

## **COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business**

12 Noon, Tuesday 17 January 2023

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 13 inclusive.***

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

**Present:** John Graystone (Chair), Sonia Reynolds (vice Chair), Jan Tiley, Caroline Davies, Chris Franks, Stephen Nicholls, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Cathy Clark, Marion Burke, Tim Palazon, Sam Emmett; Victory Ezeofor and Dona Lewis (to minute 8 only), Salamatu Fada (from minute 3 to minute 8 only). The meeting was quorate throughout.

**In Attendance:** Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum and Performance), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Steffan Wiliam (interpreter). Also Jayne Ireland for minutes 1 and 2 only.

**Apologies:** Judith Evans, Nicole Kinnaird, Siôn Aled Owen.

#### **2. Presentation by Jayne Ireland (Regional Manager, south east Wales) on the current curriculum, its trends and challenges**

Jayne Ireland detailed the high numbers attained in Term 1 of this academic year in the region, with 87% of the whole year's guided hours total already having been allocated for south east Wales early in Term 2. This was such a high proportion in part because Welsh Government's funding this academic year included a 25% uplift/rise in the hourly funding rate within the same overall budget allocation (to assist in covering for potentially smaller class sizes). The effect of this had caught up with the region somewhat unexpectedly when financial and curriculum returns were analysed early in the autumn. It meant a 20% reduction in guided learning hours in order to fulfil the funding allocation, which would in turn inevitably lead to an overall reduction in learners funded by Welsh Government monies.

This was coupled with the significant increase in demand being experienced for ESOL and the need to support Ukrainian nationals. ESOL had represented 70% of the region's educational budget in 2021-22 and was likely to be c60% in this academic year. South east Wales was also the region with the highest spike in educational demand overall, such that it was likely to exceed its 100% delivery total - a background that explained aspects of the following agenda item. It was feasible to 'borrow' money, or tutors, from other regions/programmes, but the other two geographical regions were moving steadily towards fulfilment of their own targets too, so that was not of itself an answer in the medium term.

Community venues remained free of charge by and large (e.g. for employability work, through Jobcentre Plus) but that was not the case with urban teaching on the whole; a new form of understanding on that score came with YMCA Cardiff, which had drawn up an annual agreement with Adult Learning Wales about the cost of using its rooms.

To meet increased demand, class sizes have had to be monitored closely. Alternatively, local authorities had given some funding from their own adult community learning allowances so that Adult Learning Wales could assist in meeting their expenditure targets, and there have been pots of individual money (e.g. from a food bank in Blaenau Gwent) as training budgets. Many partnerships that were active pre-pandemic were returning to action, but there was a strict degree of prioritisation involved in that, as not all could be accommodated with courses. Guidelines had been sent to Curriculum Development Co-ordinators that all such courses should be full recovery ones as of 2023-24.

Innovative bases for co-operation were being introduced to reflect all of this, such as with New Horizons (an organisation specialising in mental ill-health matters) where it was to include our tutors' fees in its budget for the following year. Recovering costs from our partner organisations was more prominent in south east Wales than in other regions, and generally reflected a 'problem of success'. With £70,000 received nationally from the Warm Spaces initiative, some of that was to be spent in the south east region too, with a craft course at Dinas Powys library being the first example. There had even been discussions with FE colleges on whether Adult Learning Wales could assist in using some of their underutilised adult community learning budgets.

Jayne Ireland was thanked for her input and left the meeting at this point.

### **3. Note on 'Future Challenges' and presentation of the Management Accounts for 1 August - 30 November 2022**

The discussion under minute 2 provided a useful backdrop to this item and the financial figures as of the end of November 2022, which were noted. The situation remained changeable: while some partners were in a position to and were willing to pay, overall there had been a decline in fee income. In the weeks since this note had been prepared, the Welsh Government had also stated that it would be acceptable for Adult Learning Wales to use the 'potential clawbacks' of the previous two academic years and write them off as a contribution to the higher demand seen this year. The passing of those weeks had however also seen the potential overspend that was quoted in the note rise to above £1 million.

Of the four options in the paper, adoption of Option 3 was the recommendation of the Senior Management Team and had been recommended too at the joint Resources and Learner Experience Committee meeting of December. Indeed, during that meeting only Option 2 (meeting extra demand in full, with an even bigger contribution from organisational reserves) had been discussed as a possible alternative to Option 3.

Chris Franks, having at the previous Council meeting expressed caution about the risk of taking on financial commitments when there were no written undertakings for them made by the Welsh Government, still found it rather odd that decisions were being taken on the basis of little more than verbal leads from civil servants. He was however more inclined to go ahead, given the indication that write-off of possible clawed back funds would be included in the package.

**Option 3 was approved - having a focused approach to the extra demand for courses by supporting delivery by up to £500,000 over the current allocation this academic year, from Adult Learning Wales's own reserves. That would cost c£340,000 and potentially put the Organisation into a deficit position for 2022-23. This would be done on the understanding that discussions would continue with the Welsh Government and costs would be closely monitored. The possibilities of reallocating staff or of not filling vacancies as further steps in reducing expenditure were also to be considered.**

#### **4. Minutes of the joint Resources Committee and Learner Experience Committee meeting held on 13 December 2022**

Steve Nicholls had chaired this combined meeting and went through salient points in the minutes, which were noted by the Council. Minute 12 referred to a 99% approval rating among learners who had completed evaluation forms for face-to-face courses: this seemed exceptionally high to some, though the Council was informed that such learner feedback surveys were scrutinised regularly by the Learner Experience Committee, in particular on the more critical comments received. On minute 14 and approval to invest a further £500,000 of cash reserves in a recently opened fund run by investment managers Brewin Dolphin, that particular fund had done well in terms of the income made during its first few months of existence.

Caroline Davies (as Learner Experience Committee chair) said that it had been interesting to have a joint gathering for the first time. When asked if it should be done again, the feeling was that with its lengthy agenda it was not appropriate to do it on every occasion but it had been shown that it could work if required again, and it provided insights on the work and content of the 'other' committee's role.

#### **5. Draft Audited Annual Report and Financial Statements to the year ended 31 July 2022**

**The draft Report and Financial Statements were approved by the Council for ratification at the AGM in February 2023,** having been scrutinised by Resources/Learner Experience and by the Audit Committee in December 2022. The large positive swing in the Local Government Pension Scheme's valuation and reduction in its deficit amounts were mentioned. It was pointed out that much of that movement controversially was likely to have come from increased valuations of holdings in petrochemical companies and in arms manufacturers, linked to macro-economic trends and the war in Ukraine.

#### **6. Draft programme for Annual General Meeting/Members' Event on 22 February 2023, with resolutions to be debated**

As a result of the consultation on the matter (agreed at the previous Council meeting) it was confirmed - with minor grumbling - that this Annual General Meeting would again be held remotely. **The programme outlined for the AGM was approved by the Council.**

**On the two resolutions being proposed, both were accepted by the Council as being in accordance with the Organisation's principles and so should be debated.** The first one on constitutional amendments would be proposed on Council's behalf by Victory Ezeofor and seconded by Dona Lewis. That on the prolongation of Nia Parry's term as President would be proposed by Jenni Jones-Annetts and seconded by Jan Tiley.

The members' event following the AGM on 22 February would be on trade unions and trade union education. Marion Burke had been responsible for putting together the speakers and themes that underlined the broad array of work conducted by unions and their historical link with WEA/Adult Learning Wales. The recent death of Clive James, a trade union course tutor at the Organisation, would be mentioned at the event.

#### **7. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 30 November 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. The five action points quoted there were briefly covered: in terms of

the final one (re. minute 12) it was confirmed that, following consultation, the Strategic Planning Day in May and one of the timetabled Council meetings in 2023 would be physical gatherings.

Dona Lewis was congratulated on her recent appointment as Chief Executive of Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Genedlaethol / National Centre for Learning Welsh.

## **8. Chief Executive's Report, January 2023**

Kathryn Robson used a PowerPoint presentation to make her key points. On the *Multiply* mathematics programme, a £250,000 agreement had been struck with our involvement in the South West and Mid Region; and an Innovation Fund application would be submitted the following week. As for the *Taith* international partnership application, the fate of the bid submitted for a Nepalese project would be known by late February, and in a separate *Taith* initiative Jayne Ireland and Mark Baines would be part of a wider group travelling to Thailand in March. A link with a Greek organisation had also been instituted.

A new organisational web-site had been launched that week, and Adult Learning Wales was also becoming a Trauma Informed Organisation. In reallocating resources to priority areas, the possibility of future voluntary redundancy proposals could not be discounted. Should they come to pass then the Resources Committee would be fully involved in the process. Senior staff continued to make representations to ensure that adult education remained central to the work of the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), and there would be an opportunity for Council members to hear from civil servants closely linked to the CTER's creation at the March Council meeting. The CTER's Chair and Deputy Chair had recently been appointed. Other senior personnel changes at the Learning and Work Institute Wales, and ColegauCymru were noted as were the appointments of the new Welsh Language Commissioner and the new Future Generations Commissioner. There had also been changes in senior grades within education at the Welsh Government.

The interest-free loan scheme had still been utilised by two staff members only (one office-based, one tutor) and would be subject to a reminder to all staff in early 2023. Even if take-up was lower than anticipated its nature as a goodwill gesture had been broadly appreciated. The mileage expenses dispensation for tutors' travelling costs had been wound up at the end of 2022 due to its cost, but as an alternative (and cheaper) contribution all tutors' annual registration fees for joining the Education Workforce Council would be paid by the Organisation - a move appreciated by the Council.

On marketing initiatives, a contact had been made with ITV Wales on a potential story, and Nation Radio was again mentioned as a possible outlet. And on education provision, 74% of the Welsh Government target (of 90%) had been reached overall, with a further 10% being classified as 'engagement activity' which would not be accounted for in the student data and targets.

## **9. Senior Management Team: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2022 and those proposed for 2023**

On the 2022 end-of-year achievements, the inability to reach the target on the provision of Continuing Professional Development needed re-consideration. That was the one target that had failed to be met for a number of successive years, despite the introduction of new initiatives such as the 2022 Inset Week. It was possible that the metric needed changing to reflect that so many tutors were part-time, and that offering evening sessions could provide greater flexibility. The Council accepted the 2022 document in its final form.

The 2023 KPI document had evolved to reflect the recently approved Strategic Plan 2023-26: progress in meeting achievements would be detailed as the calendar year proceeded. The indicators therein were

contingent on operational activity, recorded on a system established by the Digital Development Team and linked to the Organisation's Quality Development Plan. **The Council approved the document as presented.**

#### **10. Risk Register for January 2023**

The Audit Committee's December meeting had concurred with the Council's suggestion of adding a new risk related to the Organisation's sustainability drive: this was the single addition to the Register (risk 5.1.4). The Council noted the updated Register, briefly discussing risk 1.2.2 on pension costs and liabilities and whether its wording or risk level should be amended given the most recent Local Government Pension Scheme valuation.

#### **11. Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 16 December 2022 and its Chair's annual report to the Welsh Government**

Documents before the Committee had told of the high standards upheld in the Finance Section's work, a viewpoint reiterated by the external auditor during the 'in camera' session with Committee members (minute 5). The Chair's annual report had received the Committee's endorsement (minute 9). While the Council noted the minutes as a whole, John Graystone mentioned in passing that one approach used in some organisations to evaluate an audit committee's performance was for its chair to discuss each member's opinions on its work, individually.

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

It was noted that the simultaneous interpretation facility had not been utilised at all on this occasion - a first since its institution in May 2017.

The Chair asked whether having certain Council meetings at differing times of the day - starting in the morning or in the afternoon, rather than straddling lunch-time as was the norm - would be useful. A number of members thought that mid-morning starts in particular, now that fewer meetings entailed journeys to attend them, would be a good proposition for virtual/hybrid Council meetings.

#### **13. Council and other meeting dates for 2023**

- Wednesday 22 February (Annual General Meeting – in virtual form)
- Thursday 30 March
- Tuesday 16 May (Strategic Planning Day)
- Thursday 6 July

***Council Confidential Business of 17 January 2023 - see minute 14, separately minuted.***

## ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 3	Note on 'Future Challenges'	Option 3 was approved - having a focused approach to the extra demand for courses by supporting delivery by up to £500,000 over the current allocation this academic year, from Adult Learning Wales's own reserves. That would cost c£340,000 and potentially put the Organisation into a deficit position for 2022-23. This would be done on the understanding that discussions would continue with the Welsh Government and costs would be closely monitored. The possibilities of reallocating staff or of not filling vacancies as further steps in reducing expenditure were also to be considered.	KR / MB	February 2023
Minute 5	Draft Audited Annual Report and Financial Statements to the year ended 31 July 2022	The draft Report and Financial Statements were approved by the Council for ratification at the AGM in February 2023.	ST / MB	February 2023
Minute 6	Draft programme for Annual General Meeting/ Members' Event on 22 February 2023, with resolutions to be debated	The programme outlined for the AGM was approved by the Council. On the two resolutions being proposed, both were accepted by the Council as being in accordance with the Organisation's principles and so should be debated.	ST	February 2023