

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB / REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2023 AT 16:00**

**Present**

Councillor M Jones – Chairperson

S Aspey	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	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 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**

C L C Davies

**Officers:**

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Laura Griffiths	Principal Solicitor
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
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
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

**77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were made:-

Councillor JP Blundell – Prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as a School Governor at Bryntirion Comprehensive school that is mentioned in the report.

Councillor S Bletsoe – Personal interest in Agenda item 8 as a family member is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Councillor F Bletsoe - Personal interest in Agenda item 8 as a family member is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Councillor JC Spanswick – Prejudicial interest in Agenda item 8 as a close family member is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Councillor M Kearns – Prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 as a member of Pyle Community Council involved in the management of a project referred to in Appendix B (page 36) of the report.

Councillor P Jenkins – Personal interest in Agenda item 9 as a home owner bordering the land in question referred to in the Loan Agreement.

Councillor P Davies – Prejudicial interest in Agenda item 8 as a family member is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Councillor RM James – Prejudicial interest in Agenda item 8 as a family member is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Councillor T Wood – Prejudicial interest in Agenda item 8 as he is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Councillor Amanda Williams – Personal interest in Agenda item 7 as Chair of Governors at Coity Primary School

Councillor E Winstanley – Personal interest in Agenda item 7 as her employer is in receipt of the management of monies for Council owned projects.

Councillor R Penhale-Thomas – Personal interest in Agenda item 6 as an employee of an organisation of which V2c is a member.

All those members who declared a prejudicial interest in the above items so referred to, left the meeting whilst these items were being considered.

78. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of a meeting of Council dated 13 December 2022, be approved as a true and accurate record.

79. **PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVES OF VALLEYS TO COAST**

The Chief Executive presented a report that introduced representatives of Valleys to Coast, ie Jo Oak, Chief Executive and Darrin Davies, Corporate Director – Development and Growth, who then gave a presentation upon the latest work of the organisation.

The presentation initially outlined V2C's agenda, which was

- Their current position
- Their immediate priorities
- Their impact and ambition
- Clarification around empty homes
- Opportunities for questions

In terms of the current position, the Officers explained that V2C had received the highest level of compliance for their governance and financial viability following a recent regulatory review.

Rent levels had been set at 6.5% increase on average (in line with other Welsh HAs and on average £20 lower than rent cap), with rent freeze and additional support for most vulnerable.

Continued partnership working was being developed to better support their customers, including the Housing Health and Innovation programme across Cwm Taf Morgannwg region.

Works had also taken place in terms of supporting Bridgend Town Centre by encouraging colleagues back to the office and re-introducing the organisations reception area.

In terms of the organisations more immediate priorities, these were outlined as follows:-

1. Tackling dampness, condensation and mould - working collectively with other Welsh HAs & LAs and responding to the Housing Minister
2. Preventing and tackling homelessness - increased support for customers through cost of living crisis; working in partnership with BCBC and others; investing in new homes to meet demand
3. Addressing under investment in Bridgend through our 'Missing Piece' agenda, so we can do more for our customers and communities.

The Chief Executive of V2C advised that with regards to the organisations impacts and ambitions both currently and moving forward, these were to share with members that its Turnaround Programme has had a positive impact across the business, and for customers, with a repairs backlog reducing in number down as well as complaints also reducing and positive resolutions happening quicker for property tenants.

All the above was being driven forward with plans to create a wholly owned subsidiary to further improve and grow their repairs and maintenance service.

V2C had also launched its ambitious Safe and Happy Sustainable Future strategy to work towards carbon neutrality.

Furthermore, £1.2m had been secured to invest in an optimised retro fit programme. This would commence with improved heating systems to around 200 homes; external wall insulation to around 200 homes; and energy efficient lighting to communal areas at its sheltered schemes.

In relation to clarification in respect of Empty Homes, the Officers explained that Valleys to Coast is not the only RSL in Bridgend and that this on occasions led to some misunderstanding locally about the extent of ownership of some empty homes.

There was also some misconception over the number of homes V2C owned in relation to properties lost through the Right to Buy Scheme.

With regard to void properties, the Officers explained that there were presently 138 empty homes (voids) in the Bridgend area, with 63 currently undergoing construction work to prepare for re-let. In terms of 23 of these properties, works there had been completed and were now ready to be let. The works on 10 properties had been issued to contractors with the relevant works pending. 6 properties were awaiting asbestos reports and/or kitchen plans, with 3 of these awaiting clearance. 23 properties were awaiting inspection (including those where such inspections had already been scheduled).

The V2C Officers also advised, that homes can be empty for a number of reasons, for example, work in progress; specific adaptations pending; scheduled for major works; awaiting compliance testing or safety reports; awaiting utilities; awaiting clearance or those located in a hard to let area.

In conclusion, it was confirmed that since the start of the 2022-23 financial year, V2C had brought 289 empty homes back into use, including 16 'high value' voids.

As this concluded the presentation, the Mayor asked Members if they had any questions of the Officers.

A Member noted that the largest success he had noted since he had become a County Borough Councillor last May, was the much needed clear-up of the Wildmill Estate, through collaborative working between BCBC and V2C. However, as part of the Council's draft budget proposals, there was a suggestion to reduce the size of BCBC's Enforcement team. He therefore asked, how this would affect future works such as this within this area and the wider areas of Bridgend.

The Chief Executive, V2C stated that there was accountability between organisation partners to ensure that there would be positive outcomes when work of this nature was scheduled and subsequently undertaken. Expectations have been set in terms of clearing the likes of fly tipping and improving the green areas within Wildmill and she was sure that despite any reductions in workforce, works such as this would be continue to be carried out in the future so as to build on the very positive strides that have been made in hotspot areas such as Wildmill, in the future.

A Member asked what powers V2C had when it came to tenants showing anti-social behaviour and therefore causing agitation and problems for neighbouring residents, ie non-criminal behaviour.

The Chief Executive, V2C advised that V2C would investigate problems such as this either in isolation or with partners such as the MASH team or the South Wales Police. V2C could carry out legal proceedings against such perpetrators which could lead to tenants then facing eviction, however, this could result in the problem just being moved from one community to another where the tenant moved to. Or the tenant could become homeless which would exacerbate that particular problem which was increasing. Therefore, in most cases V2C and other key agencies would in the first instance look to resolve issues with the tenant and try and address their behavioural problems in order to resolve matters, without the need for further action having to take place.

A Member who was a representative on Bridgend Care and Repair advised that she recently visited a V2C property where there was a vulnerable tenant, who hadn't had a shower for a number of weeks. She asked how often V2C staff inspected properties to ensure that tenants such as this could be identified in order to ascertain whether or not they required further support. She also asked if tenants were required to move out of their property and into another, if works were required to the dwelling.

The Chief Executive, V2C confirmed that annually V2C staff inspected properties as part of a yearly inspection programme, to conduct property safety checks. There were more regular inspections during the pandemic, but of course, Covid had now subsided. There was also an 'Eyes On' campaign, where representatives of V2C interacted with tenants on safeguarding issues and property repairs and reported these back, in order for appropriate action to be taken. There was also a referrals process, working with partners such as BCBC, where problems with tenants, repairs, litter and a whole host of other issues were reported and listed to be actioned.

In terms of tenants having to move out of their property when repairs were being undertaken to it, this all depended on the extent of what was required to be carried out. This was considered in relation to the size of the works and any safety elements that needed to be considered. These were discussed with the customer. On occasions rather

than move a tenant to an alternative property for this purpose, they could be re-located to a hotel or guest house for a short period of time.

A Member noted that there had been instances of a repairs backlog for V2C tenants properties, which often resulted in a 'bottle neck' of these developing, which then delayed such repairs being resolved. He had received this feedback from some constituents, though on occasions when he made a referral to V2C directly on these same issues, he had always found that the problem was actioned by the organisation quickly. He asked if this was the case and if so, what was being done to rectify such delays.

The Chief Executive, V2C acknowledged that complaints from tenants in this area had been a problem previously, though further work had been committed to this area of work and the situation had improved. She added that she would prefer tenants to contact the organisation direct, rather than through any partner, as cutting out these often speeded up the response whereby then action was taken more quickly. Often if complaints were made and not actioned speedily enough for the tenants liking, they would then look to take legal proceedings against V2C which could become protracted and could delay the problem even longer and was often avoidable through dialogue between tenant and housing association. She advised the Member to have a further discussion on this, outside of the meeting.

For further debate that ensued on this topic, please refer here to the meeting link [here](#)

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Chief Executive and the presentation from Valleys to Coast colleagues, be noted.

80. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:**

**Mayor**

I would like to thank the proprietors of the Bettws Café who went the extra yard on Christmas Eve, delivering free Xmas dinners to homeless charities and people who live alone in the Bettws area.

In the run up to the New Year, the Leader and myself attended/witnessed the marriage of Ian and Alison (now Mr and Mrs Thomas) at the Bridgend Registry Office. Thanks are extended to the newlyweds for allowing us to be there for part of their special day.

Please can I remind members about this year's Mayor's Charity, so that they may make a donation to this if they are in a position to.

I will be meeting with Officers this week, to consider the Mayor's Award nominations.

And finally, for Members information the date of the Budget Cabinet meeting has been changed from 21 February 2023 (2.30pm) to 22 February at the same starting time.

**Deputy Leader**

Over the last few weeks, members will have noted the extreme pressures that the health and social care system has been operating under.

Understandably, much of the media focus has been on the very visible, and sometimes harrowing, position that hospitals have found themselves in.

As we have also seen these extreme pressures within the community, I want to acknowledge and pay tribute to our social care workforce as until we resolve this issue of capacity within our communities and value the staff that deliver those community services, we will not resolve the pressures within our hospitals and avoidance of ambulances waiting outside to hand over their patients.

They have been working tirelessly not only to support people who have been discharged from hospital care, but to implement new Welsh Government guidance in a way that maintains social care values and holds at its core the ongoing safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people.

We have worked very closely with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board and remain focussed not only on the immediate response, but also on implementing strategic actions that will enable more people to receive the care and support that they need in an appropriate, timely way.

To provide members with an example of just how we are doing things differently, I would like to briefly highlight our participation with a trial scheme to manage the way in which people take medication, preventing their illnesses from worsening and needing medical interventions, and tackle the £300m cost of wasted medicines across the UK due to the mismanagement of

Traditionally, ensuring that people take their medication regularly has involved a mix of daily home visits from carers, alarm clocks, wall charts, monitored dosage systems, telecare prompts and more.

As the disadvantages of such methods range from potential costs to an inability to confirm that medication has actually been taken as required, the council and Cwm Taf have partnered with Life Sciences Hub Wales to develop a new digital approach.

Called 'Your Meds', this uses smart medication management technology in the form of a digital pill box.

Pods within the box are pre-filled and delivered directly to the user, and the box has built-in tech which informs care providers and families when the medication has been accessed.

Needless to say, it also contacts them to let them know when the scheduled medication has not been accessed.

As well as increasing independence and providing greater freedom for carers and family members, this new approach has the potential to save up to £3,600 per person, per year, and enables staff to undertake other work.

By reducing the number of crisis referrals, digital technology can be preventative while also providing vital information for streamlining individual care needs.

With less room for error, it means that money can also be invested into other key services.

This is just one example of the new ways of working that we are currently exploring, and if members would like to know more, I will be happy to show them where they can find further information.

**Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations**

Members may wish to inform their constituents about some significant investment that has been made into new leisure facilities for the county borough.

As a result of a £400,000 refurbishment, Maesteg Sports Centre will soon feature a larger gym area with brand new cardio machines, a dedicated strength-and-conditioning space and a wellness zone.

All-new studio, training and workshop spaces have been created, and improvements have also been made to the changing room area.

A £200,000 refurbishment has also recently been completed at Pyle Swimming Pool. This has delivered a range of enhanced facilities, such as 30 new changing cubicles, accessible family-size booths, new energy efficient showers and lighting, and poolside changing facilities to offer greater support for people with accessibility issues.

The improvements are intended to support accessibility as well as benefiting both the physical and mental health of all residents and have been made possible thanks to investment from Bridgend County Borough Council, Halo Leisure, and Sport Wales.

I'm sure members will want to welcome this investment and help spread awareness about the new facilities.

If you would like to find out more, further details are available on the Halo website.

On a separate note, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the decision by the UK government to block a law which would improve the lives and rights of trans people in Scotland.

The question of constitutionality is important, but I think we can agree, human rights should not be used as a political football. The trans community remain one of the most maligned parts of our community, they face significant challenges when accessing health care, for example, as well as discrimination in many other parts of their lives. Taking the decision to transition is not one that is taken lightly but imagine having to live your life feeling you aren't really you and that parts of your society denies your very existence.

I welcome the calls from the First Minister and the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn to receive powers that would allow the Welsh Government to improve the lives and rights of trans people in Wales. As Vaughan Gethin said yesterday "My rights, and everyone else's, are not at risk by trans people having their rights. And it is self-evident that nobody is equal until we are all equal."

As such, I have asked officers to undertake work in the Cabinet Committee on Equalities which I chair to look into the challenges faced by our trans residents in Bridgend and how we can help mitigate those challenges.

#### **Cabinet Member – Regeneration**

I would like to share some of our recent efforts to support jobs, employment and training with members, and how we are supporting fresh local business in Bridgend County Borough.

Firstly, following investment into venues such as Heol-y-Cyw Community Centre, the Westward Community Centre in Cefn Glas and the Pencoed Miners' Welfare Hall, the Employability Bridgend team are setting up a series of community hubs.

These are designed to help residents aged 16 and over who are unemployed, looking to work more hours or to acquire a second or new job, and seeks to provide vocational qualifications, volunteering opportunities, the chance to develop new skills and more.

The team are already offering support at 20 different locations and are committed towards extending this further to support as many communities as possible in coming months.

Secondly, we are working alongside the Pop Up Wales initiative to provide opportunities ranging from practical training for entrepreneurs to events at Bridgend Indoor Market featuring festive workshops, live music and more.

The project enables people to 'try out' their business ideas by providing temporary stalls and premises and encourages them to develop their ideas and take them to the next level while also enabling opportunities for training and mentoring.

To date, the programme has matched ten pop-up ventures to empty town centre premises, and we are planning to carry out further work with Pop Up Wales throughout 2023.

Finally, the award-winning Rebel Business School is returning to Bridgend County Borough, in March to offer valuable free support to potential entrepreneurs.

Designed to help get ideas off the ground and to support existing businesses to grow, the initiative covers topics such as how to start a business, advice on sales and marketing, how to build a website, finding customers, legal issues and much more.

To date, it has supported more than 17,000 people via partnerships with local housing associations and local authorities and is sure to be a popular and well-attended event when it returns.

I would encourage members to find out more about these initiatives and to help spread awareness of their availability – more details can be found at the council website.

I have some excellent news to share with members regarding UK Government's Shared Prosperity Funding.

We have received official notification that following a successful application process, the council has been allocated more than £21m from the fund under its themes of people and skills, supporting local business, and community and place.

The money has already been fully allocated towards specific initiatives and includes £8m for establishing an employability and skills framework package, £3.5m for setting up new centres of enterprise across the county borough, and just over £1m for health, climate and economical projects that will develop stronger and more resilient local communities.

Within all of this are projects such as the Great Glamorgan Way, a 270km network of 'green corridors' which will connect communities throughout the region, schemes to improve adult literacy, funding in support of new tourism events, a local enterprise support programme, new options for diversification, decarbonisation and growth, and much more.

As members know, the Shared Prosperity Fund replaces previous European structural funds, and we are grateful to colleagues in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council as they have acted on behalf of local authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region in order to progress the area's individual plans.



With the fund expected to be in place until March 2025, we anticipate that delivery will begin within the coming months, and opportunities to access the fund will be announced in due course.

**Cabinet Member – Communities**

Last week's severe weather saw more than a month's worth of rain fall upon Bridgend County Borough in less than 24 hours, and throughout it all, council staff were out in the thick of it once more, working around the clock to respond to incidents, keep roads open, support local residents and help keep people safe and dry.

Thanks to their efforts and also the various infrastructure improvements that have been introduced over the last few years, problems were kept to an absolute minimum and widespread flooding was successfully avoided.

Among the issues that workers had to deal with were a blocked culvert which threw mud, rocks and other debris onto the A4061 Bwlch mountain road and meant that a lane closure was necessary.

While the Dipping Bridge at New Inn Road in Merthyr Mawr had to close due to high river levels, culvert alarms in areas such as Heol Faen at Maesteg and Min Y Nant at Pencoed were all triggered, but did not overtop.

Unfortunately, parts of Ogmere Vale were affected after drainage systems became overwhelmed by the sheer amount of rainfall, so after water entered premises at Cemetery Road and Alma Terrace, council crews worked alongside the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to pump out drainage chambers and divert water away from properties using sand bags.

A culvert to the rear of Bethania Row was overwhelmed by rainwater after becoming blocked by debris which had washed downstream, but efforts to access it were hindered due to parked cars.

After officers from South Wales Police helped alert householders and ensured that the cars were removed, council workers were able to clear the blockage, but not before some flooding unfortunately occurred at the nearby Welfare Hall.

Several units at Penllwyngwent Industrial Estate also experienced flooding due to water flowing off land at the rear of the premises, which was later diverted using sandbags.

Elsewhere in the county borough, a single tree fell across the highway near the Rockwool factory at Wern Fawr. Council workers quickly responded to remove the tree and ensure the road remained open.

Incidents such as this help to illustrate how the council works to keep people safe, property dry and roads clear. Our crews do a fantastic job, and I am sure that members will want to congratulate them for their efforts.

**Cabinet Member – Resources**

As we are now down to the last few days of our annual budget consultation, which opened last December, I would like to ask members to encourage their constituents to take part before it closes on 22 January.

The consultation offers residents a chance to have their say on the council's spending priorities and help shape the authority's budget for the 2023-24 financial year.

Just as households are facing stark financial challenges during the cost-of-living crisis, so too is the council, and we have to deal with significant additional budget pressures of at least £20m.

Despite a better than anticipated settlement from Welsh Government, we still need to save £3.5m, and are looking to develop new and innovative ways of providing the kind of services that residents want while using increasingly limited resources.

That's why we want local residents to give us their feedback and tell us what they think of our proposed spending priorities for next year.

With full details available at the council website, you can either fill in a copy of the consultation online, or contact our Consultation team to receive it in an alternative format.

### **Cabinet Member – Education**

I have two issues that I would like to update members on.

Firstly, you may recall that it was announced in January that our Youth Support Team would be expanding the provision of safe spaces for young people aged between 11 and 25 at its existing centres.

These are based at Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen, Cynffig Comprehensive School and the Pencoed Youth Engagement Centre.

They also announced that they would be establishing two new centres, one in the Bryntirion / Cefn Glas area, and another in Brackla.

Unfortunately, this has led to misinformation being spread on social media over safeguarding concerns at the thought of children being allowed to mix with people in their early twenties.

I want to make it quite clear that all of our youth work takes place within a safe environment, and with full regard to safeguarding measures.

The reason support is available to everyone within that age bracket is because by law, councils are expected to provide youth support to young people aged between 11 and 25.

While this is also in line with Welsh Government's Youth Work Strategy for Wales, in practice we find that many older young people prefer to access our targeted provision, and not our youth centres.

All of our centres are run by professionally qualified youth workers who are well trained and equipped in matters such as safeguarding, county lines, radicalisation, sexual exploitation and more.

Furthermore, the centres will organise their activities so that different nights or times are allocated to specific age groups.

The bottom line is that the centres are run appropriately and professionally so that they continue to offer a safe space for younger people.

The second issue I want to advise members about concerns planned industrial action by the National Union of Head Teachers and National Education Union.

This has been confirmed after the NEU Cymru ballot result saw 92 per cent of teacher members vote in favour of a strike, and 75 per cent of Welsh NUHT members.

The industrial action is expected to affect schools on the first and fourteenth of February, and the fifteenth and sixteenth of March.

In preparation for this, officers are working alongside head teachers to answer queries designed to facilitate business continuity, and to help limit disruption.

Among the queries that we have been asked to clarify so far are questions on appropriate communications with staff, parents and carers, thresholds for instigating a closure, arrangements for vulnerable pupils and those in receipt of free school meals, implications for attendance figures and more.

This work is currently progressing, and I will bring you further updates as the situation develops.

#### Chief Executive

I have a very brief update to offer members concerning the progress of the second phase of Central Government's Levelling Up fund.

We received official notification earlier in the week that an announcement on the outcome of the second phase of the Levelling Up fund is imminent.

We anticipate that letters will soon be sent to council leaders, MPs who have provided support, bid managers and Section 151 officers on the morning that the announcement is due to be made.

This will be in advance of a public announcement and a media release later that same day.

Members will, of course, be aware that we previously submitted two detailed bids to the Levelling Up Fund - a £20 million bid for the complete refurbishment of the Grand Pavilion in Porthcawl, and a £25 million Transport Bid for the replacement Penprysg Road Bridge and removal of the level crossing in Pencoed.

If successful, both of these ambitious projects have the clear potential for delivering significant benefits for the county borough, and we remain highly enthusiastic and hopeful for a positive outcome.

I will, of course, keep you informed throughout this process, and I hope to be in a position to provide you with more comprehensive details at the next meeting of Council.

#### 81. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER

While the yellow weather warning that is currently in place across much of South Wales resulted in some early morning snow showers and icy conditions across Bridgend County Borough, we have so far managed to escape most of the mass disruption that has been experienced elsewhere.

As you might expect, our teams have been working around the clock once more, and gritters have been making multiple trips to treat the roads network and keep the county borough moving.

The worst of the snow hit our valleys communities and higher-ground areas, and crews have been using our fleet ploughs to help keep them clear.

This includes the Bwlch mountain road, which was temporarily closed for several hours, but which is expected to open again this afternoon.

Thankfully, all recycling and waste collections were unaffected and have continued as normal. Maesteg Community Recycling Centre had to temporarily close its gates before reopening later in the day, but the sites at Tythegston and Brynmenyn remained open as usual.

Unfortunately, the snow did force Caerau Primary, Ysgol Cynwyd Sant, Calon y Cymoedd and Nantyyffyllon Primary to all close for the day.

There are many reasons for why this might be necessary during severe weather, and it doesn't always require heavy snowfall for a closure – for example, a school may not be able to open because of frozen pipes which may have burst, or because of insufficient staff supervision due to some school staff not being able to travel in from other areas where the snow has been heavier.

As such, members may want to remind their constituents that the council website includes a comprehensive section on how the council handles periods of severe weather and includes a dedicated school closures page which head teachers can use to let parents and carers know if a school has had to close unexpectedly.

Schools will also communicate independently with parents and carers using their own systems and are advised to prepare blended learning arrangements as a contingency in order to minimise disruption in the event of a closure.

National guidance has also been produced for schools and childcare or play settings, and you can find this at the Welsh Government website.

I would urge members to take a closer look at both this and the council's own web resource, and to make full use of it in the event of any further severe weather.

Members will be aware of our ongoing efforts to tackle homelessness in Bridgend County Borough, and I have some very good news to share on this front.

Minister for Climate Change Julie James has written to confirm that Welsh Government intends to allocate an additional £10m in revenue funding to local councils in 2022-23, so as to support homelessness prevention and the costs of providing temporary accommodation.

This is, of course, on top of £10m that has already been allocated in this financial year for temporary accommodation, and £6m for discretionary homelessness prevention.

Furthermore, the minister has confirmed that she is allocating an additional £24m to the Transitional Capital Accommodation Programme, which seeks to provide good quality, longer-term accommodation which in turn reduces pressures placed upon the use of temporary accommodation.

While the longer-term goal remains to reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation, move towards a rapid re-housing approach and fundamentally reform homelessness services, Welsh Government recognises that this transition will take time to achieve, and has allocated these additional resources in support of this.

We are currently waiting to hear what Bridgend County Borough Council's share of the allocation will be, but I am sure members will join me in welcoming this additional resource.

Finally, I am sure that members will want to join me in congratulating Deputy Leader Jane Gebbie following the announcement that she has been appointed as the new Chair of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board

As chair, Councillor Gebbie will be responsible for ensuring that members of the board are working together to improve the health, social care and well-being of people living in the Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil areas.

Among her first duties will be overseeing the delivery of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Area Plan, which outlines actions for creating better health and social care services and ensuring that partners are working co-productively with communities and frontline staff to create, lead and evaluate services effectively.

Councillor Gebbie brings a wealth of experience to the role, and I know that she will prove to be an effective and instrumental chair.

82. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE - QUARTER 3 REPORT 2022-23**

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, which provided Members with an update in relation to the capital position at the end of Quarter 3 in the current financial year.

She advised, that the Council's Capital Strategy was approved by Council on the 23 February 2022. The approved capital budget approved by Council in February totalled £69.979 million. The programme was last updated and approved by Council in October last year.

Section 4 of the report outlined the current position on the Council's capital programme in this year. The revised programme for the year totalled £61.7m with £28.2m being funded by BCBC resources and the balance of £33.5m being funded from external sources. A breakdown of the programme across services was shown in Table 1 in the report, with more detail regarding the funding of the programme being shown in Table 2.

Details regarding individual schemes were shown in Appendix A of the report.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change stated that Members will see that the total requested slippage at Quarter 3 is £28.5m. The reasons for the slippage was detailed at paragraph 4.4 of the report.

As well as adjustments for slippage the report also detailed some new and amended schemes for approval which included Welsh Government funding received to fund a number of schemes including the:

- o Transforming Towns Placemaking grant to address the decline in town centres and the reduced demand for High Street retail;
- o Housing with care funding to support the development of the children's residential hub;

- o ULEV Transformation Fund monies to support the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure within public car parks ; and
- o Access Improvement Fund Grant to support work to improve access to and on the public rights of way network.

In addition to the Welsh Government grants, funding had also been identified to fund other initiatives, to include;

- Additional as S106 contributions to support the provision of affordable housing schemes;
- Additional funding from the Cardiff Capital region local transport fund to support the Porthcawl bus station project;
- Funding to support the Porthcawl Welsh medium seedling school scheme design;
- Funding from Sport Wales to improve external facilities at Ysgol Bryn Castell for use by the schools and the community;
- Public crossing work at Kenfig Hill; and
- Additional funding for ICT equipment purchases for schools

There were also changes to two schemes detailed in the report, with the full revised programme being shown at Appendix B.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that when Council approved the Capital Strategy for this year, it included prudential indicators for 2022-23 to 2024-25. Appendix C to the report, reflected that the Council is operating within the approved local authority limits.

The Cabinet Member – Resources commended the report.

A Member asked for some clarification around the Llynfi Valley Development Loan, in that a loan suggest some monies have to be paid back, which he did not think was fully the case.

The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that though it was called a loan, part of this was in fact non-repayable.

A Member welcomed the added funding streams for Porthcawl Bus station (£404k) and the Children’s Residential Hub (608k).

A Member enquired what the Highway Schemes represented in terms of Band B schools and also asked when the electrical vehicle charging devices would be operational in Bridgend car parks.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, confirmed that funding from Welsh Government was committed in terms of Intervention Rates of 75% for special schools and 65% for ‘other’ schools. However, added funding had to be found by the local authority for infrastructure works around schools in order to achieve adequate and safe access to them. This was a significant amount he added, bearing in mind the number of schools in the County Borough as well as those intended as proposed, ie new build.

The Corporate Director – Communities added that all public car parks would have a facility to charge electronic vehicles post 2025, and the Council were currently waiting for Western Power to power some charging points by end February/March. When these were up and running, a communication would go out to this effect for the benefit of the public.



elements which individual Councils can choose to adopt. Any additional associated costs must however, be funded locally.

The current scheme adopted by Bridgend County Borough Council will end on the 31 March 2023, explained the Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme Regulations 2023 have now been laid before the Senedd for approval. The new regulations contain a change to the current scheme to:

- Ensure that applicable Ukrainian nationals will be eligible to be included in a local authority's council tax relief scheme and will be eligible for a discount if they meet the other requirements of the scheme;
- Provide protection for hosts for the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The regulations make provision so that any Ukrainian national who has been granted leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or who has a right of abode, is to be treated as a dependent on the applicant host for the purpose of calculating entitlement to this discount. In effect this preserves the level of entitlement of the host applicant;
- Remove the exception for European Economic Area citizens who are now subject to immigration control

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change added that the new regulations do not contain any other significant changes to the current scheme and the maximum level of support that eligible claimants can receive remained at 100%

Within the prescribed requirements regulations there is limited discretion given to the Council to apply elements that are more generous than the national scheme. These were:

- The ability to increase the standard extended reduction period of four weeks given to persons after they returned to work where they previously received CTR.
- Discretion to increase the amounts of war disablement pensions and war widows pensions which is disregarded when calculating income of the claimant.
- An ability to back date the application for council tax relief with regard to late claims prior to the new standard period of three months before the claim.

The Council was required to adopt a scheme by the 31 January 2023, regardless of whether it chooses to apply any of the discretionary elements. If the Authority failed to agree a scheme, then a default scheme would apply.

She added that proposed discretionary elements for 2023-2024, were outlined in more detail in Table 1 at paragraph 4.23 of the report. The discretion proposed, related to disregard levels in relation to income received in respect of war disablement pensions and war widows/widowers pensions and the proposal is that the total value of any pension specified would be disregarded.

The estimated cost to the Council of these proposals is £6,659 in 2023-24.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change concluded by stating that from the latest data, there were currently 12,602 households receiving Council Tax Reduction (CTR); 8,101 of these were of working age and 4,500 were of pensionable age. Out of the 12,601 households receiving CTR, 9,701 are entitled to a full CTR reduction.



**RESOLVED:**

That Council:

- Noted The Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013, and the 2014 to 2023 amendment regulations;
- Adopted the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023-2024 as set out in paragraphs 4.18 to 4.23 of the report.

**84. LLYNFI DEVELOPMENT SITES - FORMER MAESTEG WASHERY SITE WEST**

The Corporate Director – Communities submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to seek Council approval to enter into a Deed of Variation between Welsh Government and Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) that sets out to vary the existing Llynfi Development Sites, Welsh Government Central Capital Retained Fund Loan Agreement dated 12th February 2015.

She explained that BCBC were now considering the re-development of only the Former Maesteg Washery West Site for housing development and wish to vary the original Agreement to allow the carrying out of the feasibility works.

By way of some background information, in 2013 DTZ Real Estate Investment Management carried out an analysis of all sites in the Llynfi Valley that could potentially be brought forward for development but had issues that needed to be overcome before they could be taken to market. Three sites were originally identified in the study as Priority 1 Strategic Opportunities for residential-led development (see Appendix A to the report):

- The Former Maesteg Washery Site West
- The Former Maesteg Washery Site East
- The Former Maesteg Lower Comprehensive School Site

An application was made to the Welsh Government's Central Capital Retained Fund which resulted in Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) Regeneration securing a £2.5 million loan with no match funding being required from BCBC.

The Loan Agreement (see Appendix B) was signed in February 2015 between Welsh Government and BCBC to enable the Council to deal with physical constraints on the sites, in order to bring them forward for residential development integrated with amenity open space.

Following the carrying out of a Feasibility Study, the Council were advised not to pursue the re-development of the Former Maesteg Washery East Site, with the Former Maesteg Lower Comprehensive School Site being deemed as having the potential to be developed by other means, Extra Care Housing (ECH).

It was therefore agreed by the BCBC Llynfi Development Sites Project Board that the Council would progress with the Former Maesteg Washery Site West only.

In June 2022, the confirmed consultancy fees and site works costings for Tranche 1 (Feasibility) were sent to Welsh Government by BCBC and an application made that Tranche 1 be increased to £322,589 to reflect the significant increase. This application also proposed that Tranche 1 become a grant as opposed to a loan and entering into a Deed of Variation (DoV) to the original Loan Agreement will reflect this. Welsh Government grants panel approval and subsequent ministerial approval to vary the original Agreement to this effect via a DoV was obtained in July 2022.



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

86. **TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTION FROM:**

**Councillor Tim Thomas to the Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations:**

Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on whether they are satisfied that socially rented homes in the County Borough are, as far as possible, safe, and free from detriments that can cause negative health outcomes?

**Response**

The Minister for Climate Change wrote to all social landlords on 15th December 2022 following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, who died from a respiratory condition caused by exposure to mould. This letter outlined the action required of social landlords in Wales to ensure that measures are in place to specifically identify and address reported issues with damp and mould. This includes reference to investigations and inspections, dealing with condensation and its causes, rectifying any defects as promptly as possible and supporting tenants with help and advice. Welsh Government has requested information and assurances that landlords are responding to these issues be provided to them by the 20th January.

As Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations I am fully supportive of the steps being taken by Welsh Government in re-enforcing to social landlords their responsibilities. I too have recently sought reassurances from local Registered Social Landlord's (RSL's) that they are taking steps to ensure that their accommodation is safe. I will continue to seek reassurances that this is the case from our RSL partners in Bridgend, and that any necessary actions highlighted through the review are followed through.

There is a framework of policies, processes and law that sets out the standards expected from homes, not only within the social rented sector, but also in relation to private rented sector in general.

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 took effect on the 1st December 2022. This changes the way that landlords rent their properties and applies to landlords and letting/managing agents. The Act brings increased rights for tenants and a key element of this legislation is that all properties must be safe. This Act introduced a requirement to ensure that homes are Fit for Human Habitation (FFHH). This includes a requirement for electrical safety testing and ensuring that smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are fitted in properties.

In addition, Rent Smart Wales, a licensing and registration system supports those who let or manage properties and provides advice on the requirements and obligations to ensure that landlords comply with health and safety requirement for the private sector.

The Welsh Quality Housing Standards (WQHS) is in place for all new social housing developments and ensures that properties are in a good state of repair, safe and secure, and adequately heated. The WQHS 2023 is currently being updated to drive up standards on decarbonisation ambitions and include energy saving elements for tenants. Developments funded through the Social Housing Grant (SHG) – a WG grant - must comply with these standards. This grant supports the planned development programme to increase the supply of accommodation by Registered Social Landlords (RSL's). The

housing service works closely with Welsh Government and local RSL's to deliver new housing through a 3 year programme. Although the outcomes at this stage are estimates, the programme is scheduled to deliver 536 homes over a 3 year period with a grant funding level estimated to be in the region of £41million.

We are also able to take action in the form of enforcement. Information from the Shared Regulatory Service shows that they received 46 complaints from tenants of Social Landlords in 2022 under the following categories :-

- Disrepair = 15
- Damp and Disrepair = 15
- Damp and Mould = 12
- Rats, Damp and Disrepair = 1
- Rats and Disrepair = 3

Their first action to complaints from tenants of RSLs would be to contact the RSL for information and request that they look into the complaint and take remedial action where appropriate. They do not routinely inspect as a result of a complaint but where there is a lack of progress they will do so and issue both informal and formal notices if this is deemed to be required.

### **Supplementary question from Councillor Thomas**

I am glad the Cabinet Member for Future Generations has noted mould and dampness. I am concerned with several referrals in relation to asbestos. Can he outline any conversations he has had with the mapping and safe maintenance of incidents of asbestos that are of a concern.

### **Response**

I have been reassured by Valleys to Coast just this week that they are going to review their housing stock in properties where they may be asbestos, as a considerable number of their properties were constructed pre -1999 before the regulations regarding asbestos were introduced. If any works need to take place in properties where there is any asbestos, then this obviously has to be undertaken safely in accordance with relevant health and safety regulations to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents. He assured the Member he would look into this further. Funding has also been given to, for example Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) for VOIDS, so that these may also be brought back into usage.

### **Second supplementary question from Councillor Heidi Bennett**

How is the Council working with RSL's in order to address housing shortages in the County Borough?

### **Response**

We are working with both RSL's and the likes of Welsh Government and are in year one of a three year plan to construct further housing accommodation across Bridgend. We have plans to construct 536 homes within the life of this plan, but of course, it does take some time to construct new build housing. There is funding for this plan (including grant funding) in the sum of £41m. The new builds will be strategically planned where dwellings will include smaller affordable housing, ie 1 and 2 bed properties as opposed to just larger housing accommodation and will take into account in terms of design and structure, access for residents with difficulties, including low level access for wheelchair

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users. This work would progress in conjunction with support from our RSL's and BCBC's Housing team, in order to progress developments in line with what has been planned.

87. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 19:15