

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB /REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor W J Kendall – Chairperson

H T Bennett	A R Berrow	F D Bletsoe	S J Bletsoe
JPD Blundell	E L P Caparros	N Clarke	RJ Collins
HJ David	C Davies	C L C Davies	P Davies
S Easterbrook	M J Evans	N Farr	P Ford
J Gebbie	W R Goode	RM Granville	H Griffiths
D T Harrison	M L Hughes	P W Jenkins	M R John
M Jones	MJ Kearn	M Lewis	J Llewellyn-Hopkins
RL Penhale-Thomas	J E Pratt	E Richards	R J Smith
JC Spanswick	I M Spiller	T Thomas	JH Tildesley MBE
A Wathan	A Williams	AJ Williams	HM Williams
I Williams	MJ Williams	R Williams	E D Winstanley

Officers:

Jackie Davies	Head of Adult Social Care
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Laura Griffiths	Principal Solicitor
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Carys Lord	Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Jonathan Parsons	Group Manager Development
Michael Pitman	Technical Support Officer – Democratic Services
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive

163. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members/Officer:-

Councillors S J Griffiths, T Wood, RM James, G Walter and the Corporate Director – Communities.

164. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:-

Councillor H Bennett - Agenda item 6, personal interest as her employer was mentioned in the report as a partner provider.

Councillor JC Spanswick – Agenda item 6, prejudicial interest as a close family member is involved in Children's Services.

Councillors N Clarke, Alex Williams and H Williams – Agenda item 8, prejudicial interests as close family members have second homes.

Councillors Chris Davies and D Harrison – Agenda item 8, prejudicial interests (no reasons given)

Councillor T Thomas – Agenda item 8, prejudicial interest as he works for organisation that represents the interests of property agents.

Councillor S Bletsoe – Agenda item 8, prejudicial interest as Operations Manager, Wales, for the National Residential Landlords Association who represent the interest of Private Rental Landlords who are second homeowners within the County Borough.

All those Members who declared prejudicial interests in the items so stated, left the meeting whilst the reports relating to these were being considered.

165. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of Council dated 19 July 2023, be approved as a true and accurate record.

166. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM:**

Mayor

Please note that there has been a slight change to the membership of the Development Control Committee in that Councillor Johanna-Llewellyn-Hopkins will be replacing Councillor Heidi Bennett. This will not affect the political balance of the Committee.

With the agreement of Group Leaders there have been some changes to today's agenda. There will be limited announcements; Item 9 will be deferred to October Council to allow for additional information to be incorporated and there will also be no Council questions at Item 12.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Health

A Joint Inspectorate Review has been published on the effectiveness of child protection arrangements across Bridgend County Borough.

The report was based on visits carried out between 12–16 June by representatives of Care Inspectorate Wales, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services, the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and Estyn.

While the Council is the lead on safeguarding, the review also considered the actions and processes that are in place for our other statutory safeguarding partners, namely Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board and South Wales Police and included the partnership working arrangements between each organisation in tackling the abuse and neglect of children.

As a result, the extensive report has highlighted numerous examples of where the partnership arrangements and processes for each individual agency have performed well, while also identifying areas of variability and where further improvements need to be made – both as a group, and as separate organisations.

All partners involved in the review have welcomed the findings of this report, as it offers an independent insight into the work of each organisation as well as the effectiveness of our multi-agency efforts.

While it is particularly pleasing to note the high level of positive comments within the report, we have also paid close attention to those areas which must be strengthened or where improvements can be made.

This includes the unprecedented increase in demand which has impacted all partners and has forced an over-reliance on using agencies and operating above the funded establishment in children's services.

Each partner remains fully committed towards providing the best safeguarding services possible, and to delivering improvements across all fronts.

Anyone who wishes to take a look at the review, then copies are available from the Justice Inspectorate's website along with further details on the work of the Joint Inspectorate Review.

167. **TO RECEIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER**

The Leader made the following announcements:

The closure of the Zimmer Biomet factory is likely to take up to two years to complete, and redundancies will take place throughout this period.

69 per cent of the redundancies were employees within the County Borough.

Together with partners we have met with senior managers at the factory to discuss how we can jointly support affected staff.

There was a meeting in the summer at Bridgend Job Centre where our Employability and Economic Development team were present to discuss the support that each organisation can provide Zimmer Biomet and their staff.

The official consultation period is due to end in October. The company has stated that they do not want any involvement from Welsh Government at the moment, other than to help look for a new company who may be interested in taking the factory unit on.

A further joint agency meeting will take place with the company during November to arrange suitable support for staff being who will be made redundant next year.

Rescue attempts for Wilko have not been successful. The Maesteg store closed its doors for the last time yesterday, while the Bridgend store will close tomorrow.

It was originally hoped that the two local stores would be included among those premises that have been purchased by B&M and Pepco. Unfortunately, this has not proven to be the case.

As a result, meetings have taken place with the Employability Bridgend team at both stores to offer support to employees being made redundant.

We are continuing to provide affected staff with direct help and advice, and all partners will work closely together over coming weeks and months to offer further support.

We continue to advertise and promote Bridgend County Borough as an excellent place for businesses to invest in. Further updates will be made available as the situation develops.

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UK Government is to invest five hundred million pounds into helping the Tata Steelworks at Port Talbot make the transition towards cleaner, greener ways of producing steel.

Given the high number of residents of Bridgend County Borough Council who are employed at the plant, there are concerns over reports that trade unions were not included in the talks around the deal, and that there have been early warnings that the investment into new technology could also result in as many as 3,000 jobs being lost.

While this is a positive move towards decarbonisation, it is hoped that urgent discussions can take place which will seek to ensure the future of sustainable steelmaking in South Wales while also protecting jobs.

In addition to electric arc furnace technology, this could, for example, consider the use of further green steelmaking alternatives.

As members have been advised earlier, the Bridgend Indoor Market at the Rhiw Shopping Centre in Bridgend town centre has closed with immediate effect this afternoon.

The closure has been deemed necessary in the interests of public safety after a specialist inspection carried out this morning confirmed that there may be a potential issue involving the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within the structure's roof.

Bridgend County Borough Council has therefore taken swift action to close the indoor market to allow further in-depth assessments and surveys to be carried out, and for next steps to be agreed.

Traders have been informed and the Council will keep them fully up to date on the situation as it develops. The closure of the market hall does not affect the adjacent Rhiw Shopping Centre, which remains open as normal.

Bridgend County Borough Council has been carrying out inspections of all council-maintained premises in line with national advice from UK Government and Welsh Government.

The inspection process has prioritised local schools, where no areas of concern have been identified. The authority is currently in the process of checking other premises and infrastructure and carried out a visual inspection at the indoor market earlier this month as part of this process.

This determined that a more in-depth inspection by a Welsh Government approved specialist was required, which was carried out this morning. The decision to close the indoor market has been based on their findings.

Further surveying is now being arranged to establish the extent of the RAAC issue and what the long-term implications may be. As the council leases the market hall, the authority is also contacting the private owners as a matter of urgency.

To date, the Bridgend Indoor Market is the only premises where a potential issue involving RAAC has been detected.

We recognise the inconvenience and potential hardship this will cause to traders and the impact the loss of the market will have as a popular and busy place where people shop, meet and socialise.

Further updates will follow when available.

More information on RAAC is available from the Welsh Government website, by clicking on the link.

168. **SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing submitted a report, outlining the Director of Social Services Annual report 2022/23, which is a statutory requirement.

She advised that the report reflected on 2022/23, highlighting key achievements and challenges whilst also outlining the Directorate's key priorities for 2023/24.

In line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, performance is reported against six quality standards highlighting key actions completed in the year (paragraph 3.4 of the report referred); how Social Services have performed against these standards during this period and the key actions for 2023/24 to enable us to achieve our priorities.

The analysis that was derived from the Annual Report, drew upon on progress against the Social Services and Wellbeing Business Plan, performance data for each service area in Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, the views of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as the regulatory and inspection body for social services and social care in Wales and feedback from people who have experienced social services and well-being and their carers.

Whilst the report highlighted the key priorities for 2023/24 the Director's introduction of the annual report noted the key thematic areas for improvement for 2023/24, for example:

- Hearing and acting on the voice of children and families, adults and carers;
- Securing a stable, well-supported, motivated and permanent workforce;
- Improving practice;
- Maximising the impact of our services and interventions;
- Ensuring a more effective response to children and families, adult and carers, with complex needs;
- Seamlessly working with partners; and
- Implementing better intelligence and information systems

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that engagement and consultation were a key aspect of the report and how we undertake these activities, as well as an overview of feedback being included therein.

The report also highlighted how feedback linked to some of the key actions.

A summary of key regulatory activity undertaken in the year was also included in the report and this focussed on inspections of regulated services; the Performance Evaluation Inspection of Children's Social Care in May 2022 (further shared with Overview and Scrutiny) and the November 2023 Improvement Check of Children's Social Care. The summary further included key findings and how we will respond, to given situations that arise throughout the year.

The Directorate is also in the process of refreshing the strategic plan for children and families in Bridgend. The refreshed plan will focus on developing a sustainability plan outlining a service, workforce and financial strategy on how the Council works with

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children and families at risk in Bridgend. The plan will be considered by Cabinet in Autumn 2023, confirmed the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing.

The report also outlined how the service effectively continues to work with partner agencies and third sector organisations, that were key in terms of assisting the service as supporting bodies.

Finally, the report highlighted our financial resources noting the key challenges and pressures that the Directorate and Council face in order to deliver statutory services, as it was required to do.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing shared with Council a power point presentation, in order to pick out some of the key findings of the Social Services Annual Report, particularly outlining areas where the Directorate had worked well, including key areas of improvement, as well as identifying areas where some further progress could be made.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Health commended the report and accompanying presentation, including the video footage therein that also included a Recruitment campaign exercise.

She thanked the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing and her Heads of Service/Senior management team for their excellent work and commitment to what was a crucially important service. The Leader echoed this, as well as adding the importance of our partners who added their support to the success of the service.

A Member noted from the report that the permanent establishment in Children's Social Care was 122.91 FTE and already working at 29% above level in order to meet its statutory requirements. With this in mind, she asked how performance was monitored to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, advised that Children's Services was one of the most monitored public service areas within any area of local government, as there were many areas both locally and nationally where performance was very closely monitored.

Internally there were performance indicators monitored through the Council's Corporate Performance Framework. Some of the data in terms of performance were reflected in the report and accompanying presentation, she added.

Particular emphasis was given to the timeliness of decision making, visits to children, the various stages of the child protection processes, all of which related to the overall activity of the Social Services workforce.

Each Social Worker had a caseload and the size and complexity of each of these was closely monitored through, for example, Management Team meetings, in order to ensure they were managed and processed effectively.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing added, that quarterly performance reviews were also in place to closely look at how caseloads were progressing.

As Children's Social Services was such a highly regulated area, external monitoring and sharing of information was also conducted with inspectorates.

She concluded, by confirming to Council that the Independent Improvement Board had also commended BCBC on its performance of producing quantitative data though there was still some further progress to make on qualitative data.

RESOLVED: That Council endorsed the 2022-23 Director of Social Services Annual Report.

169. **A 3 YEAR SUSTAINABILITY PLAN TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES IN BRIDGEND**

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report, the purpose of which, was for Council to approve a 3-year plan (Appendix 1 to the report referred) to improve outcomes for children and families in Bridgend, with the financial implications arising from the actions in that plan supporting the safeguarding and protection of children in Bridgend.

The report outlined some background information, where it confirmed that in order to more robustly support the above, extra resource would be required in order to successfully achieve this when facing the number of anticipated challenges that lie ahead.

She explained that while during and post-Covid all services have been challenged, the social care services appear to have experienced the brunt of an imbalance between demand and capacity, particularly in the last two years. The level of demand for children's statutory social care services over the last 18 months, particularly in Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) and hub-based locality services has increased substantially. The headlines are that:

- 8,334 contacts to children's social care in 2022/23 compared to 5,667 (47.1% increase compared to 2021/22)
- 3,114 assessments in 2022/23 (89.4% increase compared to 2021/22)
- 1,202 children with care and support plans as at 31.03.23 (9.3% increase compared to 31.03.22)
- 2,154 initial strategy meetings in 2022/23 (98.3% increase compared to 2021/22)
- 1,557 completed S47 safeguarding investigations in 2022/23 (80% increase compared to 2021/22)
- 270 children on the child protection register as at 31.03.23 (54% increase compared to 31.03.22)

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained, that independent analysis reflected that the Council has worked hard and in general successfully over the last year to deal with the unprecedented demand rises. It has involved significant short-term funding to deal with a real capacity crisis. This response is evident in the current workforce position summarised below:

- Permanent establishment in children's social care: 122.91 full time equivalents;
- The service is currently operating at 29% above establishment to meet all statutory duties in a timely way. This additional establishment is funded through a combination of earmarked reserves and specific grants but is also contributing to a significantly overspent position;
- There are 20% vacancies in the permanent workforce. There are usually around 5% absentees from work at any time;
- All vacant posts (and more) are covered to ensure the safety of safeguarding and child protection arrangements;
- 38% of the current children's social care workforce is therefore filled by agency staff.

Following analysis being undertaken that was outlined in the report, it was considered that the current systems that were in place were too complex, and colleagues across the system work hard on a day-to-day basis to ensure that they are managed effectively, and that decision-making is consistent. However, IPC's review of specific case files, and interviews with managers, indicated they are well aware of the difficulties the system creates particularly in terms of the work streams highlighted in paragraph 3.9 of the report.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing went on to say that, for families or other professionals other more basic arrangements are potentially confusing. Currently on the website there are number of different telephone numbers which could be used regarding children's services which can build in potential confusion particularly with the separation between early help and social care contact arrangements. IPC interviewed operational leaders of the services involved, and they reviewed a small selection of ten illustrative case files, selected as examples of more and of less effective practice. IPC state that it was clear to them, from this element of the work, that colleagues work hard together to co-ordinate responses to families and to make sure that gaps in provision are minimised. IPC had therefore identified areas for further practice and system improvement. These were contained in paragraph 3.10 of the report.

Therefore, in the light of the current challenges and the need to build a comprehensive and effective integrated service, IPC recommended a more integrated service be developed which is designed for Bridgend, but draws on best practice from other local authorities in Wales who have achieved significant improvement. These were highlighted in the report and its supporting information.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing finally drew Members attention to the report's financial implications which though significant, would greatly contribute to delivering safe and effective services for children and families going forward.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Social Services and Health confirmed that she was more than happy to support the report and its recommendations and she drew Council's attention to paragraph 8.16, which gave a financial commitment to the 3 Year Plan.

A Member noted the budgetary commitment that was required to strengthen the service, including the Council tapping into its earmarked reserves in order to meet the service needs while more permanent funding options were being investigated. He asked what level of funding in monetary terms were required to support the service longer term.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that £1m would be committed into the base budget for Social & Children's Services and this would be ongoing as a permanent resource. However, a fund balance of £2.5m was required to fully support the reports proposals, though earmarked reserves could be used to achieve this in the current year. For next year such surplus would form part of the Revenue Budget setting process discussions, in order to achieve a suitable outcome.

A Member asked if the Authority were confident that the proposed Operating Module used for the 3 Year Plan will provide the sustainability required to meet estimated demand and also, would the objectives of the Plan be both met and measured. She also asked how often the Plan would be reviewed and what would be the consequences of the Plan's proposals not being achieved. Who would also be accountable for this, she further added.

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The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised that herself and key officers would be held to account on the delivery of the Plan, through bodies such as the Social Services Improvement Board which would have political representation from Cabinet members and Group Leaders. There were also weekly Performance Dashboard meetings through which progress was monitored, as well as the usual Directorate quarterly performance report updates.

The actions proposed within the Plan had been based on considerable evidence that had emerged following discussions with other Welsh and English local authorities that had found themselves in a similar position to BCBC and had subsequently made improvements in the service through a commitment of extra resource that could target issues such as for example, prevention and ways by which to assist in the escalation of need.

She added that she was the Officer responsible to meet the terms of the Plan as Statutory Officer for the service under the Social Services and Wellbeing legislation and that the Plan would also be subjected to monitoring by the Care Inspectorate for Wales, through their inspections which would look at issues such as quality of service and performance levels. Internally, the Plan would also be monitored through the O&S process and through the Corporate Performance Board (CPA).

For further details regarding debate that ensued on this important item, please click [here](#).

RESOLVED:

That Council:

- Approved 'Think Family', the 3 year sustainability plan for children and families in Bridgend.
- Approved the budget virement of £1m to social services in accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules;
- Noted the additional use of £2.5m EMR's in the current financial year to support the service as detailed in the report

170. COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS - SECOND HOMES

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented a report, the purpose of which, was to provide further information to Council on the planning and regeneration implications of applying a council tax premium to second homes, as requested at the meeting of Council on 8 February 2024, and to seek Council's approval to go ahead with the application of the premium from 1 April 2024.

The report gave some background information following which, it advised that previously Council had received a report seeking approval to apply a council tax premium on empty homes and second homes in line with Welsh Government Guidance and following a public consultation.

The proposal was to apply 100% council tax premiums to empty homes from 1 April 2023 and to second homes from 1 April 2024, with both increasing to 200% after 2 years.

She reminded that Members had however asked that a further report be brought back to Council during the year on the wider implications of council tax premiums on second homes, prior to deciding whether or not to continue to proceed with applying this premium (see Paragraphs 3.5 to 3.11 of the report for further details).

The Council currently has 81 chargeable second homes, which could generate additional council tax income of £188,000, but this was subject to discounts and exceptions being applied and successful collection.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change explained that this latest report outlined some of the planning and regeneration implications of implementing the proposal and sought a decision from Council, on whether to continue with the decision made at Council in February 2023 to apply the premium from April 2024.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning and Regeneration reiterated, that there had been an initial report submitted to Council on this topic and empty homes last year. He wished to point out that there was still a significant housing crisis within the County Borough at the current time.

A Member asked that if a member of the public buys a second home which has been empty for many years and is uninhabitable, then they would have to pay double Council Tax on this, ie as well as their primary property, for the length of time it took to make the second property habitable. She asked if there was any financial protection or support in place for these people.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, advised that there were an increasing number of grant opportunities available through which to upgrade properties such as the above, to bring them back up to habitable use. She confirmed that she would share these with Members, so that they could in turn share with any interested constituents.

A Member noted the opportunity to gain extra revenue in the form of Council Tax payments from private property second homeowners. He asked though, if the Council could similarly collect extra revenue from the owners of empty business properties.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change advised that this was dependent upon the owners of such vacated properties being known and traceable. She added, that Council Tax revenue from private properties came into the Council directly, however, Business Rates in respect of commercial properties the Authority collected on behalf of Welsh Government (WG) and paid this directly to them. The Council then received a payment from WG that was based on the adult population of the BCB.

A Member noted the extra income confirmed in the report of £188k and asked what the costs to the Authority would be for ensuring the collection of this.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change, advised that there would be no extra cost, as this would just be in the form of additional work that would be absorbed by the Council Tax section, though there could be additional costs in the form of non-payment, for example through chasing up payment and if necessary, Court proceedings and summonses, etc.

As there were some Members who reflected that they did not support the report's proposals, Council agreed to conduct an electronic vote on this item, the result of which was as follows:-

<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Abstentions</u>
28	4	4

RESOLVED: That Council approved the proposed 100% council tax premiums to be implemented from 1st April 2023 for long term empty homes, and 1st April 2024 for second homes, with these both increasing to 200% after 2 years.

171. **SOUTH-EAST WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS**

RESOLVED: Council agreed to defer this item in order to receive further information at the next scheduled meeting of Council.

172. **APPOINTMENT OF REGISTERED REPRESENTATIVES TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUBJECT COMMITTEES**

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to seek Council’s approval of the appointment of the following individuals as Registered Representatives for Education items considered by the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees, for a maximum term of four years:

- a) Ms Angela Clarke as the Church in Wales Registered Representative;
- b) Ms Samantha Rachel Lambert-Worgan as the Special School Parent Governor Representative

She advised that the term of office of the previous Church in Wales Registered Representative has come to an end and a new nomination has been sought. Ms Angela Clarke has been nominated to serve as the Church in Wales Registered Representative for Education items considered by the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees, for a maximum term of four years.

Following an election held in accordance with the Parent Governor Representatives and Church Representatives (Wales) Regulations 2001, Ms Samantha Rachel Lambert-Worgan has been nominated to serve as the Special School Parent Governor Representative for Education items considered by the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees, for the same term as above.

Following consideration of the report by Council, it was

RESOLVED: That Council noted the report and approved the appointment of the following individuals as Registered Representatives for Education items considered by the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees, for a maximum term of four years:

- (i) Ms Angela Clark as the Church in Wales Registered Representative;
- (ii) Ms Samantha Rachel Lambert-Worgan as the Special School Parent Governor Representative.

173. **INFORMATION REPORT FOR NOTING**

The Group Manager, Legal and Democratic Services informed Council of an information report for noting, that had been published since the last scheduled meeting.

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RESOLVED: That Council acknowledged the publication of the report referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

174. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE EXECUTIVE:**

The responses by the Executive to questions posed to them by certain Members of Council had been circulated to all Members in advance of the meeting.

As the Mayor had briefly announced earlier, there would be no further consideration of this agenda item at today's meeting.

175. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:20