

COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business - 12.30 p.m., Tuesday 26 September 2023
A virtual meeting held at multiple locations via Zoom software

Council Open Business - minutes 1 to 11 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: John Graystone (in the Chair), Jan Tiley, Chris Franks, Marion Burke, Cathy Clark, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Nicole Kinnaird, Stephen Nicholls, Judith Evans, Tim Palazon, Sam Emmett, Salamatu Fada; Dona Lewis (to end of minute 4).

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); Iola Llwyd (interpreter). Also Rhydian Williams (Digital Development Manager) for minutes 1 to 5 only.

Apologies: Victory Ezeofor; Siôn Aled Owen.

The meeting was quorate throughout. A slideshow of recent organisational activities played as people joined the meeting virtually.

2. Farewell

John Graystone announced that this would be Marion Burke's last meeting as a governor, as she was retiring from her job at Wales TUC Cymru in October. She was thanked for her contribution as a Council member and for the way that ALW's strong partnership with the TUC had been maintained during her tenure.

3. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 4 July 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. All action points listed at the end of those minutes had been implemented.

4. Chief Executive's Report, September 2023

This was a PowerPoint presentation rather than a written document: Kathryn Robson, Mark Baines and Cath Hicks shared its on-screen elaboration. After two tutors had won Inspire! awards earlier in the year (and made presentations at the July Council meeting), three learners had won awards at the equivalent Inspire! ceremony earlier in the month. Kathryn Robson had been unsuccessful as a candidate for the CTER Board, but hoped that she would have a place on future sub-committees there. She continued to chair the Adult Learning Review's National Programme of Co-ordination. There was discussion of ALW's presence at the National Eisteddfod at Boduan in August, on which a report would be written. While

figuring as part of the Third Sector stand meant there had been good networking opportunities, footfall had been smaller than at the previous year's event. Participation at other public events was being considered for 2023-24.

On curriculum matters, the lucrative nature of ESOL provision was again noted, and with a policy funding review underway there was a chance that it would become even more financially advantageous to teach. Certain Council members again referred to the worries expressed at committee meetings about the potential excess and imbalance caused by the significant shift to ESOL work, and the continuing need to push for more non-Welsh Government funding as a means of diversification. The recent folding of the Chwarae Teg charity, which had also received significant Welsh Government funds for educational courses they ran, showed the dangers of over-dependence; however, there might also be opportunities for ALW to take on some of the provision that had been theirs.

Figures from the 2022-23 academic year showed that a creditable 92% of the Welsh Government's target had been reached. New initiatives for this year included a proposal to work alongside University of Wales Trinity St. David (UWTSD) as a 'technical institute', enabling ALW to continue its youth work education up to Levels 4, 5 and 6. The Port Talbot Repair Café (based at the Hub there) was another recent development that promised the breaking of new ground. The learner feedback figures - and the implications of their exceptionally high percentage rates of satisfaction - were discussed; and there was further information shared on international developments and involvement.

5. Digital Strategic Plan for Adult Learning Wales

The strategy document had been circulated beforehand. Rhydian Williams, who presented this item using the Prezi platform to make key points, admitted that it was a rather dry and technical document but an essential one, as it responded to Welsh Government demands in its nature and content. It formed the Organisation's commitments towards the Digital Framework 2030 initiative, with a series of internal and external priorities. JISC had been co-ordinating work on that all-Wales initiative since 2019, and as Digital Development Manager Rhydian had been leading input from ALW to the process. Welsh Government was content with the Strategic Plan as it stood, and it now needed formal sign-off internally by the Chair and Chief Executive.

Discussion ensued on the move to increased cloud-based systems, in terms of their safety: there was reassurance provided on their security against potential cyber criminals. Conversely, Welsh Government funding was concentrated on physical materials and had not adapted adequately to financing appropriate virtual/cloud infrastructures. Thus it would need the use of internal resources to finance much of the change that was coming in that domain.

The Council approved the signing of the document by the Chair and Chief Executive.

6. Management Accounts for 1 to 31 August 2023 (first month of the financial year only)

While it was too early in the financial year to see overall trends, some of the challenges that were on the horizon were clear. The budget for the year included provision for pay increases, but the actual sum agreed could be greater than that and without certainty that the Welsh Government would cover the shortfall. Indeed, the Welsh Government was facing an overall deficit of £900 million through its funding formula, and had recently requested that all FE organisations prepare for a 10% cut in their budgets for 2024-25. Discussions about that were continuing. A question was asked whether our healthy reserves position might be an adverse factor in financial considerations, but Mark Baines reassured the Council that that should not be the case.

7. Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete - actions being undertaken by Adult Learning Wales

Cath Hicks explained that ALW was part of a ColegauCymru/Welsh Government working group that had just been set up on this matter. It seemed that we were in a similar position to many colleges, in believing that there were no immediate concerns for the buildings that were occupied by office staff. However, the FE sector had not undertaken checks on the presence of this material in the past, and there would need to be highly intrusive surveys at great cost in order to be certain that the positive assumptions were indeed the case. The report was noted by Council.

8. Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 12 July 2023

Chris Franks presented these briefly, and their contents were noted by Council.

9. Risk Register for September 2023

This had been refreshed/updated by senior managers to reflect the contemporary situation. It was asked whether Risk 5.1.3 on Covid-19 needed to be retained. Its exclusion had recently been contemplated by managers, but on balance it was felt correct to keep it in: a number of staff had contracted Covid-19 in recent weeks.

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

Those Council members who had also participated in that morning's Anti-Racism training workshop, run by the Black Leadership Group, had found it interesting, participatory and enjoyable. Certain Council members felt that there could be a compromise position on the Chief Executive's report when it formed a presentation at the actual meeting, which could be still be sent out in advance (in reduced format). There was also a request that the individual agenda papers be more effectively separated and split up, rather than distributed as a single PDF document.

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

- Saturday 25 November 2023: Christmas Fayre, Port Talbot Learning Hub
- Monday 29 January 2024
- Monday 11 March 2024
- Tuesday 9 April 2024 (Annual Conference and AGM - Theatr Soar, Merthyr Tydfil)
- Wednesday 22 & Thursday 23 May 2024 (Strategic Planning Event - Nant Gwrtheyrn, Gwynedd)
- Friday 5 July 2024

The next Council meeting, scheduled for Tuesday 28 November 2023, was proposed as a face-to-face meeting, to be held in Cardiff or Ebbw Vale. However, there was a complication as the Chair was unavailable for that particular date. **It was agreed that the Clerk would circulate alternatives for it and see which was the one that most suited Council members.**

ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 5	Digital Strategic Plan for Adult Learning Wales	The Council approved the signing of the document by the Chair and Chief Executive.	KR / John Graystone	Oct. 2023
Minute 11	Confirmed Council and other meeting dates for 2023-24 academic year	It was agreed that the Clerk would circulate alternatives for the November Council meeting date, and see which was the one that most suited Council members.	ST	Oct. 2023