



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 23 November 2022 at 5.00 pm

County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor G Hughes (Chair)

Councillor S Evans	Councillor B Stephens
Councillor L Addiscott	Councillor M Ashford
Councillor R Bevan	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor G Caple
Councillor J Cook	Councillor A Crimmings
Councillor S J Davies	Councillor R Davis
Councillor V Dunn	Councillor E L Dunning
Councillor J Edwards	Councillor A J Ellis
Councillor L Ellis	Councillor S Emanuel
Councillor B Harris	Councillor S Hickman
Councillor G Holmes	Councillor W Hughes
Councillor K Johnson	Councillor G Jones
Councillor G O Jones	Councillor W Jones
Councillor R Lewis	Councillor W Lewis
Councillor C Leyshon	Councillor C Lises
Councillor M Maohoub	Councillor A Morgan
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor M Norris
Councillor S Rees	Councillor J Smith
Councillor G Stacey	Councillor L A Tomkinson
Councillor S Trask	Councillor W Treeby
Councillor G L Warren	Councillor K Webb
Councillor M Webber	Councillor R Williams
Councillor R Yeo	

The following Councillors were present online:-

Councillor J Barton	Councillor P Binning
Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor J Elliott
Councillor P Evans	Councillor R Evans
Councillor S Evans	Councillor A Fox
Councillor D Grehan	Councillor H Gronow
Councillor C Middle	Councillor K Morgan
Councillor N H Morgan	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor D Parkin	Councillor C Preedy
Councillor A Roberts	Councillor A O Rogers
Councillor G E Williams	Councillor D Wood

Officers in attendance

Mr P Mee, Chief Executive
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Mr S Humphreys, Head of Legal Services
Mr M Jones, Audit Wales
Ellis Williams, Audit Wales

48 Welcome & Apologies

The Presiding Officer welcomed everyone to the hybrid Council meeting and apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors D Evans, G Hopkins, W Owen, S Powderhill, M Powell, J Turner, D Williams and T Williams.

49 Declaration of Interest

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

Agenda item 8 – Notice of Motion

County Borough Councillor D R Bevan – “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor S Emmanuel – “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor W Hughes – “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor K Johnson – “I am a member of the Trade Union and a member of the Licensing Committee”

County Borough Councillor D O Jones - “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor G Jones – “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor M Maohoub– “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor C Middle - “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor C Preedy - “I am a member of Unite the Union”

County Borough Councillor S Trask – “I am a member of Unite the Union, and I am also a shift worker”

County Borough Councillor R Williams – “I am a shop Steward and Branch member of Unite the Union”

50 Minutes

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

51 Announcements

The following announcements were made:

- The Presiding Officer welcomed County Borough Councillor A Dennis to his first Council meeting after his success at the recent By-Election

- The Presiding Officer also wished to congratulate a Tonypany resident, Mr Mason Harris, who recently competed in the WCKA Kick Boxing World Championship held in Cardiff. He added that Mason was already the Welsh Champion but won a gold, silver and two bronze medals at the competition which secured him the World Champion title. Mason has been competing in this field since he was 4 years old and the commitment he has shown to the sport with daily training sessions has been an inspiration to other younger members of the team and the Presiding Officer asked if the mayor would send Mason a letter of congratulations.
- The Presiding Officer welcomed Mr Paul Mee to this, his first Council meeting as Chief Executive. The Leader of the Council also advised that Mr Chris Bradshaw had officially finished working for the Council. The Leader commented on the Council's strong and sensible leadership, and he wished the new Chief Executive well. Mr Mee gratefully acknowledged the comments and stated that it was a tremendous honour to be in post as the Council's Chief Executive.
- County Borough Councillor A Ellis congratulated Mr Dane Blacker on his selection to the Welsh rugby union squad. She added that hopefully Dane will follow in the footsteps of Garin Jenkins and Staff Jones, both Ynysybwl boys. Councillor Ellis commented that Ynysybwl is very proud of Dane's achievement, and we wish him huge success for the future
- County Borough Councillor A O Rogers acknowledged the following achievements of the following residents from within the Hirwaun Penderyn & Rhigos ward:
 - Mr David James was awarded the Scouts Cymru Lifetime Achievement award and has made a great contribution to the Hirwaun Scout Group;
 - Ms Amy Williams has won the Ladies British Isles Bowls Singles championship in addition to her bronze medal in April;
 - Mr Tyler Lee-Jones won a few awards in the recent Kickboxing World championship in Cardiff including achieving Gold in the Continuous Fighting section; and
 - Mr Alistair Cope has been recognised with the Fostering Excellence Award 2022 for his contribution to the fostering community.
- County Borough Councillor W Jones referred to the recent opening of the 3G pitches in Treherbert and Treorchy and thanked the Leader, Cabinet Members and the Council for the superb facilities. He acknowledged the Cabinet Members A Crimmings and R Lewis and the Secretary State for Wales who attended the opening event. Councillor Jones thanked Mr Keith Nicholls, Head of Leisure, Sports and Parks and his staff as well as the primary school children who also attended the launch.

52 Statements

The Leader provided an update in respect of the Council's Budget and commented that although the latest figures from the UK Budget does provide

some additional resources for Wales, the Council is waiting to see if there will be any consequential for Education and Social Care as part of the Welsh Government Settlement to be announced before Christmas. He emphasised that even an increase in the Rate Support Grant (RSG) would not impact the £47M budget deficit. The Leader advised that following recent correspondence, the UK Chancellor advised that Local Authorities need to operate within their budgets which with rising energy costs, food costs, presents huge challenges.

The Leader commented that the Council will manage the cost pressures by tweaking services and delivering them to residents in different ways. He added that the Council has given a commitment to the Trade Unions that it will work hard to avoid compulsory redundancies and look to voluntary redundancies, staff seeking voluntary early retirement and deleting vacant posts where appropriate. He assured Members that the Council will continue to work with Trade Union colleagues to address these issues, but he concluded that the Budget last week did not deliver the level of support to avoid a significant budget gap next year.

53

Members' Questions

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

“What impact has the U.K. Government’s economic plans had on energy prices, in particular for local authorities?”

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

Councillor Morgan responded that in terms of non-domestic energy, there was no clarity provided on how the scheme will work beyond March meaning that businesses, voluntary sector organisations and local authorities have no certainty on what they will be paying next year.

For households the cap will increase in April next year from £2,500 to £3,000 (for average use) which is a significant increase. The Leader advised that there is no equivalent cap for Local Authorities, so the Council is looking at alternative energy options and identifying opportunities to generate its own power, by such means as wind turbines, hydro, solar farms and where it generates its own energy it will be essential to use it all (as it is more valuable than selling it back to the National Grid).

The Leader referred to the intense pressure on the Local Authority over the next 12 months.

Supplementary question:

“What long-term solutions can we look at to avoid situations like this in the future?”

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader alluded to the need for a change in Government to avoid these situations with an economy that is growing together with continued investment in energy insulation, which would impact on the overall energy unit price. He also commented that becoming more sustainable at a local and National level is the

way forward and that Council Officers are reviewing previous considerations regarding alternative energy options which are now more economical. He advised that Cabinet/Council will be asked to invest significant funds in alternative energy solutions such as solar, hydro so that the Council can become more self-sufficient.

The Leader referred to the hold that Russia has over the supply of gas to Europe in terms of the energy crisis which could be avoided should self-sufficiency and sustainability be sought.

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

“What representations are being made to the U.K. Westminster Government regarding the funding crisis that local authorities are facing in the forthcoming financial year?”

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader responded that in his role as Leader of RCT Council and of the WLGA, he has written to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the UK Government in respect of the pressures facing local authorities next year which are unprecedented and have lobbied the UK Government for additional funding.

He added that the vast majority of the Council’s reserves have been set aside for specific services such as £21M for Schools. Despite the Council facing significant overspend it held its reserves to use this year and next year. He referred to the current lack of investment in public services such as the NHS, the DVLA, Passport Office (both of which have experienced significant backlogs), Network Rail and other areas which need more investment, and which are not receiving sufficient support from the UK Government who are perhaps not personally affected or impacted by their services and do not value them as they should.

No Supplementary Question

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

“What proactive measures are the council undertaking to ensure drains and gulleys are clear in order to prevent flooding incidents?”

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader responded to the question by confirming that the Council has set up a dedicated Drainage Maintenance Team comprising of 33 officers, which is a significant number of officers and more than any other local authority in Wales. Following the Storm Dennis report to Cabinet in 2020, the Council has procured a contract with Arch, who have a regional depot in Porth, for CCTV survey and specialised high pressure vacuor cleaning of surface water sewers, for a 5-year contract.

The Leader advised that in response to requests to clear drains and gulleys, the inspectors, of which there are now three across the county borough, will assess the gully and where there is no risk of ponding the request will be picked up

under the Council's regular maintenance. If it is located in a residential area where there is a risk to properties or there is a history of blockages the gulley will be cleared.

Supplementary Question

"A gulley was blocked on the main road in Hirwaun this morning which could have caused flooding. There have been several other incidents whether from leaves or fat from private businesses causing blockages in the gulleys. When the proactive measures described fail to prevent flooding incidents such as we've experienced, does the Council monitor this and is there data for the number of reactive calls we respond to and does the Council implement further action in response to that data to achieve the aim of proactively preventing floods?"

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader commented that he had personally taken the call regarding the blocked gulley referred to by Cllr K Morgan and had advised the resident to log the call with the Council's Contact Centre. He confirmed that cleaning the gulleys are prioritised according to data that indicates areas of high risk or if there is a history of flooding. In some areas there is a 'wash off' and other areas are cleaned on a monthly basis. The Leader assured Members that every call to the contact centre is logged on the Council's CRM system and the data is used to identify areas of concern. In conclusion, the Leader advised Members to contact the Officers with any specific concerns regarding blocked gulleys by calling the Council's Contact Centre.

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

"Will the Leader please make a statement on the Council's budget planning ahead of the forecasted lower settlements for Local Authorities in the next two financial years?"

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader commented that he had recently met with Leaders, Finance Cabinet Members, the Chief Executive and Treasurers of the 21 other Local Authorities in RCT and he added that the figures across Wales are similar to the shortfall in RCT, with Swansea Cardiff and Merthyr, and other similar size local authorities, reporting similar deficits.

The Leader used the following analogy to describe the situation, next year will be like walking up a hill, the year after will be like climbing a cliff and in two years' time it will be like falling off the cliff because the UK Government has deferred spending cuts which will potentially leave significant cuts to public spending. The Leader hoped that the prediction that the recession will be shorter, shallower and the economy will grow will come to fruition and that it won't mean more tax cuts for the rich. He commented that in his opinion, the windfall tax should have been further increased to 50% or even 75% and reiterated that this tax is unexpected profit over and above what was expected. He hoped that any future Government would go further with its windfall tax.

Supplementary Statement

“Tough decisions are not the fault of the Council, and we need to communicate that these service changes are at the door of UK Government and their political choices. The individuals and councils are in the similar boat and having to make tough decisions through no fault of their own”

5. Question from County Borough Councillor M. D. Ashford to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, County Borough Councillor G. Caple:

“What engagement has the Council received from Pontyclun Community Council on the future of Café 50+?”

Response of Councillor G Caple:

Councillor Caple advised that notification was received from Pontyclun Community Council on the 8th September advising that they would no longer take on the lease for Café 50. In terms of actual engagement, however, Councillor Caple commented that Officers have confirmed that the Community Council did not engage with the Council and simply notified of the change which, was somewhat surprising.

Supplementary Question:

Would you agree that there should have been meaningful engagement with both residents and the Council on this issue?

Response of Councillor G Caple:

Councillor Caple responded that proper consultation should ordinarily take place before such a decision is taken and it is disappointing that meaningful engagement was not sought with the Council in this instance. He added that Café 50+ is clearly a well-used and popular facility locally and it is essential that consultation is undertaken with residents and service users in the event of any service changes.

6. Question from County Borough Councillor S. Rees to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:

“Following on from the disastrous mini budget in September, how will the measures in the recent autumn statement affect Welsh local authorities with regards to the Barnett formula and the block grant?”

Response of the Leader, Councillor A Morgan:

The Leader advised that the Gilt markets improved which means that it affects borrowing costs for capital investment whereas the local government borrowing is locked in. Around 80% of UK Government borrowing is locked in with 20% of the borrowing based on interest on the day. This meant that the mini budget alone added £15M to UK borrowing.

The Leader added that the measures announced in the Autumn Statement last week, will mean that Wales will receive additional funding of £1.2bn over the

next two years. The Leader explained that this funding is welcome for our larger services; however, it doesn't go anywhere near addressing the ever-expanding budget gaps the Council faces with energy costs increasing to £200M and the NHS is estimated to have a \$207M increase in their energy costs. With this picture, 80% of the funding next year will only cover the energy costs for the NHS and Welsh Councils alone.

The Leader concluded that a series of meetings will take place between now and the 14th December when the provisional Local Government settlement will be announced but even with the additional £1.2bn over the next two years, the overall budget in 2024/25 will be no higher in real terms than in the current year.

There was no supplementary question due to the lapse of the allotted time.

54 Council Work Programme 2022/23- For Information

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented the Council Work Programme for the 2022/23 Municipal Year and advised that details of a special Council meeting in December would be circulated closer to the time. He added that the scheduled Council meeting on the 18th January 2023 would include council business as set out in the work programme with the Public Participation Strategy and Constitution Guide being reported subject to these matters being considered by the Constitution Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

55 RHONDDA CYNON TAF PENSION FUND 2021/22 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AND EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Director of Finance & Digital Services advised that as the administering authority for the RCT Pension Fund, Council is now presented with the final and audited accounts for the fund for the year ending March 31st, 2022. He added that the external audit process is now complete, and he introduced Mr Mike Jones, from Audit Wales, to provide a summary of their end of year audit report.

Mr M Jones, Audit Wales presented the Audit Wales Audit of Accounts Report for RCT Pension Fund referring Members specifically to paragraphs 4 and 5 which set out the level of materiality this year of £45M. Mr Jones wished to acknowledge that the short and positive report reflects only minor typographical and presentational misstatements (as set out in paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 of the report) and he praised the efficiency of the Finance Service within RCT Council. Mr Jones also advised Members that there is a delay in signing off the RCT accounts due to issues relating to the infrastructure and how it is accounted for, he added that this is a national delay with Welsh Government currently looking at a statutory override.

The Director of Finance & Digital Services advised that there were no issues of concern identified and he added that the fund accounts are attached to his report along with a letter of representation. The Director commented that the Funds comprehensive governance arrangements have operated effectively throughout the year and the accounts had been reviewed by the Governance & Audit Committee on the 7th September 2022 with no issues raised at the meeting to prevent Council from approving the accounts.

The Leader thanked Audit Wales and acknowledged the successful joint working

and engagement with them, he also wished to place on record the thanks of Full Council to the Director of Finance & Digital Services and his teams for the management of the Council's accounts in view of the volume of grants which have been processed during the last few years.

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

1. Approve and note the Statement of Accounts for the Rhondda Cynon Taf Pension Fund (Appendix 1), and associated Letter of Representation (Appendix 2); and
2. Note the outcome of the 7th September 2022 Governance and Audit Committee meeting as required by the Local Government Measure (paragraph 8.2).

56 2022-23 Mid-Year Treasury Management Stewardship Report

In accordance with the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management the Director of Finance and Digital Services provided Members with information on the Council's Treasury Management activity during the first six months of 2022/23 and Prudential and Treasury Indicators for the same period.

The Director advised that against a backdrop of economic turbulence the Council can continue to run with its low-risk investment strategy which is performing well with a higher rate of risk weighted interest as compared to many of its peers. He added that any borrowing requirement in the near term, not likely to be substantial nor long term, will be satisfied by shorter term borrowing.

The Director advised that there is one risk associated with the Council's LOBO debt being terminated, the amount of LOBO debt held in 2022/23 is £31m with the interest rate of 4.5%. In such an event the Director stated that the Council will use an appropriate mix of borrowing to ensure the best value is achieved.

Following a discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the content of the report.

57 Notice of Motion

The following Notice of Motion was received standing in the names of:

A. Morgan, M. Webber, L. Addiscott, M. D. Ashford, J. Barton. D. R. Bevan, J. Bonetto, S. Bradwick, J. Brencher, G. Caple, J. Cook, A. Crimmings, S. J. Davies, R. Davis, V. Dunn, E. L. Dunning, J. Edwards, J. A. Elliott, L. Ellis, S. Emanuel, R. Evans, A. S. Fox, R. Harris, S. Hickman, G. Holmes, G. Hopkins, W. Hughes, G. Jones, G. O. Jones, R. R. Lewis, W. Lewis, C. Leyshon, M. Maohoub, C. Middle, N. H. Morgan, S. Morgans, M. A. Norris, D. Owen-Jones, D. Parkin, S. Powderhill, C. Preedy, S. Rees, A. Roberts, J. Smith, G. Stacey, L. A. Tomkinson, W. Treeby, J. Turner, G. L. Warren, K. Webb, D. Williams, G. E. Williams, R. Williams, T. Williams, R. Yeo:

Unite is running the 'Get me Home safely' campaign to ensure safe home transport is widely available for the night-time economy and shift workers who often struggle to find and pay for transport home after midnight. You can read

more about the campaign [Get ME Home Safely | Make Our Communities & Workplaces Safer \(unitetheunion.org\)](https://unitetheunion.org)

Councils have a key role to play in working with businesses and community safety partners to ensure that people working and living within their local community can get home safely.

This Council notes that:

- Shift work is widespread in many industries, particularly hospitality as well as health and care workers, retail, cleaning, security and porter staff and can often entail late night working.
- Many workers, especially women are increasingly worried about their safety travelling to and from work at night.
- While employers may feel that their duty of care to staff ends when an employee finishes a shift, they also need to take into consideration journeys home, especially during unsocial hours.
- Information from Unite indicates the weakness of enforcement of the law against sexual assault, including up-skirting, on public transport is appalling and it is understood that only 2% of victims go onto report sexual harassment on public transport.
- Unite, the Union's Get me Home Safely campaign which calls on all employers to take all reasonable steps to ensure workers are able to get home safely from work at night is greatly needed and should be supported.
- Greater numbers of public transport staff trained in how to identify and report sexual harassment and stronger enforcement of the law against sexual assault and harassment on public transport are urgently needed.

This Council will:

- Support Unite, the Trade Union's Get Me Home Safely Campaign.
- Reaffirm its commitment to taking positive action to prevent violence against women and girls and ensuring that people feel safe in public areas across all areas of RCT. This Council will continue to actively contribute to achieving the goals of the Welsh Government Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2022-2026.
- Continue to work with the licensed trade to operate a safe night time economy in line with our Licensing Policy Objectives, working with licencees, employers, the Police and Community Safety partners to ensure our communities are safe places late at night.
- Work with our late night premises and organisations employing shift workers to promote the safety of workers and encourage licensees and employers to consider staff transport as an integral part of operating a safe and sustainable business, helping to ensure workers in these sectors are valued This will significantly benefit the safety and wellbeing of hospitality workers, particularly women, who often cannot afford or access safe transport options late at night and benefit our community and the business through improved staff recruitment and retention.
- Continue to work with Welsh Government and the WLGA to bring forward Welsh Government's commitment to reforming the national minimum standards for taxis and private hire and how the legislative framework

operates in Wales.

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

58 Urgent Business

The Presiding Member advised that the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communication regarding 'Changes to Membership' would be considered at this juncture, as a matter of urgent business.

59 Changes to Membership

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communication advised of the changes to the Labour representation on both the Pension Fund Committee and the Edward Thomas Charity in place of former County Borough Councillor Marcia Rees-Jones.

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

1. County Borough Councillor N Morgan is to be nominated in place of former County Borough Councillor M Rees-Jones on the Pension Fund Committee; and
2. County Borough Councillor A Dennis is to be nominated in place of former County Borough Councillor Marcia Rees- Jones on the Edward Thomas Charity.

This meeting closed at 6.15 pm

**Councillor G Hughes
Chair.**