

COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business

12 Noon, Wednesday 30 November 2022

Held at multiple locations via Zoom software

Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 13 inclusive, including minute 6a).

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (Chair), Jan Tiley, Chris Franks, Stephen Nicholls, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Salamatu Fada, Cathy Clark, Dona Lewis; Sam Emmett (other than minutes 6-8), Victory Ezeofor (from minute 5), Marion Burke (to minute 7), Nicole Kinnaird (to minute 6), Siôn Aled Owen (to minute 5), Sonia Reynolds (vice Chair - to minute 3). The meeting was quorate throughout.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Iola Llwyd (interpreter); also Karolina Rucinska (Cynnal Cymru) for minutes 1-3 only.

Apologies: Caroline Davies, Judith Evans, Tim Palazon; Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum & Performance).

2. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 26 September 2022 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous (hybrid) Council meeting, held via Zoom, were approved as a correct record. All action points quoted there had been followed up, or were referred to in papers later in the agenda.

John Graystone declared a related interest, which had commenced for him since that Council meeting: he was interim Director for Wales of the Learning and Work Institute for a 3-month period until 31 January 2023.

3. Report from Cynnal Cymru: Sustainability at Adult Learning Wales

Kathryn Robson introduced Karolina Rucinska, Sustainability Advisor at Cynnal Cymru. This document was the consequence of a point first raised at Audit Committee, and the proposal was that the action plan emanating from the report be put before Resources and Audit committees in future.

Karolina Rucinska talked of the survey undertaken, of the meetings/workshop held and of the proposal that the Seren scheme accreditation be pursued in phases by the Organisation, ultimately up to Level 4. That would include training of all staff and public communications on the Organisation's achievements, on which there should be almost as much emphasis as on the processes of change. It was not merely technological answers that were required - behavioural change amongst colleagues was just as important. Essentially what was being proposed should be integrated into the Organisation's work as seamlessly as feasible, though some extra data collection was needed on a regular basis, internally - for

example as set out in appendix 3 on annual car use for work. A sustainable purchasing policy was an aspect that also needed building into it.

One Council member felt that 2050 was a long way away for certain of the targets, and that it would be useful to have explicit milestones along the way. A key decision was how much priority this should be afforded compared with the core work of providing education: a breakdown of costs and of savings would also be an essential addition to the implementation timetable. In another's opinion 'champions' were needed not only among the staff but also among Council members, and to guarantee greater success the consultants themselves should accompany the process along the way, as it could prove challenging. It was confirmed that Cath Hicks was currently the person appointed to be the staff lead on the matter. Yet another member believed that care needed to be applied in interpreting data, as one set of figures he had seen showed that working from home was more energy intensive than those working within a few miles of home going to their office regularly for work; so certain trade-offs were inevitable.

A couple of people spoke of the positive nature of electric cars, but also of the lack of a charging point infrastructure for them in Wales: could the Organisation install these in its owned offices' car parks? The lack of public grants available for this work meant that it would be an expensive business. There were however suggested steps for action in the report, and in particular some quick wins which would see savings; other moves, such as greater insulation and heat pump installations in the owned offices, would be more expensive investments. The aim should be to lower travel by car all round, regardless of whether it was by electric/other powered vehicle, as all electric cars too were initially environmentally expensive in their construction. Providing greater incentives for use of public transport, or shuttle buses to offices even, could be considered also.

Karolina Rucinska was thanked for her input and left the meeting at this point. A further retainer to ensure Cynnal Cymru's accompaniment of the Organisation's work was possible, if required.

4. Assessment of the membership scheme at Adult Learning Wales

The Chair kicked off this discussion with two observations: that he concluded from reading the report from FR Marketing that the Organisation in effect did not currently have a functioning membership scheme and so could not legitimately call itself a membership organisation at present; and that he felt the annual accounts should make a point of describing briefly how members' money had been used during that year. Cath Hicks then explained the report's structure and suggested key parts which merited discussion.

It was asked: if we were no longer a membership organisation, how would the Welsh Government react to such a development? In answer it was stated that many people within the Welsh Government were not interested or aware that we were a membership organisation, so that would not change perceptions there. However, it was true that both the Chief Executive and Chair used the membership organisation sobriquet to drive home points in deliberations with Senedd and Welsh Government representatives. Council members generally believed that learners as a whole did not understand the benefits of becoming a member; the positive comments in the paper from certain learners who had taken the membership 'plunge' however showed a strong case for strengthening it as a positive factor.

Indeed, all Council members who spoke were in favour of continuation of a membership scheme, but were agreed also that it needed change and reinvigoration. Confusion was sown by the free membership offer, though a more targeted version of it should legitimately continue. Heritage from the Workers' Educational Association was important in respect of membership perpetuation, and the claim to be a learner/student-led organisation would only remain legitimate if there were members actively involved in

its proceedings. Moreover, the constitutional implications of halting a membership scheme were too far-reaching in the eyes of some, with numerous Council seats having to be re-defined.

It was concluded that detailed recommendations from the paper come before the Resources and Learner Experience committees alike, in spring 2023.

5. Strategic Plan for Adult Learning Wales, 2023 - 2026

This emanated from the work undertaken by FR Marketing and the Strategic Planning Day held in May. The Plan had a new presentational style with three sets of objectives (rather than four), and accurately reflected discussions held and inputs received along the way. All objectives were challenging and would demand improvement of the Organisation. Council members were complimentary on its look and its contents.

One question raised was whether a commitment to a 'strong, national and diverse curriculum' should be included. It was acknowledged that this matter had certain financial risks associated with it, and so was perhaps better suited to discussions 'in the margins' as it were, rather than to being included in the document. Council members believed though that, if we truly had a learner-led curriculum and claimed to be a fully national body, as we should, then continuation of such a commitment was paramount, and that the Organisation should resist any financial or political headwinds relating to it, such was its importance. While a balancing act to be performed between demand-led courses and loss-leading smaller classes of a more 'traditional' type was undoubtedly required, **the addition of this phrase would be considered prior to the Plan's finalisation** and promulgation to stakeholders and at the 2023 AGM.

A separate point was raised about how outcomes and detailed measures of success from the Plan would be considered, and whether they should be added for each target within the document. It was pointed out that this was a succinct public document with a specific informational role to perform in this format: it would be for internal documents such as the Key Performance Indicators (see minute 7 below) and the Quality Development Plan to act as the measuring sticks and monitoring pathways for it.

6a). Chief Executive's Report, November 2022

Kathryn Robson mentioned 3 items for information, arising from the previous Council meeting: a description of the Citizens' Curriculum - a newly branded initiative, though something similar to what the Organisation had been doing for over a century in various guises; the still-pending Climate Cymru membership application; and the fact that there had been no tutors recruited (thus far) from our National Eisteddfod presence. She agreed, as the Eisteddfod was quite heavy in terms of use of human and financial resources, that that was something which needed to have tangible outcomes set for it annually, accepting the point that tutor recruitment should not be the sole objective for the Organisation's presence on the *maes*. On the *Taith* international partnership application, the bid being submitted was for a craft project in the Kathmandu valley, Nepal.

The proposal to bring in a 5% staff pay award in December's salary payments and apply a 10% increase to the Real Living Wage, all backdated to August 2022, subject to release of Welsh Government funding for these, was approved by the Council. This was understood to be an interim pay settlement as part of a sector-wide initiative, pending conclusion of a final 2022-23 agreement with the trade unions. Two staff members (one office-based, one tutor) had thus far availed themselves of the interest-free loan scheme established since the previous Council meeting. Chris Franks expressed caution in general about risks associated with taking on broader financial commitments when there were no written undertakings made by the Welsh Government for future years.

Council Confidential Business of 30 November 2020 - see minute 6b), separately minuted.

7. Senior Management Team: Key Performance Indicators for 2022

This document would return to the Council at its January meeting, accompanying a new 2023 calendar year version. That version would be shaped by the revised Strategic Plan just approved, with a sustainability indicator included (see minute 3). It was certain that some of the 2022 measures would not be achieved by the end of the calendar year and so would remain red in colour. These mostly related to the slower than anticipated return of learners and of a fuller curriculum after Covid-19, which had been true in further education as a whole and not merely at Adult Learning Wales.

8. Risk Register for November 2022

The Council noted the updated Register, and asked Audit Committee to consider adding a new risk related to the sustainability drive of the Organisation - as set out in minute 3 above.

9. Council member terms of office - criteria for applying amendments linked to constitutional changes

The changes to the Organisation's Standing Order 21 and Article 10.8 that were agreed at the previous Council meeting (which would allow for longer lengths of service by Council members, and for reduced breaks in their continuity of service) would be presented to the February 2023 AGM as a constitutional resolution.

The criteria on which current and future Council members should be offered extensions to their terms were spelled out by the Clerk, and were based on the diversity categories, skills matrix and attendance record of such members as set out in the appendix to the Standing Orders. **The Council approved these criteria as fair and internally logical, and agreed their application** - should the resolution pass at the AGM - **with the process to be placed in the hands of Council members not falling into the current potential prolongation category.**

10. Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 17 October 2022

Steve Nicholls pointed out that a number of the issues dealt with in these minutes would again be before the mid-December joint meeting of the Resources and Learner Experience committees. These included pension fund developments within the accounts plus the proposed transfer of further funds to Brewin Dolphin. It was confirmed that a sum of £300,000 for acquisition of part of the Astor Fields land in Harlech had been accepted by the building company, and advances on that transaction now depended on receiving planning permission in a timely fashion. The minutes were noted by the Council.

11. Management Accounts for 1 August - 31 October 2022

The narrative in the document underlined how difficult it was to make financial forecasts at present. More details on funding would be known in time for the joint Committee meeting in a fortnight's time, when a possible extension of the tutor travel mileage concession would be discussed, and a decision would be taken on the balance to be reached between using some of the Organisation's financial reserves and planning for a deficit outcome for the year.

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

Difficulties with the simultaneous interpretation on this occasion were noted, as were the travails encountered by the Chair in joining the meeting.

Most discussion however revolved around the strongly expressed view of Chris Franks that regular face-to-face meetings should return for the Council and for the 2023 AGM, as had occurred at other bodies with which he was associated. He received support for this view from some other members. In the opinion of certain others though (including Sam Emmett and Salamat Fada), while there was a case for physical meetings on a couple of occasions per year, virtual gatherings provided a potentially more inclusive option and were a contribution to greater sustainability on the part of the Organisation. Steve Nicholls was not entirely convinced of the sustainability credentials evidence adduced, concerning virtual meetings. **All views were noted. It was concluded that one in every three Council or other meetings in 2023 (as listed below) should be physical-only gatherings; and that the format of the 2023 AGM be considered and consulted upon by Kathryn Robson, in liaison with the Chair, in light of that conclusion.** Committee meetings worked well as blended/hybrid meetings and would continue as such.

13. Council and other meeting dates for 2023

- Tuesday 17 January 2023
- Wednesday 22 February 2023 (Annual General Meeting – tbc if in physical, virtual or hybrid form)
- Thursday 30 March 2023
- Tuesday 16 May 2023 (Strategic Planning Day)
- Thursday 6 July 2023

ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 4	Assessment of the membership scheme at Adult Learning Wales	Detailed recommendations from the paper should come to the Resources and Learner Experience committees alike, in spring 2023.	CH / KR	February 2023
Minute 5	Strategic Plan for Adult Learning Wales, 2023 - 2026	The addition of a phrase concerning a commitment to a 'strong, national and diverse curriculum' would be considered prior to the Plan's finalisation.	KR / CH	January 2023
Minute 6a)	Chief Executive's Report, November 2022	The proposal to bring in a 5% staff pay award in December's salary payments and apply a 10% increase to the Real Living Wage, all backdated to August 2022, subject to release of Welsh Government funding for these, was approved by the Council.	KR / MB	December 2022

Minute 9	Council member terms of office - criteria for applying amendments linked to constitutional changes	The Council approved these criteria as fair and internally logical, and agreed their application, with the process to be placed in the hands of Council members not falling into the current potential prolongation category.	ST	February 2023
Minute 12	Self-assessment of meeting's proceedings by Council members	It was concluded that one in every three Council or other meetings in 2023 (as listed) should be physical-only gatherings; and that the format of the 2023 AGM be considered and consulted upon by Kathryn Robson, in liaison with the Chair, in light of that conclusion.	KR / JG / ST	January 2023