

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON WEDNESDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 15:00**

Present

Councillor J Spanswick – Chairperson

S Aspey	SE Baldwin	TH Beedle	JPD Blundell
NA Burnett	MC Clarke	N Clarke	RJ Collins
HJ David	P Davies	PA Davies	DK Edwards
J Gebbie	RM Granville	CA Green	DG Howells
M Hughes	A Hussain	B Jones	M Jones
MJ Kearns	DRW Lewis	JE Lewis	JR McCarthy
D Patel	RL Penhale-Thomas	AA Pucella	JC Radcliffe
KL Rowlands	B Sedgebeer	RMI Shaw	CE Smith
G Thomas	T Thomas	MC Voisey	LM Walters
KJ Watts	DBF White	A Williams	AJ Williams
HM Williams	JE Williams	RE Young	

Apologies for Absence

SK Dendy, T Giffard, RM James, SG Smith, RME Stirman, JH Tildesley MBE, E Venables, SR Vidal and CA Webster

Officers:

Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Galvin	Interim Democratic Services Manager
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gill Lewis	Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

596. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

597. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of Council dated 21 October 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record.

598. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:

Mayor

The past month has been relatively quiet, but I am sure that will not be the case leading up to Christmas over the next few weeks. Please don't forget that this week is the last chance to grab a ticket for the Charity Fundraising evening taking place on Sat 27 November 2021 at the Heronston Hotel with a buffet, comedy stage hypnotist and music by Lee Jukes of Bridge FM and all are welcome.

In addition to this, there is a grand Christmas raffle taking place with a 1st prize of £200 cash and around 20 other prizes with the draw taking place on Wednesday 15 December 2021 after the next Council meeting. If you would like any tickets at £2.00 each, please just drop me a message and arrangements can be made to secure your tickets. All proceeds from these events will be going to Lads & Dads and Bridgend Carers Centre.

Over the past month I had the pleasure of being invited to the opening of Bridgend College STEAM Academy at their Pencoed campus. This is science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics and it was amazing to see the facilities being made available to students across these disciplines and well done to Bridgend College for bringing such an amazing facility to the county borough.

At the end of October, I opened the Lions Club of Bridgend Book Fair at Westward Community Centre and came away with a heavy load of books. The Lions have raised in excess of £180,000 since this first started in 1995 and it was great to hear about the partnership, they have now formed with the volunteer management committee of Westward Community Centre ably helped by our very own Councillor David White.

Following on from this I was invited to the opening of what is I believe Bridgend first mobile veterinary service based in Aberkenfig. Mobivet has been set up in what was previously a furniture shop and has been transformed into a modern well equipped veterinary surgery with equipment to rival that seen in any hospital. This is such a welcome service where they are available 24 /7 to call out to your home and will surely be of use to people who cannot easily travel to a vet or they would prefer their pet to be seen in the comfort of their home.

Last week I was pleased to be invited to an open-air performance by Brynteg Comprehensive School in Bridgend Town centre and was accompanied by Councillor Dhanisha Patel. They performed their own short and adapted version of Hansel & Gretel and it was great to see the whole year group there as well singing along to the performance with a great crowd of people watching as well. More of this for the town centre would be welcomed.

This past weekend I visited Tremains Wood along with the Leader and Councillor Stuart Baldwin to congratulate Tremains Woodland Rangers on achieving a Green Flag award for the work they have been doing over the past few years, protecting and enhancing this ancient woodland which has trees that are believed to be in excess of 400 years old and sits within the centre of Brackla.

On Remembrance Sunday I was honoured and privileged to be at the Bridgend Town Centre parade and laid a wreath on behalf of the people of the County Borough of Bridgend. The weather was fine and among the many veterans and service people marching, there was also a small group of people there wearing their orange hats. This was the Lads & Dads representation who for the first time since they were formed just over 2 years ago, decided to lay a poppy wreath at the Cenotaph. Poppy wreaths were laid at services across the County Borough by fellow Councillors and many thanks to all who participated in this day.

Finally, nominations are now open for the Mayoral Citizenship Awards and forms to nominate anyone in the community for one of these, were available on the BCBC web site.

I now have some Committee meeting changes to announce:

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2021

The following Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting dates will be altered, to accord with the timing of the Welsh Government budget settlement to local authorities. This has been agreed with the respective Committee Chairpersons:

SOSC 1 – change from 8 Dec to 20 Jan at 9.30am;

SOSC 2 – change from 13 Dec to 21 Jan at 9.30am;

SOSC 3 – change from 16 Dec to 24 Jan at 9.30am;

The meeting of SOSC 1 on 17 Jan will need to be cancelled in order to accommodate the above and wider work pressures in the Democratic Services team.

Further meetings of the following will also be required to be scheduled, again to deliberate the MTFS:

COSC 19 January at 9.30am

COSC 1 Feb at 9.30am (to receive Recommendations on Budget Proposals / MTFS from Scrutiny and BREP).

The rescheduling of the above meetings, will necessitate moving:

Development Control Cttee dated 20 January to 27 January 2022

Governance & Audit Cttee dated 27 January to 28 January 2022

The Chairpersons of these Committees are also in agreement with the rescheduling of these meetings

There is also a change of membership proposed on the Governance and Audit Committee, in that the Independent Alliance group wish to take off Councillor Elaine Venables and replace with Councillor Mike Clarke. This does not affect the political balance on this or any other Council Committees.

Deputy Leader

Plans for a new strategic employment site at Brocastle have moved a step closer following the completion of major infrastructure works.

Welsh Government has invested more than £10 million into the 116-acre site, which has outline planning consent in place for up to 770,000 square feet of floor space.

Key roads and utilities are now in place and can serve up to nine plots where modern businesses can be developed to aid economic growth and job creation.

An active travel route is also planned for spring, again funded by Welsh Government, and enquiries have already been received from various property developers and owner occupiers.

This is excellent news for the county borough, and I hope that it will lead to the creation of many new jobs.

Cabinet Member – Communities

Public consultation is underway on what could prove to be the single biggest highways infrastructure project carried out so far in Bridgend County Borough.

Between now and Sunday 30 January next year, we are asking people for their views on ambitious £17m plans to address long-standing traffic congestion issues in Pencoed.

These proposals aim to ease the town's congestion problems, increase safety and deliver new improvements for residents and businesses alike by separating the road from the railway line.

If approved, the plans will enable the eventual closure of Pencoed's level railway crossing by rebuilding the Penprysg road bridge so that it can accommodate two-way traffic, and creating a safe, all-new active travel bridge over the line for pedestrians and cyclists.

This will then unlock potential development land located to the west of the current level crossing and enable fresh investment and facilities to be introduced.

We are carrying out a number of drop-in sessions where members of the public can find out more and ask questions, and the consultation survey is available in a range of different formats.

Full details on these exciting proposals are available at the council website.

Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help

This week marks National Safeguarding Week 2021, and Bridgend County Borough Council is joining with other organisations across Wales as part of a national campaign.

Under the theme of 'Safeguarding our Communities', a number of virtual sessions are taking place ranging from training sessions for professionals, youth council debates, public workshops, awareness raising events and more.

Each session will discuss a range of issues affecting children, young people and adults including domestic abuse, mental health, suicide prevention, child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Our communities have faced many difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic, and we are encouraging residents to take advantage of these virtual events to learn more about the services and support that is available.

Full details are available at the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board website.

Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing

I would like to briefly mention two things. Firstly, Members should be aware that our housing options service is still under considerable demand as a result of the Covid pandemic,

In practice, this has resulted in considerably higher numbers of applications being made to the service, which in turn has impacted upon the timescales for processing and reaching decisions on applications.

To give you an idea of the current demand, the service is currently receiving approximately 350 applications every month.

There are also up to 40 additional homeless applications which, due to their often complex nature, are resource intensive.

While the department is doing all it can to manage this demand, the increase does mean there is an inevitable knock-on effect, and we are making every effort to support the service and manage expectations in an efficient and realistic manner.

On more positive news, I would like to congratulate the Shared Regulatory Service after they won Gold, Silver and Bronze awards at the 2021 RSPCA PawPrints initiative.

This is Designed to recognise achievements in stray dog services, contingency planning, housing policy, animal activity licensing and kennelled dog welfare, the SRS were recognised in three different categories – Stray Dogs, Animal Activity Licensing and Kennelled Dogs.

You may recall that the service also received gold, silver and bronze awards in 2019, so to do so again despite the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic over the last 18 months is something they should feel rightly proud of.

Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration

There have been a number of achievements at local schools recently which I would like to share with members.

Pencoed Primary has become the third school in South Wales to receive Reference School status from the online technology company.

The accolade, which is awarded to individual schools and colleges as well as specific regions, recognises the outstanding use of educational technology within the classroom.

Meanwhile, Afon-y-Felin Primary School has become the first primary school in the Cwm Taf region to win the Cymraeg Campus Gold Award for their commitment to the Welsh language. The Leader and myself will visit the school soon to personally congratulate teachers and pupils.

The school's success is also set to be featured on national television after S4C spent the afternoon filming with staff and pupils for the daily magazine programme, Heno.

In Maesteg, Plasnewydd Primary has been removed from special measures after inspectors from Estyn confirmed that the school has made significant improvements since issues requiring addressing were identified in 2018.

Following intensive support from Bridgend County Borough Council and the Central South Consortium, Estyn has confirmed that a broad base is now in place upon which the school can make further improvements. Some similar news will follow with one of our other schools, before very long.

Finally, Coychurch Primary teacher Melanie Treadwell has taken part in an event organised by the Office for Climate Education which preceded the COP26 conference.

Melanie was one of only three UK-based teachers chosen to make a presentation on leading the way in Climate Education, and the only primary school teacher to do so. As a result, ITV Wales recently visited Coychurch Primary to film some of the good work that is taking place there.

I am sure that members will want to join me in offering all the above our congratulations.

Chief Executive

Members may have seen that Bridgend County Borough has been selected as one of four areas in Wales where new, flexible ways of voting are to be piloted. The others are Torfaen, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent/

These trials have been organised by Welsh Government and will coincide with the local government elections scheduled for May next year.

They are designed to find ways of making it easier and more convenient for people to vote and will each test out a different way of enabling residents to cast their ballots.

Welsh Government has now agreed further details about what we can expect to see, so I thought I might share some of that with you now.

Two pilot schemes will be running in Bridgend County Borough, the first focusing on Cynffig Comprehensive.

Following last year's lowering of the voting age to 16, a new polling station will be created within the school so that eligible pupils can cast their votes in the days ahead of the main election day.

The second scheme will focus on wards where people have previously voted in low numbers and will see 20 existing polling stations opening for early voting in the week running up to the election.

Details are still being finalised, but they are expected to be located in Brackla East and Coychurch Lower, Brackla East Central, Brackla West, Brackla West Central, Cornelly, Pyle, Kenfig Hill and Cefn Cribwr, St Brides Minor and Ynysawdre.

Concurrently there will be a promotion campaign led by WG with the aim of increasing voting through engagement with the public and increased campaigning.

All of the findings and evidence gathered from the pilot schemes will be analysed by Welsh Government and will ultimately influence how future elections are carried out throughout Wales.

We will be fully publicising what this means for eligible voters and how they can take part and more details will be provided as we draw closer to the election.

599. TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER

Modern multi-storey car parking at Hillsboro Place, a luxury waterfront hotel, landscaping and pedestrianisation along the Eastern Promenade, improved public transport, the extension of Dock Street and new community spaces, are just some of the proposals that feature in Bridgend County Borough Council's new 'placemaking' consultation.

Organised in line with the Placemaking Wales Charter, the consultation is inviting businesses and residents in Porthcawl to give their views on the proposals either online, or by visiting drop-in sessions where they will be able to view exhibition boards and speak to regeneration officers.

The drop-in sessions will take place at the Grand Pavilion between 9am-5pm on Wednesday 24 November, and 9am-8pm on Thursday 25 November.

Following this, the exhibition boards will be placed on hoardings at Cosy Corner for three weeks, and the Council's website will feature more details and a short survey to enable people to provide further feedback.

We remain extremely ambitious for these plans, and want them to deliver realistic, sustainable regeneration in Porthcawl.

I hope that Members will help to promote this important consultation and also encourage people to take part and have their say.

UK Government has confirmed which projects have been approved to receive funding from the new Community Renewal Fund in Bridgend County Borough.

This is the precursor to the Shared Prosperity Fund, which will be launched next year as a replacement for EU structural grant funding.

A total of £46m has been allocated to projects across Wales, and Bridgend County Borough will receive £785,000 of this.

£213,000 will go to Enterprise Bridgend, an initiative which helps people who have been furloughed or who may be economically inactive to find new employment.

£200,000 has been allocated to The Life You Want, which supports people who want to develop and improve their skills or undertake new training in order to gain new work and improve their lives.

Transforming Young Minds for Tomorrow will receive £86,800 to encourage more pupils to consider careers in manufacturing and engineering, while Bridgend Elevate and Prosper will benefit from £125,000 to support new business start-ups.

The Incubator for Ambitious Entrepreneurs programme is aimed at helping female entrepreneurs to develop trusted business networks and will receive £92,700.

A further £56,700 has been allocated to Connecting Teachers with Industry, which enables local teachers to encourage pupils who want careers in creative, digital, environment and advanced materials and manufacturing sectors.

Bridgend will also benefit from a further bid submitted by Torfaen Council on behalf of the 10 local authorities working together through the Cardiff Capital Region – a Connect, Engage, Listen, Transform project, designed to add further value to the council's existing Employability Bridgend programme.

These are all very worth-while projects that will have a positive impact upon the lives of local people and I welcome investment from UK Government towards these.

However, it remains a matter of serious concern that Bridgend County Borough has not been included within the top 100 priority places marked for support through the forthcoming Shared Prosperity Fund.

We have been recognised as having some of the poorest communities in Wales, and I find myself once more calling upon UK Government to reconsider its decision.

600. **PRESENTATION BY THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER AND CHIEF CONSTABLE OF SOUTH WALES POLICE AND PROGRAMME OF PRESENTATIONS TO FUTURE MEETINGS OF COUNCIL**

The Chief Executive presented the above report, part of which introduced the representatives present from the South Wales Police.

The Mayor introduced the Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael and DCC Jenny Gilmer to speak on policing covering the 3 basic Command Units and 7 Police Authorities that covered the area of South Wales.

He began his submission, by explaining how hard the last 18 months had been for the Police due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which had also affected other large scale organisations, such as the Health Service and local authorities such as BCBC. The situation was also still ongoing, he added.

During this time however, he assured that the South Wales Police had still maintained a clear focus on its priorities, with local delivery of services and support still being at the heart of the Police and Crime Delivery Plan, the detail of which had previously been shared with local Councillors.

The likes of the NHS and Social Care services had been left 'reeling' as well as the Police he added, with the Police facing some massive demands during the above period. He confirmed that during the first lockdown, crime had reduced but as society began to re-open, levels had once more increased to as they had been previously and even above that level.

Today's discussion he advised, would look at neighbourhood policing, the role of PCSO's, responsiveness to 999 and 101 calls, crime levels, violence against females and community and neighbourhood safety. He was pleased to advise Council, that Welsh Government had funded 100 extra PCSO's across Wales, with 41 of these covering South Wales. Neighbourhood teams also supported these Officers, confirmed the Police Commissioner.

With levels of work starting to increase and at times, to an unprecedented demand, the Police had previously looked at ways where they could be contacted other than by 999 or 101 calls. They had therefore added to these methods of contact also, through email and a new single on-line social media system.

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that in July 2021 there had been a peak in demand in terms of 999 calls, ie 18,000 which had slightly reduced at the present time. 99% of these were responded to very quickly. Calls made by 101 were not classed as emergency, however, these were also responded to by the Police as quickly as possible. These had also peaked last July, he further added. The latest statistics in terms of 101 calls, reflected that 85% of these were responded to as soon as possible after they were made.

Most of the calls were dealt with by the Control Room initially, with the most urgent calls responded to quickly by a police presence visiting the caller/their location in person.

As was probably expected, crime levels had fallen during the period where there had been complete lockdown, as there was no night time economy and only essential retail food outlets were open. But certain serious acts of crime, such as for example, drug dealing levels did not reduce in number. Contrary to many people's belief also, in the County Borough of Bridgend, incidents of domestic abuse or violence had surprisingly reduced. However, numbers of these had now started creeping up to normal levels and

above, sadly as had child abuse. Similarly, as the night time economy had opened back up, incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour had increased too back to previous levels or above the pre-Covid period.

There were also groups being introduced, such as 'Drink less, Enjoy more' and further training for late night premises Door Control staff to look out for vulnerable patrons who may be preyed upon by perpetrators.

The Police were also working with the Hospitality industry and joint Local Authority Enforcement Teams, to ensure prevention as well as enforcement of occurrences.

The Police and Crime Commissioner emphasised the fact that 999 calls were very much a drain on the Police resources, particularly on Friday and Saturday evenings. He added that the 101 service had never meant to be operated by the Police alone, as this was initially introduced as a joint service with other key organisations, for example the Fire Authority.

He advised that if any Members wished to view the Control Room at the Police headquarters that took the majority of calls, then that would be welcomed.

DCC Gilmer then proceeded by giving some information with regards to tackling violence against women and girls through:-

- Actively pursuing perpetrators and where appropriate, ensuring that they are prosecuted, sometimes resulting in a custodial sentence;
- The Safer Spaces initiative – including reporting to the Police anonymously and introducing a more safer night time economy environment (eg patrolling staff in establishments being alert to drink spiking and acts of crime and violence, etc);
- Improving trust and confidence in policing (including through important initiatives such as Black Lives Matter);
- The All Wales Taskforce (that feeds into the UK Taskforce)

She then shared some information with Members on Community Safety – Neighbourhood Policing activities, which targeted the likes of:

1. Partnership and togetherness
2. Re-aligning leadership to provide improved support to neighbourhood policing (eg through the provision of more PCSO's)
3. Explore problem solving jointly with key partners

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that he had been one of the people who had introduced Community Safety Partnerships, as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This was introduced as a mechanism of support during austerity, at a time when public organisations such as the Police, Fire and local authorities were forced to make cutbacks in their finances and staffing complement.

There was in place a Safer Communities Board that assisted in co-ordinating safer communities across all the 4 Police Authorities in South Wales, that looked at preventing crime and harm to people, so as to enhance community safety.

He explained that the PCSO's had reduced in number in the last 18 months, in that they had been seconded to cover essential other work that had increased due to Covid-19. However, these were slowly returning to their substantive role, as they were seen as key in that they had knowledge of issues and problems within the local communities in the areas they served and therefore had a head start on being aware of these and of the

steps required to resolve these. PCSO's also had a key relationship with local Members in the areas they served.

The Mayor then opened up debate, by asking Members whether they had any questions of the Invitees.

A Member asked how much time the Police spent while patrolling town centres, in terms of supporting and picking up members of the public, who may have been involved in a fight and injured or found on the street overly intoxicated, that should have by right been picked up by the ambulance service and taken to hospital. She was aware that this was sometimes the case as the Police were often in the vicinity, whilst the call-out for an ambulance often took a considerable amount of time. Cases of this she felt, must impact on police resources.

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that this did sometimes occur and it was something that had been raised by Welsh Government as an area of concern. It was a bit of a vicious circle he added, in that the Health Service as well as the Police were under a tremendous amount of pressure, particularly since the inception of the pandemic and a considerable amount of ambulances and staff were often required as back-up outside hospitals and other essential care service establishments. It was a very difficult situation to resolve all round, he felt.

DCC Gilmer added, that often the Police arrived quicker than an ambulance would to provide support to people in situations such as those mentioned above, due to having received a 999 call which are acted upon urgently. With winter months still yet to come and a possible rise in Covid cases, she felt that the current situation could get worse before it gets better.

A Member confirmed that he had been well informed that at any one time, only one Local Neighbourhood Police Officer was present 'on the streets' north and west of the County Borough. Though he was conscious of the presence also in local communities of PCSO's, he felt that this was inadequate and that the number should be increased in order to achieve more effective policing.

The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that he would look into this issue. He added however, that a lot of Police time and commitment was spent concentrating on reactive responses to 999 or 101 calls and other on the ground incidents, hence the difficulty placing Officers to patrol smaller community areas.

DCC Gilmer added, that neighbourhood policing was at its most effective when addressing individual problems raised by constituents to the Police, that were then fed down to PCSO's to deal with. Central Government had sanctioned an uplift which would increase Police support across England and Wales by the introduction of 20,000 more Officers. These however, would initially receive training and be subject to a significant level of abstractions in their 1st and 2nd year of employment, so the full effect of the increase in South Wales, would not be seen until after this time. Recruitment was presently ongoing here she added. DCC Gilmer further added, that it was not only about numbers of Police Officers patrolling in communities and town centres on foot, but more knowing what to do and being aware of the issues that require solving.

The Police and Crime Commissioner thought it was worth pointing out, that even with the extra 20,000 Officers as referred to by DCC Gilmer, this number was still below the level that there were back in 2010.

A member expressed some concerns over the pay freeze the Police had faced in recent times. She also felt that indicating direct reference to 'domestic violence against women', may give perpetrators some ammunition, with this being so specific.

The Police Crime and Commissioner felt that the pay freeze that had been experienced by the public sector during the last few years had been unfair. When this was relaxed, a significant offer in terms of a percentage increase should be offered, he added. The problem was, that the Police Authority itself would have to fit the bill then for any such enhanced pay increase.

With regard to the problem of domestic violence and abuse, this did not just relate to physical and violence, but also incidents of coercive control. The Police had been involved in a programme known as DRIVE, which had involved work that attempted to reform individuals who were prone to acts of violence etc. This had been piloted in Merthyr and Cardiff where it had proven to be successful. It had involved nearly all men, the Police Crime and Commissioner confirmed. Though the funding for this initiative had been exhausted, it had proven to be so successful and had reduced the demand on Police resources, it had been re-introduced across all 7 local authorities in Wales in 2020.

A Member raised a point regarding unauthorised parking and parking infringements often being committed by drivers of vehicles. He was aware that this was a matter for BCBC and its Enforcement Officers. However, he asked if PCSO's or Police Officers had any active role to play to deter such a problem.

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that this was primarily a function of the local authority, though Police Officers could intervene if anyone parked their vehicles anywhere that could prove a danger to the public or other vehicle users. There was scope he added, for some degree of joint working between the two Authorities to reduce cases of this however.

A Member said that he could not overstate the importance of PCSO's in the community. He was concerned however, that when these individuals were trained and moved on perhaps through promotion, this would leave a void in terms of replacement Officers being provided.

The Police and Crime Commissioner assured the Councillor, that there would continue to be a significant turnover of PCSO's if they were for example, promoted to Police Officers. However, a significant amount of these Officers often remained in their role for reasons of job satisfaction, eg working in and supporting communities, as well as getting to know the residents who lived there.

A Member felt that there was a drain on police resources when a person may get arrested in Porthcawl and the support for this arrest comes from Bridgend. Back in 2020 in Llantwit major, four services were re-located in one building, ie the Police, Coastguard service, Fire Authority and the Ambulance service. Llantwit Major had 9,500 constituents. The Police, Fire and Ambulance stations in Porthcawl were all in relatively poor condition and Porthcawl had 16,000 residents. He asked in light of this, if a similar operation undertaken in Llantwit major could take place at Porthcawl.

The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that this is something that could be looked at in the future with the support of the partner organisations, both in Porthcawl and Maesteg.

The Leader closed the debate on this item, by thanking the representatives of the Police for attending the meeting, sharing some key information with Members and responding

to questions. He wished to place on record his thanks to Geraint White from the Police who was leaving Bridgend for a promotion, as he had provided a great deal of support to constituents while in post.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Chief Executive together with the presentation from the representatives of the South Wales Police be noted.

601. **BRIDGEND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) - REVISED DELIVERY AGREEMENT**

The Corporate Director – Communities submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to advise Council of the necessity to revise the LDP Delivery Agreement (DA); to seek approval of the extension to the LDP Timetable and to the submission of the revised DA to Welsh Government for agreement.

The Strategic Planning Policy Team Leader, advised that DA was a mandatory requirement of the LDP process and considered to be a key tool for the speedier production of land use plans. It comprised of the following two elements:

- The Timetable – this sets out how the Council will manage the programme for preparing the LDP.
- The Community Involvement Scheme (CIS) – this sets out who, when and how the Council will consult and engage with various stakeholders, including the general public.

An extension to the timetable of the LDP was the subject of the report, he added.

Public consultation on the Council's Draft DA was undertaken during April and May 2018 and Council approved the document for submission to WG, which subsequently approved the initial final DA on the 25 June 2018.

WG advised all Local Planning Authorities that DA's should be adjusted to account for any necessary changes to the LDP timetable in light of delays caused by the pandemic.

As a result, the Council approved a revised DA on 16 September 2020, which was subsequently approved by WG on 5 October 2020.

Since that date, Bridgend County Borough Council had prepared the LDP Deposit Draft (LDPDD), which Cabinet approved for consultation on 18 May 2021. Public consultation was held for 8 weeks between 1 June and 27 July 2021.

Progress towards the next key stage of the replacement LDP, submission of the LDPDD to WG and the Planning Inspectorate, had been delayed and this was the subject of the necessary changes to the DA, set out in the next section of the report.

The Strategic Planning Policy Team Leader continued by stating, that Council now needed to prepare a new DA with WG following the LDPDD consultation. The reason for this, was that the LDP's supporting evidence base needed reviewing and refining as a result of the representations received from our communities and key stakeholders. In approving the Deposit Draft for consultation Council made a commitment to those communities. This was that the Authority would consider, formulating and publishing a response to each of the representations received to the LDPDD. The Council had been in receipt of over 1,200 representations, which proved to be a considerable administrative exercise.

In addition to responding to the individual representations, the LDP evidence base needs to be reviewed and refined as a result of new information coming to light, as a result of changes to legislation, updated national planning guidance and the completion of supporting technical information.

These strands of work were set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report and expanded upon for the benefit of Council, by the Strategic Planning Policy Team Leader.

The proposed extension to the Timetable was illustrated in Table 1 (paragraph 4.4 of the report) and showed that Stage 4, which is the stage the Council were currently at, needs to be extended to June 2022 to enable submission of the Plan to WG next Summer.

Prior to submission, amendments to the LDPDD can be made as a result of the issues raised during the public consultation and prior to being reported to Council to seek approval to submit the plan for independent examination in public.

Finally, he confirmed that Members will be aware that the existing LDP expires this year, which places the Council in an increasingly tenuous position and open to challenge from the development industry. It is therefore imperative that the Local Planning Authority continues to progress with the statutory review of the LDP.

Of equal importance he finalised, was the need to ensure that the plan is robust and fit for purpose and supported by all the necessary evidence. As such the issues raised in the report, required additional time to resolve to reduce the potential for challenge further on in the LDP process.

The Corporate Director – Communities and the Strategic Planning Policy Team Leader responded to a couple of questions from Members, following which it was

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council approved the revisions to the timetable and authorised the Group Manager Planning & Development Services to submit the revised Delivery Agreement (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) to Welsh Government.
- (2) That Council provided delegated authority to the Group Manager Planning & Development Services to make any factual corrections or minor amendments to the Delivery Agreement as considered necessary.

602. 2022-23 COUNCIL TAX BASE

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change submitted a report, in order to provide Council with details of the council tax base and estimated collection rate for 2022-23 for approval.

She reminded Council, that the council tax base is the measure of the relative taxable capacity of different areas within the County Borough and is calculated in accordance with prescribed rules. Every domestic property in the County Borough has been valued by the Valuation Office. Once valued, properties are allocated one of nine valuation bands (Bands A to I). Each band is multiplied by a given factor to bring it to the Band D equivalent, as set out in the table shown in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

The gross estimated council tax base for 2022-23 is 55967.70 Band D equivalent properties and the estimated collection rate is 97.5%. The net council tax base is, therefore, 54568.51. The estimated collection rate has been kept at 97.5%, to reflect the

current economic circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, the higher number of citizens facing economic hardship and current collection rates.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, added that council tax base is provided to Welsh Government and is used to calculate the amount of Revenue Support Grant that a local authority receives in the Local Government Revenue Settlement. In order to ensure consistency across Wales no account is taken of Councils' assumptions about collection rates. For the purpose of distributing RSG, collection rates are assumed to be 100 per cent, regardless as to the amount collected.

The council tax element of the Council's budget requirement will be based on the net council tax base of 54568.51 and although the Council calculates the tax base for the whole of the county borough, separate calculations are provided for each town and community council. This council tax base is used by precepting authorities in calculating their own individual precepts.

She finalised her submission, by confirming that Town and community councils base their precepts on the tax base for each town and community area and details of these were shown in Appendix A of the report.

RESOLVED: That Council:-

- Approved the council tax base and collection rate for 2022-23 as shown in paragraph 4.1 of this report.
- Approved the tax bases for the town and community council areas set out in Appendix A to the report.

603. **AMENDMENT TO THE FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES (FPRS) WITHIN THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION**

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to seek Council's approval to amend the Constitution to incorporate the revised Financial Procedure Rules.

She advised that, the management of the Council's financial affairs are conducted in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution. The FPRs have not been revised since 2017, during which time new financial processes and procedures, and new legislation and guidance, have come into effect, changing the way in which the Council operates.

The Financial Procedure Rules have been reviewed by officers, including those from finance, procurement, legal and internal audit and a number of changes made to bring them up to date to reflect changes such as those outlined in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, added that a report was presented to Cabinet on 16th November 2021, to approve the revised Financial Procedure Rules.

A copy of the revised rules were attached to the report at Appendix 1 for Members information.

RESOLVED: That Council approved amendment to the Constitution to incorporate the revised Financial Procedure Rules as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

604. INFORMATION REPORTS FOR NOTING

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy (and Monitoring Officer), reported on the Information Reports which had been published since the last meeting of Council.

She referred Members to the two Information Reports in question, that were contained in the covering report.

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

605. TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FROM:

Councillor Tim Thomas to the Deputy Leader

Can the Deputy Leader outline the allocation and usage for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) for this financial year?

Response

What are Discretionary Housing Payments?

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are paid from a cash-limited budget and are intended to help people meet housing costs, usually where there is a shortfall between their Housing Benefit (HB), or housing element of Universal Credit (UC), and their rent. A DHP can only be awarded if the claimant is claiming HB, or UC with housing costs towards rental liability. The initial legislation governing DHPs can be found in the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (S1 001/1167).

'Housing costs' are not defined in the regulations and this approach purposely allows broad discretion for interpretation. In general, 'housing costs' usually refers to rental liability, although the term can be interpreted more widely to include:

- rent in advance
- rent deposits
- other lump sum costs associated with a housing need, such as removal costs

Processing a DHP application

When processing an application for DHP, consideration is given to:

the total weekly or monthly household income

less

reasonable weekly or monthly household expenses

which determines

the shortfall in income to consider for DHP award

The value of a DHP payment for an ongoing award cannot exceed the value of the UC housing costs element or, for HB recipients, the contractual rent minus ineligible service charges (see paragraph 5.1 below) e.g. contractual rent is £400 per month, and HB is £344, the maximum DHP amount would therefore be £56 per month.

What types of shortfall can DHPs cover?

The various shortfalls of HB and UC that a DHP can cover include (but are not limited to):

- rent shortfalls to prevent a household becoming homeless whilst the housing authority explores alternative options
- reductions where the benefit cap has been applied (the benefit cap limits out-of-work benefit income to a maximum of £20,000 for couples and lone parents, and £13,400 for single adults)
- reductions due to the removal of the spare room subsidy (known as the bedroom cap) or as a result of local housing allowance restrictions
- non-dependant deductions in HB or housing cost contributions in UC from non-dependants
- Other technical legislative restrictions:
 - o rent officer restrictions such as local reference rent or shared accommodation rate
 - o Government policy to limit benefit to 2 children
 - o income taper reduction
 - o removal of the family premium
- any other policy changes that limit the amount of HB or UC payable

A DHP can be awarded for a rent deposit or rent in advance for a property that the claimant is yet to move into if they are already entitled to HB or UC at their present home, and also payments for past housing costs (including arrears of rent). Further information regarding criteria and considerations can be found in the DWP's Discretionary Payments Guidance Manual (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/discretionary-housing-payments-guidance-manual>).

DWP and DHP funding for 2021-2022

DHPs have been available to local authorities since 2001. The cash-limited funding is provided by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) and since 2011-12, additional funding has been made available to enable local authorities to provide transitional support to claimants as they adjusted to the HB Welfare Reforms.

The total DHP funding for England and Wales in 2021-22 is £140 million. The DWP allocated £100m at the start of the year with Bridgend County Borough Council's initial allocation being £269,861. At the end of September, the DWP allocated the reserved £40 million of funding – at this point, Bridgend was allocated a further £94,596 bringing the total DWP allocation for Bridgend to £364,457.

DHP funding regulations provide an overall upper limit for DHP expenditure to 2.5 x the DWP allocation; the additional expenditure over the DWP allocation would have to be funded by the local authority. For Bridgend, the upper limit for 2021-22 is £911,143. Any unused DHP allocation is either not claimed from, or returned to, the DWP (i.e. the local authority cannot retain any unspent funds).

DHP expenditure as at 12 November 2021 is:

Year - 2021

Total DWP Fund - £364,457

Net Paid to Date - £234,878

Committed* - £43,025

Unallocated - £86,554

*Committed funds include lump-sum awards to be paid immediately, and future on-going awards to be paid in line with the claimant's rental cycle.

The number of DHP decisions made to the 12 November 2021 is 481, resulting in 354 awards. 140 of these have been lump sum payments (removal costs/ rent in advance/ deposits/ arrears), and 214 are for on-going awards.

Welsh Government DHP funding for 2021-2022

In March 2021, the Minister for Housing and Local Government issued a statement announcing an additional £4.1m funding to top up DHP funds and help local authorities to support tenants in rent arrears (<https://gov.wales/written-statement-extension-tenancy-saver-loan-scheme-and-additional-funding-discretionary-housing>). The funding has been provided across Wales as a homelessness prevention tool to address rent arrears in the context of the pandemic.

Bridgend County Borough Council's allocation for 2021-22 is £165,988, which will be utilised once the DWP allocation has been fully spent (this additional amount falls within the upper limit). Any expenditure over the DWP allocation up to the £165,988 will be claimed from WG; any expenditure over this amount will be met from existing BCBC budgets.

What DHPs cannot cover

There are certain elements of a claimant's rent that the HB and UC regulations exclude so they cannot be included as 'housing costs' for the purposes of a DHP. Excluded elements are:

- ineligible service charges, such as heating, lighting, hot water, or charges for water rates, or the provision and costs of white goods
- increases in rent due to outstanding rent arrears
- certain sanctions and reductions in benefit
- when HB payments are suspended
- reduced HB due to an overpayment being recovered

In addition, DHPs cannot be used for shortfalls between council tax liability and Council Tax Reduction awards.

Length of payments

There is no defined limit as to the length of time over which a DHP may be made. A time-limited award may be appropriate when an impending change of circumstances will result in an increase in benefit (e.g. the birth of a child leading to an increased HB award). It may also be appropriate to make a short-term award to give a claimant time to organise their financial or housing circumstances, particularly if they are trying to find alternative accommodation or gain employment.

Alternatively, a longer-term award could be more appropriate where a claimant's circumstances are unlikely to change and making a short-term award will cause them undue distress.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tim Thomas

Looking at the relevant data DHP is undeniably going to become increasingly popular due to reasons such as the end of Furlough and Universal Credit and because of

Welfare Reform. With this in mind, have you considered devising a Communications Strategy, in order that both public and private renters struggling financially, are kept fully informed that DHP is available and of the criteria required to qualify for this.

Response

Any opportunities we have to promote the services available to the public from the Council, etc, we seek to take full advantage of and in terms of DHP, we engage with free advisory organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau who in turn, offer free advice to residents who find themselves in difficulties including financial difficulty. I will also arrange for a press release to be made available regarding DHP and its benefits.

Question from Councillor Ross-Penhale Thomas to the Cabinet Member Wellbeing and Future Generations

What assessment has the Cabinet Member made of the availability of good quality, affordable housing in Bridgend county borough?

Response

Affordable Housing

It is a multi-layered issue with many components, involving land availability, development opportunities and partnership working, and the role of the private sector in providing rented accommodation all of which can be influenced by housing market fluctuations.

Specific policies in the Local Development Plan (LDP) backed up by Supplementary Planning Guidance requires all new development of 5 or more houses to contribute to affordable housing either as part of the scheme or by way of offsite contribution. This can include direct provision or subsidy. Planning & Housing teams work closely on each development proposal to agree the exact scope and nature of the contribution and how it will be applied. This can then be secured through Section 106 agreements.

There are many strategies and plans which support the assessment of affordable housing needs – The Local Development Plan, Local Housing Market Assessment, Gypsy and Traveller Assessment. These are supplemented by the rehousing register which records demand and needs for social housing throughout the County which in turn supports the delivery of the Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) development programme which has seen an increase in this financial year, and for the next 2 years, to £10m Social Housing Grant per annum. Discussions with the RSL's and Welsh Government takes place regularly to support their development proposals. As the grant only partially funds each development, additional private funding will be attracted into these projects on a scheme by scheme basis by the RSL's. Our Homelessness Strategy also provides information on needs, and work is currently underway on updating this information through a Homelessness Review and Housing Support Programme Strategy which will identify housing and support needs for the future.

RSL's working within the County include Wales and West, Hafod, Linc (Cymru) United Welsh, Coastal and, V2C which has the largest stock in the Borough. Discussions take place regularly on schemes to shape the RSL development programme to meet housing needs throughout the County. Social housing developments must meet planning permissions, WG financial cost guidelines and quality standards before they are supported for grant. Other opportunities are not necessarily discounted but must go through the relevant processes and approvals before they can be considered.

Additionally, as part of the Covid-19 response the Council has been successful in attracting additional capital funding grant of £2,508,231 from Welsh Government for homelessness projects, this is for a mixture of new build, refurbishment and acquisition of property. When private finance is included the total expenditure is likely to be in the region of £6,783,689.

Good Quality

Looking at post-build, the Shared Regulatory Service works with Landlords in the Private Rented Sector to ensure that they are aware of their obligations when renting out properties. We also work closely with Rent Smart Wales who operate a Registration and Licensing Scheme for Landlords, and as part of this Landlords and Managing agents are required to complete Mandatory Training. Where there is non-compliance we are able to use our Enforcement Powers under the Housing Act 2004 to bring about improvements to properties. In addition, we also work with owners of Empty Properties and advise them of initiatives that are available for them to bring their properties back into use and make them available to rent.

Supplementary question from Councillor Ross Penhale-Thomas

We have some of the oldest and inadequate housing stock in Europe and Shelter Cymru, for example, are aware that there are some cases at the moment where tenants rent has doubled overnight from £700 to £1,400 a month, with inflation increasing far ahead of wages. What more can be done as a local authority to improve the private rental sector that serves both tenants and landlords and eases the housing crisis, to ensure that tenants have security in terms of long-term accommodation. Long term tenancy gives both the tenant and the landlord peace of mind.

Response

We are working with Cartrefi Hafod to promote rental schemes via a private landlord. I live in a community where landlords of private accommodation rent out a considerable number of houses in the Ogmore Valley area. Based on that, there is evidence that the authority does link in effectively with private landlords where these are available, who provide housing rental in areas such as my own, as there is often little alternative means of housing available, particularly for those on low or little income. In terms of affordable housing, I have just received a letter from Welsh Government (WG), confirming that they are launching a scheme to help bridge any viability gaps. WG are committing to the provision of 20,000 affordable homes during the term of the Senedd and within the realms of this scheme, local authorities can apply for up to 50% towards bridging such viability gap. I will be happy to have further discussions with the Member regarding this, outside of the meeting

Second supplementary question from Councillor Paul Davies

Could the Cabinet Member – Future Generations and Wellbeing advise us how many new affordable homes have been built in the County Borough within the term of the administration and with the additional social housing grant from WG, how much more funding is due to come to BCBC.

Response

In terms of the funding element, WG have increased their allocated amount from £3m to £10m from 2019. I think that's a significant increase and I am grateful to WG for this. In terms of the pipeline, it is difficult to say, however, there is 432 houses projected over the next 3 years. This is dependent on certain factors however, such as the market at

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the time and whether or not our RSL's have the resources available to build this estimated amount of dwellings within the above period.

606. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 17:02