

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 12 APRIL 2023 AT 16:00

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	S Easterbrook	M J Evans	N Farr
P Ford	J Gebbie	W R Goode	RM Granville
H Griffiths	S J Griffiths	D T Harrison	M L Hughes
D M Hughes	RM James	P W Jenkins	M R John
W J Kendall	M Lewis	J E Pratt	E Richards
R J Smith	JC Spanswick	I M Spiller	T Thomas
G Walter	A Wathan	A Williams	AJ Williams
HM Williams	I Williams	MJ Williams	R Williams
E D Winstanley	T Wood		

Apologies for Absence

MJ Kearns, J Llewellyn-Hopkins, RL Penhale-Thomas and JH Tildesley MBE

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Helen Hammond	
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

118. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor H Bennett declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6 as a member of the Public Service Board and Regional Partnership Board, through her employment.

119. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the previous meetings of Council dated 1 March 2023 and 15 March 2023, were approved as true and accurate records, subject to an amendment being made to page 11 of the minutes of the 1 March, namely that on the top of the page where reference is made to 'the Trade Union Pay Claim for staff was unfair' that this be changed to 'fair'.

120. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:**

Mayor

I hope you all enjoyed the Easter holiday with family and friends.

It is a particular favourite time of the year for myself where I like to see sunlight and daffodils thriving across all our communities. A timely reminder that summer will soon be upon us.

Since our last full Council meeting, I have had the pleasure yet again of meeting some incredible and remarkable people within our County Borough.

Some examples included, the birthday celebrations for Mrs Helena Charles BEM who celebrated her 105 birthdays in her home community of Blaengarw. A truly remarkable lady who shared memories of a lifetime in the Garw Valley, Mrs Charles is probably our most senior person in the County Borough, but I am sure I will be corrected if this is not right.

I met the Ogmores Valley Suicide Awareness Group and had the pleasure of awarding its members a Mayors Certificate for their service to the community. The group were nominated for such an award by the Ogmores Valley Community Council.

It was a humbling experience to meet members of the group some of which had themselves experienced the collateral trauma of suicide. To listen to their experiences and witness at first hand their incredible focus and positivity to help others suffering from mental health issues was incredible.

It was also a particularly proud moment to attend the Declaration Ceremony of our new High Sheriff for Mid Glamorgan, Professor Jean White.

This was a very proud moment to witness the Declaration. I am sure the whole Chamber will join me in wishing Professor White the very best in her twelve-month term of office.

Could I also take this opportunity to thank the outgoing High Sheriff Maria Thomas for her support to the County Borough during her term of office. It was a pleasure to accompany and work with Maria at many civic events both within the County Borough and beyond.

I also had the privilege of welcoming Princess Anne Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal to the Bridgend Carers facility at Park Street Bridgend.

The event led by Helen Pitt manager of the Bridgend Carers Centre just demonstrates how vital a service the Bridgend Carers provide to unpaid carers. It was clear that unpaid carers make such a difference to our communities often in very difficult situations. The energy and pride within the centre were palpable.

A big thank you to all the team at Bridgend Carers. I am sure the whole chamber will continue to support your vital engagement and service to the most vulnerable.

Quite a unique experience and a first for me, was to be a guest of honour for a visit to the Dar-Ui-Isra Mosque at Wyeverne Road in Cardiff to share a Ramadam Meal.

This was an incredible experience, especially when I was asked to address the congregation.

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I met so many lovely people and enjoyed the various presentations on the meaning of Ramadam which is a sacred time and a key celebration in the Islamic calendar.

I would like to personally thank Dr Yasim Khan for her hospitality and her company during our evening meal.

Finally, there are still some names missing from the Dragons List. It is a £1 to nominate a name for the Dragon, and all proceeds received will go towards the Mayor's Charity.

As your Mayor and Chair of full Council, I am asking you to please donate if you can.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Social Services

Members will be aware that Bridgend County Borough Council has a strong record of promoting the importance of foster care, and of our longstanding and ongoing efforts to recruit new foster carers.

We are about to take this to the next level by seeking to become an accredited Fostering Friendly Employer.

Created by the UK's leading fostering charity, Fostering Network, this is a standard which is presented to organisations that can demonstrate their support for both fostering and people who act as foster carers.

To support this, they have developed a programme which, upon completion, sees a participating organisation adopt a Fostering Friendly policy.

This ensures that staff who also act as foster carers can work flexibly where possible and can receive up to five days leave for foster care issues, such as helping a child settle into their new home, or to attend relevant training that supports them in their fostering role.

This is an important step for the Council to take as we need to lead by example and demonstrate to other employers and organisations that it is possible to be both an effective employee and an effective foster carer.

We also want to help break the myth that individuals are not allowed to work if they become a foster carer.

This move will support our own efforts in recruiting new foster carers who can offer children vital day-to-day support, love and stability, and act as a positive role model.

If members would like to know more, further details are available at the Foster Wales Bridgend website.

I would also like to repeat the offer to Members who attended the training in relation to Foster Care, so you can all have a t-shirt to wear to the gym etc, as this will promote and advertise Foster Care Wales. Foster Caring is such a rewarding experience and I would also encourage any member of the public to explore such an opportunity. I have found it extraordinarily rewarding 35 years on after taking on such a role.

Cabinet Member - Regeneration

Members will have noted the recent news coverage regarding the purchase by Welsh Government of key pieces of land in Porthcawl that are vital for the Council's regeneration of the waterfront area.

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The sale has included the freehold interest in the Coney Beach Amusement Park site and the leasehold interest in an adjoining section of land known locally as the 'monster park' as it was previously used to exhibit sculptures of dinosaurs.

The significance of this, of course, is that it has freed up Council time and resources and has enabled us to focus more of our resources upon maximising the benefits of the regeneration.

As a result, we are seeking to increase the amount of affordable housing that will become available as part of this project.

The acquisition of the two sites means that the whole of the 20 hectare zone required for this phase of the regeneration has now been unlocked.

This is a major sign of confidence from Welsh Government, both in Porthcawl as a location and a community, and in the Council's plans for regeneration.

We will now be seeking to work in partnership with Welsh Government to regenerate the area in line with both the Local Development Plan and the Placemaking Strategy for Porthcawl.

I will bring you more news as this develops further.

Cabinet Member – Education

Members may be interested to know that a number of local schools have recently been assessed by inspectors from Estyn and praised for supporting local learners.

Afon y Felin, Brynmenyn and Corneli primary schools have all been inspected, and have all been deemed successful for demonstrating sufficient progress with no follow-up actions required.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, all schools were exempt from Estyn inspections for a two-year period which extended from March 2020 to February 2022.

While that was in effect, Estyn developed new inspection procedures which focus upon how well providers are supporting a child to learn, rather than using summative gradings used previously.

The current reporting format now uses one of four categories when inspecting a school, ie no follow up, Estyn review, significant improvement required, and special measures required.

I am sure that members will want to join me in congratulating the three schools on their inspection success.

I also want to congratulate nine year old Harri Evans from Plasnewydd Primary School for his successful poster design which is being used as the focal point of the Love It, Don't Trash It campaign in Maesteg.

Harri's design is being featured on posters, bin and lamppost signage throughout the Llynfi Valley to support the anti-littering campaign. His poster features the Grade II listed Maesteg Town Hall and the Llynfi River with a clear message not to discard litter irresponsibly, but to place it in one of the town's bins.

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As part of the campaign, pupils have taken part in interactive workshops delivered by ADA Recycling as well as litter picks and science-based workshops facilitated by NatureQuest.

The 'Love It, Don't Trash It!' campaign has already proven to be a big success in areas such as Porthcawl, Brackla, the Ogmere Valley, the Garw Valley and Pyle, Kenfig Hill and Cefn Cribbwr.

I am sure that this will be just as successful in the Maesteg area, especially with Harri's poster to represent it.

Cabinet Member – Communities

We recently completed a clean-up of a 10-mile section of the A48 to remove litter that has been thrown from passing cars, and which has accumulated along the verge, in trees and roadside shrubbery.

Our staff collected more than 550 bags within the first two days collections alone.

By the end of the week, a total of 1,200 bags had been filled with discarded litter, the equivalent of 120 bags for every mile of road covered.

Our staff also removed almost three and a half tonnes of fly tipping from the route. This included sofas, chairs and other items of furniture to worn tyres, wooden pallets and builders' waste.

Because of the need to create a safe working environment, slow-moving impact protection vehicles had to be used and rolling sections of the route had to be shut down to a single lane, which meant that the cost of the clean-up was more than £6,000 pounds.

This money could have been better spent on providing other services if only people had chosen to take their litter home and dispose of it in a responsible manner.

As a result, the Council has used the exercise as an opportunity to publicise the utter futility of dropping litter, as people who do this, are ultimately hitting themselves and other taxpayers in the pocket.

At a time when budgets are being squeezed and the cost of living crisis is hitting hard, our message is for people to take responsibility for their own rubbish and recycling and not to let taxpayers pick up the bill for dealing with their mess.

This is an issue that we will be seeking to publicise further in future, and I will bring you more details soon.

Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations

Recent media coverage has highlighted work that is taking place to improve local communities by brightening up hotspots for vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

This is being achieved by commissioning professional graffiti artists to paint uplifting scenes and images at each location, all designed to raise spirits and encourage a greater sense of community pride.

So far it has improved the look of subways located in areas such as Merthyr Mawr, Brackla and Broadlands, and while the media coverage to date has focused mainly upon

this aspect, I think Members may be interested to know that there is a more significant reason behind the work.

It all forms part of the Positive Messages campaign, a project which is seeking to combat hateful vandalism and divisive sloganeering by turning it into stunning art that all the community can enjoy.

Organised by our own Community Safety Partnership and the Western Bay Community Cohesion team, the project has involved working with Council staff to identify problem hotspots.

Suitable counter narratives have been developed in partnership with local groups such as the Bridgend Writers Circle, and replacement artwork has been designed by graffiti artists such as Another Day, Another Spray and THEW Creative.

For example, a central message of 'Hope' was chosen for the Merthyr Mawr subway, while 'nature' was selected for a subway in Brackla.

Both have made a massive difference to the local community and have drawn huge amounts of praise and attention for the positive, transformative impact that they are having.

Hate and division has no place in Bridgend County Borough, nor anywhere else.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this inspirational project a success and urge any Member who has not already done so to take a closer look.

Cabinet Member – Resources

I would once more ask Members to urge their constituents to remain vigilant for the latest scams seeking to convince householders to part with cash or hand over confidential information.

The pandemic lockdown saw the criminals behind these scams become increasingly creative and I regret to report that we are continuing to receive complaints and reports from concerned residents.

The most common scam continues to involve a fake phone call advising householders that they are owed a refund on their council tax payments.

The scammers ask for confidential bank account details in order to arrange for a rebate to be paid, but victims of this scam subsequently find that their bank accounts have been raided.

We also receive complaints from people who have been offered fake refunds on their water, electricity or gas bills.

Bridgend County Borough Council will never phone a householder to ask them to provide bank account details over the telephone.

Anyone who feels like they may have fallen victim to such a scam should contact their bank immediately and report it to the Police by calling 101.

As always, more advice on how people can protect themselves against scams is available at the Shared Regulatory Services website.

Chief Executive

Members will recall that at the last meeting of full Council, you approved the new Corporate Plan for the period 2023 to 2028.

Following this, we took the plan away for further design and translation work, and to prepare it for a public launch.

I'm pleased to inform you that this has now been completed, and that we are preparing to publicly launch the new corporate plan next week.

Called 'Delivering Together', the plan showcases a fresh new approach for outlining how we intend to provide essential services, work alongside local people and partners, and carry out business over the next five years.

Specifically designed to be more accessible and easier for people to engage with, it has been produced using feedback from residents of all ages and backgrounds, users and providers of council services, elected members, partner organisations, other local authorities and more.

The new Corporate Plan for 2023-28 provides us with a clear, well-informed and relevant basis for ensuring that we can continue to provide essential services while meeting the numerous challenges that stand before us.

Over the next few weeks, we will be carrying out further publicity to highlight different aspects of the plan, including a social media campaign, and members will receive an email featuring more information and a hyperlink to the plan itself.

I hope that members will lend their support to this publicity campaign, and that you will encourage your constituents to access and read the plan, and to consider how they too can offer feedback and help shape how we deliver our services in future.

121. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER

You will have seen news reports about an illegal gathering over the Easter bank holiday weekend, at Kenfig Industrial Estate in Margam, which borders with the Bridgend County Borough. South Wales Police made a public order to direct people to leave the area.

For safety reasons, urgent road closures were put in place with people advised not to attend the gathering on foot or in vehicles.

Responding to an illegal gathering of this size and nature takes its toll on our emergency services, highways teams and clean-up crews, who were unexpectedly called out on Easter Sunday.

I would like to thank the local community for their patience and support along with colleagues at South Wales Police, Neath Port Talbot Council and other partner agencies who worked together to deal with the situation and ensure people left the site safely.

We were also notified over the weekend that a number of caravans had parked illegally at the Rest Bay playing fields in Porthcawl. We took swift action and in conjunction with South Wales Police, a notice was served requiring the caravans to leave the site. Under law, councils must follow a set process and are required to carry out social services assessments and confirm that there are no welfare issues before a notice can be served. As a result of this response, the caravans left the site on Monday.

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New legislation from Welsh Government means that from 17 September 2023, the national speed limit will fall from 30mph to 20mph on restricted roads.

Members will know from the briefing that they received that the move aims to reduce road injuries, offer a safer environment to encourage cycling or walking, as well as lower noise pollution.

An online public engagement exercise is currently underway on local exemptions to the reduction from 30mph to 20mph and will remain open until 24 April.

I received a letter of comfort from the Deputy Minister for Climate Change at Welsh Government, Lee Waters, about funding for the implementation of the lower speed limit.

I also received confirmation that a planned consultation over the difficult issue of 'pavement parking' has been postponed until next year.

This follows feedback from Council Leaders advising that greater focus needs to firstly be placed upon the implementation of the new national speed limit requirements, and I am pleased to see that the deputy minister has listened to our concerns.

While parking on pavements is not currently illegal in Wales unless a vehicle is causing an obstruction, Scotland is in the process of banning the practice, and it is already illegal in London.

Charities such as Living Streets Cymru and the Royal National Institute for the Blind have long argued that keeping pavements clear of vehicles is essential for blind and partially sighted people, and also for those with mobility issues who may be forced out into the road to get around a vehicle.

We will bring you further details when the consultation is relaunched later in 2024.

In his letter the Minister also confirmed a short extension of the Bus Emergency Scheme to the end of the summer term. The meeting convened a meeting involving the WLGA, representatives of the bus industry, and Transport for Wales. It was agreed that the current Bus Emergency Scheme (BES) has run its course and is committed to working in partnership to find the best possible way forward.

Finally, the coronation of King Charles III is set to take place on Saturday 6 May, and a bank holiday has been declared to help mark the occasion on Monday 8 May.

Residents coming together to organise street parties marking royal or other national events has long been a British tradition, and the coronation will offer communities throughout Bridgend County Borough a great chance to get together and hold a celebration with neighbours.

To support residents who wish to do this, the Council has produced a step-by-step webpage offering practical advice designed to ensure that people can celebrate safely while also enabling key routes to remain open.

The webpage includes top tips that range from the benefits of planning early or making sure that first aid is available to applying for alcohol and entertainment licences or requesting a road closure.

While there is no charge for applying for a temporary road closure, members may want to remind residents that all applications must be submitted 10 working days before the date of the planned event.

Full details are available at the Council website.

122. **THE WELL-BEING PLAN FOR CWM TAF MORGANNWG**

The Chief Executive presented a report, the purpose of which, was to seek approval from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) of the Well-being Plan for Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board (PSB).

He confirmed that, changes to the health board footprint created the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board covering Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend local authority areas. It was agreed that the two PSBs covering that area, should merge to become a single PSB to reduce duplication and enable more effective joint working to improve well-being for people in the area.

He added that following publication of the Well-being Plan, Cwm Taf and Bridgend PSBs will merge to form Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board.

The Chief Executive advised that, the overarching theme of the Well-being Plan is 'A More Equal Cwm Taf Morgannwg' that drives every aspect of the Public Services Board's work. The Well-being Assessment informed that the communities in Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf have a lot to be proud about. However, not all communities have fair access to opportunities and face different challenges that impact on well-being.

The Well-being Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report has two objectives and these were outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

The Well-being Plan makes five commitments for the way the single PSB will work and these will be the core principles for the PSB that will guide and challenge activity throughout the PSB structure. These commitments were shown in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

The Chief Executive then alluded to the 12 week consultation that the final draft Plan had been subject to that included an on-line survey, which generated 238 responses.

The Chief Executive concluded his submission, by confirming that in addition to the Public Services Board collectively approving their well-being plan, the six statutory partners must also approve the plan for publication.

The statutory partners are:

- Bridgend County Borough Council,
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- South Wales Fire and Rescue Services
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board
- Natural Resources Wales

A member asked if there was a proposal for the Plan to be made fully accessible to all, as the copy before Council she noted, did not meet all the necessary accessibility requirements.

The Public Service Board (PSB) Officer confirmed that this would be the case, through the Council's Design Team.

A member making reference to the evidence base of the EIA, noted that the document reflected that there were 238 on-line survey responses in respect of the consultation process. There had also been further engagement sessions that took place at certain public visited establishments within the County Borough, including at Sarn Library. He asked what the attendance had been in respect of the latter.

The PSB Officer confirmed that she did not have the specific levels of attendance at each of the consultation sites, however, the results of all engagement sessions had been fed into the on-line survey. She added, that a more detailed report was planned to be prepared in respect of the engagement sessions undertaken as part of the overall wider consultation.

The Deputy Leader asked for some further details to be shared in respect of the governance arrangements for the PSB, to include details regarding accountability and finance arrangements. Members if furnished with this information, would have a better level of understanding who is responsible for what in the overall set-up.

The Chief Executive agreed that it would be useful to circulate some further information regarding the PSB to all members, including who is represented on this body in terms of organisations, stakeholders and statutory partners etc, including its terms of remit and aims and objectives.

A member made reference to the Welsh Language Standards and asked for some reassurance that the Plan supporting the PSB would be made available in a bi-lingual format.

The Leader advised that in line with all main BCBC strategic documents, that this would be produced in both welsh and english versions.

A member sought assurance that the PSB would align with certain other major plans and policies of the Council/its partners, such as for example, the Local Development Plan (LDP).

The Chief Executive confirmed that this would be the case.

For further debate on this item, please click [here](#)

RESOLVED: That Council approved the Well-being Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report, for Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board.

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

Councillor Tim Wood to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration

During recent years BCBC has expended a significant sum of public money firstly holding a consultation then a report and investigation process into opening a small portion of Bridgend Town Centre back open to traffic.

This consultation back in 2016 had the highest public engagement in the history of this council and the public were resounding in their backing of this partial re-opening of the town centre.

As such, will the Cabinet Member for Regeneration agree that we as a council are here to serve the public, to be good stewards of the public purse and are here to encourage and sustain our town centres not hinder them.

So will the Cabinet Member for Regeneration detail to me their plans to make Bridgend Town Centre accessible to all?

Response

Following on from the Bridgend Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan 2021, there is a continued focus on fulfilling Bridgend's role as a destination and centre for retail, living, employment, education and heritage. To enable this, the Council has, for a number of years, been asked to consider de-pedestrianisation as a potential solution to increasing footfall in the town centre to support the local economy and create a more vibrant and inclusive town centre for residents and visitors alike.

We have indeed completed exercises over recent years in order to establish how access could be improved but have undoubtedly faced barriers along the way, not least a change in Welsh Government policies on Planning and Active Travel, but also a UK Government moratorium on De-pedestrianisation and active travel schemes to allow a review of national policy.

The current Bridgend Town Centre Accessibility Options Appraisal, focusses on improved town centre access and puts forward three potential options to address the issue, aiming to balance competing priorities for the diverse range of stakeholders within Bridgend town centre. Whilst previous studies have suggested options for de-pedestrianisation, this work provides a re-examination of the accessibility of the town centre involving a review of current planning policies such as Planning Policy WALES (Edition 11, February 2021) and the new Wales Transport Strategy, plus a review of the previous access studies undertaken.

An evaluation of the current traffic regulation order (TRO) has also undertaken in order to gain a better understanding of the approach needed to improve town centre access, including electronic bollard management, parking provision and the investigation of click and collect and delivery options.

We are now working with specialists at Atkins to thoroughly test and interrogate the viability of the three options and to determine the preferred option that can be taken forward to delivery stage, ensuring that projects are legally and technically feasible, as well as economically justifiable and worth further investment. In order to determine the preferred option, further extensive consultation will be undertaken with relevant BCBC departments, statutory bodies and elected members.

Options will also be appraised using an criteria assessment framework against key policy and legislation, which will include (but are not limited to):

- Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015
- Wales Transport Strategy 2021
- BCBC Local Development Plan & Local Transport Plan
- BCBC Corporate Wellbeing Plan
- Public Health Board Wellbeing Plan

As part of this stage, inclusive design considerations, urban design and public realm, market demand analysis, highway layout including track runs and visibility requirements, operational considerations, TRO requirements and risk register will also be identified and appraised.

We also have to consider a scheme which is financially deliverable for the authority and acknowledge that the funding landscape has changed in recent years, and as previous

work on this project has indicated, a comprehensive scheme would require significant external grant funding to ensure its deliverability.

It is envisaged that this report will be completed by Summer 2023, allowing the Authority to progress and deliver an agreed proposal that meets the needs and aspirations of key users and that enables the town centre to flourish and achieve its full potential.

Supplementary question from Councillor Wood

Traders were told this information in a Traders meeting a number of weeks ago, yet elected Members who cover this area are only being told now after a written question to Council. It has been 7 years since the consultation, so is it not now time to do what residents want and what other towns have done elsewhere in Wales. So, what assurance will you give me that this project will go ahead, given how many people have requested this and could Councillors be kept fully up to speed on events, as matters progress.

Response

The comprehensive response sets out the current position, though I would reiterate that a number of things have changed since 2016, not least Welsh Government Planning Policy. This has made it more difficult but not impossible to undertake what was originally surveyed. The commitment still exists to explore feasible options, though there is also at the same time, issues around affordability. So undoubtedly arising from conversations with Welsh Government, it is now much more difficult to secure external funding for this type of proposal than it was 7 years ago. The options therefore relate to what is both deliverable and affordable. We will keep members updated as matters progress going forward in relation to the three main options as well as looking to ensure that we maintain a safe environment also for those who reside in the area.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Steven Bletsoe

I would like to make the Cabinet aware that this weekend an elderly person was taken ill while at a restaurant in Bridgend town centre. They phoned for an ambulance and it was confirmed that this would take 8 hours to arrive, so it was suggested that a family member or friend should take him to hospital. The bollard operators subsequently failed to allow the transport entry into the town centre to collect the individual, which obviously put the persons health at serious risk. As this is the second time this has happened in the last 3 months in the town centre, could I have an undertaking from the political leadership of the authority that this matter is addressed before a serious situation such as this, turns into a tragic one.

Response (by the Leader)

I have not been made aware of this, but I will ensure I am updated accordingly and then take it up with both the relevant section in BCBC and the South Wales Police, as an issue of community safety.

Councillor Alex Williams to the Cabinet Member - Communities

Will the Cabinet member - Communities make a statement on the subsidies which BCBC currently provides to support those bus routes which have been deemed as commercially unviable; outline what consideration has been given to the reduction or complete withdrawal of these subsidies; and what analysis has been conducted on the potential ramifications of such a reduction or withdrawal in subsidies on people within the communities which were previously in receipt of subsidised routes?

Response

Current funding for bus services deemed non commercially viable is through Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG), which is allocated for regional services and community transport by Welsh Government. In the case of BCBC the bus services currently supported are:

- Service 65 – Bridgend to Talbot Green via Heol y Cyw (Mon – Sat daytime)
- Service 70 – Bridgend to Cymmer via Maesteg (Mon – Sat evenings)
- Service X2 – Cardiff to Porthcawl via Bridgend (Mon – Sat evenings)

The allocation provided to BCBC by the Welsh Government for 2022/23 was £399,464 of which £95,000 was awarded to Bridgend Community Transport with the remainder to be spent on the region's core strategic bus network and associated services including cross boundary payments to other authorities.

An alternative identified related to Bridgend Community Transport, who have a registered 'Town Rider' provision that operates the whole Bridgend County Borough, in turn providing an alternative service for those residents who no longer had access to a scheduled bus service.

Whilst the BSSG funding described above remains in place, Bus Emergency Scheme (BES) funding is also provided by Welsh Government as a post pandemic support scheme for the industry. BES funding has been through several iterations and is not intended to continue indefinitely. Officers and members are engaging with Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and Bus Operators to understand the implications and potential way forward for all services (not just those previously subsidised) post the current format of BES funding.

Supplementary question from Councillor Williams

I thank the Cabinet Member for his response in which he mentioned support for Route 65, which operates from Bridgend to talbot Green via Heol-y-Cyw, the Ward which I represent. The Leader mentioned in his announcements the Bus Emergency Scheme and Members will be aware, that Council Leaders recently wrote to Welsh Government stating that local bus services are a lifeline for older and younger people, people with disabilities and low income households and that the loss of bus services would impact on individual wellbeing by restricting access to education, economic, health and leisure services, as well as to family and social contacts. However, the current administration started this so-called rationalisation of bus services by withdrawing subsidised groups in the last term of office, both in 2017 and 2019. This has culminated in a drip, drip effect of withdrawing subsidies to support core bus services, which serve to connect isolated communities. Recently we discussed our Net 2030 Strategy and an effective public transport system was cited as a factor which would have an essential role to play. Cabinet recently gave the go ahead for a multi-million pound Metrolink and bus terminus for Porthcawl and now they are at risk of having no buses to go there. In isolated communities such as Heol-y-Cyw and our valley locations with no Active Travel routes, people rely on bus services to remain connected with other communities. Furthermore, if we are to encourage people to get out of their cars, we need to maintain a regular and reliable local bus service to contribute to our aim of becoming a net zero local authority. So could the Cabinet member commit today for BCBC to find the transitional funding in order to subsidise the core bus network which serves our most isolated.

Response

The cuts that the Councillor refers to above were as a result of the austerity cuts of Central Government put on local authorities such as BCBC, whereby the Authority had to find collectively £70m in budget cuts in recent years. So cuts to bus services were imposed upon the Council as part of these wider savings. These have had to be made year on year, in order to reach a balanced budget. It was therefore impossible to make an accurate financial commitment to the future operation of bus services at this time, as we do not know the cost relating to subsidised routes following the subsidies that are currently in place now. Every service in the County Borough cannot operate commercially, so on that basis, every service requires a subsidy of some extent or another. We are discussing future possible options in respect of bus services with both the various operating companies and Welsh Government/Ministers. The Council is committed to taking public transport services forward and will do everything in its power to fulfil such commitment. However, this will require continued funding from both BCBC and Welsh Government funding, which is currently not in place after July of this year. So therefore, we cannot give a financial commitment at present along the lines of the Members request, though we can give an assurance with regards to the continuation of bus services within the County Borough.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Heidi Bennett

I echo some of the views expressed by the previous speaker. My Ward at Penyfai has been without a bus service since July 2022 and that has impacted negatively upon certain residents' wellbeing, leaving many feeling isolated and unable to access key services, which particularly effects our elderly population. Can the Cabinet Member clarify what is the Local Authority's response in relation to public transport provision and what is being done now to try and deliver a sustainable solution.

Response

Public transport is not a statutory service that a local authority is legally required to provide. What we have is a network of private companies operating bus services. While an argument could be made for BCBC providing such services, they are not empowered to provide them. However, it could also be argued that the Council should support the provision of these services for moral and economic reasons, in order to support local communities and to promote business in our towns. Issues regarding public transport, declined many, many years ago when bus de-regulation took place. We are though, continuing to try our best to contribute towards local bus services to support residents and visitors to the County Borough, in order to ensure as best we can, that we have a sustainable public transport network going forward.

Question from Councillor Tim Thomas to the Cabinet Member

What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure that BCBC roads and highways are accessible for the elderly and disabled?

Response

Access and safety for all highway users is important, as such is considered for all new developments in the design standards being applied from the outset, with the highway authority as consultees in the planning process, making recommendations in relation to conditions to be applied to developments including improvements/inclusion of pedestrian infrastructure.

The Local Development Plan will see significant investment in the existing highway network as well as bringing new development that will be orientated towards providing well designed and safe active travel routes and easy accessibility of services in line with sound placemaking principles.

Once an application is approved and developers enter into agreement for the adoption of their development, designs are checked to ensure compliance with conditions and design standards this may include tactile paving for directing those with visual impairments, light controlled crossings with features such as audible/tactile indicators, dropped pedestrian crossings, pedestrian refuges, including of ramped access. Designs may be safety audited as a further consideration of compliance with relevant standards.

For existing highway infrastructure, where there is capital maintenance such as for the renewal of footways or inclusion active travel routes, there is consideration of introducing dropped kerbs which may benefit not only persons with a mobility issue but also other users (push chairs). In the case of active travel, the width of the existing footway may be widened, or new footway/cycle way created which again may be of benefit for all users. Such improvements link into other initiatives such as raised boarding kerbs at bus stops that have been installed to allow easier boarding of buses for wheelchair users and those with mobility issues. Support is also provided through concessionary travel for over 60's and applicants you qualify on the grounds of disability.

For those in receipt of a 'blue badge,' there are spaces provided both on and off street that are reserved/enforced for those specific users, as well as permitting parking at other locations subject to prevailing signage and guidance.

Whilst much has been achieved there is still much of the network that continue to be improved, improvement and maintenance is all subject to existing budgets and resources being available.

An example of what has been achieved in the past year alone is listed below:

201 No. Locations where kerbing has been altered to facilitate improved pedestrian access (funded by WG Active travel);

50 No. Locations where kerbing has been altered to facilitate improved pedestrian access (funded as part of a whole street footway renewal funded by BCBC capital);

11 No. Locations where new dropped kerbing has been introduced in isolation (funded by BCBC Capital);

2 No. Locations where dropped kerbs have been introduced as part of new developments

Supplementary question from Councillor Thomas

A fellow Ward member and myself, went on a walk in our area with local constituents, one of which was a wheelchair user, to learn about some of her experiences. Arising from this, I wrote a short report and copied in some of the relevant Senior Officers and Members, which I have not yet received a response to but hopefully I will soon. It was pleasing to see that accessibility has been considered for new builds through the planning system and in respect of Active Travel Routes also. My question is quite apt, given the Leaders statement about the consultation regarding parking on pavements. I am quite interested to know, what audits have the local authority undertaken, in order to look at the appropriateness of existing street furniture in order to check if it is appropriate and not obsolete for accessibility purposes for the disabled and elderly, as the Leader did cite walking in streets in the consultation and I believe that this is also a campaign aim of Walking Streets, as well as to ensure that such street furniture on our highways is appropriate.

Response

I will have to come back to the Councillor on the point of if audits of street furniture are carried out, however, Highway Inspectors do regularly carry out inspections of the highway network. I will come back to Members on the first point above.

The Cabinet Member – Communities asked the Member if he could re-send his report through to him so that he could address the points contained therein. If there were any specific issues or concerns along the lines contained in his question within his Ward, then again please share details of these including in respect of provision of accessible parking for the disabled, etc, though wider issues would also be looked at within the County Borough as a whole. I hope when street furniture is provided, these are assessed for the particular area they are provided within, so as not to just resolve one problem while possibly creating another. He stressed that BCBC was committed to both the elderly and disabled when it comes to accessibility for car parking on highways. It was added that we are aware of requests for street furniture that have been refused, as to provide these in specific areas may give rise to a problem of a different nature.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Melanie Evans

I note in the response above, that there are 264 locations referenced where there have been kerb alterations. Please could you elaborate on where these are, including reference to those dropped kerbs

Response

There are 201 locations for kerbing works through the Welsh Government Active Travel Initiative and the majority of these are in the Porthcawl area. There are 50 locations in 4 areas where there have been kerb operations/alterations, undertaken in order to improve pedestrian access and 11 locations where improvements have been made through BCBC Capital Funding. He gave examples of where these works had taken place in the County Borough, for the benefit of Members.

Question from Councillor Ian Williams to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration

Could the Cabinet Member - Regeneration please let me have an update on what measures are being taken to restore the many derelict buildings in our town centre and what is the timeline for this remediation?

Response

There are a variety of reasons for buildings falling into disrepair, and over the years BCBC has put significant emphasis and resource into programmes which have offered support and finance to renovate and revive vacant and underutilised buildings in our town centres.

The Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme operated from 2002 – 2020 and over that time awarded more than £5 million to 66 properties to bring forward major remediation. Through this scheme some of our most successful town centre projects have been completed, including the Elder Yard scheme, 2 Caroline street and the former Victoria Public House, in Bridgend, The Harlequin building, the Jennings buildings and nearing completion 37 The Esplanade (Former Apollo) in Porthcawl, to name but a few where all have thriving businesses operating from them, on the back of major capital investment from BCBC, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Cadw.

Similarly, our Transforming Towns programme has invested finance into schemes such as 11 Nolton Street (the former McDonald's building), Family Value building Commercial St Maesteg, and more recently Marble Steak House, all previously vacant and run down properties which via support and finance have been transformed. The Transforming Towns programme awarded £2,275m in grant in the last three years and will continue to work with property and business owners to offer significant support and finance to other properties across Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg going forward.

We understand that there are a number of challenging buildings across our towns which have a variety of barriers to enabling comprehensive renovation to come forward, and a willing partner is critical to allowing this to occur.

Some of our more challenging properties fall within our recent Vacant Property action plan. The plan, developed in conjunction with Welsh Government takes a more detailed approach at finding solutions to progressing work on specific properties. Last year cabinet underwent a training session with WG to understand how this agenda could be taken forward, accepting that the plan represents some of the most challenging properties, for which there is no quick win, and where the authority has made several previous attempts to engage with owners.

Within the plan, most of the buildings prioritised are in our town centres, but not exclusively and cover both commercial/social and residential.

The plan has 3 priorities and a series of actions.

Firstly, to identify the extent and location of long-term empty commercial and residential buildings and/or properties that have a detrimental impact on an area or local community.

This includes;

- A review current information available to BCBC from internal and external sources to establish background data
- Undertaking visual survey of key town centre areas, identifying properties with a negative impact on the street scene or an opportunity for a regeneration project.
- Prioritising a database of buildings using established risk assessment criteria used for empty homes.

Secondly, we aim to raise awareness among building owners, local businesses and estate agents, local members. This involves;

- Maintaining an index of vacant properties in town centres for marketing purposes
- Signposting vacant and derelict property owners to local architects / contractors who can assist with works.
- Provide advice on financial assistance available to owners & via estate agents.
- Engage with residential property owners to encourage them to bring their properties back into use through the provision of advice, support and encouragement.
- Explore the offer of free initial scoping pre- application advice preparation of development advice note for vacant buildings.

Thirdly, we need to consider the use of enforcement action using the full range of legislative options to deal with dilapidated or poor condition properties where an outcome cannot be achieved via cooperation. Enforcement is not taken lightly, and the legal process needs careful consideration. Preferably as part of a carrot and stick approach.

The most difficult buildings are supported by an Empty Properties Working Group, these buildings require a whole authority approach, and a financial commitment to pursue them. This group has principally looked at residential properties but has more recently considered action on commercial properties. For the domestic properties many of which are within our towns, we are continuing to work with the owners of these properties and a number of long-term empty properties have now been sold to new owners or are to be marketed for sale. Where necessary enforcement action is taken to address public health issues at the properties,

The Working group consists of advisors from Planning, Regeneration, Conservation, Housing Shared Regulatory Services, Legal and Finance.

Currently 20 buildings on the List and action including discussions with owners and enforcement action where necessary has progressed against 8 of those.

In addition to the work on identified properties, we have also carried out an updated survey of vacant churches and chapels at risk or in danger, these were principally located across the valley commercial areas, but hope to extend that to other towns to look at future end uses and partners when finance is available.

We are also looking to complete a review of all vacant properties across Bridgend Town centre to identify what owners and occupiers see as the barriers to ensuring their properties are occupied, to enable us to look at more bespoke engagement and assistance. Where renovation and capital investment is a principle barrier, we can ensure that the right support and finance is made available.

Supplementary question from Councillor Williams

I think some of the response was from a generic communication because my question was directly related to Bridgend town centre and the dilapidated state of far too many town centre buildings. I refer specifically to the Ranch at Nolton Street, which is both dangerous and an eyesore and has meant that the pavement has been fenced off there for nearly 3 years. It also has had a significant impact on nearby residents who are unable to sell their homes due to the disgraceful state of this building. The other property in question is No. 2 Ewenny Road which is one of the first buildings people see when accessing our town centre from Ewenny Road. This property has been empty for 35 years and nothing has been done by BCBC to make it habitable. I could also mention the York and Monroes, which is the first buildings seen by people when entering the town via the Bus Station. When will the Council consider using Compulsory purchase Orders (CPO's), to take ownership of these buildings, a course of action that has been used in Porthcawl.

Response

There are legal issues ongoing with the owner of the premises The Ranch, that prevent us from discussing this premises in an open Forum. I am aware that there are a number of buildings across the County Borough that need to be renovated and brought back in to a habitable standard and in support of this, we have an Empty Property Action Plan that we developed last year with Welsh Government and this is being updated and reviewed during the forthcoming summer period. The Monitoring Officer added that where there were legal proceedings ongoing in relation to properties, including the ones referred to by Councillor Williams, details of these could not be discussed in an open Forum such as Council. However, if any member wished seek information on specific properties for example, those situate in their Ward, then they could approach the relevant Officer outside of the meeting, where some level of detailed information would be able to be shared in respect of these on a confidential basis.

Supplementary question from Councillor F Bletsoe

It is good to hear that there are processes in place that can be used as exemplified today, however, I am aware that there are a considerable number of premises in a state of disrepair in Bridgend town that have not been subjected to such processes and because of this, there is an issue with the town looking degraded, especially when considering these properties are often left to decline for a number of years. So please could some progress be made here in some form or another of restoration works, in order that Bridgend is able to have an improved look.

Response

I do agree with what has been said and we can work with Officers to progress with improvement works to some of these properties where the owner or landlord etc, is prepared to work with the Council to this end. The Council does offer grants where applicable, to assist property owners improving these dilapidated properties through the undertaking of renovation works. The Deputy Leader added in respect of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO), that though the Council in certain situations could pursue these, these were costly so members needed to establish where the budget would come from to support the making of these Orders. It also should be borne in mind, that the process of a CPO could take a number of years to complete from start to finish, particularly if the owner of the property was unknown or did not wish to agree to the making of a CPO.

124. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 17:44