

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
held on Tuesday 4 March 2014 at 10.00am till 2.20pm approx.
in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre, Pontypool

NB this meeting was broadcast live over the internet. The entire meeting and all the agenda items can be viewed via the following link: [http://www.torfaen-public-tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/124037](http://www.torfaen.public-tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/124037)

The agenda for and the reports presented to this meeting are also available to view at:

<http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/CouncillorsAndCommittees/Committees/CommitteeDirectory.aspx>

Following prayers led by the Mayor's Chaplain, Canon Brian Pippen, the Mayor formally opened the meeting.

The Mayor reminded everyone present that the meeting was being broadcast live over the internet, welcomed everyone and outlined the usual procedural arrangements relating to microphones, emergency evacuation procedures and the like.

1. ATTENDANCE

Councillors

Neil Mason (Mayor) (Chairing)

Stuart Ashley	Giles Davies	Brian Mawby
Mary Barnett	Nigel Davies	Raymond Mills
Huw Bevan	Stuart Evans	Mandy Owen (Deputy Mayor)
Stephen Brooks KSS JP	Alun Furzer	Jessica Powell
Ron Burnett	Maria Graham	Jeff Rees
Pamela Cameron	Kelvin Harnett JP	Philip Seabourne
Glyn Caron	Mike Harris	Graham Smith
Gwyneira Clark	Elizabeth Haynes	Barry Taylor JP
Richard Clark	Anthony Hunt	Colette Thomas
Leonard Constance	Mike Jeremiah	Wayne Tomlinson
Veronica Crick JP	Alan Jones	Neil Waite
Fiona Cross	Lewis Jones	Bob Wellington (Leader)
John Cunningham MBE KSG	Robert Kemp	David Yeowell
David Daniels	John Marshall	

Officers on the dais

Nigel Aurelius	Assistant Chief Executive (Resources)
Richard Gwinnell	Lead Officer, Council and Member Support
Lynda Willis	Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer
Alison Ward	Chief Executive

Other officers attending (or observing from the gallery) for parts of the meeting

David Congreve	Assistant Chief Executive (Communities)
Richard Edmunds	Head of Strategic and Democratic Services
Sue Evans	Chief Officer, Social Care and Housing
Christina Harrhy	Chief Officer, Neighbourhood Services
Dermot McChrystal	Interim Head of Education Services
Graeme Russell	Head of Human Resources and Pensions
Duncan Smith	Chief Officer, Planning and Public Protection
Communications Team	Neil Jones
Democratic Services	Ros Gwynn
Financial Services	David Lilly and David Weaver
Housing Services	Neil Howell
Legal Services	Polly Ellis, Delyth Harries and Tim James
Webcasting Team	Caroline Genever-Jones and Karen Mayo

Other people attending

1 member of the public (in the public gallery)
Canon Brian Phippen – Mayor’s Chaplain (for pre-meeting prayers only)
Inspector Micah Hassell - Heddlu Gwent Police
Mr Lyn Oelmann – Independent Chair of the Ethics and Standards Committee

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – COUNCILLORS:

David (Keith) James Norma Parrish

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 Following advice from the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer (CLO&MO), every member of the Council present declared that they had a personal but not prejudicial interest in agenda item 15 (the annual report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) for Wales) as the IRP decided the salaries of members and they would all therefore be affected. All members could vote as the decision was for Council to take and there was an exemption under the Code of Conduct to enable such decisions to be taken.

3.2 The CLO&MO stated that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor could more significantly be affected than most other members. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor also had personal but not prejudicial interests, given the relevant exemption given under the Code of Conduct, but they had both made clear to her that they would not take part in the debate or the vote on that issue.

3.3 The CLO&MO also advised that every officer of the Council was affected by the Pay Policy Statement (agenda item 12). The Council was not being asked however to approve the pay of officers today; rather they were being asked to agree that the statement accurately reflected the situation as it was. She would advise later during the meeting, if any officer should leave the meeting (if the salary of any particular officer was discussed).

4. COUNCIL MINUTES – 28 JANUARY 2014

4.1 **Council CONFIRMED** the minutes of the Council meeting held on 28 January 2014 as a correct record and agreed that they be signed by the Mayor, subject to the word “in” being replaced with the word “by” in the last but one line of paragraph 20.7.

5. UPDATES ON ACTIONS

5.1 **Council NOTED** the updates listed in the agenda.

6. CONSULTATION MONITOR

6.1 **Council NOTED** the consultation monitor.

7. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

7.1 No petitions were received for this meeting.

8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

8.1 No public questions were received for this meeting.

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

9.1 The Leader of the Council announced, in brief:

- (a) congratulations to Councillor Mary Barnett on her recent nomination by the Welsh Local Government Association to represent eight local government pension schemes on the Shadow Advisory Board for Local Government Pensions,

as well as her co-option onto the Local Authorities Pension Fund Forum

- (b) that the Deputy Leader would answer the questions asked of him today about the Torfaen Leisure Trust (TLT), but the TLT was a separate body, not part of the Council. People with questions about the TLT should therefore address any future questions to the TLT directly.

9.2 The Chief Executive had no announcements.

10. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

10.1 The Council considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer and the Independent Chair of the Ethics and Standards Committee, informing members of the work of the committee during the previous year.

10.2 The Independent Chair of the Ethics and Standards Committee outlined the report in detail, emphasising, in brief:

- the importance of observing high standards of conduct
- the committee's supportive role
- the good progress made over the last year or two, with Torfaen having had only one (self-referred) complaint in the last year referred to the committee for resolution
- the importance of balancing rights and responsibilities
- the importance, relevance and quality of member training on Code of Conduct issues and the value of the time spent attending training
- that Torfaen was among the first local authorities in Wales to adopt a Local Protocol
- that member attendance at meetings was good
- that the committee would continue to monitor attendance
- his thanks to the officers who supported the committee and to recently retired members of the committee.

10.3 **Council AGREED** to note the annual report of the Ethics and Standards Committee as set out in the appendix to the report.

11. BUDGET 2014/15 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

11.1 The Council considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive, Resources (ACER), seeking approval to the 2014/15 budget, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), the level of Council Tax and the Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators.

11.2 The ACER outlined the report in detail, emphasising, in brief:

- the exceptional and unprecedented times in terms of local government funding, with austerity, welfare changes and the national deficit reduction programme all key factors
- the likelihood of difficult and controversial choices having to be made over the long term, by all councils in Wales
- the significant switch of funding from local government
- that this was the most difficult budget the Council had ever faced, with a 4% reduction in funding from government, increasing costs and increasing demand for essential services, especially social care
- on the extensive budget preparation process, which started last April, with members seminars, Cabinet consideration five times, the Joint Scrutiny session held in November and the Council meeting held in January, where the savings measures were approved
- the greater funding protection proposed for schools and social care and the consequent additional squeeze on other service budgets
- the proposed Council Tax increase of 3.95%
- the balance this represented between keeping Council Tax increases low and protecting services and jobs
- the Pensioners Council Tax Support and Profile funding issues outlined in the report
- the capital funding situation, dominated in the main by 21st Century Schools funding
- the Council's financial standing, reserves and risks position
- the risks around organisational capacity; particularly the impact of redundancies on the remaining workforce
- that some grant funding decisions were still awaited
- on the degree of funding uncertainty for future years and the possibility of large scale change ahead, in terms of the regionalisation of services and the reorganisation of local government in Wales amongst other things
- the importance of planning ahead; avoiding "short-termism"
- the importance of setting a balanced budget
- that this was a difficult but "do-able" budget, which as far as possible protected education, social care and other vital services, as well as jobs
- his thanks to Finance colleagues, chief officers and their teams and the Corporate Improvement Team for their hard work and contributions to the budget
- the Council's good record of collective responsibility and discipline.

11.3 The Executive Member for Resources (Councillor Hunt) emphasised, in brief:

- his thanks to officers in Resources and other departments who had worked hard to contribute to the budget

- the realistic and positive spirit with which the budget was approached; facing the challenge, working together and recognising that success was about choosing the “least worst” solutions
- the question asked throughout: “if not this, then what?”
- that this was the most challenging budget for Torfaen and other councils across the UK in memory
- the difficult and unpalatable decisions faced by local councils, due to decisions taken by central Government
- that Torfaen had £6 million less funding for 2014/15 than for the previous year; the Council had to save £11 million over the coming year, when rising demand for services and rising costs were taken into account
- the opposition of many people to Government austerity measures
- that the distribution of funding was politically driven and unfair; he gave examples of areas particularly affected in different ways, e.g. Newham and Woking
- that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should visit places like Torfaen, to see the impact of austerity on real people
- that the Council had to set a legal budget, within the resources available, whether it agreed or not with the resources allocated and choices made by the Government
- more funding would have enabled the Council to invest more, avoid some unpalatable savings and develop ideas like the Living Wage for example, but that required a change of approach in Westminster, not Pontypool
- the Council recognised the need to keep Council Tax increases as low as possible, given that people were struggling with the cost of living, but 80p a week more on average was worthwhile, to protect services and jobs
- a freeze in Council Tax would mean £1.3 million more cuts would need to be found
- more spending in some areas meant less in others
- only 12% approx. of the Council’s funding came from Council Tax – so a 20% rise in Council Tax would be needed to make up for the £6 million funding shortfall
- nearly double that increase would be needed to pay for the service demand increases and other cost pressures too; this would not be fair on local people
- the importance of values
- the importance of valuing staff, as the Council’s biggest asset, and working with them and the trade unions, to face the challenge and avoid compulsory redundancies as far as possible
- that shedding large numbers of staff would not solve the problem of the funding gap; the vast majority of staff were front line workers, paid modestly (on average £17,000) to run vital local services

- that several senior posts had been removed from the Council's structure in recent months and years, but this would not go far to meet the financial challenges faced
- the importance of Profile; to ensure vital skills were not lost when posts became redundant, but that staff were matched appropriately to other roles where their skills were needed
- that most of the Council's employees were residents of Torfaen; so less jobs for local people meant less money being spent in local shops and a poorer local economy
- the need to prioritise spending on services for the most vulnerable people, whose voices often were not heard, and education, to equip people with skills for the future
- the importance of moving away from simply delivering services, to equipping and enabling communities to do more for themselves where possible
- the importance of exploring new and innovative ways of doing things
- that councils were best placed to deliver local services and empower local communities
- the importance of communicating and consulting effectively so that people had a real voice in the way ahead
- that every effort had been made to listen to and take on board the views of the public and members, through many means including public consultation exercises, seminars, meetings and a webcast budget debate
- that the responses received had informed the decisions proposed now and those made in January
- that further efforts to engage people in better ways would be made next year, for example using new technology
- the positive scrutiny and engagement of members in the budget
- that suggestions for improvement were always welcome
- the importance of learning from other local authorities; especially those in England, who had already gone through significant budget cuts and were somewhat ahead in terms of redesigning services and
- the importance of starting preparations today for next year's budget.

11.4 The Leader of the Council briefly referred to:

- this being the most difficult budget faced by the Council, with a significant (4%) and sudden reduction in funding
- the savings which were agreed by Council in January, after robust scrutiny
- the efforts to protect schools and social care funding, minimise the impact of cuts on other frontline services and minimise job losses as far as possible
- the difficult choices which had to be made
- Torfaen's approach to setting the budget, with the process starting early every year

- the fact that the financial situation was not likely to improve for several years, regardless of other issues (e.g. arising from the Williams Commission review of council structures)
- the need to plan ahead and look to the medium term
- the difficult choices made in respect of Council Tax
- the reasonable increase in Council Tax proposed, given the financial challenges faced
- the proposed Council Tax increase in Torfaen being lower than in some other councils
- his appreciation of the efforts of Cabinet colleagues and Chief Officers for their disciplined, collaborative approach.

11.5 Various other members commented and/or asked questions (some indicating whether they supported or opposed the budget), with the following a summary of the main points:

- thanks were given to the Assistant Chief Executive for Resources and colleagues, and the Executive Member for Resources, for their hard work in getting to this point in the budget process and for the high level of information and engagement with members
- the Council had to set a legal budget
- governing effectively was all about making choices between competing priorities
- the Council should continue to look vigorously for better ways of doing things and delivering services
- the Council had a duty to its staff but its first duty was to its residents, who relied on and paid for council services
- an over-emphasis on protecting jobs may potentially prevent the delivery of better services; some services may be delivered better and at lower cost, with less staff (e.g. using new technology)
- the times were not exceptional; this was the “new normal”
- many English authorities had faced more severe budget reductions
- in Ireland, reductions of 30% had been known
- any new Government was unlikely to be able to change the financial situation significantly
- the choice was between bad or even worse options
- the Council was moving in the right direction, but there were still areas of excessive or unnecessary spending (examples were given of the money spent on councillors and a calendar produced by the Housing Services Team)
- every penny of unnecessary expenditure needed to be stopped
- the vigour and diligence of the Executive Member for Resources was commendable, but waste of resources needed to be addressed in other areas
- all councils were putting up Council Tax; Torfaen was not alone; freezing Council Tax would mean cutting more jobs and services

- any Council Tax rises were of concern, but this seemed to represent the best solution available
- the Council was making cuts in school crossing patrols, sports fields etc and increasing charges for meals for elderly people and care services for children and young people: this was not acceptable
- the Council should spend less on tourism, which did little to help the people of Torfaen; visitors simply came and went
- a clear message should be sent to the Government, that the cuts imposed were having a huge negative impact on people's lives; enough was enough
- Council Tax increases were less in England; this needed exploring – and continual cuts could not be sustained
- a mature approach was needed, to face the challenge
- robust scrutiny of the savings proposals had taken place, at the joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committees and at various seminars; no-one had put forward any different savings proposals at any stage
- whether the Leader would rule out any voluntary mergers with any other councils
- that the scrutiny process could have been more robust; for example the joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committees had been asked to look at the 4% savings options but not the 10% savings options (equating to an extra £1.9 million), some of which may have been worth further exploration
- some members did not vote for the savings proposals in January
- some of the “10% options” could have been better than the “4% options”; scrutiny should have seen them all
- whether the Wales Audit Office had made clear their views on the method of accounting for debt repayment as referred to in paragraph 6.4(c) of the report
- that the budget proposed was clearly a Cabinet-driven budget
- whether, if an amount of money became available in year, from changing the debt repayment period, a Council Tax rebate may be an option
- the politicisation of the budget was regrettable
- the Government in Westminster was not responsible for the cuts in Torfaen or in other Welsh councils; the UK Government had given the Welsh Government more than £100 million extra this year
- the Council had made cuts in street lighting, potholes, bin collections, leisure services and elsewhere, as well as putting up charges (e.g. for replacement bins) and failing or overspending in some areas (e.g. education, laptops and the SRS); why however was it continuing to fund certain projects (e.g. the community farm)

- the webcast budget feature was good but the figure quoted was wrong in respect of the cost of the Council Tax increase (£36 at Band D was actually £39.81)
- this undermined confidence in the budget
- what plans there were for future budget webcasts
- some members appeared to be distancing themselves from the budget decisions; this was a lack of accountability
- the budget was a very good attempt at mitigating the worst impacts of the cuts imposed on the Council; this was the best that could be hoped for in the circumstances
- people should not deny responsibility for or abstain from making these decisions; they had to be made
- all members had had every opportunity to get involved in the process
- member engagement on the budget this year had been the most comprehensive to date; denying responsibility at this stage was a failure
- the scrutiny process had been exhaustive, informative and excellent, but some members chose not to take part or ask questions
- setting the budget was inevitably a political process; it was all about making choices and setting priorities according to one's political beliefs
- opposing for the sake of opposing was not effective
- no credible alternatives had been put forward over the many months of the budget preparation process, despite the many meetings held and opportunities given, and no alternatives were put forward today
- the Council was setting the budget today but scrutiny was happening tomorrow (e.g. of the school crossing patrols proposals); this was the wrong way round
- whether the Leader would permit officers to enter into full and frank discussions with Opposition members in future.

11.6 The Executive Member for Resources and the Assistant Chief Executive, Resources and the Leader replied to comments and questions. In particular (without repeating what had already been said and is recorded above):

- there would inevitably be areas on which people would disagree about priorities
- the position on mergers was not yet clear; people should seek their own political parties' position before asking other people for theirs
- chief officers had been asked to identify potential cuts equating to 4% and 10% of existing budgets
- the 4% options were much better worked up than the 10% options
- the Cabinet had decided to go forward with the 4% options and put those to all members for scrutiny

- some of the 10% options were completely unpalatable, for example closing public toilets, closing libraries and making significant numbers of people redundant
- discussions had taken place with the Wales Audit Office over accounting for loan debt repayment; they were not comfortable that changing the current arrangements was appropriate, albeit discussions were continuing
- alternative savings had therefore been identified
- if the loan debt repayment position changed, this could be revisited, albeit in year, reactive decisions were not usually the best way of managing the budget
- the way in which political groups engaged with officers on the budget could be looked at in future
- the Executive Member for Resources was more than happy to engage directly with anyone who wished to speak to him from whichever political group
- Welsh Government was in a similar position to councils; it had £1.7 billion less next year (than in 2010).

11.7 A recorded vote was requested and supported by the required number of members.

11.8 **COUNCIL AGREED** (*with councillors voting as set out in paras 11.9 to 11.11 below*):

Part One:

- (i) The budget for 2014/15 and medium term financial plan as set out in appendix one (and annexes 1-6 within that appendix) to this report is approved;

Part Two (statutory recommendations):

- (ii) It is noted that at its November 2013 meeting, the Cabinet approved the following amounts for the year 2014/15 in accordance with regulations made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended):-

- a) 31,884 being the amount calculated by the Council in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Wales) Regulations 1995 (as amended), as its Council Tax base for the year.
- b) the Council Tax base estimate for each Community Council levy for 2014/15 is as follows:-

Cwmbran	12,040
Pontypool	12,793
Blaenavon	1,794
Henllys	1,121
Croesyceiliog & Llanyrafon	3,396
Ponthir	740

- c) The Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 1992 for each banding of dwellings:-

A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £	I £
135.67	158.28	180.89	203.50	248.72	293.94	339.17	407.00	474.83

(iii) That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2014/15 in accordance with the Section 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-

- a) £267,237,491 - being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2) (a) to (e) of the Act.
- b) £97,112,752 - being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3) (a) to (c) of the Act.
- c) £170,124,739 - being the amount by which the aggregate at (iii) (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (iii) (b) calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.
- d) £120,000 - being the amount the Authority estimates in relation to Section 37 and 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended), discretionary non-domestic rate relief.
- e) £135,486,653 - being the aggregate of the sums the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its Council Fund in respect of the redistribution of non-domestic rates and Revenue Support Grant.
- f) £1,090.14 - being the amount at (iii)(c) above plus the amount at (iii)(d) and less the amount at (iii)(e) above all divided by the amount at (ii)(a) above calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of it's Council Tax for the year.
- g) £1,353,538 - being the amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act.
- h) £1,047.69 - being the amount at (iii) (f) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (iii) (g) above by the amount at (ii) (a), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item relates.
- i) The County Borough Tax including Community Council Precepts Valuation Bands.

	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £	I £
Cwmbran	729.55	851.14	972.73	1,094.32	1,337.50	1,580.68	1,823.87	2,188.64	2,553.41
Pontypool	727.14	848.33	969.52	1,090.71	1,333.09	1,575.47	1,817.85	2,181.42	2,544.99
Blaenavon	722.65	843.10	963.54	1,083.98	1,324.86	1,565.75	1,806.63	2,167.96	2,529.29
Henllys	713.26	832.14	951.01	1,069.89	1,307.64	1,545.40	1,783.15	2,139.78	2,496.41
Croesyceiliog & Llanymorfa	725.16	846.02	966.88	1,087.74	1,329.46	1,571.18	1,812.90	2,175.48	2,538.06
Ponther	712.68	831.46	950.24	1,069.02	1,306.58	1,544.14	1,781.70	2,138.04	2,494.38

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (iii)(f) above by the number which in the properties set out in Section 5 (1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which is that proportion applicable to dwellings listed in Valuation band D calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuations bands.

- j) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts (ii)(c) and (iii)(i) above the Council in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the Council Tax for the year 2014/15 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £	I £
Cwmbran	865.22	1,009.42	1,153.62	1,297.82	1,586.22	1,874.62	2,163.04	2,595.64	3,028.24
Pontypool	862.81	1,006.61	1,150.41	1,294.21	1,581.81	1,869.41	2,157.02	2,588.42	3,019.82
Blaenavon	858.32	1,001.38	1,144.43	1,287.48	1,573.58	1,859.69	2,145.80	2,574.96	3,004.12
Henllys	848.93	990.42	1,131.90	1,273.39	1,556.36	1,839.34	2,122.32	2,546.78	2,971.24
Croesyceiliog & Llanymorfa	860.83	1,004.30	1,147.77	1,291.24	1,578.18	1,865.12	2,152.07	2,582.48	3,012.89
Ponther	848.35	989.74	1,131.13	1,272.52	1,555.30	1,838.08	2,120.87	2,545.04	2,969.21

Part Three – Treasury Management Guidelines and Prudential Indicators:

- (iv) The Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators as outlined in paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 of the report and appendix five to the report are agreed.

11.9 The following 32 councillors voted **for** the above resolutions:

Councillors Ashley, Barnett, Brooks, Cameron, Caron, Gwyneira Clark, Richard Clark, Constance, Crick, Cunningham, Daniels, Giles Davies, Nigel Davies, Evans, Furzer, Harnett, Hunt, Alan Jones, Lewis Jones, Kemp, Marshall, Mason, Mawby, Owen, Powell, Seabourne, Taylor, Thomas, Tomlinson, Waite, Wellington and Yeowell.

11.10 The following 7 councillors voted **against** the above resolutions:

Councillors Burnett, Cross, Graham, Harris, Haynes, Jeremiah and Rees.

11.11 The following 3 councillors **abstained** from the vote on the above resolutions:

Councillors Bevan, Mills and Smith.

11.12 The Mayor adjourned the meeting for approximately 10 minutes at this point, for a refreshment break. All members returned after the break (at 12.05pm approximately) except Councillors Furzer and Smith.

12. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

12.1 The Council considered a report of the Head of Human Resources and Pensions (HoHR&P), seeking approval to adopt the Pay Policy Statement for 2014.

12.2 The HoHR&P outlined the report, emphasising (or replying to questions), in brief that:

- this was a statement of the current position – it was not a proposal to change any officer pay grades or arrangements
- it affected all staff, including chief officers, except staff in schools
- the pay policy statement was published on the Council's website to ensure maximum transparency
- the statement reflected the latest statutory guidance
- the specific changes from the previous year's pay policy statement (which he outlined) were shown in the report
- there was provision to amend the statement if necessary following Council approval, if further statutory guidance or other factors required it (e.g. around the role of the IRP (Independent Remuneration Panel) in local authority Chief Executives' pay)
- Torfaen did not help any members of staff with their tax arrangements, so things which may have happened in other places (as reported recently in the national news) did not happen in Torfaen
- the key issue was the ratio between the highest paid staff and the lowest paid staff
- in Torfaen, the ratio had reduced, from 6.4:1 to 6.1:1 (in other words, the gap between the Chief Executive's pay and median staff pay had reduced); this was because the Chief Executive's pay had stayed the same, while the median had risen
- similarly, the gap between chief officer pay levels and other staff pay levels had reduced as there were now several fewer staff at chief officer level and chief officers pay had been frozen, again while the median increased
- the Council had to approve its pay policy statement before 31 March every year

- if any amendments to the policy were needed, he would report back to Council, as the report explained
- the report affected all staff, including himself – but again the Council was not being asked to make any pay changes
- it was not possible to estimate how long it might take to implement the recommendation of the Silk Commission, that power to set teachers' pay should be devolved to the Welsh Government.

12.3 The Executive Member for Resources (Councillor Hunt) briefly commented that:

- the change in the ratio was welcome
- the Torfaen ratio was well below the maximum and compared very well to other public services in Wales
- the approach and personal expectations of the Council's chief officers was encouraging
- money saved on not replacing posts meant more money was available for delivering services.

12.4 **Council APPROVED** the 2014 Pay Policy Statement attached to the report as an accurate summary of the Council's current policy for the purposes of publication under the Localism Act.

13. SUPPORT TO CARERS IN TORFAEN

13.1 The Council considered a report of the Chief Officer, Social Care and Housing (COSCH), updating members on how the Council was managing the demand for carers services, the progress made in implementing the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure and future service developments for carer services.

13.2 The COSCH outlined the report in detail and answered detailed questions, emphasising, in brief that:

- the Council was currently supporting around 800 adult carers and 50 young carers
- carers were the "hidden army"; without people caring for their relatives or friends, the cost to the economy would be in the region of £212 million
- many improvements to the service had been made, to increase the support to carers (she gave details of specific improvements as listed in the report)
- bringing together the staff who supported service users and the staff who supported their carers made the service much more effective and efficient, as carers and the people they cared for were, in most cases, in alliance
- workers would not however get involved in conflicts between service users and the carers who cared for them, as sometimes happened

- the service was learning from best practice and innovation elsewhere, as well as demonstrating best practice and innovation for the benefit of others
- the Carers Leisure Card scheme was being replaced with better more targeted arrangements, as it was not cost effective and was not used by many people
- the recently announced Intermediate Care Fund may present an opportunity to bid for additional funding on a regional basis, which could mean more money for carer or “community connector” services
- 87% of carers rated the service as good or excellent in 2013 (up from 75% in 2012)
- a presentation to members, perhaps at a seminar, with case studies, may be more helpful than a written report to Council next year
- the Young Carers Group would themselves prioritise the spending of any additional funding (e.g. from the Intermediate Care Fund) but she would raise the possibility with them that some funding may be helpful in terms of establishing mentors (for carers) in schools and colleges
- welfare reform would have a significant impact on some carers, as referred to in the report – she would send some statistics to Councillor Barnett as requested
- the carers support team was now embedded in the service users’ support teams; this meant the same member of staff was there for the service user and their carer
- this reduced duplication of effort, ensured service users and their carers were seen in a much more joined up way and took away any potential for miscommunication
- new legislation gave carers exactly the same rights as service users
- the authority was working with Torfaen Carers Centre
- the authority was also working more closely than ever before with other councils, the health service and other public service providers; there was a Gwent-wide Steering Group, to map out the services being delivered, increase collaboration, reduce duplication and improve value for money wherever possible
- people often became carers to family members or friends who suddenly became ill; Social Services would usually not know about this
- most carers did not see or define themselves as carers; they simply cared for their dependents, seeing it as part of normal family life or friendship responsibility
- family or hospital doctors however were often the first people to know if someone was ill, and someone else was caring for them
- particular efforts were therefore focused, nationally and locally, on ensuring doctors gathered such information and communicated it to Social Services, and that Social Services worked more closely with the health service

COSC&H

- it may be possible to extend the use of the Flex system to consult young carers for their views; this was the subject of ongoing work following the recent pilot scheme
- carer awareness building was a key success factor
- significant efforts were put in to building awareness, for example the Carers Information Day, Carers Handbook, Support Course, Support Group, website presence and Carers Information Packs amongst other things
- resources were however in short supply – the priority was to serve people with the highest needs
- signposting people to other potential service providers was an important part of the service, where appropriate.

13.3 The Executive Member for Health, Social Care, Wellbeing and Equalities (Councillor Richard Clark) thanked the COSC&H for the report, emphasised the vital role played by carers and the importance of awareness raising, looked forward to the proposed seminar, case studies and future reports, referred to the protection as far as possible of frontline Social Care funding in the budget and reminded members of the need to focus resources on those in most need in the first instance.

13.4 **Council AGREED:**

- (1) to note how the Council is managing demand for support to carers, including future service developments that will support this
- (2) to note the progress made in implementing the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure and Torfaen's ongoing commitment to the Gwent-wide Carers Partnership Board.

14. DRAFT PLANNING (WALES) BILL AND POSITIVE PLANNING: PROPOSALS TO REFORM THE PLANNING SYSTEM IN WALES

14.1 The Council considered a report of the Chief Officer, Planning and Public Protection (COP&PP), seeking approval to the Council's response, which had been provided to the Welsh Government, on the Draft Planning (Wales) Bill and "Positive Planning" proposals.

14.2 The COP&PP outlined the report, commenting particularly:

- that the Bill represented the most significant change in the planning system in Wales since the 1970s
- that a seminar had been held for all members in February
- that all members had received the draft consultation response for comment
- on the detailed implications of the Bill / Positive Planning as outlined in the report, including:
 - the introduction of a new National Development Framework, to sit above all other development plans

- the introduction of new Strategic (i.e. regional) Development Plans, which would sit above Local Development Plans (LDPs)
- on the potential devaluation of LDPs; they were never meant to be “light touch”
- that the proposals may lead to more speedy decision making but this was likely to mean less negotiation with builders and other people, more refusals, people having less rights, and less local democracy in planning decisions
- that democracy was key to planning decision making
- the LDP was about democratically elected representatives of local people deciding the future of land allocation (and, for example, housing supply numbers) in their local areas
- the new proposals meant these very high level decisions would be made elsewhere
- that the proposals removed peoples’ choice around the method of dealing with appeals (e.g. by hearings or written representations) and introduced charges for written reps
- that some of the proposed changes were welcome, for example removing some restrictions, making small-scale development quicker and easier, speeding up the process of enforcement and Temporary Stop Notices
- that there were further questions to be asked around, for example, the training of Planning Committee members and the size of Planning Committees (which would be decided nationally in future)
- that the standard scheme of delegation proposed for the whole of Wales would remove local flexibility and choice
- the proposals made the planning system more technical, less transparent (e.g. introducing more plans and more layers of decision making) and less democratic, with less involvement of local people
- that the new system would be target, not outcome, driven
- that there was little information as yet on the potential financial consequences of the proposals.

14.3 The Executive Member, Housing, Planning and Public Protection (Councillor Gwyneira Clark) referred to the recent seminar on this topic and the many unanswered questions on the changes. She also expressed similar concerns to those of the COP&PP.

14.4 Discussion ensued, with comments being made by members (principally):

- that the new system over-complicated the planning system and introduced more layers, when everything else seemed to be going the other way (e.g. the Williams Commission review, which envisaged less councils and less layers)
- that the new system was over-bureaucratic, obscure, more complex and hierarchical, and significantly less democratic

- that it would be useful if all Chief Planning Officers in Wales collectively formed a view and responded to the proposals
- that the proposals were very alarming, and could lead to more challenges, to more decisions, from more people, as well as environmental groups for example
- that the proposals undermined local democracy
- that having unelected people appointed to decide Strategic Development Plans (covering whole regions) was not welcome
- it made sense to plan regionally for very large scale infrastructure projects (e.g. motorways, railways, airports etc) due to their impact across whole regions; in this way the advisory panels proposed were welcomed
- however, the proposals seemed to introduce more quangos and less transparency, which was worrying
- decisions which affected local people should not be taken out of the hands of local people
- whether and how the proposals related to the Council's Green Infrastructure Strategy; this needed to happen.

14.5 **Council AGREED** (*with all members in favour except 2, who abstained*):

- (1) to the consultation response which was submitted to Welsh Government prior to the end of the formal consultation period on 26th February 2014, detailed in Appendix A to the report
- (2) to forward any further comments made at this meeting (and contained in these minutes) to Welsh Government.

COP&PP

15. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (IRP) FOR WALES – ANNUAL REPORT

15.1 The Council considered a report of the Head of Strategic and Democratic Services (HoS&DS), informing Council of the IRP's recent annual report and seeking approval to the remuneration of the Civic Head (Mayor) and Deputy Civic Head (Deputy Mayor).

15.2 The HoS&DS highlighted in particular that:

- the IRP decided what elected members must be paid
- the IRP enabled councils to make a choice over what they wished to pay their Civic Head and Deputy Civic Head.

15.3 The Leader of the Council moved (and the motion was seconded) that Council:

- 1) notes the contents of the IRP for Wales Annual Report for 2014/15
- 2) sets the level of remuneration for the Civic Head (Mayor) in Torfaen at £21,500

- 3) sets the level of remuneration for the Deputy Civic Head (Deputy Mayor) in Torfaen at £16,000 and
- 4) authorises the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Members Constitution Working Party to make the necessary changes to the Scheme of Members Remuneration.

15.4 The Leader of the Council also commented that all Labour Group members wished to forego the increases which had been decided by the IRP and that they would write to the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer to that effect.

15.5 Councillor Rees moved an amendment (which was seconded), that Council:

- 1) notes the contents of the IRP for Wales Annual Report for 2014/15
- 2) sets the level of remuneration for the Civic Head (Mayor) in Torfaen at £19,000
- 3) sets the level of remuneration for the Deputy Civic Head (Deputy Mayor) in Torfaen at £14,000 and
- 4) authorises the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Members Constitution Working Party to make the necessary changes to the Scheme of Members Remuneration.

15.6 The amendment was put to the vote and, with 5 members voting in favour and all other members against, it was declared lost.

15.7 **COUNCIL AGREED** (*with 5 members voting against and all other members in favour*):

- 1) to note the contents of the IRP for Wales Annual Report for 2014/15
- 2) to set the level of remuneration for the Civic Head (Mayor) in Torfaen at £21,500
- 3) to set the level of remuneration for the Deputy Civic Head (Deputy Mayor) in Torfaen at £16,000
- 4) to authorise the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Members Constitution Working Party to make the necessary changes to the Scheme of Members Remuneration.

HoS&DS

HoS&DS

CLO&MO

16. OUTSIDE BODY NOMINATIONS – UPDATES

16.1 The Council considered a report of the Lead Officer, Council and Member Support, which he outlined briefly, informing Council of changes to outside body nominations.

16.2 **Council NOTED** the updates.

17. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

17.1 Councillor Daniels presented and moved the following motion, which was subsequently seconded:

- (1) That this Council commemorates International Women's Day, which takes place on the 8th March each year, and celebrates women's economic, political and social achievements throughout history and promotes greater gender equality in every aspect of life.
- (2) This Council notes the huge contribution to the life of this council and our communities made by past and present women Councillors and Officers, including pioneers such as Cllr Fanny Carver who was first elected to represent Cwmbran Urban District Council in 1935.
- (3) That this Council resolves to install a framed picture and biography in the corridor to the Chamber to commemorate the area's first female Councillor.
- (4) That this Council invites EHRC Wales (the Equalities and Human Rights Commission for Wales) and any interested local women's rights charities or organisations to present a webcasted seminar on 'Gender Equality', and that any interested Members may contribute suggested additional content.
- (5) And that this Council promotes that session amongst the community and in schools to benefit residents of Torfaen.

17.2 Several members spoke in favour of the motion, with the following main points being raised:

- it was surprising how little work had been done in terms of women's suffrage at the local authority level
- the need to do more to promote the role of women, e.g. ensuring more women served on the boards of public bodies, better careers advice and career shadowing opportunities for young women in schools, networking opportunities for women etc
- the need to actively challenge barriers to women in the workplace, through job sharing, flexible hours and child care for example; the Council already did a significant amount but more needed to be done
- that many more opportunities were available to women now than they were a few years ago, for example to stand as candidates for election
- Councillor Colette Thomas was currently the longest serving female member of the Council
- Fanny Carver had also been a Monmouthshire Councillor

- many women had served on Torfaen Council (or its predecessors) and deserved recognition including former Councillors Millie Dean, Phyllis Roberts, Zoe Scott, Barbara Ryan, Anita Lloyd, Sarah Richards MBE, Cynthia Beynon MBE, Lynn Howells, Cynthia Howells and Margaret Pead
- no-one had done more to drive equalities forward than former Councillor Marlene Thomas
- much progress had been made, but there was more to do
- the number of women attaining the top jobs in Wales had declined over the last ten years; it would be useful to hear about this further at the proposed seminar.

17.3 COUNCIL AGREED:

- (1) That this Council commemorates International Women's Day, which takes place on the 8th March each year, and celebrates women's economic, political and social achievements throughout history and promotes greater gender equality in every aspect of life.
- (2) This Council notes the huge contribution to the life of this council and our communities made by past and present women Councillors and Officers, including pioneers such as Cllr Fanny Carver who was first elected to represent Cwmbran Urban District Council in 1935.
- (3) That this Council resolves to install a framed picture and biography in the corridor to the Chamber to commemorate the area's first female Councillor.
- (4) That this Council invites EHRC Wales (the Equalities and Human Rights Commission for Wales) and any interested local women's rights charities or organisations to present a webcasted seminar on 'Gender Equality', and that any interested Members may contribute suggested additional content.
- (5) And that this Council promotes that session amongst the community and in schools to benefit residents of Torfaen.

**Equalities
Manager (EM)**

EM

EM

EM

18. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

- 18.1 Members' questions and the replies to those questions are set out in appendix A to these minutes.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 19.1 **COUNCIL NOTED** that its next ordinary meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 8 April 2014 at 10am in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre, Pontypool.
- 19.2 The Leader expressed concern that a number of members had left today's meeting early.

20. CABINET DECISIONS – 11 FEBRUARY 2014

- 20.1 Councillor Rees asked how the Leader could justify the decision to go ahead with a Housing Solutions Collaborative Service with Monmouthshire County Council, when the Williams Commission was recommending that Torfaen County Borough Council merged with Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly.
- 20.2 The Leader stated that he would reply in writing. **Leader**
- 20.3 Councillor Evans referred to the Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) fund and the intention to use it for redevelopment of Cwmbran and Pontypool. He asked why it was not being used in Blaenavon. He also asked for the reply to be put in writing. **Leader**
- 20.4 The Leader stated that the VVP criteria were such that Blaenavon was not appropriate for inclusion in this project.
- 20.5 **COUNCIL NOTED** the Cabinet decisions, which were set out in the agenda.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 2.20pm approximately.

Signed as a correct record by the Mayor

.....

Minutes produced by Richard Gwinnell, Lead Officer, Council and Member Support

Appendix A to the Council minutes of 4 March 2014

COUNCIL MEETING – 4 MARCH 2014 - MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPLIES

	Question	Reply	Action
MQ 1	<p>From Councillor Mary Barnett:</p> <p>Deputy Leader, as you are aware March 6th is World Book Day. Would you join with me in congratulating staff of Bookstart Wales on their dedicated and innovative efforts in providing bilingual reading materials and story telling experiences for the very young, during these challenging socio-economic times?</p>	<p>From Councillor Lewis Jones - Deputy Leader of the Council:</p> <p>Yes, I am delighted to congratulate the Bookstart project. It's been a longstanding project in Torfaen and beyond, and gives children the very best start in life as regards books, which is something they can value for life. The project has been hugely successful in Torfaen and I congratulate everyone involved in it.</p>	
MQ 2	<p>From Councillor Elizabeth Haynes:</p> <p>Will the Leader outline who was responsible for editing and publishing the content of the brochure "Pontypool Renewal Area - November 2013 edition?</p>	<p>From Councillor Gwyneira Clark, Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Public Protection (EMHP&P):</p> <p>The brochure was developed and published by the Housing Services Team. As part of its drafting, the content was considered and advice was provided by the Council's Communications Team before being published. The Council is required to produce appropriate literature and communication when ending a formally declared Neighbourhood Renewal Area, to ensure the community is advised appropriately. This links to ensuring the Council delivers neighbourhood renewal programmes effectively, and then can access future valuable funding from Welsh Government.</p>	

MQ 2a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>Can I have that reply on email please?</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>Yes</p>	EMHP&P
MQ 3.	<p>From Councillor Robert Kemp:</p> <p>With ten (10) new events having been introduced as part of the Winter Olympic Games 2014, will the Deputy Leader make a statement in regard to what future developments are to be made to Pontypool Ski and Snow Boarding Centre in order to encourage young people to take up the sport of skiing or snowboarding?</p>	<p>From Councillor Lewis Jones - Deputy Leader (DL) of the Council:</p> <p>I am a member of the Torfaen Leisure Trust which is responsible for the ski slope but have spoken to the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer for advice. The Ski Centre is managed by Torfaen Leisure Trust, of which I am a Council appointed trustee. The Ski Centre already provides skiing and snowboarding and to coincide with the recent Winter Olympics is running a special offer of the 'Olympic Unlimited Pass' for adults and juniors at a special rate which gives customers unlimited recreational use of the slope until 31 March 2014. In terms of future investment the slope caters for the activities that can be delivered on a dry ski slope. Any future investment to improve these facilities would have to be considered by the Trust against other priorities and a business case would have to be made in relation to the return on investment for any such proposals. At present no immediate improvements are planned.</p>	
MQ 3a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>Can I have that in writing please?</p> <p>The Winter Paralympics is due to be held shortly. There is no specialised equipment at Pontypool Ski Slope to help disabled people to ski or snowboard. What is the Council going to do to encourage and give an opportunity for all people to take up skiing and snowboarding?</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Again, I am a member of the Leisure Trust. It is incumbent on me to declare that interest under the Code of Conduct. Please refer your question to Christina HARRY, Chief Officer for Neighbourhood Services; she will liaise with the Chief Executive of the Torfaen Leisure Trust if you wish on your behalf.</p> <p><i>Councillor Kemp stated that he would.</i></p>	DL

<p>MQ 4.</p>	<p>From Councillor Jeff Rees:</p> <p>Does the Executive Member for Children and Young People believe that the proposed new catchment areas (as stated in appendix 5 of the Consultation Document “Removing Surplus Secondary School Places in the South of Torfaen”) for English Medium secondary schools contribute to increased social cohesion in Cwmbran as a whole?</p>	<p>From Councillor Brian Mawby, Executive Member for Children and Young People:</p> <p>In my experience Torfaen has not encountered the sort of unrest associated with a lack of social cohesion which other places, often larger cities, have experienced. I am sure that all right minded people want this to remain the case, and schools across the County Borough will continue to make a very important contribution to the preparation of young people for a full and active role in society. The Council and its schools share that responsibility, along with other community leaders, but our particular focus is on improving educational outcomes and, through the experience of going to school, the development in our learners of common values, a sense of belonging and an appreciation of diversity.</p> <p>Appendix 4 of the consultation document, which shows the home location of pupils attending each of the Cwmbran secondary schools, demonstrates that home location is frequently not a factor in determining choice of school, so I don't believe a change in catchment areas will in itself have a negative impact on social cohesion.</p> <p>The proposals to reduce surplus secondary school places and the associated adjustments to the catchment areas are a response to the fact we have more secondary schools than we need in Cwmbran. We have to address that situation and in doing so the Council has to be able to demonstrate that the standard of education in any new arrangement will be at least as good as the current provision. Estyn will provide its opinion on that. The Council also expects that the new school arrangements will continue and improve upon the good work of our schools in Cwmbran and across Torfaen in preparing young people for later life. Improvements in learner outcomes and the continued good work in our schools should have a positive impact on social cohesion in the area.</p>	
------------------	--	---	--

<p>MQ 5.</p>	<p>From Councillor Giles Davies:</p> <p>I would like to ask the Executive Member of Neighbourhood Services why members can't report fly tipping directly to Neighbourhood Services so that it can be logged as fly tipping? I have along with my ward colleagues visited areas in our ward that have seen a huge increase in fly tipping and yet when I have tried to report it to Neighbourhood Services, I am told that it is no longer the department I have to contact. Could you please give me information as to how you now record the statistics related to fly tipping?</p>	<p>From Councillor John Cunningham, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services:</p> <p>Thank you for the question; you have identified a loophole that members were not aware of.</p> <p>A fly-tipping report submitted to the Cleaner Scrutiny Committee in February 2013 outlined that performance in this area had been poor and that a more streamlined procedure had been introduced. This new procedure has been in place since January 2013 and fly tipping performance, in so far as collecting fly tipping within 5 working days is concerned, has improved significantly. Our current target is 80% and we are currently projecting that we will exceed our target to 96%.</p> <p>The improvement in our performance has been the result of ensuring that all such reports are made via Call Torfaen so they are logged onto the system, a ticket is raised and the matter dealt with as swiftly as possible. It has recently come to our attention that a very small number of member enquiries relate to requests to remove fly tipping and as such, are not being captured and recorded against our performance indicators.</p> <p>We would ask members to support us in helping to ensure that our performance and record keeping remains robust in this area. Therefore, if members or any resident wants to report fly tipping then it is essential they phone Call Torfaen so that the call can be logged correctly, a ticket will be raised and the matter dealt with as swiftly as possible.</p> <p>However, I appreciate this is a change of procedure that members have not yet been informed of formally, but an e-mail will be issued from the Chief Officer over the next few days explaining this procedure in detail.</p>	
------------------	--	--	--

		This answer will be reproduced in the minutes of the meeting for all members to see.	
MQ 5a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>So I need to go through Call Torfaen in future to report fly tipping, not the member enquiry system?</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>Yes, that's right. We have an obligation to collect within 5 days and we were missing some.</p>	
MQ 6.	<p>From Councillor Fiona Cross:</p> <p>What progress has been made, since my motion in 2012, towards making members paperless?</p>	<p>From Councillor Bob Wellington, Leader of the Council:</p> <p>The motion agreed in December 2011 required Council to 'move forwards' conducting business digitally with effect from May 2012.</p> <p>Every member, since the local government elections that took place in May that year, has been offered a wireless laptop and has been provided with a comprehensive ICT training programme. The training programme has included one to one and class based sessions on basic ICT Training, digital meetings and a Microsoft Office 2010 overview.</p> <p>Over that same period, an opt in list was introduced that required members to publicly state their wish to receive hard copy agendas and Democratic Services also removed the distribution of hard copy agendas for members who do not sit on specific committees.</p> <p>At present, around 25% of members regularly attend meetings paperlessly. At Council, for example, only 31 members choose to receive hard copy agendas. The remaining 13 tend to operate digitally.</p> <p>During the early stages of the opt in scheme, the numbers were nearer 50% but due to some intermittent ICT problems at the time, a number of members opted back in to receiving paper copies. With this in mind, a temporary Members ICT Technician was employed for 6 months to</p>	

		<p>try and address any issues that were surfaced and to rebuild confidence. As a result, many of the ICT issues have now been resolved. The now former Members ICT Technician has also been made available by the SRS before and during key meetings such as the Council, to fix any issues that arise.</p> <p>In my opinion, while progress has clearly been made towards working paperlessly, it has not yet developed as far as I would have liked. With this in mind, I would implore any members that are interested, to contact the Head of Strategic and Democratic Services directly, who will arrange for a dedicated training programme to be provided that will build the skills and confidence any member needs to participate in meetings digitally.</p>	
MQ 6a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>Can you please let me know how much money has been saved as a result of going paperless? It was estimated in the past that £20,000 approx may be saved.</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>Yes - I will do that.</p>	Leader
MQ 7.	<p>From Councillor Mary Barnett:</p> <p>Would the Executive Member for Children and Young People comment on the findings of the recent Western Mail Survey of primary schools, which, using 21 indicators of good performance, places a Torfaen primary school as number 1 in Wales and another Torfaen primary school in the top 50? Furthermore, it seems almost all Torfaen primary schools were placed in the top 50% of the 1, 462</p>	<p>From Councillor Brian Mawby, Executive Member for Children and Young People:</p> <p>I am very pleased. The top school in Wales, according to that survey, is in my ward. We need to remember this is an unofficial survey, not accepted by Estyn, and that this does not mean we are coming out of special measures; but publicising this fact, as you have done through this question, is a good way of publicising that Torfaen primary schools do provide children with good opportunities.</p>	

	<p>Maintained Primary Schools in Wales (232,865 pupils) and not one in the bottom quartile. Although such surveys can be open to criticism, surely we have grounds for celebrating this published media recognition of good practice /success with Early Years Education in Torfaen and reassure our schools' prospective parents/carers that Torfaen primary schools provide good opportunities for children to reach their full potential?</p>		
MQ 8	<p>From Councillor Elizabeth Haynes:</p> <p>Will the Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Public Protection confirm which councillors (County Borough or Community) were asked to agree, approve or comment on a draft copy of the brochure "Pontypool Renewal Area - November 2013" edition?</p>	<p>From Councillor Gwyneira Clark, Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Public Protection:</p> <p>No councillors were asked to comment on a draft of the brochure. As the Neighbourhood Renewal Area lasted for a period of 10 years, in July 2013, the current and former Pontypool councillors were invited to contribute to the development of the brochure, as were the Leader and the Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Public Protection. Those who responded and submitted contributions were included in the brochure. The councillor for Pontypool didn't respond and I respect his decision not to do so.</p>	
MQ 8a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>Can you please send me your responses in writing?</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>Yes - I will. I can also send you a copy of the email which was sent to the Pontypool Councillor if you wish.</p> <p><i>(Councillor Haynes signalled that she did).</i></p>	EMHP&PP

MQ 9.	<p>From Councillor Robert Kemp:</p> <p>Will the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services make a statement in regard to the current condition of the public highway, footpaths and pavements (now known by the engineering profession as footways) across Torfaen?</p>	<p>From Councillor John Cunningham, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services (EMNS):</p> <p>In the last two years the Highway Network Section have undertaken an annual survey of adopted highways, based on nationally agreed rules, and these reveal that the overall safety condition is improving.</p> <p>All highway footways are routinely inspected in accordance with the criteria set out in the Council's Highway Maintenance Plan. This defines the frequency of inspection, the defect intervention criteria used and the response time for any necessary repairs. Footways identified from these inspections as in need of major repair are prioritised accordingly and undertaken using our budget allocations.</p> <p>That answer will be reproduced in the Council minutes.</p>	
MQ 9a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>Can you please circulate a copy of the criteria and how it is prioritised to all members?</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>Yes – it is a substantial document but we can provide that.</p>	EMNS
MQ 10.	<p>From Councillor Jeff Rees:</p> <p>Is the Leader proud of the work undertaken by his Cabinet?</p>	<p>From Councillor Bob Wellington, Leader of the Council:</p> <p>Yes, I am immensely proud of the work undertaken by Cabinet. Just this morning we've seen a budget set that has seen no major service cuts, one of the lowest Council Tax increases in Wales and no significant job losses. It is not possible to achieve an outcome like that against the current backdrop of austerity and the emerging picture across Wales, without a Cabinet and a Leadership Team working together in the best interests of residents.</p> <p>Members may also have seen the recent Ministerial report on 2012/13 local government performance across Wales. Whilst the report relates to past years, it is worth noting that we have seen some notable quartile improvement in three of the seven indicators that relate to our</p>	

		<p>2014/15 budget priorities of Education, Social Care and Waste. We've also maintained our quartile position in the other four but have still seen improvement within. I believe that this again is something that should be heralded.</p> <p>There is always work to be done to improve on many areas of performance, including education, where we are working hard to improve results and move out of special measures. I trust all Members, in the Cabinet and beyond, will continue to play a constructive part in those efforts.</p>	
MQ 10a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>I recognise there has been some improvement, but I'm not satisfied that it is enough, if we are still in the lower 25% in some areas. As the Council's annual meeting is coming up soon, will the Leader be looking to introduce some new members into the Cabinet from the back benches?</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>You will get the answer to that question after the annual meeting.</p>	
MQ 11.	<p>From Councillor Fiona Cross:</p> <p>Why has an item within today's budget been scheduled for scrutiny discussion tomorrow?</p>	<p>From Councillor John Cunningham, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services:</p> <p>As a Chair and experienced member of a scrutiny committee, you should know that you should not ask that question of an Executive Member. We do not determine what and when items are discussed at scrutiny; we are not allowed to do that. Scrutiny committees determine when issues are on the scrutiny agenda; not me.</p> <p>The budget report that was approved at Council on 28 January "approved the mitigation measures which were submitted to joint</p>	

		<p>scrutiny of 20th November”. I am making an assumption based on your earlier comments that you are asking about the school crossing patrol issue. One such measure was the £65,000 saving in Neighbourhood Services to “reduce the school crossing patrol service through reviewing each individual crossing point and assessing it against current national criteria”. Council has therefore already approved the budget reduction, but at Council today we have bound everything together in one place.</p> <p>As part of the Joint Scrutiny back in November, Members asked that “the Chief Officer for Neighbourhood Services and relevant Executive Member should ensure all Members receive the outcome of the review of school cross patrols and the Cleaner Overview & Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise any proposals for change prior to the decision for implementation being taken”. The consultation has now concluded and is being brought back to the Cleaner Communities Committee as requested.</p> <p>It is also worth noting that whilst the decision to reduce the budget has been taken at Council, the decision to actually implement the changes will not be taken by the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services for a few weeks. The Scrutiny Committee will, therefore, have the opportunity to establish whether the processes that have been used as a basis of the review are clear, and will also be able to consider whether the proposals to engage and communicate key stakeholders is appropriate.. The recommendations of the committee to this end will then inform the decision that will be taken by the Executive Member.</p>	
MQ 11a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>In fairness, I didn’t specify who the question should go to. I am concerned that the timing is poor: a better informed debate could be held if scrutiny took place before</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>The sites have been anonymised within the report; we couldn’t issue a report with the sites listed individually. A decision has been made today by the Council to save £65,000 on the service. The scrutiny committee tomorrow is due to look at the detailed implementation of the review. I will be making a decision in the next few weeks, depending on what</p>	

	<p>decisions like this were made. Members might now feel the decision has been made; it's too late to do anything different. This might look to the public like a "done deal". What can be done in future to ensure scrutiny has a greater presence? The question is open to others.</p>	<p>happens at scrutiny.</p>	
<p>MQ 12.</p>	<p>From Councillor Elizabeth Haynes:</p> <p>Does the Leader agree that a Local Authority shall not publish any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party (as referenced in the Welsh Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity in Wales and also in Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986), and will the Leader pledge to support any successful reporting of such?</p>	<p>From Councillor Bob Wellington, Leader of the Council:</p> <p>Yes.</p>	
<p>MQ 13.</p>	<p>From Councillor Robert Kemp:</p> <p>Would the Executive Member of Resources give a statement in regard to whether or not the financial allocation for 'Discretionary Housing Payments' 2013 – 14 will be fully awarded?</p>	<p>From Councillor Anthony Hunt, Executive Member for Resources:</p> <p>The total cash limited allocation for Discretionary Housing Payments that the Council is allowed to spend is £483,960.</p> <p>The Council receives Department for Work and Pensions funding towards two-fifths of this limit (which works out at £193,584). We have to fund the remainder ourselves.</p>	

		<p>The latter figure has been exceeded significantly due to the high demand for additional assistance with housing costs attributable to Housing Benefit changes such as the bedroom tax.</p> <p>For the current financial year, overall expenditure is expected to be between £360,000 and £370,000 based on current demand, although there is still scope for an increase before the closure of this year's fund on April 6.</p> <p>2416 awards have been made so far this year. 92% of applications have been successful and the average award is £10.58 per week</p> <p>This is obviously a demand-led budget, but we remain committed to our budgetary decision to meet all of the demand in line with our approved Policy.</p>	
MQ 13a	<p>Supplementary:</p> <p>How is the Council going to make use of the surplus of £124,000? I have concerns this will be lost to the housing budget.</p>	<p>Reply:</p> <p>We don't know what the surplus is going to be until the end of the financial year. Unfortunately we can't roll it forward into the next year because the limit we are allowed to assign is limited to £483,960. There are lots of other pressures on spending due to benefit reform and any extra money can be considered in that context.</p>	