

**CABINET - TUESDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2020**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD IN REMOTELY VIA SKYPE FOR BUSINESS ON TUESDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2020 AT 14:30**

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

CE Smith  
NA Burnett

HM Williams

D Patel

RE Young

Officers:

Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Gill Lewis	Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer – Committees

562. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Cabinet Members declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4. in that a current Member of the Authority was a former Director of one of the organisations referred to in the report:-

Councillors HJ David, HM Williams, N Burnett, D Patel, CE Smith and RE Young.

The following Cabinet Members declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 11, for the reasons so given:-

Councillor D Patel – As she knew one of the applicants mentioned in the report  
Councillor RE Young – As a member of Litchard Primary School Board of Governors who knew the applicant who applied for the vacant governor post (at that school).  
Councillor HJ David – As he knew some of the applicants mentioned in the report.

563. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet dated 20 October 2020, be approved as a true and accurate record.

564. ARBED PROGRAMME IN CAERAU

The Chief Executive submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to update Cabinet on an independent survey, commissioned by the Council and undertaken by NuVision Energy (Wales) Ltd (NuVision), on Arbed 1 funded properties in Caerau, and for Cabinet to further consider the findings.

By way of background, he confirmed that in 2011 the Welsh Government (WG) introduced a domestic energy efficiency programme which ran until 2013. This was known as the Arbed 1 Programme and had two primary objectives, to reduce carbon emissions and lower fuel bills within properties to alleviate the effects of fuel poverty. More than 6,000 homes across Wales were included in the Arbed 1 Scheme.

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The Chief Executive advised that in the early part of the scheme, work was undertaken in Caerau which was neither funded by, administered, or involved the Council. At this time RSL's sought funding from energy companies to undertake CESP work in social housing in Caerau. In addition Wales Co, a Community Interest Company, were working with private sector home owners to gauge interest in accessing energy efficiency schemes.

In August 2012 Welsh Government provided the Council with an opportunity to bid for additional funding to complement existing Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) projects. Funding of £56,050 was approved for the installation of boilers and insulation of lofts. In January 2013, additional funds were made available by Welsh Government to progress CESP schemes. The Council made a joint bid with Green Renewable Wales (GRW) Ltd for external wall insulation at 25 owner occupied properties in Caerau. The Council were advised that the bid for £259,825 was successful in early February 2013 and completion had to be by 31st March 2013. Therefore, total funding of £315,875 was received by Bridgend Council from Welsh Government. The funding for both projects was paid to Green Renewable Wales Ltd by the Authority.

GRW Ltd project managed both schemes and appointed sub-contractors to carry out the work, including WalesCo. The same contractors and sub-contractors were also appointed by GRW Ltd and WalesCo to utilise funding (CESP) they gained via energy companies to work on additional properties in Caerau. This resulted in properties having similar work being undertaken by the same contractors regardless of the funding stream. It is evident that the property owners were unaware which funding stream was used on their property.

The Chief Executive continued by confirming that it was estimated that 150 properties in the Caerau ward had boiler replacement, loft insulation, external wall insulation (EWI) and internal wall insulation (IWI) works undertaken during 2012 to 2013, utilising money from different funding streams. 70 of these properties had work undertaken via the funding administered by the Council, of which 25 properties had EWI and IWI work. Based on information gathered, a total of 104 of the 150 properties had EWI and IWI work undertaken in Caerau at this time, so 79 of these were not funded or administered by the Council.

He explained that since completion of the work in 2013, there had been numerous complaints over the standard of this, carried out by the contractors. The majority of the complaints related to the external and internal wall insulation undertaken via all funding streams.

In view of ongoing concerns brought to the attention of the Council, in 2018, Bridgend's Internal Audit Service were requested to carry out a review by the previous Chief Executive to ascertain the extent to which the Council's policies and procedures had or had not been applied in respect of the Arbed funding scheme for the period September 2012 to April 2013 in Caerau. The findings of Internal Audit highlighted a number of internal procedural issues relating to the governance, decision making, procurement, monitoring and control aspects of the funding that the Council administered for this scheme at this time.

Turning to the present situation, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Council and WG agreed to evaluate the work undertaken in Arbed 1 in the Caerau ward. It was anticipated that a jointly commissioned survey would be undertaken, however, the joint commission did not materialise and so the Council subsequently commissioned NuVision Energy (Wales) Ltd (NuVision), to undertake a study on a sample of homes within the whole programme in Caerau.

A non-invasive investigation and evaluation was carried out by NuVision with the objectives of ascertaining:

- Have the measures lowered energy bills for residents?
- Have the measures achieved carbon savings?
- Could the properties currently transition away from a gas boiler to a heat pump?
- What is the current condition of the measures installed?

The NuVision report (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) surveyed a total of 32 properties (as a sample) but due to a lack of baseline information, it was not ultimately possible to accurately quantify either the carbon or cost savings generated by the measures. However, when assessing the current condition of the measures that were installed, defects were identified in each. Seven of these properties surveyed by NuVision had work carried out through the funding stream administered by the Council. The remaining properties had work carried out utilising funding from other non-Council administered funding streams.

Appendix 1 concluded, that some of the work was defective, some of it significantly so. It further stated that whilst there was a case for remedial action to be undertaken to every property surveyed, it was possible that not all homeowners would want further work to be undertaken in view of the inevitable disruption. The NuVision report has provided an estimated cost per property of £16,000 which will involve removing the wall insulation, making good and redecorating where necessary. However, these costs are indicative only and would vary between properties. Whilst only a sample of homes were surveyed it is considered a reasonable sized sample and there is a degree of uniformity in the defects identified. It was therefore reasonable to assume, that defects would be identified in most or all of the 25 properties where funding was administered via the Council, where internal and external wall insulation was installed. It was also evident from the NuVision report that the same defects were present regardless of how the work was funded.

To summarise, the Chief Executive stated that the funding mechanisms and implementation of the whole Arbed 1 programme in Caerau during 2012 and 2013, were reasonably complex. The passage of time with regard to this historical matter and the fact that the Council officers involved in the delivery of the scheme no longer work for the Council, has made the investigation and compilation of the report more difficult. However, it was clear from the work undertaken and the independent survey carried out, that the Council was involved in administering funding for 70 properties in the Caerau ward. Of these 25 mainly focused on external wall and internal wall insulation. It was apparent from the non-invasive survey of building condition that much of the wall insulation work, whether it was on properties where the Council administered the funding or when other parties were responsible, is not of a standard that homeowners would expect.

It was now therefore important he concluded, that the Council seeks to liaise as quickly as possible with other relevant stakeholders involved in the wider EWI / IWI programme in Caerau, to explore available options and determine if a collective and consistent approach can be agreed to address the matters raised in the report/attached Appendix.

Each of the Cabinet Members, in turn, expressed their deep concerns with regard to the content of the report.

The Cabinet Member – Communities, confirmed that cavity wall insulation and external wall insulation was considered to offer many homes the insulation they needed. However, insulation that is installed incorrectly will cause more harm than good and

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unfortunately, at the time, the consequences of that happening were not well understood.

The scheme was launched by Welsh Government to address fuel poverty and to contribute to carbon reduction in some of Wales' poorest areas, and was carried out in more than 6,000 homes across Wales between 2011 – 2013, by a range of contractors, some of which were as it turned out, inexperienced and not fully trained.

In the 1990's and early 2000's With rising energy costs, the government was backing various grants and funding schemes like the one subject of the report, to provide more properties with cavity wall insulation using retrofitted insulation, for those properties with cavities and external wall insulation for those without. Insulation work was subsequently completed on properties right across the UK. Though at first reported problems were minimal, there was now a legacy of incorrectly installed insulation in thousands of houses across the whole of the UK, that sadly included the scheme at Caerau, amongst others in a number of different areas all across Wales, as part of the Arbed programme.

This of course was extremely concerning, especially in light of the excellent progress that has been made locally on other unrelated work which is aiming to provide residents with cheaper, cleaner energy solutions.

The Council was contacting other funding administrators to discuss the findings of the NuVision report and further updates in respect of this would be awaited, as the situation further develops.

The result of the works had been devastating to the owners of the properties affected in Caerau, as was portrayed by the photographic evidence in the report, confirmed the Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing.

Members felt it was important that this was an isolated occurrence in relation to work carried out by the Council on other different major housing schemes.

The Chief Executive confirmed that evidence suggested that this was a one-off historical issue that related just to the Arbed 1 Scheme in Caerau. There were other associated issues he added that had raised some concerns, with regards to compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPR's) and the effective management of external funding, both of which had also come under scrutiny as a result of the project.

It was also felt Cabinet advised, that the Council had to openly acknowledge the devastating effects that had taken place upon residents of the properties affected and apologise for this workmanship. The Authority needed to be totally open and transparent to this end, added the Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help.

The Chief Executive added that this had been and would continue to be the case. The Council had involved both Internal and External Audit in the investigations, as well as the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales. The feedback from any key findings would form part of follow-up reports to the relevant Committees.

The Deputy Leader asked when Cabinet would receive a further follow-up report, outlining the way forward in respect of this matter.

The Chief Executive confirmed that this would be in the New Year and hopefully to the February Cabinet meeting.

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The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration, enquired how many properties in Caerau had been the subject of internal and external wall improvement works and how many of these, had been the subject of Council administered funding.

The Chief Executive advised that a total of 150 properties had been included in the Arbed 1 Scheme. 104 of these had been the subject of internal/external wall works, with only 25 of these having been carried out via funding administered by the local authority. The Council had however, been directly involved in some kind of improvement works at 70 of the above properties. There had been minimal complaints as a result of boiler improvement and loft insulation type works.

The Leader concluded debate on this important report, by extending his apologies to the residents of the properties adversely affected by the project. He added that some of the work carried out had been of an unacceptable standard. He assured the residents who had been affected, that the Council were taking this matter very seriously and that it would resolve these issues by whatever methods were considered both appropriate and necessary, in an open and transparent manner. Further reports he stated would be awaited, as soon as possible, as the Chief Executive had confirmed.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- Noted the content of the NuVision report and that the Council was responsible for administering the funding for 70 properties, of which 25 properties had external wall insulation/ internal wall insulation work.
- Delegated authority to the Chief Executive to engage with relevant stakeholders involved in the wider external wall insulation / internal wall insulation programme in Caerau, and to further explore available options with a view to bringing a further report to Cabinet for consideration.
- Noted that the recently completed Internal Audit report on the current Council Contract Procedure Rules and procurement processes for externally funded schemes will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee.

### 565. VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK FUTURE FUNDING

The Corporate Director – Communities submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to provide an update on the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) scheme and the request from the VRP board that BCBC continue in its role as host. The report also sought approval to accept grant offers, subject to their full approval, from the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) and Welsh Government for future funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Rural Development Programme (RDP) respectively, to fund the continued development of the Valleys Regional Park to June 2023.

She advised that the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) has been developed through the Welsh Government Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys in partnership with the Valleys local authorities (Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Carmarthenshire), Natural Resources Wales, Visit Wales and Welsh Government officials in Health and Environment Divisions. It reflected the views of stakeholders from Valleys communities, the Third Sector, Public Health Wales and feedback received through a series of engagement events. The VRP prospectus was published on 18th October 2018 and plans have been further developed through the partnership led by the VRP team, hosted by Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC).

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She reminded Cabinet, that in the autumn of 2019, Welsh Government and WEFO indicated that funding opportunities existed through RDP and ESF resources to potentially support the continuation of the VRP delivery from March 2021 to June 2023. At its meeting in March 2020 the VRP Board invited BCBC to apply for funding through ESF and RDP in its role as host. This invitation was subsequently supported by the VRP Forum.

In June 2020 BCBC officers under delegated authority submitted two full business cases to Welsh Government and WEFO.

The proposal to Welsh Government was submitted under the RDP Co-operation and Supply Chain Development Scheme to support the continued development of the VRP Guardians Scheme. The current work will provide an evaluation of the development phase which is funded by Welsh Government and is currently being delivered through a contract with Groundwork Wales working to the VRP team. This proposal would deliver the ongoing Guardian Scheme that will utilise the facilities being delivered through the Discovery Gateway capital investments that have been made directly by Welsh Government. The proposal would also enable a procurement process to be undertaken that would seek to take forward the current approach and enable funding to be in place to June 2023 for the Guardians element of the VRP.

The second was a proposal submitted to WEFO for ESF Priority 5, Specific Objective 5: Public Services Reform. This proposal was based on an approach to regional working that would strengthen sustainable management of natural resources through strategic regional collaboration to establish and enable the long-term vision and aims of the VRP to provide significant social, economic and environmental benefits. This proposal would support the VRP team and the development of the partnership with funding in place to June 2023. The proposal supports the development of proposals for the long term governance, operating model and funding mechanism for the VRP. Welsh Government and WEFO have agreed to allow the current funding for VRP to be used as retrospective match for the ESF proposal and attract the grant offer.

Based on the request of the VRP forum to do so, these proposals outlined that BCBC will continue to act as host for the programme team and to extend the appropriate financial and legal agreements with Welsh Government and the Local Authorities that form the VRP. The VRP Strategic and Operational lead would remain as a Welsh Government employee but be hosted by BCBC via an extension of the terms and conditions of the existing hosting agreement.

The Corporate Director – Communities reminded Members that there were two park areas in Bridgend that were part of the VRP, namely Parc Slip Nature Reserve and Bryngarw Park.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration commended Officers in BCBC, for their hard work which had seen the Authority continue to host this initiative and whilst he was happy to note the level of ongoing funding that had been made available, he was also sorry to note, that this was only until 2023.

The Leader advised that the funding to date had gone a considerable way to improving facilities that were now available at both Parc Slip Nature Reserve and Bryngarw Park. He encouraged people to visit both these parks to see these enhanced improvements.

The Cabinet Member – Communities gave his support for what was a good news story, particularly for open areas such as park land during the pandemic.

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The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing concluded debate by commending the 3 valley locations that were situated in the BCB area, adding that it was worth people paying a visit to these scenic locations in order to see what was available there, which included a warm welcome from the residents.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted progress to date in developing the VRP.
2. Noted the request from the VRP board that BCBC continue in its role as host of the VRP
3. Approved the proposal for BCBC to extend its role as host of the VRP delivery team to June 2023 and delegate authority to the Corporate Director Communities, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Chief Officer of Legal, HR & Regulatory Services, to:
  - (i) Approved the final terms of the grant offers and accept the offers of funding from Welsh Government and WEFO for RDP and ESF resources upon their receipt; and
  - (ii) Approved the entering into any appropriate funding and legal agreements necessary to fulfil its role as host the VRP delivery team and its obligations in relation to RDP and ESF funding.

566. DEVELOPMENT OF A TOURIST FOCUSED LAND TRAIN OR SIMILAR PASSENGER CARRYING VEHICLE OPERATION IN PORTHCAWL

The Corporate Director – Communities presented a report, the purpose of which, was to seek Cabinet approval for a proposal to support the establishment of a tourist focussed land train or similar passenger carrying vehicle operation in Porthcawl. The proposal will aim to add value to on-going work to develop a range of sustainable transport methods that better connect the attractions, facilities and services that exist across the seafront with the town centre.

By way of background information, she advised that in 2014, Visit Wales (VW) stated that as part of their European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Infrastructure Development Programme, they were looking to prioritise a small number of regional tourist 'Attractor Destinations' within Wales and anticipated that 2-3 priority schemes may be taken forward in the parts of South East Wales eligible for ERDF funding.

Following a regional prioritisation exercise involving all 10 Local Authorities in the South East Wales area, Porthcawl was scored as a priority for support. This highlighted the importance of the resort in tourism terms, both locally, and for the wider Welsh economy. This was supported in principle by Cabinet in April 2015.

The Corporate Director – Communities reminded Cabinet that to date, BCBC had delivered a number of initiatives through the TAD programme, as were detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

She continued by stating, that as a result of re-profiling the funding package that has already been secured by BCBC through the TAD programme an opportunity now exists to allocate funds to support the establishment of a tourist focussed land train or similar passenger carrying vehicle operation in Porthcawl.

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The intention would be to seek to link the town centre, beaches and other attractions along the seafront from Sandy Bay/Coney Beach to Rest Bay. The proposed operational season would be expected to cover, as a minimum, the main holiday periods and therefore generally commence at the end of March or beginning of Easter through to the end of September. The operator would be responsible for providing the vehicle and meeting all maintenance, repair, insurance and all other operating costs and be responsible for obtaining all approvals necessary to operate the vehicle.

The Corporate Director – Communities added, that this proposal had been discussed in principle with VW and subject to BCBC following appropriate financial processes and procedures is considered to be in line with the overall aspiration of the TAD programme and to add value to work undertaken to date.

It was therefore proposed that the opportunity to operate a tourist focussed land train or similar passenger carrying vehicle on the roads across Porthcawl Seafront, be openly advertised and expressions of interest sought from potential operators.

As soon as an operator has the appropriate consents required to operate the vehicle, route signage, line painting and amendments to the Bridgend County Borough Council (Prohibition and Restriction of Waiting and Loading and Parking Places)(Civil Enforcement) Order 2013 (TRO) will be required to assist in the safe delivery of the local transport link. It was proposed that eligible costs to facilitate these works be funded through the resources already secured by BCBC as part of the TAD programme.

The Cabinet Member – Communities welcomed the report and an added tourist attraction for Porthcawl. He hoped that when expressions of interest were submitted, that these would be for the provision of an energy sustainable vehicle ie electrically run, in-keeping with the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy going forward.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration, stressed the fact that BCBC were facilitating this proposed added feature to one of our leading tourist locations through a successful grant funding application. The business operation itself and any costs generated through this, would be borne by an external operation as opposed to the local authority.

The Leader concluded debate on the item, by reminding those present of the popularity of trains such as this. There was a similar facility provided by volunteers at Parc Slip Nature Reserve, that was very popular with visitors to this tourist location. He assured that the Council would work with the successful operator in order to ensure, that the vehicle provided is both sustainable and accessible, ie for people with mobility issues. He welcomed a further report on this topic, in due course.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted progress of work to date in delivering the aspirations of the TAD programme in Porthcawl
- (2) Approved the proposal to support the establishment of a tourist focused land train or similar passenger carrying vehicle operator in for Porthcawl.
- (3) Authorised officers to undertake the processes and procedures outlined in section 4 of this report and in doing, and in agreement with the Section 151 Officer and Head of Legal and Regulatory Services, grant any necessary consents and enter into any required agreements with the preferred operator.

567. TREASURY MANAGEMENT - HALF YEAR REPORT 2020-21

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to:

- comply with the requirement of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's 'Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice' to produce interim Treasury Management Reports.
- report on the projected Treasury Management Indicators for 2020-21.
- provide an update on the proposed changes to the Treasury Management Strategy 2020-21 and recommend that they be presented to Council for approval.

The background to the report, reminded Cabinet that Treasury Management is the management of the Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risks. The Council is exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of financial risk are therefore central to the Council's prudent financial management.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change also reminded Members, that in 2017 CIPFA also published a new version of the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code). The updated Prudential Code includes a requirement for Local Authorities to provide a Capital Strategy, which is a summary document approved by full Council covering capital expenditure and financing, treasury management and non-treasury investments. The definition of investments in the revised 2017 CIPFA Code now covers all the financial assets of the Council as well as other non-financial assets which the authority holds primarily for financial return. The Council's Capital Strategy 2020-21, complying with CIPFA's requirement includes the Prudential Indicators which in previous years were included in the TMS, along with details regarding the Council's non-treasury investments. The Capital Strategy and TMS should be read in conjunction with each other as they are interlinked as borrowing and investments are directly impacted upon by capital plans and were approved together by Council on 26 February 2020.

She explained further, that the Council had complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements during the first half of 2020-21. The TMS 2020-21 was reported to Council on 26 February 2020 with the Half Year Outturn scheduled to be reported on 18 November 2020. In addition, a quarterly monitoring report was provided to Cabinet in July 2020.

A summary of the treasury management activities for the first half of 2020-21 was shown in table 1 in Appendix A to the report. The Council had not taken long term borrowing since March 2012 and it is not expected that there will be a requirement for any new long term borrowing in 2020-21. Favourable cash flows have provided surplus funds for investment and the balance on investments at 30 September 2020 was £64.29 million with an average rate of interest of 0.24%. This was a significant reduction from the same time last year when the average rate was 0.85%, and showed the impact of the reductions in interest rates during March 2020.

Table 4 in section 4 of Appendix A, detailed the movement of the investments by counterparty types and shows the average balances, interest received, original duration and interest rates for the first half of 2020-21.

The TM Code required the Council to set and report on a number of Treasury Management Indicators. The indicators either summarised the expected activity or

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introduced limits upon the activity. Details of the estimates for 2020-21 set out in the Council's TMS, against current projections, were shown in Appendix A and these reflected that the Council is operating in line with the approved limits.

The Council defines high credit quality as organisations and securities having a credit rating of A- or higher and Appendix B to the report, showed the equivalence table for credit ratings for Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's and explains the different investment grades.

CIPFA's Code of Practice for Treasury Management required all local authorities to conduct a mid-year review of its treasury management policies, practices and activities. The outcome of this review is that there are changes required to investment limits, as were reflected in bullet point format in paragraph 4.7 of the report.

The proposed revised TMS was included at Appendix C to the report and the proposed amendments highlighted in red. Both these amendments had been discussed with the BCBC Treasury Management Advisors, Arlingclose.

The Deputy Leader stated that whilst low interest rates were very good for borrowers at the moment, they weren't so good for savers and investments.

He asked for some assurance that the proposals within the report, would not reduce in any way reduce the Authority's threshold of its present security and risks.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, assured that the Council's financial priority was based very much on security, liquidity and yield as a final financial objective. She added that the local authority lending was extremely secure and it followed closely to this end, the directives from its Treasury Management advisors.

The Leader also sought assurance that the Council were depositing its funds in other institutions that were extremely safe, for example through the use of other local authorities, etc.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that this was the case and that she could not remember a time when another local authority went bust. The Council were also very careful about the duration of time when placing funds in other institutions (in terms of looking to limit any 'risk'). BCBC she added, also used market monetary funds and should the need arise, the Authority could invest in certain registered providers which would give some flexibility when pursuing with some of its proposed future schemes.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- noted the Council's treasury management activities for 2020-21 for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020 and the projected Treasury Management Indicators for 2020-21.
- recommended that the proposed changes to the Treasury Management Strategy 2020-21 be presented to Council for approval on 18 November 2020.

### 568. DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-2024

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, that sought Cabinet approval to adopt and implement the Digital Strategy 2020-2024, which had taken into consideration public consultation responses.

By way of some background, she confirmed that in 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned the Society of Information Technology Managers (SocITM) Advisory Ltd to establish the digital maturity of all local authorities. It had been identified that while digital maturity was low, appetite to improve was high and a vital prerequisite to meet the Wales National Digital Agenda.

In September 2016 a Digital Transformation Programme of works commenced to primarily introduce a single 'digital platform' (My Account) and an accessible website. The Strategy builds on these improvements by further developing how citizens, businesses and visitors engage and transact with the Council.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, advised that as part of the 2019 Budget Consultation, feedback showed that 87% of Bridgend citizens want more Council services online, using better and more modern online functionality to support channel shift as well as self-serve facilities. Also according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), 85% of Bridgend citizens have access to the internet and prefer the convenience of online transactions, as opposed to certain other methods of communication by which to conduct their business.

For the Budget Consultation 2019 and in a separate Digital Survey undertaken between June and August 2019, the public were asked for feedback on current digital capabilities provided to them by the Council, as well as suggestions to further enhance its services. The results have been incorporated into the assessment and delivery model and were included, at Appendix A to the report.

Turning to the current position, the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change stated that, an ambitious four year Digital Strategy had been drafted which encapsulates Bridgend's well-being objectives, the national digital landscape and includes a matrix of measurements utilised by SocITM to assess Bridgend's digital maturity and growth. The Strategy had been divided into 3 key areas, namely Digital Citizen, Digital Council and Digital Place.

Each section has an allocated action plan, with dedicated owners to ensure the ambitions of the Strategy are achieved by 2024.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change continued, by confirming that one of the aims within the Digital Strategy is to streamline routine and repetitive processes, delivering end-to-end connections to back office systems with the ambition of delivering efficiencies through digital automation, in order to enhance service delivery.

The Council's Digital Principles have been developed to underpin the foundations of the Five Ways of Working within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, aligning a "Digital First" approach and encapsulating the good practice principles identified by SocITM. Further information regarding this, was outlined in paragraph 4.4 of the report.

In respect of the report's financial implications, the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, advised that there were established Earmarked Reserves to support both the revenue and capital aspects of Digital Transformation. The current budget available is £407,000 (revenue) and £520,000 (capital).

During the delivery of the digital programme, business cases will be developed to be approved by Corporate Management Board ahead of any future development works.

The Deputy Leader stated that this was an exciting piece of news, as there was a big demand for Digital services that would rise expedientially in future years, including over the life of the Strategy. The Strategy would allow customers the opportunity to engage

with the Authority in a more modern and innovative way, including out of normal office hours. The Strategy would also track the demand for different digital type services moving forward, that customers wish to be made available, by which to conduct their business and other queries, etc.

The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing confirmed that digitally speaking and in terms of advancing the Council's website, BCBC had improved considerably in the last few years. She was pleased to see that the Digital Strategy was a corporate strategy that also accounted for individuals who were digitally excluded also. She extended her thanks to the ICT and Communications teams for all their hard work in recent months, particularly during the pandemic, where effective engagement between the Council and others had continued, including crucially with our most vulnerable in society.

The Leader was pleased to note, that the BCBC web site had been recognised by an accreditation, for both its user friendly accessibility and in terms of what it offers the public at large. The Strategy was also a flexible document, to take account of any potential fast moving changes that undoubtedly would take place in the future, with regards to the developments of technology. More than ever before, large organisations were now reliant on ICT and no local public body could function in this day and age, without an effective and reliable digital platform. He hoped to see further progress reports coming before Cabinet on the development of the Digital Strategy.

The Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help, welcomed the Strategy and the "One front Door" policy the Council had introduced as part of this. She added however, that it was important for management to take on board, that not all of the Council's constituents wished to engage with the Authority by electronic means. Therefore, provision still had to be made for these individuals. She also felt that records should also be digitally archived as a safeguard for maintaining record keeping electronically.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet approved the Digital Strategy 2020-2024, attached at Appendix B to the report.

569. **LEARNING DISABILITIES SUPPORTED LIVING CONTRACTS EXTENSION**

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report, in order to seek authority to vary the current contracts in place with the three supported living services commissioned for people with a learning disability, by extending the existing terms for a further 12 months, in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule (CPR) 3.2.9.3.

She explained that in November 2019, Cabinet approved a two-stage procurement process for the re-commissioning of service providers to deliver supported living services for individuals with a learning disability living in Bridgend. The re-commissioning plan moved away from the current 'county-wide' contracts with 3 service providers, to a 'locality' based model whereby service providers can deliver person-centred, localised support for people that enables them to engage more fully in their local community and helps to better promote their journey towards independence.

Following the above, in March 2020 Cabinet approved the award of a framework agreement to successful bidders, and for the Council to begin to implement the Stage 2 procurement of local area service call-off tenders. People First Bridgend (PFB) were the independent body that would be involved in this process, the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing added.

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It was anticipated that all the local area service tenders would take place over a 12-month period, between April 2020 (when framework agreements commenced) and March 2021, when the current contracts expire.

The PFB consultation and engagement work commenced via face-to-face meetings with individuals in the service in March 2020, but due to the significant and unforeseen impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown restrictions, these had to cease shortly afterwards, in April.

With national and local lockdown restrictions limiting face-to-face consultation, there has been a reliance on virtual consultation methods instead of face-to-face engagement, which is severely impacting on the effectiveness of the engagement, and also the timescales needed to fully engage with each supported living scheme prior to tendering the local area service contracts, which was originally scheduled to be completed by March 2021.

It was proposed that the existing contracts in place with the three service providers be extended for a further 12 months therefore, to 31 March 2022, which is the length of time deemed necessary in order to carry out full and meaningful consultation, in accordance with the commissioning approach approved previously by Cabinet.

There was provision under CPR 3.2.9.3 to seek to modify an existing contract, under the criteria detailed in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

The need for modification had been brought about by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, circumstances which the Council could not have foreseen when entering into the original contracts. The overall nature of the contract will not be altered, and all other contractual terms remain unchanged, as the proposed variation is for a 12 month extension only. The proposed modification does not exceed 50% of the original contract value. The financial implications as shown in the report, detailed the value of the proposed modification.

The Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help fully supported the report, adding that this was a continuation of providing vital services to vulnerable adults. She was familiar with the Cartrefi contract and was very pleased to see continuity in terms of service delivery to the people who very much needed this, particularly in the face of the Covid-19 crisis.

The Leader echoed the above, adding that he was pleased to see that the Council were committed to a full consultation and engagement exercise being undertaken with individuals that were supported by these schemes, as soon as circumstances allowed us to do so. It was vitally important he felt, that the support provided continued to be person centred with such support focusing on the specific needs and requirements of the individuals concerned, with the aim and objective also being, to improve and increase this support, where possible.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet authorised the modify of the existing contracts with Cartrefi (Lot 1), Mirus (Lot 2) and DRIVE Ltd (Lot 3) by extending the existing terms for a further 12 months to 31st March 2022, in accordance with the Council's CPR 3.2.9.3.

### 570. CONTRACT FOR THE SUPPLY OF FRESH, FROZEN AND COOKED MEATS - SUSPENSION OF THE CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support presented a report, seeking:

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- to suspend those parts of the Council's contract procedure rules in respect of the procurement requirements relating to the tendering of the contract for the supply of fresh, frozen and cooked meats; and
- to authorise the Corporate Director Education and Family Support to enter into a contract with the current contractors, Mid Glamorgan Provisions Ltd on the same terms as the current contract to 18 December 2021.

He explained that, following a procurement process in November 2019, the Council awarded a contract for the supply of fresh, frozen and cooked meats to Mid Glamorgan Provisions Ltd. That contract is due to expire on 18 December 2020.

The Council is part of a regional delivery group and as part of that group, has committed to the establishment of a regional framework for the supply of foods such as fresh, frozen and cooked meats. The commissioning of the regional framework is to be led by Caerphilly County Borough Council.

He proceeded further, by stating that the contract with Mid Glamorgan Provisions Ltd was awarded for a limited period to 18 December 2020, as it was anticipated that the new regional framework would have been in place by this time and that the Council would utilise that new regional framework.

Using the regional framework will likely bring financial advantages to the Council, however, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been delays to the commissioning of the regional framework and it has not yet been established by Caerphilly County Borough Council.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, added that due to both the unprecedented mentioned pandemic, and the approach of Brexit, it is essential to maintain supply of these high-risk foods with a supplier who we have tested quality and commitment to our service, until the regional framework can be utilised.

It was therefore proposed that the Council should suspend the contract procedure rules and enter into a contract for fresh frozen and cooked meat with Mid Glamorgan Provisions Ltd on the same terms as the current contract from 19 December 2020 until 18 December 2021. This will allow for the regional framework to be established and for the Council to ensure continuity of provision of this high risk food, until such time as the Council is able to utilise the regional framework to appoint a supplier for the provision of fresh frozen and cooked meats from the regional framework.

He concluded his report, by reminding that Cabinet should be aware, that by not complying with its contract procedure rules the Council is exposed to the risk of potential challenge from other suppliers of such products, as we are entering into a contract without any competition which breaches the requirements of procurement legislation.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration confirmed that he supported the recommendations within the report.

### RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Suspended the relevant parts of the Council's contract procedure rules in respect of the requirements relating to the procurement of the contract for the supply of fresh frozen and cooked meat; and
2. Delegated authority to the Corporate Director Education and Family Support in consultation with the Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Chief

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Officer - Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, to enter into a contract for the supply of fresh, frozen and cooked meat with Mid Glamorgan Provisions Ltd from 19 December 2020 until 18 December 2021.

571. APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNORS

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support presented a report, which sought approval from Cabinet for the appointment of local authority governors to the school governing bodies listed at paragraph 4.1 and 4.2 of the report.

He explained that for the 26 schools in the table within paragraph 4.1 of the report, all 3 applicants listed there, met the approved criteria for appointment as local authority governors and there was no competition for any of the vacancies.

There was however, competition for a vacancy at one school, ie Coety Primary and in line with the Council's selection criteria, Mrs Ella Dodd was appointed, due to her tenure as a governor, as well as her added experience as a LA governor.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration thanked all those individuals who had successfully shown an interest in the school governor vacancies as shown in paragraph 4.1 of the report. He was very pleased to see so many vacancies being filled at a considerable number of schools around the same time, he added.

For future reference, he also felt that it would be useful to put in a training programme for any future potential candidates in advance of them applying and subsequently securing a school governor vacancy at one of our schools. This would assist those interested candidates who had limited or no experience in a school governing body role, to be better placed when successfully applying for a vacant school governor position in the future, as opposed to them just having such training after they had been successful (or unsuccessful) in their application.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support confirmed that this point would be both followed-up and put in place.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the appointments listed in paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the report.

572. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services presented a report, the purpose of which, was to present the revised BCBC Corporate Complaints Policy and seek approval for the same.

She advised that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) wrote to the Leaders and Chief Executives of all 22 local authorities in September 2020 explaining how his Complaints Standards Authority has engaged with representatives from all local authorities to put in place a raft of measures designed to support and enhance complaint handling. These measures include bespoke training, and a process for all local authorities to report complaints statistics to the Ombudsman's office on a quarterly basis.

In his letter the Ombudsman also encouraged all local authorities to reflect on how their current practices and procedures comply with the Statement of Principles, Model Complaint Handling Process and Guidance published on the Ombudsman's website.

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The Corporate Complaints Policy had therefore been reviewed and revised in line with the Ombudsman's Model Complaints Handling Policy and was attached at Appendix 1 of the report, for approval.

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, confirmed that the revised Policy would be published on the Council's website and internally on the intranet.

The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing advised that in BCBC any complaints by the public etc, were taken very seriously and if deemed necessary, acted upon. She always made it clear to her constituents that they should contact herself in the first instance, in order to see if any complaint could be dealt with first and foremost, on an informal basis. She added that she was pleased that the Council adopted the model that was before Cabinet, which was very clear and set out the protocol that residents and others could expect, should they felt the need to put in a complaint.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the Corporate Complaints Policy attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

### 573. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, presented a report, seeking Cabinet approval for items to be included on the Forward Work Programme for the period 1 November 2020 to 28 February 2021.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Forward Work Programme will be prepared by the Monitoring Officer to cover a period of four months except when ordinary elections of councillors occur, in which case the Forward Work Programme will cover the period up to the date of the elections.

She explained that the Forward Work Programme will contain matters which the Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and full Council are likely to consider

It will also be published at least 14 days before the start of the period covered. The Authority is required to publish once a year a notice in at least one newspaper circulating in the area, stating that a Forward Work Programme will be published and giving the publication dates for that year.

Attached to the report were the Cabinet Forward Work Programme (Appendix 1), the Council Forward Work Programme (Appendix 2) and the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme (Appendix 3).

The Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing advised that it was important for the public to see up and coming topical items that were earmarked for agendas of Cabinet, Council and Scrutiny, for reasons of transparency and to assist in engagement with them and residents of the County Borough, in order to share details of up and coming reports to be debated by Members/Officers on key service areas of the Council etc, they may have an interest in and to look to increase interest in the local authority decision making processes overall.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- Approved the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for the period 1 November 2020 to 28 February 2021 at Appendix 1 to the report;
- Noted the Council and Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes for the same period as above, shown at Appendix 2 and 3 of the report, respectively.

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574. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 16:45