



COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business

12.30 p.m., Wednesday 20 May 2020

Held in multiple locations, via Microsoft Teams software

Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 12 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (in the Chair), Sonia Reynolds (Vice Chair), Cathy Clark, Gareth Cork, Caroline Davies, Julie Cook, Salamatu Fada, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Suzanne Samuel, Guy Wallace Smith, Dafydd Rhys, Daryl Leeworthy, Stephen Nicholls, Tim Palazon. The meeting was quorate throughout.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum & Performance), Rhydian Williams (Digital Development Manager), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Rachel Burton (Manager, Youth, Community and Play Work) for minutes 5 and 6 only.

Also: Rowland Jones (Chartered Surveyor) for minute 4; Nia Parry (Hon. President) for minutes 5 and 6; Keith Towler (Chair, Interim Youth Work Board for Wales) for minute 6.

Apologies: Toni Schiavone (Vice Chair), Chris Franks, Malgorzata Zedler.

2. Welcome, plus Introductory Technological and Governance Matters

All were welcomed from their disparate points of contact to this first virtual Council meeting. A protocol sheet had been circulated with guidelines on how best to use the Microsoft Teams technology, and Rhydian Williams provided further advice on good conference call techniques as the meeting's 'Organiser'.

Stephen Thomas brought members up-to-date with changes in the Council's composition. John Graystone and Stephen Nicholls had been interviewed in late March and as a result both were appointed to governor roles for 3 year terms. Malgorzata Zedler was a new learner governor, having taken Stephen Nicholls's former position at that same time. With 17 current Council members, three vacancies remained. These were:

- the elected seats for the North West and North East democratic regions, for which there had been no nominations when the positions were advertised in April. Colleagues were being consulted on how to elicit interest from possible candidates; and
- one appointed role from among our Affiliated and Partner Organisations, to be filled with a view to plugging lacunae in skills and expertise.

Correspondence seeking nominations for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair(s) had recently been sent to Council members. Those subsequently received were for John Graystone (as Chair), and Sonia Reynolds and Toni Schiavone (as Vice Chairs). They were therefore duly confirmed in those respective roles for a further calendar year. Daryl Leeworthy added that he felt it important for continuity during this period of very particular change that stewardship of the Organisation remained in such experienced hands.

3. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 12 March 2020 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous Council meeting held at Bangor (with VC link at Cardiff) were approved as a correct record.

Three matters in the minutes were discussed further. Regarding the task and finish working group on branch futures (minute 4), while it was accepted that there had been obvious other priorities over previous weeks, Council members did not feel that this matter could be shelved until matters 'returned to normal': that was likely to be a considerable time away. It was instead imperative to use the sort of technology employed to ensure that this Council meeting was proceeding to shore up the work of existing branches and indeed see whether new, digitally-based branches could develop. Membership issues more generally were related to the issue - a Membership Strategy was currently under preparation. **It was stated that the Campaign, Membership and Communications Group could have a role to play in this also, and that the matter of shaping branches' futures should not remain static.**

On minute 5, the proposed limited staff restructuring presented initially to the Resources Committee had been due to return for consideration at this Council meeting. However, the impact of Covid-19 on the organisation had meant altered priorities, no action taken yet, and indeed revised proposals for the staffing structure. Hence **amended proposals would be put before the Resources Committee meeting in July 2020.**

Finally, on minute 6, the diversity survey for Council members had been postponed because of the welter of other important and urgent actions taken over the previous two months. Given that the survey would take the same form as that for employees to complete, **it was proposed and agreed that it be implemented in parallel with it, before the end of July 2020,** rather than within its original timescale.

4. Harlech land holdings proposal

Rowland Jones of RJ Chartered Surveyors joined the meeting for this agenda item only. He referred members to the background paper which provided updates on the property, and former property, owned by the organisation in Harlech and concentrated on the land holdings owned there. In 2016 two plots had been submitted for consideration for inclusion as candidate sites for housing development in the Snowdonia National Park Authority's Local Development Plan (LDP). The area above the car park, between Ffordd Newydd and Ffordd Isaf, had been turned down (having been submitted more as a marker for the future). Up to 8 acres on Astor Fields north of the town had however been approved by the Authority, and now a plot with 24 proposed residential units (33% of them to be 'affordable') within that 8 acre site had received an expression of interest from housing association Grŵp Cynefin. That matter needed to be linked to the revised Astor Fields grazing agreement with the farmer who occupied the land there.

The Council approved four recommendations that emanated from the paper, as follows:

- **Pursuing with Grŵp Cynefin the potential development of part of the Astor Fields land delineated in the LDP in order to maximise the output for both parties, with the Council to receive a report on the outcome of initial negotiations before considering whether or not to approve a formal option agreement to take the proposal forward;**
- **Granting of a new agricultural tenancy agreement for the then remaining Astor Fields grazing land area to the present occupier of it;**
- **Retaining the plot of land behind (above) the car park, between Ffordd Newydd and Ffordd Isaf, pending an opportunity to make a further application to include it in the LDP in future;**

- **Receiving proposals from/via the Senior Management Team for the timing of disposal/bequeathing of the freehold at Pen Y Graig to Harlech Community Council.**

5. Nia Parry, Honorary President

On her joining the meeting, the Chair expressed the Council's pleasure that Nia Parry had accepted the invitation to become the Organisation's President, a role confirmed by vote at the AGM in late March. She in turn provided background on her career and current work in education and the media, how she had discussed AOC|ALW and her role within it with certain staff in recent days, and how she looked forward to undertaking duties which assisted the organisation. Other Council members confirmed their delight at the appointment and anticipated new contacts and useful connections that Nia Parry could create for the Organisation. The Presidential Remit, included in the papers, laid out the role's details: it was felt that the current Covid-19 challenges meant that such support was needed more than ever. Nia Parry confirmed her willingness to travel throughout Wales when such opportunities re-presented themselves: this included making connections with our branches.

6. Presentation and discussion on our involvement in Youth Work training

Keith Towler joined the meeting for this item. He explained the genesis of the Interim Youth Work Board, following a review of the field by a committee of the National Assembly (now Senedd) which identified a lack of strategic leadership in youth matters. The Welsh Government had asked the Board to set out a sustainable future for Youth Work: the revised strategy that the Board drew up had 'extending entitlement' as its key, rather than the narrower focuses of old. The Board, whose term of office had been extended beyond the end of 2020 because of the pandemic, was connecting with other important bodies in the health, education and disability sectors. Its link with AOC|ALW had been both positive and enthusiastic thus far. He referred to some of the issues under consideration in the present situation - why youth work did not automatically imply 'key worker' status, and redeployment or furloughing of youth workers in the pandemic; and to longer-term youth-related matters such as safeguarding, homelessness, unemployment, digital poverty, well-being and mental health, and vulnerability.

In the discussion that followed, the importance of ensuring that there was a 'one sector' response reflected in the Board's final report was underlined, covering both the maintained sector and the third sector's roles within Youth Work. Wales TUC Cymru's web-site had a whistleblowing section which had recently noted greater emphasis on reporting lack of job opportunities, school and college return concerns, and lack of future prospects, by younger people. This was reflected in Keith Towler's experience of reactions to Covid-19, with a shift to greater support being acknowledged as needed by 18-25 year olds, not merely 12-17 year olds. The importance of mentoring roles for young people was also acknowledged.

Rachel Burton explained what AOC|ALW was doing in this field as a leading provider of qualifications for Youth Development workers, with almost 1,000 people trained over the previous three years. 5% of those had been taught through the medium of Welsh. She mentioned the key partners with which we worked in this specialist field, that meant we were well-positioned as an Organisation both to inform and to influence education in this sector. An Estyn review of youth work education was to be published in October. With the pandemic our training work had stopped, but by the end of Term 3 there would be an on-line safeguarding course available specifically for those in the Youth Work field.

Keith Towler suggested that a question about the key worker status of youth workers could usefully be channelled by the Organisation through Lynne Neagle, MS. He looked forward to working with AOC|ALW

so as to bring pressure on the Welsh government formed post-2021 elections, to implement recommendations from the Interim Board's final report.

7. Chief Executive's Report, May 2020

Kathryn Robson wished to start by acknowledging the exceptional work of all staff over the previous few weeks in making the transition from face-to-face to on-line working. The Chair in turn asked that the Council's appreciation for employees' efforts be minuted. The digital divide had shown itself to be very stark amongst our learners, and while ESOL courses had made great steps forward in terms of on-line provision some other courses were slower in being transformed. The Project Tracker attachment showed two successful grant applications thus far, but the expected drop in curriculum delivery would involve an inevitable financial hit too. Although libraries might open soon - with thorough risk assessments of them in advance by AOC|ALW - other community venues which we used as locations were likely to remain closed for the foreseeable future. Salamatu Fada had information on particular sources of support funds for individual learners (rather than for institutions) that might assist in bridging the digital divide for some: Kathryn Robson undertook to get in touch with her on that.

Attention then turned to the attached Digital Development report, which Rhydian Williams introduced by praising the rapid upskilling of our staff which had occurred. The moves undertaken represented a big organisational shift, with a more truly 3-dimensional educational body emanating from it. The current situation showed examples of good practice (though it was quality rather than quantity that was in place thus far) and there was also a vision of where future investment and attention was needed.

Kathryn Robson asked if there was some nervousness amongst Council members about the degree of increase in our digital offerings. Julie Cook thought quite the opposite, as in her view the Organisation had reacted well and appropriately to introduce a suitable, blended learning approach, and that it was not necessary to pursue the fully virtual route to its extremes. Daryl Leeworthy felt that our hand was being forced anyway, with other institutions in higher and further education leading the way. AOC|ALW should accept that digital delivery would be much more important across the board within education in future, and we would have to keep on building our expertise and our comfortableness with it. Tim Palazon and Salamatu Fada were concerned about the level of exclusion that was likely as a result of this change - for members of the black and minority ethnic community and others who lacked digital literacy. In that respect it would be useful to see greater statistical analysis of who our revised provision was in fact reaching, and who not. There was also a significant difference between providing facilitated e-learning with the support of a tutor, and purely self-directed learning, accessed entirely on-line by a learner without an intermediary educator. The traditional strengths of our work, in its social nature, should not be forsaken completely: otherwise it was likely that an increased lack of engagement/completion of courses would follow. Rhydian Williams said he was aware that c20% of the population – and therefore potentially a higher proportion than that of our possible learners – were digitally excluded and that we should have a role in helping people make a transition to an era of enhanced digital skills, both staff and learners.

For 2020-21 there would be sector-wide guidance from Welsh Government; it was likely that Term 1 courses would start on-line and it was feasible that much of the academic year would continue to be on-line because of safety considerations. Certain staffing and quality accommodations were already being made to reflect this, including greater flexibility with end-dates for 2019-20 courses, especially vocational ones, and there was awareness of possible pressure points both for resources and personnel.

The Council's conclusion was approval to go ahead as set out in the Digital Development paper, with an opportunity to discuss where matters had reached at the Council meeting in two months' time. Smaller

class sizes through having more on-line learning would likely mean higher unit costs, though there were savings to be made elsewhere: the precise financial implications were yet to become clear.

On the attached Curriculum Report, it was pointed out that the Organisation was assisting certain ACL partnerships in the re-distribution of the Welsh Government grant, in which some had had increases and others decreases. This was a positive development, as AOC|ALW was raising its profile through so doing.

8. Risk Register for May 2020

Three new risks were included in the Register to reflect Covid-19 from different angles – loss of income (risk 1.2.3), on-line learning and support changes (2.1.3) and the health of staff and learners (5.1.3). The financial net risk in 1.2.3 - measured as '12: Undesirable' - was thought to be rather underplayed, given continuing uncertainties about the pandemic's longer-term direction. Two other risks whose severity levels had been reduced since the previous version of the Register were noted without comment. On risk 1.1.2 however there was discussion of the continuing reference to a 25% increase in educational delivery over a 3 year period: it was acknowledged that this was now an aspirational, internally-referenced increase and that the official, Welsh Government-funded increase during that period was in fact 16%.

9. Minutes of the most recent Committee and virtual meetings and matters arising from them

The Council noted the minutes of the Learner Experience Committee meeting of 27 February 2020, the Resources Committee meeting of 5 March 2020, and the Audit Committee meeting of 9 March 2020.

On the virtual AGM held on 26 March a formal note of the outcome of the resolutions before it had been circulated. Thanks were recorded to Jonathan Goddard for enabling the event to proceed through an entirely on-line communication and voting system. Follow-up with regard to the Presidential appointment (Nia Parry), the signing and filing of the annual accounts, and implementation of the revised constitution, had already occurred. The three policy motions passed would be added to those from the 2019 AGM at Wrexham in being pursued, and progress on them all would be reported upon at the 2021 AGM.

10. Financial Matters

a) Revised conclusions to Utilisation of the Organisation's reserves and surpluses: the March Resources Committee and Council meetings had made significant spending decisions on the use of forecast surplus funds from 2019/20, and of the Organisation's cash reserves. However, the effects of Covid-19 had been so significant that the Senior Leadership Team wished to recommend that the Council reconsider those decisions in part.

Those recommendations were approved, as follows: the two items relating to use of the previously projected 2019/20 surplus should proceed as agreed: research on the economic/social impact of adult education (£20,000); and the creation, or expansion, of a scholarship fund which referenced Coleg Harlech (£10,000). However, the two items utilising the Organisation's reserves, namely to pay off part of the Organisation's Local Government Pension Scheme deficit (£500,000), and to contribute towards the employment of a person to initiate the establishment of a Tudor Bowen Jones library (£45,000), should be placed on hold until further notice due to the uncertainty created by Covid-19 and the revised current priority of having as many unrestricted cash funds available for our use, flexibly, as possible. It

was acknowledged that the latter recruitment commitment could not be held off indefinitely and needed to be reviewed, in the light of other staffing developments, in the relatively near future;

b) Financial Report and Management Accounts to 30 April 2020: Mark Baines confirmed that there would be no financial clawback from the Welsh Government for this financial year and that there were some cost savings arising on room hire and travel expenses. However, there would be an overspend on tutor costs, as a commitment had been made to tutors to pay them for all of the already arranged courses during Term 3, rather than the normal situation of cutting back on courses as our delivery totals approached their targets; and significant amounts of course fee income would also not be received due to cancellations. The overall effect was that there was now an estimated deficit of £177,000 for 2019/20.

In response to a question about the effect of increased digitalisation of learning on staffing levels, it was stated that digital developments thus far were an expansion, over and above face-to-face delivery commitments, and therefore there were no effects on personnel numbers at present. However, should face-to-face teaching possibilities contract permanently then there could indeed be implications for tutors and possibly for office-based staff. However, our 2020/21 budget was in the early stages of preparation and there was a Welsh Government undertaking that income from it would be precisely as per the amounts for that financial year to which it had previously committed itself.

11. Self-assessment of meeting's proceedings by Council members

The lack of simultaneous interpretation facilities over Microsoft Teams was one drawback which would be further analysed: different video conferencing platforms enabled it to occur. Apart from that, members thought that the meeting had worked well, other than the unforeseen lack of the on-screen Chat box facility's visibility for certain members (including, most tellingly, the Chair): full operation of it would have further facilitated matters. One lesson of relevance for the use of such technology - for teaching and our learners, as much as for business meetings - was that the smaller the screen (e.g. smartphone, iPad) the less satisfactory the experience and less effective the communication channel.

12. Remaining Council meeting date for 2019-20:

- Thursday 23 July: in theory Bangor / Cardiff, but in practice probably a virtual meeting once more

ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 3	Matters arising from the minutes of the Council meeting of 12 March 2020	On the matter of the task and finish working group on branch futures, it was stated that the Campaign, Membership and Communications Group could have a role to play in this also, and that the matter of shaping branches' futures should not remain static.	KR / CH / MB	July 2020
		Amended staff restructuring proposals would be put before the Resources Committee meeting in July 2020.	CH / KR / MB	July 2020

		The Council members' diversity survey would be implemented, in parallel with the staff one, before the end of July 2020.	CH	July 2020
Minute 4	Harlech land holdings proposal	The Council approved four recommendations that emanated from the paper, as follows: - Pursuing with Grŵp Cynefin the potential development of part of the Astor Fields land delineated in the LDP in order to maximise the output for both parties, with the Council to receive a report on the outcome of initial negotiations before considering whether or not to approve a formal option agreement to take the proposal forward; - Granting of a new agricultural tenancy agreement for the then remaining Astor Fields grazing land area to the present occupier of it; - Retaining the plot of land behind (above) the car park, between Ffordd Newydd and Ffordd Isaf, pending an opportunity to make a further application to include it in the LDP in future; - Receiving proposals from/via the Senior Management Team for the timing of disposal/bequeathing of the freehold at Pen Y Graig to Harlech Community Council.	KR / CH / Rowland Jones	July 2020
Minute 10	Financial Matters	The recommendations were approved, as follows: the two items relating to use of the previously projected 2019/20 surplus should proceed as agreed: research on the economic/social impact of adult education (£20,000); and the creation, or expansion, of a scholarship fund which referenced Coleg Harlech (£10,000). However, the two items utilising the Organisation's reserves, namely to pay off part of the Organisation's Local Government Pension Scheme deficit (£500,000), and to contribute towards the employment of a person to initiate the establishment of a Tudor Bowen Jones library (£45,000), should be placed on hold until further notice due to the uncertainty created by Covid-19 and the revised current priority of having as many unrestricted cash funds available for our use, flexibly, as possible. It was acknowledged that the latter recruitment commitment could not be held off indefinitely and needed to be reviewed, in the light of other staffing developments, in the relatively near future.	KR / MB / CH	July 2020