

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD  
REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2022 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

S Aspey	JPD Blundell	G Chappell	C L C Davies
P Davies	S Dendy	DK Edwards	T Giffard
RM Granville	JE Pratt	KL Rowlands	DA Unwin
KJ Watts	RE Young		

Apologies for Absence

T Lyddon, C Reeves, CE Smith, JH Tildesley MBE and CA Webster

Officers:

Rhodri Davies	Development & Building Control Manager
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Deborah Exton	Deputy Head of Finance
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Jonathan Parsons	Group Manager Development

221. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr JP Blundell declared a personal interest in item 6, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was a member of Laleston Community Council which had community asset transferred (CAT) Bryntirion Community Centre and was in the process of submitting expressions of interest in other community projects.

Cllr P Davies declared a personal interest in item 6, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was the Deputy Chairman of Caerau Development Trust and there was a lease currently running on the Community Centre and negotiations were on going with regard to a CAT transfer. He was also a member of Nantyllyllon RFC which was involved in the CAT transfer of Caerau Welfare Park.

Cllr R Granville declared a personal interest in item 6, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was involved in discussions regarding the transfer of the football field to Cornelly Community Council.

Cllr Chappell declared a personal interest in item 6, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was associated with Kenfig RFC and they had recently applied for an asset transfer.

Cllr Huw David declared a personal interest in item 6, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was a member of Kenfig Hill Rugby Club, Cefn Cribwr Athletic Club and Cefn Cribwr Bowls Club and these clubs had all been involved in the CAT process.

Cllr R Young declared a personal interest in item 6, Community Asset Transfer Update, as he was a member of Coity Community Higher Council and an application had been submitted for a CAT transfer on Great Western Avenue and other playing fields.

222. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 29 November 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

223. NEIGHBOUR NOTIFICATION AND TOWN/COMMUNITY COUNCIL CONSULTATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services presented a report advising Town and Community Council members of the statutory process of notifying neighbours and consulting with Town and Community Councils in the planning application process.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services explained that where a valid application for planning permission had been submitted, there was a statutory obligation for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to undertake publicity and consultation. LPAs had discretion over how they informed communities and other interested parties about planning applications, although there were minimum statutory requirements. He explained that at Bridgend County Borough Council, they went beyond the minimum statutory requirements for notifying neighbours. On simple applications for a house extension, whilst the Order stated that they should give requisite notice by site display in at least one place on or near the land to which the application related for not less than 21 days; or by serving the notice on any adjoining owner or occupier, they tended to do both and also tended to extend the notification to a wider range of neighbouring properties. They also went beyond the minimum 14 day deadline for receipt of representations from Town and Community Councils by allowing 21 days. If the Town or Community Council could not meet that deadline, they regularly agreed extensions of time.

The Group Manager Planning and Development Services reported that individual Community Councils and the Town and Community Council Forum had proposed that the LPA should send copies of neighbour objections to them for the Councils to ascertain the strength of local feeling. He explained that unfortunately, they were not able to forward any neighbour comments on to the Town and Community Councils (TC)/Community Councils (CC) as that would be a breach of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Even if they had the neighbour's consent to forward their representation on to the TC/CC, they did not have the time or resources to redact each submission of personal information before doing so. In addition, the consultation and notification processes were undertaken concurrently, and they could not delay the process due to the statutory targets for determination. He suggested that Town and Community Councils could approach and advise their residents that they could, if they wish, send a copy of their representation on any planning application to the Community Council at the same time as they respond to the LPA.

A member referred to the LPA extending notification to a wider range of neighbouring properties and asked if there was a definitive distance. The Group Manager Planning and Development Services replied that there was no set distance and it was discretionary. They were only compelled to consult with the adjoining landowners or neighbours but they tried to consult further depending on the type of application. They would also use site notices in a location close to the development. They would prefer to get it right the first time and allow everyone the opportunity to comment rather than have to restart the process at a later date.

A member explained that he understood both why Town and Community Councils wanted to know what residents were saying and the issues with GDPR. He asked if it would be feasible for the LPA to advise the consultees that Town and Community Councils were engaged in the process and that they could make their concerns known

to the LPA and also to their Town and Community Councils as a statutory consultee. The Group Manager Planning and Development replied that they had to take care when providing information to residents and the wording of the consultation was indicated in statute. The Town and Community Council were not part of the decision-making process and it was not a function of the LPA to advise residents to contact Town and Community Councils to hear their grievances or air their views. Any comments made by external bodies were taken on board and addressed when the officer wrote his report.

A member referred to the 3 week consultation period and asked if it could be extended in light of the fact that most Town and Community Councils met every 4 to 5 weeks. The Group Manager Planning and Development Services replied that 21 days was a reasonable period taking into account the LPA only had 8 weeks to determine the application and if they failed within that period, the decision would be taken out of their hands. He understood the issues and explained that if there was a genuine reason to extend then this would be considered. Larger schemes clearly took longer than 8 weeks to determine but this had to be agreed with the applicant.

**RESOLVED:** The Town and Community Council Forum received and considered the report.

224. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022-23 TO 2025-26**

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) presented to the Town and Community Council Forum, a copy of the report that went to Cabinet on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022-23 to 2025-26 on 18 January 2022, for information.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) explained that due to the delay in the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2021, the Welsh Government did not publish its draft budget until 20 December 2021, or the Provisional Local Government Settlement until 21 December 2021. This was in line with the previous year but still approximately 2 months later than normal. As a result of the delay in announcements, the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy was not presented to Cabinet until 18 January 2022, prior to being submitted for scrutiny by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The final Medium Term Financial Strategy would be presented to Cabinet and Council on 22 and 23 February 2022, respectively, for approval. The proposed council tax for 2022-23 would also be presented to Council for approval on 23 February 2022.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) explained that in seeking to continue to meet the Council's identified priorities and protect its investment in Education and early intervention, Social Services and Wellbeing, and prioritise the most vulnerable in our society, they were proposing a number of changes in the 2022-23 budget. She referred to opportunities to raise additional income, alternative delivery models to ensure greater sustainability and efficiency, efficiency and property savings and changes to service provision.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) explained that the Council's MTFS was set within the context of UK economic and public expenditure plans, Welsh Government's priorities and legislative programme. The MTFS articulated how the Council planned to use its resources to support the achievement of its corporate priorities and statutory duties, including the management of financial pressures and risks over the next four years. She outlined the Welsh Government Provisional Local Government Settlement 2022-23, the settlement implications for 2023 to 2026, transfers into and out of the 2022-23 Revenue Settlement and specific grants.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) explained that there were a number of significant cost pressures they needed to fund within the increase, including additional funding to meet the teachers pay deal for the remainder of the current year and for next year, to meet the new requirements in relation to National Insurance contributions and to fund the introduction of the real living wage for care workers. During the current financial year and last year, the Council received monies from Welsh Government via a hardship fund which helped the authority to meet the additional costs and lost income experienced as a result of the pandemic. This grant would no longer be available in 2022/23, so the budget that was set would need to take account of any additional spend that they may still have in relation to the pandemic.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) concluded that the report was considered by cabinet on the 18th January and had now been to all of the scrutiny committees during January. The final budget proposals would go to cabinet on the 22nd of February and then to Council for final resolution on the 23rd of February.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) thanked the Town and Community Councils for forwarding their agreed precepts for the coming financial year as requested. These would be included as part of the final report to Council at the end of February.

A member referred to appendix B to the report, COM2 which related to the cessation of the tourism contract with AMA Associates who promoted Bridgend with a range of publishers. He said that it appeared that news coverage about Bridgend would reduce with potential implications for visitor numbers and the local economy. He asked if this was the only way tourism in the area was promoted and the impact at a time when staycations had increased by 40%. The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change (Section 151 Officer) replied that the Council used a number of ways to promote tourism and this was just one aspect. Work was ongoing to ensure Bridgend was promoted as much as possible both internally via the website and externally. This was having a positive impact and there were now more visitors coming to Bridgend.

A member was concerned that there was very little promotional material around South Wales, including in the train stations and in service stations on the M4.

The Leader confirmed that this was one strand of work that was undertaken to promote Bridgend as a tourist destination and they would continue to use the others. The number of tourists visiting Bridgend had reached record high levels over the last 12 months and the contribution to the Bridgend economy had reached a record high as well.

**RESOLVED:** The Town and Community Council Forum received and considered the report that went to Cabinet on 18 January 2022 on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022-23 to 2025-26 (Appendix 1).

## 225. **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER UPDATE**

The Community Asset Transfer (CAT) officer presented a report providing the Forum with an outline of the changes to Bridgend County Borough Council's Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy and the support and opportunities currently available to Town & Community Councils (T&CCs) to work with the Council and community groups to achieve the best management arrangements for public sector assets and services.

The CAT officer explained that the updated CAT Policy was approved by Cabinet in July 2019 and took account of the recommendations of the CAT Task & Finish group. The

main changes to the policy were the priority of assets; priority 1 sports pavilions, playing fields and Community centres, priority 2, playgrounds, free car parks and allotments and then priority 3 covering everything not included in priority 1 and priority 2. He explained that the document introduced a fast track system as one of the biggest criticisms they had received was the length of time it took to complete CATs. Where previously they required detailed business plans, now they only asked the submission of income and expenditure projections for a minimum of a 5-year period for the majority of CATs (but detailed business plans would still be requested for more complex projects, e.g. new builds).

The CAT officer outlined the position regarding CAT funding and resources and added that in October 2020 a Business Case for support under the Council's Change Management Fund of £266,461 was approved by the Corporate Management Board (CMB). This included the creation of three new fixed-term posts required to progress multiple CATs and to achieve the financial savings under the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). He explained that paragraph 4.12 of the report outlined in summary, the progress made particularly during the last two years of the COVID pandemic and Appendix B, also provided detailed information on the transfers that were being progressed. Details of eight transfers completed to date were included in the report and a further one had completed since the report was published.

The CAT officer explained that one of the most pleasing aspects of the Community Asset Transfers during the pandemic was that 10 out of 12 bowls clubs agreed to undertake the self-management of 11 bowls greens from 1 November 2020 while long-term leases were being progressed.

The CAT officer outlined progress on the strategic review of the 3 major parks. The first phase of the review was completed in May 2021. The remit for the Second Phase Review should be developed in consultation with Just Solutions to take account of the principles agreed by Cabinet / CMB and enable appropriate frameworks for individual strategies for Newbridge Fields and Maesteg Welfare Park to be progressed.

The CAT officer explained that the CAT staff resources had increased in the last few months and there had been a corresponding increase in progress made in that short period. Sadly, one member of staff resigned at the end of December and they were in the process of trying to recruit a replacement. In conclusion, they had had very good experiences of working with Town and Community Councils and looked forward to increasing partnership working going forward.

The Leader said that he was really pleased to see the progress that had been made and thanked the small team that was working on this for what had been achieved by working so closely with clubs and the Community Councils.

A member said that a Town Council had requested oncosts for various aspects in relation to Welfare Park but nothing had been forthcoming. There was a company looking at a way forward but they were unable to progress without the oncosts. The CAT officer replied that working with the Town Council would be a positive step forward however it would be difficult to provide oncosts and as a way forward they were looking at the cost of maintaining each particular aspect. Consultants were already discussing with Tennis Wales, resurfacing the tennis courts. They were looking to provide meaningful information going forward.

A member stated that Bridgend Town council had 5 lease arrangements for allotments and asked if it was the intention to transfer rights to the Town Council for those not subject to a lease agreement. The CAT officer replied that they were not looking to change the existing ones.

The Leader concluded that it was recognised that the team were working incredibly hard and he asked that a further report be submitted to the Forum in 6 to 12 months as this was a topic of particular interest to the Town and Community Councils.

**RESOLVED**

That Members of the Town and Community Council Forum noted the Council's:

- Revised CAT Policy designed to simplify the process and reduce delays.
- Associated funding under the CAT Fund that has been set aside to encourage and support the transfer of Priority 1 assets.
- And recognised that community owned and managed models of delivery could reinvigorate community assets and could be devolved to the local level in which they operated. The success of CAT was dependent on the proactive participation of willing participants – T&CCs and community groups - together with their ability and capacity to manage the asset.
- Commitment and willingness to engage with T&CCs and community groups to progress CATs.

226. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 17:10