

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON WEDNESDAY, 20 JULY 2022 AT 15:00**

Present

Councillor M Jones – Chairperson

S Aspey	H T Bennett	A R Berrow	F D Bletsoe
S J Bletsoe	JPD Blundell	E L P Caparros	N Clarke
RJ Collins	HJ David	C Davies	C L C Davies
P Davies	M J Evans	N Farr	J Gebbie
RM Granville	H Griffiths	S J Griffiths	D T Harrison
M L Hughes	D M Hughes	RM James	M R John
MJ Kearns	W J Kendall	M Lewis	J Llewellyn-Hopkins
RL Penhale-Thomas	J E Pratt	E Richards	R J Smith
JC Spanswick	T Thomas	G Walter	A Wathan
A Williams	AJ Williams	I Williams	MJ Williams
R Williams	E D Winstanley	T Wood	

Apologies for Absence

P Ford, W R Goode, P W Jenkins, I M Spiller, JH Tildesley MBE and HM Williams

Officers:

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Laura Griffiths	Principal Solicitor
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T Wood declared a personal interest in Agenda item 11. (3) as a Bridgend town trader.

30. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of Council dated 15 June 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the following paragraphs being added to the minutes on Declarations of Interest the Capital Programme Update:-

'Reason for declaration of interest made by Councillor I Williams to be altered from that contained in the Minutes, to as follows:-

Personal interest as Chair of Governors at Oldcastle Primary and Brynteg Comprehensive schools.'

With regard to the paragraphs relating to investment at Coety Primary and Pencoed Schools from a Member responded to by the Corporate Director – Education and Family

Support on the Capital Programme Update item, add the following Member question and response from the Corporate Director – Communities to this part of the minutes:-

‘There has been a £500k increase committed to the Cosy Corner project, Porthcawl, so please can I have an assurance that this is the last cost increase for this scheme and would it not be wiser to progress here with the previous Credu Scheme, as the scheme had overrun in any event.

Credu had planned developing a Maritime Centre at this location back in 2020, at a cost of £5.8m. Funding had been committed by Visit Wales in the sum of £3m towards this. However, Credu withdrew from the scheme as they went into administration, so with the site half constructed, BCBC took it over to initially make it safe. With only £1m of the £3m Visit Wales funding subsequently then being available, Cabinet made a decision to take the site forward as part of a Community Scheme. So, a single storey building was then developed there, in-keeping with other buildings at the location, with a number of uses within this. The Council then as part of its Capital Programme committed a further £1m of match funding to the Visit Wales funding. However, to progress with other external works at the site as part of the Cosy Corner development and in a bid to cover increased market and inflationary pressures and costs a further £500k has had to be committed to the scheme, in order to progress with the works. The original scheme had never overrun.’

31. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:

Mayor

The Mayor announced, that as a council, we often warn people to remain alert for scams that are designed to convince people to part with their money or to reveal private banking details.

He was sure colleagues could imagine his surprise, after he was recently informed by a resident about his own name and position as Mayor were being fraudulently used.

It transpired that the resident concerned had received an email from a bogus account set up to look as if it belonged to the Mayor of Bridgend County Borough.

In the email, the scammer using my name asked the resident if they could do ‘me’ a favour by purchasing several hundred pounds worth of digital gift cards and promised to reimburse them immediately.

On seeing the messages from the scammer, several things stood out immediately. The first thing I noticed was that the email was full of spelling mistakes and poor grammar and had been badly put together.

The other big giveaway was the fake email address, which did not end in a gov-dot-UK address, and I am appalled that someone tried to use my name and my position as Mayor in such a criminal manner.

Sadly, it seems that this is quite a common scam which nearly always involves impersonating somebody and sending an email to their friends, family members, people they have supported through public office or customers they may have done business with.

The Mayor urged people to remain alert and to report all suspected scams to the Action Fraud website, without delay.

On happier news, he was delighted to attend the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the council and Japanese green energy specialists, Marubeni.

This was a non-binding partnership agreement which set out how both organisations intend to work together to explore and develop a largescale new hydrogen energy initiative.

Bridgend County Borough was specifically selected by Marubeni as the preferred UK location for a green hydrogen demonstrator project, following discussions with Welsh Government.

It aimed to create a plant capable of generating and balancing the supply and storage of low-cost green energy and could act as a trailblazer by generating clean fuel for fleet vehicles, ranging from council gritters to recycling and refuse collection lorries.

It could also be extended to cover emergency response vehicles used by blue light services and will consider how hydrogen fuel might be used to heat buildings and facilities a such as schools, Extra Care residential homes, local swimming pools and more.

Welsh Government is actively supporting its development and as the project develops, the Cardiff Capital Region has also agreed in principle to consider the opportunity for making further investment.

Depending on how successful the scheme is, it could then be rolled out across the UK.

Anyone who has filled up their car recently will know that it is becoming increasingly important to find alternative sources of clean, green cheap energy.

This scheme has the potential to not only contribute towards our own decarbonisation targets, but could help meet national Welsh Government targets on achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030 and establishing renewable hydrogen production sites as part of the Net Zero Wales agenda.

The Mayor looked forward to seeing the project make progress in the weeks and months to come.

In terms of functions and events, the Mayor's Office had continued to be very busy in supporting various organisations across the County Borough.

Both the Deputy Mayor and myself have been privileged to attend many diverse events and met some incredible people. A selection of these events included:

The BAVO volunteer awards ceremony held at the Grand Pavilion Porthcawl. It was truly humbling and inspiring to witness at first hand the incredible work undertaken by people helping others sometimes in very demanding and unique circumstances. He extended congratulations to all those nominated for an Award and thanked the BAVO management team for organising this event.

The Mayor was sure Members would wish to join him in saying a Big Thank you to all volunteers across the County Borough, that had been involved in the above.

He announced that he also had the privilege to attend award ceremonies at The Bridgend College and CCYD at Tondy, where students can be very proud of their achievements there. There was no doubt the County Borough has a wealth of talent

within its younger generation, both in terms of academic achievement and vocational qualification. Well done to all.

On a very hot Sunday afternoon the Mayor also attended a " Night at the Musicals " show at the Grand Pavilion Porthcawl. This had been a great performance.

51 Children from across the County Borough were amazing, along with a packed audience the young people involved, entertained them with song and dance of a very high standard. It was also a pleasure to meet many of the very proud parents after the event. Very proud parents I may add. The Mayor extended his thanks to the Bridgend Show School for the invitation and for organising this event.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help, advised that Foster Wales Bridgend has recently celebrated its first birthday and has been reflecting on a year dedicated to improving foster care for children across the county borough.

As members may know, Foster Wales Bridgend is part of an all-Wales fostering network of not-for-profit fostering services, comprising of all 22 local authority teams.

Over the last 12 months local authority foster carers have come together to provide vital support for vulnerable young people and parents, with 163 new fostering families formed.

However, there is still a need to recruit an estimated 700 new foster carers and families across Wales, all while the country faces a continuing cost-of-living crisis.

The Foster Wales team in Bridgend wants to encourage more people to take up fostering through their local authority, so children can remain in their local area, close to their friends and families and in their schools.

Latest statistics show that last year, 84 per cent of young people fostered by their local authority stayed in their immediate local area.

In comparison, 77 per cent of children cared for by commercial fostering agencies were moved out of their local area to find foster placements. Almost six per cent of children were moved out of Wales entirely.

Our Bridgend foster team wants to support the Welsh Government in its aim to remove the profit element of the care system, ensuring young peoples' interests remain at the heart of the process and offering stability to foster carers through long standing and experienced local authority teams.

We are committed to supporting our hard-working, dedicated foster carers by making life even better for children and those who care for them.

We will be looking at offering carers the financial support they need to provide opportunities and stability for children and continuing best practice for matching, by having a wide pool of foster families to choose the best fit for both the foster carer and the child. Even when placements are made in an emergency, enabling social workers to introduce the child to their foster carer before being welcomed into the home.

This is why local authority, not-for-profit fostering services work alongside schools and children's social workers to develop an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the specific opportunities or challenges in our local area.

We are in this for the long term, for the right reasons, and most of all, for the children themselves, she concluded.

Cabinet Member – Education

The Cabinet Member - Education advised that the next phase of the new digital payment voucher scheme is set to be distributed to eligible families.

Designed to ensure that children who are entitled to free school meals will not go hungry over the summer holidays, the £39 vouchers will be issued in three stages and will provide up to two weeks' worth of food each.

Redeemable at any one of the UK's 28,000 Pay Point outlets, the vouchers will remain valid until the first of September, and more information is available at the council's website.

He was sure that members would also want to join him in congratulating several of our school-based staff for some recent significant achievements.

The Professional Teaching Awards Cymru have named Meurig Jones of Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd as this year's Headteacher of the Year, while Gill Sullivan from Maesteg School was also nominated in their 'Supporting Teaching and Learning' category.

While over at Penybont Primary School, teacher Jemma Evans has scooped the 'Teacher of the Year' accolade at the Into Film Awards for incorporating film techniques into her lessons.

The Cabinet Member – Education extended his thanks to all three individuals for achieving these accolades.

Cabinet Member – Regeneration

The Cabinet Member – Regeneration, was pleased to confirm that Welsh firm John Weaver Contractors Ltd have been appointed to provide all-new community facilities at Cosy Corner, Porthcawl.

Workers are about to start laying down the groundwork for an all-new stone and glass-clad building and a landscaped external area that can be enjoyed by visitors and residents.

This £2.4 million project will incorporate premises suitable for five small retail units, public toilets, meeting space for community use, offices for the harbour master, changing facilities for users of the nearby marina and more.

The site will also feature an outdoor children's play area, plenty of public seating, space for staging events and an all-weather canopy capable of providing comfortable outdoor shelter from rain and the sun.

It has been part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through Welsh Government and is expected to be ready in time for spring 2023.

This exciting new project will support our ongoing plans for the development of the Salt Lake and waterfront areas and will complement other regeneration projects such as the new marina, new sea defences, the recently restored Jennings Building and improvements to the eastern breakwater.

Cabinet Member – Communities

The Cabinet Member – Communities was sure that members will be pleased to hear that work is well underway on the investment programme which is refurbishing play areas across the county borough and providing new equipment.

The work is being undertaken by the Green Spaces team, and by the end of the month, we anticipate that play areas based in Ogmores Vale, Nottage, Evanstown, Wildmill and Caerau will have been completed.

Then, in September, the work will move on to play areas located in Ogmores Vale, Porthcawl, Aberkenfig and Tondu.

Once the new equipment has been installed, further works are planned that will provide refurbished street furniture for the benefit of local children and families.

Further news on the investment programme would be relayed to members, as it progresses.

He was also sure that members will have noted the work that is taking place just outside the Civic Offices to replace and upgrade the traffic lights at the junction between Angel Street and Park Street.

This was also the first temporary traffic light system of its kind to be trialled in Wales, and that early analysis of its performance has revealed it to have been a big success.

Designed to mimic the set-up of the original traffic lights, it ensures that the flow of vehicles through the busy junction can continue as normally as possible and keeps the need for unnecessary queuing to an absolute minimum.

This has greatly supported the refurbishment of the existing traffic lights, which is necessary as they are now more than 25 years old, and also helps with our efforts to improve air quality.

It has certainly proven to be of major benefit in minimising disruption for drivers, and I am sure that we can expect to see the set-up being used for similar works in the future across the County Borough.

The Cabinet Member – Communities thanked Officers in the Street Lighting team for introducing this initiative.

Cabinet Member – Resources

Absent - No announcements

Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations

Absent – No announcements

Chief Executive

Absent – No announcements

32. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER**

The Leader announced that he was aware that rumours are circulating about the Aldi food store development at Porthcawl, with some claiming that the company has withdrawn due to issues of ground contamination.

He was happy to confirm that this is completely untrue.

There are no issues with the ground at the site, and the project is very much moving ahead as planned.

The company recently confirmed to us that initial preparations are nearing completion, and that contractors are being lined up for construction to begin at the two-acre site.

As members were aware, the development aims to provide a landmark gateway into the town while creating up to 40 full-time jobs for local people.

All money generated from the sale of the land is being reinvested back into Porthcawl to support local infrastructure improvements and further stages of the exciting regeneration plans.

During the store's construction, public car parking will remain available at Salt Lake and Hillsboro Place, and separate plans are under development for creating an all-new multi storey at Hillsboro Place.

If all proceeds as planned, we can expect to see the new Aldi store opening its doors in summer 2023.

The Leader confirmed that he was pleased to attend an event recently alongside the Deputy Leader, the Mayor and Cabinet colleagues to mark the tenth anniversary of the ongoing partnership between the council and Halo Leisure, Social Enterprise.

When the partnership was first formed back in 2012, members may remember that it was criticised as being destined to fail.

Thankfully, the opposite has proven to be true, and in the ten years of operation, customer visits have increased by 2.35 million people a year.

It has enabled more than £7 million to be invested back into local initiatives and has resulted in major refurbishments and new facilities being introduced at Halo sites in Bridgend, the Garw Valley, the Ogmores Valley, Pen-coed, Pyle, Maesteg and Ynysawdre.

More than 32,900 swimming lessons have been delivered to 2.1 million local children in that time, and if the pandemic lockdown had not forced centres to close their doors, I am sure that we would also be looking at more than a million group exercise classes delivered for local people.

This partnership has achieved all that we wanted it to and more and was recognised in 2016 when it became the first in Wales to be awarded an 'Excellent' rating by the industry's national benchmarking service.

The Leader stated that he looked forward to what the next ten years will bring, and thanked everyone who has helped make this such a resounding success.

Finally, members may wish to inform their constituents that the annual programme of activities for children – the Summer of Fun - will be running again this year in partnership with organisations like Halo and our local town and community councils.

As well as supporting parents and families, this ensures that children and young people can enjoy fun, exciting activities during the school holidays in Bridgend County Borough.

A huge range of community activities are taking place, so whether children are into BMX biking, football or want to try out surfing and bushcraft, there is something to suit everyone, he added.

The programme of events included Active 4 Life schemes in Porthcawl, Brackla, Maesteg and Pencoed, and the popular Summer Reading Challenge which is being provided by Awen Cultural Trust at all Arwen County Libraries.

Halo Leisure is providing activities such as free swimming sessions and for the first time, a new Kid's Club will be staging free events using the square at Bridgend Indoor Market.

At Bryngarw Country Park, children will be able to enjoy activities ranging from pond dipping to shows such as David Walliams 'Awful Auntie', and organisations such as Menter Bro Ogwr and The Urdd will provide activities for Welsh-speaking children also.

New activities are being added all the time, and anyone who wants to find out more should be directed to the Summer of Fun webpages at www.bridgend.gov.uk

33. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME OUTTURN 2021-22 AND QUARTER 1 2022-23**

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change submitted a report on the above, the purpose of which was to:-

- comply with the requirement of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) 'The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities' (2021 edition);
- provide details of the capital outturn for 2021-22 (Appendix A to the report);
- provide an update of the capital position for 2022-23 as at 30 June 2022 (Appendix B);
- seek approval for a revised capital programme for 2022-23 to 2031-32 (Appendix C);
- note the projected Prudential and Other Indicators for 2021-22 and 2022-23 (Appendix D)

She explained that the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) Regulations 2003 as amended, contains detailed provisions for the capital finance and accounting controls, including the rules on the use of capital receipts and what is to be treated as capital expenditure. They modify accounting practice in various ways to prevent adverse impacts on authorities' revenue resources.

As well as the legislation, the Council manages its Treasury Management and Capital activities in accordance with the following associated guidance:-

1. CIPFA's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice;
2. CIPFA's The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities;
3. Welsh Government (WG) revised Guidance on Local Authority Investments

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, confirmed that on 24 February 2021, Council approved a capital budget of £62.363 million for 2021-22 as part of a

capital programme covering the period 2021-22 to 2030-31 and Council received regular updates and approved revisions through the year. Although Council approved new schemes for the 2022-23 capital programme in June 22, the programme for 2021-22 was last updated and approved by Council on 23 February 2022. The report provided an update on the following:

- Capital Programme outturn 2021-22;
- Capital Programme monitoring quarter 1 2022-23;
- A revised Capital Programme for 2022-23 to 2031-32;
- Capital Strategy monitoring;
- Prudential and other indicators

Paragraphs 4 of the report, then gave in some detail, narrative on the Capital Programme Outturn Position for 2021-22, with Appendix A of the report giving information of the various schemes within the Programme and the budget available compared to the actual spend. This included in bullet point format, some amendments to the 2021-22 Programme, including information regarding slippage of some of these schemes.

Section 4.2 of the report, provided Members with an update on the Council's Capital Programme for 2022-23 since the budget was last approved by Council, this incorporated any such new schemes and grant approvals.

Table 1 in the report reflected the Capital Programme broken down by Directorate for 2022-23, with Table 2 (at paragraph 4.2.2) summarising the current funding assumptions for the Capital Programme for the above period.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change then referred to Appendix B of the report, which provided details of the individual schemes within the Capital Programme, showing the budget available in 2022-23 compared to the projected spend at 30 June 2022.

This section of the report showed new and amended schemes since the Capital Programme was last approved. She added that a revised Capital Programme was therefore shown in Appendix C of the report.

The remainder of the submission related to information on Prudential and Other Indicators 2022-23 (Monitoring) and Capital Strategy Monitoring.

A Member referred to 4.1.21, page 25 of the report, where he noted that the Council has been awarded funding of £1.162 million for free school meals. He asked the Leader whether or not this will allow the BCBC administration to meet its manifesto commitment of delivering free school meals to all primary school children by September 2023.

He had a further question on education, in respect to paragraph 4.1.4 on page 26 of the report with regards to school capital maintenance. The report confirms that there have been a number of underspends due to internal and external resource availability, which has meant that the grant in question has been used to fund various other schemes in the Capital Programme. He asked what these schemes were.

Finally, once more on page 26, the report noted that £1.677 million of funding for Minor Capital Works has slipped due to delays in completing a number of schemes. He was interested to know which schemes had been delayed.

The Leader advised that unfortunately, due to rising costs, there are five schools that did not currently have kitchens and they therefore had no ability to cook any meals, including free school meals.

The aim the Leader added, was that free school meals would be available for all pupils at Reception age from this coming September and Infants aged pupils also. Everyone then of Primary school age would receive this benefit by September 2024.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support added, that there was a commitment from Welsh Government to ensure that all primary school pupils, have an offer of a free school meal by September 2024. Work was actively ongoing by the Council, to meet this target.

Over the last two years and as was announced back in 2021, the only formal commitment he was aware of from a Welsh Government perspective, was for all the learners in primary schools to be offered free school meals by September 2024. With regards to the other two questions, he would have to provide further information to the Member outside of the meeting, as they come under the purview of the Council's Corporate Landlord section as they related to capital maintenance schemes. Any delays to the schemes referred to, were as a result of resourcing and supply pressures internally, as well as COVID-19 pressures and the rising cost of the materials and other contractor costs. That meant that some of the proposed schemes have had been reviewed in terms of specification and retendered, which has inevitably slowed down some of the work.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family support added, that he would provide the Member with a full list of schemes in relation to the minor works outside of the meeting, though this list remained unchanged with officers working through these on a prioritisation basis, albeit playing some catch-up work due to the problems experienced to date. Work was ongoing with colleagues in procurement to ensure that the schemes were being addressed, in order to achieve satisfactory further progress on these.

The Member then asked a further question in relation to page 29 of the report on the Levelling Up Fund. He was aware that the cost of the Penprysg Road Bridge at Pencoed was estimated to be £20m a couple of months of months ago. He asked therefore, why this cost had now escalated to £25m.

Finally, he asked if Heol-y-Cyw could be considered sometime in the future, as an Active Travel connection route.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised, that the cost of the works has increased for the Penprysg Road Bridge, ie feasibility costs. The bridge had not been fully designed yet, though this was work commissioned with Network Rail but yet to be completed.

The cost had originally been estimated at approximately £19m, however, colleagues at Network Rail have advised BCBC that this will be substantially more going forward. With inflation currently at 9.4%, and noting that the delivery of the bridge probably won't be in place until the Spring of 2026, if we are successful with our Levelling-Up Fund bid, the costings have been re-estimated to around £25m, to ensure that there will be enough money contained in the bid to progress fully the works.

She added that due to inflation and material costs rising almost daily, it was becoming increasingly difficult to accurately tie down the cost for the different schemes that made up the Capital Programme and this was a problem being experienced by local authorities across the whole of the UK.

In terms of Active Travel, BCBC were as far ahead as any local authority in Wales. She added that she would be happy to discuss this with the Councillor, ie the scope for a further active travel route in Heol-y-Cyw and come up hopefully with some viable options of how to achieve this.

A Member noted from the report that there was some slippage of monies for the Ewenny Road development, in the sum of £2.26 million. He noted that the report mentioned a revision to the engineering scope of works and to the works specification. He sought some clarification that any such revision would not result in a lowering of expectations, or be at the detriment of the extensive works required on the site.

He also enquired if more than one tenderer for the works had submitted a quote to ensure we were having a competitive and value for money work specification and finally, he asked when the works would be undertaken.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that the slippage had been as a result of legal agreements having to be drawn up, as this was a regional project that had been planned with the 10 other local authorities that made up the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal. This process however had now been completed. A further delay had also resulted from problems with contamination of the site, which had now also been addressed and resolved. Therefore, site investigation works and planning would be carried out as soon as possible.

In relation to the tendering of the works, she added that interest from more than one tenderer had been received, however, only the one tenderer met all the requirements of the works specification.

The Member asked, how strongly the capital programme featured in the Authority's Risk Register. Due to increased inflation, difficulties in getting labour and materials and a national skills shortage, amongst other reasons, he asked if there was an ongoing exercise looking at the deliverability of various pieces of work that may in the future unfortunately find themselves the victim of economic difficulties.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, confirmed that the capital programme per se is not an individual risk on the programme. However, there were a number of risks identified in the Corporate Risk Assessment, which would cover exactly the issues that the Member had just raised, for example, the risk register would look at issues like the impact of inflation for tendered work. It would also examine the ability to actually successfully tender for different pieces of work.

BCBC wanted companies not only submitting tenders for works, but it also needed these companies to deliver the work to a high quality standard that also met our procurement requirements.

She reminded Members also that the Governance and Audit Committee of the Council monitors and updates the Risk Register periodically as part of its remit of functions.

The Cabinet Member – Communities added, that the Council now accounted for risk contingencies in the Contract documents that are sent out and returned as part of the tendering process, due to the rise of costs, such as diesel and materials, etc

A Member referred to page 36 of the report, where it stated there was an underspend of £49k in a safe route project. This was Welsh Government funding specifically for this project. There was also a number of projects similar to this that showed underspends against them. If these monies from Welsh Government funding specifically relate to

those projects, she asked where the underspends were going. Would it be able to be spent on other safe routes projects, or was it being allocated to a central Council fund.

The Member also asked for an explanation as to what were communities minor works and highway small schemes.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that we receive Welsh Government funding for safe routes to schools in the form of a very significant amount. The underspend referred to, is very small in relation to this and should the Council be unable to spend all these funding allocations in one year, it would ask the Welsh Government if it could roll the money over to the following year, or alternatively, ring fence it so that it eventually can be used for the purpose it was given for.

She added that in terms of the communities minor works and highway small schemes, these were very small pieces of work. For instance, such as minor highway amendments, moving streetlights, small repairs, maybe a dropped kerb, etc. There was a small scheme budget for this purpose for works spanning the County Borough.

The Cabinet Member – Communities added that the Council had set aside a significant sum of money for highway improvement schemes going forward and he was very pleased to remind Members of this.

The Member also referred to page 45 of the report, where reference was made to S106 Agreement monies and an instance of slippage of £246k which had been rolled over to this financial year. She was aware, that the local authority had a five year window period to spend S106 allocations at different site developments, so she sought an assurance that the Council never puts itself in a position whereby any such monies were given back to the developers should they not be spent within the above period.

The Corporate Director – Communities assured Members that the Council would always spend these allocations within the five year period as this money was needed to provide on-site, facilities such as maybe a children's playground or other assets and improvements that may be required as part of the development. Legal agreements were put in place for this purpose, in order to protect this money, she added.

RESOLVED:

That Council:

- Noted the capital outturn for 2021-22 (Appendix A to the report)
- Noted the Council's Capital Programme 2022-23 Quarter 1 update to 30 June 2022 (Appendix B)
- Approved the revised Capital Programme (Appendix C)
- Noted the projected Prudential and Other Indicators for 2021-22 and 2022-23 (Appendix D).

34. MARKET STABILITY REPORT

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to provide Council with a brief overview of the Market Stability Report (MSR), as required under Section 144B of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

By way of background information, she advised that legislation requires local authorities to prepare and publish market stability reports and makes provision for regulations setting out the form these must take, matters to be included, and the prescribed period for carrying out market stability assessments as set out in the Partnership Arrangements (Amendment) and Regulated Services (Market Stability Reports) (Wales) Regulations 2021.

The Regulations also amend the Partnership Arrangements (Wales) Regulations 2015, so that the preparation and publication of market stability reports must be carried out on a regional footprint, with local authorities and Local Health Boards working together through Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs).

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed, that Regulations also required local authorities to produce market stability reports every five years, with the first reports aimed to be published by 1 June 2022. The Local Government Elections on the 5 May 2022 meant that it was not possible to gain approval of the MSR until new Councils were formed.

The report she added, will help inform and shape the next five-year area plan, along with the 2022 Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) population needs assessment.

In preparation for undertaking this report, the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing stated that local authorities carried out, in partnership with the Local Health Board and other RPB partners, an assessment of both the following:

- Sufficiency - an assessment of the sufficiency of care and support in meeting the needs and demand for social care as set out in the population needs assessment. and
- Stability - an assessment of the stability of the market for regulated services providing care and support

She explained that the COVID19 pandemic had been an unprecedented challenge and has changed the type of demand and the way in which local authorities delivered care and support. The impact on people who need care, and their carers is recognised as is the ongoing workforce pressures and market uncertainty.

In January 2021 the Welsh Government published a White Paper setting out their ambition to rebalance care and support providing a mixed economy ensuring there was not an over reliance on the private sector. The ambition sought to simplify current commissioning arrangements, strengthen quality and social value and actively manage the market through effective partnership arrangements.

She stressed that it should be further noted, that the Programme for Government outlines the Welsh Governments commitment to 'eliminate private profit from care of looked after children' (Next Senedd term 2026-2031).

The diagram in paragraph 4.5 of the report, illustrated the relationships between each of the different elements of the MSR how they will contribute towards the ongoing development of regional plans and commissioning strategies and statements.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing then advised that the next section of the report, reflected the key messages from the Market Stability report, and that the recommendations would be further explored within the Regional Partnership Board, adult and children's boards within future work programmes, as appropriate.

Prior to receiving questions from the floor, she gave a resume of the key messages and recommended actions arising from the different elements of the Market Stability Report (MSR), for the benefit of Members.

The full version of the MSR was attached to the report at Appendix 1, with a summary version shown at Appendix 2.

The Deputy Leader thanked the Officer for this regional report. She confirmed that it was no surprise in this area of work, to see issues regarding difficulty around the recruitment and retention of staff, given the demands upon the service which had increased significantly so, particularly since the inception of the pandemic.

This had resulted in some difficulty around giving full commitment to the various plans and strategies relating to the future commissioning of care support mechanisms, including the not-for-profit type for young people. If local authorities are able to fully commit to the delivery of these services, adequate support needs to be provided from Central Government.

A Member asked what preventative measures the Council had moving forward for families that require early intervention, in order to ensure they are not put in a position of risk. Also, he asked if the Council have looked at any options of enhanced support for Foster Carers, for example free bus passes, free/reduced access to leisure facilities, etc.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that a report was considered by Cabinet yesterday entitled Foster Care Allowances update and if the Councillor read this, he will find that there is a considerable amount of information therein, including what Foster Carers think of the Council's service provision.

She added that service demands had increased by around 200% in recent times and this was proving to be extremely difficult to manage, especially as support to both Foster Carers should be accessible 24/7.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised, that through both her and the Education and Family Support Directorate, there was a wide range of support available in terms of early help and prevention and wellbeing services, including support from reunification staff which was invaluable.

These staff undertook very focused work in the support of children to become reunited with their families and stabilise placements at risk of breakdown. She added that efforts are also continually being made, to reduce the numbers of children being looked after, where this is safe and in the best interests of the child. She further added, that the Council had also introduced a Foster Care Charter which would support Foster Carers to look after some of the more challenging children, who had experienced unfortunate events in the early part of their lives.

Finally, the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, confirmed that a survey carried out as part of the Foster Carers Charter, included for feedback from them on their relationship and experiences with other providers, the full results of which could be shared with Members in due course.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- Noted the key messages and recommendations; and
- Endorsed the Regional Market Stability report.

35. **SIZE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, that proposed an amendment to the size and membership of the Council Standards Committee.

She confirmed that in accordance with statutory regulations, the membership of that committee shall consist of not less than five and no more than nine members.

The Standards Committee of the Council, presently had a membership of seven members, and these were listed in paragraph 3.2 of the report. Members would note that this number consisted of three elected members and four independent members.

The Monitoring Officer added, that the Standards Committee will only be quorate when at least three members, including the chairperson are present and at least half the Members present at any one time, are independent.

Given this requirement, the committee was on occasions in danger of not having the required number of members for a quorum at certain meetings, due to the balance of elected and independent members. If independent members were not available, as was the case in a recent meeting when, unfortunately, a meeting may be inquorate and as a consequence, the business on the agenda could not be proceeded with.

It was therefore proposed that the membership of the Standards Committee is increased to eight members in total, with an additional independent Member being appointed to the committee.

In accordance with the independent Remuneration Panel for Wales annual report, ordinary members of the committee are paid £105 for up to a four hour meeting and subsequently £210 for any meetings exceeding this time. These additional costs would be met from the centrally held provision for pay and price increases during the 2022-23 financial year.

A member of the Standards Committee confirmed he supported the recommendations of the report. He added however, that further consideration be given next year to increase the number of Town and Community Council representatives on the Committee, as had been the case in previous years.

Subject to budgetary pressures being taken into consideration regarding this proposal, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that this request could be given further consideration in due course.

RESOLVED:

That Council:

1. Approved the revised membership and size of the Standards Committee;
 2. Receives a further report following the recruitment process;
 3. Noted that the Constitution will be amended to reflect the revised membership.
36. **OUTCOME OF SURVEY OF MEETINGS TIMINGS**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, in order to update members on the survey that has recently been undertaken, in relation to the timings of meetings survey, the feedback from which was shown in Appendix 1 to the report.

The details of the feedback on each Committee and the preferred timings of these based on the wishes of members of each of those bodies, were set out in the report from paragraph 4.3 onwards.

Whilst the information was there for all members to note, the Monitoring Officer felt it was important to note the result of the survey taken in relation to full Council meetings. The majority of responses received here, requested a start time of 4:00pm and therefore, from September next going forward, the meetings of Council would commence at this time. However, she asked members to note that presently the Civic offices building closed at 6:30pm.

Therefore, when the Council commenced with hybrid meetings, there may be a requirement to keep the building open later than 6:30pm, should this be required.

The revised programme of meetings from September 2022 was detailed for members at Appendix 2. There was one proposed change to the schedule in relation to Subject O&S Committee 1, which due to a clash with another Council appointment on the 12 September 2022 would now commence at 2:30pm and that had been agreed following the approval of the Chairperson of this committee.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- a) Noted the outcome of the timings of meetings survey as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- b) Approved the proposed Programme of Meetings from September 2022 as shown in Appendix 2, which has been compiled from the survey and developed using the rationale as outlined in this report.

37. **INFORMATION REPORT FOR NOTING**

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy (and Monitoring Officer), reported on the Information Report which had been published since the last meeting of Council.

RESOLVED: That Council acknowledged the publication of the document listed in the report.

38. **TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FROM:**

Councillor M Williams to the Leader

Does the Leader agree that the Cabinet should reverse its policy of sports pitch full cost recovery for sports clubs and charitable events, ending the coercion of clubs and town & community councils into undertaking asset transfers or face pitch fee increases of up to 500%?

Furthermore, following cancellation of the policy does he agree to continue maintenance of Bridgend County Borough Council's sports facilities to a playable standard whilst it works with all teams in all sports, governing bodies and Town & Community councils to develop and implement a comprehensive sports and recreation strategy that works for all. Establishing Bridgend County Borough as the foremost local authority for sports and recreation within Wales?

Response

No sports club in Bridgend County Borough will experience full cost recovery in their fees. That has been the position since 2020.

The council confirmed in a public report to Cabinet in 2020 it would not introduce full cost recovery charges for any clubs provided that they committed to undertaking self-management either by full lease or licence. It was reported to Cabinet that in 2020 that the Council has received expressions of interest for all of its playing fields and park pavilions either from Town & Community Councils and/or sports clubs. Therefore, no club will experience full cost recovery.

Furthermore, I am pleased to confirm that for last 2 years (seasons 2020-21 and 2021-22), the Council waived all hire charges for the use of Sports Pavilions and Playing Fields managed by the Parks Department to assist sports clubs during the covid

pandemic. In addition, the Council created the Bridgend Sports Support Fund in 2019-20, providing funding of £75,000 to lessen the impact of covid with grants of up to £1,000 for sports clubs to assist with day-to-day operating costs. Similar funding was again provided in 2021-22 under the Bridgend Sports Support Fund with grants of up to £2,000 (Club Development) or £3,500 (Asset Development) to assist sports clubs recover from the pandemic.

Assets such as Sports Pavilions and Playing Fields at Bryncethin and Rest Bay, Community Centres and Play Areas transferred under the CAT programme have seen significant improvements with capital funding under the Council's CAT Fund and external investment of circa. £1M from Welsh Government, the Welsh Rugby Union, National Lottery and the Ford Community Legacy Fund. The CAT Team and our partners Cwmpas (formerly Wales Co-op) and Coalfields Regeneration Trust are currently working with Town and Community Councils and community groups across Bridgend so that similar outcomes can be achieved in more areas.

Supplementary question from Councillor M Williams

In answering the question the Leader has confirmed that he is not minded to change the policy of full cost recovery and the coercion of clubs to enter into asset transfers remains. However, he didn't answer my point regarding a charitable event but that is the nature of my supplementary question in any case, so he does have the opportunity to reflect on that.

I viewed remotely the last Budget Council meeting in February. It was agreed then by this Council to increase the cost to reflect full cost recovery of special day events such as Community Fun days and Race for Life on BCBC property or at BCBC playing fields. I note with interest that the Bridgend and Ogmores Young Labour summer social picnic and politics event will be taking place in Newbridge Fields this Saturday at 1:00PM. Could I ask the Leader, will the Bridgend and Ogmores Young Labour summer social group be paying the fees that are levied to other organisations, such as Race for Life?

Response

I am not a member of the Young Bridgend or Ogmores Labour group and therefore, I don't know about this event. I can of course find out about it, but I assume it's an informal gathering, as people often do gather in areas such as public playing fields and/or green open spaces available for recreational purposes for the public. But I will take this away and find out a bit more about the event. Just to confirm, Mr Mayor, there is no collusion. There is a partnership that we have with sports clubs across the County Borough and I am proud of that.

Partnerships are made here also with Town and Community Councils as well as organisations and we have made progress here in terms of investment in sports clubs across the County Borough, together with any associated facilities.

We have also seen more than £1,000,000 invested in facilities such as these and we will continue to work with all our Sports Clubs and Town and Community Councils to this end, because they have expressed an interest in delivering those further improvements to such facilities across the BCB.

Second supplementary question form Councillor I Williams

Could you please inform me what the procedure is if a club decides to withdraw its interest in the capital asset transfer process for whatever reason, maybe inability to maintain the assets so taken over, for example, sports pitches and changing rooms.

Perhaps because they cannot commit to the responsibility of taking on a lease for any particular period of time. What would that entail for that club if they pulled out and also in the event of a club being forced into administration or bankruptcy, would the Authority take that lease back over?

Also does the 500% increase in sports field hire then kick in or not, how will this apply? Why don't you remove this fee if BCBC do not intend to enforce it?

Response

That is a couple of questions there from Councillor Williams. The lease situation means that obviously the conditions of these are tailored to different individual sites, because each one is slightly different in their own right. The asset would in such cases then return to the responsibility of the local authority.

We haven't yet reached a position where this is an issue in terms of Clubs or Town and Community Councils as it has not yet arisen.

We have very successfully worked with Pencoed Town Council as a partnership, however, if such a situation as referred to above did arise, we would look at these on a case-by-case basis with an overriding commitment of ensuring that sport would continue at these locations, in order to promote and encourage continued and greater participation in sports across the County Borough.

Also, no club will face the 500% increase, because every club is expressed an interest in the consideration of taking over sports assets and when I recently had an update on CAT this week, no Club or Town/Community Council has indicated that that that they are not prepared to undertake a partnership arrangement. Therefore, we are talking about a hypothetical situation that does not exist at the moment.

As no fees have been increased we are working very successfully with the above organisations, to create on these successes in respect of all these sites. Some clubs are making further progress than others, but we will continue to work very closely with them all, in order to build upon present capacity and this is something that is being built into the programme overall.

The Clubs also get independent support from the Coal Fields Regeneration Trust and the Co-operative Centre to help strengthen that capacity, because BCBC does recognise that some Clubs are in a better financial position than others.

Councillor S Bletsoe to the Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing

What criteria do BCBC use to determine that a person is designated as a “rough sleeper” in Bridgend County Borough. Could the cabinet member please detail how a person who is classed as a “rough sleeper” is registered and documented for official reporting purposes and could the cabinet member please give numbers of those designated as “rough sleepers” that were registered and documented as of September 2021, January 2022, April 2022 and the most up to date information (if later than April 2022).

Response

A ‘Rough Sleeper’ is not defined in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, but for statistical purposes, the Welsh Government closely followed the definition used by the then

Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (now Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) and have used it since 2016:

The following definition of a rough sleeper is recommended:

- a. People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding), actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments);
- a. People bedded down in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (eg such a stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats,).

Since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic, Welsh Government has had an 'all in approach' to ensure that rough sleepers are provided with temporary accommodation. Bridgend has adopted this approach and temporary accommodation has been provided for people presenting as homeless. As part of BCBC's response to the 'all in approach' a weekly Homeless Cell meeting has been created. This is attended by a range of statutory and third sector partners and enables a multi-agency approach to both the identification and support of rough sleepers.

Key to our support for rough sleepers is the Wallich Rough Sleepers Interventions Team (RSIT). The Breakfast Run element of the service operates 365 days a year. Staff support clients by providing humanitarian aid in the form of breakfast, hot drinks, warm clothing, toiletries and linking in with further local provision. The service also responds to any notifications made via the Street Link app or website (<https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>). The drop-in centre element of the service (10 Park Street, Bridgend, CF31 4AX) provides a safe environment, off the street to facilitate support work. There are washing facilities and also access to a telephone and computer. Service users can access this Monday to Friday.

In addition to our statutory homelessness provision the Council also commissions a wide range of housing support services funded through Welsh Government Housing Support Grant. These services support the Local Authority in its efforts to both prevent and relieve homelessness. Detail of the services funded in 2022-23 was provided to Cabinet on 08th March 2022.

Despite this approach, there remains a small number of complex cases where the support offered has been rejected due to an individual's personal circumstances. Broadly, individuals who rough sleep often do so by choice or where individuals have been asked to leave accommodation, due to an ongoing unacceptable risk to staff, property or other residents.

Where there is non-engagement with support, all efforts are made to prevent placement breakdown, including moving people to alternative placements. A multi-agency approach is utilised through members of the previously referenced Homeless Cell. South Wales Police and Probation are key members of the Homeless Cell and discussions feed into the wider community safety agenda. This ensures that where enforcement action is taken, such as notices under S.35 of the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act it is done so with a true understanding of circumstances and not to criminalise rough sleeping.

All individuals in temporary accommodation are offered a range of support services to meet their individual needs – this can include support from a regionally commissioned health outreach team, which provides specialist support for those with mental health and or substance misuse issues.

In addition to traditional temporary accommodation BCBC does also provide basic shelter in the form of emergency PODS and 'floor space'. These are situated alongside existing supported accommodation projects and are used only as a last resort, where all other options have been exhausted. Availability is limited to only a small number of cases.

Welsh Government has previously undertaken a 'single night' snapshot survey of rough sleepers on one particular night in the autumn. Recent figures for Bridgend are 2018/19 = 5, and 2019/20 = 7. Since Covid, Welsh Government is monitoring rough sleepers on a monthly basis and in September 2021 = 2 cases were recorded, January 2022 = 6 cases were recorded and April 2022 = 3 cases recorded. This small number of individuals are well known, and services continue to work to provide the best support to them, dependent on their complex needs while balancing that with the needs of the wider Bridgend community

Anyone concerned about a rough sleeper can report it through the <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> service which will notify the Authority and the Wallich directly.

Supplementary question from Councillor S Bletsoe

Before my supplementary, I would like to confirm in the response above it states that in April in Bridgend it recorded three individuals as sleeping rough in the County Borough that particular month.

However, Welsh Government advice on this and those sleeping rough in the BCB and other neighbouring County Boroughs, reported that BCBC had provided a figure to them, that actually eight people had been sleeping rough in the BCB during this month. So obviously, there's a disparity between those two figures.

The people who sleep rough in our County are possibly some of the most vulnerable people that we are charged with looking after and I have spoken to a number of key people and organisations in our Borough who work on the front line with those who sleep rough. They state that the figure of eight and especially the figure of three is drastically underreporting of the figures in their experience in their personal experience. I have no reason to doubt that.

I have even spoken to people who sleep rough, who have given me the names of more than eight people who were sleeping rough in Bridgend town, let alone Bridgend County in April of this year.

Given that this is such a difficult thing to measure, how can we, as an authority, improve the way that we report these figures so that we can deal with them properly and in a way that represents and looks after those who are some of the most vulnerable people in our County Borough?

Response

I have not seen the literature from Welsh Government, however, I will check this against the Council information as quoted above. I would be keen to hear from the professionals working in this field, to see how the information regarding figures differs from the local authorities.

We commission the Charity Wallich to deliver a service 365 days a year, to support homeless people and we also work with the likes of Registered Social Landlords to identify the extent of the problem going forward. There are homeless people who reside

in temporary accommodation and these individuals do not sleep rough, though we have tragically witnessed an increase in the number of homeless people in Bridgend from 308 in June of last year when compared to 321 for the same month this year.

We are maintaining the support though, through providing some with temporary accommodation. Although these people are classified as homeless, they are not sleeping rough. Other people can be accommodated in pods or on floor accommodation.

Positive actions have additionally been put in place also, namely additional Welsh Government funding and an extra £2m accounted for in the MTFS to support homeless people, together with further Council funding again for V2c, in order for them to upgrade 35 empty properties.

It should also be borne in mind the continued support we also provide to those who are homeless who have mental health problems, addictions and other complex needs.

Second supplementary question from Councillor M Hughes

I viewed Cabinet yesterday and noted from a report considered as part of the agenda business, that additional funding had been given to Llanmau, an organisation who support the homeless and most vulnerable in society. Could the Leader confirm what this additional funding will offer to tackle homelessness across BCB.

Response

Llanmau provide family mediation support services, as sadly the 2nd highest cause of homelessness in the County Borough is relationships that break down between parents and teenage children in the same household.

This further funding will help to hopefully intervene and resolve the situation via organisations such as this, with a view to re-building the broken relationship to a point whereby there is no total family breakdown that would result in the young person leaving the family home.

We have supported 72 households here who were in this position last year with Llanmau and have achieved a 57% success rate of such families either remaining intact, or the young person in question leaving, but then returning home after a short time of leaving and being classed as homeless. 89% of these people who did leave the family home, were offered move on accommodation and the feedback from them showed that 100% felt they had a satisfactory outcome, one way or the other.

Third supplementary question from Councillor E Winstanley

What help through partners such as The Wallich are we providing for Bridgend's homeless people.

Response

The Wallich supports rough sleepers and assists in providing them with a place where they can access bathroom facilities, as well as an access to food and other support services. They also assist with move on accommodation where they wish to receive this (as opposed to permanent accommodation which is sometimes refused).

The organisation have supported 36 rough sleepers recently to this end and they continue to support individuals across the whole of the County Borough and not just those sleeping rough in Bridgend and other town centres.

Question from Councillor R Thomas to the Cabinet Member - Regeneration

What is the local authority doing to support town centre high streets across the county borough?

Response

BCBC have a suite of interventions in place which aim to support our high streets which includes, investment in businesses and enterprise; support to traders and owners; investment in premises and town centre environment and delivering marketing campaigns. Year on year we are reviewing and tweaking opportunities to better respond to issues and to take advantage of new grant or finance programmes and opportunities working with colleagues across the County Borough and Welsh Government.

As part of the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Programme and previously Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI), between April 2018- March 22, £1,572,620 of funding was secured and expended on high street properties in Bridgend and Maesteg via the Urban Centre Property Enhancement programme. These projects focused on the delivery of physical and social improvements through the re-development of vacant, poor quality, underused or derelict buildings and premises, with a view to generate employment opportunities; provide prominent and suitable locations for commercial and retail use; protect and sustain local shopping areas, increase town centre footfall and make available suitable town centre housing.

Project proposals for the Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant 2022-2025 are currently being formulated aimed at direct investment in the three town centres of Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg, which will include further opportunities for grant aid and investment in property.

Over the last 2 years seventeen town centre properties across Bridgend, Maesteg and Porthcawl also benefitted from £113,247 Covid Outdoor Improvements Grant funding.

The completion of the £8.9million Maesteg Town Hall redevelopment will include the creation of a new glass atrium, studio theatre and cinema space, a café and mezzanine bar, and a modern library. The multi-use facility will provide a space to socialise, learn, access information, improve skills, create jobs and celebrate the significant heritage that this building encompasses.

A bid is currently being prepared to support similar investment in the Porthcawl Pavilion, to generate activity, creative opportunities and footfall in Porthcawl. Investment in key buildings and assets within Town Centres and high street is very much part of the programme to develop activities and footfall in our towns. In addition to the Pavilion officers are also working on a new Road Bridge for Penprysg, which would see significant traffic issues being alleviated and improvements to the town centre environment.

Specifically in Bridgend, the Town Centre Access Study, currently underway, reviews previous studies and the latest UK policy/guidance as well as the current Traffic Regulation Order in order to provide potential options for improved town centre access and better operational access for businesses.

Also, in Bridgend officers are working very closely with colleagues at Bridgend College, to bring a new learning campus to the town centre. This multi million pound project in its self would bring more than a thousand students and staff to the town centre on a daily basis, increasing daily footfall and activity within the town and act as a catalyst for spend, development and investment.

It is planned to deliver a range of Green Infrastructure (GI) interventions across the three main town centres as part of the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant 2022-2025 building on the £117,000 GI enhancements carried out on Commercial Street Maesteg.

A Green Infrastructure Enhancement Strategy for Bridgend Town Centre, currently being finalised will provide an overarching strategy for the delivery of multifunctional Green Infrastructure (GI) interventions. The document is seen as a key tool to inform and educate key stakeholders and decision makers that urban GI is critical to the future vitality and sustainability of town centres and to promote collaborative working. As well as the environmental and wellbeing benefits, GI will significantly contribute to economic development and boost investment whilst increasing land and property values.

Multiple grants and support to business and enterprise is offered through our Business Support Team. Over the last 2 years over £50m of grant aid was awarded to support business through a period of Covid restrictions, much of that awarded to businesses and independent traders and retailers on the high street, not only to support their existing business but to help change and adapt for the future.

The first phase of the new Business Start-up Fund applications are currently being processed and the next round of applications will be reopened towards the end of July,

This is a flexible grant scheme, delivered through a partnership with UK Steel Enterprise and Bridgend County Borough Council. It provides financial assistance to new or existing micro-businesses that are located, or are planning to locate, in Bridgend County Borough.

POP-UP WALES Grant Fund - This is a specific grant scheme delivered by BCBC for participants of the Pop-Up Wales Project. This project is funded by UK Government via the Community Renewal Fund. The purpose of the grant is to provide financial support to new start-ups, social enterprises and businesses that are located, or are planning to locate in BCBC and who have registered with Pop-Up Wales for ongoing business support, this grant will support 100% of eligible projects costs.

The type of activity and support our business grants provide for includes, equipment; website development; marketing and publicity costs; small scale premises improvements; staff costs; legal and professional fees and in some cases 1 month business rates.

There is also the opportunity for high street traders and businesses to take advantage of Bridgend Business Forum membership. As a member of the Bridgend Business Forum, you have the opportunity to market your business and offer, take advantage of free events and networking opportunities, member offers.

Through the town centre management function, the authority ensures that operational issues within the town centres are managed and resolved. Enquiries and issues from traders, the public and potential investors are supported. Investors are targeted and opportunities are publicised. Also various promotional activities across the town centres as visitor destinations, seasonal offers and marketing and investment opportunities such as Christmas and Spend Summer in your Town Centre campaigns. Schemes to support traders with marketing aps for seasonal offers have also been successfully delivered.

The recently completed Bridgend Town Centre Masterplan encapsulates a comprehensive strategy for increasing the number of people who shop, work, live, visit and enjoy the town centre and seeks to improve retail opportunities, create new commercial and office space, introduce new public realm works and provide better transport facilities. It identifies a series of ambitious and deliverable projects for the next 10 years that will support future economic growth and secure more benefits and opportunities for Bridgend County Borough.

Similarly, a Placemaking Strategy for Porthcawl has also recently been completed, which will support major development across the wider town, but with a view to connect development to and support and invest in a thriving town. Work on a placemaking strategy for Maesteg will also start later this year, again to support the various investment opportunities across the town.

The authority continues to support parking offers in Porthcawl and Bridgend to enable free parking to access our commercial centres.

Footfall across the three primary town centres in BCBC has increased week on week since covid restrictions have come to an end, and whilst not quite reaching pre pandemic levels, is heading in that direction. The introduction of street markets in Bridgend and Porthcawl has been hugely successful, along with the support of offers, activities and events run by traders and local organisations themselves within Bridgend market and town centre.

More opportunities for targeted investment, support and advice for high streets is being created within the new Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) 2022 – 2025, which can be delivered across all high streets and commercial areas in the County Borough.

The package of investment being created will include more capital grants and investment for current vacant commercial premises; a larger suit of business and enterprise grants; pop up and meanwhile use advice and finance and marketing and event finance.

Officers continue to work to ensure all avenues of support and investment are explored to support to support High Street improvements. We are seeing some positive changes month on month, with 12 new high street businesses opening since April this year in Bridgend, Maesteg and Porthcawl.

All opportunities to engage with BCBC to access advice, support and grants are promoted via our communication channels principally BCBC website, Twitter, Facebook.

Supplementary question from Councillor R Thomas

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the ongoing work of the Council's Regeneration Team who although they are a very small section, they are making significant strides in terms of seeking external investment and securing grants, etc.

I recognise the efforts made both locally and nationally in the face of economic turbulence experienced within the last 2 years or so, as well as the road ahead still carrying a great deal of uncertainty. So, what constructive lessons have been learnt from the previous Business Improvement District Initiative in the Bridgend town centre and despite this being wound up, are there any plans for this Council in the current term of office, to look at bids/similar initiatives to pool investments and ensure the local pound remains local.

I would also like to invite the Cabinet Member – Regeneration to visit Treorchy with me, to see their success story to this end.

Response

The Corporate Director - Communities advised she was unable to comment upon the previous bid so referred to, given that this took place before she was employed by the Council. She would however, arrange for a suitable response to be put together by one of her Officers and sent to the Member outside of the meeting, or meet with him to discuss this matter further.

The Cabinet Member – Regeneration also confirmed that she would be happy to take up the visit to Treorchy.

Second supplementary question from Councillor G Walter

What progress is being made in rolling out free Wi-Fi in our town centres

Response

We are rolling out free Wi-Fi in all four of our town centres and this is being delivered through major investment in our CCTV provision that will keep our communities safe and provide a deterrent against crime. This will be an asset to visitors to the County Borough and residents alike.

Third supplementary question from Councillor R Collins

As someone with long term experience in the retail trade in Maesteg town centre, can you confirm that the support for SME's and sole traders is very much at the forefront of BCBC, in order to ensure that our high streets remain of high priority as a visible point of contact.

Response

The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that there were a significant number of traders and SME's in Maesteg town and the market area, where there were a number of small independent shops, which would be protected moving forward and our town centre Manager at Maesteg is passionate about this. We have worked hard to protect these businesses through support in the last couple of years by issuing Covid Support and Business Improvement Grants, so that traders could be assisted with their business operational modules. These had allowed certain businesses to continue operating outdoors as well as accommodating avenues for on-line retailing. These were key to the effective operation of businesses in the town and BCBC would continue to support local traders and SME's to this end. Shopping locally has been maintained and even progressed further since and during Covid, where appreciation has been shown to traders by customers, highlighting the value of smaller shops. Further investment was also planned through the Shared Prosperity Fund for small businesses of this nature.

Question from Councillor Alex Williams to the Leader

Councillor Williams advised that he wished to withdraw his question.

Question from D Hughes to the Cabinet Member – Communities

As the time of 30 minutes for questions from Members to the Executive had now been reached, the Mayor advised that the above question as shown in detail on the meeting agenda, would roll over to the September meeting of Council.

39. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:15