

COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business - 1.00 p.m., Tuesday 28 November 2023
A hybrid meeting held at 9 Coopers Yard, Cardiff and at other locations via Zoom software

Council Open Business - minutes 1 to 11 inclusive.

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: Stephen Nicholls (in the Chair), Salamatu Fada, Sam Emmett, Siôn Aled Owen, Tim Palazon, Jan Tiley, Nicole Kinnaird, Chris Franks, Cathy Clark, Judith Evans, Dona Lewis; John Graystone (who joined the meeting part-way through).

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum and Performance); Iola Llwyd (interpreter). Learners Jane Johnston and Rachel Parker (accompanied by Curriculum Development Co-ordinator Nicola Holmes) joined the meeting for items 1 & 2 only.

Apologies: Victory Ezeofor, Jenni Jones-Annetts; Stephen Thomas (Clerk).

The meeting was quorate throughout.

2. Learner Presentations

Learner Jane Johnston opened the meeting by sharing the background to her learning with ALW. With 50 years' experience in education, Jane was forced to retire from her teaching role after suffering from chronic illness, pain and anxiety. At this point, her house became her world. Jane was introduced to ALW 4 years previously, when she attended a class in her local church hall with tutor Maria Parry-Jones. Jane loved the class and persisted with it, despite the face-to-face learning environment triggering some of her symptoms and proving challenging. Things changed again when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, as Jane joined online classes and found that she thrived on their accessibility and being able to meet people from all over Wales in the comfort of her home. Jane's mental health improved significantly, and her physical health also through using her brain more. ALW courses and Jane's learning commitment gave her "a reason to get up each day" and a "sense of purpose" and meant that she did not feel alone. Alongside this, she was able to develop her sewing and crafting skills, progressing to making her own items to sell and donate and therefore contributing to society.

Jane gave positive feedback regarding ALW courses and particularly her tutor Maria, whilst also providing constructive comments regarding improvements required to course booklets and the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The senior managers present confirmed that the improvements suggested had been previously identified and were being implemented.

Jane then handed over to Inspire! Award winner Rachel Parker, a learner from our Counselling course in Wrexham. Rachel said that she was a recovering addict who had experienced significant childhood trauma. She could never apply herself at school, went through the care system and took heroin for 17 years. Though in some

ways she should not still be alive, she had managed to turn her life around and was 9 years recovered. After rehabilitation Rachel decided she wanted to pursue education, completing a college course, then progressing to ALW's, and moving from Introduction to Certificate to Diploma level Counselling courses. Rachel was particularly proud of the Inspire! award that she had won earlier this year, was grateful to ALW for providing opportunities and the chance to give back to society, and excited to be working with clients with drug, alcohol and mental health problems herself next year.

Council members thanked Jane and Rachel for sharing their inspirational stories. Their courage throughout the challenging circumstances they had faced was commended, and their stories would be further shared in order to inspire and motivate others.

3. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 26 September 2023 and matters arising

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous virtual 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. Report on progress towards Sustainability / Seren Scheme at ALW; and Environmental Policy

Following ALW's engagement with environmental consultants Cynnal Cymru during 2022, Cath Hicks presented a report outlining developments since the completion of that consultancy. Progress was demonstrated in key environmental areas including carbon emissions, buildings and travel, water, waste, purchasing, staff commuting and home working, training, governance and influence. ALW continued to work towards accreditation via the Seren Scheme (BS8555 Seren Scheme) in relation to our owned offices in Cardiff and Bangor. Recommended by Cynnal Cymru due to its low cost, phased approach and relative ease of implementation, the scheme covered all the important aspects of an environmental management system, and provided a good structure for taking action at this stage of transition.

A revised Environmental Policy was presented to Council members for approval. Subject to small amendments (including reference to the whole of the supply chain in the purchasing section, and a greater emphasis placed on the 'circular method') the policy was approved.

5. Chief Executive's Report, November 2023

Kathryn Robson presented her report to Council, highlighting some key updates as follows. It was encouraging that the social value research grant, funded by the Welsh Government, was underway. Sam Emmett asked if ethical research methods were in place for it; Kathryn Robson would discuss that with him outside the meeting.

ALW was currently exploring various opportunities to become a technical institute under the umbrella of the University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD), building on the current Youth Work programme whilst looking to develop and enhance other curriculum streams. The potential for "stepping on toes" was recognised, but it was confirmed that this work would complement rather than compete with the university.

Positive strategic developments were highlighted including partnership with Coleg Sir Gâr and our role in numerous Multiply programme contracts, though the Chair expressed surprise that there was no basic framework document in place for it thus far. Provision had increased significantly in the North region, due to factors such as better marketing, web-site improvements, and partnerships with libraries working well.

A formal offer of a 5% pay increase for all staff, backdated to 1 August 2023, had been put forward by the Wales Negotiating Committee Further Education (WNCFE), and was presented to Council for approval at the

recommendation of Resources Committee. **The 5% pay increase was approved, though a final sum for the 2023-24 year remained subject to ongoing negotiations with trade unions.**

Forthcoming events were highlighted, including the Port Talbot Repair Café Launch on 7 December 2023, the Knowledge Transfer Fund Community Development Event on 27 February 2024, and the Conference, Learner Awards and AGM on 9 April 2024. The learner data audit for 2022/23 had concluded with an overwhelmingly positive outcome: only one learner record error was identified. The team were congratulated on this success, and the hard work required to achieve such an outcome.

Members of the Senior Management Team then responded to various questions and comments from Council members:

- Attracting and engaging learners for Multiply projects was being done through using various methods including partnership working, our web-site, and social media.
- The Welsh Government's Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) had seen increased demand in recent months. The challenges associated with it were recognised and would be carefully considered in preparation for the next academic year.
- A small number of tutors had been selected to trial annualised hours tutor contracts, based on the curriculum areas they taught and the hours worked previously. The trial would continue throughout this academic year.
- The cost of Purchasing Virtual/Augmented Reality (VAR) headsets was recognised, such that the benefits and potential return on investment on them would need establishing before purchase.
- Recruitment of tutors able to teach in the Welsh language remained a challenge, though some appointments had been made. It was recognised that those with Welsh language skills did not always feel confident to teach in Welsh. Opportunities to increase the number of Welsh language tutors, potentially through partnership arrangements, would continue to be sought.
- It was recognised that anti-racist action plans could be seen as tick-box exercises for some organisations. In order to give ALW's plan real credibility we would need a member of staff who was from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background to push this agenda. Funding had prevented us from creating an additional post to date, but we would continue to review the situation.

Council members commended the SMT on the numerous initiatives underway and the progress made in so many areas, despite the small size of the team.

6. Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting of 16 October 2023

The Chair summarised the main points discussed at the previous month's meeting. These included a new business continuity plan tool; the closing of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) project at the end of December; confirmation that our owned and rented offices were free from Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC); a report on marketing activity over the previous 6 months; and a detailed discussion on our financial position (covered under the following minute).

7. Financial Statements - Management Accounts for 1 August to 31 October 2023

Mark Baines outlined the financial challenges currently facing the Welsh Government across the board, and in the FE sector in particular. The impact of those challenges on ALW's funding was currently unknown; however, it was likely that funding for part-time learning provision would be reduced, with a disproportionately negative effect on the Organisation. There was also the potential for reduction in or loss of the funds we currently benefited from, such as the Personal Learning Account (PLA) and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. We would not face in-year 2023-24 cuts, but the position for the following financial year was uncertain.

There were nevertheless a couple of positives for ALW: our involvement with the Multiply programme and the financial benefits associated with it, and our healthy financial reserves (though it was noted that the Welsh Government was looking at reserves held by colleges when taking financial decisions). Further information would be provided as it became available. In the meantime, ALW continued to look at areas of efficiency, cost savings and income generation opportunities. **It was suggested that, when we had more concrete financial information regarding 2024-25, it would be useful to draw up a plan outlining how we would potentially use our reserves.**

8. Risk Register for November 2023

An additional risk had been included within the Register, relating to the potential for a cyber and/or fraudulent attack on our banking processes, along with the measures in place to avoid this risk. Council noted that and the Register's contents as a whole.

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

The written version of the Chief Executive's report was welcomed by those Council members who preferred to view the details of it in advance of the meeting, rather than having a 'live' visual presentation.

10. Any Other Business

Tim Palazon highlighted that 2026 marked the centenary of the General Strike. **It was agreed that ALW should plan to recognise this in some way, potentially during Adult Learners' Week. He undertook to explore the theme further and come back to Council with suggestions.**

In line with overall commitments to staff wellbeing, **Jan Tiley requested that ALW consider covering the cost of flu vaccinations for those members of staff who were not eligible for a free vaccine.**

11. Dates for Council and associated meetings in 2024:

- Monday 29 January 2024
- Monday 11 March 2024
- Tuesday 9 April 2024 (Annual Conference inc. our AGM: Theatr Soar, Merthyr Tydfil)
- Wednesday 22 & Thursday 23 May 2024 (Strategic Planning Event: Nant Gwrtheyrn, Gwynedd)
- Friday 5 July 2024

ACTION POINTS

| Reference | Minute name | Action agreed | Action by whom | Action by when |
|-----------|---|---|----------------|----------------|
| Minute 4 | Report on progress towards Sustainability / Seren scheme at ALW; and Environmental Policy | A revised Environmental Policy was presented to Council members for approval. Subject to small amendments (including reference to the whole of the supply chain in the purchasing section, and a greater emphasis placed on the 'circular method') the policy was approved. | CH | Jan. 2024 |

| | | | | |
|----------|--|--|------------------|------------|
| Minute 5 | Chief Executive's Report, November 2023 | The 5% pay increase was approved, though a final sum for the 2023-24 year remained subject to ongoing negotiations with trade unions. | MB / CH | Jan. 2024 |
| 7 | Financial Statements - Management Accounts for 1 August to 31 October 2023 | It was suggested that, when we had more concrete financial information regarding 2024-25, it would be useful to draw up a plan outlining how we would potentially use our reserves. | SMT | Jan. 2024 |
| 10 | Any Other Business | It was agreed that ALW should plan to recognise the centenary of the General Strike in some way, potentially during Adult Learners' Week 2026. Tim Palazon undertook to explore the theme further and come back to Council with suggestions. | Tim Palazon / CH | March 2024 |
| 10 | Any Other Business | Jan Tiley requested that ALW consider covering the cost of flu vaccinations for those members of staff who were not eligible for a free vaccine. | SMT | Jan. 2024 |