

## COUNCIL

(Civic Centre, Port Talbot)

**Members Present:**

**27 November 2024**

**The Mayor:** Councillor M.Crowley

**The Deputy Mayor:** Councillor W.Carpenter

**Councillors:** A.R.Aubrey, T.Bowen, H.C.Clarke, C.Clement-Williams, R.Davies, S.E.Freeguard, N.Goldup-John, W.F.Griffiths, S.Grimshaw, J.Hale, S.Harris, M.Harvey, J.Henton, S.K.Hunt, J.Hurley, C.James, N.Jenkins, J.Jones, L.Jones, R.G.Jones, S.Jones, C.Jordan, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, E.V.Latham, C.Lewis, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, D.M.Peters, C.Phillips, S.Pursesey, S.Rahaman, P.A.Rees, S.H.Reynolds, G.Rice, A.J.Richards, P.D.Richards, P.Rogers, D.Thomas, S.Thomas, D.Whitelock, C.Williams, L.Williams, R.W.Wood and B.Woolford

**Officers in Attendance:** L.Beynon, N.Chapple, S.Curran, N.Daniel, C.Griffiths, A.Jarrett, H.Jones, C.Morris, F.O'Brien, N.Pearce, M.Shaw and A.Thomas

**Representatives of the Translation Service:** Present

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### 1. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Frances O'Brien to her first meeting of Council as Chief Executive.

Frances addressed Council, stating how she is looking forward to working with everyone in the Local Authority and that despite ever increasing challenges and demands to finance, resources and services she is confident that the Council is positive and resilient and she thanked everyone for the warm welcome she has received.

She went on to declare that the Celtic Freeport is 'open for business' and looked forward to seeing what the opportunities will look like for this once in a lifetime opportunity for jobs and prospects within Neath Port Talbot.

## 2. **Leader's Announcements**

The Leader reiterated the welcome to the Chief Executive and explained that the opening of the Celtic Freeport marks a pivotal moment for the area, with the opportunities that it represents to revitalise the region. He stated that further information will be shared with Council as and when it becomes available.

The Leader continued with an update following the last meeting of the TATA Steel Transition Board whereby the Secretary of State for Wales had released a £13m Business Start Up Growth and Resilience fund. He explained the detail of the fund, which was enthusiastically supported:

- START UP- Grants up to £10k to support former TATA employees, contractors and their families to start up their own businesses.
- GROWTH- Grants up to £25k-£250k to support local business expansion
- RESILIENCE- Grants of between £2.5k- £20k to aid businesses indirectly affected like local shops and cafes.

The Leader concluded that the Council remained committed to the TATA workforce and reminded members of the pledge of a guaranteed interview if the applicant met the essential job criteria. He stated that 87 former TATA employees had applied for jobs at the Council and that 10 had been offered employment.

## 3. **Declarations of Interest**

The following interests were declared:

In relation to agenda item 6, Annual Presentation from Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service to Council:

- Councillor Matthew Crowley (MAYOR) as he is a Member of the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority.
- Councillor Sharon Freeguard as she is a Member of the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority.

- Councillor Carl Jordan as he is a Member of the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority
- Councillor Dan Thomas as he is a Member of the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority
- Councillor Gareth Rice as he is an ex- employee of the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service

In relation to agenda item 8, Replacement Local Development Plan Preferred Strategy 2023-2028:

- Councillor Sian Harris- a personal interest
- Councillor Jo Hale- a personal interest
- Councillor Caroline Lewis- a personal interest
- Councillor Mike Harvey- as he works for SW Police as a Design of Crime Officer.

4. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting/s of Council**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

5. **Public Question Time.**

None received.

6. **Annual Presentation from Chief Fire Officer to Council**

The Chair of the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority, Councillor Gwynfor Thomas, Chief Fire officer Roger Thomas and the s.151 officer Sarah Mansbridge were welcomed to Council.

A presentation was received on the current position, corporate plan and financial challenges of the service including background, scene setting and emerging issues.

Members were pleased to see the priority of culture change and heard about the different training that is offered across the service, aligned to the VAWWDAR network.

Members queried the 'on call' model which was labelled as 'unsustainable' and other alternatives to the model were discussed such as a new banding model and the plans in place to address the issues.

The ongoing level of manning at Port Talbot was queried in light of the TATA Steel position. It was confirmed that Port Talbot has a 24 hour crewed station and a retained element when available predicated on the Community Risk Management Plan, and not only the TATA Steel presence and there were no plans to change this.

A discussion was had around the concept of moving to a 'precept' for the Fire and Rescue Service funding model.

The challenges of recruitment at retained fire stations was stated and an assurance was given that at present there are no plans to close any existing Fire Stations within the NPT area.

The Employers National Insurance contribution was questioned. It is expected that this will come fully funded to the Fire and Rescue Service through the Local Authority.

Officers from the Fire and Rescue service were thanked for their presentation and their ongoing work in partnership with the Council.

## 7. **Gambling Acts Policy**

The Gambling Acts Policy 2025 was presented to Council as per the circulated report.

### **RESOLVED:**

- That the revised Gambling Acts Policy 2025 be approved
- That the 'no casino policy' be re-adopted
- That the ongoing work proposed in developing a Local Area Profile be noted and will be considered by the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee.

## 8. **Replacement Local Development Plan- Preferred Strategy 2023-2038**

The Replacement Local Development Plan Preferred Strategy 2-23-2038 was presented to Council as per the circulated report.

It was reiterated that all elected members are able to request individual briefings with the Planning team on the detail of the preferred strategy.

Concern was raised on the technical and complex nature of the full documentation and members were assured that an 'Easy Read' version and video will be made available to enable the public consultation to be as engaging, accessible and meaningful as possible and details of the consultation was shared with Council.

Reference was made to the 'Valleys Impact' and concern that there needs to be more detail considered. It was explained that at this stage the plan is strategic looking at overall vision. Reference was made to the National Development Plan in place which identifies areas of growth which we need to adhere to. It was recognised that the detail around the focus of the Valleys will be part of the next stage, the full detailed deposit plan.

It was reiterated that ongoing work and dialogue with other agencies and stakeholders is essential.

The importance of sustainability of the long term nature of this plan was addressed and it was queried if it is likely that the sustainability assessment criteria included would be updated. Officers confirmed that while it is unlikely that the criteria will change, the site responses could which would impact on the sites identified on the plan going forward.

Members were urged to fully participate in the detail of the plan, speak to the officers and assist with the communication of the consultation as community champions.

## **RESOLVED:**

That having due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment:

- The Replacement Local Development Plan Preferred Strategy (2023-2038) (December 2024) as presented in Appendix 2 be agreed for the basis of public consultation.
- The Interim Integrated Sustainability Appraisal Report (December 2024) as presented in Appendix 3 be agreed for the basis of public consultation.

- The Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report (December 2024) as presented in Appendix 5 be agreed for the basis of public consultation.
- The Candidate Sites Register / Assessment (December 2024) as presented in Appendix 6 be agreed for the basis of public consultation.

9. **Notice of Motion under Section 10 of Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) the Council's Constitution**

None received.

10. **Questions from Members, with Notice, under Rule 9.2 of the Council's Procedure Rules**

Councillor Grimshaw asked the following question:

“What is NPTBC doing to support residents who are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of council tax debt?”

Cllr Simon Knoyle, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice responded:

“The Council Tax team will check if the taxpayer qualifies for any of the 30 available discounts or exemptions available. In addition, the Council Tax support scheme, a means tested reduction based on specific circumstances and the Council supports 15,300 tax payers via this scheme. Support and signposting is offered for debt support including to our welfare rights team who ensure all eligible benefits are claimed, payment plans for arrears.

Different payment systems are available to assist wherever possible and text alerts are sent to advise on missed payments. Residents are encouraged to engage with the Council as soon as possible if they are experiencing any difficulties so that support can be offered and discussed.”

Cllr Grimshaw followed up with:

“Given that 4,492 residents in NPT in the current financial year have been billed for the full year following a missed payment it is clear that Council Tax debt is a problem. As debt collection agencies are legally required to act responsibly and not demand unreasonable payments such as the full amount in one go and agree payment plans, Council’s

do not have same legal obligation. Do you agree that this legal obligation should also extend to Council Tax debt?"

Cllr Knoyle responded:

"I will reserve judgement, and out of the 4,492 council tax payers referenced, some will already have engaged with us. I will ask the Council Tax team to come back with more information on the people and cases involved in order to provide us with further detail to allow us to further consider our position."

11. **Urgent Items**

There were none.

**CHAIRPERSON**