

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD IN REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE 2021 AT 15:00**

Present

Councillor KJ Watts – Chairperson

S Aspey	SE Baldwin	TH Beedle	JPD Blundell
NA Burnett	MC Clarke	N Clarke	RJ Collins
HJ David	P Davies	PA Davies	SK Dendy
DK Edwards	J Gebbie	RM Granville	CA Green
DG Howells	RM James	B Jones	M Jones
MJ Kearns	DRW Lewis	JE Lewis	JR McCarthy
D Patel	RL Penhale-Thomas	AA Pucella	JC Radcliffe
KL Rowlands	B Sedgebeer	RMI Shaw	CE Smith
SG Smith	JC Spanswick	RME Stirman	G Thomas
T Thomas	E Venables	SR Vidal	MC Voisey
LM Walters	CA Webster	PJ White	A Williams
AJ Williams	HM Williams	JE Williams	RE Young

Apologies for Absence

T Giffard, A Hussain, JH Tildesley MBE and DBF White

Officers:

Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gill Lewis	Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

542. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:-

Councillor A Hussain  
Councillor R Granville  
Councillor JH Tildesley  
Councillor RM James

543. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C Webster declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7, due to her son being in receipt of School Transport.

544. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of meetings of the Council dated 24 February and 10 March 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record.

545. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:

Mayor

The morning after the annual meeting I was invited to attend a remote meeting with KPC Youth, this “cuppa and a chat” is a regular get together for them. It was lovely to “virtually” meet all the dedicated volunteers and hear about their current initiatives and was a really positive start to my Mayoral year.

The Deputy Mayor and myself then collected our chains of office in a short private ceremony in the Mayor’s Parlour with my wife (Mayoress), the Chief Executive and the Leader.

As part of Volunteers week, I was invited to visit The Zone in Bridgend town centre. As you are probably aware, this is a family centre that has been set up to support all members of the community, with their volunteers providing support and guidance on a whole range of issues. It was interesting to meet the staff and learn how they have adjusted and carried on during the pandemic. In a similar vein, I also visited the Bridgend Carers’ Centre during Carers week, to meet and say thank you to all the staff who do such an amazing job all year round.

Other events in my calendar included a visit to Parc Slip Nature Reserve on Saturday morning with Iolo Williams who broadcasts live on the BBC and on Monday - lunch with the High Sherriff.

In terms of my charity fundraising, I am in the process of arranging events and have two provisional dates for your diaries:

Saturday 13th August – a tandem skydive with the Mayoress, at Swansea airport and Saturday 18th September – Welsh 3 Peaks Challenge, with hopefully at least 2 minibuses being available for around 20 participants.

If you would like to make a donation in support of my charity fundraising, you can do so by going the Mayor’s page on the BCBC website and clicking on the Charity button - this will then direct you to a donations page. As a reminder, my charities are “Lads and Dads” and “Bridgend Carers Centre”.

Deputy Leader

Work has now started on improving the entrance into Village Farm Industrial Estate at Pyle.

This is being carried out ahead of the planned opening of the estate’s all-new community recycling centre later in the year.

To improve traffic flow, avoid congestion and prevent vehicles from queuing, an all-new dedicated lane for turning into and out of the estate off the A48 is being created.

As part of the works, new traffic lights are being installed, and the road at Heol Mostyn will be resurfaced.

The improvements are expected to take up to 12 weeks to complete and every effort is being made to minimise inconvenience.

When it opens later this year, the new Community Recycling Centre will feature parking bays for 31 cars, on-site queuing capacity for up to 72 vehicles at a time, and easier access with new bypass lanes.

Once they see how easier it is to access and use, I believe people will welcome the new recycling centre, and I am looking forward to bringing you more details very soon.

**Cabinet Member – Communities**

Members may want to remind their constituents that public consultation is underway on proposals which could see a new onshore wind farm developed on land between the Llynfi and Afan valleys.

Called Y Bryn, the wind farm development has been proposed by the energy companies, Coriolis Energy and ESB.

If successful, this scheme promises to deliver enough clean energy to power more than 125,000 homes.

However, there would also be a significant visual impact as at 250 metres high, the proposed turbines would be the tallest seen so far in the UK.

At this stage, the project involves up to 26 turbines and associated infrastructure such as a battery storage facility, on-site substations and access tracks.

It would be split between two forestry blocks on land owned by Welsh Government and managed by Natural Resources Wales.

It is important to note that this project has not been proposed by either Bridgend or Neath Port Talbot councils, and the final say on whether it goes ahead or not will fall to Welsh Government.

Public exhibitions are underway. One was held last Monday at Maesteg RFC, and a second will take place at Cefn Cribwr Athletic Club between 1pm and 7pm on Thursday 24 June.

A website has also been set up to offer full details about the project as well as information on the various ways in which residents can have their say.

You can find this at W-W-W Dot Y Bryn Hyphen Windfarm Dot Cymru.

I hope that people will make full use of this opportunity to study the proposal in closer detail, ask questions, and have their say.

**Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing**

Members may be interested to know that more than 1,500 people living in the county borough are currently registered as volunteers with the Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations.

We have all seen how volunteers have come into their own during the coronavirus pandemic.

Whether it is through welfare calls, shopping for groceries, collecting medicine, giving people a lift people to an appointment or supporting the ongoing vaccination programme, we are all aware of the important role that volunteers have played.

Their contributions were marked recently as part of the 37th annual Volunteers Week, which sought to thank volunteers and acknowledge their efforts to help support our communities.

Volunteers continue to play an important role in all aspects of community life, so this was an opportunity to say 'thank you' to them, and to let them know how much we appreciate their help and support.

We remain incredibly grateful for all of their support, dedication and care.

Anyone who wishes to find out more about volunteering opportunities should visit the BAVO website.

#### **Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help**

The Leader and I recently visited a number of our domiciliary care staff at settings ranging from the Bryncethin Depot and the Glyncynffig facility in Kenfig Hill to new, purpose-built supported living units at Maesteg.

We wanted to thank staff personally for the fantastic work that they are continuing to carry out, and for the important role that they are playing within our local communities.

The visits coincided with a report produced by Care Inspectorate Wales on the domiciliary support service, and I was delighted to see how positive it was.

Inspectors highlighted how everyone they spoke with was complimentary of the care staff, and felt that they provided a service which met their needs.

They praised the clear management structure, the good support and development opportunities that are in place, and the positive feedback from staff who said that they felt valued and supported.

People receiving care and support also told the inspectors how they are confident in allowing care workers into their homes because they follow all hygiene practices.

We are hugely proud of our care teams, and the commitment and dedication that they continue to demonstrate has been reflected in the comments from the people they support.

At any one time, there are around 1,200 users of the service, and with more information available at the council website, we are actively encouraging more people to take a closer look at how they might become a part of the domiciliary support team.

#### **Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration**

Construction specialists Knights Brown are making strong progress on the £6.4m flood defence scheme which will defend Porthcawl from any potential future rise in sea levels.

They have set up a compound on land at Salt Lake and have commenced the first phase of the work, which is focusing on the iconic Western Breakwater.

As the internal structure of the 200 year old breakwater still features its original wooden core, it needs extensive renovation and refurbishment to ensure that it can continue to stand up to the tides and tough maritime weather conditions.

Knights Brown have also commenced upgrading the Eastern Promenade to create improved flood defences between Porthcawl Marina and Coney Beach. The work will then extend into Sandy Bay and as far as Rhych Point, where flood defences and dune protection works will be carried out.

The project will help to secure future development in the Salt Lake area of Porthcawl while keeping more than 500 homes and over 170 businesses safe.

Plans for Cosy Corner are also progressing. Visit Wales is processing a £1m funding application, and the council has agreed to match this with an additional £885,000.

Planned facilities include an all-new stone and glass-clad building offering new premises suitable for retail and start-up enterprises, meeting space for community use, a parade square for the Sea Cadets, an office for the harbour master and changing facilities for users of the nearby marina.

If funding allows, plans are also in place to enhance the scheme with new landscaping, public seating, a children's play area and a canopy structure capable of providing comfortable outdoor shelter from rain and the sun.

At Cabinet yesterday, approval was given for investment in primary education in North Cornelly and further and higher education in Bridgend town centre.

I'll bring you further updates as all these projects develop.

#### Chief Executive

I thought members would appreciate an insight into where we are with the coronavirus vaccination programme.

Latest figures from Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board have confirmed that more than 529,600 vaccines have now been administered throughout the region.

This figure includes almost 318,800 people who have received their first dose, and more than 210,800 people who have received their second dose.

For Bridgend County Borough, it means that a cumulative total of 167,775 vaccinations have now been administered to local residents.

In terms of progress, vaccinations for the first five priority groups have all been completed.

This covers the residents and staff of care homes for older adults, people aged 65 to 80 and over, people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and frontline health and social care workers.

In addition to this, around 76 per cent of people aged 16 to 64 who have underlying health conditions have been fully vaccinated, and GPs are continuing to complete this priority group.

Unpaid carers who have not yet been vaccinated within their priority groups are being invited to contact the health board to arrange for an appointment, while 89 per cent of people aged 60 and over have been fully vaccinated.

Within the last week, 85 per cent of people aged 55 and over have received their full vaccinations, while the priority group for people aged 50 and over has just passed the half-way mark at 53 per cent complete.

The final priority group covers the remaining eligible adult population.

Appointments for second doses are currently being issued to people aged between 40 and 49, and everyone aged 30-39 has now been offered their first vaccination.

Around 58 per cent of people aged 18 to 29 have also received their first dose, and appointment letters are continuing to be issued.

In other related news, you will have seen that the Delta variant is by now the most common viral strain identified in new cases of Covid-19.

While there is no evidence to suggest that it is more dangerous, the Delta variant is certainly proving to be highly contagious.

It is worth noting that a recent study carried out by Public Health England found the UK's two main vaccines, Pfizer and AstraZeneca, to be 33 per cent effective against the Delta variant after one jab, and more than 80 per cent effective after a second dose.

This ably demonstrates how important it is for people to fully complete their vaccinations.

Together with our partners, we are reminding people of the importance of not letting their guard down, and of following all rules and procedures to help keep our communities safe.

This is especially significant as people seek to enjoy the summer weather or to celebrate events such as the Euros.

Members may wish to remind their constituents that mobile testing facilities remain available within the county borough, and full details can be found on the Covid-19 advice page at our council website.

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

Members may be aware that Armed Forces Day will take place this year on Saturday 26 June.

While pandemic restrictions have limited how we have been able to mark this important occasion, the Armed Forces flag has been flying outside the Civic Offices in recognition of the event.

We are also using the occasion to remind current and serving members of the military that an Armed Forces Community Covenant is in place to provide them with help and support.

The covenant, which has been in place since 2013, promises mutual support between the people of Bridgend County Borough, the armed forces community, public service organisations, local businesses and the charitable and voluntary sectors.

It brings organisations together at a local level to work in partnership and use their specialist knowledge, experience and expertise to provide members of the armed forces community with appropriate help, support and advice.

Over the years, the community covenant has been developed and expanded to offer a range of benefits.

As a result, housing applicants who require adapted accommodation due to injuries sustained while in service or who may need to find somewhere to live as a result of having left the Armed Forces receive priority treatment.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been amended so that war widow pensions are no longer included when calculating a person's income.

The School Place Allocation Policy also ensures that veterans are not disadvantaged when returning to Bridgend County Borough.

Serving personnel and veterans can enjoy free sessions at local Halo swimming pools across the county borough, and can apply to the community covenant fund for financial support designed to help them integrate into civilian life.

The Armed Forces Community Covenant makes it easier for service personnel, families and veterans to receive the help, support and recognition that they so richly deserve.

As well as representing a mark of respect, the community covenant demonstrates that the people of Bridgend County Borough have not forgotten the service, sacrifice and dedication of our armed forces.

More information about the Armed Forces Community Covenant and how it can support local people is available at the council website.

I'd also like to briefly remind members that the deadline for applying to the EU Settlement Scheme expires on 30 June.

If you have constituents within your wards who are EU citizens, this is their last chance to apply to continue to live and work in the UK, although the Government has also confirmed that there will be a 28 day extension for people who have a reasonable excuse for the delay.

The council website contains a wealth of information about the settlement scheme, and includes details on available support and advice.

You can also visit the UK Government's EU Settlement Scheme webpage.

Finally, the latest phase in our ongoing investment into highways infrastructure is underway with a £2.7 road improvement scheme which is targeting 40 local roads.

Resurfacing has already been completed on roads within the Porthcawl, Nottage, Caerau, Cefn Glas and Brackla Industrial Estate areas, and is due to take place on the A4063 Maesteg Road in Tondu as well as roads in Nantymoel, Brackla, Llangeinor, Shwt and Pontycymmer.

Further repairs and resurfacing works will also take place later in the year, and more details on this will be confirmed soon.

Iolo Williams in our recent event we attended Mr. Mayor, asked for every Council in the UK to minimise grass cutting of our road side verges, so that we can enhance the biodiversity features of such areas which are critical in terms of connecting our fragmented nature resources as we are doing in BCBC because of the threat to biodiversity and to create wildlife boundaries across welsh authorities.

547. CWM TAF MORGANNWG TEST, TRACE AND PROTECT PROGRAMME A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, the purpose of which, was to present the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) Region – Test Trace Protect COVID-19 Prevention and Response Plan 2021/2022 for noting and to outline the contribution of the Shared Regulatory Service (SRS) in the delivery of the plan.

She introduced to the meeting, Kelechi Nnoaham, Executive Director of Public Health and Lead for R&D and Innovation (EDPH) and Dave Holland, Head of Shared Regulatory Services, who would give a joint presentation in respect of the above programme.

The report advised, that Welsh Government produced their “Test, Trace, Protect” Strategy on 13 May 2020 which was based on Public Health Wales’ (PHW) advice. Each region was required to develop a response plan outlining how the aims of the Strategy would be achieved. The Cwm Taff Morgannwg response plan, referred to as the CTM TTP Programme, is being managed on a regional (CTM) footprint under the leadership of the Director of Public Health. A multi-agency Regional Strategic Oversight Group (RSOG) comprising of members of the Health Board, Local Public Health Team and the three local authorities was been set up to operationalise the response plan within the CTM area.

The Cwm Taf Morgannwg COVID-19 Prevention and Response Plan for 2021/2022, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, was submitted to Public Health Wales and Welsh Government in August 2020.

The 2020/2021 plan led to a number of significant deliverables, delivered in partnership and often within very short timescales, all with the aim of preventing and responding to the pandemic to minimise the impact on our communities as far as possible. These were included in bullet point format, at paragraph 4.1 of the report.

The plan was set in the context of a ‘look-back’ to events in 2020/2021 and lessons learned. It provided some of the epidemiological back-drop, together with the current status of COVID-19 in CTM and potential scenarios communities need to be ready to respond to, as we moved into 2021/2022.

In March 2021 Audit Wales produced a report “Test, Trace, Protect in Wales: An Overview of Progress to Date” (attached at Appendix 2 of the report). The key messages on a national level included:

- The TTP programme has seen different parts of the Welsh public and third sector work together well, in strong and effective partnerships, to rapidly build a programme of activities that is making an important contribution to the management of COVID-19 in Wales.
- The configuration of the TTP system in Wales has a number of strengths, blending national oversight and technical expertise with local and regional ownership of the programme, and the ability to use local intelligence and knowledge to shape responses.
- The TTP programme will remain a key tool in Wales’s battle with the virus for some time to come.

The Audit Wales report, highlighted a number of challenges which impact upon the delivery of services, these have been taken into account in the development of this year's plan. These were listed in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

Whilst the positive progress in the vaccination programme is recognised there remains uncertainty around COVID-19 variants of concern and there remains the need to maintain monitoring and be agile and flexible, in order to respond to emerging threats.

The TTP recovery work is presented as an enabling piece of work which will underpin the programme, as we moved hopefully from a health pandemic to an endemic situation.

Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) were also at the forefront of business closures at the start of the pandemic and provided support and advice to a number of premises. As the legislation evolved the advice continued and such advice, had to change rapidly in line with current restrictions. Officers provided tailored advice to assist businesses with their plans for re-opening.

Members then asked a number of questions of the two Invitees.

A member referred to paragraph 4.10 of the report and reference to the JET's team, ie comprising of representatives of the SW Police and SRS. He was aware of the fact that fixed penalty notices could be issued to individuals and business operations, for failure to comply with rules and regulations relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. He asked if there was the opportunity also, to change people's behaviour so that they were educated in how to comply with these, rather than have to face enforcement action. For those who faced the receipt of fixed penalty fines, he asked where the revenue went for the payments derived from this.

The SRS representative confirmed that advice was given far and wide both by UK and Welsh Government, with regards to precautions that should be taken due to the pandemic and this was reinforced in terms of businesses by the SRS team. If these were not complied with, then unfortunately enforcement action was then taken. 121 Improvement Notices had been served on businesses to date due to their failure to comply with regulatory guidance, that had been brought in, in order to improve Covid safety practises at premises, 7 of which premises were closed, due to non-compliance with such regulations. The revenue that is taken from fixed penalty notice fines, is then fed into the SRS and BCBC's funding of that service, he added.

A Member referred to page 83 of the report and a map showing Covid virus 'hot spots'. He felt that epidemiological surveillance, was key to the Test, Protect and Trace programme moving forward. As the Delta variant was now the dominant strain and of some threat to people, he asked if there was any Ward level data, where the variant was currently most prevalent, in the County Borough. Data such as this he felt was needed, in case there was a third wave of the illness in the autumn. It would be beneficial for Members to have some of this data capture, in order to communicate to their ward members what areas the illness was higher in, as opposed to others.

The EDPH representative confirmed that in terms of national figures presently, 70 – 80% of Covid-19 infections were the Delta variant, so this was very much the dominant strain throughout the country at the moment. In terms of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) area, 100% of all samples taken so far, were of the Delta variant. So undoubtedly, throughout the County Borough of Bridgend the Delta variant was dominant. This variant was 40% more contagious than the Alpha (Kent) variant, with people who caught this strain, being two and a half times more likely to be hospitalised than with the Alpha variant. The good

news however was, that in the CTM location, there was not presently an inordinate amount of increased cases of this, nor hospitalisations, more particularly in Bridgend.

The Member followed up by stating, that if there were cases of a 'spike' in one or two areas of the County Borough of the Delta variant, then it would be advantageous if the relevant Ward Members could be made aware of this, in order to feed this back to their constituents.

A Member asked if members of the public were in the main complying with protocols, ie going into isolation for the required period, if they had been diagnosed with Covid-19. He also asked that if when offered, some members of the public refused the vaccine, could they change their mind and have it after the time they were offered it.

The EDPH representative in respect of the second point, advised that there was always a second opportunity to have the vaccine, for example through mop-up sessions/walk-in clinics.

In terms of compliance with the regulations and isolation for those who contracted the illness, he added that this had been high throughout the life of the pandemic. The SRS representative added that this isolation period was monitored by regular phone calls to the affected person and compliance was also enforced through the SW Police/SRS. Businesses were also challenged and strongly urged to send any staff home to isolate, if they were aware that they had caught the virus.

The Leader added that it was never too late for anyone to have the vaccine. The vaccine was safe and had a high percentage of success, in terms of preventing people from either catching an infection or if they did, preventing them from becoming seriously ill as a result of it.

He added that in terms of Ward level data, there had been instances in the past, when there had been spikes of the illness in certain areas of the County Borough, including for example in the Garw Valley and Porthcawl. Information and advice was also continuing to be given to Business organisations, especially as the illness changed and evolved and supplementary information and guidance was required to be adapted in-keeping with this. He commended the work of Health, SRS and SW Police in terms of the Test, Protect and Trace programme and the implementation of enforcement measures that was helping to keep the public safe and well.

The EDPH representative echoed these comments and urged the public to receive the vaccine, as any adverse effects from having it, were heavily outweighed by the effects of the illness, for those that did not.

A Member asked if individuals were taken to Court, for non-payment of any Fixed Penalty Notices for breaching Covid 19 regulations.

The SRS representative confirmed that they were. However, due to the pandemic there was a backlog of cases waiting to be heard, including the above, which were less serious offences that some of the major ones being heard that were therefore receiving priority.

A Member made the point that CTM had developed an on-line cancellation form for those that were unable to meet their invited vaccine appointment and on this, there was an opportunity to re-book this to an alternative date. However, this was not specified on the initial letter inviting people to get their vaccination. She asked what was being done in terms of engagement with Welsh Government, in order to ensure that these two guidance letters married-up.

The EDPH representative confirmed that he would take this issue up further with the vaccination teams and come back to the Member with a response accordingly, outside of the meeting.

A Member urged for the provisions of the TTP programme to continue to be reminded to the public at large, so as to keep awareness raised of the illness and its effects, as society opened back up, particularly now the Delta variant had come about.

The EDPH representative acknowledged this, but added that if the vaccine programme continued in the pace it was presently progressing at and the country reached a point of herd immunity, ie 80 – 90% of people being vaccinated, the drive on TTP pushed forward previously, would not require as much publicity as it had when the disease was more in control of society. Though this could be revisited if required in the future, ie bringing the TTP programme back in its fullness, if needs be. At present though, he did not think this would be the case.

A Member stated that home appointments for the vaccine needed to be looked at closely, for those people who were bed bound or for individuals with physical impairment. There had to be alternative arrangements in place for those that received a vaccine appointment in their GP's etc, but who could not attend due to reasons such as this. She added, that regulations were also required to be monitored regarding safety elements in respect of the disease, for those people who used public transport, ie adhering to seating arrangements and cleaning the buses regularly between service routes.

The SRS representative confirmed that there were provisions in the regulations for this, but these were the responsibility of the SW Police in terms of their monitoring, albeit through the Joint Enforcement Team.

The Chief Executive and the Leader, in turn, concluded debate on this very important topic, by thanking the EDPH and SRS representatives for attending today to respond to Members questions and for the hard work they have committed to the pandemic, which has been a very difficult, important and has been in addition to the other work they also undertake, on a day to day basis.

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region – Test Trace Protect COVID-19 Prevention and Response Plan 2021/2022 and the ongoing work of the Shared Regulatory Service in the delivery of the plan.

548. **REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2020-21**

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to provide Council with an update on the Council's revenue financial performance for the year ended 31st March 2021.

By way of background, the report reminded Members that on 26th February 2020, Council approved a net revenue budget of £286.885 million for 2020-21. As part of the Performance Management Framework, budget projections are reviewed regularly and reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The delivery of agreed budget reductions is also kept under review and reported to Cabinet as part of this process.

She explained that the 2020-21 financial year had been a unique and complex year in managing the financial position of the Council primarily as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Significant changes have occurred throughout the year as circumstances

altered and services were supported in different ways to deliver outcomes in the best way possible. A Covid-19 Hardship fund was set up at an early stage by the Welsh Government to the tune of £188.5 million which the Council was able to draw on for financial support.

The Council had been extremely successful at securing support for many of the additional costs incurred along with loss of income claims. Our claims against the WG Hardship fund totalled £21.5 million of which only £882,000 were disallowed.

Additional to the assistance and support from the WG Hardship fund were specific grants received to help cushion the effects of COVID on the delivery of services. These included ICT for digitally excluded learners, concessionary fare reimbursement and local authority cyber security along with specific support for schools in for school counselling services, face masks and support for additional cleaning costs. Furthermore, significant grants were received in the last quarter of the financial year.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, confirmed that the other significant change between quarter 3 and quarter 4 was the £1.261 million contribution from WG in February 2021, in recognition of the reduced council tax collection rates experienced by Councils in 2020-21 as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The key areas of investment were outlined in the report and shown in more detail at Appendix 1.

The Council's net revenue budget and final outturn for 2020-21 was shown at Table 1 in the report.

The overall outturn at 31st March 2021, was a net under spend of £432,000 which has been transferred to the Council Fund, bringing the total Fund balance to £9.771 million in line with Principle 9 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Table 1 highlighted the changes referred to of £6.6 million since quarter 3 on total Directorate Budgets, and a change of £4.549 million on total Council Wide budgets. Table 2 in the report, highlighted the main reasons for the change and additional funding received by the Council since quarter 3 that support the changed outturn position.

Since quarter 3, the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that the authority had successfully claimed £2.144 million of Hardship funding, along with £1.066 million to support loss of income experienced by the authority as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Further detail was provided on the movements since quarter 3 at individual Directorate level and on Council wide budgets in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

The main financial pressures are in the service areas of Home to School Transport and Adult Social Care. These two alone had an underlying pressure of £1.864 million. It should be noted she added, that these budget areas can be volatile and small changes in demand can result in relatively high costs being incurred.

The net budget for the financial year was set assuming full implementation of the current year budget reduction requirements across the Council's budget, which amount to £2.413 million. Where proposals to meet this requirement have been delayed or are not achievable directorates have been tasked with identifying alternative proposals to meet their requirements such as vacancy management, or bringing forward alternative budget reduction proposals. These were set out in paragraph 4.2.4 of the report.

The next part of the report highlighted the effect that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the Council and the Authority's response to this. The information in Table 3 and Table 4, gave further details on this.

Table 5 in the report, then detailed Outstanding Prior Year Budget Reductions and in paragraph 4.2.2 of the report, it itemised in monetary terms, those proposals still not achieved.

Table 6 then included information relating to the monitoring of Budget Reductions for 2020-21. The most significant budget reduction proposals not achieved in full and the action required to achieve them in 2021-22, were outlined in Table 7 of the report.

A summary of the financial position for each main service area was attached at Appendix 4 to the report and comments on the most significant variances were provided at paragraph 4.3 (Directorate by Directorate).

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change concluded the report, by detailing information on Council Wide Budgets and Earmarked Reserves.

The Deputy Leader thanked the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change for looking after the Authority's finances during such a difficult time over this last 14 month or so period and prior to that. He commended the Welsh Government Hardship Fund, as without the £21.5m funding the Council had received through this, it would be in a very difficult position. He also added that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, would continue to help constituents who were single occupants in properties, as well as those on low income. He would ensure that financial pressures that existed in Directorates would continue to be targeted as future budget reductions.

A Member asked that if the Authority knew it was going to be in such a favourable financial position, due to the funding provided by Welsh Government under the above Fund, which including assisting the Council on cost recovery, would the Administration have still increased Council Tax this year by 3.9%. He also asked for an explanation as to why there were specific pressures in the areas of Home to School Transport and Adult Social Care

The Deputy Leader stated that this was a question that was retrospective in its nature and that with the benefit of hindsight the above may have been approached differently. However, this was not the case at the time the MTFS was approved by Council earlier this year, at a time when the local authority found itself in a very difficult financial position.

The Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help, advised that she was fearful of the existing pressures Social Services presently faced, which she unfortunately anticipated, would continue in the future. These related to Covid-19 and pressures around Long-Covid, as well as individuals continuing to require both support through Adult and Children's Social Services. The Council and its partners were obligated to look after the most vulnerable in society, she added.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration, confirmed that Home to School Transport continued to be a budget pressure, due to austerity more than any other reason. The proposal to cut the budget of Home to School Transport was still in the MTFS as a targeted reduction. It should be noted he reminded Members, that the Council still continued to provide this service at a more generous rate than that recommended by Welsh Government.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised that there were three underlying reasons why there continued to be an overspend in Adult Social Care. Firstly because of demographics with an ageing population whereby people were living longer. Secondly, as a result of the outcome of the pandemic and the effect it's had on services pressure wise and lastly the cost of care, namely for the workforce and commissioned services, which would be longer term pressures.

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the Revenue Outturn position for 2020-21.

549. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to seek approval from Council for a revised capital programme for 2020-21 to 2030-31 (Appendix A to the report referred).

She reminded Members, that the capital programme approved by Council in February 2021 for the period 2020-21 to 2030-31 totalled £205.732 million, of which £116.147 million is to be met from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) resources, including capital receipts and revenue contributions from earmarked reserves, with the remaining £89.585 million coming from external resources, including General Capital Grant.

As mentioned in the report, a number of proposals for new capital schemes have been received, and these have been considered and prioritised by Cabinet and Corporate Management Board, in line with the Council's Capital Strategy. Funding for these schemes has been set aside through new earmarked reserves, established during the 2020-21 year end process, from unallocated general capital funding received through the 2021-22 Local Government Settlement and from public realm fund revenue funding for the 2021-22 financial year. In addition, there was one school scheme that also needs inclusion in the capital programme which is part funded from school delegated budgets and partly via a Salix interest free loan, to be repaid by the school.

The total cost of the new schemes was £4,552,271 and this was broken down in Table 1 in the report, with Table 2 showing the breakdown of funding for the proposed schemes.

Further information was detailed on the schemes, in paragraph 4.4 of the report, some of which added the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing, in turn, commended some of the projects so listed, the former the replacement of the new CCTV system and the latter, the added facilities provided by Arwen Trust and Halo at their buildings, that would benefit those with mobility issues and the provision of gully sucking equipment and playground refurbishment proposals.

A Member commended the provision of solar panels at Litchard School and asked if this was intended for other schools interested in this, particularly those that could not afford this out of their own budgets.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support advised that he could update the Member on the above outside of the meeting.

The Interim Deputy Head of Finance advised that there was an Energy Saving Scheme in the Capital Programme to look at energy saving efficiencies in Council buildings including for schools as well as for solar panels at these and other buildings.

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved the revised Capital Programme for 2020-21 to 2030-31 (at Appendix A to the report).

550. **INFORMATION REPORT FOR NOTING**

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

A Member asked about the suspension of the relevant Contract Procedure Rules that related to a decision made regarding Home to School Transport costs. He asked if it would be in order to ask the COSC to look at this process retrospectively, in order to establish that everything was in order in relation to this particular decision.

The Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, advised that she could write to the Chairperson of the above O&SC or the Member himself, to explain the reason for the suspension of the Contract Procedure Rules in this instance, executed under the relevant provision of the Scheme of Delegation (of Functions).

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

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

**Councillor Ross Penhale-Thomas to the Leader**

What is the local authority doing to help address poverty and disadvantage across our communities here in Bridgend?

1. At a strategic level, the Council has set out in its Corporate Plan three wellbeing objectives that aim to help us address poverty and the disadvantaged across our communities in Bridgend County Borough. These are:
  - Supporting a successful and sustainable economy
  - Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient
  - Smarter use of resources
2. These objectives, also demonstrate the Council's commitment to the seven well-being goals, introduced by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and embed the sustainable development principles of the Act.
3. In addition to the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan, and those within the Bridgend County Wellbeing Plan, the Council has to ensure compliance with the **Socio-Economic Duty**. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, public services are required to think about how their strategic decisions, such as setting objectives and developing public services, can improve inequality of outcome for people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage. All services areas across the Council are tasked with this consideration and our reporting procedures have been updated to ensure these important questions and responses are fully understood
4. One example of how the Council is delivering against our commitment to help address poverty and the disadvantaged across our communities is the Employability Bridgend Programme. Employability Bridgend supports disadvantaged participants across the whole Council, regardless of location, by offering a suite of interventions that aim to break patterns of multi-generational worklessness and poverty. These include:

- Building soft skills and confidence to create more resilience and independence
- Offering upskilling to increase employability
- Support to look for and sustain employment
- Providing laptops and wi-fi dongles to help overcome digital literacy and digital access barriers
- Support for volunteering placements to reduce social isolation and interaction with communities – which also provides work experience to put on a CV.

4.1 To date, the programme has achieved over 1200 job outcomes.

5. Another example is the Council commissioned Financial Advice and Support Service (FASS) that is delivered by the Citizen's Advice Bureau. The service was specifically designed by us to tackle a range of poverty related issues and includes the provision of support across the following areas:

- Debt problems Financial difficulty
- Unemployment (claiming benefits, including Universal Credit (UC))
- Inability to budget or manage finances effectively
- Those experiencing 'in work poverty'
- Those requiring information and support to undertake employment better off calculations.

5.1 FASS has been instrumental in providing support to those disadvantaged as a result of the pandemic, particularly those who have found themselves struggling financially, whereby 80% of their income has been met by the furlough scheme although unfortunately was not enough to meet their household outgoings.

6. These are just two examples of how the Council helps address poverty and the disadvantaged across our communities within Bridgend County Borough. There is a wide-ranging suite of other support available that includes:

- **council tax reduction scheme** – support for residents on low incomes to pay their council tax. The Council also provided residents with flexible options for paying Council tax last year and still enable people to pay over a longer period and council tax reminders provide signposts to support from Step Change, The Money Advice Service, Bridgend Life Saves Credit Union and Citizen Advice some of which help with poverty related issues
- **housing advice and homelessness support** – residents who are at risk of becoming homeless or who are homeless, can contact us directly or via the Housing Jigsaw Portal to find out about the range of support available and then follow their own personal housing plan to help them secure accommodation
- **housing benefit support**
- development of the county borough's new **Economic Futures Framework** that will provide a long term strategic vision for our economic growth ambitions and set out the priority actions to be undertaken by the

Council in the coming months with a focus on supporting our economic recovery

- developing **procurement strategies** that can boost the foundational economy and create wealth within our local communities
- **apprenticeship opportunities.**

6.1 The Council recognises the importance of its partnership arrangements and collaboration with key stakeholders, for example through the Public Service Board and Regional Partnership Board. This cross-sector collaboration was critical to our response during the pandemic. Through the Resilient Communities programme, over the last year, 1300 volunteers came forward to help support more than 4444 individuals across a number of areas including mental health, anxiety, financial security, alcohol and substance misuse and reduced mobility/ frailty.

7. To finish, if we focus on the support available to help address poverty and the disadvantaged across our communities in Bridgend County Borough from one of our Directorates, the **Education and Family Support Directorate**, then the breadth and wealth of support available is clearly demonstrated.

#### **8. Business Support**

Schools and local authority caterers encourage the uptake of free school meals and we coordinate the provision of free school meal food parcels during the school holiday periods.

#### **9. Family Support**

Flying Start provides free help and support for children under four in certain areas. It aims to improve their chances and give them a 'flying start' when they go to school with support on:

- High-quality, part-time childcare (up to 30 hours) for two and three-year-olds;
- a health visitor and Family Support Worker to provide intense support to those families outside of the eligible postcode of Flying Start;
- access to parenting support; and
- help with early language development

The School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) is a school-based education programme that provides food and nutrition education, physical activity, enrichment sessions and healthy meals to children in areas of social deprivation during the school summer holidays.

Staff are trained and deliver 'GroBrain' during pregnancy or following birth to help parents understand how to improve bonding and positively "wire up" their baby's brain.

Nurture programme - parenting support for generally under 5s, working on the child's strengths and celebrating their positives which improves bonding and family relationships.

Early Help is a voluntary service that aims to help provide the right support for individuals and their family to aid positive change. The service focuses on:

- talking about strengths as well as areas that could be improved;
  - getting you the right help at the right time;
  - bringing together a team of the right people who can help your family;
  - listening to you and giving you choices; and
  - parenting support/mental health support/access to relevant finances and benefits/housing
- Delivery of non-violent resistance (NVR) parenting/relationship building.
  - Wellbeing support for primary school-aged children delivering targeted intervention to support family relationships, improve school attendance and reduce the number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
  - Inspire 2 Work supports young people (16 to 25 years-old) who are furthest away from the labour market to identify and secure relevant employment to improve their individual life circumstances.
  - The Period Dignity initiative provides free-to-access menstrual products to children and young people from deprived and disadvantaged communities to help support, among other areas, engagement in school.

#### **10. Learner Support**

- The Bridgend Education Psychology Service provides an active and significant role in supporting our most disadvantaged families, children and young people. We work closely with families and other agencies such as social services, health and third sector charities like Barnardo's so we understand the barriers, wider context and identify the best supports for our children and young people.
- We provide the Early Years Education Psychologist contribution to the Flying Start programme across the local authority which promotes the delivery of positive health and wellbeing to vulnerable families and communities. The educational psychologist role includes early identification of additional learning needs and direct support and advice to families and practitioners. This encompasses collaborative work and advice towards supported childcare for families with children with emerging additional learning needs.
- The Portage Home Advisory Service which works with families to help them develop a quality of life and experience for themselves and their children in which they can learn together and play together. We deliver Early Years ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) and THRIVE training, consultation and advice to build knowledge and understanding within early years settings.
- The Bridgend Education Psychology Service leads Wales in the development of ACEs training for schools and settings for Welsh Government. We support ACEs awareness raising and recognition of trauma experienced by children and their families, through direct training, discussion, support and listening to the voices of others. This includes staff who have also experienced loss and trauma but are also working with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. We raise awareness of diversity and the bias agenda to clarify perception of need and promote further discussion among staff supporting our children and young people.

- The Bridgend Education Psychology Service provides a key role in the identification of ALN from birth to 19, and this will now expand to 25 under the ALN Reform. We support pupils who are care experienced and those with any additional needs, building school capacity through training, direct therapy, supervision and support of emotional well-being. We have developed and oversee the training, delivery and supervision of ELSA and the PERMA well-being profiler tool which can directly draw data and support vulnerable groups (eg those children eligible for free school meals (eFSM)). We have ELSAs in almost every school in Bridgend and this year we have set up 20 schools on the PERMA profiler as part of the well-being pilot across the consortium and the roll-out is ongoing.
- The Learner Support Team works jointly with National Health Service (NHS)/Learner Support approach to supporting nursery schools in Flying Start areas across the local authority, in order to promote early assessment, identification and support through the WellComm programme. Training, drop-ins, school visits and advice and support is offered and available virtually.
- The Learner Support Team provides advice and support to schools related to the management of pupils with speech and language difficulties including differentiation. In addition, team members deliver NHS speech and language programmes to a small number of individual pupils with significant specific speech and/or language difficulties in schools across the borough, including those in Flying Start areas.
- The Learner Support Team provides ancillary support for pupils with complex emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder, and speech and language difficulties.
- Working in a person-centred planning way so that all learners have a voice and any educational plan has been identified with the pupils needs as the focus.

## **11. School Support**

- The local authority, in partnership with Central South Consortium allocates grant funding (eg the pupil development grant) to schools in the region along with guidance and advice on how grant funding can be used to drive improvement.
- Improvement partners working with each school in Bridgend offer support so that schools use the funding effectively and in a way that makes a difference to individual children. Schools are specifically asked to think about how the funding can be used to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills as well as offering enrichment activities.
- Professional learning is offered to schools linked to the principle of developing equity and excellence for all our learners. The local authority has contributed to the first version and the re-draft of Central South Consortium's 'Equity and Excellence' strategy.
- Schools in Bridgend have made effective use of the funding since it first became available. When compared to similar local authorities, outcomes for pupils entitled to the additional funding are better than other local authorities. This is a reflection of the strong emphasis that all schools in Bridgend have placed making a difference to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- The local authority has supported eFSM pupils by providing digital devices and MiFi equipment, where needed, to ensure that the 'digital divide' is diminished.

## **12. School Modernisation**

- Training and work experience opportunities are sought through construction project via contractors. In addition, as a named local authority on the SEWSCAP Framework, our construction projects are now able to refer people for training through the On-Site Construction Training Academy which provides a unique opportunity, bringing together employment support partners and employers to ensure sustainable careers across the south east Wales region. This benefits job seekers, construction diploma students and the construction industry itself, creating a throughput of trained local workers to fill roles in this ever-expanding sector.

### **Supplementary question from Councillor Ross-Penhale Thomas**

To what extent does the local authority currently involve people who have lived experience in poverty, in its decision making processes and will the Leader explore the possibility of setting up a Poverty Truth Commission in Bridgend, such as there are in other locations, so we can lay bare and be transparent about the reality and challenges of poverty and work together, in order to co-produce solutions for this very real problem

#### **Response**

We can certainly consider that suggestion, ie look to set-up such a Commission and explore where it has been used in other areas, any tangible impact it has had on those who experience poverty in their lives. BCBC always try to engage closely with all individuals across the County Borough, including those in poverty, in order to improve our services and the delivery of these. Examples of such services being, Flying Start and the Employability Service. Both these are examples of successful engagement in terms of reaching out to our constituents. We can always do more however and look to improve services and engagement across the County Borough, including in areas where there is poverty and disadvantage.

### **Second supplementary question from Councillor Jon-Paul Blundell**

What action has been taken to tackle food poverty and those that are disadvantaged in BCBC, through the free school meals programme.

#### **Response**

Members will be aware of the provision that was put in place in order to ensure that no child went hungry at the start of the pandemic. Packed lunches and food parcels were provided, the latter of which are still being provided with the assistance of Welsh Government. This was not just during term time but in school holiday periods also. There had been positive feedback from parents as a result of this, with 1,000's of families benefitting from this support that reached out to over 5,000 children. The Council were also looking to encourage more people to sign up for free school meals, and this was a priority moving forward, as there are those families that though being eligible for free school meals, were not at present claiming for them. Some were now eligible as a result of the pandemic and family members losing jobs. Welsh Government were also funding the School Enrichment Programme, in order that even more children can benefit this year, through play and learning opportunities during school holidays, where included in this, was a healthy nutritious meal for them at lunchtime, in order to encourage healthy eating at a young age.

**Third supplementary question from Councillor S Dendy**

The valleys regeneration report 2019 gives an overview of the issues faced in areas north of the M4 and makes reference to the fact the 'Valleys' area has 13 lower super output areas, classed as being in the 20% most deprived in Wales.

The report highlights some startling points:

27% of people in the Garw Valley have limiting long-term illness who have limited access to healthcare provision

35% of adults in the Garw Valley alone have no qualifications.

A serious lack of job opportunities within the Valleys

The blight of derelict large scale buildings impacting on mental wellbeing, impacting community pride.

And the enormous need for public transport with 27% of households in the Garw Valley alone having no car and as we all know in recent years the subsidies have been cut and reducing of routes.

Although these statistics relate to the Garw Valley these issues are faced by the Ogmores and Llynfi communities.

This really plays into the creation of poverty in these communities. Is this council dedicated in fulfilling that framework, through tackling the issues which feed into the poverty experienced within these communities?

**Response**

I fully agree with some of these points which have been rightly identified. Examples such as those above, have blighted our communities for some generations, particularly the loss of the coal industry which was a massive blow to certain valley areas. This was hard to recover from, though we are continually looking at ways to do so. One of my proudest moments since becoming Leader, was seeing the Authority opening two new schools in Bettws in the form of both an English and Welsh medium school, which amounted to a record level of investment in the Garw Valley. I am also very pleased to see young people benefit from state of the art facilities at Coleg-Y-Cymunedol Y Dderwen, where children from both the Ogmores and Garw Valleys are educated. I am also pleased to announce, that we will be having a ground breaking ceremony this week for a new Welsh medium childcare facility in Blackmill and developing a similar facility in the Garw also. This is because, we know from research and evidence that childcare issues can be a major barrier to parents having employment opportunities and promotion in work. These would meet a major need for improved childcare arrangements in the Ogmores/Garw Valleys, as had been identified in the last Annual Childcare survey. Examples of the above, are developments in regeneration, only in a wider sense, educational progression. The Council were also looking at transport infrastructure improvements across the valley locations, with a transport Hub and facility looking to be developed at the Ewenny Road site, Maesteg, that had been supported as part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal initiative.

**Councillor Tim Thomas to the Cabinet Member - Communities**

What percentage of County Borough public rights of way are accessible to the public and are at a satisfactory standard.

### **Response**

Bridgend has 800 individual public rights of way with a total network length of 613.72 Km. These routes include Public Footpaths (84% of the network), Public Bridleways (14.6%), Restricted Byways (0.1%) and Byways Open to All Traffic (1.3%).

The County Borough Council has overall responsibility for the maintenance of the network and also has a duty to protect the rights of the public to use the network and to prevent routes from being stopped up or obstructed. However, landowners too have a responsibility in that they are generally responsible for the maintenance of structures i.e. stiles, kissing gates, field gates, etc. on routes, although they can recover some costs from the Council for this.

Through the Wales Programme for Improvement the Council used to be required to report annually on the condition of the public rights of way network using a nationally adopted Performance Indicator, namely 'Paths that are easy to use'. This Indicator stopped being reported nationally approximately 8 years ago, although it was reported internally for a number of years after that with the last 5% random sample survey being carried out in 2016. The Council did, however, have a whole network survey completed last year in preparation for the review of the Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Information from that survey has been analysed and the results are as follows:

- 69.5% of the total number of paths are classed as being available for use, whilst
- 59.5% of the total length of paths were classed as being available for use

It is impossible to say at any one time which routes are available as it is, by its very nature, ever changing. A path that may be considered as being passable one day may, for a variety of reasons, be unusable the next. An unscrupulous landowner may deliberately obstruct a route, or routes may become overgrown or structures fall into disrepair through lack of use or maintenance, even for only a short time.

When any of these issues are identified to us we try to resolve and reopen routes as soon as possible. We work with landowners to remove obstructions and repair structures and with many of the Town and Community Councils who have Agency Agreements with us to remove vegetation. We have, however, seen a several fold increase in the use of the rights of way network since the start of the pandemic and our maintenance officer has seen an increase in the number of issues being reported as well as dealing with the results of the whole network survey.

Although the Performance Indicator is no longer reported nationally an attempt has been made to contact other Rights of Way teams throughout Wales to determine the current situation. From the small number of responses received to date only one authority has decided to continue with collecting that data with the rest citing a lack of resources as the reason.

In terms of accessibility for persons with mobility issues the rights of way section has, and continues to, make improvements where funding is made available, particularly internal capital and grant funding from Welsh Government or other groups such as the Ramblers, has permitted. This has included replacing stiles with kissing gates and making surface improvements where possible. It should be remembered that much of the rights of way network crosses agricultural land and as such the surface would be of natural formation and not surfaced. Furthermore, structures have to remain stock proof.

**Supplementary question by Councillor T Thomas**

I acknowledge that some Rights of Way are blocked by landowners, including some in the Valleys Gateway. This is a longstanding problem and is frustrating, particularly when pursuing complaints in respect of this through the member referrals process. Would the Cabinet Member – Communities join me and with a couple of constituents to walk these paths to see the problems and look at ways to rectify them?

**Response**

Yes course. Please tie in with me and we can arrange a suitable date for this.

**Second supplementary question from Councillor Ken Watts**

Where evidence exists of over ploughing of footpaths, could I have a reassurance that action will be taken to restore the paths, or alternatively, have put in place Diversion Orders. I have had a Member referral(s) on this also.

**Response**

If you share further details of this including the referral with me, I will look into this issue for you.

**Third supplementary question from Councillor Sorrel Dendy**

In terms of accessibility to public Rights of Way, some routes are on rough ground. Is it possible to have a graded system put in place, so that people looking to access them are aware of their length and gradient, etc. We are looking at this with footpaths in the Garw Valley, in order that members of the public are aware of the condition of such footpaths, when bearing in mind their levels of fitness and ability to walk them.

**Response**

As I do not have information on this to hand, in order to give you a detailed response, I will refer this matter to the Public Rights of Way Officer for consideration and either he or myself will come back to you, outside of the meeting.

552. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:00