

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD IN REMOTELY VIA SKYPE FOR BUSINESS ON WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020 AT 15:00

Present

Councillor SE Baldwin – Chairperson

TH Beedle	JPD Blundell	NA Burnett	MC Clarke
N Clarke	RJ Collins	HJ David	P Davies
PA Davies	SK Dendy	DK Edwards	J Gebbie
T Giffard	RM Granville	CA Green	DG Howells
A Hussain	RM James	B Jones	M Jones
MJ Kearn	DRW Lewis	JE Lewis	JR McCarthy
D Patel	RL Penhale-Thomas	AA Pucella	JC Radcliffe
KL Rowlands	B Sedgebeer	RMI Shaw	CE Smith
SG Smith	JC Spanswick	RME Stirman	G Thomas
T Thomas	E Venables	SR Vidal	MC Voisey
LM Walters	KJ Watts	CA Webster	DBF White
PJ White	A Williams	AJ Williams	HM Williams
JE Williams	RE Young		

Apologies for Absence

JH Tildesley MBE

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Deborah Exton	Interim Deputy Head of Finance
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gill Lewis	Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Manager
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

418. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

419. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meetings of Council of 26 February and 11 March 2020, be approved as a true and accurate record

420. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR

The Mayor announced his sincere thanks to all the staff of BCBC who have truly stepped up to the challenges presented to them over the last four months. Staff across all departments had worked extremely hard to ensure that services have continued to run smoothly and successfully for its residents. Staff had adapted very quickly to new and different working environments and brought innovation to areas where a rapid response was necessary, working over and above for an extended period while also facing their own personal challenges brought on by the pandemic, their dedication and hard work is admirable.

The Mayor also announced that he had adapted to a new way of working and had attended engagements via Skype and will continue to do so. He was honoured to provide video messages on behalf of BCBC to mark VE Day and commemorate the victims of the genocide in Srebrenica. Despite the current situation he felt it was important to continue to mark important events and remember the people affected.

The Mayor announced with sadness the passing of former Mayor and Councillor Reg Jenkins, who served as a member of the Council for two terms before stepping down to enjoy retirement in 2017. He was not only a very active ward member for Pontycymer but also infamous for his annual stint as Santa, raising thousands of pounds for local charities. On behalf of the Council, he extended the Council's condolences to his wife Teresa.

421. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER

The Leader announced that the Council is aiming to reopen children's play areas by 30 July. He stated that all sites could not be opened immediately as each site had to be properly risk assessed and inspected to make sure they are safe to use, the play equipment is not damaged or vandalised and we are able to take all necessary precautions to limit the potential for exposure to the coronavirus. To accommodate this new signage has to be introduced to advise people on requirements of social distancing and use of hand sanitizer in the play area and more.

He also announced that the annual electoral canvas is underway and the Council is encouraging as many eligible householders as possible to complete their registrations online as part of efforts to limit the spread of coronavirus. He informed Council that following the Bill passed by members of the Senedd in November last year, teenagers aged 14 and 15 years of age can now register as pre attainers so they can vote at the age of 16. He hoped Members will encourage local residents to complete the canvas where ever necessary and the electoral pages of the Council's website contain more details about how they can do this.

The Leader also announced that throughout the pandemic the Council has undertaken a range of initiatives designed to help local sports clubs, this includes setting up the Bridgend Sport Support Fund to provide clubs with grants for up to £1,000. There had been a recent decision to waive fees for the 2019-20 season and ongoing support for clubs that are already developing community asset transfers. More support has been made available through the Sports Wales De-active Wales Fund this is enabling clubs to apply for grants for between £300 to £50,000 to help pay for utilities, insurance and other fixed costs that may be in place for facility or equipment hire. It can also help clubs make adaptations to ensure that activities are safe such as introducing one way system, providing hand sanitizer and online booking platforms or installing health and safety signage. If Members are aware of any local clubs within their communities who may benefit from this full details are available at the Sports Wales website and we would encourage sports clubs to take full advantage of the funding opportunities available.

He also wanted to inform constituents know that with the pandemic still in effect a range of financial support is available for anyone who is facing difficulty paying their Council Tax. More than 6,000 letters had been issued to advising residents of outstanding balances on their accounts. He stated this was a particular challenging and uncertain time and the Council has sought to work with residents whenever possible. A range of options are available including reductions, discounts and referrals and he hoped Members will encourage anyone who may be experiencing issues to contact the authority in order to find a way forward.

The Leader announced that today's meeting of Council would be the last meeting to be attended by Sue Cooper, Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing, prior to her retirement. He referred to the Director's distinguished record as a leader of such an important profession to this authority and to Wales. A profession that she had been part of all her working life and she had been very passionate about the support provided to the most vulnerable of the Borough and her determination to ensure the heart of all the decisions made was there from the first day she started working for Ogwr Borough Council and it will be there for the last day she works for Bridgend Borough Council. Ms Cooper started on the front line and that dedication to the citizens and to the communities of Bridgend has been demonstrated time and time again and not least by her recent decision to defer her retirement as the pandemic was having such a devastating impact in Bridgend. He stated that she had changed her plans as she wanted to lead the authority's response to the emergency in Social Services. He thanked Ms Cooper for the outstanding job she has done.

The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help thanked the Director for her dedication, determination to get things done and to get them done safely which had been a superb trait and done with compassion. He was so proud to be a colleague and a friend of hers and from speaking to others in her profession and position had admired her professionalism and a role model for others. He stated that she had been inspirational over the last 5 years taking the Directorate through the transformation programme and merging the authority into a new health region, that transition had been a great success for Bridgend. He informed Council that she had reached the pinnacle of her career reaching it through sheer hard work. He was going to miss Ms Cooper and felt the Directorate is fit for purpose for the 21 century and this authority and the people and residents of Bridgend are better for her contribution and compassion for doing things right for social care in Bridgend and for Wales. He wished Ms Cooper a long and healthy retirement.

The Leader of the Opposition reiterated everything all her colleagues had said and that she would miss Ms Cooper greatly. She thanked her for the professional way in which she had carried out her role and what she has done for the residents of the County Borough of Bridgend and especially for its most vulnerable residents and wished her a very happy and long retirement.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing thanked the Members for their comments, which had left her overwhelmed. She stated that it had been a tough few months but felt Bridgend has come through it really well and it had been a privilege to work alongside everybody during the last few months. She thanked everyone for their support over 36 years, and particularly thanked the Leader and Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help, the former Leader of the Council and to the previous Cabinet Member. She stated that it has been hard at times and really challenging but always been rewarding. It had been a privilege to being a small part in supporting and improving the lives of people and those people how are most vulnerable. She stated that she is very proud of her profession and to be a social worker and very proud to work of the Council, which has a really good reputation. She thanked all for their good wishes.

422. UPDATE ON BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Chief Executive delivered a presentation on the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the steps being taken towards recovery, and to update Members on the approach to recovery, including the establishment of a Cross-Party Recovery Panel.

He informed Council that in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic, on 23 March 2020 the UK Government imposed a nationwide lockdown in an effort to help minimise

the spread of coronavirus. Since then, Council has undergone significant change over the last four months, often responding urgently to changing circumstances, guidance and regulation. New services have been created, some services stopped, staff redeployed and new working practices put in place including enabling those that can work from home to do so. He stated that the focus throughout the last four months has been on the delivery of essential services, in particular those for the most vulnerable in its communities, and seeking to prevent the spread of the virus to save lives. He informed Council that services had been adapted at a scale and pace that was unprecedented, while emergency governance arrangements had been out in place. Throughout this process, there had been one Council approach and enhanced partnership working.

He highlighted a graphic showing the Council's response to Covid-19. He also highlighted the number of Covid-19 cases and sadly the number of deaths in the County Borough.

The Chief Executive outlined the steps being taken with the gradual easing of lockdown, together with the ongoing challenges affecting the Council. He highlighted the financial challenges on the Council, namely the additional cost pressures, lost income to the Council and that savings in the Medium Term Financial Strategy of £2.413m may not be achieved. However unanticipated savings had been made in home to school transport, premises and fuel. He stated there was likely to be a shortfall in Council Tax collection, especially given the delay in starting recovery and an increase in Council Tax benefits. He informed Council of the range of financial support which had been available by the Welsh Government across Wales. He highlighted the position of the monthly claims for additional expenditure submitted to the Welsh Government together with the financial challenges facing the Council, with a £3.8m overspend at quarter 1.

The Chief Executive outlined the process of Restart, Recover and Renew, the establishment of a Cross Party Recovery Panel. There would be a need to reset the 2020/21 budget and Corporate Plan taking account of circumstances and revised priorities. He highlighted the recovery priorities facing the Council together with a coordinated response to recovery. He informed Council of the need to embrace the new normal but also to understand the opportunities and risks. He concluded by informing Council that it had been a uniquely challenging 4 month period, with unprecedented change and the Council's response had been excellent, with the response by some staff being heroic. He stated that the economic hit was likely to be severe with increased unemployment and benefit claimants.

A member of Council questioned how confident the Council is to cope with a second peak. The Chief Executive informed Council that all Nightingale hospitals had been kept and services were better prepared for a second peak. The infection had been less in Bridgend compared to the other areas making up Cwm Taf Health Board and that weekly meetings take place with the Chief Executive and Chair of the Health Board.

A member of Council thanked the key workers of the Council for their work during the pandemic and he thanked officers for their work in processing referrals in such a timely manner during this time.

A member of Council referred to the Cross Recovery Panel and asked whether meeting arrangements would be flexible and webcasted. The Chief Executive envisaged that meetings of the panel will be flexible, it would be able to invite attendees and then report its findings to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations to Cabinet. There would be no intention for meetings of the Panel to be webcasted. He stated that the Panel would need to look at the reset of the budget

and Corporate Plan in order to make recommendations to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and onwards to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (1) noted the presentation of the Chief Executive;
- (2) noted the approach approved by Cabinet to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and allow the Council to re-start, recover and renew its service provision;
- (3) noted the establishment of a Cross-Party Recovery Panel to help shape, inform, and advise Cabinet on the Council's recovery planning.

423. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME OUTTURN 2019-20 AND QUARTER 1 UPDATE REPORT 2020-21**

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change presented a report to comply with the requirement of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities; provided an update on the capital outturn for 2019-20; provided an update of the Capital Programme for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020; sought approval for a revised capital programme for 2020-21 to 2029-30 and for Council to note the projected Prudential and Other Indicators for 2020-21.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change reported that Council on 20 February 2019, approved a capital programme of £35.474m, which was last updated on 26 February 2020 and which had been further revised and approved by council during the year to incorporate budgets brought forward from 2018-19 and any new schemes and grant approvals. She stated that the most recent programme for 2019-20, approved by Council in February 2020 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, totalled £30.137m, of which £13.964m is met from BCBC resources, including capital receipts, revenue contributions from earmarked reserves and borrowing, with the remaining £16.173 million coming from external resources.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change informed Council that few amendments had been made other than new approvals of £1.964m as a result of a new grant scheme from the Welsh Government - the Hwb Infrastructure Grant and £0.403m funding brought back from 20-21 to more reflect more accurately the spend profiles, which brought the revised budget to £32.504m. She informed Council that total expenditure as at 31 March 2020 was £22.822m, resulting in a total under spend of £9.682m. During the year a number of schemes have commenced but not been completed during the year, or have been moved wholly into 2020-21. These include the refurbishment of Waterton Depot, Bridge Strengthening at the A4061 Ogmere Valley, City Deal and regeneration works at Llynfi Valley. She stated that slippage has arisen due to a number of reasons including delays in starting projects due to the need to undertake more detailed survey works, ongoing discussions with funding bodies and other general programme delays. There was also likely to be significant slippage during 2020-21 as a consequence of the Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent regulations on social distancing.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change informed Council that net slippage into 2020-21 of £9.073 million was required, the main schemes being:

- £2,246,000 in respect of the Llynfi Development – Welsh Government has agreed an extension to the loan of 6 months to enable the Council to undertake further feasibility work

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020

- £908,600 of funding for minor capital works has slipped due to the delay in completing a number of schemes
- £564,000 in respect of the Children's Residential Hub due to delays in finalising funding approval
- £471,000 in respect of Bridge Strengthening. Substantial elements of the works were delayed by the utility company and as such many elements of the contract spend were deferred until later within the revised contract period.
- £582,000 in respect of the Enterprise Hub due to the project being reprofiled and reconfigured in 2020-21
- £520,000 in respect of Digital Transformation whilst the digital strategy has been developed, to ensure the development is taking into account the effects of Covid -19 and how digital can support the Council in terms of its operational model
- £320,000 in respect of 21st Century Schools Band B. New schemes are currently at feasibility stage
- £260,000 in respect of Maesteg Town Hall due to delays, and changes to funding profiles as a result of the Council maximising additional grant funding during 2019-20.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change reported on an update on the Council's capital programme for 2020-21 since the budget was last approved by Council which incorporated any new schemes and grant approvals. The revised programme for 2020-21 currently totalled £62.305m, of which £40.313m is met from the Council's resources, including capital receipts, revenue contributions from earmarked reserves and borrowing, with the remaining £21.992 million coming from external resources, including General Capital Grant. The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change highlighted the position by each Directorate. She summarised the current funding assumptions for the capital programme for 2020-21 and that capital resources are managed to ensure that maximum financial benefit for the Council is achieved, which may include the realignment of funding to maximise government grants.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change reported on a number of amendments made to the capital programme for 2020-21 as follows:

- 21st Century Schools Band B
- Mynydd Cynffig Primary School – Mobile Classrooms
- Installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs)
- Children's Residential Accommodation Hub
- Bryncethin Depot
- Bridgend Enterprise Hub
- Community Recycling Centre (CRC), Village Farm Industrial Estate, Pyle
- Western Valley Empty Homes Pilot

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change also reported on the monitoring of Prudential and other indicators for 2020-21 to 2022-23 together with some local indicators. The Capital Strategy is intended to give an overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future sustainability. A number of prudential indicators were included, and approved by Council. In line with the requirements of the Prudential Code, the Chief Finance Officer is required to establish procedures to monitor both performance against all forward-looking prudential indicators and the requirement specified. She detailed the actual indicators for 2019-20, the estimated indicators for 2020-21 set out in the Council's Capital Strategy and the projected indicators for 2020-21 based on the revised

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020

Capital Programme, which shows that the Council is operating in line with the approved limits.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change reported that the Capital Strategy also requires the monitoring of non-treasury management investments and other long term liabilities. She stated that the Council does have an existing investment portfolio which is 100% based within the County Borough and primarily the office and industrial sectors. Income streams are spread between the single and multi-let office investments on Bridgend Science Park, the multi-let industrial estates and the freehold ground rent investments. The total value of Investment Properties was £4.635 million at 31 March 2020. She informed Council that it has a number of Other Long Term Liabilities included within the Capital Strategy.

The Deputy Leader informed Council that this was a very challenging time for the Council which had resulted in slippage to a number of schemes. He stated that emergency powers had to be used to amend the capital programme to authorise expenditure of £1.2m for the provision of temporary classrooms and to undertake infrastructure works on sections of the main school building that are required to be retained and kept in use (e.g. hall and kitchen) at Mynydd Cynffig Primary School.

A member of Council was pleased to note the emergency funding of works to Mynydd Cynffig Primary School, which due to the serious identified to the condition of the school posed a health and safety risk to pupils and staff. The member thanked the Council on behalf of the pupils, staff and governing body for the speed of which temporary classrooms and infrastructure works were authorised.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- Noted the capital outturn for 2019-20;
- noted the Council's Capital Programme for 2020-21 Quarter 1 update to 30 June 2020;
- approved the revised Capital Programme;
- noted the projected Prudential and Other Indicators for 2020-21.

424. INFORMATION REPORT FOR NOTING

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

<u>Title</u>	<u>Date Published</u>
Urgent Delegated Decisions	16 July 2020

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

425. TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FROM:

Question from Councillor MC Voisey to the Deputy Leader

"How many court actions, fines, attachment to earnings orders etc.) and the use of bailiffs have BCBC used in the last 12 months to recover unpaid council tax, and how much has been recovered in such actions?"

Response of the Deputy Leader:

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020

Council Tax is payable on all domestic dwellings in the borough and is payable as of 1st April each year. However everyone is given the option to pay by way of 10 or 12 monthly instalments. If an instalment is missed then a reminder notice is issued requesting payment and the recovery process commenced. The process was summarised in the form of a flow chart.

Once a final notice is issued the council tax payer loses the right to pay by instalments and the full outstanding balance for the year becomes payable.

- If full payment is received then no further action is taken
- If part or no payment is received then a summons is received and costs incurred for the outstanding balance

Once a summons is issued the council tax payer loses the right to pay by instalments and the full outstanding balance for the year becomes payable

- If full payment is received including costs before the court date then no further action is taken
- If part payment is received before the court date then a Liability Order is obtained from the Magistrates Court for the remaining balance
- If no payment is received before the court date then a Liability Order is obtained from the Magistrates Court for the outstanding balance

Currently once a liability order is obtained from the Magistrates Court the following courses of action are available to us in order to recover the Council Tax outstanding debt:-

Course of Action

Comments

Office agreement

If someone enters into an agreement and payments continue to be paid then no further action is taken. However if an agreement is broken then initially they receive a letter asking them to bring their agreement up to date. If this is not done then an alternative method of recovery is taken which could involve any of the other methods available depending on what information is held on the particular account.

Attachment to earnings

This is where the outstanding balance is collected via a person's earnings at source based on their net income. Only 2 attachment of earnings can be running at one time. Central government stipulate the amount to be deducted by the employer and will continue until the debt is paid in full or the employee leaves employment. The employer is then responsible for forwarding any deductions directly to us in order to clear the debt. If a person leaves employment then a letter is sent asking them to contact us to make alternative arrangements to clear the debt. However if no contact is received and no alternative method available the debt may be passed to enforcement agents for collection where further costs will be incurred.

Attachment to benefits

This is where the outstanding balance is deducted from a person's benefit at source. However it is only possible to make these deductions from certain benefits and the amount deducted is set by central government depending on the benefit the person is in receipt of and only 1 attachment to benefits can run at any time. Due to the fact that a person in receipt of benefits is on a low income the

deduction amounts are relatively low so a debt takes a considerable time to be paid off. If a person is no longer in receipt of a benefit that can be attached to then a letter is sent requesting they contact us to make alternative arrangements. However if no contact is received and no alternative method available, depending on the value of the outstanding balance, the debt may be passed to enforcement agents for collection where further costs will be incurred.

Taking control of goods
via enforcement agents

The use of enforcement agents is usually the last resort when no other alternative method of recovery is available to us. Once a debt is passed to the enforcement agents an initial letter is sent to the debtor. At this point a charge of £75 is incurred, however the debtor can now make an arrangement with the enforcement agents to clear the debt without them having to visit the property. As long as this arrangement is kept and the debt paid in full then no further action is taken and the enforcement agent would not have to visit the property. If however the letter is ignored then an enforcement agent would visit the property with the view to collecting the full outstanding balance, at which point an extra charge of £235 becomes payable. There may also be an extra fee payable depending on the value of the debt. Note, the fee structure has been set in legislation under the Tribunals Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 – The Taking Control of Goods (Fees) Regulations 2014 - and are therefore not negotiable.

Charging Order

If a debt has been returned from the enforcement agents as they were unable to collect it, then if the property is owned by the debtor a charging order may be placed on the property if the debt outstanding on that property is over £1000. This requires the Legal section of the Council to request an interim charging order from the County Court. The legal section then write to the debtor advising them that the interim charge has been obtained and of the date the final charge will be requested unless paid in full. If the debt is paid in full along with the legal costs incurred then no further action taken. If the debt is not paid in full then the final charge is requested from the court and registered against the property on land registry. Only when the debt is paid in full including any costs incurred, will the charge be removed from the land registry records. This type of recovery action is only used in very limited cases and is effective when a property is being sold as the new owners do not want to buy a property with a charge on it. If the property is empty then the Council may apply to the court for an order of sale.

Bankruptcy

This form of recovery action can only be used if the council tax debt outstanding is over £5,000 and would only be used if the assets of the council tax payer would be in excess of the amount owed. A bankruptcy hearing will be

arranged for the County Court which every effect should be made to attend.

Prior to 1 April 2019 the threat of imprisonment coerced council tax payers into paying their charge however since 1 April 2019 the sanction of Committal for non-payment of Council tax has been removed making it more difficult to collect debt from problem debtors. However where committal proceedings have commenced prior to 1 April 2019 these can continue to be dealt with.

One council tax payer could have numerous liability orders with a debt outstanding on each relating to numerous years.

One liability order could start to be collected via an attachment to earnings, however the debtor then becomes unemployed and makes an office agreement, they then fail to keep to the terms of the agreement and the debt passes to the enforcement agents. This shows that an individual liability order can have numerous methods of recovery taken in order to collect the debt outstanding and could take years to be collected in full.

We have many council tax accounts where we are collecting debts on more than one liability order at any one time, each one being collected by a different method of recovery. This could also be in conjunction with the current year's instalments.

The revenues ICT system we use does not lend itself to providing a breakdown of how much has been collected via each recovery method as each liability order could potentially have had several different recovery methods used over a course of time with part payment from each method of recovery .

Also it is not possible to identify payments made in relation to attachment of earnings via the cash receipting system used by the council.

This authority has always tried to maximise the collection of debt and will only send debt to the enforcement agents as the last resort as we try to avoid as further costs being incurred by the debtor.

A Table showing the number of liability orders obtained from the Court in the 2018/19 financial year and for 2019/20 to date was outlined. It also includes the number and value of accounts sent to the enforcements agents for the same period along with the income received from them during the same period. However the amount received for a period of time does not necessarily relate to the accounts sent during the same period as they could be for debts sent in previous years.

Attachment of earnings and enforcement agency could relate to debts from previous years, and not solely those for which Liability Orders have been obtained during the year. They could also be sent for the same recovery method more than once in a year: e.g. a debt may be sent to the enforcement agents who may then return it to us as they cannot trace the debtor. If we then locate a forwarding address the debt may be sent back to them for the same liability order. Hence one liability order will show as 2 liability orders sent to the enforcement agents. Likewise If an attachment to earnings is sent and the person leaves that particular employer but starts employment elsewhere a new attachment of earnings will be sent to the new employer hence showing again as one liability order with 2 attachment to earnings.

Currently the in-year council tax collection rate stands at 95.1% which equates to a total of £78,993,469.70 being collected to date this financial year and the arrears collection for previous years currently stands at 31.6% which equates to a reduction in the arrears total compared to the start of the year of £1,808,042.17.

The revenues section is looking to make system improvements in the new financial year as part of the automation/digitalisation programme in order to improve efficiency and collection. With these modules the revenues section will be able to automate more of the current manual processes which will free up time in order for the service to be able to focus on the recovery of the more difficult and time consuming outstanding debts. The quicker the process the more likelihood of collecting the debt. This automation of processes will result in faster response times and engagement with customers, improved collection rates and income for the Council as a whole.

Councillor Voisey in his supplementary question asked what action the Council will take to improve the collection rate of Council Tax where residents will not pay Council Tax. The Deputy Leader informed Council that the number where the Council fails to get a response from residents and summons residents who will not pay Council Tax is low. He stated that offices will work towards achieving a 98% collection rate. The Section 151 Officer informed Council that she would inform Members of the collection rate of Council Tax at year end.

A member of Council questioned the positive impact of the removal of Council Tax on empty properties. The Deputy Leader informed Council that the removal of Council tax had enabled 866 previously empty properties to be brought back into use. The construction of new properties in the Borough had generated an additional £1.5m in Council Tax.

A member of Council referred to the furlough scheme coming to an end and asked whether data modelling exercises could be carried linking Council Tax records with credit reference agencies in order to assist residents who may experience hardship in paying Council Tax. The Deputy Leader stated that he would be happy to look at this. He stated that collection rates will affect authorities across Wales and he was grateful for the support provided by the Welsh Government.

Question from Councillor A Hussain to the Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help

Evidence has emerged during the Pandemic that health professional from ethnic backgrounds have been disproportionately affected by COVID – 19. Could the Cabinet Member assure us that all health professionals working in Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Authority including our Care Homes had their risk assessments as a precautionary measure including their ethnicity as a risk factor, along with age, weight, underlying health conditions, disability and pregnancy, and what have we learned?

Response of the Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help

The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board have been using a standard risk assessment tool which has been made available to all staff. The risk assessment tool has been targeted at BAME staff and where a risk has been identified then managers adjust the workplace or the working pattern or if it is not clear then a referral is made to Occupational Health. If Cllr Hussain has a specific concern about an individual or a local setting then I will be happy to receive that referral and will direct it to the appropriate health professional.

Bridgend County Borough Council has developed a workforce risk assessment to support staff in work and to ensure that any staff member who has been away from work can return to work safely and that any necessary adjustments can be made. In addition the Council have been running infection control training throughout the pandemic and places have been prioritised for BAME staff. Environmental Health, the Health Board and CIW have also been supporting the Care Sector in infection control.

Councillor Hussain in his supplementary question referred to the workforce risk assessment and asked whether lessons had been learnt and when would the report be available. The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help informed Council that the toolkit which has been introduced and had initially focused on health and social care employees working in a clinical setting. This has now been revised by the Welsh Government and can now be used in any workplace, and the Council and Health Board have been reviewing the toolkit and introducing a scoring matrix to support employees to return to their duties. As toolkits are being progressed more widely, the Cabinet Member stated that he would find out when the report will be available.

A member asked a supplementary question in relation to the recent staff survey and whether he was satisfied that all staff who had identified as BAME had done so. The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help informed Council that he was pleased with the response that BAME had identified themselves in the survey and he would send a copy of the report to Members.

A member asked a supplementary question in relation to encouraging partners to use the toolkit. The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help informed Council that the toolkit was now being used more widely and had been developed with the trade unions who had agreed the process for members of staff completing the toolkits. He stated that Cwm Taf Health Board are at the forefront regarding BAME and the risks not only to BAME staff but to BAME residents.

426. NOTICE OF MOTION PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR R YOUNG

Notice of Motion Proposed by Councillor R Young

Bridgend County Borough Council recognises the overwhelming scientific evidence of changing weather patterns as demonstrated by the recent unprecedented rainfall and flooding both at a local and a UK wide level, and is of the opinion that this represents further evidence of global warming, and therefore firmly believes that a climate emergency now exists, and as such calls upon the UK and Welsh Governments to provide Bridgend County Borough Council with:

- a. the necessary powers and resources to make Bridgend County Borough carbon neutral
- b. levels of resource at a scale to respond to the challenges faced and processes for accessing those resources that enable action at the earliest opportunity
 - i) Establish appropriate engagement mechanisms to work with key stakeholders
 - ii) Undertake a Bridgend County Borough Council wide review of current action to respond to Climate Emergency
 - iii) Develop a Climate Emergency Response Strategy and prioritised action plan that sets out short, medium and long term actions.

The Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor CE Smith.

An amendment to the Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor R Penhale Thomas, which was seconded by Councillor N Clarke that the words "Bridgend County Borough Council declares a climate emergency" be added to the beginning of the Notice of Motion.

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Young.

RESOLVED: That the amended Notice of Motion be approved.

427. URGENT ITEMS

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 16:48