

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD HYBRID, COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, /REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 16:00**

**Present**

Councillor M Jones – Chairperson

H T Bennett	A R Berrow	F D Bletsoe	S J Bletsoe
JPD Blundell	E L P Caparros	N Clarke	RJ Collins
HJ David	C Davies	C L C Davies	P Davies
M J Evans	N Farr	P Ford	J Gebbie
W R Goode	RM Granville	H Griffiths	S J Griffiths
D T Harrison	M L Hughes	D M Hughes	RM James
P W Jenkins	M R John	MJ Kearn	W J Kendall
M Lewis	J E Pratt	R J Smith	JC Spanswick
T Thomas	G Walter	A Wathan	A Williams
AJ Williams	HM Williams	I Williams	MJ Williams
R Williams	E D Winstanley	T Wood	

**Apologies for Absence**

S Aspey, J Llewellyn-Hopkins, RL Penhale-Thomas, I M Spiller and JH Tildesley MBE

**Officers:**

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Michael Pitman	Technical Support Officer – Democratic Services
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager

**59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor J Pratt declared a personal interest in Agenda item. 5. as a member of the British Red Cross Emergency Support Service.

**60. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:**

**Mayor**

Following the suggestion of Officers and with the agreement of the chairperson the meeting of the Development Control Committee scheduled for the 29th of December will be moved to Thursday 5th January 2023, to avoid the Christmas/ New Year period. Members calendars will be updated accordingly to reflect this change of meeting date.

Both the Deputy Mayor and I are continuing to fulfil Civic responsibilities across the whole of the county Borough and beyond.

From visiting schools and colleges attending evening concerts and having the privilege of attending numerous awards ceremonies it certainly is a busy time.

But a time to be reminded that there are people within the County Borough of Bridgend who go well beyond the call of duty to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Which brings me to a point that I would like to remind you all that the Nomination Process for Mayors Awards is now open. You should all have received an email message introducing the process and of course full details are also included on the BCBC web site. I look forward to the numerous applications.

Last weekend of course was a period of Remembrance where no doubt you all attended various Remembrance Services and Ceremonies across the County Borough.

Last Friday morning on your behalf I presented Great Western Railway with a poppy wreath that along with many others was conveyed to London. I was joined at the Railway Station by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant, The Mayor of Bridgend Cllr Tim Woods, Deputy Leader of the Council Cllr Jane Gebbie, the Chief Executive Mark Shepherd and many other local dignitaries.

It was quite a sight to see one carriage full of poppy wreaths.

Of course, the Remembrance Parade at Bridgend Town was a solemn occasion that was well attended especially by current and ex-service personnel. The public attendance and participation were incredible. These large public numbers just illustrate the respect and deep sincerity that our communities have for our Armed Forces. I have no doubt this respect was replicated right across the County Borough of Bridgend.

Last weekend I was invited to a presentation at Wildmill Community Centre to focus on Bridgend's relationship with a war time submarine HMS URGE. The presentation was jointly given by Francis Dickinson the grandson of the submarines captain and Councillor Steve Bletsoe.

There were many families' descendants present including remarkably the daughter of the captain of the ship a lovely, charming lady who introduced herself as Bridget.

HMS URGE was adopted by the people of Bridgend but was sadly lost in April 1942 off the coast of Malta. All 44 crew members perished. The submarine had hit a German sea mine during special operations.

It was not until 2019 and nearly 80 years later was the ship was discovered at the bottom of the seabed.

It was a very moving experience speaking with family descendants some of which were visibly moved during and after the presentation.

They all were very appreciative of the warmth and hospitality provided to them within Bridgend.

Family members also attended and laid a wreath at the Remembrance Ceremony on Sunday.

Could I take this opportunity to thank Bridgend Town Council for supporting this event and in particular to Cllr Steve Bletsoe and his wife Cllr Freya Bletsoe for their personal contribution.

There is no doubt this support raised the profile of the County Borough of Bridgend.

And finally, I recently attended Castle Bingo here in Bridgend where I was presented with a cheque for £2000 for the Mayor's Charity.

This will be placed into the fund to support those caught up in the dreadful situation in Ukraine.

Could I please thank all staff and members of Castle Bingo for this generous donation?  
Could I please also invite you to also make a donation?  
Perhaps instead of sending a Christmas Card a small donation to the charity would be more than an equal substitute to celebrate the Festive Season.

I will shortly be reaching out to all members and officers within the Authority with an invitation to make that donation.

I would also like to bring members attention to the fact the that before we next meet, in a fortnights time on December 1st will be World AIDS Day.  
World AIDS Day is a moment that we take time to reflect and remember on all those that we have lost to the HIV AIDS epidemic.

This year also marks 40 years since the creation of the Terrence Higgins Trust, named for Terry Higgins from Haverford West who was one of the first people to sadly die from AIDS in the UK. Terrence Higgins Trust works across the UK to support those living with HIV. Today, people living with HIV who are on effective treatment cannot pass on the virus and have a life expectance which is the same as anyone else.

However, many people living with HIV still face stigma due to outdated views. I welcome the work of the Welsh Government on stamping out this stigma as part of the HIV Action Plan for Wales.

#### **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Social Services**

Safeguarding Week 2022 is currently underway, and we have been working with partners under the banner of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board to develop a programme of educational events and awareness-raising activities.

The theme for this year is 'safeguarding our communities from exploitation', and we are highlighting this through a range of online and face-to face events aimed at professionals, children, young people and communities throughout the region.

This will include the launch of all-new National Safeguarding Learning and Development Standards by Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Social Services.

Closely aligned with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, the standards set out future expectations around knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for anyone working with adults and children who may be at risk of abuse, harm or neglect.

As well as the new standards – which are a first for Wales - a full events programme has been produced covering the entire week. This is available to view at the Cwm Taf website, which I would encourage members to take a closer look at and also for members to take a peek at the Sexual Exploitation display as you enter the Civic building.

I would also like to advise members about the work of two very worthy charities.

Firstly, the local Bro Morgannwg Baby Loss Support Group has been supporting bereaved families for more than ten years now, meeting on the first Wednesday of every month at the Princess of Wales Hospital between 7pm and 9pm.

The group is facilitated by two bereavement midwives and the meetings offer a safe, confidential environment where people can listen to the experiences of other bereaved mums, share their own experiences, and offer one another advice and support.

Secondly, the organisation CRY will be raising awareness of their work next week, and I would appreciate the support of all members, officers and members of the public which is very personal for me.

CRY, which stands for Cardiac Research In The Young, seeks to prevent cardiac deaths among young people by improving awareness, increasing the availability of screening, and supporting further research into the condition.

The charity also seeks to support people living with a cardiac condition as well as the family members of those who have not survived it.

CRY is currently supporting my daughter, son-in-law and three grandchildren who are all at risk of having a major cardiac event. Genetic testing is currently underway with the support of the charity as is the portable defibrillator donated to the family for use in an obvious emergency.

Having felt the impact of such a traumatic event in our family, I feel it is vitally important that I use the political platforms available to me to highlight this specific charity following the death of my 19-year-old grandson in January 2020. It in no way eases the pain of the loss Justin, but it may assist other families by raising awareness to these particular issues and I acknowledge the assistance that they have provided for us unavailable with the NHS.

Both CRY and the Bro Morgannwg Baby Loss Support Group provide important services for the people of Bridgend County Borough.

They are both deserving of our support, and I hope that members will let their constituents know of their availability.

Anyone who would like to find out more can obtain further information by visiting the websites for both charities or by visiting the members lounge where I have left a raft of resources for their perusal.

#### Cabinet Member – Communities

I have some excellent news that I would like to share with Members.

Thanks to the efforts of local residents, Bridgend County Borough has once again exceeded Welsh Government targets for recycling waste and diverting it away from landfill.

Latest figures have confirmed that we have achieved a 72.6 per cent recycling rate. This means that in terms of performance, Bridgend County Borough has been ranked as the second best area in Wales, with only Pembrokeshire scoring slightly higher.

What's more, we are one of just four local authorities who have not only passed the current recycling target of 64 per cent, but have already exceeded the forthcoming 2024-25 national target of 70 per cent.

This is a fantastic result. Each time Welsh Government raises the bar, local residents rise to the challenge to ensure that we are among the best in Wales, and I want to thank them for their ongoing commitment and participation.

I also want to thank the efforts of our dedicated staff and our waste partners, Kier.

As you know, Welsh Government has set a bold target to achieve zero waste in Wales by 2050 by moving to a circular economy which keeps resources in use.

Our collective efforts here in Bridgend County Borough are making a significant contribution towards delivering on this ambition.

#### Cabinet Member – Resources

I would like to ask Members to help spread awareness among local communities about Child Trust Funds.

Set up as a Government initiative for children born between the first of September 2002 and the second of January 2011, the scheme saw each child receive £250 to start a long-term savings account.

The funds within each account have remained untouchable until the children reach the age of eighteen.

As this is now coming to pass, HM Revenue and Customs have advised that thousands of matured Child Trust Funds have so far gone unclaimed.

This means that local eligible teenagers could potentially have savings waiting for them worth an average of £2,100.

An estimated 6.3 million Child Trust Fund accounts were set up while the scheme was in operation.

If a parent or guardian was unable to open one for a child, HMRC did it on the child's behalf, so there is a very good chance that children born between those dates will be able to benefit from it now.

The easiest way to find out is to visit the GOV.UK website and fill in an online form that will identify where the funds are being held or, if the trust fund provider is already known, to simply enquire at your nearest local branch.

With many eligible teenagers preparing to leave school or start university, an apprenticeship or their first job, the Child Trust Fund could offer them a much-needed financial boost, and I hope members will help to spread the word.

#### Cabinet Member – Regeneration

Together with Cabinet colleagues, I was able to visit Maesteg Town Hall recently for a look at how the works there are progressing, and I am happy to report that we were hugely impressed by what we saw.

Contractors Knox and Wells are finalising the installation of a new 'clear story' roof which will link the existing building with the newly created extension to create a new public entrance.

This section of the development will house a new foyer, a public café and a changing places facility.

Also featuring new, flexible performance space and a unique mezzanine balcony complete with a bar and studio, it is certain to become one of the community focal points when the building work has been completed.

During the restoration of the 141-year-old Grade II listed structure, a number of historical features have been uncovered which have subsequently been preserved and brought back into use.

While accommodating this extra work has had a knock-on effect on the planned opening, we are confident that the revamped and refurbished town hall will be ready to open its doors again next summer.

#### **Cabinet Member – Future Generations**

Members recently received an update on how the council is working alongside local support organisations to identify ways in which we can work together to help communities meet the challenges of the cost of living crisis.

The council is co-ordinating the response locally and is continuing to develop an approach alongside its key partners.

Meetings have already taken place in the Ogmores Valley and Pencoed areas, and more are due to take place in Maesteg and Kenfig Hill.

These meetings are specifically looking at how existing venues and events can adapt to become places where people feel a warm welcome and are supported during the winter months.

The meetings have proven to be a great opportunity for community leaders to find out about latest efforts and plans, and to make suggestions about how we can best work together to support local residents.

They have also been useful in avoiding the duplication of efforts - for example, in areas where food or warm banks may already be running – and for ensuring that local residents take full advantage of all existing support, ranging from community transport to school uniform grants.

The intention is to combine existing provision while developing new activities. For example, warm space grant money has been provided by Welsh Government, and once a formal offer has been made, the council will provide it to organisations who are supporting this provision within our local communities.

Awen have rolled out their own Warm Spaces project, encouraging people to spend more time in local libraries by offering a welcoming, comfortable environment with warm drinks and new activities.

Plans are also in place to develop this further by adding new sessions on arts, crafts and music to encourage greater participation.

As many residents are struggling for advice regarding energy, local job centres, BAVO and Employability Bridgend are holding events where local people can access advice and support.

At one of these events which was held recently in Maesteg Job Centre, participants were able to talk to key agencies such as Welsh Water about their circumstances and bills and were able to reduce some of their costs.

With the next planned event due to take place at Dyffryn Chapel in Caerau on Wednesday 30 November, a new cost of living webpage has been established on the council website which is designed to offer further advice and support, and to help keep people informed on latest developments and local events.

Accessing the right help at the right time can make a real difference to people who are struggling, and I hope that members will make use of these resources and encourage their constituents to take advantage of these free events.

#### **Cabinet Member – Education**

I would like to provide members with a brief update on the Welsh-medium childcare facility that we are establishing at Bettws.

As you know, this is one of three such hubs that we are establishing for the county borough, with a further three planned at Porthcawl, Bridgend and Blackmill as part of an overall £2.8 million investment into Welsh-medium childcare.

Built on the same site as the former Boys and Girls Club, the construction work has been largely completed, and we have now reached the point where we are preparing to showcase the facilities to potential providers on 22 and 23 November.

Designed to serve the Garw Valley and surrounding valleys gateway area, the Bettws hub will provide 16 Welsh-medium childcare places, plus six places for younger children aged up to two.

As the provision develops, it will offer out-of-school childcare provision and will operate for up to 51 or 52 weeks of the year.

We want the single-storey building to offer full day care from Monday to Friday, and it will feature new play space, quiet rooms, soft play facilities, an all-weather canopy, storage facilities, offices and a car parking area with room for seven vehicles.

The new hub will ably serve families throughout the Garw Valley who want their children to be educated through the medium of Welsh.

It also demonstrates our ongoing commitment towards increasing the number of local Welsh speakers while encouraging the Welsh language to prosper and grow.

#### **Chief Executive**

I have a very brief announcement for Members.

The UK Commission on Covid Commemoration is holding a national consultation on how the global pandemic should be remembered.

Some of the proposals so far have included setting appropriate dates for a national day of remembrance, suggestions on education for children, and marking key achievements such as the development of the vaccines and the contribution of volunteers.

We have been asked as a local authority for our thoughts on this, and I am compiling a response that can be sent back to the WLGA.

They will then formulate an official response to the commission which represents the views of Welsh local government.

I am sure that Members will have their own thoughts on how this could best be carried out, and that you may also want to consult with your constituents.

The deadline for the end of the consultation is Monday 5 December, so if you have any suggestions, please send them to me in advance of this date, and I will make sure they are included in our response to the WLGA.

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

I am sure that Members will have noted recent news coverage highlighting latest developments in the efforts to establish a £250m adventure resort in the upper Afan Valley.

With outline planning consent already in place from Neath Port Talbot Council, the authority was asked to approve a reserved matters application covering issues such as access, layout, landscaping, scale and appearance.

This is of course all taking place outside of Bridgend County Borough, but as it is close to our border, it will also have a knock-on effect in terms of employment, access, traffic, future investment and more.

In addition to the construction jobs that will be generated, developer Wildfox Resorts has estimated that the resort will employ approximately 1,000 people and will incorporate a 50-bed hotel, spa and restaurant, 570 lodges and facilities for biking and hiking.

We will be seeking to share in and capitalise upon the benefits that this ambitious project may offer, and with expectations high that work could begin on site next year, we will be keeping a very close eye upon its development.

In other news, a local couple have won a prestigious national Fostering Excellence Award for their hard work and dedication towards fostering children and young people across Bridgend County Borough.

Pete and Becky Walsh were presented with the 'Jon and Kathy Broad Special Recognition Award' at the Fostering Network's recent annual ceremony, which was held at Birmingham's Repertory Theatre.

The couple had been nominated by Bernadette Guy at Foster Wales Bridgend and were described as being 'exceptional foster carers who always remain focused on what is best for the children in their care'.

The couple, who are currently caring for a child with complex health needs, often have to attend hospital appointments which can be a hundred miles from home and are well known for supporting other carers and maintaining a positive, can-do attitude. I am sure that Members will want to join me in congratulating Pete and Becky, and to thank them for their inspirational dedication and hard work.

Anyone who is interested in finding out more about becoming a foster carer can do so by visiting the Foster Wales Bridgend website.

Finally, at the last meeting of Council, you may recall that a member queried the figure used to describe the monthly rough sleeper statistics that are reported to Welsh Government.



Because of the transient nature of rough sleepers, this total can change rapidly, sometimes on a daily basis, as people may have shifting patterns of moving between accommodation and rough sleeping, or even moving in and out of different local authority areas.

For Bridgend County Borough, figures on rough sleepers are collected throughout the month and verified by a multi-agency Homeless Cell which features third sector agencies as well as other partners.

The data they provide is analysed at the end of the month to identify the core group of regular rough sleepers at the end of that period.

This figure is then reported to Welsh Government to provide them with an overview of how many people are still sleeping rough at the end of the reporting period.

With this in mind, the most recent data provided by the Homeless Cell confirmed that the monthly figure for the end of October was 10.

It is also worth reminding members that anyone can report someone whom they suspect to be a rough sleeper by sending details to the Streetlink website so that the local council and homelessness agencies can offer appropriate support.

We are continuing to provide a wide range of services to keep homeless people warm and safe.

On that note, I hope that members are also encouraging their constituents to check their eligibility for the Welsh Government Winter Fuel Scheme.

This enables eligible households to claim a one-off £200 cash payment towards paying their winter fuel bills.

It is being offered in addition to both the Energy Bill rebate and the Winter Fuel Payment that is normally paid to pensioners.

Applications for the grant will close in February 2023, so there is still time for anyone who has yet to apply to do so.

Full details, including eligibility criteria, are available at the council website.

62. **PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

The Chief Executive presented a report on presentations that the Council receives from time to time from its key partners, which in turn, introduced representatives Huw Jakeway, Chris Barton and Councillor Pamela Drake from the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, in order for them to give an update on the work of the Service to Council.

Mr Jakeway firstly gave a brief introduction of the South Wales Fire Service, that had been born from local government reorganisation in 1996, where 8 County Councils which had their own individual Fire Brigades then went to the 22 local authorities. Arising from this, he advised that the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales then became combined fire authorities. He then passed over to Mr. Barton to give some financial context in terms of their submission.

Mr. Barton advised that the South Wales Fire Service covered the following County Borough's, that included a varying number of Fire Stations/establishments (47 in total) that also existed in each of these areas:-

- Bridgend
- Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Vale of Glamorgan
- Caerphilly
- Merthyr Tydfil
- Blaenau Gwent
- Torfaen
- Monmouth
- Cardiff
- Newport

He confirmed that each of the constituent Authorities committed a budget towards the operation of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service that was in proportion of the population of each of the areas (Bridgend being 147,892), and in terms of Bridgend, this equated to in the region of £7.5m (just under 10%) of the overall budget. The Service also was supported financially by a nominal amount of grant funding allocation. A large percentage of this budget he explained, went to employees, but this also included resource for the likes of Transport, Supplies, Training, Premises, Pensions and Capital Finance.

Mr. Barton confirmed that in terms of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service budget history, there had been a cumulative change in its revenue budget contributions over the last number of years. In 2021-22 there had been an underspend in the service of £3.8m due to an over-estimate in pay awards. However, given the recent increase in inflation and interest rate rises, this had now transformed into an estimated overspend of anything between £1m to £3m. He explained that this year's pay award was still being negotiated but it could well prove that the outcome of that would result in the year's overspend being assisted by last year's underspend. The future projection, was that in 2023-24, the budget consideration could account for a two year pay inflation in that year resulting in a further 10% being added onto the Services overall pay bill. He added that all 2022-23 overspends would be absorbed by the Service. The estimated potential £8.4m in financial pressures would equate to a 10.6% increase in the overall budget. The Service's draft Budget would be considered later this year, he further added.

In terms of the Service Medium Term Financial Strategy and the financial outlook, Mr. Barton shared with Members the following:-

<u>Year</u>	<u>Potential increase in Budget</u>
2023-24	10.6%
2024-25	2.0%
2025-26	2.1%
2026-27	1.7%

Mr. Jakeway then shared with Members the number of different services the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service supports, which included putting out wildfires and flooding rescues, supporting NHS colleagues, road traffic collisions and large animal rescues.

He added that the Service had also played a major role in community safety support, in incidents where fire is used to intentionally injure or kill.

The Service also reached out to schools, in order to educate young people about the dangers associated with fire. This included Fire Cadet courses for 14 – 18 year olds, including the Bernie programme where work had been undertaken at schools and colleges around the problem regarding deliberately setting of fires.

Mr. Jakeway also made reference to a Water Safety campaign that had been established in the Cardiff Bay location, in relation to safety measures connected with late night economy establishments and the public visiting these places and consuming levels of alcohol in an area close to water and the resulting dangers of this.

He advised that the Service undertook approximately 17,000 home safety checks each year, that included Fire Risk Assessments and involved the installation in homes of hardware equipment, as well as giving advice to homeowners etc about electrical safety measures residents should be mindful of.

The Service also had an active involvement with partner organisations around Sexual Abuse, Domestic Abuse and Human Trafficking, that included pathway signposting to referrals.

Mr. Jakeway then made reference to the Grenfell tragedy in London and that arising from this, the Service was actively looking at issues of cladding, particularly in any high-rise buildings, in order to check their fire safety resistance levels.

In terms of future challenges the Service faced, he confirmed that some of the main ones here were:-

- Industrial action (of Firefighters) due to pay dispute awards;
- Cost of Living crisis and the impacts of this;
- Governance and Funding Reform;
- Welsh Government's ambitions;
- Challenges of Climate Change; and
- Ageing and population challenges

Mr. Jakeway then referred to the operational issues of the South Wales Fire Service, where he advised that almost all the investment that was made went towards making communities safe.

Prevention was considered extremely important, where a considerable financial commitment was made towards educating the public about areas of fire safety.

With support from Public Health Wales, smoke detectors were fitted at some homes where residents were also given anti-crime advice.

He paid tribute to the Operational side of the service, which was often unseen when compared to Fire Fighters.

The Control Room was where incidents were first reported, where the base there was connected to other emergency services, for example the Police.

Following the conclusion of the presentation, the Mayor opened up debate by asking Members if they had any questions for the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service representatives.

The Deputy Leader noted that there may be industrial action at some point following a ballot that may be undertaken due to a challenge by trade union members to the

proposed pay award. She asked if industrial action did take place, what resilience was there as back-up for frontline firefighting staff etc, should there be any strike action.

Mr. Jakeway confirmed that there was a very heavily unionised workforce in place within the Service. An example of this, was that in 2013-14 when there was a pay dispute, 1,500 staff took industrial action and due to this, the Service deployed military support from the 'Green Goddesses'. However, this support was no longer available, so the service employed its own auxiliary firefighters which totalled around 65 in number. If any such strike action did take place in terms of specialised equipment, there would be a reduction to anything between 0 and 8 fire engines that would ordinarily be available to support service needs during any dispute.

Members expressed some concerns regarding this and the subsequent danger this would cause to the public.

A Member raised some concerns regarding climate change and due to this, the potential increase for grass and forestry fires. He asked if the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service had extra resources in place to deal with this

Mr. Jakeway confirmed that the Service was working collaboratively with Natural Resources Wales, in order to ensure that landowners manage vegetation etc on open areas and mountain sides, to ensure that any fire that may start there is managed and put out quickly by the emergency services. South Wales firefighters had in the past, also been assisting out in Greece where there had been some major fires on wasteland caused by the heat. In the case of any fire that did get out of hand and was spreading on land such as this, then aircraft could also be used to carry water and drop this over the area in order to extinguish the fire. He added however, that preventative measures and educating people was also so important in order to avert issues such as this occurring.

A Member referred to an operational response to problems associated with fire and the like. She noted that the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service visited schools in order to educate children of most ages. She asked if this was carried out as part of a set programme or was it also reactive upon request, if there was a problem with lighting of fires at any particular location.

Mr. Jakeway replied that the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service adopted both of the above methods.

She also asked, if Members or the public were aware of any issues with property or buildings where there may be health and safety risks such as cladding that is not fit for purpose, could they bring this to the attention of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service so that they could investigate.

Mr. Jakeway welcomed this, though ultimately any remedial or upgraded works to make the property safe, was the responsibility of the buildings Responsible Officer. He added that there may be problems that existed in certain high-rise buildings with cladding, however, there were tighter building regulations that were now in place regarding the safety of buildings to this end. The Service could audit buildings to see if they were safe, following any complaints of this type of nature being received and request that the Responsible Officer makes good these or if not, declares the building unsafe for habitable use.

A Member asked what role the retained Fire Brigade has in the County Borough and would the role extend now there were constraints that had emerged with regard to public finances.

Mr. Jakeway advised that the retained Fire Brigade were part of the wider South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and on a defined salary scheme. Some of these staff were on-call with others being whole time. The retained contingency had the same level of kit and training etc, as whole-time staff.

A Member asked if there were any plans to combine any working establishments such as the Fire and Rescue Service with other emergency services, for example the Paramedics, Lifeguard Services or even the Police.

Mr. Jakeway advised that there were no such firm plans for this in the Llynfi Valley at this time, however, it may be possible in other areas and options such as this could be considered going forward, where a sufficient case could be made for this. There were training difficulties however, for employers from the different services to cross over. An example being that whilst Firefighters were trained to deal with cases of trauma, there was insufficient budget available for them to be trained as, for example, a Paramedic.

The Member also noted that sometimes car vehicle owners parked their cars over fire hydrants which could result in a highway problem. He asked if there were any moves afoot to make this a criminal offence.

Mr. Jakeway advised that he had no knowledge that there were plans to enforce this activity, adding that it was fairly straightforward if there was an urgent need to access a fire hydrant to move any vehicles obstructing these with essential fire safety equipment.

The Mayor at this point of the meeting, thanked Officers from the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service for attending at today's meeting, giving their submission and responding to questions from Members.

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Chief Executive and the accompanying presentation be noted.

**63. SCHOOL MODERNISATION - PORTHCAWL WELSH-MEDIUM SEEDLING SCHOOL**

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support presented a report, seeking Council approval for a capital budget for the proposed Porthcawl Welsh-medium seedling school scheme's design and survey costs up to tender stage to be included in the Council's capital programme. This would be funded from Bridgend County Borough Council resources initially, on the assumption that costs will be recovered once Welsh Government has approved the re-submitted business justification case.

He explained that following desktop appraisal of options for developing a Welsh-medium seedling school in the Porthcawl area, a report was submitted to Cabinet in September 2021, who approved the submission of an expression of interest to Welsh Government in respect of the second tranche of the Welsh-medium capital grant. Welsh Government approved this in principle following a business justification case being submitted to them in May 2022. BCBC had recently been advised however, that this needed to be re-submitted, once tenders relating to the scheme have been returned.

The Welsh-medium capital grant commits Welsh Government to 100% of the scheme funding, but only upon their approval of the business justification case.

Council approval is now required, therefore, to include a capital budget for this scheme's design and survey costs (up to tender stage) in the Council's capital programme.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, advised that up front design/survey costs (required in order to develop the scheme to tender stage and

thereby meet Welsh Government business justification re-submission requirements) were currently estimated to be circa £370k.

These costs would need to be funded from uncommitted capital in the interim.

The Welsh-medium capital grant commits Welsh Government to 100% of the funding upon approval of the business case and permission for a budget for this scheme's design and survey costs (up to tender stage) to be included in the Council's capital programme is now sought from Council, on the assumption that costs will be fully recovered once Welsh Government has approved the re-submitted business justification case. Council approval will be sought to accept the risk in the interim, this being that should Welsh Government ultimately fail to approve the business case, the incurred design and survey costs (up to tender stage) would need to be funded by the Council as abortive revenue costs.

A Member whilst welcoming the report, asked why the proposal was for a Welsh Seedling School in this area rather than a Welsh Primary School.

The Cabinet Member – Education advised that the new school would cater for Nursery and Reception age children and there would be a proposal moving forward for the provision of welsh medium education for primary aged pupils in time and in conjunction with the further progression of the regeneration work ongoing in the Porthcawl location.

A Member asked why consideration hadn't been given to make provision for Welsh Medium education in other areas of the County Borough, for example in Pencoed.

The Cabinet Member – Education advised that due to the excessive areas of flood plain within the town it was difficult to build development in the area, however, in the Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP), consideration would be given for welsh medium education at Pencoed.

A Member noted that certain schools previously constructed in areas of the County Borough required extending, due to the fact that the size of the schools had not sufficiently met future new housing allocation in the area and any subsequent increased population that came with this. He therefore sought assurance, that this had been considered in this case.

The Cabinet Member – Education acknowledged this, but stated that a change of formula for Section 106 Agreement allocations had now been put in place, that would ensure that this problem in the future will significantly reduce.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support added his Officers and key Members, had worked closely with the Council's Planning Officers on the Replacement LDP and housing land allocations and with a reconfiguration of statutory planning guidance he anticipated this would help prevent cases of the above re-occurring in the future. He added that welsh local authorities now had a statutory duty to expand welsh language provision at its schools.

A Member asked for some assurance that the new school would reach capacity in terms of pupils and if there was any assurance that this would be the case, as opposed to it becoming over-populated with pupils. If this did not turn out to be the case, could the school possibly be used for alternative means of education

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support advised that the School Modernisation team had done some considerable research which strongly indicated that with the demand in the Porthcawl area and the growth of welsh language learning at an

early age in surrounding areas such as Cornelly and Pyle, that there would be no resulting excess spaces at the school upon it being constructed and occupied with pupils. This had been backed-up by survey work, he added. To date around £2.6m of funding had been secured by the Council for Welsh medium education provision.

In response to a question regarding a breakdown of the finance to support the provision of the new school, the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, advised that there was a budget of £676k allocated for the project, with application to Welsh Government for £370k funding in the interim to complete feasibility and design work etc. A consultation exercise would also be put in place on the proposal, involving a range of statutory stakeholders. A further progress report would be brought back to Members, should the need arise.

The Leader concluded debate adding that at present there was no current provision of Welsh medium education within Porthcawl.

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved a capital budget of £370k for the proposed Porthcawl Welsh-medium seedling school scheme's design and survey costs up to tender stage to be included in the Council's capital programme, initially funded from BCBC resources on the assumption that costs will be recovered once Welsh Government has approved the re-submitted business justification case.

64. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT - HALF YEAR REPORT 2022-23**

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to update Council on the mid-year review and half year position for Treasury Management activities and Treasury Management indicators for the current year, and to highlight compliance with the Council's policies and practices.

In terms of the present situation, she reminded Members that Treasury Management is the management of the council's cash flows, borrowing and investment, and the associated risks that run parallel with this.

She explained that 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 Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/2023 was approved by Council on the 23 February, the Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change added.

She was able to confirm, that the Council had complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements during the first 6 months of this year, with detail regarding its activity shown in Appendix A of the report.

The key points to note were:-

- Context in this period:
  - Ongoing conflict in Ukraine;
  - Period of increasing inflation and impact on the cost of living;
  - Increased interest rates. Increased from 0.75% to 2.25% at end of September and for some time, more than previously;

- Long-term borrowing at the end of September was £99.94m. Little change over the period of the report.
- BCBC was unlikely to need to borrow this year but this will be kept under review.
- The Council does invest its monies and in doing so ensures the security of the funding, the liquidity and then the yield from that investment. Investments consist of monies received in advance of expenditure and use of balances and reserves.
- At the end of September 2022, the sum invested was £98m – with other Local Authorities, Government and money market funds
- BCBC do take advice from its advisers regularly with regards to where our monies are placed.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, finally referred Council to Appendix A, which gave more details on the Treasury Management activity for this period.

A Member asked how long the Council's current Treasury Management advisors had been in place and should they mis-advise the Authority are they then in any way liable for this.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that the Council commissioned in this service, though the work was re-tendered on a regular basis. She added however, that there were very few such expert advisors for this field of work in the open market supporting local authorities, as it was such a specialist area. She further added, that the company would be covered if they gave un-sound or bad advice to a local authority such as BCBC.

The Member followed-up, by asking if the Council benchmarked the advisors performance in any way.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change replied that when the Council put its specification out to tender, it would ask for certain specialist information to be provided by the companies, so it could gauge and compare their expertise as financial advisors when it came to considering the award of the Contract. Companies such as this had to prove to local authorities that both the level and standard of advice meets the high level that is required. If this was not forthcoming, then the Council could challenge the advisor. She added that the current advisors had always given sound advice to date.

A Member asked if training could be given on the subject of Treasury management and borrowing/lending etc, for the benefit of new Members of the Authority.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change advised that this had been given to Governance and Audit Committee members as part of the Council's initial Member Development Programme, though it was scheduled to also be rolled out to all Councillors in the new year.

A Member asked the Cabinet Member – Resources how much interest the Council pays out per month or annually and conversely, how much it receives.

The Cabinet Member – Resources confirmed that he would provide this information outside of the meeting.

The Leader referred Members to Table 8 on page 24 of the report which gave details regarding interest expenditure and receipts, but he stressed this was at the time of the writing of the report and that these figures would probably change almost daily given the present economic climate.



**RESOLVED:** That Council noted it's treasury management activities for 2022-23 for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and the projected Treasury Management Indicators for 2022-23.

65. **COUNCIL TAX BASE 2023-24**

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, in order to seek Council approval for the estimated Council Tax base and Collection rate for 2023-24

She advised that the Council Tax base determined the amount of Council tax which can be raised to fund the Council's budget.

The Council tax base must be set by 31 December for the following financial year and it is used by Welsh Government to allocate the Revenue Support Grant for the coming financial year, as well as for the Council to calculate the Council Tax required to fund the budget for the year 2023/23.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, confirmed that the base represented the number of chargeable dwellings in the area expressed as Band D properties. This also took account of properties that BCBC think will come onto the rating list in the coming year.

In the report BCBC also proposed a collection rate of 97.5% for next year. This was the same rate as the current year and it is not the intention to increase this in any way, due to the current challenging economic circumstances globally, the cost of living crisis and the current collection rates.

A Member asked how the Council Tax Base differed this year from the previous year.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that the difference was based upon anticipated new properties that would come onto the register in the coming year.

Regarding this the Council had to make assumptions on not only what was coming onto the register, but when they would come on the rating list. Also, what had to be taken into account, was the number of residents in these properties that would have some sort of reduction and/or some level of financial support. This was to a level of degree therefore all estimated.

A Member noted that the collection rate last year had been based at 98.5%. This year the level of collection rate had been set at 97.5%. He asked if this rate was achievable given the current economic climate with increased mortgage rates and an increase to utility bills etc.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change advised that collection rates had increased since the inception of Covid-19 and this trend was continuing. Therefore, a rate of 97.5% was considered both reasonable and achievable.

The Cabinet Member – Resources reminded Members that people who were struggling with paying their Council Tax could be eligible to receive a reduction under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- Approved the Council Tax base and collection rate for 2023-24 as shown in paragraph 4.1 of the report.
- Further approved the tax bases for the town and community areas set out in Appendix A of the report.

66. **INFORMATION REPORT FOR NOTING**

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy, 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.

67. **NOTICE OF MOTION PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR STEVEN BLETSOE**

Councillor S Bletsoe gave an introductory speech on why he considered the Council should support the following Notice of Motion as proposed by him and seconded by Councillor D Harrison. He stated that in light of years of austerity from central government, which has seen BCBC budgets slashed year on year and departments in this authority referred to as "barely fit for purpose" and in light of the current Cost of Living crisis which is placing pressures on all Councils to produce a lawful, balanced budget for 2023/24:-

"This Council requests that the Cabinet reviews the CCRD agreement and if permissible considers seeking the agreement of ALL CCRD member Councils to negotiate the postponement or significant reduction of the scheduled CCRD payments for 2023/4, thus allowing authorities to set balanced budgets that maximise the resources available to protect services within their areas."

The Leader responded by confirming that in view of current financial restraints that included the recent increase of interest rates, cost of living demands (including increased utility bills) and high inflation etc, Cabinet would look to review all the Authorities joint working arrangements with key partner organisations amongst others, due to the fact that similar to other neighbouring authorities, it was essential that the Council made efficiency savings in all areas where there was scope to do so.

Council unanimously supported the Notice of Motion.

68. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:30