

**COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB / REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022 AT 16:00**

Present

Councillor M Jones – Chairperson

S Aspey	H T Bennett	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
S Easterbrook	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 Kearns
W J Kendall	M Lewis	J Llewellyn-Hopkins	RL Penhale-Thomas
J E Pratt	E Richards	R J Smith	JC Spanswick
I M Spiller	T Thomas	JH Tildesley MBE	G Walter
A Wathan	A Williams	AJ Williams	HM Williams
I Williams	MJ Williams	R Williams	E D Winstanley
T Wood			

Apologies for Absence

A R Berrow

Officers:

Jackie Davies	Head of Adult Social Care
Carmel Donovan	Group Manager - Older People
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Laura Griffiths	Principal Solicitor
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Michael Pitman	Technical Support Officer – Democratic Services
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Heidi Bennett Declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 –as she was an employee in a partner organisation noted in the response.

Councillor Richard Williams declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as a member of Pencoed Town Council as well as a member of the Development Control Committee.

Cllr Melanie Evans declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as a member of Pencoed Town Council with reference to the question from Cllr Tim Thomas.

Cllr Tim Wood declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as a member of Bridgend Town Council with reference to the question from Cllr Tim Thomas.

## COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022

Councillor Steve Easterbrook declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as he was a trader in Bridgend town centre.

### 70. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of 22/10/22 and 16/11/22 be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the changes below.

Councillor Ian Spiller was noted as absent for the meeting of 16/11/22 but was present for the meeting.

Councillor Norah Clarke was noted as present for the meeting of 16/11/22 but gave her apologies for the meeting.

### 71. PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVES OF CWM TAF MORGANNWG UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD

The Chief Executive presented a report to advise Members of a presentation proposed to be delivered to Council by representatives of one of the Council's key work partners, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB).

A PowerPoint was presented by representatives of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board.

#### **Questions to the Health Board:**

The Deputy Leader stated that we further wish to integrate our health and social care, however we have a different operating model to that of the rest of the health board footprint so has this been acknowledged by the health board.

A representative of the health board explained that the difficulties with Bridgend had been acknowledged and they were aware of the lack of facilities currently covering the Bridgend County Borough. He added that Rhondda Cynon Taf had 2 community hospitals in which they covered Merthyr Tydfil also. The aim was to use these facilities to also cover Bridgend for more specialist care like stroke patients that have been discharged from the Princess of Wales Hospital.

A Member explained that a relative was taken into hospital earlier this week with a suspected heart attack but had waited in an ambulance for approximately 30 hours in -3c temperatures. She provided another example whereby a neighbour of hers suffered a stroke and was told over the telephone that there was a potential 4 hour wait for an ambulance. Luckily, with the help of others they were able to take him by car to the hospital where he was seen immediately. She added that herself and another Member were at a Bridgend Care and Repair meeting whereby they were waiting for a representative from the health board to be sent to the group as they believed they could support some of the patients as well as waiting for over 70 DFG's from BCBC to allow patients to live in their own homes with equipment/adaptations etc. She asked what was being done to work with organisations such as Bridgend Care and Repair so that patients can be released from hospital and cared for in their home. She also asked if there was a way of utilising the facilities that were used during lockdown to care for these patients in the interim before they were able to be released to go home. On a more positive note, she made an unannounced visit to Princess of Wales a number of weeks ago and speaking with patients there, they had had very good things to say about the staff there and their only concerns were with waiting times for admissions, etc.

## COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022

The Health Board representative explained that with regards to Bridgend Care and Repair they were working closely with them and would look into the reasons why there was not a representative at the above meeting(s).

He explained that due to the Covid 19 pandemic we were able to utilise Ysbyty'r Seren to manage patients who did not need to be in hospital but were unable to go back to their own homes and there were the staffing and resources available to do this. However he agreed that something needed to be done and emergency planning was necessary and so this was something that would be looked at.

A Member thanked the Health Board representative for the recent meeting that he had with himself and fellow ward members. He explained that one of the things that was discussed was the pressures on ambulances and hospitals due to the winter pressures, but in relation to access to primary health care he noted that there had also been a spike in residents struggling with this. He explained that recently he had written to the practice manager of a local doctor's surgery on behalf of two elderly patients and although they did manage to get appointments for them, it was not a sustainable way for the elderly to have to get an appointment. These he felt should be more readily available for patients. He asked for reassurance on how the health board were going to deal with the added pressures and number of people trying to ring a surgery and the E-consult service to get an appointment.

The Health Board representative agreed that there were significant pressures in this area also and they have been made aware of large volumes of calls being made to practices, with there having been a lot of frustration by members of the community regarding this. He explained that his staff were working closely with GP practices to establish better ways of gathering information on GP access, in order to see how many calls were being managed and handled and it was evident that different practices managed their appointment booking systems differently, which may be why there were variations between practices. He asked that if Members had specific issues to raise to ensure that they get in contact with the health board and this information will be fed back to the GP practices to ensure that they were working to improve this situation where they can.

A Member stated that Wales had a long and proud history with the NHS however health services were a worry in Wales at present. He asked what safeguarding measures and support mechanisms were put in place for the staff, many of whom were at the front line dealing with this crisis and many would also be residents of the county borough.

The Health Board representative agreed that staff were under immense pressures at the moment with the demands that have been placed on them. He explained that there was a very well-developed wellbeing service for staff across the region that involves access to an employee assistance programme which provides counselling and wellbeing support over the telephone and online which helps with stress at work or in home life. He added that the health board regularly met with staff and listened to their concerns and took on board any suggested areas for improvement that could be made in order to better support their wellbeing

A Member asked in relation to the Covid vaccines, why many residents were being sent to a different area to receive it when they had a vaccine centre more closer to their home. The Health Board representative explained that when the model was changed at the start of 2022, whereby Ravens Court was no longer to be used as a centre, the health board struggled to find a facility that could enable proper storage, access to patients, parking and the size of such a facility. However, patients could choose to change their appointment location if they feel their allocated location was too inconvenient.

A Member mentioned that in Porthcawl, the local GP surgery is so difficult to get into contact with or to book an appointment there, that residents are travelling to A&E to be seen. The Health Board representative took this feedback away and stated that he would look into it.

Further questions were asked of the health board representatives which can be found at the recording link [here](#) together with the responses.

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the presentation as referred to at paragraph 4.1 of this report.

72. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:**

**The Mayor:**

"It certainly is a busy period as we enter the festive season. The mayor's office continues to receive many enquires and applications for Mayoral visits. I am grateful to the Deputy Mayor and his consort for stepping in on those occasions we have multiple requests. On a personal note, on your behalf, I have attended many events that range from Christmas Community Events Shop window judging competition Carol Services Hospital visit Annual General Meetings of various organisations.

Civic events outside of the County Borough It was a pleasure to accompany the respective Town Mayors at both Maesteg and Bridgend to witness the illumination of the Christmas lights. There was incredible public attendance at both events which just demonstrates the importance and enthusiasm the public have for the festive season.

Could I thank both Town Councils for organising these events.

I would also like to thank Mr Lee Jukes and his team from Bridgend FM. His enthusiasm energy and skill in entertaining the large crowds at these two events was incredible. To date I have been called many things in my life but to be introduced by Lee Jukes to the large crowd at Maesteg as the "Cool Mayor of Bridgend" is something I shall not forget. It was also an honour and privilege to attend the Emergency Services of South Wales Christmas Carol Service at Llandaff Cathedral. The Carol Service was attended by representatives and families of South Wales Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust.

The South Wales Police Band was accompanied by the Kenfig Hill and District Male Voice Choir. It was a proud moment for me at the Cathedral to receive compliments from many Civic dignitaries from across South Wales who went out of their way to praise the incredible "Spine-Tingling" performance from the choir. Once again thank you to all at the Kenfig Hill and District Male Voice Choir you done us proud.

Could I please encourage you all members and officers to donate to the Mayors Charity Appeal? Could I suggest that instead of sending a Christmas Card to each other you donate to the charity fund. Details of how the donation can be made will shortly be circulated on the BCBC website.

And finally, please do not forget about the Mayors Award application process. I expect to see an avalanche of applications. There is so much good work being carried out in our communities, work and commitment that deserves recognition, so please you're your applications in by 13th January 2023

Details of the application process can be found on the council website.

Last but not least one of our members today is celebrating their birthday. Can I please say happy birthday to Councillor Elaine Winstanley I hope you have a lovely day and a better evening.

**Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services:**

As this is the first time that we have met as a full Council since the publication of the Child Practice Review following the murder of five year old Logan Mwangi, I would like to provide members with a brief update on the progress that has been made on implementing the report's recommendations.

You will have seen that as an authority, we have offered a full and unreserved apology to Logan's father, Ben Mwangi, and all who knew and loved Logan.

As we stated at the time, all relevant agencies, including the council, have accepted the findings of the Independent Child Practice Review panel which has highlighted a number of opportunities for strengthening our practice.

With an Improvement Board in place to oversee progress in the improvements required within children's social care, we are actively working alongside partners in the Cwm Taf Regional Safeguarding Board to improve our practice and the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding as highlighted by the review.

Children's services must improve the quality of practice, how our practice is quality assured, and the management oversight.

As we know that Mr Mwangi was not contacted as he should have been, we have acted to provide clear guidance to staff on the importance of contacting parents with parental responsibility if their children are on the child protection register.

We are implementing changes, such as a new model of social work practice, to improve the ways in which we work with children and families, and how agencies work together to share and act on information to safeguard and protect.

We are also taking steps to ensure people throughout Bridgend County Borough are better informed and have confidence in how to report any safeguarding concerns that they may have.

Throughout this difficult process, we have been entirely transparent, and have fully co-operated with the review panel to ensure that all opportunities for learning have been identified.

Alongside our partners in health, we have expressed deep sorrow that our safeguarding and child protection endeavours were not enough to prevent Logan's murder and have made a public commitment towards our absolute priority to make them as effective and as thorough as possible.

Logan's tragic death, the media coverage of the trial of his murderers, and the subsequent revelations about the role of each agency generated a great deal of comment and debate.

While fully embracing and taking full responsibility for the areas where we need to improve and do better, I must also admit to feeling disappointed at how this tragic incident was nevertheless used to try and score political points on a national level.

## **COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022**

Some of those comments not only appeared to wilfully ignore the findings of the child practice review, they attempted to unfairly link individuals directly to the tragedy, and I found this to be particularly distasteful.

Throughout this entire process, our thoughts have remained with Logan, and all who knew, loved or cared for him. The impact of his passing will always remain with us as an authority, and in his memory, we are determined to do all that we can to improve our practice for the benefit of vulnerable children and adults alike.

As a large part of our effort to deliver improvements involves addressing our ongoing recruitment issues, we are currently running a campaign which is encouraging people to 'give the gift of care' this Christmas.

As a council, we strongly value the role of all our social care and social work workforce. We want to celebrate and promote what they do, and the many opportunities that are available for making a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable members of the local community.

Designed to coincide with the 12 Days of Christmas, the campaign highlights the variety of job opportunities that are available within the council's social care teams. It emphasises the need for social care staff to provide physical, emotional and social support for local people, and features existing employees who talk honestly and realistically about their work, the impact it has and the support they receive from the council.

The campaign seeks to make people aware that a wide range of opportunities are available – from care home staff, reablement workers who care for people in their own homes and advanced mental health practitioners to social workers, occupational therapists and even social work apprentices and funded degree courses.

Anyone who is interested in finding out more can do so by visiting the job pages at the council website, so I hope that members will help us to make as many people aware as possible.

### **Cabinet Member - Resources**

I am sure that members will have noted the announcement from Welsh Government on the draft budget settlement for next year, and that Bridgend County Borough Council is set to receive an increase of 7.7 per cent for 2023-24.

I would like to express our gratitude towards Welsh Government, in particular the First Minister, finance minister and local government minister, for once again listening to the concerns of local councils and the Welsh Local Government Association about the huge pressures that we continue to face.

Any increase to our core grant funding is always welcome, and we will of course ensure that the money can be used as effectively and as efficiently as possible.

At the same time, the increase must be considered against a wider context of increased costs, additional demands and an underlying rate of national inflation which remains significantly high.

This is not spare or extra money. Following the impact of national austerity measures, Brexit, the global coronavirus pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, the last few years have been among the most challenging that local authorities have ever had to face.

Nevertheless, this is still good news, and deserves to be celebrated as such.

Work will now take place to examine the draft settlement in closer detail in order to determine how far the increase is likely to help us meet the additional costs that we face, and whether it can be used to ease some of the reductions in services that we may potentially need to make.

**Cabinet Member - Education:**

There have been a number of changes in senior school personnel recently that I would like to share with members.

I'm delighted to confirm that following the retirement of Andrew Slade, Mike Stephens, the current Deputy Headteacher of Cynffig Comprehensive, will take up the position of Headteacher of Porthcawl Comprehensive in January 2023.

At Cwmfelin Primary, head teacher Julie Morgan has accepted a secondment as an improvement partner for the Central South Consortium. Her deputy, Joanne Edwards will serve as acting headteacher in Julie's place.

Josh Slade at Litchard and Claire Merfield at Maes Yr Haul primary schools have both been appointed acting deputy headteachers.

At Croesty Primary, Alan Poole has reverted to his substantive position as deputy headteacher at the school, and Claire Nicholas has taken up the position of head teacher.

Meanwhile, Chris Jones has become interim executive headteacher for both Llangynwyd Primary and Tynyrheol Primary schools.

The former deputy headteacher of Llangynwyd Primary, Kelly Kehoe, has become the acting head for the school.

Finally, Richard Edwards, the former head teacher of Tynyrheol Primary, has taken up a position with the National Academy of Educational Leadership.

Rachel Warner, who was substantive deputy head teacher, has become the new head of school.

I am sure that members will join me in wishing them all every success.

**Cabinet Member - Regeneration:**

I'd like to ask members to help spread word about the recent launch of free Wi-Fi access across all town centres in Bridgend County Borough.

Introduced in order to increase connectivity between residents, businesses and visitors, the service is free to use and is available within Bridgend, Porthcawl, Maesteg and Pencoed.

All people need to do in order to take advantage of the new service is to search their Wi-Fi network settings for 'BCBC Free Wi-Fi' and then enter their email address.

The free Wi-Fi means that people can now browse the internet, work remotely from town centre premises, check their emails while waiting for a bus or train, and more.

This represents the latest positive investment into the county borough, and I am sure that it will be of great benefit to businesses, residents and visitors alike.

I would also like to highlight how taxi marshals are helping revellers to enjoy a safe journey home from Bridgend town centre during the festive season.

Working in pairs on Friday and Saturday evenings between 10pm and 4am, the taxi marshals are supporting people in using the taxi ranks on both Market Street and Derwen Road.

Liaising closely with South Wales Police, they are also helping to prevent potential disruption, and are ensuring that everyone can leave the town centre safely and without any trouble.

They are proving to be highly popular with revellers, and are also supporting taxi drivers by defusing and deterring potential incidents before they can occur and escalate.

The service is being provided as part of the Safer Streets initiative, and I am sure members will want to congratulate the taxi marshals for their good work.

**Cabinet Member - Communities:**

I want to give members an update on the exhibitions that have been taking place as part of the pre-application consultation over a new green energy Hybont plant planned for the Brynmenyn area.

A great deal of debate has been taking place on social media recently this proposal, and because a huge amount of misinformation has already circulated, we have been encouraging people to come and find out more about the plans, and to get their facts directly from the experts.

The exhibitions, which have been held at Ynysawdre Swimming Pool, have been attended by hundreds of residents. They were able to speak directly to Japanese specialists Marubeni as well as the council's energy team, and had an opportunity to discover how the technology is already in use across the UK and Europe.

I think it is fair to say that the event generated robust and lively debate, and that the attendees were able to express their concerns regarding the safety, size and location of the proposed plant.

Unfortunately, it would appear that much of these concerns were also based upon misinformation and rumour.

The exhibition team made efforts to address this, and explained that the Hybont plant forms part of a new move towards tackling climate change by increasing the use of clean renewable energy and decarbonising vehicles.

This has already seen the safe, effective introduction of 22 new hydrogen buses in London – the equivalent of removing 836 petrol cars and saving 1,848 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> – while in Aberdeen, 15 hydrogen buses have already jointly travelled more than a million miles while saving 1,700 tonnes of emissions.

With hydrogen-powered waste and recycling trucks being successfully used in areas such as the Wirral, the Bridgend project represents a £31m investment that could ensure we are at the forefront of the increasing use of sustainable energy in everyday life.



The proposed new plant would be based alongside existing industries within Brynmenyn Industrial Estate where it would occupy a small, extensively landscaped site, and the only by-product it would produce is oxygen. When used, the fuel itself produces water.

The exhibition team also reassured people that the proposed plant is only at the pre-application stage, and encouraged everyone to submit their concerns so that they could receive an official response based on actual information and hard facts.

It is clear that a great deal of this misinformation remains, and that further work will be required to ensure that people are properly informed about the plant and what its impact will actually be.

I hope that members will support these efforts. We are organising additional briefings for local councillors, MPs and MSs to ensure that they are fully informed, and I will bring you further updates as this situation develops.

**Cabinet Member – Future Generations:**

I am sure that members are, like me, being regularly contacted by worried or distressed residents who are concerned about how they are going to manage during the cost of living crisis.

In recent weeks, I have become aware of several cases where people have reported having to cancel wi-fi broadband access due to costs or because they have hit the limit for their mobile data capacity.

This is having an adverse impact against their efforts to stay online, complete job applications, access school learning or online training, and much more.

The good news is that help is at hand.

Members may wish to let their constituents know that as well as being able to access free internet and computer services through local libraries, the National Databank is available to offer support.

Working alongside a network of community partners and telecommunication companies such as Virgin Media, Three and Vodafone, the National Databank currently provides free internet connectivity data for more than 500,000 people across the UK.

This ensures that people can stay in touch with family and friends, apply for and attend job interviews, use the internet to search for essential information on health or other important issues, and make full use of the increasing move towards digitised public services.

Furthermore, cheaper broadband packages are also available for people who receive specific benefits including Universal Credit and Pension Credit. With tariffs starting from just £15 a month, this offers another way for people to maintain access to fast, efficient internet services.

Anyone who wants to find out more about how the National Databank can help should visit [goodthingsfoundation.org](http://goodthingsfoundation.org), while the Ofcom website features full details on cheaper social tariffs.

**Chief Executive:**

## COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022

With regard to the remedial work to correct legacy issues resulting from failing wall installation in Caerau in 2012 to 13, I previously advised members on how we'd received informal endorsement from the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James, that the business case we'd submitted to Welsh Government for funding to address all installation working had been successful.

We are of course extremely grateful to Welsh Government for their support and for working closely with us to resolve this matter. The business case was submitted because, regrettably and through no fault of their own, a significant number of householders have been living in conditions over the past decade that are unacceptable, and have not received the benefits of enhanced insulation and increased energy efficiency that the original retrofit schemes had intended to bring about.

While we have now received a formal letter from the Minister verifying her approval, for clarity, we are still waiting for the grants terms and conditions confirmation letter - and to be absolutely clear, we have certainly not yet received the funding that has been allocated to us.

I understand there has been some considerable interest and perhaps consternation from some Members as a result of something the Minister said on television on Sunday. To be frank, I wouldn't read too much into this. Though I understand Members' concern, I genuinely believe it is simply a misunderstanding over the different use of language, and too much can be made of this.

To reassure you therefore, Welsh Government and ourselves are very much clear on the situation and on the same page, and I have spoken to the Minister's office today at some length. So from the minister's point of view, I think it's fair to say she has given ministerial approval - so as far as she is concerned, the money is allocated to Bridgend, and she is expecting us to get on with it.

I think from our point of view, yes, the funding has been awarded and it will be forthcoming. We're clear on that. But the way these grants work, unfortunately, you don't simply walk out of Cardiff Bay with £2.65 million. What actually happens is that we await the terms and conditions grant letter. Ordinarily, the funding is claimed based on actual expenditure retrospectively, and we know that it is profiled over three financial years.

To be clear, therefore, the funding is now confirmed, and I want to reassure you that there will therefore be no further delays because we are all very clear that it is forthcoming, and we are progressing the initial steps and the initial work in line with the approved business case. There is no delay from anything that has happened, or anything that has been said.

Just as an additional point, Welsh Government officials have helpfully confirmed that spend in advance of the grant letter can be incurred if necessary, and that may well be the case.

I will confirm some of the detail of the first steps later in my statement. However, we do know that because approval has taken longer than anticipated that we will have to go back to Welsh Government to talk to them again about some of the current profiling of the expenditure, recognising that approval has probably come six months later than we originally anticipated, and those original time scales have changed.

I'll just give you an example of that. We need to be very clear that this is where we need to take expert advice that we can still deliver in the way that was originally intended. In the original business case, it was intended that the external wall insulation work and internal wall insulation work removal would begin in November 2022. Obviously, that is

not now going to happen. Therefore, we can assume that that will move back six months and it may be about May 23. I don't think that will be a problem. However, what we do need to be clear on is where it was originally envisaged that the reinstatement of external wall installation and internal wall installation would have been in June 23, If you take that six months on, that would now be November or December 23. Now I simply don't know the answer to that. I would need expert advice whether that is feasible or whether that is sensible to do that in the winter period. And that's the kind of thing that we need to check with Welsh Government, to make sure that we get the profiling of that expenditure correct.

In total, Welsh Government have confirmed that we will have a grant of £2.65 million from them, and the council of course has matched the sum of £855,000 against this in its capital program.

Members will recall that wall installation work was originally carried out on 104 homes under the national Community Energy Savings Program and ARBED initiatives in 2012/13. Unfortunately, there continues to be a great deal of inaccurate misreporting and social media comment regarding this matter, despite various clarifications being issued over recent years So for absolute clarity, the council's involvement was limited to 25 properties where we administered ARBED funding for carrying out the original work. Welsh Government allowed local authorities to bid for ARBED funding to supplement existing CESP schemes being run in their areas. The council had no involvement in the work of those other 79 properties where work was carried out under the Community Energy Savings Program in Caerau, and importantly, that is a fact confirmed by Ofgem, the relevant national energy companies and government departments themselves.

However, it is important to note that our intention is to address the failed installation at all 104 homes, and to ensure that the properties where work was funded by the separate schemes are all included in the remedial work.

Clearly, we have a great deal of sympathy for all of the householders impacted by this matter, and a desire to improve their homes as quickly as possible. In doing this, we will provide householders with a permanent, positive, long term solution which will be delivered over a period of approximately two years during 23/24 and 24/25.

The intention is that those eligible householders who choose to participate in this revised scheme will benefit from homes that will become better insulated and more energy efficient, which of course is particularly important during the current cost of living crisis and at this time of hugely increased energy costs.

Again, just for absolute clarity, unfortunately, as you know, this is not just a case of just putting scaffolding up and going straight to work to repair the properties. The first step of the agreement with Welsh Government is to commission a program manager and a technical expert, and to engage the relevant householders so essential technical surveys can take place before we then procure a relevant contractor to carry out the work.

Importantly, to support this, we also intend to appoint a community liaison officer who can work closely alongside residents and act as a single point of contact for them. The actual physical work, therefore, is currently planned and phased, as I say, to take place during the financial years 23/24 and 24/25, subject to confirmations around the feasibility of carrying out the work in those particular seasons.

This, of course, will need to be very carefully managed, so it is absolutely vital to ensure that qualified experts are in place who can deliver on this and monitor quality standards. I would make the point, of course, that we need to learn very carefully not just from

previous schemes in Bridgend, but indeed elsewhere in the UK, to make sure that this is done properly with the appropriate quality standards. So what we all want is to deliver this as soon as possible. We are also minded that we do need to take the appropriate expert advice.

So in short, as the Minister indicated, we are getting on with it.

To avoid further delays, we have already initiated the procurement exercises necessary for engaging with the relevant experts prior to receiving that final award letter from Welsh Government and are keen to make further progress as quickly as possible on this important work.

Clearly, we want to make necessary improvements to the affected homes as soon as possible, but as I say, we do also need to learn from the deficiencies in the way that previous programs have been managed. I think that it is really, really important that we do that.

I'm sure members will welcome this long-awaited positive news, and as the project develops further and takes greater shape, I will of course provide additional updates. This will include details of an intended meeting early in the New Year with all local members in Caerau, members of parliament and members of the Senedd, as soon as that Welsh Government confirmation is in place with details of the program, timescales and profiling, and they have told me they intend getting that to us before Christmas.

The intention is that once we hold that initial meeting, we will also take soundings from local members within their communities about the best way of engaging with local residents. Clearly, the balance here again is that when we are going to do that we do need to have sufficient information to be able to adequately answer their likely questions.

I hope that gives you a comprehensive briefing. What I will say is that, as always, I am always happy to answer additional questions or meet with members as appropriate if there is any more information that you require, and I have committed to ensuring that you are kept up to date as necessary moving forward.

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

I am sure that members will have noted the recent extensive media coverage around cases of Strep A and scarlet fever.

The rise in infections this year has mainly affected children aged under 10, and has been linked to several tragic deaths around the UK.

While this has generated headlines and has triggered widespread concern among parents and carers, Public Health Wales and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board are reassuring and reminding people that cases still remain rare, and that children have a very low risk of contracting the disease.

The increase in cases across the UK has largely been attributed to a return to familiar social patterns following two years of pandemic conditions, and with hospitals and GP surgeries already reporting huge pressures upon their services, people are being asked to remain calm and to follow advice and guidance.

To support this, a series of frequently asked questions have been published to the Public Health Wales website along with up to date information on how you can access further support.

Members may wish to inform their constituents that this guidance is available.

Members may also be interested to know that a £1.2m upgrade is underway at Coychurch Crematorium.

The work is focusing on improving the Flower Court at the rear of the main building, and extending it out onto the grassed area adjacent to Crallo Chapel.

The intention is to help people to exit the chapel more smoothly, provide easier access to some of the facilities and avoid delays to services which sometimes occur due to a build-up of people in this area.

As a listed building which has won awards for its unique design, the extension work has been carefully tailored so that it reflects the unique character and history of the crematorium.

It is being overseen by Welsh architect Jonathan Adams, whose other projects have included the Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay and the Sherman Theatre refurbishment in Cardiff.

The project is expected to be completed in time for summer 2023, and arrangements are in place to ensure that the crematorium can remain operational throughout the work.

In other news, I was pleased to note that a further four children's play areas have benefitted from a £500,000 investment recently and can now offer inclusive play equipment suitable for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

The upgraded play areas, which are located in Ogmere Vale, Porthcawl, Aberkenfig and Tondy, include facilities ranging from inclusive roundabouts to new multi-play units, and represent our ongoing commitment towards providing facilities that are accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

Finally, South Wales Police are continuing to investigate the circumstances that led to the discovery of two deceased infants at a property in Wildmill last month.

Two men, aged 37 and 47, and a 29-year-old woman who were arrested on suspicion of concealing the birth of a child, are all currently on police bail.

No further details have been revealed, but the council is offering its full co-operation to officers while the investigation continues.

We are also reminding the local community of the need to avoid speculation, and to ensure that they contact police with any relevant information which could support their enquiries.

#### **74. AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy presented a report which sought Council approval to an amendment to the Constitution to reflect the revised financial thresholds within the Contract Procedure Rules to take effect from 1 January 2023.

She explained order to procure goods, services and works above £5,000 a service must obtain three quotes. This has proved to be unmanageable due to the volume of

quotations across the Council, leading to delays on service delivery. Further details on this were at section 4 of the report.

The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy explained that A benchmarking exercise has shown that an increase to £10,000 for obtaining three quotations is in line with neighbouring councils. A report was presented to Cabinet on 13 December 2022 seeking approval to amend the lower financial threshold from £5,000 to £10,000 for obtaining three quotations within the Contract Procedure Rules and recommending to Council an amendment to the Constitution to reflect those revisions.

The Cabinet Member Resources stated that the report was deliberated at Cabinet yesterday and it was noted that the cost of living crisis as well as the invasion on Ukraine by Russian troops had driven costs to an unmanageable level and therefore it was necessary to increase the threshold from £5,000 to £10,000.

A Member asked that this report and a review of the threshold be undertaken after 6 months and also for it to be discussed at the Governance and Audit Committee.

A Member asked what safeguards are in place to ensure that there was no carving up of larger procurement into sub £10,000 procurement slots.

The Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy outlined a number of controls that were in place and added that the procurement team perform regular audits on activities as does the Internal Audit service. There were also training sessions recently provided to all staff who procure or commission goods/services and so staff were clear on the procedures to be followed.

The Leader explained that local companies were always looked at and sought after for procurement activities and this was always at the heart of the decision making where possible.

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved an amendment to the Constitution to reflect the revised financial thresholds as set out at paragraph 4.5 to take effect from 1 January 2023.

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

**Councillor Alan Wathan to the Cabinet Member – Resources**

Can the Cabinet Member – Resources provide me with the risk assessment of Short Term Loans to local authorities under the adopted BCBC procedures?

**Response:**

Treasury management is the management of the Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risks. The Governance and Audit Committee has been nominated to be responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) and policies.

Treasury risk management at the Council is conducted within the framework of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) '*Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice*' 2017 Edition (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve a Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) before the start of each financial year. The CIPFA Code also requires the Council to set a number of Treasury Management Indicators, which are forward looking parameters and enable the Council to measure and manage its exposure to treasury management risks,

and performance against these indicators are reported to Members regularly throughout the financial year.

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy, was reported to and approved by full Council on 23 February 2022, and it sets out clearly the investing limits for all counterparties. Specifically in relation to local authorities it sets the following lending limits:

Local authorities & other entities:

Time limit: 25 years,  
Counterparty limit: £12 million,  
Sector limit: £unlimited.

In summary, the maximum than can be lent to any single local authority at any time is £12 million, for a period no longer than 25 years. The total amount this Council can lend to all local authorities cumulatively is unlimited.

The Council regularly lends to other local authorities as it is a well-established practice across the sector and provides a high level of security and a low level of risk, with a commensurate level of return. Local authorities are regarded as very low credit risk investment counterparties. As public sector organisations they are far less subject to the type of market forces that can make banks and other businesses insolvent and although they may merge, split or otherwise change, they and the functions they provide are unlikely to cease to exist.

Most local authorities are not rated by credit rating agencies, however those that do possess strong ratings.

All investments are made in line with the advice of the Council's Treasury Management Advisors, who were appointed via a competitive tendering process. The majority of investments this Council makes to other local authorities are less than 1 year, although one recent investment has been made for a period of 2 years, with a value of £5 million to July 2024. All other investments with other local authorities are for less than 1 year. To help to reduce risk, this Council also does not invest up the maximum permitted and approved by Council. The approved limit per authority as noted above is £12 million, however the maximum amount lent is usually no more than £8 million in total, and this would be across 2 separate amounts and timelines and/or durations.

Currently we have investments with other Local Authorities of £41 million, which is spread over 9 different local authorities, with average investment of £5 million, and with maturity dates falling across financial years as follows:

2022/23	£11,000,000
2023/24	£2,500,0000
2024/25	£5,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£41,000,000</b>

This Council has not been subject to any failure of any other local authority to repay its debt on time **and** with the associated interest due. The Council's Treasury Management Advisors have confirmed that:

***'.....the intervention and support provided by central government underlines the credit worthiness of the local authority sector'***.

Our advisors also believe that the probability of a UK local authority default on debt obligation remains low, with expected loss given default lower still. The Local

## **COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022**

Government Finance framework, creditor protections and likelihood of central government support result in local authorities, including those facing particular budgetary challenges, retaining high levels of credit worthiness.

Regular Treasury Management reports are presented to Cabinet, Council and Governance and Audit Committee, which gives the opportunity to review the Treasury Management Indicators and to make any formal changes to the Treasury Management Strategy.

The Council's Treasury Management service is regularly reviewed by both external audit as part of their annual audit process, and internal audit. The latest review by internal audit concluded in February 2020 that 'the effectiveness of the internal control environment is considered sound and therefore substantial assurance can be placed upon the management of risks.'

### **Supplementary question by Councillor Alan Wathan**

"Thank you for a very detailed technical answer. I note with interest that this Authority on the 30th of August 2022 confirms the ethical policy for pension Investments. I would like to ask the cabinet member does this Authority have a similar adopted ethical policy on investments to low risk local authorities that would have questionably Casino style operating practices that are reported prior to agreeing lending terms"

### **Response**

The Chief Officer Finance Performance and Change explained that we do have strict guidelines on who we can and cannot lend to. From an ethical standpoint Local Authorities were considered to be a low risk. Much of the lending is done through the Governments Debt Management office which is Central Government ran. She added that she did not have the information regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> part to the question but would provide it to the Member at a later date.

### **Supplementary question by Councillor Steven Bletsoe**

"Following from Cllr Wathan's question, is an ethical policy that were not linked to pensions something that Cabinet would consider moving forward"

### **Response**

The Chief Officer Finance Performance and Change explained that we reviewed the Treasury Management document on an annual basis and have already made a commitment to the Governance & Audit Committee to do that, in particular in relation to our investments with Local Authorities and so this could be looked at the next review.

### **Councillor Della Hughes to the Cabinet Member – Resources**

How is Bridgend County Borough Council along with other partners, creating financial support mechanisms to help protect the most vulnerable in society?

### **Response:**

The Council has provided support to residents in the County Borough via a number of different means in recent times and is continuing to do so now.

### **Discretionary Housing Payments**



## COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are paid from a cash-limited budget, provided by the Department of Works and Pension, and are intended to help people meet housing costs, usually where there is a shortfall between their Housing Benefit (HB), or housing element of Universal Credit (UC), and their rent. A DHP can only be awarded if the claimant is claiming HB, or UC with housing costs towards rental liability.

A DHP can be awarded for a rent deposit or rent in advance for a property that the claimant is yet to move into if they are already entitled to HB or UC at their present home, and also payments for past housing costs (including arrears of rent).

These payments are emergency payments and the council has to ensure that any payment reaches those who are most in need.

The DWP's allocation of funding to Bridgend in the current year is £258,312, and this is being supplemented by a further £150,000 allocated from Welsh Government's Discretionary Homelessness Prevention grant (total £408,312).

We do promote these services via our own resources and also work with free advisory organisations such as CAB, who offer free advice to residents and promote this support.

### Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme helps people on low incomes to pay their council tax. This support is provided via an application process and individuals can receive this help to pay their council tax whether or not they are receiving other benefits, working, unemployed, caring for an adult or child or retired.

The total financial support provided to individuals in Bridgend via this route is estimated to be £14.87 million in the current year. Currently 12,565 individuals or families are receiving financial support via this scheme.

Again, information on how to claim this support is available via our website.

### Fuel Payments

For the second year running, the Council is acting as an agent for Welsh Government and is currently paying the Fuel Support Scheme. This scheme supports eligible households with the cost of heating their homes throughout the winter months and provides applicants with a one off £200 payment. This year the scheme is open to households where someone is claiming benefits such as Council Tax Reduction (based on household income), disability benefits, universal credit, income support, child and working tax credits, income-based jobseeker's allowance and income-related employment and support allowance. Householders who are not themselves receiving a qualifying benefit could also receive a payment if they live with another adult or child who receives a disability benefit. The full criteria and list of qualifying benefits are available on our website.

To date, 14,201 payments have been made, totalling £2,840,200; the scheme continues until the 28 February 2023.

### Payment to unpaid carers

Earlier this financial year, the Council also acted as an agent for Welsh Government to make one-off payments of £500 to unpaid carers. The payment was made in recognition of the increased financial pressures that unpaid carers experienced during the pandemic, and to help with some of the additional costs they incurred. The payment was available to all eligible unpaid carers who were in receipt of Carer's Allowance on 31 March 2022.

In total 2,587 payments were made, totalling £1,293,500

### Cost of Living Scheme

## COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022

The cost of living scheme is another Welsh government initiative which is being managed locally by this council. The scheme is intended to provide support as Wales recovers from the pandemic and supports households to deal with the impact of increasing energy and other costs. The criteria for accessing the scheme was set by Welsh government. Each eligible household within the county borough received a payment of £150 under the main scheme which ended on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

The total funding allocated to Bridgend for the main part of this scheme was £7.514 million. As a result Bridgend Council allocated 49,120 payments totalling £7,368,000 which was 98.05% of the allocated funding, against an average of 96.25% throughout Wales.

Welsh Government also made available a further £1.236 million towards a discretionary scheme where the Council could determine how the extra support could be distributed to those most in need. The Discretionary Scheme commenced on 1 October 2022 and to date 10439 households have received a £60 payment with 6197 payments of £50 being made in respect of child in receipt of free school meals. This scheme will run until 31 March 2023.

### Warm Hubs

In anticipation of rising energy costs and the concern that people will not be able to keep warm at home we are working with strategic partners and local community groups to identify places and events across Bridgend where people can access to keep warm during the winter of 2022/23. Most of these activities will build upon what currently exists but are being adapted to take account of the need to keep warm but also to undertake an enjoyable activity in a welcoming space. Council staff are engaging with the local groups and organisations in each area of the county to map what exists and this information is being hosted on a new Cost of Living Web page on the councils site as well as being shared with other key organisations so they can post it. Welsh Government has provided funds for Local Authorities in Wales to support Warm Hubs. It is anticipated that a grant scheme will be available shortly so that organisations can apply for funding to expand or enhance their existing offer or develop new if a gap exists.

<https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/residents/benefits-and-support/cost-of-living-support/>

### Business Rate Relief for businesses in the area

Support has been given to local businesses via the Small Business Rates Relief Schemes and the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme to ensure they can continue to trade to support the local economy and maintain employment levels in the County Borough.

Through the Small Business Rates Relief scheme 3,206 businesses in Bridgend with a rateable value below £12,000 receive relief on a sliding scale of between 0% and 100% depending on their rateable value.

Currently there 362 businesses that are benefiting from 50% Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief. Letters have recently been issued to eligible businesses to encourage them to apply for the reduction and reduce their liability.

### Council Tax 2022/2023

In setting the revenue budget for the current year, the Council agreed to a 0% Council Tax increase. Within the budget report it states clearly that the rationale for this was to support the citizens of Bridgend to deal with the rising cost of living, such as increased energy and food bills, other inflationary increases, mortgage interest rises and national insurance increases.

### Free Parking

## COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022

During the pandemic the council has had a generous parking offer of free parking for 3 hour in its primary car parks.

### Grants

We have been providing capital grants across the County Borough for business and new home owners, to bridge the gap in being able to get on the property ladder or to allow businesses to operate differently.

Since March 2021, £371k in grant has been awarded to 23 new home owners in our Valley communities to enable them to get on to the property ladder and bring back into occupancy previously vacant residential properties in their local communities.

Almost £600k of capital grants were also given to 83 businesses across the County as a result of covid to invest in their premises and in outdoor spaces. The changes enabled businesses to remain viable and operational, and will support their business going forward.

### Food Poverty

The community pantries were established as part of our RDP (LEADER) funded project on Sustainable Community Venues. The project was refocused at the beginning of the pandemic to provide relief to residents in terms of access to affordable food.

The aim of the pantries was to provide an affordable bag of food per week (£5/bag) and the income went directly to cover the costs of the food deliveries from FareShare Cymru and the membership fee each centre had to pay FairShare to be part of the scheme. The remaining money went straight into the community centres to support their costs which supported the overall aims of the project to support community centres to thrive and continue to provide services to their communities.

The Council funded the pantries until October 2021 and it is now being delivered through a Community Interest Company who have secured funding from a number of other sources. This is a real success story for BCBC as not only was the project very successful in supporting communities in rural wards but it went on to continue post pilot phase and has created a CIC and associated jobs. Up to October 2021 we supplied 6037 bags of food equating to approximately 53,750Kg of food.

In addition to the community pantries, the Council is helping to support the mobilisation of Welsh Government Big Bocs Bwyd scheme across the County Borough. The scheme supports a network of 'pay as you feel' shops based in converted shipping containers in school grounds. Called the Big Bocs Bwyd project, there will be 60 of these projects in situ across Wales by the end of 2022 and Bridgend Local Authority area has received the largest number of these projects in one county – 16 in total. These Big Bocs Bwyds provide affordable food, to both the school families and the wider communities.

The Council is part of the Food Poverty Network of providers, co-ordinated by BAVO, and has worked with BAVO to deliver a capital/revenue grant fund to support community organisations addressing concerns within their localities.

The Council has also been able to support food poverty support organisations with funding drawn down from the Welsh Government's Household Support Fund. The Big Bocs Bwyds, Baobab Bach CIC Pantries and the Bridgend Foodbank Network have all received funds this year.

Further funding will be available via the Council in the next calendar year, following an award of £68,619 from the Welsh Government's Direct Food Support Scheme.

The Council is also exploring funding options from the Welsh Government's Sustainable Food Partnership programme. The programme seeks to provide targeted support to the most vulnerable households to help meet the rising household costs through strengthening a range of activities delivered to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis. This funding would support joint working between the Council and our partners, to develop cross-sector food partnerships and strengthen existing food partnerships. These will help build resilience in local food networks through the co-ordination of on the ground, food-related activity which tackles the root-causes of food poverty.

#### Employability Bridgend

Through the Employability Bridgend programme, the Council continues to provide training opportunities and assist our residents back into work through initiatives such as "Employability Bridgend" which supports disadvantaged participants across the whole Council, regardless of location, by offering a suite of interventions that aim to break patterns of multi-generational worklessness and poverty.

The schemes work closely with community venues across Bridgend to ensure that we are providing services locally that meet a local need and reduce travel costs for residents by bringing the service to their locality.

In the 7 months From April 2022 to end of October 2022, the Employability Team helped 774 people from Bridgend engage in the programme, including 33 people who were already in work being supported to improve their labour market position; 193 people have achieved qualifications and 239 have gone into work.

#### **Supplementary question by Councillor Della Hughes**

Thank you for the response and it was pleasing to see the support that is available to the residents of Bridgend. With the current sky rocketing energy prices, the support from the UK and Welsh Government is welcomed but there are still many struggling to heat their homes. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the significant financial impact for our most elderly and vulnerable residents and in particular the charges relating to communal spaces of sheltered accommodation such as Court Gwalia in Ogmores Vale. Residents will now see their weekly charges for the communal area increased significantly and this is on top of their energy increases in their own apartments. I am concerned that we could see these wonderful living environments become unaffordable to some of our most vulnerable. One resident's service charge is going to be increased by over £200 a month and some will be paying slightly more and some slightly less. This is before any rise in cost for her own apartment and any rent increases, and the monthly rent is now more than she gets from her state pension. Staff are working closely with the residents and their families to ensure that they are receiving any financial support that they are entitled to, however, they will be unaffordable for some so we are aware of this issue in our sheltered accommodation and nursing homes and what can we along with other agencies do to support these vulnerable residents."

The Deputy Leader thanked Cllr Hughes for the question and shared the concerns particularly around the extra care and supported living and stated that would look into this and provide a response to the member outside of the meeting.

#### **Supplementary question by Councillor Melanie Evans**

"After recently visiting Pencoed Primary I noticed there was a school uniform Swap Shop and was wondering if you could advise what further support is available for Learners and parents in the county Borough"

**Response:**

The Cabinet Member Resources explained that the Pupil Development Grant assists schools and parents in providing school uniform to pupils. Parents are able to claim up to £225 and in some cases even more. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support added that money was available to support the purchasing of school PE kits and equipment and was targeted for lower income families. The funds have also benefited children over the holidays with free school meal provision which had helped over 6000 pupils in Bridgend over the last 2 years.

**Councillor Tim Thomas to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration**

What plans does the Cabinet Member have to increase town centre footfall in our County Borough town centres?

**Response:**

“BCBC have a suite of interventions in place which are aimed at increasing footfall in our town centres. Footfall across the three primary town centres in BCBC, has increased since Covid-19 restrictions have come to an end, and whilst not quite reaching pre pandemic levels, the numbers are steadily growing.

Our approach to generating footfall can only be delivered by a combination of investment in businesses and enterprise; support to high street traders and owners; enhancements to premises and town centre environment and delivering marketing campaign. It also requires our partners, local organisations and traders and to play a role in promoting and investing in our towns and local initiatives.

Town centre promotional and marketing work underpins all activity and investment in our high streets. Under the branding: Town Centres – People | Community | Belonging - a number of coordinated campaigns have been run for specific agendas; these include a promotional video and press campaign promoting Independents Day which highlighted the diversity and quality of the independent shopping offer we have in our town centres, directly featuring local traders and products.

Another campaign in May 2022 was run specifically to support Bridgend Indoor Market. This celebrated the markets centenary and promoted the traders, whilst also highlighting the opportunity for new businesses to take a market stall under the councils Elevate & Prosper project.

This year we promoted ‘Spend Summer in your town centre’, a campaign which encouraged people to visit the town centres across the summer months and engage in various activities taking place.

Similarly at present, we are running the ‘Spend Christmas in your town centre’ campaign which promotes our town centres as places to shop, socialise and celebrate over the festive season. A new Christmas film on the councils You Tube channel celebrates the distinctiveness of each of our three town centres. We are also using the opportunity to showcase in the film some of the nine destination restaurants that have changed the night-time economy in Bridgend town centre by offering a wide variety of culinary experiences.

All of this promotional work to support businesses over the crucial Christmas trading period and prolong dwell time is underpinned by a very successful social media campaign. In addition, a Digital Christmas website once again provides businesses with a free opportunity to register an offer, voucher or loyalty card and feature on the sites Advent Calendar.

## **COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2022**

The authority has worked with Green Top Events to bring a programme of street markets to Bridgend and Porthcawl in 2022 and will add Maesteg to the programme of markets planned for 2023. The number of additional people visiting a town centre on market days does vary considerably, but on average we see an increase of between 2000 and 2500 between the two towns, with the highest additional footfall on market days recorded as 8035 in Porthcawl.

Bringing events to the town centres is supported by the authority through the engagement of event operators with the councils ESAG process, where assistance and support is given to help them develop their event. Over the last few weeks Christmas events have taken place and the authority has worked alongside Town and community councils who worked incredibly hard in staging Christmas activities to draw footfall to our high streets.

A significant amount of Business Support happens across our towns and high streets, the council works in partnership with business representative groups, including Bridgend Traders Forum, Bridgend Market Traders Association, Porthcawl Chamber of Trade & Maesteg Business Association to develop and support ideas to promote trade and business.

Increase in footfall comes from an improved offer on our high streets and evidence of this can be seen in the number of new businesses that have opened in our three town centres since April 2022 – in Bridgend 17 new businesses have opened, 6 in Porthcawl and 5 in Maesteg. Importantly, it is recognised that each of these new businesses is making an investment in one of our town centres.

One of the innovative ways that the council uses to attract new businesses is through its online Town Centre Property Index which lists the properties for sale or to let within the three town centres of Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg. The Index shows the agents contact details and lists some information about the properties which the agents have supplied. There is also a photo for each property and a map showing its location.

The authority continues to work with business start-ups and entrepreneurs to bring new business ideas and ventures to the town centres, recently delivering an Elevate and Prosper Project (EAP) project in Bridgend. A project which works by developing a series of meanwhile and popup initiatives to create opportunities for start-ups and micro-business, with 18 new businesses being supported with various types of support.

The authority also continues to support parking offers in Porthcawl, and Bridgend offering free parking to access our commercial centres seven days a week. Improved LED lighting has been installed at the Maesteg multi-storey car park to increase user safety as part of the Maesteg Town Hall goodwill projects.

An increase in the footfall is also a critical outcome from all major financial Capital investment and grants for property and environmental improvements, including works to Maesteg Town Hall, where the library will be brought into the heart of the high street and create a community focal point. Works at Cosy Corner in Porthcawl will create much needed additional retail and leisure space and a major funding bid has also been submitted to renovate Porthcawl Pavilion. Also, officers are working very closely with colleagues at Bridgend College, to bring a new learning campus to the town centre. This multi million pound project in itself will bring more than a thousand students and staff to the town centre on a daily basis which will change the demographic profile of visitors to the town centre. This in turn will increase daily footfall and it is hoped act as a catalyst to generate spend and attract new development and investment.

As part of the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Programme and previously Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI), between April 2018- March 22, £1,572,620 of

funding was secured and expended on high street properties in Bridgend and Maesteg via the Urban Centre Property Enhancement programme. These projects focussed spend on the delivery of physical and social improvements through the re-development of vacant, poor quality, underused or derelict buildings and premises, with a view to generate employment opportunities; provide prominent and suitable locations for commercial and retail use; protect and sustain local shopping areas, increase town centre footfall. As the Authority owns very few properties across our towns the vast majority of this finance is utilised as an incentive, available to support buildings owners and tenants wanting to be part of regenerating their environments.

Officers are continuing to work with our housing developers and local Registered Social Landlords, and Welsh Government to develop and invest in housing in town centres to make available suitable town centre housing solutions, including providing grants for living above shops. Ensuring a greater number of people live within walking distance of our high street, in addition to the provision of services and leisure in our centres, will inject daily investment into our high street economies.

Proposals for the Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant 2022-2025 are being worked through with Welsh Government to ensure investment aimed at our primary high streets will support a variety of interventions principally aimed at increasing footfall.

More opportunities for targeted investment, support and advice for high streets is being created within the new Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) 2022 – 2025, which can be delivered across all high streets and commercial areas in the County Borough.

The package of investment being created will include more capital grants and investment for current vacant commercial premises; a larger suite of business and enterprise grants; pop up and meanwhile use advice and finance and marketing and event finance, all with a view to attract footfall and activity to our high streets.”

### **Supplementary question by Councillor Tim Thomas**

“Thank you to the cabinet member for the very comprehensive response to my initial question. One area that I was a little bit surprised that was not given any mention was the importance of increasing footfall for the night-time economy for our town centre areas and this comes at a time when some of my constituents reported to me that when they visited Bridgend Town Centre for an evening meal they were dismayed to learn that the Rhiw car park closes at 7 pm when other local Authority car Parks actually offer a little bit more flexibility to support the night-time economy.

So given this one example I would like to ask the cabinet member what is her personal political vision for a safe and sustainable night-time economy for our town centres in the county borough.”

### **Response**

I totally agree with Councillor Thomas and it is something that we have raised with the officers and we are exploring how we can resolve the car parking issue. I do understand that you can park on the streets after certain times so although the Rhiw car park closes at 7:00pm, there are parking spaces available on the streets but it is an issue that that was raised by the local ward members as well. So we are going to be looking at it.”

The Leader added that recently he parked in the Brackla Street car park or commonly known as The Wilkinson’s Car Park, which is very close to town. He added that it was heartening to see the new Greek restaurant as well as the new Steakhouse recently opening in Bridgend and wished them ever success.

**Supplementary question by Councillor Eugene Caparros**

“Bridgend is indeed becoming a place to come for our fantastic restaurants and I was very pleased to see the new Marble steakhouse transforming a unit at the Rhiw and providing employment opportunities for local people. So please, can I ask what involvement did BCBC have in supporting this venture and what else were you doing to show that Bridgend is open for business?”

**Response:**

The Cabinet Member stated that Marble Steakhouse received a £100,000 in grants from BCBC and Welsh Government in conjunction with the transforming towns programme.

76. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 19:00