

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

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

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick and KJ Watts – Chairperson

S Aspey	SE Baldwin	TH Beedle	JPD Blundell
MC Clarke	N Clarke	RJ Collins	HJ David
P Davies	PA Davies	DK Edwards	J Gebbie
T Giffard	CA Green	DG Howells	RM James
B Jones	M Jones	JE Lewis	JR McCarthy
D Patel	RL Penhale-Thomas	AA Pucella	KL Rowlands
B Sedgebeer	RMI Shaw	CE Smith	RME Stirman
G Thomas	T Thomas	SR Vidal	MC Voisey
CA Webster	A Williams	AJ Williams	HM Williams
JE Williams			

Apologies for Absence

NA Burnett, SK Dendy, RM Granville, M Hughes, A Hussain, MJ Kearns, DRW Lewis, JC Radcliffe, SG Smith, JH Tildesley MBE, E Venables, LM Walters, DBF White, PJ White and RE Young

Officers:

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

567. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:-

Monitoring Officer – Prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 13 and who left the meeting whilst this item was being considered.

Councillor G Howells – Personal in interest in Agenda Item 10 as he knew two of the individuals mentioned in the report.

Councillor RM James – Personal interest in Agenda Item 8 as his wife was Chairperson on the BCBC Fostering Panel.

Councillor E Venables – Personal interest in Agenda Item 9 as a serving Magistrate.

Councillor M Jones – Personal interest in Agenda Item 9 as a serving Magistrate.

568. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of Council dated 21 July 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to it being noted that Councillor JC Spanswick was Chairperson at the meeting and not Councillor K Watts, as was reflected in the Minutes.

569. **PROGRAMME OF PRESENTATIONS TO FUTURE MEETINGS OF COUNCIL**

The Chief Executive presented a report, the purpose of which, was to inform Members of the proposed programme of presentations to be delivered to future meetings of Council in 2021/22.

He reminded Members that Council will be accustomed to receiving periodically in the past, presentations from its key stakeholders.

At the meeting of Council today, Members will receive a presentation from the Chief Executive of Valleys to Coast (V2C).

The following proposed presentations are due to be delivered to future meetings of Council, during 2021/22:-

Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable of South Wales
Police – 17 November 2021
Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board – 15 December 2021
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) – 23 February 2022
South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority – 9 March 2022

He advised that external Invitee sessions may be subject to some change, based upon their availability on the dates so listed above.

County Borough Quarterly Debates will be considered as part of agenda business for the Council meetings dated 20 October 2021 and 19 January 2022, the Chief Executive concluded.

The Mayor then asked Jo Oak, Chief Executive of V2c to deliver a presentation together with a few short video's regarding progress on the work of V2c, particularly during the period of Covid-19.

The presentation covered the theme of 'Working together for a better Bridgend – Strengthening Relationships to benefit our Local Communities and Wales.'

She explained that as part of V2c's Turnaround Programme, its main priorities were:-

- Repairs
- Empty Homes
- Adaptations
- Complaints, and
- Compliance

The submission gave some statistical information on progress in the above areas, together with other relevant associated data.

The Chief Executive of V2c explained also that the organisation worked closely with developers of new build, in order to give something back to communities in the areas where new residential developments were being constructed.

V2c had consulted with colleagues and stakeholders regarding the ways and manner by which partnership working needed to be changed for the better, giving regard to key issues such as:

1. Flexible Working
2. Working Locations and Environments
3. Colleague wellbeing, and more

V2c were now in the process of reviewing feedback in relation to these initiatives, the Chief Executive, V2c added.

She then referred to V2c's "New Homes" programme for 2021/2022, with plans for new Eco friendly developments, taking into consideration BCBC's Decarbonisation Agenda. These type of developments were being planned for construction at Ffordd Yr Eglwys North Cornelly, Maesteg Road Tondu, Ewenny Road Bridgend, Woodland Avenue Porthcawl, Brocastle Avenue Waterton, and Parc Derwen, Coity.

V2c Officers then covered the Social Housing Grant (SHG) Programme Delivery Plan (PDP) 2021, with a Grant requirement that totalled £32,478,981. In relation to this, Programme Development Plan Submissions had been considered for:-

Heol y Groes, Pencoed - 24 Homes
Station Rd, Porthcawl - 20 Homes
Oxford Court Phase 1, Ogmere Vale - 6 Homes
Blaen Llynfi Primary School site, Caerau - 23 Homes
Glanyrafon Care Home, Ynysawdre - 35 Homes (acquisition only)
DCWW Site, Cefn Cribbwr - 16 Homes (acquisition only)
15nr Off the Shelf Acquisitions - 15 Homes
Sunnyside House, Bridgend - 31 Homes
Nolton Arcade, Bridgend - 43 Homes
Sax, Bridgend – 36 Homes

A representative of V2c also highlighted the organisations new land swop with BCBC, as part of the Marlas School Project.

The Chief Executive V2c following this, gave a resume of V2c's Annual Review Report, which gave details of V2c's Financial Statements and Strategic Review.

To conclude the Chief Executive, V2c's current focus was in respect of:

- £15.8m Social Housing Grant for 100 homes to be built on average each year in Bridgend for the foreseeable future
- £9.1m to spend on planned repairs and improvements

She explained that partnership working, such as with Keep Wales Tidy and for the provision of tree planting schemes at housing developments, was key for the Housing Association going forward. As was the continued provision of Foodbanks, during the course of the pandemic.

A Member asked what the current status was in relation to energy efficiency being provided at homes, particularly in Social Housing where often occupiers residing there were on low income.

A representative of V2c confirmed that a programme had been planned to improve energy efficiency at V2c homes and they were part of a collaborative group that were being supported by grant funding from Welsh Government for this purpose and in a cost effective way for the benefit of the property occupiers.

A Member asked about the 16 Social Rented flats and 7 properties that were going to be constructed at Parc Derwen. She asked when these were going to be ready for occupation and also if the flats would be allocated as per the BCBC's housing waiting list.

A representative from V2c confirmed that all these dwellings would be ready for occupation by end of year and the flats would be let on the same basis as the BCBC waiting list.

A Member pointed out that many of the V2c inhabited properties on development sites were blighted by residents who were causing anti-social behaviour, that was causing a nuisance and sometimes creating conflict with other residents that occupied properties in adjoining estates and developments. This had on occasions resulted in Police investigation and intervention. He felt that more support from V2c should be given in cases such as this.

A representative of V2c advised that lockdown as a result of Covid-19 had exacerbated problems such as the above, as people had been confined in their properties and the pandemic had also caused a rollback of initially of services and support. However, the Association took issues of this very serious and worked with the likes of BCBC, the Police and Offender Management to try and reduce these cases. Officers from V2c also engaged with its residents, in order to encourage them to report any such problems. If any such complaints continued after tenants had been warned about their anti-social behaviour, then legal proceedings were pursued. Unfortunately, the health and wellbeing of people had suffered since the inception of Covid-19, which had resulted in the health of people who suffered from the likes of alcohol or substance misuse and mental health problems deteriorating. In cases such as this though, such residents where signposted in order to get professional support for these problems. She urged any Member to take up with V2c any complaints they received in regards to these matters.

Debate on this item concluded by Members urging V2c to respond quicker to complaints of all different types of nature when they were made and to continue to improve ways of Customer engagement, including in communities regarded as 'lonely', ie Ynysawdre and harder to reach older tenants.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That Council noted that a programme of presentations will be delivered by the Council's partners and Council's S151 Officer, as referred to in paragraph 4.2 of the report during 2021/22.
 - (2) Further noted the presentation given today by the Chief Executive and team members from V2c.

570. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:**

Mayor

It gives me great pleasure to announce the names of this year's Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor. The Youth Mayor will be Xander Payne from Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School and the Deputy Youth Mayor is G Williams of the Royal Welsh Collage of Music and Drama. Both have been part of the youth council for a few years.

G Williams won the Diana Award for His Transgender awareness Training and helps with our YPOP LGBTQIA Group (YPOP is the name of the Youth LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual) Group that we run on a Monday evening from 5-6pm virtually at present).

Xander is one of Bridgend's Young Ambassadors and is also looking to stand as our Welsh Youth Parliament representative. We wish them both all the best for the coming year and for their future ambitions.

I would like to congratulate Bridgend's very own Paralympic champion Aled Sion Davies for yet another successful games and for representing Bridgend and Wales on the World Stage. Aled has won his third Paralympic gold medal, this time in the men's F63 shot put event at Tokyo and was also co-captain of the Great Britain Paralympic team. He has been a great ambassador for Bridgend and Paralympic sport and will now be looking towards Paris in three years time. Aled is one of a long line of successful Bridgend based paralympian's and will no doubt have inspired future paralympian's also.

Over the summer period since our last meeting I have had the pleasure of attending a number of events along with a 60th and 65th wedding anniversary. It was great to see the work taking place as part of our School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) at both Cynffig Comprehensive School and Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen. I also enjoyed having school dinner with the children at these events.

I attended Pencoed Library for the launch of the Wales Co-Operative Centre iPad Loan scheme being made available to Carers in the County Borough. A great scheme and one that can be accessed via our libraries. I also learnt what a great online resource we now have at our libraries with free access to magazines.

At the end of August I attended the annual Gilfach Goch Forestry Fun Run along with the Mayor of RCT and it was well attended with numerous children taking part. Medals were presented to all that took part with trophies for those in first and second place in 3 age categories.

On 26 August at 8.10am, I attended the annual Parc Slip Memorial Service along with the Mayoress and it was a moving tribute to the 112 men and boys who lost their life in the dreadful explosion that took place in 1892, which each and every one of their names being read out, with the Leader being part of the group of people reading out the names.

September started off with a visit to Laleston Gardening Club 50th Anniversary celebrations along with the Leader and it was great to see some sort of normality returning with the wonderful display of flowers and vegetables and a lovely cream tea was provided. Cllr. Pam Davies was also in attendance and all three of us ended up joining the gardening club as members.

On Thursday 9th September it was 999 Flag Day and along with the Leader and High Sherriff we raised the flag at the Civic Offices in honour of the 7,500 emergency service workers who have lost their lives in their line of duty and we held a 2 minute silence in honour of them.

As for raising funds for the two groups I am supporting (Lads & Dads and Bridgend Carers Centre), the Mayoress Tandem Skydive was postponed due to the weather in July and is now scheduled to take place on Saturday 27th November 2021. Not sure what chance there is of clear skies, but fingers crossed. If not held on that date, it will then be scheduled for March 2022. Many thanks to those who have sponsored the Skydive to date and it's never too late to make a donation via the Council website on the Mayors page.

I hope to soon be announcing a Charity Pre-Christmas buffet at Bridgend RFC (Brewery Field) where there will be a buffet, comedy hypnotist along with music and entertainment to follow at the end of November. Tickets will be available soon.

I would draw your attention to an item of business, it has been requested that the meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 scheduled for Wednesday, 29th September 2021 be moved to Monday 4th October. With the agreement of the Chair this has been actioned and a new calendar appointment has been sent and Members are therefore asked to note the change.

Lastly and to end of a positive note, I would like to congratulate Councillor Cheryl Green and her husband Tom on celebrating their golden wedding anniversary recently, we all pass on our best wishes on reaching this impressive milestone.

To Councillor Stephen Smith and his partner Gemma I would like to say congratulations on your marriage, we wish you all the very best for a long and happy future together.

Deputy Leader

As you know, Bridgend County Borough already has one of the highest recycling rates in Wales, and we quickly rose from 46 per cent back in 2010 to our current, steady 69 per cent.

Now, latest figures have revealed that more than 155,000 tonnes of waste have been recycled and diverted away from landfill over the last four years.

Within that figure is just over 26,000 tonnes of paper and card, 17,500 tonnes of glass, 12,000 tonnes of plastic, 7,700 tonnes of metal, and 3,700 tonnes of electrical waste.

To help you visualise that, I am told that it is the equivalent in weight of 26,000 elephants, and that on average, each person has generated 856kg of waste during the four-year period.

The purple bag scheme has recycled more than 4,350 tonnes and has converted cellulose fibres into fibre boards, acoustic panelling and more, while 32,000 tonnes of food have been converted into electricity to power our local communities and produce fertiliser.

Our Cleaner Streets team have cleared just over 4,000 tonnes of fly-tipped waste, while more than 3,200 tonnes of garden waste has been taken away for composting.

I'm sure you will agree that these are highly impressive figures, and with final preparations also underway for the opening of the new community recycling centre at Pyle, they are set to rise even higher, especially now that a new contractor is in place who will recycle waste collected from public litter bins.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this such a success, but especially the Kier collectors keep the service running by walking between seven and ten miles and carrying up to four tonnes of waste every day, and our local residents who have made such a fantastic recycling effort.

I'd also like to remind members that next Monday will see the launch of our annual budget consultation where we will once more be inviting local residents to help us to develop our spending priorities for 2022-23.

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This time, the budget consultation will focus upon a longer-term vision for the county borough while still covering traditional areas such as investment in schools, roads, regeneration projects, energy schemes, council tax levels, support for businesses, tourism and the economy, how online services might be developed further, and more.

The annual budget consultation forms an important element in our efforts to deliver effective and efficient services that are right for our communities, and I am sure that members will want to encourage their constituents to take part and have their say.

The consultation will be available in a variety of formats, and the deadline for responses will be 14 November 2021. Further details will be available soon, including on the consultation page of the Council's corporate website.

Cabinet Member – Communities

Members will be aware that our £2.7m programme of investment into the local highways network is ongoing and is making strong progress across the county borough.

This year's investment programme is targeting 40 local roads. While some temporary inconvenience is unavoidable, every effort is made to minimise disruption, and to complete the work as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

I am sure that members will also welcome news that a number of children's play areas are set to benefit from a £700,000 programme of refurbishment which will allow more than 30 play areas to receive much needed investment.

This first phase will begin early next year and will target play areas in Aberkenfig, Bettws, Blackmill, Blaengarw, Brackla, Bridgend, Bryncethin, Caerau, Cefn Cribwr, Cefn Glas, Cornelly, Coytrahen, Evanstown, Kenfig Hill, Pencoed, Llangeinor, Lewistown, Nantymoel, Ogmere Vale, Pen-y-Fai, Nottage and Wildmill.

The work will range from general refurbishment to the re-laying of safer surfaces and the installation of new equipment.

Funding is being sought for the next phase of this scheme, and I am looking forward to bringing you further details soon.

Finally, I'd like to confirm that Carn Rovers FC have become the latest sports club to have successfully completed a community asset transfer.

They have taken on the management of Cwm Garw Pavilion and Playing Fields in the Garw Valley after agreeing a 35-year lease with the council.

Funding of almost £11,000 is being provided to support them in making improvements, and a further contribution of £10,000 is being provided to support the purchase of new pitch maintenance equipment.

I'd like to congratulate the club, and to take the opportunity to encourage further organisations to come and find out how they might work with us to protect and improve other community facilities within their areas.

Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration

Across the county borough, pupils have returned to school following one of the most unavoidably disruptive periods in education that we have ever experienced.

Schools and officers of the council have gone above and beyond in trying to minimise this disruption, and have done a fantastic job under some very difficult and challenging circumstances.

Throughout it all, the health, safety and well-being of pupils has remained our top priority. This continues to be the case, and their return to school has been supported in a number of ways.

While Welsh Government no longer requires the routine use of face coverings within the classroom for either staff or learners, schools and other educational settings have been able to determine how they should be used in areas where there is likely to be more social mixing, such as in school libraries, common rooms and more.

The exception has been school transport, where pupils in Year Seven and above are required to wear face coverings while travelling on school transport vehicles.

All secondary school pupils were asked to undertake a lateral flow test before their first day back, and to continue to do so twice a week thereafter.

Schools also have a range of specific processes in place along with risk assessments, hygiene procedures, adequate ventilation and more.

To support pupils, parents, guardians and carers, Frequently Asked Questions have been published on the council website which cover issues ranging from uniforms and school dinners to transport and health and safety.

In the event that local risks differ from the national risk rating, we will work alongside schools and partners to put additional measures in place to prioritise the ongoing health, safety and wellbeing of all pupils.

Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing

Members will be aware that there continues to be a high demand for temporary accommodation all across Bridgend County Borough.

To help meet this demand, the council has entered into a new partnership with Cartrefi Hafod for a new private rent-leasing scheme.

The scheme aims to recruit private landlords, and to lease their properties for use as temporary accommodation for homeless people.

With lease agreements of between one to three years, landlords will receive guaranteed rental income for the duration of the contract and will be paid monthly in arrears.

They remain responsible for all structural and external repairs and fixtures and fittings, and must also ensure that relevant gas and electrical safety checks are carried out annually.

However, Cartrefi Hafod can assist with this, and all participating properties are fully managed and are regularly inspected.

The scheme also includes a round the clock repair service, no set-up fees, free garden maintenance and more, all provided at no extra charge to the landlord.

As well as providing an income and keeping buildings in use, the scheme aims to reduce homelessness, and to provide much-needed temporary homes for both families and individuals while they await permanent accommodation.

I hope that members will give their support to this scheme, and that you will advise any landlords within your ward areas to find out more by visiting the Cartrefi Hafod website.

Chief Executive

I delivered a report to Cabinet yesterday where I outlined progress that has been made around the council's future operating model, and I thought members would find it informative if I just recapped some of that progress here.

As you know, during the coronavirus pandemic, we found ourselves in a position where we had to adapt very quickly to rapidly changing circumstances.

The lockdown period meant that the vast majority of council staff had to be mobilised and equipped to work from home.

Over the months that followed, we successfully delivered an increasing number of council services remotely or digitally, and were able to study how we might learn from this experience to make fundamental changes to how we operate in future.

Following this ongoing review, we are now developing a new blended model of working which could see staff dividing their time between both home and office.

Members will be aware that Welsh Government has set new targets of enabling at least 30 per cent of the workforce to operate from home by 2024, even though current guidance says you can continue to work from home where possible.

The new model that we are currently working on reflects this ambition, and is intended to offer greater choice and flexibility.

It is also designed to increase the efficiency of services for customers while continuing to effectively target those who are most in need.

There are a number of potential benefits associated with this, including reductions in traffic, pollution and sickness absence levels, financial savings, greater well-being among our staff, improved retention and recruitment within key service areas, and greater alignment with the council's ongoing digitalisation strategy.

With more than 6,000 staff delivering up to 800 different Council services, the new model will mainly affect employees who are office-based rather than those who work across areas such as schools or within depots.

It goes without saying that we remain extremely proud of the way in which staff have pulled together to meet the ongoing challenges of Covid-19.

This represented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make fundamental changes and improvements to the working culture of the council, and follows hot on the heels of the most recent staff survey.

The results of the survey have so far been very encouraging. To give you an idea of some of the headline figures, more than a thousand staff responded to the survey.

86 per cent stated that they enjoyed their role, and 67 per cent felt valued at work.

73 per cent told us that they were satisfied with the council as an employer, and 66 per cent had discussed their learning and development needs with their line manager within the last 12 months.

Overall, staff were positive about line management, with 74 per cent delivering positive responses about support from their line manager and 82 per cent citing opportunities for two-way communication to discuss and raise ideas and issues.

85 per cent of staff stated that they felt safe carrying out their role during Covid-19, and 83 per cent felt reassured that the council is taking the appropriate health and safety measures to minimise risks associated in the workplace.

At 72 per cent, the majority of respondents felt that corporate communication during the Covid-19 pandemic has been effective.

In relation to staff well-being, 59 per cent told us that they were able to meet the demands of their job within their working hours, and 69 per cent said they were comfortable with the work demands placed upon them in their role.

Of particular interest in relation to our plans for developing a new model of working was the fact that 84 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed that they can work productively within a remote environment.

Overall, when comparing the seven questions used to measure trends between the three surveys, staff were more positive in 2021 than in previous surveys carried out in 2020 and 2018.

We will be studying these results very carefully and will be taking account of them in the development of the new model of working.

Engagement with staff and trade unions on the proposals is underway, and further reports will be forthcoming which will provide firmer details around what shape the new model will take.

I will of course keep members fully updated as this progresses.

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

Members will have seen the latest coronavirus rates, and how extremely serious the situation has become on a national scale across our entire health and social care system.

The council is experiencing unprecedented pressures across all services, but especially in areas such as adult and children's social care, early help, children's safeguarding, and placements.

These issues are being particularly effected by the challenges that we face in recruiting and retaining our social care workforce.

Our capacity to respond to the need for providing care and support at home is proving to be especially challenging, and as the Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help reported to the last meeting of Council, we are currently providing a total of 640 hours per week more than we did when compared to the same period last year.

Faced with increasing need to extend existing packages of care and to provide care to more individuals, the key issue remains that residents may be forced to wait for these to become available.

The situation continues to be extremely delicate as a consequence of delays in people accessing and receiving NHS treatments, exacerbations of chronic conditions due to long Covid or increased social isolation issues as a result of staying at home, and the impact of all this on family, friends and carers.

The social care workforce are tired from the superhuman efforts of the last 18 months, and the risk of burn out and attrition from the sector is very real.

I cannot emphasise enough the need to recognise that the situation is now at the most challenging point we have seen throughout the pandemic.

Welsh Government ministers recently commented that the entire system will remain under pressure while the pandemic is underway and we are expected to maintain a 'business as usual' approach.

The health minister went as far as to state that while the situation may level off after October, we will still face our usual winter pressures such as flu and other respiratory viruses which may impact upon the system.

However, we are continuing to present a strong response to these challenges.

We have Gold, Silver and Bronze level meetings taking place with health board colleagues on a regional level, we are prioritising care on a daily basis and a very detailed set of action plans in place, and we are regularly reviewing, prioritising and co-ordinating essential services at a director and heads-of-service level.

Since the last meeting of full Council, a new recruitment drive has been launched for social care workers across areas ranging from home care and the reablement teams to young people's services.

This is linked to the national 'We Care' campaign run by Welsh Government and Social Care Wales which is promoting the benefits of working in care, and is also encouraging people to apply for roles within the sector.

The recruitment drive focuses on the many benefits of working in this area, and emphasises how full training and support help staff to make a positive difference in the lives of local people.

Care worker recruitment features prominently in our action plan, we have re-opened our six residential reablement beds at Bryn Y Cae in Brackla, and we have recruited an additional two new providers into our framework.

Our social care rebuild and recovery plan is well developed in line with the Welsh Government Social Care Recovery Framework.

We are also in close contact with the whole social care sector and partners, and are continuing to support them in delivering care for the most vulnerable.

We want residents who are seeking work, or who may be considering their career options, to understand that social care offers rewarding career opportunities for individuals from all sorts of backgrounds.

We want them to realise that having the right values and being positive, caring and motivated are the most important qualities.

We are also reminding residents who need information or advice about supporting themselves by accessing the many services available within their communities, which can be done either through the council or our third sector partners.

This includes using the council's Common Access Point for services involving information and advice, the protection of vulnerable adults from harm or neglect, and support for people who care for others.

Anyone seeking support around children and families can contact the council's Information, Advice and Assistance Service team, while our Local Community Coordinators focus upon those whose needs would not usually meet eligibility criteria for care and support.

The co-ordinators form an important part of our overall preventative approach to maintaining independence and well-being, as do the many carers whom we continue to support via the Carers Trust South East Wales which includes a 24/7 helpline.

Unfortunately, one aspect of the current situation is that it continues to pose a risk around increased complaints and queries via members.

This is because a small proportion of people who we support may face delays in meeting their assessed needs, but we are doing all that we can to sensitively and professionally address this under the reality of the circumstances we face.

All members can support these efforts by promoting the social care recruitment initiative within our communities, and encouraging people to come forward and find out more.

In the meantime, staff are continuing to demonstrate exceptional dedication and determination, and I am sure you will want to join me in thanking them once more for their ongoing efforts.

This serious situation recently forced Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health to make changes around hospital visits and the collection of free coronavirus tests.

Now, people are currently only able to visit hospitals if a patient is receiving end-of-life care and the visit has been agreed in advance with specialist palliative care in-patient services.

For pregnant women, one partner or support person is able to accompany them once they are confirmed as being in labour. This includes the immediate post-natal period prior to them transferring either home or to a postnatal area.

One person is able to accompany patients within paediatric and neonatal areas as agreed with clinical teams. However, no visiting is allowed on either the antenatal or postnatal wards.

For ultrasound appointments, one partner is allowed to attend the 12 week dating scan, the 20 week anomaly scan and some scans arranged via the early pregnancy service.

People attending outpatient appointments must do so alone, but staff will provide support where needed and free Wi-Fi access is available to help people keep in touch with family and friends.

The health and safety of patients, visitors and staff must obviously remain a top priority, and I hope that communities throughout Bridgend County Borough will offer their support and understanding during this challenging time.

Local vaccination rates remain very high, and we recently broke through the 100,000 barrier for the number of residents who have received both doses of the vaccine.

However, it remains vitally important for everyone to keep their guard up against coronavirus, and to do all that we can to stop it from spreading further.

As part of the leave no one behind strategy, Anyone aged 16 or over who has not yet received their first vaccination appointment can walk in to a centre and receive one, while people aged over 18 who have already received their first dose can now do the same for their second vaccination.

Welsh Government and the health board are currently considering new medical advice on whether the vaccine can be provided to young people aged 12 to 15. They are also considering a proposed booster programme, and we expect to know more details about the arrangements for how both of these will be delivered very soon.

There are two groups of children within the 12 to 15 year old group, those who are extremely vulnerable, and those who are not. Cwm Taf Morgannwg have begun to vaccinate the vulnerable, with those falling into the definition expanded by the JCVI on the 3 September being invited to Community Vaccination Centres, including Ravens Court, next week. These children will receive two doses of Pfizer vaccine.

On 1 September, JCVI announced that those very vulnerable individuals who are severely immunosuppressed should receive a third dose of vaccine as part of their primary course. This third dose is recommended to be Pfizer. The people in this category are being identified either by their clinician or via a self-referral form. This process is underway and vaccination will begin in community vaccination Centres next week.

We continue to work very closely with Cwm Taf Morgannwg on the vaccination programme and as always, I'll share further details via email as soon as they are finalised.

In other news, as part of our commitment towards the UK's national Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, we have agreed to provide up to three families with safe homes and support, and are waiting for further confirmation on how this will work.

It has been heartening to see the overwhelmingly positive response that this has received from residents, and the way in which many have asked how they might offer help and support.

We have partnered with the Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations to consider this, and would ask anyone who might be keen to help to visit the BAVO website for more information on what may be required.

At this point in time, there is no requirement for items to be donated, but support may be needed with issues such as befriending, companionship, conversational English, showing people around the area, transportation, help with running errands and so on.

Later, there is likely to be a need for more specialist services covering areas such as legal matters, tutoring and mentoring, mental and physical health, well-being and more.

More information on the scheme and how it will work will soon be known, so look out for further details.

Finally, members may want to remind their constituents that dozens of employers and organisations will be exhibiting in Bridgend town centre tomorrow as part of our first outdoor Jobs Fair.

The free event, which will be based in various locations including Dunraven Place and Caroline Street, is being held between 10am and 2pm.

Organised in partnership with Employability Bridgend and Jobcentre Plus, it will feature free expert advice and support on a range of work, training and volunteering opportunities.

Some of the employers who will be taking part include South Wales Police, Avon Cosmetics, First Cymru Buses, G4S, Careers Wales and A & R Cleaning Services as well as MPS Industrial, Rubicon Wales Facilities Management, Harlequin Home Care Ltd and Wilmott Dixon.

With a range of temporary and permanent vacancies on offer, the jobs fair is an excellent opportunity for people to find work, change career or access new training, and I am sure it will be a big success.

572. **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chairperson of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) submitted a report on behalf of the Committee, the purpose of which, was to present Council with a review of work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny over a two year period 2019/20 and 2020/21.

She advised that Scrutiny is required to submit an Annual Report to Council with a review of how the function has operated for the previous period. The review was a useful tool for reviewing the effectiveness of Scrutiny, providing an opportunity to reflect properly on how Scrutiny has operated, including the various challenges and outcomes. The report provided commentary on scrutiny activity for the period.

The Chairperson of COSC further added, that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and endorsed the Scrutiny Annual Report at its meeting held on 1 September 2021, which was attached as Appendix A to the report, for submission to Council.

She explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the report covered a two year period and provided detail on the challenges and outcomes for Scrutiny Committees and Panels for the period, as well as identifying some areas of focus for improvement to ensure Scrutiny continues to develop and achieve positive outcomes for the residents of Bridgend moving forward.

The Leader thanked the Chairpersons of the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees the last few years, i.e. both past and existing for their contributions to Scrutiny and the Annual Report before Members.

RESOLVED: That Council noted the contents of the Scrutiny Annual Report attached at Appendix A to the covering report.

573. **SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, in order to present to Council, the Director of Social Services' Annual Report for 2020/21, and request that Members note the assessments reached locally about social care services in Bridgend.

She explained that this is the eleventh Annual Report of the Director of Social Services and is based on the Authority's self-assessment of the performance and delivery of social care services over a two year period 2019/20 and 2020/21. The report was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The report outlined some background information, following which it stated that the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, placed strong emphasis on promoting the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support. It was important that the views and voices of people and their carers are heard, the report identified.

The guidance for the report sets out the sections in relation to the six national quality standards for well-being. These were:

- Working with people to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people want to achieve;
- Working with people and partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- Taking steps to protect and safeguard people from abuse, neglect or harm;
- Encouraging and supporting people to learn, develop and participate in society;
- Supporting people to safely develop and maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships;
- Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic well-being, to have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

The report provides a summary of the main achievements in 2019/20 and 2020/21 taking into account the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and references areas where progress has been delayed, or priorities needed to change as a consequence of the unprecedented global pandemic. The report also highlighted the priorities for social services in 2021/22. The analysis draws on progress against the business plans, performance data for each service area in both adults' and children's social care, as well as feedback from people, carers and staff.

The report also demonstrated that despite the challenges of the pandemic, BCBC, together with its key partner organisations, have continued to progress key service developments and improvements, and have continued to be effective in supporting those who need care and support. It did however, further identify areas where improvement was needed and the most significant risks and challenges facing BCBC and its stakeholders going forward, and these were detailed in the priorities for 2021/22.

The report further highlighted that in November 2021, a full regulatory inspection had been carried out of BCBC's Domiciliary Care Services, the outcome of which was extremely positive, confirmed the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing.

In April 2021 CIW had carried out an assurance check of how well BCBC and partners, had ensured the safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services,

the safety of services they access, and the safety and well-being of people who work in those services. Overall CIW had found that the local authority had made clear its strategic and operational intent to support vulnerable young people, adults and carers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that there were some whole service priorities and then more specific priorities for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, moving forward. The Directorate would implement the actions as set out in the 2021-22 Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate Business Plan. The 8 highest priorities for social services and wellbeing in 2021/22 were detailed in paragraph 4.11 of the report and she gave a resume of these for the benefit of Members.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing also gave a power point presentation with the support of immediate colleagues that covered the main key areas of the Social Services Annual Report. This was further supported by a number of short video clips from key workers in Social Care settings, acknowledging the job satisfaction that came about from supporting the most vulnerable.

The Annual Report of the Director of Social Services had been presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) on 1st September 2021, and the COSC comments and suggestions given by Members of the Committee, she confirmed had been taken into account in the most up to date version of the report.

The Mayor paid tribute to all those who had supported the care service, particularly over the last 18 months or so during Covid-19, particularly those who were voluntary and/or unpaid carers. He felt all carers had given some invaluable support during what were unprecedented times, the like of which had never before been experienced.

The Leader commended the report, adding that it was one of the most important statutory reports the Council considered annually. He thanked the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their input in the previous consideration of the Annual Report, for the high level of scrutiny and focus they had given to it. He wished to remind the public and Members alike, that in addition to the Annual Report, that there was intense scrutiny of BCBC Social Services by its regulators, which had only intensified during the pandemic. He recognised the fact that the CIW had completed a full inspection of the Authority's Domiciliary Care Services which had proven to be very positive in terms of its outcomes, despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic on top of normal day to day work. This had been the subject of a further subsequent assurance check in April 2021, analysing the ways and methods that BCBC and its partners adopt, to keep people safe. This had also been a very positive follow-up review. The Leader thanked all frontline staff within the care workforce for their unrelenting efforts, who had given their undying commitment to support the most vulnerable in society, risking their own health in doing so, which he thought was so very admirable. The Council would now going forward, target the eight priorities detailed in the Annual Report, he added. These sentiments were echoed by the Deputy leader.

A Member asked what was being done for both the recruitment and retention of Care Workers.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised, that the Council had a very detailed and comprehensive Recruitment and Retention Action Plan, which Officers were meeting weekly upon to improve and perfect this further. She urged Members also, to promote the need for Care Workers through the likes of their newsletters and on Social Media. The Council continued to work with HR, Employability Wales and the Communications Department, to similarly promote this important role. Flexibility in

Contracts for Care Workers was also being looked at she added, in order to encourage people to come forward in this line of work.

A Member referred to the Baby in Mind Service concentrating upon new parents, particularly during the time of the pandemic. This period had been very hard for parents of newly born children. She asked how this was progressing and if support was continuing for this, with parents with other problems other than may be that of a financial nature.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, confirmed that the Baby in Mind Project was excellent and quite unique, in that it was something that had not been pursued by other neighbouring authorities, that was invaluable in terms of supporting the most vulnerable, including the new born during the time of the pandemic. This was a service that was primarily outside of the Social Services arena and more in the Early Help area of BCBC. Early Help Services also included Flying Start as well as ongoing support through various Hubs that were situate throughout the County Borough. Health visits had also been maintained during the pandemic she added. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing concluded, by confirming that the Council would continue to review pre-birth interventions also during the future.

RESOLVED: That Council approved the Director of Social Services' Annual Report for 2020/21.

574. **REPRESENTATION AT THE MAGISTRATES' COURT**

The Chief Executive presented a report, in order to seek approval to amend the Scheme of Delegation of Functions, to authorise Revenue Officers to attend the Magistrates' Court on behalf of the Council in respect of recovering unpaid Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates.

He explained that there was currently only one member of the Recovery Section within the Revenues Team that was authorised to attend the Magistrates' Court. Approval was therefore required for other Revenue Officers to attend Valuation Tribunal Hearings and Magistrates' Court hearings on the Council's behalf, for the recovery of Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates and to ensure the effective performance of the day to day operation of the Service.

In order to accommodate this, it was necessary to amend Scheme B2 of the Scheme of Delegations as suggested in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

The Chief Executive added, that the proposed delegated power would then circumvent the need to take a report to Council for every individual officer change. Any authorisations made under the delegation will ensure that the officer is appropriately qualified, trained and experienced and the function to be exercised is within that officer's area of responsibility. The authorisation will be recorded in writing and shall be provided to the Monitoring Officer within 5 working days.

RESOLVED: That Council approved the amendment to the Scheme of Delegation of Functions as set out at paragraph 4.2 of the report.

575. **REAPPOINTMENTS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, with the view to seeking the approval of Council to the extension of the term of office of two Independent Members of the Standards Committee.

Paragraph 3.1 outlined the present composition of the Committee and the criteria with regards to its membership, whilst the next section of the report confirmed that the term of office for two Independent Members of the Committee, runs out in October 2021. She explained however, that the Members in question were eligible to be reappointed for a further term. Thereafter, they were required to stand down as they could not serve more than two terms of office under the Regulations. In addition, the Regulations specify that the second term of office can be a maximum of four years.

The Monitoring Officer added, that the Members in question had made a beneficial contribution to the governance of the Council and were in agreement to standing for a further term.

RESOLVED: That Council reappointed Mrs Judith Kiely and Mr Clifford Jones OBE to the Standards Committee for a further term of four years.

576. **AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION AND SCHEME OF DELEGATION OF FUNCTIONS**

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services presented a report, the purpose of which, was to seek Council’s approval of:

- a number of minor refinements to the Constitution in relation to the sealing of Council legal documents to enable a more efficient management of the legal process;
- amending the Constitution to incorporate the revised Contract Procedure Rules; and
- amending the Council’s Scheme of Delegation of Functions in relation to Council functions in accordance with section 4.7 of this Report.

She explained by way of background, that certain agreements, namely land transfers and contracts over an agreed monetary value, are required to be executed as deeds. This enables enforcement action to be commenced after the usual time limitation period of 6 years. In such instances the agreements are completed by the signature of an Authorising Officer and by affixing the Council’s Common Seal.

Also, the Council is required to review the Contract Procedure Rules, which form part of the Council’s Constitution, on a regular basis.

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services continued by stating that, Article 14.05 of the Constitution requires that “the affixing of the Common Seal shall be attested by either the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the Leader or the Deputy Leader and by the Solicitor of the Council or a person authorised by him/her”.

The inclusion of these Members is an historical requirement and it is unclear what purpose this additional requirement serves given the complex nature of these documents and the governance processes that are undertaken before such documents are sealed. The logistics around the current process arguably involve unnecessary delay and expense and it is therefore suggested that the requirement for the Mayor or Deputy Mayor, Leader or Deputy Leader to attest the sealing of documents is removed. This is now the common practice of a number of local authorities.

It was therefore recommended that this Article of the Constitution be amended as per paragraph 4.2 of the report, along the lines recommended above.

Furthermore, Rule 20.2 of the Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) provides that: "Every Contract, including frameworks which exceed £500,000 shall be executed under Seal". The monetary value of a contract is not the sole factor in determining whether an agreement requires execution under Seal. Statutory and common law requirements and practical consideration such as the complexity of the arrangement also need to be considered. It was therefore proposed that the CPRs within the Constitution be amended to read, 'Every Contract, including frameworks which exceed £500,000 in amount or value shall be referred to the Solicitor for the Council for approval.'

Paragraph 4.4 of the report, further recommended that the following be inserted at Article 15.03 to allow the Monitoring Officer to make typographical and other corrections to the Constitution:-

"The Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Head of Paid Service shall have power to make typographical and other corrections and clarification amendments to the Constitution (provided they do not make substantive change to the meaning of the Constitution) and to make updating amendments to the Constitution where required due to changes in legislation".

Following a review of the Contract Procedure Rules, a number of changes have been made to the existing Contract Procedure Rules to ensure the Council modernises the way it procures goods, services and works. A copy of the revised Contract Procedure Rules was attached to the report at Appendix 1 to the report.

A report was presented to Cabinet on 14th September 2021 to approve the revised Contract Procedure Rules to take effect from 1st October 2021.

The revised Contract Procedure Rules now needed to be incorporated into the Constitution.

Paragraph 4.7 of the report, outlined amendments to the Scheme of Delegations with regards to its Council functions. These related to the General Powers of Chief Officers and to Scheme B2 and were itemised in the report, including by way of tracked changes (that reflected the proposed changes).

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services advised that a similar report was submitted to Cabinet yesterday for amendments to their Executive functions.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) approved the amendments to the Constitution as set out within this report;
- (2) noted the revised Contract Procedure Rules to take effect from 1st October 2021; and
- (3) approved the amendments to the Scheme of Delegation of Functions in relation to Council functions as set out in section 4.7 of the Report.

577. INFORMATION REPORT FOR NOTING

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

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

578. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE JNC SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Chief Executive presented a report, seeking Council approval on a proposed amendment to the senior management structure and to commence formal consultation with relevant JNC officers with regards to the proposed JNC senior management structure.

He reminded Members by way of background information, that Council had approved in November 2017 a new JNC Pay and Grading structure.

Further changes and amendments had subsequently been made to this by members, the last being in October 2019, as referred to in Paragraph 3 of the report.

The Chief Executive added that since then, further recruitments had been made in respect of the JNC posts of Corporate Director – Communities, Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing and more recently the appointment of a Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change.

He that Members will recall that in the previous report to Council in October 2019, following a review of Human Resources and Organisational Development, the Service was moved to report to the then Head of Legal and Regulatory Services, and consequently that post was re-designated Chief Officer Legal, Human Resources and Regulatory Services. There was however no change in the grading of this post, notwithstanding however, that the scoring of the post increased.

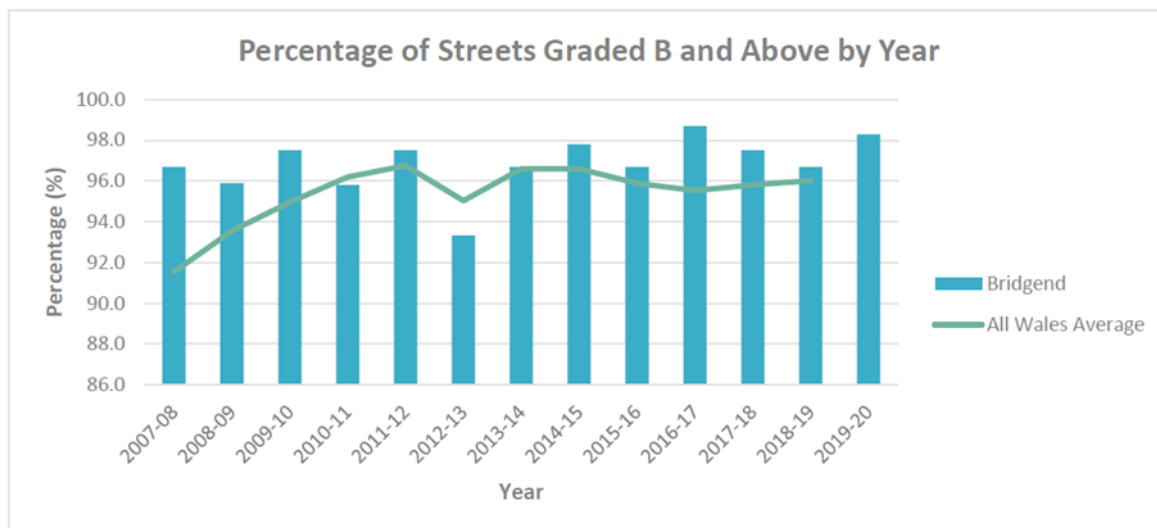
In addition to the duties and responsibility of this post, during the Covid-19 pandemic the post-holder has also taken on important and significant additional responsibilities with regard to representing the Council on the multi-agency Regional Strategic Oversight Group (RSOG). This is a high level strategic and corporate role requiring sufficient authority and accountability to make decisions on behalf of the Council rapidly, and deploy resources accordingly. In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery and response phase, the postholder also represents the Council on the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Incident Management Team (IMT) whose role included the establishment and implementation of the test and trace and protect programme, close liaison with the Health Board to develop and set up locally testing centres and the vaccination programme and other responses to government advice, guidance and legislation as they emerged. It has become clear, that these additional responsibilities are not confined to the Covid pandemic and as we reach an endemic phase in due course, there will be an ongoing requirement for someone at a Chief Officer level to fulfil this corporate and strategic function and represent the Council where there is an imminent threat or danger to public safety. The role requires strong leadership and close corporate working throughout the organisation and alignment with the work of the emergency planning team.

The Chief Executive advised that for the reasons outlined in paragraph 4.6 of the report, including the demands that Covid has placed on local authorities not only past and present, but in the future too, it was considered that a new Policy and Public Affairs Unit should be placed within the portfolio of the Chief Officer Legal, Human Resources and Regulatory Services. This would necessitate a change whereby it is recommended that the post of Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, be redesignated as Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory Services, Human Resources and Corporate Policy. The duties and span of responsibilities that the post holder will now undertake (as set out in paragraphs 4.3 to 4.4 of the report) have been re-evaluated within a revised job description incorporating the wider range of responsibilities using the Council's approved Job Evaluation scheme, and there is a consequent suggested change in the grade to the proposed position as follows: The existing role of Chief Officer Legal, Human Resources

The surveys carried out by KWT grades area's / streets inspected into categories of cleanliness, A to D, streets grade B and above are the streets considered by members of the public to have an acceptable level of cleanliness.

Therefore the % of streets that score B or above, has become one of the key measurements of cleanliness perception (Higher score being better).

Below is a graph provided by Keep Wales Tidy that records the percentage of streets at or above that accepted level of cleanliness in Bridgend year on year. The last recorded year saw the authority recording its second best score to date. The graph also shows the all Wales recorded average figures for comparison.



Supplementary question by Councillor Thomas

Does the Deputy Leader have any ideas how the Council could support volunteer groups across the County Borough?

Response

The Authority has a very good track record in supporting Community Groups in terms of litter picking, many of which have come forward since the pandemic and this has had a positive impact as it encourages people to go out, improve their health and wellbeing through exercise and meet other people in adjoining communities. There were examples to refer to, such as the 'Love it Don't Trash it Campaign.' The Council had also teamed-up with the Bridgend Ravens for litter picking and recycling purposes.

The Corporate Director – Communities added, that volunteers from communities had come forward as volunteers for litter picking, however, the Council had to provide them with the necessary equipment in order for them to safely undertake this task in conjunction with assistance from key groups, for example "Keep Wales Tidy." An event was to be held in Wildmill over the next few days, whereby the Council and V2c were heading-up a litter picking campaign on the estates there and to advocate this in other communities in order to keep them cleaner. She added that it was evident through data that litter picking had increased across the County Borough in recent years.

Second supplementary question by Councillor Bridie Sedgebeer

There are often problems that arise in terms of litter through Fly Posting, by groups such as Yes Cymru in particular. Would Council consider removing this graffiti from property and sign posts and then bill the perpetrators accordingly for this.

Response

The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that the Council would take appropriate action against this and she asked the Member to confirm the location where this had taken place.

580. **NOTICE OF MOTION PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR RL PENHALE-THOMAS**

The following Notice of Motion was put forward by the above Member:-

“This council recognises:

- the success of the Welsh Government-backed Free Breakfasts in Primary Schools scheme
- Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities' efforts in provision of free school meals throughout school holidays during the Covid pandemic to 31 August 2021
- the significant and myriad benefits of a nutritionally balanced, healthy school meal, including on educational attainment, mental and physical health and childhood obesity
- data compiled by the Child Poverty Action Group (Wales) highlighting that of the 129,000 school-age children living below the poverty line in Wales, over 55,000 are not eligible, mainly because their parents are in low-paid jobs which take them over the eligibility threshold
- the severe impact the withdrawal of the £20 Universal Credit uplift will have on the most vulnerable families across the county borough

This council believes:

- it is unacceptable in a modern society that children still go hungry

This council calls on Welsh Government to:

- extend its eligibility policy on free school meals to include all children whereby their family is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent benefits
- extend its eligibility policy on free school meals to include all children whereby their family has no recourse to public funds
- undertake a review into the universal provision of free school meals

This council calls on UK Government to:

- withdraw its planned reduction in Universal Credit uplift.”

The Notice of Motion was supported by way of co-signatories by Councillors Alex Williams and Malcolm James.

The proposer of the Motion and one of the Members that supported this, gave at the meeting, the following further submissions in the support of this.

Proposer: In Wales more children in poverty miss out on free school meals compared to England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

That figure stands at 55,000 children – that’s 42 per cent of school aged children who are in poverty in Wales and missing out on a school lunch.

The income threshold in Wales for free school meals is £7,400. I can’t fathom that any elected member of this authority might believe £7,400 is a significant sum of money when considered as an annual household income.

In Northern Ireland that threshold is almost double at £14,000.

Moreover, the current criteria is prohibitive to families who literally have nothing – people with no recourse to public funds such as those seeking asylum in the UK who are effectively destitute on arrival while their immigration status is determined.

Some children are eating lunch at school that consists solely of jam sandwiches. In the fifth richest country in the world, that cannot be right or justifiable.

The over-complicated, tangled web that is the existing welfare and benefits system can mean that children in receipt of the lowest level of child support are just over the threshold and miss out on free school meals. It forces families to food banks and while we can appreciate the relief that foodbank support can bring, their very existence is an indictment on our modern society.

Utility bills are rising.
National Insurance. Rising.
Cost of living. Rising.

And the Universal Credit uplift is disappearing making matters all the worse.

Again, this winter, many families will be forced to make the decision between heating or eating. All against the backdrop of the most uncertain financial and economic outlook in modern times.

The benefits are all too clear to see. Not just the nutritional value of a proper lunch, but the development of social skills and the higher levels of concentration in afternoon sessions. Long term, we're talking impacts on life chances, with proven links later in life to depression, suicidal episodes and developing chronic illnesses.

We only have to look to our neighbours in parts of Scandinavia, where free school meals are a universal provision.

And the cost? The Wales Anti-Poverty coalition puts the estimate of expanding the programme at £10.5m per year, while universal provision would be nearer £140 million. Still less than 1% of the Welsh Government's total revenue budget.

Members may recall that more than £550m was found mid-way through the financial year just a few weeks back for the NHS and social services; and more recently, officials just 'wrote off' £75m relating to the last stages of the M4 Relief Road project. That's a project that won't see one inch of tarmac laid but had £135m spent on it.

Too often, however, it's a case of knowing the cost of everything but the value of nothing. Invest now, save later and reap the rewards of a healthier and more prosperous population.

Second: I'm sure that all Members would agree with the motion's laudable aims both in recognising the achievements which the Welsh Government has made to date including free breakfast clubs and during the pandemic but also in calling on them to go further in introducing universal free school meals which would ensure that all children living below the poverty line don't go hungry and in turn improve educational attainment.

Of course, there are many factors which influence educational attainment but one is hunger and it is one in which Government at all levels can address. The last Welsh

Labour manifesto rightly said that “it is unacceptable in a modern society that children still go hungry”.

It is blatantly clear to me that if the eligibility criteria were extended to include all children from families in receipt of universal credit or equivalent and families with no recourse to public funds, this situation would be resolved.

Furthermore, I agree that a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted into the universal provision of free school meals. By doing this, the perception that there is a stigma to receiving free school meals could also be minimised.

We as a Council could start by doing a cost-benefit analysis of what it would cost us as a local authority to provide free school meals to all school-aged children in BCBC and then lobby the Welsh Government for further funding to provide this from central funding.

And also, I would suggest that more could be done by our local authority in identifying the families and show them that there is a way to get confidential support if they are reticent to apply for free school meals because of the perceived stigma attached to it. Perhaps it is time for a new campaign to get as many eligible people as possible to take up free school meals.

Finally, as Members will know, the Manchester United footballer, Marcus Rashford, has been a high profile advocate for the provision of free school meals and has urged the UK Government to keep the £20 Universal Credit uplift to prevent thousands of children from going hungry. Even some MPs on the Tory benches are pressing Boris Johnson to retain the Universal Credit uplift introduced during the pandemic, so I hope that Welsh Conservative Councillors in this local authority can also support this motion today.

It is time that we as community leaders in Bridgend took a more active stance to lobby senior politicians in both Cardiff Bay and Westminster to bring about national policy change and end the scandal of child food poverty so I urge all Members to support Councillor Penhale-Thomas’ motion.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration emphasised the value of school meals that dated back by statute to 1921. In 2001 he confirmed that the Labour Government put basic nutritional requirements back into school meals. During the pandemic BCBC valued school meals and during austerity free school meals were very important for those who were entitled to receive them. He added that currently Welsh Parliament and Welsh Government were reviewing the criteria for free school meals and later this evening, the UK Government would be voting on whether or not to make the £20 uplift to Universal Credit permanent. So with those things in mind, he felt the Notice of Motion was very important and one which he supported whole heartedly.

Further Members also gave their support to the Notice of Motion also.

Members agree to have a recorded vote on the Notice of Motion, the result of which was as follows:-

For:

Councillors A Aspey, T Beedle, JP Blundell, M Clarke, N Clarke, R Collins, HJ David, P Davies, DK Edwards, J Gebbie, CA Green, G Howells, D Lewis, JE Lewis, JR McCarthy, D Patel, B Sedgebeer, CE Smith, JC Spanswick, R Thomas, T Thomas, E Venables, KJ Watts, A Williams, AJ Williams, HM Williams, J Williams, RE Young = **28 Votes**

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

Against:

Councillors T Giffard, A Pucella, K Rowlands, S Vidal = **4 Votes**

Abstentions:

None.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that the above Notice of Motion was supported and carried by way of a clear majority vote.

581. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 19:05