Motion

13A The following Notice of Motion was received standing in the names of County Borough Councillors, A Roberts, W. Lewis, L. M. Adams, J. Barton, D. R. Bevan, H. Boggis, J. Bonetto, S. Bradwick, J. Brencher, A. Calvert, G. Caple, A. Crimmings, A. Davies-Jones, L. De- Vet, J. Edwards, J. Elliott, S. Evans, M. Griffiths, G. Jones, M. Fidler Jones, M. Forey, A. Fox, E. George, J. Harries, G. Holmes, G. Hopkins, R. Lewis, C. Leyshon, A. Morgan, S. Morgans, M. A. Norris, D. Owen-Jones, S. Pickering, S. Powell, S. Rees, J. Rosser, G. Stacey, M. Tegg, G. Thomas, W. Treeby, R. K. Turner, M. Webber, D. Williams, R. Williams, T. Williams, R. Yeo:

This Council recognises the efforts of the Welsh Government in helping to address the issue of fuel poverty in Wales, both in terms of providing financial support to low income households, and also through a range of home energy efficiency improvements through the Warm Homes initiative.

Since 2009/10, over 67,000 lower income households have benefitted from energy efficiency improvements, at an estimated average saving on their energy bills of £300 with the added benefit of reduced carbon emissions.

One element of the Welsh Government’s Warm Homes programme is the Nest Grant scheme, which offers a range of free, impartial advice and if eligible applicants can access a package of free home energy efficiency improvements such as a new boiler, central heating or insulation, which can lower energy bills and benefit the applicant’s health and wellbeing.

Excellent work has been carried out by the Council’s Heat and Save team, despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, with RCT being the 2nd highest referring area in 20-21 with 9% of Nest referrals being received from RCT residents and the 2nd highest area for successful installs at 12.5%. During 2021-2022 the Councils Heat & Save Department, have sent out 3,631 direct mailers to strategic areas in partnership with Nest offering a targeted intervention helping the correct households access Nest assistance.

Despite this positive work undertaken in Wales and locally in RCT, the continually increasing costs of energy prices means more and more households are being pushed toward fuel poverty.

This trend threatens the targets outlined in the Welsh Government’s Tackling Fuel Poverty 2021-2035 strategy and with the Welsh Government recently launching a consultation on shaping the next iteration of the Warm Homes programme, it is now an opportune time to examine the feasibility of broadening

the criteria for applications for the Nest scheme.

This Council therefore notes:

- The good work undertaken in Wales by the Welsh Government, and on a local level by the Council's Heat and Save team in tackling fuel poverty.

And resolves to:

- Request that the Council Leader writes to Julie James MS, the Welsh Government's Minister for Climate Change, to make the necessary representations for the criteria of eligibility of the Nest (and other schemes) to be widened to allow further applications to be approved, to the benefit of our residents.

With the consent of the proposer and in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure 12.7 the following alteration to the Motion was voted on and moved "*Request that the Council Leader writes to Julie James MS, the Welsh Government's Minister for Climate Change, to make the necessary representations for the criteria of eligibility of the Nest (and other schemes) to be widened **and funded** to allow further applications to be approved, to the benefit of our residents*".

The altered Motion read:

This Council recognises the efforts of the Welsh Government in helping to address the issue of fuel poverty in Wales, both in terms of providing financial support to low income households, and also through a range of home energy efficiency improvements through the Warm Homes initiative.

Since 2009/10, over 67,000 lower income households have benefitted from energy efficiency improvements, at an estimated average saving on their energy bills of £300 with the added benefit of reduced carbon emissions.

One element of the Welsh Government's Warm Homes programme is the Nest Grant scheme, which offers a range of free, impartial advice and if eligible applicants can access a package of free home energy efficiency improvements such as a new boiler, central heating or insulation, which can lower energy bills and benefit the applicant's health and wellbeing.

Excellent work has been carried out by the Council's Heat and Save team, despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, with RCT being the 2nd highest referring area in 20-21 with 9% of Nest referrals being received from RCT residents and the 2nd highest area for successful installs at 12.5%. During 2021-2022 the Council's Heat & Save Department, have sent out 3,631 direct mailers to strategic areas in partnership with Nest offering a targeted intervention helping the correct households access Nest assistance.

Despite this positive work undertaken in Wales and locally in RCT, the continually increasing costs of energy prices means more and more households are being pushed toward fuel poverty.

This trend threatens the targets outlined in the Welsh Government's Tackling Fuel Poverty 2021-2035 strategy and with the Welsh Government recently launching a consultation on shaping the next iteration of the Warm Homes programme, it is now an opportune time to examine the feasibility of broadening the criteria for applications for the Nest scheme.

This Council therefore notes:

- The good work undertaken in Wales by the Welsh Government, and on a local level by the Council's Heat and Save team in tackling fuel poverty.

And resolves to:

- Request that the Council Leader writes to Julie James MS, the Welsh Government's Minister for Climate Change, to make the necessary representations for the criteria of eligibility of the Nest (and other schemes) to be widened and funded to allow further applications to be approved, to the benefit of our residents.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Notice of Motion with the alteration.

(Note: County Borough Councillor M Powell declared the following declaration of personal interest – "I have 40 plus years of experience of working in the heating and plumbing industry").

13B The following Notice of Motion was received standing in the names of County Borough Councillors, J. Barton, J. Edwards, L. M. Adams, D. R. Bevan, H. Boggis, J. Bonetto, S. Bradwick, J. Brencher, A. Calvert, G. Caple, A. Crimmings, A. Davies-Jones, L. De- Vet, J. Elliott, S. Evans, M Griffiths, G. Jones, M. Fidler Jones, M. Forey, A. Fox, E. George, 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:

The rising cost of energy prices is being described as a "national crisis" affecting households, businesses and the energy companies themselves.

The significant rise in gas prices has seen the U.K. energy sector pay approximately £20bn more this year. With the energy price cap, which currently sits at £1,277 set to jump in April, households could see their energy bills alone rise by 50%, meaning that households could be as much as £1,200 a year worse off as National Insurance contributions also rise.

The rising price of energy has seen more than 20 energy suppliers go out of business since September, with many customers unfairly moved on to new providers on more expensive tariffs.

Whilst most consumers are protected by the energy price cap at £1,277 for

normal domestic usage, the limit will rise on 1st April in line with an expected announcement in early February – meaning the U.K. Government is running out of time to tackle the crisis.

The charity National Energy Action (NEA) has warned that a record 6 million UK households will be in fuel poverty when the next increase in the energy price cap comes into force in April, and this view is compounded by the findings of the Resolution Foundation think tank, which warned that millions of UK families face a "year of squeeze" in 2022 thanks to rising energy bills, stagnant wages and tax rises. The Bank of England has also said it expects inflation to reach 6% by the spring.

The Resolution Foundation have said that an increase in National Insurance contributions from April, along with an expected rise in energy bills in the same month could amount to a £1,200 hit to household finances, with low-income families forced to bear the brunt of these rises as they spend a greater proportion of their income on electricity and gas.

Earlier this month, a group of twenty Conservative MPs and Peers – including five former Ministers – called on the Prime Minister to take action to tackle the spiralling cost of living and alleviate the pressures on the lowest income families.

Energy suppliers including Good Energy, EDF and trade body Energy UK have called for government intervention, after the cost of gas in wholesale markets rose by more than 500% in less than a year. The increase has bankrupted over twenty providers, forced to buy wholesale gas at higher prices than they are allowed to sell it.

The Westminster Government's inaction is leading to "an enormous crisis for 2022" with energy bills potentially increasing by another 50% unless the government intervenes. Many other governments across Europe have reduced taxes and other levies, and similar action taken in the U.K. could save close to £200 a year on an average bill.

One solution voiced by the industry is to move green levies from energy bills to general taxation as it would mean higher earners pay more than lower income households, who spend a larger proportion of their income on essentials like heating.

They also argue it would lower the measure of inflation, saving the government money on inflation linked borrowing costs. The Treasury, however, appear not to favour this approach in reluctance to increase the general tax burden, and the indications are that the U.K. Government will instead seek to expand the £140 Warm Homes Discount Scheme as part of a targeted relief package to up to 6 million households.

Despite the Westminster Government's apparent inability to act decisively, residents in Wales and across RCT have benefitted from initiatives designed to cut fuel poverty and increase household energy efficiency.

The Welsh Government's Arbed am Byth scheme has delivered 206 energy measures to 113 homes in Penrhiwceiber, whilst RCT was also the 2nd highest referring area and 2nd highest successful install area in Wales in 2020-21. The Council's own RCT Heating Grant - which provides funding of up to £5,000 to assist up to 20 households who are at risk of fuel poverty but not eligible for

other assistance schemes – has received 24 applications with 7 grants approved at a cost of £1,500 per property.

Council Officers are also working closely with the Citizen's Advice Bureau and other organisations to signpost individuals and families in need of support to the most appropriate stream of financial assistance.

This Council therefore resolves:

- To call on the U.K. Government to honour the Brexit campaign promise of cutting the 5% VAT rate on energy bills, or to bring forward an alternative support package that provides additional funding – both to subsidise energy companies and to provide relief to households - so that families across the U.K., including here in Rhondda Cynon Taf, are not the ones to bear the brunt of price increases.
- To request that the Council Leader writes to the Business Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister to request that urgent action is taken to address the energy price crisis.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Notice of Motion.

119 Urgent Business

120 Change of Membership

Following changes to the Leader's scheme of delegation, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented his report requesting that Council elect the following appointments for the remainder of this Municipal Year: He also sought authority from Council to make any consequential changes to the Labour Group's committee representation.

- a) Mayor;
- b) Deputy Mayor;
- c) Vice-chair of the Planning & Development Committee;
- d) Chair of the Appeals/ Employee Appeals/ Chief Officer Appeals Committee

a) **RESOLVED** – to elect County Borough Councillor W Treeby as Mayor of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021-2022.

(County Borough Councillor W Treeby announced her Consort as Mr Paul Hammett and that details of her chosen Chaplain would be announced in due course)

b) **RESOLVED** – to elect County Borough Councillor W Lewis as Deputy Mayor Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021-2022.

(County Borough Councillor W Lewis advised that details of her consort would be announced shortly)

c) **RESOLVED** –to elect County Borough Councillor R Williams as Vice-Chair of Planning & Development Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021-2022.

d) **RESOLVED** –to elect County Borough Councillor G Holmes as Chair of the Appeals/ Employee Appeals/ Chief Officer Appeals Committee for the remainder

of the Municipal Year 2021-2022.

e) **RESOLVED** - That the Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication be authorised to make appointments to the Labour Group representation to politically balanced committees of the Council, upon receipt of notification to him of the wishes of the political group in question.

This meeting closed at 7.50 pm

**Cllr S Powderhill
Chairman.**