

Minutes of the Meeting of CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL
held at Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely
via video conference on Thursday, 13th July, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Maldwyn Lewis (Chair); Councillors Bryan Davies, Catrin M S Davies, Clive Davies, Euros Davies, Gareth Davies, Gethin Davies, Ifan Davies, Marc Davies, Meirion Davies, Rhodri Davies, Amanda Edwards, Endaf Edwards, Elaine Evans, Elizabeth Evans, Eryl Evans, Gwyn Wigley Evans, Keith Evans, Rhodri Evans, Wyn Evans, Paul Hinge, Hugh Hughes, Chris James, Gwyn James, Gareth Lloyd, Sian Maehrlein, Ann Bowen Morgan, Caryl Roberts, John Roberts, Mark Strong, Wyn Thomas, Matthew Vaux, Alun Williams and Carl Worrall.

Also Present: Alan Davies, Chair of Governance and Audit Committee and Caroline White, Chair of Ethics and Standards Committee 2022/23.

(10.00am - 11.30am)

Procedure

The Chairman of the Council, Councillor Maldwyn Lewis welcomed all to the meeting and confirmed that the meeting was being webcasted.

1 Apologies

Councillors Keith Henson and Ceris Jones apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

2 Disclosure of personal / prejudicial interests

There were no declarations of personal or prejudicial interest.

3 Personal matters

- a) Councillor Maldwyn Lewis congratulated Ceredigion school pupils recognised for their sporting achievements at the Ceredigion Sports Awards held last week;
- b) Councillor Maldwyn Lewis paid tribute to Ceredigion Music Service and all the primary and secondary school pupils who took part in the School Proms last week;
- c) Councillor Maldwyn Lewis extended his best wishes to all pupils that have taken part in recent examinations and wishes them well on their results, and future endeavours;
- d) Councillor Paul Hinge extended his best wishes to Shaun Button, an ex-serving Royal Marine following a recent accident in the Penrhyncoch area;
- f) Councillor Meirion Davies congratulated Ysgol Llanfihangel y Creuddyn on celebrating 185 years;
- g) Councillor Marc Davies congratulated Josh Tarling who competes for 'Ineos Grenadier', on winning a bronze medal at the European Cycling Individual Pursuits, and Finlay Tarling on winning a silver medal in the Cycling Track Championship Team Pursuits;
- h) Councillor Rhodri Evans congratulated Lisa Pullman on being selected to represent Wales in the ladies' shooting championship held in New Zealand last week;

- i) Councillor Euros Davies paid tribute to pupils from the nine primary schools in the Aberaeron area on the recent concert held at Aberaeron Comprehensive School.

4 Minutes of the Meetings of the Council held on 15 June 2023 and the Special Meeting of Council held on 20 June 2023

It was **RESOLVED** to confirm as a true record the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 15 June 2023, subject to an amendment to item 3 m) Personal Matters to confirm that Ysgol Talgarreg School were the winning football team in the Urdd 5 a side National competitions.

Matters arising:

Councillor Bryan Davies noted that Cefin Campbell MS has been in contact with Councillors Wyn Evans and Gareth Lloyd regarding the Council's Notice of Motion relating to TB testing in cattle.

It was **RESOLVED** to confirm as a true record the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 20 June 2023

Matters arising:

There were no matters arising.

5 Notice of Motion submitted under Rule 10.1 of the Council's Rules of Procedure

Proposer: Councillor Catrin M S Davies

Seconder: Councillor Rhodri Davies

Council notes:

We know that poor digital connectivity remains a serious problem in many rural areas across Ceredigion and that access to and use of online services reflects other inequalities in society; and that this can cause economic underperformance and lead to further rural poverty in our county. Poor connectivity can lead to the loss of economic opportunities not to mention its impact on the education of our children and young people.

Alternative network operator, Broadway Partners had been aspiring to deploy their own gigabit-capable Fibre-to-the-Premises network across the north of Ceredigion after engaging with local communities for over 2 years. It could have revolutionised the lives of many of our residents and would improve economic growth across the county.

5 projects were outlined and approved for Broadway Partners - in the north of Ceredigion, but recently BDUK (Building Digital UK) has delayed funding for 2 of the projects (namely Ysgubor y Coed and Pontarfynach), stating that these areas would now likely to fall within the scope of the Wales-wide procurement exercise, which is being conducted by BDUK. This effectively destroyed the Broadway partners' plan.

Broadway Partners called in the administrators at the end of May 2023. The administrators are currently looking for buyers to take over part or all of the business and they hope to close the process by end of July 2023. But

securing a buyer does not guarantee that the proposed infrastructure projects will continue to be built in Melindwr and Ceulan and Maesmawr wards.

The UK Government's current funding model makes it difficult for alternative network providers to fill the connectivity gap in rural areas. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate for the UK Government to intervene to support these communities, and in particular to help find a company that can take over the plans that have been left unfinished and to include the original areas of Ysgubor y Coed and Pontarfynach. These communities have already waited far too long for adequate broadband connectivity. Every effort must be made to ensure that the plans are not delayed further.

Therefore, the Council is:

- a) Asking BDUK to urgently look at providing fast connectivity to the areas of Ceulan and Maesmawr, and Melindwr - that connectivity that was promised two years ago.*
- b) Asking the UK Government, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, to intervene to support the communities that have been affected by the collapse of Broadway Partners, and in particular to help find a company that can take over the plans that have been left unfinished and to include the original areas of Ysgubor y Coed and Pontarfynach.*
- c) Noting that Welsh Government recognises that digital connectivity is as important as digital inclusion (it is difficult to have one without the other) We ask what are they doing to support the rural areas of Ceredigion that have been affected by the collapse of the Broadway Partners company?*
- d) Requesting details from the UK Government, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, regarding their procurement process for the Gigabit Project in Wales, specifically areas of Ceredigion that are still digitally underprivileged, and also for a definite timetable for bringing fast connectivity to the whole county.*

Councillor Catrin M S Davies presented the Notice of Motion, highlighting the concerns regarding poor digital connectivity throughout the county. She noted that access to online services reflects other inequalities in society which can cause economic under performance and further rural poverty with a loss of economic activity, not to mention the impact on the education of children and young people. This was re-iterated by Councillor Rhodri Davies, who emphasised the concern regarding delayed funding of the projects in Ysgubor y Coed and Pontarfynach and the collapse of Broadway Partners which meant that the work may not be completed before 2029.

Councillor Bryan Davies thanked members for presenting the motion, noting that there appears to be a focus on developing ultra-fast broadband in urban areas, rather than the needs of rural areas. He noted that Ceredigion is heavily reliant on the tourism and the agriculture sector, and both industries are very dependent on connectivity, therefore it's very important that the Government listens to our concerns.

Members noted their concerns that residents were having to invest in their own technology, and that in some under-privileged areas, families were

dependent on 1–3Mbps which meant that they could not use more than one device in the house at any time. Members also questioned the role of Welsh Government in relation to this and asked for a workshop to be held to review the connectivity status of various areas in the County. It was also noted that improved connectivity would contribute to a reduced carbon footprint, with more people able to attend meetings remotely, and work from home.

Councillor Clive Davies noted that a Digital Connectivity Officer has now been appointed, and one of the first tasks will be to create a picture of where the gaps are within the county. He noted that the digitalisation programme has not been devolved to Welsh Government, and where this was previously funded by European funding it is now distributed by the UK Government, with the criteria constantly changing. He recommended that a copy of the Motion is shared with Eleanor Williams, Head of Ofcom Wales in order that she is aware of the concerns, and able to forward these to the UK Government.

Following a vote, it was **RESOLVED** to agree the Motion as presented.

6 Report of the Corporate Lead Officer: Legal and Governance upon amendments to the Constitution and Constitution Guide

Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for Housing, Legal and Governance, People and Organisation and Public Protection presented the report to Council, noting that the Guide to the Constitution and the proposed amendments had been considered by the Constitution Working Group at its meetings dated 25th of April 2023 during which the amendments presented in this report were considered. An additional meeting took place on the 22nd of June 2023 to consider further amendments and changes made in response from comments from the working group.

Councillor Bryan Davies noted that the number of Councillors had reduced from 42 to 38, which had placed additional responsibilities on all of them and especially Chairs of Committees, and that Members were welcome to contact him if they wished to review the requirements of the Constitution.

Members also noted that they be given an opportunity to revisit delegated powers in relation to the planning process, and especially the direction of travel when declaring an interest on a particular application. Officers confirmed that this is a live document, and that there are further amendments due to be considered.

Members also asked for clarity in relation to number of Members, and quorate requirements of the Charity Trustee Committee.

The Council unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

1. Approve the Constitution Guide as amended (at Appendix 1);
2. Approve the changes to the Constitution (at Appendices 2 – 16); and
3. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Council's Constitution to reflect the above changes.

7 Report of the Corporate Lead Officer: Legal and Governance upon the Recruitment of Independent Members to the Ethics and Standards Committee

Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for Housing, Legal and Governance, People and Organisation and Public Protection presented the report to Council, noting that John Weston and Carol Edwards are eligible for reappointment on 22 February 2024 for a further period of 4 years. Carol Edwards has confirmed that she will accept the reappointment, however John Weston has confirmed that he will not be seeking reappointment once the initial six years comes to an end on 21/2/2024.

Consequently, it is now necessary to recruit a new independent member to the Ethics and Standards Committee to maintain the Committee's composition, as set out in the Constitution, and as required by legislation.

Members asked for clarification of the eligibility requirements for former members and officer of Ceredigion County Council and town and community councils. Officer noted that this would be reviewed and amended if inconsistencies are identified.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve:

- 1) That Carol Edwards' term of office is extended from 22/2/2024 to 21/2/2028.
- 2) the role description, person specification and criteria (as set out in Appendix 1 of the report)
- 3) Membership of the Selection Panel as follows:
 - Chair of the Council (in absence Vice Chair);
 - Independent/Lay Panel member (nominated by the Monitoring Officer)
 - Chair and Vice Chair of the Ethics and Standards Committee (or other independent members nominated by the Monitoring Officer as necessary)
 - Town and Community Council representative nominated by One Voice Wales.
 - Independent/Lay Panel member (Chair of the selection panel) (nominated by the Monitoring Officer)

8 Report of the Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services upon the appointment of Councillor Keith Henson to the Four Rivers for LIFE project

Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Democratic Services, Policy, Performance and People and Organisation presented the report to Council noting that a request was received from the Four Rivers for LIFE project for a representative from Ceredigion County Council to be part of the External Stakeholder Group for a period of three and a half years to end of December 2026. The Four Rivers for LIFE project is a river restoration project to improve the conditions of four major rivers in Wales: Teifi, Cleddau, Tywi and Usk.

Councillor Bryan Davies confirmed the appointment of the relevant Cabinet Member, currently Councillor Keith Henson as Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services and Carbon Management as External Stakeholder.

Council noted the appointment of the relevant Cabinet Member as External Stakeholder to the Four Rivers for LIFE Project for a period of 3 and a half years (until end of December 2026), currently Councillor Keith Henson.

9 The Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2022-23

Councillor Elizabeth Evans, Chair of the Democratic Services Committee presented the report to Council. She thanked Officers for their constant support and for the preparation of the report.

She referred to the work of the Committee, drawing attention to the Member training, and surveys on timing of meetings and ICT requirements, noting that it has been agreed that the Committee would revisit the member ICT requirements towards the end of the current administration, taking into consideration technological changes. She also highlighted the amendments to legislation and protocols for remote attendance and hybrid meetings. Councillor Elizabeth Evans reminded members to submit any items that they wished to discuss to the Committee for consideration.

Councillor Gareth Lloyd, Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee re-iterated the words of the Chair, and also noted that the revised format of the report made it far more attractive and easier to read.

Councillor Bryan Davies thanked the Members of the Committee and Officers noting that this is an extremely important committee, and that Members should address any concerns to the committee, or to speak to him directly.

Members noted that they were pleased to see increased diversity in democracy in relation to female representation and hoped that this trend would continue in four years' time. An error in relation to the date of the diversity data was noted.

The content of the report was noted by Council.

10 The Ethics and Standards Committee annual report 2022-23

Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Housing, Legal and Governance and Public Protection presented the report to Council outlining the reporting requirements in referencing the way the committee has discharged its new functions, and monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups on their duties brought about as a result of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Caroline White, Chair of the Ethics and Standards Committee during the reporting period presented the Annual Report to Council, thanking Members for attending the training provided, and highlighting the importance of presenting applications for dispensation.

She noted that guidance from the Welsh Government on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 was published in June 2023, and that this would provide greater clarity as to the expectations in relation to the additional duties placed upon Group Leaders.

She noted that Caryl Davies is now the current Chair of the Committee and asked that Members continue to support her in the way she had been supported and also thanked Officers for their support.

Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council thanked Caroline White for her work, and thanked the Committee for their advice, and readiness to discuss matters of importance to Members in their communities.

Members asked for clarity regarding the deferred items noted in the report. Officers confirmed that there are no outstanding items currently.

The content of the report was noted by Council.

- 11 The Governance and Audit Committee annual report 2022-23**
Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Housing, Legal and Governance and Public Protection presented the report to Council noting that the Annual Report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting of 21st June 2023, and that the Committee agreed to approve the draft Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report 2022-23, subject to the addition of the attendance details for the former Lay Member, Liam Hull, and the inclusion of the words 'not applicable' for meetings which took place outside the period of membership of Committee members. These changes have since been made to the report.

Alan Davies, Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee presented the Annual Report to Council, thanking officers for their hard work in preparing the report, and support provided by Officers of the Committee. He noted that there is a positive attitude towards the Committee and that the procedures of Council are in order as acknowledged by Audit Wales, and that the Committee will be implementing a programme of continual improvement.

The Chairman of the Council thanked Alan Davies for his work, in keeping the Council in order. Councillor Endaf Edwards noted an error in relation to his attendance on 9 March, confirming that he did apologise, but was present at the meeting.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Council held on 21 September 2023

CHAIRMAN: _____