

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 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	T Giffard	RM Granville
CA Green	DG Howells	M Hughes	A Hussain
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	JC Spanswick
RME Stirman	G Thomas	SR Vidal	MC Voisey
LM Walters	CA Webster	DBF White	A Williams
AJ Williams	HM Williams	JE Williams	RE Young

Apologies for Absence

SG Smith, T Thomas, JH Tildesley MBE, E Venables and PJ White

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Laura Griffiths	Principal Solicitor
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Gill Lewis	Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Gaynor Thomas	School Programme Manager
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

552. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

553. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the following meetings of Council be approved as a true and accurate record:-

Annual meeting – 19 May 2021
Ordinary meeting – 23 June 2021

554. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:

Mayor

A further meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee has been scheduled for 9 September at 2.00pm. This was agreed by the Committee at its meeting held on 18 June 2021. The reason for this meeting being added to the Programme of Meetings, is

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

to accommodate business scheduled on the Forward Work Programme that needs to be considered before the next scheduled meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021

Since the last Council meeting I have had the pleasure of being present at the ground breaking ceremony of the new Welsh school / child care facility at Blackmill.

The opening of Joe's Flower shop at Cefn Cribwr (and I need some practise at cutting the ribbon as it took 3 attempts to cut, I blame the scissors being too small).

On Sunday 27th June it was a pleasure to spend a few hours at the annual Cefn Cribwr open gardens day. There were some stunning displays and the weather was kind to us as well. A great event and one that should not be missed especially if you like taking a look at how your garden should be. Later that day we visited a resident in a care home at Maesteg who was celebrating her 101st. birthday and I know the following week the Deputy Mayor visited another resident at the same home who was celebrating her 100th birthday.

On 28th. June I was invited to join the Polish Ambassador on his visit to Porthcawl museum and the war graves of 5 Polish servicemen who paid the ultimate price in the 2nd. World War and are buried at Porthcawl Cemetery. It was a very moving experience as I accompanied the Ambassador to pay our respects as he laid a wreath at each one of the war graves. If you have not visited Porthcawl museum then I suggest you consider taking a trip there as while it may look small on the outside, it's like a Tardis inside with lots of interesting memorabilia and information about our local area.

The most recent visit this month was to Kenfig Nature Reserve as part of its Open Day and it was great to see how the trustees have started to make the visitor centre more sustainable and have plans for the future to provide an indoor café looking out onto the reserve. It was great to see that this important landmark in our County Borough is in safe hands and has a prosperous future.

I recently attended a "Not Forgotten" Charity Summer Party at Ewenny Priory for Veteran Soldiers. This was a very poignant occasion and should any Member wish to donate to this Charity, which is for an extremely worthwhile cause, please let me know.

Finally, just a few words about the Mayors charity fund. While there is no longer a Mayors Charity Committee, my wife and I fully intend to try and raise as much as possible for Lads & Dads and Bridgend Carers Centre. Therefore on Saturday 14th August my wife Susan (a.k.a. Mayoress) will be taking part in a tandem skydive from 12,000 ft. at Swansea airfield. I have set up a Go Fund Me page where donations can be made and it is also possible to make a donation via the BCBC website by going onto the Mayors page. All donations will be going to the groups mentioned and not a penny will be spent on the cost of the event itself as we are funding that ourselves.

There will be other events and hopefully a Christmas raffle, but the Welsh 3 Peaks Challenge I may have mentioned previously is now likely to take place in early April 2022, as I realised that perhaps a few Councillors out there need a bit of encouragement to participate and to get their hiking boots on with some training over the winter months.

Deputy Leader

Final preparations are underway at Village Farm Industrial Estate in Pyle for the all-new community recycling centre.

Together with fellow Cabinet and local members, I visited the site last week for an early look at what it is going to offer, and I have to say that I was hugely impressed.

Featuring a split-level design, drivers will be able to follow a simple one-way system around the new centre.

They will be able to choose whether they want to access parking bays and recycling skips at ground level, or to use bypass lanes and ramps which lead to high-sided skips on an upper level.

With an all-weather canopy on the higher level, the site features flexible bollards to help guide drivers and prevent accidental damage to vehicles, lighting powered by on-site solar panels, and flat kerb-free parking bays to enhance safety and remove potential trip hazards for people carrying waste from their cars.

Capable of accommodating up to 24 vehicles at a time, the new recycling centre also features on-site queuing capacity for a further 72 vehicles, and there are plans to create a 're-use shop at the site.

At the last meeting of Council, I outlined how work is also taking place at the entrance to village Farm Industrial Estate to ease congestion and support the flow of traffic.

This will result in a new dedicated turning lane from the A48 onto Heol Mostyn, new traffic lights, and a new safe crossing island.

Together, the junction improvements and new recycling centre represent a £2.3m investment that is going to help thousands of households to recycle even more of their waste.

Cabinet Member – Communities

Public consultation over the replacement Local Development Plan is ongoing and I understand that the draft report on this engagement is already more than 800 pages long.

This is good news as we are encouraging as many people as possible to take part and have their say, and will be continuing to do so right up to the deadline of Tuesday 27 July.

The plan will, of course, be used to determine what kinds of development can take place throughout Bridgend County Borough between now and 2033, so it is important for people to be aware of its wide-reaching scope.

We want residents to understand how, once completed, it will set out how land can be used, and which parts of the county borough will be maintained as open space or designated for residential, employment, retail, waste, mineral development, community and tourism purposes.

The plan seeks to ensure that there are enough new homes to meet the needs of growing communities while also providing new infrastructure and facilities, and drawing in fresh economic investment to the area.

It aims to support the creation of 5,000 additional jobs, deliver new developments and regeneration within Bridgend, Pencoed, Maesteg, Pyle and Porthcawl, and to ensure that each new development contributes positively to creating or enhancing environments within which people, communities, businesses and nature can thrive.

The Council website outlines the different ways in which you can take part and what alternative formats are available, and copies are also available at local libraries.

I hope that members will encourage their constituents to look at it in closer detail, and to pass on their views so that we can take account of them and agree a final draft.

Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help

At the meeting of Council last December, I updated Members on how adult social care services were facing elevated risks as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, and outlined the steps that were being taken to counter its impact.

I'm afraid that I have to advise members that the situation continues to be very serious, and that it is not limited to Bridgend County Borough.

Essential services are continuing to be regularly reviewed, prioritised and co-ordinated at a director and heads-of-service level.

Our prioritised service areas cover both adult and children's social care, and include safeguarding, care for the most vulnerable, mental health assessments, case management for vulnerable children, residential care, day services, respite care and services that support fostering.

However, Welsh Government recently confirmed that services such as reablement and domiciliary care are facing particular challenges in terms of their capacity to respond to projected demand.

Here in Bridgend, we are now providing 640 hours per week more than we did in April 2020, and we are receiving increasing requests to extend existing packages of care.

The danger that we want to avoid is people being forced to wait for a package of care to become available.

This situation is being exacerbated by factors such as individuals who don't want to seek treatment or to go to hospital, family members being unable to care for them as they once might have, increased social isolation issues as a result of staying at home, and more.

The reality of the situation is that this level of demand is likely to be in place for both the medium and longer term.

As part of our response, a bronze-level task group is in place, and is working through the agreed action plan.

We are exploring opportunities with our partners at Cwm Taf on joined-up recruitment processes, and are exploring the use of agency workers as well as how we may increase the uptake of direct payments.

A review of people within the current service and a resource matrix will be in place, and in addition, we will be looking at care home vacancy opportunities.

We are also working to attract individuals who want experience in the care sector through a recruitment process.

This is something that I would ask Members to help promote within their local wards, and to direct people who are seeking job opportunities towards provider services.

Our goal will always be to work with people and families and to prioritise those who are most in need, both in the community and in a hospital setting.

However, we should also recognise that the current situation could result in a rise in complaints around being able to meet a person's assessed needs.

In the meantime, staff are continuing to demonstrate their usual dedication and determination, and I would like to recognise and thank them once more for all of their efforts.

The situation continues to remain open to rapid change, and I will bring you further updates as the pandemic continues.

Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing

A new Welsh Government fund is set to support housing tenants who are renting privately, and who may have fallen behind on their rent.

The £10m Tenancy Hardship Grant is designed to prevent people from losing their tenancies if they fell behind on their rent by more than eight weeks during the period between March 2020 and June 2021.

The rent arrears may have been as a result of a loss of income due to pandemic furlough, a reduction in work or because they were only able to claim Statutory Sick Pay while ill with Covid-19.

The grant is open to people who are not receiving housing-related benefits, and replaces the Tenancy Saver Loan, which was introduced in October 2020.

Anyone who received a loan as part of that scheme will have the loan converted to a grant.

Anyone who is struggling to pay their rent should contact their landlord or agent and organisations such as Citizen's Advice and Shelter Cymru as early as possible to ensure that they can receive the right advice and support.

To apply for a Tenancy Hardship Grant, people should email Housing At Bridgend Dot Gov Dot UK and use 'THG Support Grant' as the subject line of the email.

More details on the grant and eligibility is available at the Welsh Government website.

Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration

I'm sure that members will want to join me in congratulating Bryntirion Comprehensive for becoming the first school in Bridgend County Borough to be awarded for its efforts to support autism.

The school has spent the last two years raising awareness of autism among teachers, pupils, staff, governors and the wider community, and Autism Wales has recognised their efforts with a prestigious Learning with Autism Secondary School Award.

This is a fitting testament to the hard work and effort that all at Bryntirion Comprehensive have put in, and their desire to ensure that children with autism can receive the best school experience possible.

I'd also like to make Members aware that once schools close for the summer break, a wide range of free activities will become available for children and young people to enjoy as part of this year's Summer of Fun programme.

The Active 4 Life scheme will offer children aged eight to 11 sports, games and creative arts, while the Urdd is providing bilingual sports camps to give three to 11 year olds a chance to try team sports and games based around rugby, football, netball and more.

Young ambassador volunteers will provide a 21 things to do in summer '21 programme featuring activities ranging from stargazing to making a den, and at local libraries, children will be able to take part in the nature-themed 'Wild World Heroes' summer reading challenge.

Bryngarw Country Park, Menter Bro Ogwr and Halo Leisure are also offering a range of activities, and full details will be publicised soon.

Some of the sessions may have limited capacity because of the coronavirus pandemic, so where advance booking is required, you may wish to advise constituents to do it as early as possible.

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

The latest changes to pandemic restrictions have been confirmed by Welsh Government and the majority took effect in Bridgend County Borough from Saturday 17 July.

While face coverings will remain a legal requirement in all indoor public places and on public transport, educational settings and hospitality will be exempt.

Up to six people will be able to meet indoors within private homes and holiday accommodation, and there will no longer be a limit on how many can gather outdoors.

Outdoor premises and events now have greater flexibility around physical distancing, and organised indoor events will be able to take place for up to 1,000 people if seated and 200 people if standing.

The previous restriction requiring people attending events to be seated in order to consume food and drink has been lifted.

In other changes, up to 30 children from organisations such as the Brownies and Scouts are able to attend residential centres over the summer holidays, and businesses will be required to share information with their staff about the risk and mitigation details contained within their individual Covid-19 risk assessment plans.

Fully-vaccinated adults and under-18s no longer need to self-isolate when returning from amber-list countries, but it should also be pointed out that official advice remains to avoid non-essential foreign travel and to holiday at home this summer.

While the changes are welcomed, we must also remember that coronavirus cases are rising, particularly in Bridgend County Borough and particularly among people who are aged 25 and under.

The Director of Public Health at Cwm Taf University Health Board, has warned that in recent days hospital cases due to cases of Covid 19 having risen again. The headroom we had in the second wave no longer exists. The NHS are now trying to bring back as many cases as possible in relation to people who need treatment for other health issues, that have built-up since the pandemic had come about. We still need to take precautions

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

and act as a single, unified community in order to protect others from the risk of exposure.

Local vaccination rates remain very high with almost 83,000 residents having now benefitted from both doses of the vaccine, but it remains vitally important for everyone to take part and do their bit to protect others.

Depending on how the situation changes between now and then, the next pandemic review by Welsh Government could see us safely moving further out of alert level one and into alert level zero.

We will know more about this when the results of the review are announced next month and of course we will keep Members updated accordingly.

Members will be aware that in many of our local communities, the issue of ongoing maintenance for streets that have not been adopted by the council remains a source of concern.

That could all be about to change thanks to a new Welsh Government initiative which we are about to pilot here in Bridgend County Borough.

Using the results of a previous survey, Ynyslas in Porthcawl has been selected to benefit from work that will bring the street up to the standard required for it to be formally adopted by the Council.

The scheme will involve reconstructing footways and carriageways, carrying out surveys, repairing highway drainage where necessary, and undertaking other associated works.

The £230,000 pilot scheme is designed to provide Welsh Government with a better understanding of the cost implications for tackling the historical backlog of such streets throughout Wales.

It is hoped that work will commence during the summer or autumn this year with an aim to complete the process by March 2022.

If successful, it could lead to further unadopted streets being brought up to standard and adopted for future maintenance, which in turn will benefit many local residents.

Members may have seen media coverage around the announcement from WRW Construction that they are going into administration.

This is, of course, very disappointing news, but I want to point out that it is not the first time such a Construction Company has gone into liquidation and it does not present us with insurmountable problems.

The most high-profile local development to be affected by this is the Sunnyside Wellness Village, which is being led by Linc Cymru and funded by Welsh Government and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board.

Elsewhere in the County Borough, WRW were involved in the children's hub development at Brynmenyn, and the Welsh-medium childcare facility planned for Blackmill.

While this will inevitably impact upon the timescales for these projects, we remain confident that another high-quality contractor will soon be confirmed, and that the developments will still be delivered for the benefit of local residents.

We will of course work to ensure that the disruption is kept to an absolute minimum and we will work very closely with partners to address the situation and will share with Members further updates, as and when these develop.

556. **REVIEW OF CORPORATE PLAN TARGETS FOR 2021-22 FOLLOWING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

The Chief Executive submitted a report, which sought Council approval of the proposed changes to Corporate Plan targets for 2021-22, as outlined in Appendix A to the report.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented the report and confirmed that as part of the approval process for the refreshed Corporate Plan, it was acknowledged that COVID-19 had an impact on BCBC's planning cycle, making it more challenging to set targets for 2021-22. It was therefore agreed by Council that a flexible approach to setting corporate plan targets was necessary to ensure business planning is robust and effective.

As part of BCBC's COVID-19 recovery planning, each directorate had the opportunity to consider targets for 2021-22, based on verified year end data. Proposed changes to targets have been considered at Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee (COSC) meeting on 5 July 2021 to ensure appropriate challenge and transparency.

On 20 July 2021 Cabinet considered the proposed changes to Corporate Plan targets for 2021-22. Appendix A to the report, sets out the proposed target changes, and will be published as an addendum to the current Corporate Plan.

As part of a wider review of performance and governance due to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council was proposing that corporate planning adopts this approach to target setting in future planning cycles. This will ensure that the published corporate plan remains up to date with the most recent year end data and avoids the issue of publishing the corporate plan without targets due to lack of data.

The Leader thanked Officers for their work on refreshing the targets in and some aspects of the wider Corporate Plan, some of which had inevitably been delayed due to the pandemic. There had been an obvious impact on the target relating to rough sleepers and the homeless, as well as Wi-Fi connectivity in Primary and Secondary Schools. He thanked Members of the CO&SC in their recent analysis and scrutiny of the refreshed Plan.

A Member noted from the report's Appendix, that the number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use, was showing as 2 for 2020/21 while in 2019/20 this had been 20. A revised target had now been set for 2021. He asked if this decrease had been as a result of the pandemic.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that this was the case.

The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing added that this was further compounded by the Lead Officer dealing with this having been seconded to head up the TTP Enforcement Team. As we moved out from the pandemic, this target would look to be increased in future years.

RESOLVED:

(1) That Council approved the revised Corporate Plan targets for 2021-2022.

(2) That Council also approved the proposal to introduce a flexible process to review the setting of targets informed by year end data. Any revised targets will then be published as an addendum to the Corporate Plan.

557. CAPITAL PROGRAMME OUTTURN 2020/21 AND QUARTER 1 UPDATE REPORT 2021-22

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

- comply with the requirement of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) 'The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (2017 edition)
- provide an update on the capital outturn for 2020-21 (Appendix A to the report)
- provide an update of the capital position for 2021-22 as at 30 June 2021 (Appendix B)
- seek approval for a revised capital programme for 2021-22 to 2030-31 (Appendix C)
- note the projected Prudential and Other Indicators for 2021-22 (Appendix D)

The report provided Members with an update on the Council's capital programme for 2020-21. The original budget approved by Council on 26 February 2020 had been further revised and approved by Council during the year to incorporate budgets brought forward from 2019-20 and any new schemes and grant approvals. The most recent programme for 2020-21, approved by Council in February 2021 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, totalled £35.440 million, of which £12.419 million was met from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) resources, including capital receipts, revenue contributions from earmarked reserves and borrowing, with the remaining £23.021 million coming from external resources.

Appendix A provided details of the individual schemes within the capital programme, showing the budget available in 2020-21 compared to the actual spend. The revised programme was only approved in February 2021, so there had been few amendments since then other than the main changes outlined in paragraph 4.1.2 of the report.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, confirmed that a total expenditure as at 31 March 2021 was £23.461 million which, after slippage of £14.376 million into 2021-22 and adjustments to grant funded schemes of £0.842 million, resulted in a total under spend of £0.139 million, which will be returned to Council funding.

A net slippage into 2021-22 of £14.058 million was required, for the main schemes as outlined in paragraph 4.1.4 of the report.

The next section of the report provided Members with an update on the Council's capital programme for 2021-22 since the budget was last approved by Council and incorporated any new schemes and grant approvals. The revised programme for 2021-22, currently totalled £87.347 million, of which £53.067 million is met from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) resources, including capital receipts, revenue contributions from earmarked reserves and borrowing, with the remaining £34.280 million coming from external resources, including General Capital Grant. Table 1 in the report showed the

capital programme for each Directorate from the June 2021 approved Council position to quarter 1.

Table 2 in the report, then summarised the current funding assumptions for the capital programme for 2021-22. The capital resources are managed to ensure that maximum financial benefit for the Council is achieved. This may include the realignment of funding to maximise government grants.

Appendix B provided details of the individual schemes within the capital programme, showing the budget available in 2021-22 compared to the projected spend at 30 June 2021.

There were a number of amendments to the capital programme for 2021-22, such as new and amended schemes, since the capital programme was last approved. These were detailed in paragraph 4.2.4 of the report.

The last sections of the report, concentrated upon Prudential and Other Indicators 2021-22 Monitoring and Capital Strategy Monitoring and the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, gave a resume of these for the benefit of Council.

The Deputy Leader thanked the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change and her team for securing the grants so applied for as part of the Capital Programme and looked forward to seeing some of the exciting schemes that were being pursued, including those that looked to decrease the Carbon footprint.

RESOLVED: That Council:

1. Noted the capital outturn for 2020-21 (Appendix A to the report)
2. Noted the Council's Capital Programme 2021-22 Quarter 1 update to 30 June 2021 (Appendix B)
3. Approved the revised Capital Programme (Appendix C)
4. Noted the projected Prudential and Other Indicators for 2021-22 (Appendix D)

558. **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN 2020/21**

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change submitted a report, in order to:-

- Comply with the requirement of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's 'Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice' (the Code) to report an overview of treasury activities for the preceding financial year; and
- Report on the actual Treasury Management Indicators for 2020-21.

By way of background information, she confirmed that Treasury management is the management of the Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risks. The Council is exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of financial risk are therefore central to the Council's prudent financial management.

The Council's treasury management advisors are Arlingclose. The current services provided to the Council include:-

- advice and guidance on relevant policies, strategies and reports
- advice on investment decisions
- notification of credit ratings and changes
- other information on credit quality
- advice on debt management decisions
- accounting advice
- reports on treasury performance
- forecasts of interest rates
- training courses

In terms of the economic context (of the report), the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that the coronavirus pandemic dominated 2020-21, leading to almost the entire world being in some form of lockdown during the year. This very much had a detrimental effect on finances and in particular interest rates, including that of the Council's. This had been compounded also by the still ongoing uncertainties surrounding Brexit.

The local authority has administered a number of the Welsh Government Schemes, including payment of over 2,400 business and charity Business Rates Grants worth over £30 million; over 1,700 Lockdown Grants totalling just over £5.4 million; and 4500 Business Restrictions Grants totalling £14.96 million, as well as bearing the upfront costs of additional support required throughout the pandemic in advance of receiving WG funding. This has clearly had an impact on the Council's cash flow during the year and measures have had to be put in place to manage the significant sums of money flowing into and out of the Council's bank account, including receiving earlier payments of Revenue Support Grant and interim business grant payments from Welsh Government, making short term deposits until funding is required and increasing our daily BACS limits, to enable more payments to be processed quickly.

In terms of the Treasury Management Outturn for 2020-21, the Council had complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements during 2020-21. The TMS 2020-21 and the Half Year Report were reported to Council on 26 February 2020 and 18 November 2020, respectively. In addition, quarterly monitoring reports were presented to Cabinet during 2020-21, added the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change.

A summary of the treasury management activities for 2020-21, was shown at Appendix A to the report. The Council's external debt and investment position for 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was shown in Table 1 in the report and more detail was provided in Appendix A section 2, Borrowing Strategy and Outturn, and section 3, Investment Strategy and Outturn. No long term borrowing was taken out in 2020-21 and no debt rescheduling was undertaken as there were no significant savings to be made. However, the loan portfolio will be reviewed during 2021- 22. Favourable cash flows have provided surplus funds for investment and the balance on investments at 31 March 2021 was £51.5 million, with an average interest rate of 0.21%.

Table 2 at Appendix A, detailed the movement of the investments by counterparty types and showed the average balances, interest received, original duration and interest rates for 2020-21.

The Council defined high credit quality as organisations and securities having a credit rating of A- (A3 for Moody's) or higher and the Council did not invest in any organisation below this level. Appendix B of the report, showed the equivalence table for credit ratings for Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's and explains the different investment grades.

RESOLVED: That Council approved the Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

560. **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Leader of the Independent Alliance Group presented a report on behalf of the Monitoring Officer and Chairperson of the Democratic Services Committee, in order for Members to receive and note the Democratic Services Committee Annual Report for the period May 2020 to May 2021. The report outlined the work of the Committee during that period.

He explained that the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, required each council to establish a Democratic Services Committee. The Measure prescribes the functions of the committee and requires the committee to make a report at least annually to the Council. The Committee approved the Annual Report at its meeting of 24 June 2021.

The report then outlined information regarding the following:

1. The composition of the above Committee in terms of its Members, including Chairperson;
2. Dates of Democratic Services Committee meetings held in the municipal year 2020-21;
3. The Committees Terms of Reference;
4. It's main activities for the above period, ie 2020-21; and
5. The current structure of the Democratic Services Staffing Team

RESOLVED: That Council received and noted the Democratic Services Committee Annual Report.

561. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, in order that Members could receive and note the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for the period 2020/21.

By way of background, the Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to establish a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and probity in the conduct of Councillors of the County Borough. The Annual Report covered the period May 2020 to May 2021, whilst the Standards Committee considered the Annual Report at its meeting of 29 June 2021.

The report then outlined information regarding the following:

- a) Standards Committee membership, including during the reporting period;
- b) Term of Office (for both its Independent Members and its County Borough Members);
- c) The role of the Committee
- d) The Committees Terms of Reference
- e) Dates of the Committee meetings held in 2020-21
- f) Training and development initiatives
- g) Work areas to look at moving forward

There had been one referral from the Public Ombudsman for Wales in 2020/21, where it had been agreed that a local Community Council Member had failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, in relation to his role as a Community Councillor.

RESOLVED:

That Council received and noted the Standards Committee Annual Report.

562. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, so as to advise Members of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) 'Diversity in Democracy' report and seek Council's endorsement of becoming a 'Diverse Council' and the resulting actions that need to be taken forward to achieve a 'step change' at the 2022 Local Government Elections.

She explained that the WLGA has committed to making a change in local government diversity at the 2022 Local Elections, as it is acknowledged that despite previous action and campaigns, progress has been slow and it is recognised that there remains a lack of diversity in Councils. Examples of what these were, was shown in paragraph 3.2 of the report and expanded upon at the meeting by the Monitoring Officer.

The evidence base, barriers and challenges to attracting more diverse councillors were referenced in the WLGA's submission to the Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into diversity in local government in September 2018. The barriers and challenges can broadly be summarised as:

- Time-commitment and meeting times
- Political and organisational culture
- Childcare and other caring responsibilities
- Public criticism and online abuse
- Remuneration and impact on employment and
- Lack of diverse role models and incumbency

The WLGA has committed to making a step change in local government diversity at the 2022 Local Elections. At a special meeting during March, its Council endorsed the 'Diversity in Democracy report' (attached as Appendix 1 to the report). The report was the culmination of the work of a cross-party working group (represented by Councillors D Patel and CA Green for BCBC) and builds upon the action plans and ambitions of both councils and partners. WLGA will take forward several actions nationally, as outlined within the report including:

- The launch of the "Be a Councillor" website (already in place);
- Representations made to political parties to take action and make progress;
- Representation to Welsh Government and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales that councillors should be entitled to 'resettlement grants' should they lose their seat at an election.

At its meeting and through its report, the WLGA Council recognised the diversity work already under way locally but called for concerted and ambitious local action. Through its report and resulting actions, it asks Councils to prioritise action locally, promoting the take-up of members' allowances and progressing 'Diverse Council' Declarations by the summer. The WLGA Council unanimously agreed that all councils should commit to a declaration by July 2021 on becoming 'Diverse Councils' in 2022, to provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity.

The Monitoring Officer continued, by stating that Councils' local diversity work will be supported by a national awareness raising, publicity and support through the WLGA and Welsh Government. WLGA officials will be meeting with Heads of Democratic Services to share ideas and approaches to develop local declarations and action plans.

As part of the commitment from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to support the Diversity in Democracy agenda, all Members were asked to complete a diversity and inclusion survey during May 2021. The headline figures as a result of this, were shown in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

Attached at Appendix 2 to the report, was the equality information captured as part of the County Borough Census for 2011. The member survey results will support the work to make the Council more diverse, provide a better understanding of the support people may need and help to support equality and fairness.

It was important stressed the Monitoring Officer, that BCBC is committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy. It was therefore proposed that the Council commits to being a 'Diverse Council' and makes a declaration, in order to meet required timescales set by the WLGA, as detailed at paragraph 4.6 of the report

Attached at Appendix 3 to the report, was a draft Action Plan which will be updated accordingly ahead of the 2022 Local Elections. The Plan illustrated Welsh Government's overall objectives and a combination of Welsh Government derived actions for local authorities to drive forward and proposed actions that are bespoke to the Council.

The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing, advised that the WLGA report had been unanimously supported by local authorities as well as also being heavily supported by the Minister of Housing and Local Government. As part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, new Members in the forthcoming local elections would be supported by existing Members (as mentors) and key Officers alike. In particular she added, Members would be supported in training and development, promoting the role of Councillors, discouraging social media abuse and supporting Members with family commitments.

A Member felt also that in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the RGT population and its communities needed to be considered as part of the above.

The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing confirmed that a report in relation to this would be considered at a future meeting of the Cabinet Equalities Committee.

RESOLVED: That Council endorsed the 'Diverse Council' Declaration, as set out in paragraph 4.6 of the report.

563. **REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE - CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, the purpose of which, was to:

- advise Council of the outcome of the political balance of the Authority resulting from changes to the membership of political groups;
- seek approval of the revised political balance;
- approve the allocation of seats to political groups in accordance with political balance rules, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and approve the changes to the membership of the Committees as outlined in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

She explained that, there had been a recent change to the membership of political groups, whereby Councillor C Webster had left the Conservative Group to join the Independent Alliance Group.

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

The change outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report, had therefore affected the political balance on Committees.

In view of the contents detailed within paragraph 3.3 (of the report), changes to Committee memberships were now required, as follows:-

1. Town and Community Council Forum – Conservative Group to lose a seat, Independent Alliance Group to gain a seat.
2. Development Control Committee – Councillor M Hughes to lose a seat, Independent Alliance Group to gain a seat.
3. Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 – Conservative Group to lose a seat, Councillor M Hughes to gain a seat.
4. Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 – Councillor JH Tildesley to lose a seat, Independent Alliance Group to gain a seat

The Monitoring Officer verbally advised Members that aside of the above, a further change was also required, namely to add a member of the Conservative Group to the membership of the Development Control Committee.

Following the review of political balance as suggested above, the membership of committees would be updated, to reflect the composition of Council Committees accordingly. The updated political balance figures accounting for these changes, was shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

RESOLVED: That Council:-

- (1) Noted the outcome of the political balance of the Authority resulting from changes to the membership of political groups;
- (2) Approved the revised political balance (of the Council);
- (3) Approved the allocation of seats to political groups in accordance with political balance rules, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and the resulting changes to the membership of the Committees as outlined in paragraph 4.1 of the report, through the following named Councillor nominations:-
 - Town and Community Council Forum – Conservative group to lose a seat (former member Councillor C Webster) and Councillor C Webster, Independent Alliance group to gain this seat;
 - Development Control Committee – Councillor M Hughes, Independent to lose a seat and Councillor C Webster, Independent Alliance group to gain this seat. That a seat is also gained on this Committee by Councillor S Vidal, Conservative group;
 - Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 – Conservative to lose a seat (former member Councillor C Webster) and Councillor M Hughes, Independent to gain this seat, and
 - Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 – Councillor JH Tildesley, Independent to lose a seat and Councillor C Webster, Independent Alliance group to gain this seat.

564. TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTION FROM:

Councillor Altaf Hussain to the Leader/Cabinet Member - Communities

Up to £20 million could be spent over the next 2 years to improve the look of shops, support and start-up of businesses, subsidise bus fares and increase bin collections in

Swansea. Every ward in Swansea will share in a package of support. Swansea Council would be covered by a Council underspending in 2020-2021.

Instead, in Bridgend, there is a 3.9% increase of Council tax in 2021-2022 without any benefit to wards or residents of the Borough.

Could the Leader let the Council know about his plans, if he has any, of helping residents of our Borough and what legacy he would like to leave behind at the end of his term in 2022 ?

Response

This last year, we have been concentrating on responding to and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Bridgend's economy and local business by improving the economic climate for business growth and delivering key regeneration projects in our main towns and valley areas. We will continue to invest in key industrial and business infrastructure, for example developing additional starter units for growing businesses in Pyle and Bridgend. The units at the Pyle Industrial Estate will commence development later this year and we are continuing to explore other potential locations across the Borough for new employment uses. This includes working with the Welsh Government Inward Investment Team to market Bridgend across the UK and Europe and seeking to attract new companies and investment opportunities into the Borough. Attracting grant funding is a key part of this work and the Directorate is currently working on potential projects that could be submitted for the UK Government's new Levelling Up Fund. This could include a possible "Agri Hub", which could be a new agricultural livestock market and with associated retail opportunities. If successful, this could deliver significant economic and environmental benefits to the agricultural and local food producing communities in the region. The extension of the Rural Development Programme to December 2022 offers the opportunity to support the progression of this scheme. We will also continue to provide training opportunities and assist our residents back into work through initiatives such as "Employability Bridgend". This year, from April 2020 to end of March 2021, the Employability Team helped 1255 people from Bridgend engage in the programme, including 60 people who were already in work being supported to improve their labour market position; 408 people have achieved qualifications and 398 have gone into work.

Delivering financial support to businesses and the economy from the Welsh Government Covid Recovery Fund, has been a core function for our Directorate. Over the past year, the Council has assessed and distributed 6,500 business grants and over £50m to businesses in the Borough. This is in addition to supporting retail businesses and our town centres to operate effectively during the pandemic, through initiatives such as Outdoor Improvement Grants and interventions in retail environments such as public health Window Vinyls, social distancing floor markers and Covid Public Health Advice booklets. This work will continue to ensure that businesses are provided with the best opportunity to make a full economic recovery coming out of the pandemic and for new businesses to continue to flourish and grow.

In June 2020, Cabinet started a process of local economic recovery planning by putting in place:

- A Bridgend County Economic Task Force
- An economic engagement programme
- A specific ring-fenced budget to support these activities – The Economic Futures Fund.

The task force was also created with a clear aspiration to evolve its focus over time to develop an economic plan for the future of the County Borough which will include action

to help businesses adapt to the changing economic landscape and improve resilience, as well as support for residents to develop new skills, training and employment opportunities. A process of creating a new economic plan through a proposed Bridgend County Borough Economic Futures Framework, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic presents a wide range of challenges, many of which are clear but many of which will emerge in the coming months and years. The ability to react will still be required but must now be coupled with a proactive longer-term approach towards economic recovery, resilience and growth. This approach will be linked to the Council's broader approach towards holistic recovery planning relating to the coronavirus pandemic as well as delivery of the Corporate Plan. Following an in-depth review of data and extensive engagement with stakeholders, the framework and its work packages will provide the basis for dialogue on prioritised actions with Welsh and UK Governments as well as the Cardiff Capital Region, a range of funding sources, investors and developers. This will support the Council's ongoing ambitions to play a full and active role supporting the local economy.

We are actively progressing regeneration schemes across the Borough. By way of a snap shot of on-going and proposed projects for the Llynfi Valley alone.

We have the largest BCBC community project on site at Maesteg Town Hall, with a value of works in excess of £8m to renovate and enhance the historic Town Hall, this will open the summer of 2022 as a transformed and state of the art venue for the valleys.

In addition, over £400k in capital grants have been awarded to commercial properties along Talbot Street and Commercial Street, which will commence work over the few months, alongside to investment in green infrastructure in the town, renewing and enhancing the trees and planting along Commercial Street.

We are close to securing £3.5m of investment at Ewenny Road. Which will remediate the site to transform the former Cooper Standard and Revlon site with 180 new affordable homes, a business and transport hub and green space.

This will total a minimum of £13m of investment in the Llynfi Valley alone by 2024.

We are progressing with the delivery of the Bridgend Town Centre Masterplan, after its public consultation in early 2021. This includes improvements to the Bridgend Railway Station to provide a vibrant gateway to the town centre and the acquisition of the South Wales Police Station Building, in Cheapside, as the first step in a planned relocation of the Bridgend College Campus to this central location. The schemes will be assisted by grants from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Scheme, which is also looking to commit over £500k to building and property enhancements in the town centre this financial year, and the development of a pipeline of project for assistance over the next few years. These programmes and projects will bring much-needed vibrancy and footfall back into Bridgend and assist the economic recovery of this town.

There is also a considerable amount of regeneration activity planned for Porthcawl over the coming year. The Council is in the process of disposing of the retail site on Salt Lake to Aldi. It is anticipated, that a planning application for a bespoke designed food store on this gateway site, with a landscaped car park and public realm will be received later this summer. In addition, the Directorate is undertaking a placemaking study to ensure that all the key component parts of the regeneration strategy for Porthcawl are complementary and high quality. Also that they are well designed and connect the town centre back into the sea front. This includes a redesign of the Hillsboro Car Park and the installation of electric charging infrastructure.

This regeneration approach in Porthcawl also involves the Directorate looking at a partnership approach to delivering a mixed-use housing development on Salt Lake. This could be designed to be “Net Zero Carbon” and have enormous economic and social benefits by being a sustainable mixed tenure development. The added benefit of this partnership approach to regeneration is that the land would remain in Council ownership, as it is such a valuable asset to the community of Porthcawl.

Another key project this next year includes the redevelopment of the vacated Cosy Corner Site. The Directorate is applying to Welsh Government’s Tourist Attractor Destinations (TAD) fund to access circa £1m of funding. This will be match funded by the Council, and if approved, the grant will assist in providing employment space, landscaped public realm and a possible children’s play area. There will also be community facilities including as a new base for the Sea Cadets, a Changing Places facility and improved amenities for Harbour Berth Holders. The Directorate is committed to working in partnership with the key stakeholders and the local community on all its regeneration projects across the Borough and holds engagement sessions to assess the views of local businesses and residents. The Council and Directorate does recognise however, that there are many district centres and local shopping areas, which play a key role in the life of residents within the Borough. This has been particularly evident during the pandemic, where shopping locally has become more widespread. For this reason, we have extended our Commercial Property Enhancement Fund. It is offering assistance to businesses across the County Borough to make improvements to their properties to ensure their business model is aligned to the new ways of operating as we move into recovering from the pandemic. Over 70 grants have already been awarded since January, and can help to improve outdoor areas with the installation of canopies and seating areas.

In addition, having previously been very successful in attracting European Structural Funds to support projects in Bridgend, as part of the transition period, the Council is aiming to establish a new direct relationship with UK Government, helping to shaping the opportunities for Bridgend through the UK Replacement Funds. Initially acting as the lead authority in pursuing and coordinating opportunities for the Council and key partners through the new Levelling Up Funds and Community Renewal Funds.

In June 2020, BCBC formally made a declaration in relation to Climate Emergency and recognised the role of the Council in responding to this as a community leader, that works with residents, groups and businesses in relation to their energy use and preparing for climate impacts. In addition, as a service provider, to deliver more resource efficient services that are less carbon intensive, encourage more resilience and support the most vulnerable in society. Whilst the Council is also the manager of the corporate estate and must ensure that this and its operations are as resource efficient as possible, to use clean energy and prepare for the impacts of climate change. At this time, Cabinet approved the creation of a cross-party member committee to oversee the Climate Emergency Response Programme, a Bridgend County Climate Emergency Citizens’ Assembly and the hosting of an annual Bridgend County Sustainability Summit. Each of these will be established within the coming 12 months.

In January 2021, Cabinet approved the development of a “Bridgend 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy” which will set out how the Council will aim to reach a net carbon zero position by 2030 as part of its response to the climate emergency. . This was in response to Welsh Government’s mandate that within 10 years, by 2030, all public sector organisations should be net carbon zero in four main areas. This included in its transport and mobility, buildings and energy, in land use and biodiversity and in the procurement of goods and services. Whilst this is a corporate initiative, the Communities Directorate is leading this agenda. A Bridgend 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy and Action Plan is being developed for public consultation later in 2021. The first part of this

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

detailed work involves understanding the Council's carbon footprint and providing a baseline. This exercise has commenced with the assistance of The Carbon Trust. However, the Council cannot do this without the involvement of its key partners and will be working closely with Public Services Board (PSB) members, local authorities in the region and the Welsh Government to ensure the development of an effective and deliverable strategy.

The Council's approach to responding to the climate emergency and developing its 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy is not coming from a position of a standing start. Over the past four years, the Council has been progressing its Smart Energy Plan and has developed three major projects with the benefit of approximately £10m of grant funding from both the UK and Welsh Government and prudential borrowing from the Council itself. These are namely the Bridgend District Heat Network, the Caerau Heat Project and the Re-FIT Project. The Bridgend District Heat Project will progress to the procurement of a Design, Build, Operate and Maintain Contractor over the next year and should this be successful, then the construction of the heat network could commence in 2022. The Caerau Heat Project, has been redefined, to include a blend of energy projects, from mine water, ground source heat to a private wire from a local wind farm. This change in development direction has had approval from the funder, Wales European Funding Office, (WEFO) so detailed designs will now be progressed with the aim of achieving Cabinet approval in the summer 2021. The Re-Fit Project, is developed to install £1.3m of energy efficient measures within the corporate estate, the majority of which are in education use. This includes new heating and ventilation systems, insulation and photovoltaic (PV) panels. A contractor has been appointed and the works will be carried out over the next 6 months.

In addition to the work to reduce the Council's carbon footprint, a focus will be on measures to support the Council's statutory function to maintain and enhance biodiversity and take forward carbon sequestration action. , to the energy schemes described above the Directorate is committed to improving the biodiversity of the Borough and in particular affording protection to the natural parks and nature reserves within its control. Work will continue through the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) initiative, building on the over £1m in improvements to at Bryn Garw Country Park and at Parc Slip nature reserve. The Council will seek to formally designate Bedford Park as a local nature reserve (LNR) this year and extend the footprint of the existing Frog Pond Wood LNR and to use capital to enhance these areas. The Council want to increase the number of trees planted across the borough in order to assist with its ambitious carbon reduction targets. It has a number of schemes to be implemented but will also seek to work in partnership with a range of partners over the next year to develop a tree and hedge-planting schemes across the Borough, for implementation in 2022.

Looking across the wider Council services, as part of the Covid 19 response and in line with a Welsh Government Guidance Note all local authorities were expected to ensure that no individual was street homeless and was provided with suitable accommodation. To support a strategic, joined up and timely approach a multi-agency weekly Homeless Cell meeting was established to respond to these demands.

In 2020/21 BCBC received over 1600 homelessness applications from households either threatened with or imminently homeless. To safeguard vulnerable individuals anyone at threat of rough sleeping was offered an accommodation placement, which led to over 600 households being provided with temporary accommodation through 2020/21.

To meet these demands additional accommodation resources have been secured, primarily from the tourism sector, including hotels and holiday lets. In partnership with third sector support providers all those accommodated have been provided with support

to help with any underlying support needs, to ensure individuals develop independent living skills, enabling longer term accommodation to be secured and maintained. Where necessary joint working with the Police and Community Safety Partnership has addressed concerns around Anti-Social Behaviour. In partnership with Registered Social Landlord partners a Rapid Rehousing Protocol has been adopted, which has supported the move on from temporary accommodation.

Homelessness presentations remain high and as of 11th July 2021 there were 306 people from 185 households in temporary accommodation. There is a clear expectation from Welsh Government that those accommodated will not be expected to return to homelessness, but instead supported to secure long term accommodation. There is also an indication that the highlighted expectations from Welsh Government will remain on a longer term basis, suggesting that these demands will remain for the foreseeable future.

In addition to the above there is also the potential for further pressure on services, with the lifting of emergency laws protecting evictions effective from 30th June 2021. As these emergency laws come to an end there is the potential for increased presentations. In addition the longer term socio-economic impact of the pandemic has the potential to leave increased households threatened with homelessness.

In education, the local authority has worked closely with its school improvement partner (Central South Consortium) to ensure all learners benefit from effective teaching and learning. The Council's school modernisation programme has resulted in several new schools being built across the county. In addition, BCBC has invested in an effective Music Service that offers high-quality tuition to learners across the county borough.

Significant investment has been made in the local authority's inclusion services to ensure all pupils with additional learning needs receive appropriate support. The needs of children, young people and their families are further supported by an effective (as recognised by Estyn) integrated services model.

The investment the Council has made in health and safety services has made a significant difference to a wide range of delivery partners; especially schools who received excellent support throughout the pandemic. Similarly, Bridgend learners benefit from the Council's investment in a highly effective school catering service which actively promotes healthy living.

Through its Corporate Landlord Department BCBC has invested significantly in the repair, maintenance and upgrading of its Education Property Estate, enhancing wherever possible the accommodation to provide improved facilities for learners; both internally and externally. There is currently £3.57m programmed for expenditure in 2021/22 and includes a number of roof replacements, external teaching space upgrades, enhanced ventilation works, several soft play surface replacements, drainage upgrades, DDA lift installations, a potential all weather pitch replacement, classroom extensions, enhanced road safety measures, plus a significant amount of energy saving measures and other essential maintenance works.

With regards to social services, the Council continued to offer vital support to the county borough residents throughout the pandemic, despite the significant challenges faced. The service worked closely with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to ensure they were assured and advised of how we were working, and adapting our operating models, to comply with Welsh Government guidance, and tiers of restrictions, whilst continuing to safeguard, protect and deliver essential services.

Face to face service delivery continued throughout the pandemic in social care – care homes, supported living, domiciliary care direct payment Personal Assistants, children protection investigations and Mental Health Act assessments.

The service developed and constantly risk assessed its operating models for adult and children's services in accordance with the Welsh Government tiers of restriction. Risk assessments meant at some tiers of restriction, services operated digitally as the risk to public health of spreading the virus was too great. In children's services, when risk mitigations were robust enough to allow, officers carried out face to face visits to children and families in respect of child protection, care and to our care experienced children and foster carers. A difficult area was contact between parents and care experienced children and the service closely followed Welsh Government guidance to enable face to face contact to resume as soon as risk mitigations allowed

In adult services, day opportunities operated at reduced numbers and with extensive risk mitigations when tiers of restriction allowed, at other times the public health risks were too high and day services staff supported people to be occupied and engaged in their own homes, including the Council's supported living settings. Adult social workers worked closely with other professional colleagues to minimise the number of people who visited care homes and other vulnerable settings, and kept in touch with people in a way which best suited them which for many individuals was via the telephone. Assessments of people's best interest under the Mental Capacity Act was a challenging area of work, given the restrictions on professionals visiting care homes. The service worked to address delays in carrying out this essential safeguarding work as tiers of restriction have reduced. Demand for the service continues to grow and is currently providing 640 hours per week more than in April 2020 with increasing requests to extend existing packages of care.

Going forward the Council will continue to respond to and mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on recovery, and building on the wide-ranging support and service delivery highlighted above.

In terms of my legacy, this is something that will be judged by the electorate and constituents of BCBC and not by myself

Supplementary question by Councillor A Hussain

Neath Port Talbot Council is looking to invest £5m from its reserves into the local area as we build out of the pandemic, to assist local businesses, support local communities and ensure clean and safe neighbourhoods.

We all know that Councils across Wales including our Council, have shown local leadership and innovation during the Pandemic and as we now emerge from it.

Leader, it looks like you are trying to build your Legacy although late, by mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, when everybody is now looking at the legacy that COVID-19 is leaving for our communities.

Our Bridgend town is a bit (not a bit) is dead right now but it was before the pandemic so it could do with being injected with some new life.

Apart from that, what role are you playing as a Leader of the Council for 2021-2022? Are you going to use the Council's resources to help secure the long-term future of our County Borough in supporting recovery and reviewing our Bridgend town?

Response

A recent report to the Cabinet included a proposal to purchase the Bridgend Police station site, in order to bring Bridgend College more into the town centre, which in turn, will bring a record amount of investment in further and higher education. This will also increase vibrancy and footfall into Bridgend and free-up a Brownfield site that can then be re-developed. The Council have also recently approved the Bridgend Heat Network project (the first of its kind in Wales), which also aligns with our net zero agenda and the emergency that is climate change, which the Council are actively and positively responding to. The Authority has also invested £2.85m in walking routes between Bridgend and Pencoed and Pyle and Porthcawl, as well as committing investment in the Evergreen Hall. It has further invested in promoting ultra-low emission vehicles, including the provision of charging points. This will improve air quality across the County Borough, with the conversion of vehicles from diesel to electric charged low energy vehicles.

We also have in progress or proposed, Masterplans for the towns of Bridgend and Porthcawl, works being carried out at Maesteg Town Hall and at the Level Crossing in Pencoed

The pandemic is not over and we are deeply concerned with what the winter months may bring in terms of the illness, whilst also concentrating on the here and now in this regard. We will do all in our power, in order to ensure residents of the County Borough continue to get vaccinated and are kept safe both at the present time and moving forward.

Second supplementary question from Councillor R Young

Having faced over 10 years of local government cuts, how much financial resilience remains in the Authority, for further future cuts it may face due to the continued challenges brought about by the pandemic, amongst other challenges.

Response

£60m worth of cuts within the above period, cannot be made without having an effect on frontline services. However, I'm extremely proud of the efforts that have been put in staff in this time, and more particularly, in the last 16 months during the period of Covid-19. In this time, 6.5 thousand businesses have received over £50m from the Council in grants. We have also helped a record number of people back into employment after they had lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, over 400 people. We have also helped a record number of people who had found themselves homeless, 600 families and supported 23,500 individuals in Schools and 4,500 in Social Services, in addition to our response to the pandemic. All Authorities in Wales had increased their Council Tax in order to be able to meet these increased financial challenges, which are not going away but are increasing and are likely to continue increasing in the foreseeable future. Council has received reports today on Treasury Management and its Capital Programme and should any Member feel that the Authorities Reserves are not appropriate, then they are able to take this up individually with the S151 Officer. We review our finances on a quarterly basis, at which times, we look at the likes of Reserves with the view wherever possible, of investing these into improvements within our communities.

Third supplementary question by Councillor S Dendy

The Garw Valley is colloquially known as the forgotten valley and the response once again highlights this.

Although I fully support the response to the carbon neutral movement and measures mentioned in the reply and tackling homelessness in our County Borough. Very little of the reply effects the day to day lives of residents of the Garw Valley. A lot of the work being done in Maesteg, Porthcawl and Bridgend town centre will not be readily accessible to those in the Garw Valley and Ogmore Valley.

When I ask what the Council has done for the Garw valley the Leader may mention the new school in Bettws which is a fantastic asset, but not accessible by the rest of the Garw Valley unless they have their own transport which I pointed out in the last full Council meeting, is not something a large part of the population of the valley community has.

The Garw Valley is also forgotten about in the LDP which is currently being consulted on, meaning the chances of change and development in our area is minimum. No commercial areas have also been safeguarded in Valleys communities and new areas within the Borough.

Does the Leader recognise these issues and is he willing to apologise to the Garw residents for feeling, I would say rightly so, they are forgotten?

Response

We have funded both Ffaldau and Blaengarw Primary Schools for children in the Garw Valley, as well as older children from that region also being educated in an excellent state of the art Secondary School, namely Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen. The Authority also supports homeless people in Blaengarw, as well as many businesses there through the Employability Scheme. We are also developing a new Medium Welsh Childcare facility in the Garw, something that isn't being provided in every community comprising BCBC. There was an opportunity earlier for Councillor Dendy and other Members present, to make a contribution when the Capital Programme report was considered, where Council was in conjunction with that report, making decisions with regards to investment proposals/opportunities. I would be happy to listen to Members from the Garw Valley in relation to any plans or suggestions for this area, possibly as part of the new Local Development Plan (LDP) proposals.

565. QUARTERLY DEBATE ITEM - POST COVID EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT PRIORITIES

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration opened the debate, which he considered was presumably intended to offer advice to cabinet and officers on the priorities affecting the education and family support across the county.

It is presumably not a substitute for another council procedure, such as questions to the executive. Similarly, it is not a substitute for ward-by-ward member referrals.

After hearing the debate, he would sum up, and then invite the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support to comment and make some closing remarks.

In general terms, at this stage our high-level priorities are as follows:-

We will (as a Council):

- Continue to develop a post-Covid strategy for all schools in the county; building upon the “Team Bridgend” approach which served us well before, and during, the lockdown emergency.

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

- Make careful note of lessons learned from this current situation, in various policy areas, such as arrangements for childcare, the use of “hubs”, blended learning, provision for free school meals, shielding, and internal and external assessment - all of which could well be brought into use again in the case of another, similar emergency in the future.
- Make sure that lessons learned are built into professional development opportunities for staff, governors and local members.
- Promote the physical and emotional wellbeing of learners and staff.
- Maintain and continuously improve the standards that earned the council a positive Estyn inspection report before Covid came along.
- Continue to provide high-quality, integrated support services, working closely with Social Services and other delivery partners to support families, especially those most in need. A Member stated that he would like to concentrate on the provision of Welsh language education in the east of the County Borough and the lack of equality of opportunity and parity of choice for those parents who would like to access Welsh language education for their children.

In his view, there is a strong argument to say that a town the size of Pen-coed should have a Welsh language primary school and he wondered whether the Cabinet Member would agree with this long term ambition given the proposed expansion of the town in the Draft Local Development Plan?

However, given the unlikelihood of a primary school springing up by September, I'm given to understand that section 3.5 of the School Admissions Code allows for Cabinet to relax the published admission number of pupils at a particular school if there is a proposal to expand the school as is the case at Ysgol Bro Ogwr in Brackla.

After speaking to the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support at some length, he informed me that this would not only compete with Welsh Government legislation on reducing class sizes below 30 pupils, with a potential clawback of Welsh Government funding as a result, but that it could open a further can of worms in that other over-subscribed schools could ask for a similar relaxation in expanding capacity. I acknowledge the difficulty of this situation.

However, the overall strategic question remains when it comes to Welsh language education here in the east of BCBC. While there was an acknowledgement that non-statutory free home to school transport is provided to other Welsh language schools such as Ferch o'r Sger in North Cornelly, Calon y Cymoedd in Bettws or Ysgol Cynwyd Sant in Maesteg, all of these schools are in the West of the County so where is the fairness when it comes to the provision of Welsh language education for residents in the East, and should parents in Pen-coed have to choose between sending their young children up to 12 miles across the county or sacrifice their choice of Welsh language education by opting for English language education instead?

Therefore, will the Cabinet Member liaise with the Headteacher of Ysgol Bro Ogwr and revisit the suggestion that the school can accept more children for this coming intake in this isolated case?

Finally, is there also a case to define catchment areas for Welsh language education provision in BCBC. For example, at the moment, with parental choice, we have parents

from Bryncethin applying for a position at Ysgol Bro Ogwr whereas they could easily go to Calon y Cymoedd in Bettws.

In this case, the policy of parental choice is actually serving to squeeze out children in the east of the county from accessing Welsh language education at their closest school and only serving to add to the significant pressure on the already highly stretched Home to School Transport service because children from Pencoed have to travel across County to access Welsh language education.

I would be very grateful on behalf of my constituents and others in the east of the County if BCBC could urgently revisit this matter.

A Member stated that he was really pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this afternoon's topical debate and wanted to focus on the equality impact on learning through and beyond the pandemic.

He recognised and appreciated the tremendous efforts of all our teaching and support staff in schools and in the local authority over the past 15 months.

Being married to a secondary school teacher, he had a special insight into the difficulties faced by schools and those working in and around them. They have risen to the challenge, adapted to the most difficult of circumstances and put our learners front and centre of everything. He was aware that there is nowhere a teacher would rather be than in front of learners in a classroom, understanding and soaking up each and every nuance of what's going on around them in a proper learning environment.

At the onset of the pandemic, some UK politicians referred to coronavirus as "the great leveller." Far from levelling out anything, it has laid bare and worsened the deep-seated inequalities that have existed in this country for too long.

From an education perspective, it's all too similar and the inequalities have been laid bare there too, whether it was initially issues with access to resources (laptops and tablets for example) or access to a decent internet connection; the capacity of parents and carers to support learning at home, or there being no quiet and suitable space to learn. Finally, even for some, the home environment not being safe. Added to that, the concept of lockdown is something many adults have struggled with, without trying to explain the curb on ordinary life to younger learners.

Let's set out the stall, education is generally thought of as the main engine of social mobility in most corners of the world. And whether we like it or not, income levels and educational attainment are inextricably linked. Broadly, the greater the level of your education, the more income capacity you have. At the bottom of that scale, we have families and learners who are all but destitute because of a grossly unfair and complex welfare system.

In a survey commissioned by Welsh Government and carried out among learners earlier this year, some 61 per cent of respondents said that they agreed or tended to agree with that the statement that they were "concerned with the future of their education or training prospects as a result of COVID 19". That's a stark a figure and a huge amount of confidence lost in the system and the sector, through an event it had absolutely no control over.

Behind each response is an individual with hopes and with dreams to achieve their own successes and clearly for too many, they feel those hopes and dreams are all but dashed.

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

While he broadly welcomed the new curriculum, he was disappointed to see Welsh Government hasn't taken the opportunity to pause its introduction in order that schools have one full-year (we hope!) to recover somewhat from the past 15 months. He also wished to use this opportunity to point out that, away from the political hype and hysteria, Welsh Government has been presented with an opportunity to make free school meals a universal benefit. Well-fed learners go on to achieve so much more. Despite the finger-pointing, both east and west of Offa's Dyke, we will still have learners here in Wales going hungry.

He wished to end his submission by issuing a plea, which he had no doubt is recognised, understood and probably to a certain extent, already underway here in Bridgend. That plea is that we work with and support our school staff to the ninth degree in taking time to specifically understand the changing or changed needs of our learners. On top of slowly introducing and teaching a brand new curriculum, this is a huge ask and some may think it's part and parcel of the day job, but the building of a picture like this takes time and effort.

The cumulative impact of being away from the classroom and all its ancillary support may not be known for some significant time yet and so teaching and support staff are in it for the long haul.

It's a lost generation versus a determination to put things right. Whether we're talking about Foundation Phase or through to A levels and apprenticeships, we need to do everything we can to dust down the hopes and the dreams our learners held. We must demonstrate that, while there has been a big blip in the road, the system and the people within it will do everything it and they can to help get them where they want to be. We owe them nothing less.

A Member raised concerns with regards to lack of overall primary spaces at schools in the County Borough. An example of this, being at Coity Primary where 25 in catchment area children could not gain admission to the school this year, with 32 children being in the same position last year. This year, this has had a knock-on effect at other schools in the vicinity, such as at Coychurch, Litchard, Penyfai and Pencoed Primary schools. All these schools are also full to capacity, so children are being refused admission to these schools as well, due to lack of spaces there. This meant that families were therefore seeing their children not only refused admission at the first choice of school, but their 2nd choice school as well. This highlighted the fact that there were whole neighbouring communities developing now, where schools simply could not accommodate the children of families who resided there. This meant that children were being sent away in dribs and drabs to different schools throughout the County Borough, on some occasions quite far away from their family home. She also had significant concerns that despite schools being built too small on new estates, site developers were still extending their housing developments further that was attracting added S106 monies for school places, however, this money was being used elsewhere rather than to alleviate the above pressures on local schools where the money was intended to be allocated. Whilst there plans to resolve this process, these were years down the line, so the S106 allocation was now being committed to build a new welsh school, with the result being that the mop-up places for the above primary schools that are full, being allocated in the old Bro Ogwr building that was several years away from completion. The children that eventually have places there, will then also have to walk past 2 new schools en route, where they could and should have been educated if things had been planned out more effectively. Added to this was the ongoing issues with the pandemic and this was a grave concern also, as the wellbeing of children was key in terms of their potential education attainments going forward. So she was therefore looking for assurances from the Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration and the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, that young people's wellbeing going forward is classed as being

paramount, particularly in respect of being educated at a preferred school of their choice, as opposed to this being about money or the provision of Welsh medium schools. The fuller picture needed to be looked at, she felt.

A Member had some sympathy, in that we could only do what we could at schools in terms of their financing and this was difficult as children in Wales had much less capita per head when compared to their counterparts in England. It wasn't always straightforward either, for children to be educated in their first choice of school, for sometimes a number of reasons. However, often transport was provided to take children to school and take them home, should they be placed at a school a certain distance or above, from where they resided. On occasions families did find themselves in the difficult position of having children being educated at different schools, which put a strain on the families time and commitments. She considered however, that BCBC had done extremely well maintaining free school meals as part of the breakfast club as well as at lunchtime. Meals had also been delivered to children and these included also frozen meals. Children were also given healthy nutritious meals, which was important for their health and wellbeing. In fact, other Councils were following the lead set by the Authority. However, the main stumbling block always came down to an overall lack of resource, that had to be spread amongst all schools in the County Borough regardless of whether these be primary or secondary, etc, including for their curricula. These continued to be unprecedented times, but she hoped these would improve at sometime within the future.

A Member advised that there were 42 articles of the Rights of a child as defined by the United Nations. She wished to highlight 5 of them.

ARTICLE 1 The rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child apply to everyone under the age of 18.

ARTICLE 2 The rights apply to every child whatever their race, colour, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, disability or any other status.

ARTICLE 3 In all decisions and actions that concern children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

ARTICLE 4 The state must do all it can, through passing legislation and creating administrative systems, to promote and protect children's rights

And ARTICLE 23 Disabled children have the right to enjoy a full life, with dignity, and to participate as far as possible in their community. The government should support disabled children and their families.

She was pleased that there are schools in Bridgend County Borough Council which have received recognition for being a 'Rights supporting school'. Indeed, she was pleased that this local authority has always been meticulous in hearing the voice of the child when it comes to changes about their education.

She was also delighted with future plans for Bridgend's Super - Special School, Heronsbridge. She recognised the value of this type of provision, and the cost of not having such provision outweighs the cost of providing it. She congratulated the leadership and looked forward to it being delivered, on time, on budget and with the capacity it needs for our growing borough.

There were 4 main towns in the County Borough. Bridgend, Porthcawl, Maesteg and Pencoed.

She remained disappointed that there is still a lack of SEN unit in the Porthcawl cluster. If the LDP gets the go-ahead from her fellow Councillors for growth in Porthcawl, there

are children who will not be able to be offered a place in a school in Porthcawl. Every child with a MLD or a sensory disability, including autism, who is not capable of learning in a mainstream class has to be taxed out of the town, at taxpayers expense, to be educated in another town, away from any friends that they could look to grow, away from siblings, stopping parents being able to build a relationship with the class teacher and the wider school. In other words, out of their community.

She was not referring to the children whose needs are so great that they need the specialist centralised provision of a school like Heronsbridge.

She was referring to the children who would attend one of the Obs units and MLD classes across the Borough.

Fantastic schools, where great things have happened with children whose parents so often hear the words, "I don't know" as a clinical prognosis.

Porthcawl, a growing town, doesn't have a single MLD class or a single Obs Unit.

Whilst she once more sympathised with the issue that schools are, in effect, independent organisations, this is something on which the local authority can effect, influence and lead change.

Further to the UN on the rights of the child.

Disabled children have the right to enjoy a full life, with dignity, and to participate as far as possible 'in their community'. The government should support disabled children and their families.

The Local government should support these children, where possible, to be educated 'in their community' and lead change, which is inclusive and non-discriminatory.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration then in his summing-up advised of Bridgend priorities and national priorities, as follows.

BRIDGEND

As education and family support progresses beyond the current crisis, the following policies and projects will be prioritised (not necessarily in this order).

BCBC will:

- Build new, 21st Century primary schools in North Cornelly, Kenfig Hill and Porthcawl, including a replacement Welsh-medium school at Cornelly, and a "seedling" Welsh-medium primary at Porthcawl.
- Invest in additional Welsh-medium and English medium primary school provision in Brackla.
- Provide a replacement for Heronsbridge School with the ambition of creating the best special school in Wales.
- Continue to provide nursery education above statutory levels throughout the county.
- Ensure that all secondary schools have sixth forms, with a collaborative 21st Century approach to making classes viable through blended learning supported by the individual deployment of laptops to all post-16 learners in our schools.
- Investigate the potential for a cross-county "travel card" for all post-16 learners.

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

- Continue in our partnerships with Bridgend College and other post-16 providers, including post-16 provision shared with Pencoed Comprehensive School at Coleg Penybont.
- Following its positive consultation process, progress the Bridgend Town Centre masterplan, and kick start this in partnership with Bridgend College by facilitating its move from Cowbridge Road to a brand new town centre campus on the Cheapside Police Station site.
- Develop our family support services and early help strategy to ensure the right support, is delivered by the right people, at the right time, to those who require it.

NATIONALLY

BCBC will continue to engage positively in national debate with Welsh Government, the UK government, the WLGA, Central South Consortium and other regional bodies.

We will continue to be actively involved with wider educational issues, such as:

- Curriculum reform to ensure all Bridgend schools provide excellent learning experiences for all pupils.
- High-stakes exams and internally assessed coursework (assessment of learning and assessment for learning), including the role GCSEs play in a world where students may not leave education aged 16.
- The long-standing problem of vocational studies and their parity of esteem with academic programmes.
- ALN reform by continuing to commit fully and enthusiastically to the Welsh Government's Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act to children and young people with additional needs in Bridgend receive the best possible support.
- Welsh Government's ambitions for Welsh language and culture.
- Childcare and education for our youngest learners.
- Catchment areas and parental choice regarding school admissions.
- School budgets and the general funding of local government services.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, confirmed that last year had been unique and extremely challenging, with Covid-19 having had an extremely detrimental effect on both learners and education staff. He stressed however, that Officers had worked tirelessly over the last 16 months to ensure services continued to be provided both safely and effectively. An example of this commitment was in the meeting at this moment in time, where he had all his Senior Leadership team present in support of the debate, as well as the leadership team from Central South Consortium (CSC). He was also indebted to Members for their support during these very difficult times and in contributing to today's debate.

In relation to some of the points made by Members, he commented as follows.

There was a statutory requirement to increase the number of Welsh speakers and as part of this, it is key that we work with all stakeholders in order to achieve this objective. There were challenges in terms of rolling this out, particularly in the east of the County Borough. Strategic proposals in respect of this objective were due to be rolled out in January and at this time, the local authority would set out its stall on how we extend

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2021

welsh medium in all areas of the County Borough as far as is possible, in terms of the provision of welsh medium education opportunities at schools in different locations.

We also needed to learn lessons as a result of the pandemic going forward and the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support agreed with a previous Members comments that we must focus upon the physical and emotional wellbeing of learners moving forward, including the challenges we face in respect of school admissions and school places. A Task and Finish Group had been put in place to look at how best we meet and endeavour to overcome such challenges. When new schools are being built these come with challenges in their own right, until such time they are completed. Examples of these have been shared today as part of the debate. The Council would continue to focus on learners and their needs and we will be committed to that he added, while new schools were going through the construction process.

There were some critical issues also highlighted by a previous Member, one of which was our commitment to the UNCRC and the five areas referred to earlier in the debate. The Authority had an ambition to ensure that the new Special School in Bridgend would be the best in Wales. It was very important to establish local provision, especially for those children with learning needs, so that they are able to avoid facing long taxi journeys to a school out of their area which was a challenge for them in terms of their wellbeing. Improvements to this end had been looked at for the last 2 years, by developing more specialist schools and in classes to overcome the above and more cater for the needs of these young individuals. Finally, he added how important funding was for schools, particular within the areas of curriculum and ALN Reform.

Finally, the Managing Director of CSC reassured Members that CSC would continue to work closely with Education Officers in BCBC, in order to ensure that all schools across the County Borough have the best possible quality provisions for its children and young people. The new curriculum would put a huge amount of stress on schools and its staff, so it was extremely important to ensure that they had sufficient resources in place to adequately deal with the challenges of this. She assured that CSC would work with all schools in order to ensure that happens.

566. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 17:30