

## **COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business - 11.00 a.m., Tuesday 4 July 2023**

A hybrid meeting held at 9 Coopers Yard, Curran Road, Cardiff and at multiple other locations via Zoom software

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### **Council Open Business - minutes 1 to 14 inclusive.**

#### **1. Attendance and Apologies**

**Present:** John Graystone (in the Chair), Jan Tiley, Chris Franks, Stephen Nicholls, Judith Evans, Tim Palazon, Sam Emmett, Salamatu Fada; Victory Ezeofor (to minute 10 only).

**In Attendance:** Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Iola Llwyd (interpreter). Also Mary Jones & Ruth Stronge (two Inspire! Tutor Award winners for 2023) and Paul Lewis (British Sign Language - BSL - interpreter) for minutes 1 and 2 only.

**Apologies:** Marion Burke, Cathy Clark, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Nicole Kinnaird, Dona Lewis, Siôn Aled Owen; Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum and Performance).

The meeting was quorate throughout, with six people at the physical location in Cardiff.

#### **2. Presentation and discussion with two Adult Learning Wales tutors - winners of 2023 Inspire! Awards**

The first presentation was by Mary Jones - nominated for the Lifetime Achievement award by Jayne Murphy (Curriculum Development Co-ordinator) - who was about to retire having been a BSL teacher with the Organisation for over 15 years. She had been deaf since birth as had multiple generations in her family, but now her 2 great-grandchildren were the first without hearing loss. From Abertyswg originally, she had attended Manchester School for the Deaf. In her teaching career of over 20 years she had taught BSL to teachers at Greenfield Special School, at Merthyr Tydfil College and Rhondda Cynon Taf education authority before moving to Adult Learning Wales. She had received great satisfaction from assisting students to succeed in BSL Level 1 and 2 qualifications. Common challenges she encountered included getting shy learners to gain confidence and break down barriers in their use of BSL, and she had successfully adapted her techniques to continue on-line teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. She observed that finger pointing and shoulder-tapping were accepted as 'short hand' communication means for deaf people, though they might appear rude to some hearing people. Asked why mother and baby sign language courses were useful and on the increase, she said that they were means of pre-speech language communication which also enabled participants to learn basic signs. Kathryn Robson mentioned how inspirational yet modest about her achievements Mary had been throughout her career at ALW.

Ruth Stronge, an ALW partnership tutor, had been an early years and outdoor learning teacher prior to setting up Snowdonia Donkeys, based near Bangor. A chance encounter with an ALW colleague had led to various community courses being offered there, including 'Long Ears Listening', providing sessions for pre-school children/family learning in woodlands with donkeys present. There was some use of BSL in

that group, where adults were also taught donkey care skills and gardening. A Children in Need grant had led to courses for disadvantaged young people and a number of them had then progressed to becoming volunteers at the sanctuary. ALW had also assisted in putting on accredited courses for the first time as part of the sanctuary's summer school. Some youngsters had re-engaged with school/college careers as a result of being at Snowdonia Donkeys, and it was acting as a stepping stone for them that made Ruth most proud. Kathryn Robson had visited when a forest school and art class were in progress and so observed biodiversity being taught there too, with donkeys proving to be therapeutic presences. Some of the sanctuary's staff had recently strengthened the link with ALW by undertaking its 'Train the Trainers' course.

John Graystone, who had been at the Inspire! Awards ceremony earlier in the year, underlined how proud the Organisation felt about their achievements and thanked both tutors and Paul Lewis, interpreter, for their input. All three left the meeting at this juncture.

### **3. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 30 March 2023 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. An update was provided on minute 2: Simon Pirotte, Principal of Bridgend College, had subsequently been appointed chief executive of the CTER on a two-year secondment, starting in September. This was a potentially useful development, as he would be a good advocate for Further Education and a potential counter-balance to any Higher Education bias. Chris Franks however noted the criticisms made by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee, that the open appointment process for such a senior role had been circumvented by making it a Ministerial, rather than a public, appointment - though no criticism had been made of Mr Pirotte as an individual.

### **4. Chief Executive's Report, July 2023**

This was a PowerPoint rather than a written document, with Kathryn Robson and Cath Hicks sharing its on-screen presentation. In follow-up to the previous minute, Kathryn Robson had been interviewed as a possible CTER Board member the previous week, with the outcome to be known in late July or August. The potential conflict of interest that that represented had formed part of the interview discussions. Separately, ColegauCymru had asked for volunteers to represent the FE sector on the Social Partnership Council, and ALW had expressed an interest. The Social Partnership Council was newly-formed, chaired by the First Minister, and would comprise representatives of employers and workers from all sectors.

On teaching regulations, overseen by the Education Workforce Council, all further education tutors would in future need a Level 5 teaching qualification, with a grace period to be given from when the legislation was passed for those who needed to upgrade their qualifications. This included all teaching staff at ALW, as a designated Further Education Institution. Level 3 qualifications would remain the norm for those teaching ACL at unitary authorities, however. A couple of Council members expressed concern as to what this might entail for our tutor base, in particular those with much experience who might not wish to study for an extra qualification - such as carpentry tutors at the Unit 10 Port Talbot Learning Hub. There was also the fear that some ALW tutors could be more easily recruited by other educational providers who paid more, in what could become a more competitive market. Given that this change was coming more quickly than had been anticipated, tutors working for partner organisations (such as Snowdonia Donkeys) could also face greater compliance challenges. Cath Hicks reassured members that 60% of staff already held the Level 5 qualification, and it might be that partners' tutors would be exempted from the legislation as they may be considered to be ad-hoc "guest speakers" with specialisms. What was certainly true was that extra finance would be required to ensure that additional

training for tutors was available, and it was unclear whether that would come from the Welsh Government, although the request had been made.

In other developments, the Organisation's Digital 2030 policy had been submitted (with Council members' input) and, as with the National Charter for Lifelong Learning, ALW was contributing to consultation processes and being seen to be so doing. *Multiply* had one contract confirmed with 5 others pending, via unitary authorities: it was noted that a high proportion of *Multiply* money was to cover the bureaucracy involved, rather than extending student numbers. On Personal Learning Accounts an extra £1.7 million had come ALW's way this financial year, though much of that provision was being outsourced. And active citizenship remained a major theme in much that we did, not just through the Citizens' Curriculum initiative.

There had been good news on the international front, with approval of a *Taith* project on autism in adults linking ALW to Greece, as well as representation on a Thailand visit, confirmed membership of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and new connections with WEA England and Scotland. Interesting new links had been created too with the Shannon Trust (for prisoners in the UK) and Nottingham University/the Raymond Williams Foundation. Salamat Fada mentioned the potential for further global links on issues such as rural women's education or digital training.

On equalities matters, the strides taken in completing the anti-racism action plan were to be reflected in a renewal of the detail contained in ALW's Strategic Equality Plan, providing a more coherent approach across all protected characteristics. One Council member said it was obvious that Welsh Government was imposing great demands in these matters at present: to avoid being pulled in too many directions the Organisation should make sure that it kept to clear priorities. In terms of reduction of the Organisation's estate, an update was that we were to remain at St. David's House in Newtown as the landlord had offered a smaller space office there for ALW's needs. In answer to a question, the Organisation was keeping a watchful eye on building developments in the environs of the Cardiff office as yet more high-rise buildings were going up there, with an awareness that pressure would rise over time on development of our Coopers Yard office site.

On the 2022-23 pay award, there had been a final offer of an additional 1.5% consolidated increase made, on top of the 5% already received in this academic year, plus a further 1.5% one-off payment (or £375, whichever was higher). The Resources Committee had recommended the offer for approval. **The Council duly approved it at this juncture, so that it might form part of the July salary run.**

## **5. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Senior Management Team (SMT): July 2023 progress report**

The 8 overarching SMT KPIs had been approved at the January 2023 Council meeting, and an update was provided which detailed the 45 SMART objectives in place to deliver those KPIs, reflecting the new Strategic Plan and a few additional points arising from the Stackpole planning event. It would not prove practicable to achieve all of the indicators during this calendar year, so some were consciously carried forward to specified months in 2024 as set out in the paper. 7 objectives had been achieved thus far and were coded green. Some of the 8 overarching indicators were to be achieved annually, others by 2026.

## **6. Management Accounts for the ten months 1 August 2022 - 31 May 2023**

A small year-end deficit of £24,000 (less than the previous estimate) was forecast, though that final position would inevitably change in the two remaining months of the financial year. Cash reserves remained high, and the Cost of Living pay increase referred to in the paper had already been approved

(see minute 3). The Chair was intrigued as to why there was expected to be such a major upward swing in expenditure as compared to fairly modest income patterns over the final two months of the year.

Chris Franks mentioned the big increases during the year on income received from the Welsh Government (c£2.5 million more than in the budget). While undoubtedly welcome, it also made the initial budgeting exercise somewhat artificial.

## **7. Proposed budgets for the 2023-24 financial year**

Steve Nicholls pointed out that the £47,000 surplus proposed in the budget (0.5% of turnover for the year) represented the Organisation's norm for budgeting exercises, as it was obliged to aim for a better than break-even outcome. In reality it was acknowledged that major uncertainties meant that the year-end result could be entirely altered. *Multiply's* possible expansion, for example, could throw the figures into very different directions.

Appendix 1 included a cross-section of alternatives for income generation and cost savings that had been contemplated by senior managers. An interesting possibility listed there was that concerning the Local Government Pension Scheme's contributions discrepancy in payments between the Gwynedd and the Cardiff schemes - ALW contributed to both of them. **The Council approved the 2023-24 budgets as presented.**

## **8. Recommendation on the appointment of external auditors for the 5 years from 2022-23 to 2027-28**

The recommendation from the tender process, conducted under the aegis of the Audit Committee and explained in the accompanying paper, was that Baker Knolly Chartered Accountants be re-appointed for the forthcoming 5 years of external audit work. **This was approved by the Council.** Chris Franks thanked Guy Wallace Smith for playing the key role in involvement in the process on the Committee's behalf.

## **9. Outcomes from the Strategic Planning event in Pembrokeshire, 23/24 May 2023**

Conclusions from the residential event were covered in the document. The implementation points on the various policies and strategies mentioned there were to be pursued by the managers responsible for the relevant action plans. The arrangements made for the event were praised.

## **10. Minutes of the Learner Experience Committee meeting held on 13 June 2023**

The Council noted the minutes, including the fact that two new co-opted members had recently joined the Committee. There had been a lengthy discussion on employability courses, and Salamatu Fada (now Chair of the Committee) underlined their importance in terms of the BAME community.

A question was asked about the Organisation's loss of ACL provision on Anglesey to a private provider (a decision taken by Isle of Anglesey County Council). That had been the outcome of a tender exercise, which was frequently an unpredictable process. That was an unfortunate result, but there were other examples among counties in the North region of idiosyncratic mechanisms for distributing ACL funds.

## **11. Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 21 June 2023**

The Council noted the minutes. Steve Nicholls mentioned only two points - that the new Additional Voluntary Contribution shared cost proposal within the Local Government Pension Scheme was now up and running; and that there had been difficulties in releasing monies from ALW's account at Barclays Bank for transfer to a fund in the hands of our investment managers Brewin Dolphin.

## 12. Risk Register for July 2023

The updated version of the Register was noted by the Council, and there were no comments.

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

It was agreed that the tutors' session involving the BSL interpreter at the start of the meeting had gone well, both technically and in terms of content. No use had been made of the Welsh language interpretation option at the meeting, however. The relatively large number of absentees sparked a discussion on Council and Committee gap filling - a point that was subject to action within the KPI document (minute 5). Prof Kevin Morgan of Cardiff University was mentioned as a potential governor worth pursuing.

## 14. Confirmed Council and other meeting dates for 2023-24 academic year

- Tuesday 26 September 2023
- Tuesday 28 November 2023
- Monday 29 January 2024
- Monday 11 March 2024
- Tuesday 9 April 2024 (Annual General Meeting)
- Wednesday 22 & Thursday 23 May 2024 (Strategic Planning Event)
- Friday 5 July 2024

## ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 4	Chief Executive's Report, July 2023	The Council duly approved the balance of the pay rise for 2022-23, so that it might form part of the July salary run.	MB	July 2023
Minute 7	Proposed budgets for the 2023-24 financial year	The Council approved the 2023-24 budgets as presented.	MB	Aug. 2023
Minute 8	Recommendation on the appointment of external auditors for the 5 years from 2022-23 to 2027-28	The Council approved the recommendation that Baker Knoble Chartered Accountants be re-appointed to the external audit role for the coming 5 years.	MB / Matthew Lloyd	July 2023