

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 10 MARCH 2021

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD IN REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 10 MARCH 2021 AT 15:00

Present

Councillor KJ Watts – Chairperson

S Aspey	SE Baldwin	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	RE Young	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
A Williams	G Thomas	T Thomas	JH Tildesley MBE
E Venables	SR Vidal	LM Walters	
CA Webster	DBF White	PJ White	
AJ Williams	HM Williams	JE Williams	

Apologies for Absence

M Voisey, R Stirman, A Hussain

Officers:

Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

513. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Chief Officers present declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda item. 6 and left the meeting whilst this item was being considered. The Officers that remained in the meeting, were the presenting Officer from Human Resources and Organisational Development and Democratic Services Officers.

514. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:

The Mayor

The Mayor commenced by wishing everyone a good afternoon. He hoped that all those present were keeping safe and well and have been enjoying the early spring weather.

He announced that he had no engagements to update Members on but he did have an announcement for those present to note. Members will soon be receiving their annual related party transaction disclosure form. He reminded all Councillors that it was essential that they completed the form to declare any related party transactions for the financial year 2020-21, even if it was a nil return. The forms needed to be completed no earlier than 31 March 2021 and returned no later than Friday 9 April 2021.

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A few days ago Councillor Altaf Hussain had a heart attack, but thankfully, after a few days in hospital, Councillor Hussain has now returned home where he is comfortable and recovering. The Mayor had contacted him and he was pleased to announce, that Councillor Hussain was feeling a lot better. The Mayor was sure, that Members and Officers would join him in wishing Councillor Hussain a full and speedy recovery back to good health.

Deputy Leader

The Deputy Leader advised that time was running out for EU citizens who are living in Bridgend County Borough, and who need to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme.

The scheme, which is part of the UK's new post-Brexit immigration system, offers citizens of the 27 EU member states the right to keep living and working in the UK as they did when the country was part of the EU.

It is free to apply for, all but applications must be submitted by the deadline of 30 June, next.

So far, almost 2,000 applications have been processed in the County Borough. Of those, 1,370 have been granted settled status, and 570 have received pre-settled status.

These are people who are contributing to the communities in which they live, and we want them to be able to continue to live, work and access services here.

Members are asked to encourage all EU citizens living within their wards who have made their home in Bridgend County Borough to apply to the settlement scheme before the deadline.

More information on how they can do this is featured on the Council's website

Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration stated that colleagues may have seen the recent announcement from Education Minister Kirsty Williams, confirming that Welsh Government is to provide schools across Wales with an additional £72 million.

We are still waiting for Bridgend County Borough Council's share of this to be confirmed, but the funding forms part of the overall recovery from the pandemic, and is intended to help schools as they seek to support learners.

It will enable the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards programme to continue into the next academic year, and will provide extra learning resources and support for foundation phase learners across schools and childcare settings which provide early education.

The funding will also enable support to be targeted at learners in years 11, 12 and 13 as they transition into the next stage of their education.

Furthermore, it is intended to support trainee teachers by helping them to undertake their practical experience in the autumn, complete their qualifications, and move into full-time teaching.

After the major upheaval of this past year and the hard work of schools to minimise the impact upon children, this additional funding will support our efforts as we look towards whatever the 'new normal' will be.

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He was sure that Members would join him in welcoming this additional funding from Welsh Government.

Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help

The Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help, advised that Members may be interested to know, that a new, innovative service for people experiencing mental health problems is being piloted in the centre of Bridgend.

This is deliberately designed to offer less formal early intervention based within a homely, relaxed non-clinical environment.

The emphasis is on making it welcoming and calm for the benefit of residents who are experiencing anxiety, depression, loneliness, isolation, domestic and family relationship issues, carer's responsibilities, stress and other issues which may also be affecting their mental health and well-being.

Since opening just before Christmas, the out-of-hours service has received more than 100 referrals from across the area.

Access is through a referral process via professional health, social services or social care staffs, and the service even includes transportation by taxi to ensure safety and remove barriers to attendance.

It is provided by Mental Health Matters Wales and is delivered as part of a collaboration between the council, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, South Wales Police and other third sector service providers.

As this is the first pilot of its kind within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area, it's good to see that the feedback received so far has been positive, and she was sure that members will welcome this as a new, fundamental part of an extended network of mental health services in Bridgend County Borough.

Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing and Future Generations advised that Officers from the Shared Regulatory Service were continuing to work with local businesses and carrying out checks to ensure that they are remaining compliant with all current lockdown requirements.

Now that Spring has arrived and the weather is starting to improve, people who purchase takeaway food and drink are being reminded that they should maintain social distancing at all times, and not consume alcohol in areas where a Public Space Protection Order is in place.

This follows recent issues experienced around the marina area in Porthcawl.

In an area where a Public Space Protection Order is in place, drinking alcohol or carrying it in an open container is prohibited.

Notices have been placed in designated areas to remind people of these rules, and officers from South Wales Police and the local authority will be conducting regular patrols.

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The Shared Regulatory Services is also advising licensed taxi and private hire vehicle drivers in the county borough that a Welsh Government scheme offering free personal protection equipment has been extended.

The scheme, which provides eligible drivers with a pack featuring six months' worth of PPE items, will now be available until 26th March.

Drivers can apply and find out more by visiting the Welsh Government website.

Cabinet Member – Communities

The Cabinet Member – Communities was sure that colleagues will have noted how people throughout Bridgend County Borough have embraced walking and cycling as a form of permitted exercise during the pandemic.

Over the last twelve months, we have seen shortages of bicycles in shops, and an increase in dog ownership as residents rediscover what is literally on their doorstep.

BCBC had a long track record of providing active travel routes in the county borough.

In July 2020, we secured a £3m grant from Welsh Government to improve cycle ways and footpaths, including £2.6m for the planned active travel route between Bridgend and Pencoed College.

Then in January this year, work began on the active travel route linking Pencoed with Pencoed College.

Last December, more than 900 people responded when we asked them to tell us about the barriers they face when making every day journeys on foot or by bike.

That had been used that feedback to put forward proposals on new active travel routes for the county borough, and launched the second phase of our consultation last week.

This is currently underway, and we are also encouraging people to tell us what additional improvements they might like to see.

The consultation will be available until Sunday 4 April, and details of how people can take part are available at the council's website along with maps showing the existing and proposed routes.

He hoped that Members would encourage their constituents to take part, and let us know if the proposed routes will help them get around their local areas as a pedestrian or cyclist.

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive wished to share a very recent development with Members which, if successful, could prove to be the key that will unlock a major development site within the county borough.

As Members were aware, the former Budelpack COSi and Cooper Standard site on Ewenny Road Industrial Estate in Maesteg, which the Council part-owns, has been vacant for more than a decade.

This is despite a number of ongoing efforts at regeneration over the years, including site clearance, exploratory work and planning approval for one particular scheme, which ultimately did not proceed.

The truth of the matter is that the 20-acre site is largely unviable due to the considerable costs required to make the site ready for development.

Some major infrastructure work is necessary there, including the diversion of a historic mining drain and the need to backfill several mineshafts, and the cost of this runs into millions of pounds.

Now, thanks to our involvement with the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, the site is one of nine projects which have been shortlisted for funding as part of a £30 million viability gap fund.

We should soon know if our bid has been successful or not, but if approved (and we are confident that it will be) officers will work alongside the City Deal team to ensure that all key criteria can be met in order to secure the grant in full.

The Chief Executive stressed, that the Council have only been able to take advantage of this funding opportunity because of its ongoing involvement with the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal.

In the event that subsequent development takes place, proceeds from the sale of land will be reinvested back into the Llynfi Valley, with future plans including new facilities such as a park and ride, an enterprise hub and more.

He would share further details with Members, as soon as they became known.

515. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER

The Leader wished to share a brief update on matters relating to the pandemic.

Members will have noted the fantastic news yesterday that more than a million doses of the coronavirus vaccine have now been administered across Wales.

In the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board area, more than 160,000 people have now received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine throughout the region.

For Bridgend County Borough, this breaks down as more than 46,000 residents.

The health board remains optimistic that it will have delivered one or more doses of the vaccine to the 120,000 residents within priority group's five to nine by mid-April.

To support this, a referral form was published earlier this week at the Welsh Government website which unpaid carers can use to apply for an appointment.

To recap where we are with the rollout of the vaccination, all residents and staff within care homes have been offered their first dose of the vaccine, and mobile vaccination teams are currently revisiting the homes to offer a second dose.

People aged 80 and over have received their first dose via their local GP, and are being contacted to come back for their second dose.

Frontline health workers have received their first dose at hospital vaccination centres, and second doses are currently underway.

Frontline social care workers have also received their first dose, this time at community vaccination centres, and their second dose is being arranged.

People aged 75 and over have received their first dose via GP surgeries, and are being contacted with details of the second dose.

People aged 70 and over have attended community vaccination centres and are receiving details about their appointments for the second dose.

People who received shielding letters have had their first dose, and GP surgeries are contacting them to arrange their second dose.

People aged 65 and over are currently being vaccinated with their first dose through local GP surgeries, and this is ongoing.

GPs have started contacting people aged 16 to 64 who have underlying health conditions to arrange for their first dose of the vaccine.

Letters will soon be issued inviting people aged 60 and over to attend a community vaccination centre for their first dose.

This will be followed with letters to people aged 55 and over, and then people aged 50 and over. Both of these groups will be asked to attend community vaccination centres.

As he earlier, unpaid carers have been asked to submit a form at the Welsh Government website to arrange an appointment for their first dose of the coronavirus vaccine.

Younger adults with learning disabilities, including those in care homes and supported living settings, are also being vaccinated as part of priority group six.

People with learning disabilities living in registered care homes are being vaccinated by the mobile testing teams, and adults with learning disabilities living in supported living will either be vaccinated in their home or at their local GP practice, whichever best suits the individual.

Elsewhere, the community testing work was ongoing across the Cwm Taf region.

As one in three people are believed to be asymptomatic, this is designed to locate and identify individuals aged 11 and older, who may not even know that they have coronavirus, and could be spreading it to family, friends, colleagues and more.

The first week of the initiative has been highly successful, and saw more than 500 people attend a community testing centre which was set up at Kenfig Hill Rugby and Football Club.

This resulted in 505 negative results, a single void result, and one positive result.

The centre will move on to Pencoed Social Club between Wednesday 10th March and Tuesday 16th March, Tondu Cricket Club from Wednesday 17th March until Tuesday 23rd March, and the Caerau Athletic Social Club between Wednesday 24th to Wednesday 31st March.

Overall, the community testing will focus on specific areas within the county borough - namely Caerau, Nantyffyllon, Pyle, Kenfig Hill, Cornelly, Cefn Cribwr, Sarn, Aberkenfig,

Coytrahen, Ynysawdre, Bryncethin, Bryncoch, Pencoed, Hendre, Felindre and Heol-Y-Cyw.

This is because the testing areas have been selected using public health surveillance data.

Lateral flow testing will also be taking place within local schools and the Bridge Alternative Provision, again in line with Welsh Government requirements.

This will seek to prevent the likelihood of clusters and outbreaks, and the disruption to education and care that inevitably follows.

As always, anyone seeking up to date details of where mobile testing facilities are located within the county borough can find out by visiting the council website, which is being regularly updated.

Our plans to mark the one year anniversary of the start of the pandemic are ongoing, and expectations are high that a number of changes will be announced when Welsh Government conducts its next scheduled review of lockdown procedures.

In the meantime advised the Leader, we must all continue to follow the rules and guidance, and keep making every effort to keep our communities safe and well.

516. TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTION FROM A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE 'SAVE OUR FIELDS' GROUP TO THE CABINET MEMBER - COMMUNITIES

Question by Mr. A Drury

We were delighted that, in the wake of the Brackla Hill feasibility study, Cabinet members of Bridgend County Borough Council have publically recognised the value of green spaces to the wellbeing of their residents and communities. The Leader has recognised “the value of that public open green space to the community of Brackla”, The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration has acknowledged that his “disposition has always been preserving open spaces” and the Cabinet member – Social Services and Early Help, has even gone so far as to say that “the extensive work that has been carried out will ensure the preservation of Brackla Hill as a green open space.” Article 11.01 of the Council’s Constitution permits the Council to undertake joint arrangements with other bodies in the interests of promoting well-being, these being powers granted by the Local Government Act 2000.

In recognition of these powers, the vital role green spaces play in our emotional and physical well-being, particularly in the height of a global pandemic, and BCBC’s current commitment to not develop on Brackla Hill, does the Cabinet Member – Communities agree to follow through with the Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help’s promise, to preserve Brackla Hill as a green open space and immediately begin the process of working with Fields in Trust to legally protect both Brackla Hill and the green open space at Channel View and Foxfields through a Deed of Dedication?

Response by Cabinet Member – Communities

The Council has recently made a commitment to preserve Brackla Hill as a green open space, as it fully recognises the value of open space to the emotional and physical wellbeing of its residents and communities.

This open space will be afforded protection through the Bridgend Local Development Plan (LDP) as it is the principal strategic land use planning document that guides future

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development within the County Borough. It is also the principle consideration in the determination of planning applications, as planning law requires that the planning decisions must take into account the provision of the development plan.

The Brackla Hill area is already protected in the current LDP and is specifically allocated under Policy COM13(5) – Provision of Accessible Natural Greenspace (including public open space) as well as a number of other key open spaces within the County Borough. Any development on these areas of land will potentially depart from the development plan and would be resisted in planning terms.

The draft replacement LDP is due to be published later this year and will include allocated accessible open space provision based on up to date evidence and open space audits. The plan will be open for public consultation and any comments taken into consideration before the plan is scrutinised by an outside Planning Inspector with a view to eventual adoption in 2022. The provision and importance of open space within communities is outlined in national planning policy i.e. Future Wales 2040 and Planning Policy Wales both of which are material to the emerging plan.

Whilst understanding the Fields in Trust concept, the Council prefers to work in partnership where possible, with Town and Community Councils. Thereby to protect future use, but also to enhance and invest in the provision of amenity at Brackla Hill, the area could be handed over via a community asset transfer to the local Brackla Community Council. The Save Our Fields group may wish to consider approaching the local council in this regards.

517. PAY POLICY STATEMENT - 2021/2022

The Group Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development presented a report on behalf of the Chief Executive, the purpose of which, was to seek Council approval for the Pay Policy Statement for 2021/2022. This was in response to legislative requirements and to provide openness and accountability in relation to how the Council rewards its staff.

She explained that the Council had a statutory requirement under the Localism Act 2011, Section 38(1) to prepare a Pay Policy Statement for the new financial year 2021/2022. This Statement needs to be approved and published by 31 March 2021.

The Pay Policy Statement provided the framework for decision making on pay, and in particular decision making on senior pay.

The Group Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development referred Members to the updated Pay Policy Statement for approval, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

This had been produced in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011, which required all local authorities to develop and make public their policy on all aspects of Chief Officer remuneration. In order to achieve further transparency, reference has been included to the pay of other relevant groups within the policy statement.

Since its introduction on 1 April 2012, the Pay Policy had developed to take account of relevant guidance, legislation and changes to the Council's senior management structure over recent years. The pay structure relating to this group of staff was at Appendix B to the report, within the Pay Policy, which had also been presented to Council for noting.

The Group Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development then gave an update on paragraph 6.8 of the attached Appendix in respect of the homeworking allowance and paragraph 8, pay relativities, for Members information.

A Member asked whether or not the Pay Policy captured employer's mileage claims and what protocols were in place within the Authority, in order to ensure that such claims were both accurate and legitimately made.

The Group Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that the Pay Policy did not go into any detail with regards to employer travelling expenses. However, there was both guidance and checks and balances in place, in order to ensure that these were completed accurately. Guidance regarding this was also available through on-line expenses system she added. Should a fraudulent claim be made and identified, then this would be taken further with the employee and their manager, explained the Group Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development.

In terms of any future proposals regarding Job Evaluation and/or Redundancy processes, a Member recognised that some employees had been disadvantaged when compared with others, particularly this last year since the pandemic and home working, in that they had no option but to commit more time to home care management commitments, whether this be for children or older family members. He sought reassurance that these employees would not be disadvantaged in any way, when it came to the Authority looking at potential cases for redundancy, etc.

The Group Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development gave an assurance that HR policies would be applied in accordance with service needs of the Authority as opposed to other factors as mentioned. She confirmed that adjustments had been made to the Council's flexitime policy as a result of Covid-19 enabling those who were able to work at home to manage both their contracted hours and any such caring commitments, with each case of these being considered on its own individual merits by management.

RESOLVED: That Council approved the Pay Policy Statement 2021/2022 attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

518. **BRIDGEND TOWN HEAT NETWORK PROJECT PHASE 1**

The Corporate Director – Communities and the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change submitted a joint report, the purpose of which, was to:

- update Council on the development of the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project;
- seek approval for the inclusion of a budget of £3.4m within the capital programme for the project;
- seek approval for a loan of £1.821m to be made from the Council to the proposed Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV).

The Corporate Director – Communities commenced, by advising that Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) initially started looking at the opportunities for the development of heat networks in Bridgend County Borough in 2012, with drivers for the projects identified as decarbonisation, economic and social reasons, as expanded upon in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

The Bridgend Town Heat Network Project is included as a project within the BCBC Smart Energy Plan (SEP) (approved by Cabinet in February 2019). This Plan details the projects that BCBC will participate in during the period 2019 – 2025. This proposes to test various technologies, consumer propositions and business models, to provide a

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pathway to the decarbonisation of Bridgend County Borough. It was also a key contributor to the Welsh Government's decarbonisation strategy (published March 2019) "Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales".

She continued by stating that the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project proposed to deliver heat (via a gas combined heat and power engine located within the Bridgend Life Centre) to the Bridgend Life Centre, Civic Offices and the Bridgend Bowls Hall. The project would also provide electricity to the Life Centre, Civic Offices and Bowls Hall.

A capital grant application had been made to UK Government via its Heat Network Investment Programme (HNIP) in April 2019. This had been approved in December 2019 for: (i) £1,000,000 capital investment towards the construction of the heat network; and (ii) £241,000 for pre-construction activities.

The Corporate Director – Communities continued further, by stating that at its meeting of 19 January 2021, Cabinet approved the continued delivery of the Bridgend Town District Heat Network project. Progression of the scheme involved certain financial decisions. One was to note that the Treasury Management Strategy will need to be revised to enable the Council to make a loan of £1.821 million to the SPV; that this was to be reflected in the draft Treasury Management Strategy 2021-22 that was presented to the Audit Committee on 28 January 2021 and then subsequently to Council for approval in February 2021.

She added that, Cabinet had also agreed that a report be taken to Council, recommending that the capital programme be amended to include the Bridgend Town District Heat Network project and that Council agrees the loan to the SPV, subject to approval to changes to the Treasury Management Strategy. As Members were aware, Council had since approved this at its previous Budget meeting.

The Corporate Director – Communities, stated that Cabinet approved the procurement of a Design Build Operate Maintain contractor for the Bridgend District Heat Network by utilising the negotiated procedure with prior call for competition under the Utilities Contract Regulations 2016. It had been agreed to Brodies LLP (legal advisers for the Council on this scheme) running the procurement of the Design Build Operate Maintain Contractor under the negotiated procedure with prior call for competition under the Utilities Contract Regulations 2016 on behalf of the Council.

A further report is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet, following the conclusion of the procurement of the Design Build Operate Maintain contractor, for a decision on whether to award the contract.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained, that with regard to future phases of the Bridgend Town District Heat Network, Cabinet had also approved the procurement of and subsequent appointments of a technical/financial consultant and a legal advisor, to prepare an Outline Business Case for Phase 2 of the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project. This included delegating authority to the Corporate Director - Communities to tender for the technical/financial consultant and Legal Advisor to prepare an Outline Business Case for Phase 2 of the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project and awarding the contracts to the successful tenderers, with the contractual terms of the contracts to be approved by the Corporate Director - Communities in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services.

A further report on the creation of the Special Purpose Vehicle which will provide the commercial delivery mechanism for the project, would also be presented to Cabinet in due course, she added.

Cabinet have recommended to Council that the Capital Programme be amended to the full value of the project as outlined in paragraph 8 of the report and that a loan be provided to the SPV for the Bridgend Town District Heat Network Project.

The report before Council, was therefore seeking approval for the inclusion of a budget of £3.4m within the capital programme for the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project. Further details on the breakdown of the funding was also highlighted in paragraph 8 of the report. The Corporate Director – Communities concluded, that Council will likely need to borrow the funding itself, (within the terms of the approved Treasury Management Strategy), and then on-lend this to the proposed Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). The interest rate charged to the SPV, will ensure there is no detriment to the Council.

A Member confirmed that he was supportive of anything that improved the Local Energy infrastructure. However, it was his understanding that Local Heat Networks such as this, had a shelf life resulting in them becoming less efficient with time. He asked what the expected shelf life was this for this particular Heat Network Project and what support mechanisms were in place longer term, to upgrade it as necessary, so that its efficiency level is maintained.

The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that the life span of the project would be 40 years, ie to coincide with the loan period. What was proposed presently, was Phase 1 of the scheme only, which included work to 3 buildings. This would be looked to be expanded though to other public sector buildings, for example such as Bridgend College and the POW Hospital. This would increase the capacity and benefits the Heat Network had to offer further afield. She recognised that the technology elements of the project would change with time, so therefore built into the financial model was a Capital Contingency fund, in order to support the carrying out of infrastructure upgrades over the life span of the project.

Table 3 in the report, showed the various costs for the operation of the project, and these would ensure the efficient operation of the Network Project going forward. The SPV would also be supported by a Board of Directors which would monitor and provide increased management support to the project.

The Cabinet Member – Communities advised that the proposals of the report, would bring about a significant change to the way energy was supplied in Bridgend. This was required, in order to comply with Government targets of areas becoming carbon free. This was a new and innovative scheme, which other local authorities had successfully pursued as new ventures. The proposals would help address the climate crisis, which formed an integral part of the Council's De-carbonisation Strategy.

A Member sought assurance that that with regard to any public funds committed to the Bridgend Heat Network Project and the resulting profit that comes from this, these would not end up going to large profit making companies, that will be involved in supporting the project, including to the Board of Directors.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that the Board of Directors would receive no remuneration package and any external people to be invited to sit on the Board, would only receive travelling expenses. Any capital made from the project would be ploughed back into its further development and/or, to commit to other energy efficiency proposals, such as tackling for example, fuel poverty.

A Member felt that the presentation of the project was untimely and too much of a financial commitment, in a year where people had suffered both financially and from a

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mental health perspective, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This had been compounded by people losing their jobs and facing poverty.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, advised that with regards to committing any profit back into the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project, she reminded Members that at last Council the Treasury Management Strategy had been approved. In conjunction with this, she had made the point at that meeting, that the Council borrowing just for yield would present a situation whereby the Authority would then be unable to borrow for any Capital Schemes in the future. Therefore, she reaffirmed that any income derived from the project, would be fed back into it, rather than be profited by any companies involved in the support of this.

The Leader concluded debate on the item, by advising Members that whilst the Council had some choices and manoeuvrability in terms of schemes in its Capital Programme, there was no choice as to where to commit the £1m grant from the UK Government for this particular project. If the Council did not give a commitment towards the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project, it could not use the funding for anything else, the money would simply just have to be returned. He reminded Members that there was a climate emergency to address, that was impacting detrimentally on communities within South Wales, such as ever increasing problems with flooding and with this in mind, it was imperative that avenues were urgently pursued in order to alleviate these problems.

As some Members were not in support of the recommendations of the report, it was agreed that an electronic vote be conducted, as follows:-

For: (the recommendations of the report)

Councillors SE Baldwin, T Beedle, JP Blundell, NA Burnett, M Clarke, N Clarke, RJ Collins, HJ David, P Davies, PA Davies, DK Edwards, J Gebbie, RM Granville, CA Green, G Howells, RM James, B Jones, M Jones, M Kearns, DRW Lewis, JE Lewis, JR McCarthy, D Patel, JC Radcliffe, B Sedgebeer, RMI Shaw, CE Smith, SG Smith, G Thomas, R Thomas, T Thomas, KJ Watts, DBF White, PJ White, AJ Williams, HM Williams and RE Young = **37 votes**

Against:

Councillors S Aspey, A Pucella, A Williams and J Williams = **4 votes**

Abstentions:

Councillors T Giffard, KL Rowlands, S Vidal and L Walters = **4 votes**

It was therefore,

RESOLVED: That Council:

1. Approved the inclusion of the Bridgend Town Heat Network Project within the capital programme with a budget of £3.4m.
2. Further approved a loan of £1.821m to the Special Purpose Vehicle on the terms set out in the report, and delegated authority to the Chief Executive to agree and approve the final terms of the Loan Agreement and arrange execution of the Loan Agreement on behalf of the Council subject, with such powers being exercised in consultation with the Chief Officer - Legal, HR & Regulatory Services and the Interim Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change.

519. EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

The Corporate Director – Communities submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to seek Members approval to adopt SPG16 - Educational Facilities and Residential Development as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the Bridgend Local Development Plan (LDP).

He stated that Members will be well aware that the Council has a duty to ensure that good quality educational facilities are available to the children and young people of the County Borough. This was a key objective of both the Corporate Plan and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The development of new housing in the County Borough, places existing education facilities under increased pressure, he explained.

SPG16 was a key tool in alleviating that pressure, by providing advice and guidance in relation to the circumstances in which the Council may justifiably seek financial contributions towards the provision of educational facilities.

In summary the SPG sets out:

- The National and local Planning Policy context and legislation;
- The Council's own policy and practice relating to education;
- Guidance notes explaining the circumstances, mechanisms for calculating the likely contributions;
- Examples of how this is done; and
- Guidance on how the policy will be administered.

In terms of the current situation, the Strategic Planning Team Leader advised, that the Council already has an SPG16, which had successfully generated millions of pounds towards school projects. However, the current version was adopted in 2010 and in recent times, officers have found that the level of contributions being generated was failing to keep up with the cost of modern construction practices. So a small working group was therefore formed, in order to undertake a formal review and produce an updated draft, and on the 16th January 2020, members of the Development Control Committee approved the draft version of the SPG as the basis for public consultation.

A 6-week period of consultation was held between 21 February and 3 April 2020, with the consultation advertised in the manner described in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

By the end of the consultation period seven representations were received on the draft SPG. These representations were summarised in Appendix 1 to the report.

On 21st January 2021, the Development Control Committee considered all of the representations and agreed the changes to be made to the document, in light of the comments received. These are now incorporated as amendments to the SPG attached at Appendix 2 (to the report).

Members would note from the bullet points at paragraph 4.4, that the proposed amendments are limited to relatively simple points of clarification, which reflected the amount of work that went into the draft SPG, from the outset. The Strategic Planning Team Leader acknowledged the input of the School Modernisation team and that of Cllr Amanda Williams, who both gave valuable contributions to the review and production of the draft SPG and ensured that Members had a voice in the process.

The report therefore informed Members of the requirement to complete the declaration attached at Appendix A, with reference to the guidance attached at Appendix B by Friday 9 April 2021. It was very important added the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, that the form was completed as at 31 March 2021 and covered the full financial year or period for which the individual was a Member of the Council. Members should note that a copy of this declaration would be emailed separately to their BCBC email, address for completion and return.

In response to a Members question, the Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, confirmed that copies returned with a typed Members signature would be accepted.

She also confirmed in response to a further question, that Members who were involved in Sub-Contracting to Contractors for the Council, should also disclose this on the form, as should they disclose close family members who were providing the same, or a similar service.

In terms of the management of grants that BCBC had completed as a distribution element for Welsh Government, these should also be disclosed on the form, she added.

RESOLVED: That Council notes the requirement for Members to:

- (1) Formally declare any related party transactions for the financial year 2020-21.
- (2) Complete and date the return no earlier than 31 March 2021.
- (3) Submit the return by Friday 9 April 2021.

521. **REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES 2021-2022**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, to advise Council of the Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales in respect of the level and range of remuneration the Authority must make available to its elected members for the 2021/22 municipal year.

This was the thirteenth Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (the Panel), and the tenth published under the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report). The Measure extended the responsibilities of the Panel and its powers under Section 142 to decide (prescribe) payments to members of relevant authorities.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed, that representatives of the Panel held consultation meetings on their proposals, which was attended by the Authority's Head of Democratic Services. The Panel had acknowledged each of the 39 responses to the consultation on the draft report and answered all the queries that were raised in respect of this.

The Panel's Determinations for 2021/22, were shown at Annex 1 of the Annual Report (from page 51 onwards).

She explained, that the Basic Salary in 2021/22 for elected members of principal councils shall be £14,368 with effect from 1st April 2021 (Determination 1). This salary shall be paid by each principal authority to each of its elected members unless any individual member opts personally and in writing to receive a lower amount. Adjustments in recent years have been in keeping with the Panel's principle that its determinations should be affordable and acceptable. This principle is maintained in the increase for 2021/22 in the basic salary elected members of £150.

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The senior salary levels in 2021-22 for members of principal councils shall be as set out in Table 3, page 14 of the Annual Report (Appendix 1 refers). The Panel considered that the leadership and executive roles carry the greatest individual accountability and that size of population remains a major factor in influencing levels of responsibility and the use of the population groups has therefore been retained.

The Salary for the Leader and Deputy Leader has been based on the population of the County Borough (100,000 to 200,000). The Leader is entitled to receive £49,974 and the Deputy Leader £35,320. Cabinet Members will be entitled to receive a senior salary of £30,773.

Where Chairs of Committees are remunerated, they will be paid a salary of £23,161. The Panel had re-iterated that it is a matter for individual authorities to determine which Chairs are paid. At its Annual Meeting in May 2020 Council determined that the Chairpersons be remunerated of the Committees, as shown in paragraph 4.2.4 of the report.

The Panel had determined that Council must make a senior salary of £23,161 available to the leader of the largest opposition group.

In terms of Civic salaries, Councils have strongly expressed to the Panel that Elected Members do not wish to make any choices that require Councils themselves to choose and match the level of activity or duties of a specific member to a given range of salary levels for a role. The Panel has determined (Determination 3) that (where paid) a Civic Head (Mayor) must be paid a salary of £23,161 and (where paid) a Deputy Civic Head (Deputy Mayor) must be paid a salary of £18,108 with effect from 1st April 2021.

The remainder of the report gave information in respect of the following:-

- Co-opted members of Committee's allowances;
- Contributions towards Costs of Care and Personal Assistance (CPA);
- Sickness Absence for Senior Salary Holders; and
- Compliance with Panel Requirements

RESOLVED: That Council noted the Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales 2021 and approved:

- the adoption of the relevant determinations of the Panel contained within its Annual Report (Appendix 1 to the report);
- those posts (as shown in the revised Members' Schedule of Remuneration at Schedule 1 of the report), who will receive a senior/civic salary;
- the level of remuneration for the Senior and Civic Salaries (where appropriate);
- the revised Members' Schedule of Remuneration at Appendix 2, and for it to become effective from 1 April 2021;
- that the Members' Schedule of Remuneration be updated with any changes to Senior/Civic Salary positions subsequently made by

Council during the 2021/22 municipal year;

- the Democratic Services Committee reviewing the provisions on the contribution towards Costs of Care and Personal Assistance as set out in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

522. TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FROM:

Councillor Altaf Hussain to the Leader

In Wales, 60% of the adult population and 1 in 8 children age 4-5 years are overweight or obese and each year this figure is increasing. There is consistent evidence that obesity (excess weight) is associated with an increased COVID-19 risk in addition to the risk of diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and respiratory diseases which themselves increase the risk of complications in someone who contracts COVID-19. Knowing that excess weight is one of the few preventable risk factors for COVID-19, could the Leader let us know what measures he is taking to help those residents who are living with overweight or obesity to lose weight in a sustainable manner, together with interventions to prevent weight gain and reduce risk of COVID-19 in our Borough?

Response

There is no doubt that the pandemic has served to highlight the detrimental impact of such a virus on more vulnerable groups and people with higher levels of risks that can often be associated with poor lifestyle and behaviours. The National Survey for Wales in 2019-2020 identified that amongst adults:

18% of the population were smoking
19% of the population were drinking more than the weekly guidelines
Only 25% had eaten five portions of fruit or veg the day before
53% were active for 150 minutes or more per week
10% followed fewer than 2 healthy behaviours
61% of the adult population were overweight or obese (including 25% obese).

In terms of childhood obesity Bridgend Council is an active partner with Cwm Taf Morgannwg health board and is part of a network that is focused on preventing childhood obesity across the health board footprint. A whole system event involving many stakeholders took place prior to the pandemic and will support work going forward. Bridgend is supportive of a collective effort to tackle childhood obesity to improve the wellbeing of young people and our communities. The National Child Measurement survey is one of the tools that is used to track the physical wellbeing of children. In the most recent publication of data, Bridgend was slightly below the Welsh average of children classed as obese at 11.9% compared to RCT at 14.4% and Merthyr at 15.6%).

Supporting people to be of a healthy weight remains a public health priority and the Council has a role in maintaining or enhancing the wellbeing of local people and our communities. The evidence confirms that obesity increases the risks of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and respiratory disease and it is important that people have opportunities, information and support to sustainably manage their weight. This will be beneficial to combatting the negative impact of Covid 19 but potentially other communicable diseases or chronic conditions also. Welsh Government identify from learning and insight gained during the first phase of the pandemic that existing inequalities and issues around food insecurity may have been exacerbated.

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In February 2020, Welsh Government launched its Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales strategy with a related delivery plan to run to 2022 but due to the pandemic original aspirations for delivery have needed to have renewed priorities as the response to the pandemic has seen a shift in services, funding and capacity.

The renewed priorities for Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales to 2022 are as follows:

Priority Area 1-Setting out proposals to make the food environment healthier

Priority Area 2-Increase Active Travel Opportunities

Priority Area 3-Increase physical activity and exercise opportunities

Priority Area 4-Commence delivery of a revised obesity pathway

Priority Area 5-Communications and digital packaging

In relation to the renewed priorities that have been presented, the Council and its partners are playing an active role in supporting the stated objectives. The following items all connect with the afore mentioned Healthy Weight...Healthy Wales priorities and identified actions;

The Council has continued to invest in community routes and safe routes to school to encourage more people to walk, cycle and scoot as opposed to vehicular travel and this will have built a solid foundation using the Active Travel Grant, Safe Routes in Communities grant and Road Safety grant.

The authority directly delivering the National Standards cycling/Active Journeys programme to young people in our schools at levels 1 and 2 and this programme has seen growth and whole county coverage in recent times. Despite the pandemic delivery of the programme has continued with schools.

The ability of young people to navigate their communities without being transported is an important part of our local play sufficiency assessment and action plan also. The Council has continued to invest in outdoor play spaces and more accessible opportunities also in partnership with Welsh Government.

The authority is working with Play Wales to explore how a safer streets approach might encourage more families to allow children to play outdoors as a doorstep opportunity as a simple way of increasing daily activity near to home.

The authority is also supportive of its own workforce engaging in Active Travel using the salary sacrifice scheme to purchase cycles.

The authority been part of the national steering group that has led to a new Active Leisure offer for the over 60's across Wales that is complementary to other investment into the National Free Swim offer for this population group. This will be launched when facilities are permitted to re-open but engaging older adults will commence sooner. The junior free swim programme has been expanded with a focus on disadvantaged groups who might be considered more "at risk" of poor lifestyles.

Through our partnership with Halo Leisure the National Exercise Referral scheme has continued to support people virtually and this will be an important part of the Covid 19 recovery pathway for people. The programme offers both lower level preventative support for those needing to move more often and also delivers the 'Foodwise' programme to promote healthy eating as part of a healthier lifestyle approach.

As part of National Exercise Referral Scheme, a full chronic condition pathway is offered for back pain, pulmonary rehabilitation, cancer, postural stability and with new joint care programmes being commissioned by the health board. These will be helpful for those for whom other medical support might be delayed. The exercise referral programme has

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piloted a Covid recovery programme in partnership with public health Wales in 2020. This is anticipated to be an area of focus over the coming year.

The authority has ensured that cost is not a barrier to accessing public sector leisure via the Access to Leisure scheme and has secured investment to engage more people who are disadvantaged at low cost or no cost to maximise the reach and benefit of services. The impact of disadvantage on being able to live active and healthy lives is recognised in service planning and offers sustainable opportunities.

Our partnership with Halo Leisure has also seen a Halo at Home digital platform develop to support those who are shielding to maintain activity or those who are comfortable to manage activity at home. This digital platform has the potential to develop and stream a broad range of wellbeing programmes into people's homes. There is targeted work progressing with Wales Co-Operative Centre to develop carer co-operatives and to support people living with dementia including support to build confidence and digital skills.

The authority has been supported by the Healthy and Active Fund to lead the Super Agers programme to encourage increased physical activity amongst older adults, including support at or near home. The programme has recently been identified as a Bevan Exemplar. There has been home mentoring support and resources developed that could be used more broadly in due course.

The authority has also been playing a leadership role in the Valleys Regional Park initiative encouraging increased use of the natural environment and development of social prescribing opportunities. This is an integral part of Healthy Weight...Healthy Wales.

The authority operates its own Love To Walk programme that has increased its interest when regulations have permitted and using volunteer led approaches where appropriate can become sustainable and low cost for participants. The Love to Walk festival was delayed but attracted positive interest and participation.

Through our partnerships with local schools there are action plans that help to develop the wellbeing of young people including physical wellbeing and emotional/mental wellbeing. We use peer mentoring by other young people and network groups to support individuals and have developed e-learning approaches for our young leaders. Our older ambassadors' group who are also supported by the AYP service have established media accounts to promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles to other young people.

A new wellbeing programme called Ascent has been developed for boys and girls with lower levels of confidence or aspiration and with low activity levels. This health promotion project is being run over a 39 week period and aims to improve the engagement of participants.

Our Active Young People service is collaborating with Swansea University to research 9-11 year old children's health and wellbeing in the County Borough. The 'BridgeLinx' programme has resulted to compare Bridgend to other areas as part of a more global programme.

Active play is being developed through our schools and also in partnership with Welsh Government and Play Wales. There are now 24 activity pods in place and we have been working with some schools to make their grounds more accessible to the community to support active lifestyles.

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There are partnership agreements operating with our primary and secondary schools who have been supported during the pandemic with resources by our Active Young People department to maintain and enhance pupil wellbeing.

We have previously operated a Family Active Zone approach that includes all aspects of lifestyle and nutrition that was run in partnership with schools but will be available at a household level going forward. A range of other resources are being developed to support individual and group wellbeing.

Throughout the pandemic our volunteer run community centres have been available for essential public services and these venues would in a normal year be supporting weight management programmes and related organisations.

Our schools also participate in the Welsh National Healthy Schools scheme and use this framework to improve wellbeing. The aim has been to create a network of health promoting schools and within the seven health topics, food and fitness is one of the components.

In regard to school catering all menus in Bridgend's primary, secondary and special schools are certified by the WLGA as compliant with the Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013. All menus are devised to reduce salt, fat and sugar content to support the healthy eating agenda.

Beyond the above, the authority is actively involved in regional planning and networking regarding a health board approach to the Healthy Weight Healthy Wales strategy and related delivery plan and how we might be able to play an effective role in this important challenge.

Supplementary question from Councillor Altaf Hussain (presented by Councillor Giffard in his absence)

There are many inactive residential areas in the County Borough, for example, Penyfai. When are you going to help residents in such areas and others like this, in order to get them connected to our towns via Active Travel walking and cycling routes.

Response

We have a multi-million pound investment currently underway to support Active Travel routes across the County Borough and have undertaken a consultation engagement with Sustrans and Members regarding this and I'm sure Members would have fed their views into that consultation. The outcome of this would be considered, in order to plan future phases and investment in Active Travel to this end, which has received a significant investment commitment from Welsh Government in terms of future plans for this.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Jon-Paul Blundell

Can the Leader outline how the Council have promoted healthy eating through school lunches during the pandemic.

Response

We are providing food parcels to over 4,000 families each week for those children unable to attend school and whilst they have very tasty and nutritional meals in school, at home the food parcels include fruit, vegetables and pasta as well as other healthy products. Recipe cards were also provided as an accompaniment, in order to encourage families to cook innovatively. There had been positive feedback to this. Consultation on

these food parcels was ongoing and, the Council were awaiting feedback from parents and young people alike who were in receipt of these. An extension of funding for food parcels from Welsh Government for school holiday periods as well as term time, was also being proposed.

Third supplementary question from Councillor Paul Davies

Are we providing guidance at schools presently in relation to healthy eating through classes, ie are there any specific educational lessons or guidance being given regarding this as well as nutritional guidance also, in terms of the best things to eat (and drink).

Response

We have seen a much stronger focus on the practical cooking and food preparation skills within schools in recent years. I was very pleased to see that Welsh Government an award winning food project called 'The Big Box Boyd,' in order to develop an early understanding of healthy food choices, while at the same time, providing affordable priced food to parents that benefit families in the County Borough.

Councillor Tim Thomas to the Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help

Compared with other local authorities, how well do children in care do at school, both academically and in terms of other achievements?

Response

Comparing the performance of children looked after (CLA) in schools across Wales is very difficult, as Welsh Government ceased national data collections on CLA attainment after 2013-2014. Unfortunately, there has been no comparative all-Wales annual data since that time. Local authorities have tried to maintain some of the previous performance indicators for CLA attainment at a local level, but have had very limited success, as the cohort changes frequently with many children experiencing very short periods in care.

For 2018-2019, officers extracted a list of children recorded as CLA from the school management information system (SIMS) on the day that the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) was taken in January 2019. Officers later undertook a detailed manual matching against the data obtained from Welsh Government on teacher assessment and key stage 4 examination data for summer 2020. I attach this analysis for your information and retention. This provided some data on CLA attainment. However, this analysis has not been progressed again as there has been no 2019-2020 data collection and there have been changes in the measures used which impacts on comparability.

The issues of regional benchmarking have been raised with Central South Consortium (CSC) as a consequence of the cessation of a number of Welsh Government data collections/publications. CSC produces a regional data pack with comparative data but the last available data is 2019. Unfortunately, data specifically for CLA is unavailable and due to the difficulties with this data the CSC Benchmarking Group decided that work on this and other cohorts, would not be progressed

The local authority's Digital Transformation Board is currently assessing the business case for the procurement of a management information system that can provide enhanced intelligence to the local authority on the CLA cohort in the future. It is hoped that this business case will be successful and will provide for a range of improvements to the accessibility of pupil level data for all cohorts moving forward.

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The Education Engagement Team is the single point of contact for schools and other professionals in respect of any vulnerable learner within the local area. This includes CLA. The team works closely with schools and children social care to ensure that education provision meets that learners needs. The team is responsible for the co-ordination and scrutiny of personal education plans (PEPs) which are implemented for all CLA.

In addition, the team provides training to schools to ensure that they are fully aware of the impact of becoming looked after can have on a child on their development which may affect their learning or behaviour within a school environment. This training has included First Aid, mental health and trauma-informed approaches to adverse childhood experiences.

Each school is required to identify a designated person to lead on CLA. Prior to Covid-19, six-monthly events were held with designated safeguarding leads or CLA leads to explore and consider best practice in respect of improving educational attainment and attendance. Schools are encouraged to share approaches in supporting learners and the Education Engagement Team provides updates in respect of Welsh Government guidance and legislation.

The relationship with Children's Social Care is crucial in respect of support for CLA. The Education Engagement Team will attend CLA reviews (when required to do so) to ensure the PEP and support related to education is appropriate and benefits the learners.

The local authority is provided with some funding via the Pupil Development Grant. This funding is used to provide support to schools through training as described earlier, but also through additional tuition for learners in respect of their literacy and numeracy should this be required.

Within Children's Social Care, the 16+ Team supports care leavers during a transitional period in their life encouraging them to be aspirational and to plan for their future. This planning is completed through direct work that the social workers and personal advisors undertake with young people. This work includes close liaison with school/college tutors and Careers Wales. Once a plan is agreed with the young person, this is formalised in a Looked-After Children's (LAC) Review or Pathway Planning Review if the young person is aged over 18 years.

The Cardiff University and First Campus Confident Futures Project is accessed by care-experienced young people and care leavers aged 14 to 19-year-old aiming to raise aspirations and confidence. The sessions run monthly from October through to April on an annual basis. They are administered at Cardiff University and consist of group work and individual support session run by Cardiff University students. The workshops are aimed at supporting care experienced young people with their existing studies as well as any applications to university. It is open to all young people regardless of their academic ability, as the aim is also to increase confidence and self-esteem for care experienced young people. In the last academic year, 3 students from Bridgend have attended these sessions with staff from the 16+ Team providing transport and support.

Confident Futures Summer School is a yearly summer school which aims to raise aspirations, devote one-to-one time with young people who are looked after to mentor them about the next stage of their academic life, to have some taster sessions from University lecturers/professors and to find out what university social life is like. Participants spend time and stay in student accommodation with current undergraduate and postgraduate students and have academic taster sessions with experts in their chosen fields. Sessions include advice on personal statements writing, mock

interviews, budgeting and talks from support services. There are also taster sessions for opportunities outside of study, including societies and sports clubs. Finally, they experience a mock graduation. All of our care-experienced young people who are considering applying for university are encouraged to attend.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tim Thomas

LAC do 'generally' have less positive educational outcomes than other cohorts, so considering that, could the Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help confirm what Strategies we have in place, to specifically target LAC so their numbers are reduced in terms of NEETS.

Response

Something we have done recently, was to change to an "Outcome Based model" launched just before Christmas and part of our philosophy is instilling into these young people a sense of self-belief in the first instance. Often these children have suffered from adverse childhood experiences and therefore, to make them the focus of their future plans and allowing them to set their own agenda and give them support there in both an holistic and therapeutic way was a very important start of the process. Outcomes from this approach, would hopefully be that by the time they reach 16 years of age, they will be inspired and have sufficient confidence to allow them to be capable in terms of academic achievements. This process was a bit more difficult than the previous approach that was in place, however, the change was believed, would result in the academic prospects of our young people going forward, receiving support in a more effective way than previous. The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration added that further information in respect of the above, could be obtained from the Education Department outside of the meeting, should the Member wish to receive this. As corporate parents, Members and Officers do their best to replicate supporting children in the same way they would be supported by their natural parents in terms of their education needs and requirements, up to the stage where they enter higher education, for example University.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Jane Gebbie

Could you be more specific, as the majority of our LAC do experience adverse childhood experiences and as we are well aware, this often results in a barrier to both their academic and personal achievements. Therefore, how are we as corporate parents, encouraging them to achieve more positive life outcomes.

Response

The Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help, replied that it was all about putting the voice of the LAC first, whilst weaving in a more therapeutic and holistic approach in terms of their education. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Early Help added that the local authority had a fundamental responsibility to ensure that it provides the right family environment for our children and young people, so there is an assurance that they have the right amount of care and support in place for them, in order that they may have a happy and balanced life. Actions that are pursued in order to achieve this, include the recruitment of highly qualified Foster Carers. At yesterday's Cabinet meeting, a report had been approved regarding the best way going forward on not just how to recruit these professionals, but also putting in place ways to retain them. It was also important that LAC were effectively and well supported both at home and in school. The Council had invested in Foster Families for those children who were unable to stay with their parents or Foster Carer(s), as well as its own residential provision. Funding had also been made available by Welsh Government, in order to assist learning

opportunities for LAC during the pandemic as well as for longer term, in order that they can support LAC's outcomes up to the time they enter higher education. She assured Members that the Council were adopting a person centred approach dually through its Early Help and Children's Services sections. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support added that supporting LAC, included joint working collaboratively as well as ensuring any interventions were evidence based. The Council had an Education Engagement team, that ensured that the local authority discharged its statutory duty in relation to children's education needs at schools. The Council also advised all schools how best to use Pupil Development Grants as a support mechanism to the learning process. There were presently 32 LAC who received additional teaching tuition, in order to assist in closing the gap between them and certain other learners. He concluded by advising that 4 years ago, Estyn had identified excellent practice in both Brynteg School and Penybont Primary School, for the extent of support that they had in place for LAC.

Third supplementary question from Councillor Stuart Baldwin

What work was the Authority doing, to encourage Foster Carers from more diverse backgrounds, such as for example the LGBTQ Plus communities.

Response

The Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help, confirmed that there had been a campaign just last week encouraging people from LGBTQ Plus communities to consider being a Foster Carers. There were other examples of encouraging individuals far and wide (including from such diverse backgrounds), to consider committing to such a role and she was happy to share these with any Members who may be interested in having this information. A report had also been considered by Cabinet at its meeting yesterday, entitled 'Fostering Recruitment – Children's Social Care,' that gave approval to align fostering recruitment across Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil, and dealing with fostering recruitment enquiries, processing applications, as well as supporting potential Foster Carers through the process of becoming a Foster Carer.

Councillor Matthew Voisey to the Leader

why is this Labour administration discriminating against some key workers, by not allowing those in the private sector access to childcare provisions during this current lockdown, considering these are the very workers the Labour party claims to look after, part time workers and those on or near minimum wage?

Response

Welsh Government guidance in respect of critical workers requires local authorities to have regard for its critical worker list. However, it states that it is for individual local authorities, based on their current situation to determine eligibility. Given the public health emergency in Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC), we took the difficult decision to restrict our eligibility to traditional 'blue light' occupations such as National Health Service (NHS), education, prison officers and social care workers (both public and private sector).

This decision was made in the interests of ensuring schools had adequate capacity to protect the health and wellbeing of the pupils and staff without compromising their ability to provide high-quality blended learning. We have worked with key delivery partners (listening to their concerns) to develop effective and COVID-safe learning/working environments. Although it is fully recognised that this has caused some difficulties for some families, the strategy has helped to reduce rates of transmission of the virus in the community while maintaining educational standards in schools.

We have also worked hard to support families whose children didn't secure on-site, in-school provision. This has included working with the Early Years and Childcare Team, private childcare settings, supporting families/grandparents, and communicating with employers. Early years colleagues have continued to deliver the Flying Start programme and have also supported non-maintained settings to deliver childcare throughout the pandemic (with advice, guidance and, where eligible, funding). Support has also been provided by members of the Inclusion Service, offering online check-ins with pupils identified as being vulnerable and/or requiring additional learning support and for families who have been struggling to manage their children's behaviour. Priority for support has been given to looked-after children, children on the child protection register and children with complex disabilities and medical needs. Schools have also offered outreach support through multi-agency working. This has included home visits by the teams and regular check-ins to the most vulnerable.

School staff currently provide on-site provision for vulnerable learners and the children of critical workers, direct off-site support for vulnerable learners and remote learning opportunities for all learners. Therefore, any increase in on-site provision will inevitably have an adverse impact on the school's ability to provide high-quality online learning and limit a school's capacity to provide off-site support to vulnerable learners. All headteachers report that it is very difficult to have sufficient staff on-site to supervise those pupils attending school while also having sufficient staffing capacity to provide blended learning for those pupils who are off-site.

We are in a very difficult position of needing to keep numbers as low as possible to reduce transmission opportunities in the face of growing pressure from parents/carers to offer places to their children. We acknowledge that the current situation creates difficulties for parents/carers who are also key workers who have to go to work but who are not eligible according to BCBC's agreed criteria and have no alternative childcare available. We are naturally keen to expand on-site provision when/where it is safe to do so to meet the needs of parents/carers where this support is required.

As the transmission rates have reduced, we have made plans to expand the local offer to meet the needs of more parents and carers by continuing to provide a safe teaching and learning environment for pupils and staff based on the results of a recent online survey. On 5 February, we launched an online survey to ascertain the demand for on-site provision. The results of the survey indicated that 1797 additional on-site places were required. Of these, 1405 referred to on-site provision for primary school-aged learners while 392 referred to on-site provision for secondary school-aged learners.

At the same time of the launch of the online survey, the Minister for Education announced that all foundation phase learners (ie in Bridgend, all three to seven-year-olds eligible for a school place) would return to school during the week commencing 22 February. As expected, much of the demand for on-site places for primary school-aged learners were linked with younger children. Consequently, by applying a range of filters (eg by asking parents/carers whether they would make use of the additional provision, whether they'd be able to care for their child/ren at home, whether their child attends a foundation phase setting, and/or whether they actually consider themselves a critical worker based on Welsh Government's eligibility criteria), the actual demand for on-site provision is lower. In this scenario, if we were to expand our eligibility criteria to include all occupations on the Welsh Government list, the indicative demand for places would see an additional 163 (key stage 2) on-site places being required in the primary school sector and an additional 39 (Year 7 and Year 8) places being required in the secondary school sector.

However, due to the significant increase in pupils attending primary schools following the half-term break, feedback from schools has been that any increase in on-site provision at this time would present significant difficulty. For example, due to recent Welsh Government advice in respect of maintaining class/year group 'bubbles', an increase of only four learners in a primary school may require an additional eight staff (ie one teacher and one learning assistant per class) to be on-site. This will inevitably impact negatively on the school's ability to deliver high-quality online learning. Consequently, this has impacted on our ability to bring more children of critical workers back sooner, in that there will be less capacity to cater for additional childcare requirements. The more pupils there are in school, the more school staff will be required to supervise/teach and this will reduce the capacity for staff to be able to offer high-quality remote and blended learning opportunities for all pupils who are not on-site.

In conclusion, however, I am pleased to advise members that on-site, in-school provision will be available to all children (in nursery to Year 8 (inclusive)) of critical workers (as defined by Welsh Government) from Monday 15 March.

Supplementary question from Councillor Matthew Voisey (presented by Councillor Walters in his absence)

Whilst it's good to know that children of key workers up to Year 8 will have space in schools from next Monday, this has been a long time coming. These non-blue light key workers have served us all through the pandemic and have often been forgotten about or the recipients of frustrations when there were food shortages earlier on in the pandemic. I appreciate all they have done to keep all of us going. There is another set of key workers whose children were also excluded, namely those employees of the Armed Forces who were excluded from the list to start with and many of these people were on 24 hour Movement Notices. How did this exclusion fit in with the Council's signing of the Armed Forces Covenants. Without the help of the Armed Forces during the pandemic, many of the food and other supplies would not have got through to those that needed them. They were now assisting in the vaccine roll-out and without their support here, Wales would not have progressed so well, as they have to date in succeeding with its vaccination programme.

Response

We of course value the amazing work being carried out by critical and key workers throughout the pandemic. The difficulty has been capacity of our schools to accommodate the pupils, as all of our schools Head teachers, had been concerned regarding the shortage of space and staff at schools required, in order to accommodate all the children of all key/critical workers that would have been eligible under that wider definition. We are of course, going to see all Primary School pupils back at schools in the next week or so and that will address the immediate issue for younger children. This decision was made following a comprehensive consultation and engagement exercise with families, ie that even if schools had not been re-opened to all primary aged pupils, we had decided to widen that eligibility, upon establishing that there was capacity at the schools, to accommodate children of key workers, including the Armed Forces/Service personnel, etc. These service personnel had been fantastic during the pandemic and outside of this also. I have not however, received any examples of where the above has given rise to an issue. However, if there have been any and they are raised with me, I will address them quickly. The Cabinet Member – Communities as Armed Forces Champion for the Authority, added that the above highlighted a glaring absence when it comes to children of serving members of the Armed Forces. The reason for this, was that there was no mechanism within schools to build a register of pupils there, confirming they were children of parents who were in the Armed Forces. We should be required to keep such a register at schools for this purpose, in order that it could be

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made easier for them to flag this up to the Education Department/wider Council/Cabinet Members. However, far as I am aware, we have had no representations as the Leader has said, from any members of the Armed Forces or the organisation itself with regard to children of their members in this regard. So it is difficult for us to pinpoint where the need was (at schools).

Second supplementary question from Councillor Bridie Sedgebeer

In Councillor Voisey's original question, he makes reference to the minimum wage. In terms of this, it was the Labour Party and only that party that stood up for key workers and working families over years past and it was the Labour Party that campaigned for and introduced the minimum wage, which had been opposed to by the Conservative Party. So why are they now defending key workers and their families?

Response

This is correct and the national minimum wage was opposed to by the Conservative but I'm glad to say, that this challenge was unsuccessful and the minimum wage is now protected by law.

Third supplementary question from Councillor Jane Gebbie

Would you consider that our Welsh Labour Government have been considerably more successful and pro-active in managing their Consequential budgets to protect both key workers and the public, than the UK Government. In Wales there was put in place a 'Test and Trace' system which had been structured in such a way, that proved to be effective and cost effective, as it was organised by staff in the NHS and primarily local government workers on low to moderate incomes. In contrast the Conservative Government had undertaken the same project though employing highly paid Consultants at a cost of £22m, which had been far less successful.

Response

Critical Care workers have been at the frontline of the Covid crisis, and I cannot thank them enough for their unrelenting hard work, carried out in the face of extreme pressure and trauma through people sadly losing their lives as a result of the virus. I'm proud that the Welsh Government had paid an additional £500 to its Care Workers as a recognition of the invaluable role they have provided at this most difficult of periods in the support of our most vulnerable in society.

523. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 18:02