

## COUNCIL

(Civic Centre, Port Talbot)

**Members Present:**

**27 January 2021**

**The Mayor:** Councillor S.Jones

**The Deputy Mayor:** Councillor J.Warman

**Councillors:** A.R.Aubrey, S.Bamsey, D.Cawsey, H.C.Clarke, C.Clement-Williams, M.Crowley, N.J.E.Davies, O.S.Davies, R.Davies, C.Edwards, S.E.Freeguard, C.Galsworthy, W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.K.Hunt, J.Hurley, C.James, H.N.James, C.J.Jones, D.Jones, H.Jones, J.Jones, L.Jones, R.G.Jones, D.Keogh, S.A.Knoyle, E.V.Latham, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer, A.McGrath, J.Miller, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, D.M.Peters, R.Phillips, M.Protheroe, L.M.Purcell, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds, A.J.Richards, P.D.Richards, M.Spooner, A.J.Taylor, R.L.Taylor, D.Whitelock, C.Williams, A.Wingrave, R.W.Wood and A.N.Woolcock

**Officers in Attendance:** K.Jones, A.Evans, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins, N.Pearce, S.Rees, C.Griffiths, H.Jones, R.Headon, S.Curran and J. Woodman-Ralph

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

Council heard that 100,000 deaths had been recorded yesterday as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

As a mark of respect Council observed a minute's silence.

The Mayor also extended Council's sympathy to all those affected by the recent flooding in Skewen and thanked all the staff and partner agencies involved in the emergency.

The Mayor was pleased to announce the following recipients who were Medallists of the Order of the British Empire in the New Year Honours List 2021:

Robert Malcolm Davies, Special Constable, South Wales Police, for voluntary services to Policing in Neath.

Vicki Broed, Head of Long Term Care, Hywel Dda University Health Board – for services to the NHS Wales during Covid 19 response, who resides in Neath.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting/s of Council (Civic Year 2020/21**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of Council held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 be confirmed as accurate records of the meetings, subject to the addition of Councillor P.A.Rees to the attendance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> December meeting.

4. **Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2021/22**

Cllr. C.Clement-Williams, Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report.

Following the above, Members queried whether there were monies built in to cover any additional increase in claims to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2021/2022 in view of the ongoing Covid 19 Pandemic. It was explained the draft budget for consultation had built an additional £500,000 for 2021/2022 and that in relation to the current year the Welsh Government had reimbursed Neath Port Talbot the increased costs incurred so far and had indicated that they would continue to do so for the rest of the year. This is continually reviewed to ensure that all monies are reclaimed but in addition, monies had been allocated in the budget to support this.

- RESOLVED:**
1. That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013 as further amended by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 be adopted.
  2. Approval be granted for the retention of the existing discretionary elements in relation to the Prescribed Scheme.
    - (a) That no increase in the backdate period for all claimants be applied from the standard 3 months contained in the Prescribed Scheme.
    - (b) That no increase in the extended reduction period for all claimants be applied from the standard 4 weeks currently contained within the Prescribed Scheme.
    - (c) That a 100% disregard be applied for War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and War Widower's Pensions for all claimants.

## 5. **Capital Programme Monitoring Reports**

Cllr. C.Clement-Williams, Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which had been commended to Council from Cabinet held on the 13 January 2021.

Members thanked Officers for an excellent report which identified the huge investment being made by the Council and asked how the delivery of the various projects was being monitored to ascertain the impact of Covid 19 pandemic. Officers stated, that the projects are monitored on a regular basis and are on track, half of the monies allocated had already been paid and that the rest was due to be spent by the end of March 2021.

**RESOLVED**

1. That budget 2020/2021 budget totalling £70.682million be approved.
2. That the expenditure as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 be noted.

6. **Strategic Equalities Plan 2020 - 2024 - Actions to meet the Equality Objectives**

Councillor D. Jones, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Equality introduced the report.

Members were please with the work that Officers had undertaken in developing the action plan to ensure the Council meets the equality objectives.

Following on, Members raised the following:

- Within the report it states that zero hour contracts would be replaced by casual or temporary contracts. Could officers confirm that Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council does not employ staff on zero hour contracts. Confirmation was received that the authority does not employ any of staff on zero hour contracts.
- What plans were in place to ensure the authority was giving equal opportunities to the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in regard to employment? It was explained that the Council has committed to develop a BAME Equality and Diversity Action Plan as it was recognised that more work was needed. Discussions had taken place with staff and the Equality and Cohesion Group. Currently, a BAME employee forum was being organised to assist with the development of the action plan.
- How has the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic been measured in regard to Domestic Abuse? In response, officers explained that a community impact assessment had been undertaken to measure the impact of the pandemic on the different parts of communities. The assessment has shown that there had been a disproportionate effect on some people more than others. The assessment was continually being updated and was currently being used to inform the current priorities while in response to the pandemic and as the situation evolves and more information is gained on how communities are being affected by

the pandemic the action plan would continue to be updated and brought back to members in due course.

- Are the Gypsy and Traveller communities represented as an ethnic group in the BAME groups? Also, was there any provision for accommodating Gypsy and Travellers on arrival in Neath Port Talbot? Members were assured that there was a variety of ways that officers engage with the Gypsy and Traveller communities and when the Strategic Equalities Plan was being developed, officers who had links with those communities were involved. Members heard, that there were no Gypsy and Traveller transit sites within Neath Port Talbot although, some neighbouring authorities did have them. Neath Port Talbot has two authorised sites where accommodation was available. Both sites are included in the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment which requires the authority to project the future needs and make the appropriate provision and identify in the Local Development Plan and submit to the Welsh Government.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the actions developed to meet the equality objectives be adopted.
2. That the Head of Human and Organisational Development be authorised to publish the actions as part of the Strategic Equality Plan.

7. **Appointment of Standing Deputy Returning Officer**

Council received information in regard to the appointment of standing Deputy Returning Officer as detailed in the circulated report.

**RESOLVED:** That Rhys George (Electoral Services Manager) be appointed the Council's standing Deputy Returning Officer.

8. **Mayoral Arrangements**

Council considered the Mayoral Arrangements as detailed in the circulated report.

- RESOLVED:**
1. That Councillor John Warman be nominated Mayor for the civic year 2021/2022 pursuant to Section 23 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.
  2. That Councillor Del Morgan be nominated Deputy Mayor for the civic year 2021/22 pursuant to Section 23(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

9. **Minutes of the Previous Meetings of Cabinet and Cabinet Boards**

Council noted the following Cabinet Decision Records:

20 <sup>th</sup> November 2019,	25 <sup>th</sup> June 2020,
9 <sup>th</sup> December 2019,	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2020,
10 <sup>th</sup> January 2020,	2 <sup>nd</sup> September 2020,
5 <sup>th</sup> February 2020,	17 <sup>th</sup> September 2020,
12 <sup>th</sup> February 2020,	30 <sup>th</sup> September 2020,
19 <sup>th</sup> February 2020,	21 <sup>st</sup> October 2020,
5 <sup>th</sup> March 2020,	4 <sup>th</sup> November 2020,
21 <sup>st</sup> May 2020,	11 <sup>th</sup> November 2020,
	25 <sup>th</sup> November 2020,
	10 <sup>th</sup> December 2020.

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

There were no notice of motion under Section 10 of Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) of the Council's Constitution received.

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

There were no questions, under Rule 9.2 of the Council's Procedure Rules received.

## 12. Urgent Items

Because of the need to deal now with the matter contained in Minute Number 13 below, the Mayor agreed that this could be raised at today's meeting as an Urgent Item pursuant to Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

### Reason

Due to time element.

## 13. Covid 19 - Verbal Update

The Leader addressed Council on the current situation in regard to Covid 19.

The rate of cases per 100,000 population has further reduced. On the 14<sup>th</sup> January the rate was recorded at 363.5 and the positivity rate was recorded at 20.2%. As of the 24<sup>th</sup> January the rates had reduced to 235.8 and 17.2% respectively. The current levels compare with those seen at the time of the last firebreak. As of 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 the figures had reduced further to 187.7 with the positivity rate 15.1.

Currently, there are 3 new variants of concern (VoC), Kent variant, South African variant and the Brazilian variant within in the UK. In Wales, 10 cases of the South African variant have been identified. All these variants have been identified as being more transmissible. Evidence has emerged that the Kent variant may have a slightly higher mortality rate with 13 cases per 1,000 compared to 10 per 1,000. Within Wales 50% of cases tested was of the Kent variant. In addition, concern had been highlighted that the Brazilian and South African variant may blunt the effectiveness of the vaccines. As a result the UK government has introduced travel restrictions.

Although the number of cases was showing and improvement, the health and social care system remains under severe strain. As a result, communities must not become complacent, the guidance must still be adhered to.

The number of people presenting for testing remains considerably lower than seen before the Christmas break. The reasons for this are still unclear. Testing capacity has increased and there was concern that people may not be applying for tests. Public communications

has increased to encourage people to test never mind how mild their symptoms are as without this information it was difficult to understand how the disease was progressing within communities.

Concerns have been highlighted to Welsh Government in regard to the additional modes of testing that are being introduced within for example universities and Tata Steel. If these are not fully integrated into the Test, Trace and Protect arrangements there was a risk that the system would become undermined.

It was highlighted that vaccinations were progressing with 37,236 (as of the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021) vaccinations administered in the Swansea Bay Health Board area. Members noted that this data needed to be confirmed as there was a delay in the information from G.P.surgeries administering the vaccine. Further data was awaited on the breakdown of the groups receiving vaccines to show a clearer picture of progress made in vaccinating the top four priority groups by the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

Pressure was growing to add other populations to the priority lists, but the Welsh Government is following the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, and therefore, these groups would not be considered for inclusion in the priority list until Phase 2.

Welsh Government has amended definitions of who receives vaccinations in the social care workforce which could result in children's social care workforce being excluded. Also, the Council was still waiting to put forward eligible staff from special schools to be vaccinated. There has been a delay in policy decisions within Welsh Government on who would be included despite the Welsh Government announcing that they would be included some weeks ago.

Service pressure were still continuing in adult social care, with a number of care homes at risk. Also, there has been an increased number of clusters within domiciliary care.

It was announced that England would not open schools until after the half term holiday, or later due to the lack of data to enable a decision to be made. We are awaiting Welsh Government's direction on the approach to be taken in Wales. 95% of Neath Port Talbot pupil population had continued to receive remote learning. One to one devices had been delivered for Key Stage 3 – 5 pupils and students. Also, all staff members who needed a device were issued with one to allow them to deliver remote learning.



The Minister for Education announced that the end of year qualifications would be awarded based on centre assessment grades. There was concern over the process as a significant minority of Key Stage 4 pupils had not been engaging with remote learning and the evidence base needed for accurate assessments could not be compromised. Work was still ongoing to resolve these challenges.

School improvement officers had been and were continuing to monitor pupil's engagement with learning and the most recent data showed that while numbers were increasing, there continues to be an inconsistent picture with the percentage of pupils involved in remote learning ranging from 45% to almost 100%. Work continues to support schools to overcome issues to secure a consistently higher rate of engagement.

Discussion were ongoing with the Association of Directors of Education (Wales) and the Welsh Government to identify options for returning pupils to on-site learning. Currently, the advice was that priority should be given to those pupils who find home learning most limiting and those with additional learning needs. Welsh Government were continuing to consider how the reopening of schools would be facilitated.

Another area of concern was the vaccination of school based staff who deliver intimate personal care. Clarification is awaiting on the definition of 'intimate personal care' from Welsh Government as there was an inconsistent picture across Wales. A number of Councils and Health Boards had started to vaccinate school based staff, and other staffing groups based on local interpretations. Neath Port Talbot schools were awaiting guidance from Swansea Bay University Health Board. This was causing considerable tension and legitimate Trade Union challenge.

Officers would begin to scope the way that recovery would be approached in the next month, with detailed work commencing around Easter time, subject to the overall context.

Members thanked the Leader for such a comprehensive report and raised the following questions:

- In regard to the different variants of Covid, what is being done to test the vaccine to ensure it continues to work on all the new variants? It was explained that work was continuing to investigate the impacts of the different variants but that there

was no new information at present. The Leader and Chief Executive met on a regular basis with Public Health Wales and were happy to raise the question at that forum.

- Was there a reason why there had been a spike in the mortality rate or was this due to a delay in the data being received? The data was comparing the numbers against a normal year and anyone who was tested positive for Covid 19 within a 28 day period who died was added to the number of deaths due to Covid 19.
- Members asked whether school children had been provided with a device to access remote learning? Confirmation was given that all key stage 3 and 5 children had received devices. There had been delays in the deliveries of orders placed, but as of this week, delivery has been received, so every secondary school child would receive a device for one to one learning. Primary school children were allocated devices on the basis of 1 between 3 or 5.
- Were there any discussions taking place with broadband providers to assist with connectivity issues? It was explained that in cases of connectivity issues, those pupils had been provided with a MiFi Dongle to enable them to connect. Members were asked if they were aware of any pupil experiencing connectivity issues to advise parents to contact their school but no issues had been raised with the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning.

### **Flooding in Skewen Update**

The Leader continued with an update on the current situation in Skewen after the recent flooding.

On Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021, information was received of a significant flooding incident at Goshen Park, Skewen. As a result an emergency response was put into action. Following on, a major incident was declared by Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service and a Strategic Co-ordinating Group was convened.

Eighty homes were evacuated but after the immediate threat to life was contained a deep depression was noticed at the junction of Drummau Road and Goshen Park so a further 30 houses were evacuated.

The cause of the flooding was confirmed as a blow out from a disused mine working in the area.

As a result, the Coal Authority are leading the investigation into the cause of the incident and would also be leading on remedial works for the immediate future and to determine a longer term solution for dealing with the mine water.

The Streetscene and Drainage team were exceptional in installing temporary drainage to channel the water still spilling from the blow out point of the mine into a drainage system. In addition, they cleaned and cleared the highway assets in the affected area. Positive comments were received on the Council's response from residents and partners.

Social Services mobilised a rest centre at Cwrt Herbert to deal with the evacuated residents. All residents were able to secure accommodation with friends, family, neighbours or in local hotels. Rest Centre staff were supported by the Salvation Army, local people, business and the Local Area Co-ordinator to distribute food and clothing parcels.

A residents' information centre has been set up at Abbey Primary School with over 60 residents visiting the centre over the weekend. Work was ongoing to extend the role of the centre to include a wider range of agencies to assist with the recovery process.

An advice line and dedicated website has been set up to facilitate social media and broadcast media activities. The First Minister has visited the site. Compliments were received on the way that this has been actioned.

Going forward, the Council will lead on the process of recovery with a multi-agency recovery group being convened to look at the immediate priorities.

Members noted that the impact on residents both physically and psychological would continue for many months. An on-line system was opening to make payments to residents on behalf of the Welsh Government. Council tax exemptions were also being activated for all affected properties.

Waste disposal vehicles were being deployed and public health advice provided through Environmental Health, initially at the information centre and then by a door to door service.

Update reports would be brought back to Members on a periodic basis.

Council praised the work of Neath Port Talbot staff and partners in responding to this emergency. In addition, Council thanked local communities, business, volunteers and local members who had supported those residents affected.

Members discussed the continuing consequences that mine workings was having on the area, and the whole of Wales, and the ongoing costs in mitigating those consequences. Confirmation was given that the Coal Authority was responsible to the UK Government and that any works to inspect undertake remedial works would be at the instigation of the UK Government. Discussions had taken place with Welsh Government on the legacy of mining within the area and a letter has been submitted to Welsh Government by Mr. Stephen Kinnock M.P. outlining the issues.

## **CHAIRPERSON**