

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE JOINT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (BUDGET MONITORING)**

**SUBJECT: JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (BUDGET
MONITORING) - 9TH MARCH, 2020**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. HEALY (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook
J. Holt
C. Meredith
M. Cross
G. A. Davies
G. L. Davies
M. Day
P. Edwards
K. Hayden
J. Hill
W. Hodgins
H. McCarthy
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
L. Parsons
K. Pritchard
T. Smith
B. Summers
S. Thomas
H. Trollope
J. Wilkins
B. Willis
L. Winnett

**WITH: Chief Officer Resources
Corporate Director of Social Services
Interim Corporate Director of Education
Head of Community Services
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor**

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Paulsen and T. Sharrem.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>Councillor J.C. Morgan declared an interest in the following:</p> <p>Item No. 5 Capital Budget Monitoring, Forecast for 2019/2020 Financial Year (as at 31st December, 2019) (<i>Tredegar HLF</i>)</p> <p>Councillors W. Hodgins & L. Parsons declared an interest in the following item:</p> <p>Item No. 7 Revenue Budget Monitoring – 2019/2020 Forecast Outturn to 31st March, 2020 (as at 31st December, 2019) (<i>Aneurin Leisure Trust</i>)</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (BUDGET MONITORING)</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th January, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 18TH NOVEMBER 2019</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the Joint Scrutiny (Budget Monitoring) Committee held on 18th November, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><i>Civil Parking Enforcement</i></p>	

A discussion ensued when Members' expressed concern that schools were not being prioritised for patrols, but patrols were being undertaken of other areas that were not deemed a priority.

A Member sought information on the number of parking fines that had been issued in every area of the Borough, and the Chair confirmed that this information would be provided.

Another Member referred to the access road to Tredegar Sports Centre which was subject to yellow lines and within the boundary of Tredegar Comprehensive, and asked whether patrols could be undertaken within the site.

A brief discussion ensued when Members expressed concern that no Officer within the Environment Department was available to answer questions on the Civil Parking Enforcement, and the Chair undertook to raise this issue with the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

A Member pointed out that it was agreed previously that the Borough's town centres and schools would be prioritised in the first instance, however, patrols would also be undertaken of other areas.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.

The Head of Community Services joined the meeting at this juncture.

No. 6 **CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR 2019/20**
FINANCIAL YEAR

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources presented the report which provided a forecast financial position to the end of March, 2020 across all Portfolio, and also provide details of any significant adverse and/or favourable variances.

The overall financial position as forecast at 31st December, 2019 indicated a nil variance against a total in year capital budget of £23.7m, and it was anticipated that all in year capital expenditure

would be fully funded.

The following points were then raised by Members:-

Active Living Services – Splash Pad

A Member said when this was previously reported to Committee the funding was estimated at £144k. He asked why this figure had now reduced to £110k and also requested an update on progress of the splash pad.

In response the Chief Officer Resources said she understood that the figure of £144,699k in the previous report was an error. No additional monies had been allocated to the project other than the £110k funded by Welsh Government.

A discussion ensued when the Corporate Director Social Services explained that a request for additional money was made to Welsh Government, and they granted £20k, however, this additional funding was subject to a deadline for spending the monies. This was not possible as a definite site had not been agreed so the extra funding did not come to fruition. In relation to the Festival Park site, he was aware that discussions were currently taking place regarding a possible change in ownership of the site, and a report would be submitted when more information was available.

A Member said Parc Bryn Bach would have been a more suitable site for the project and felt that this had not been adequately pursued.

Another Member felt it was time to consider other options, rather than 'sitting' on the money, and the Corporate Director confirmed that another option was being considered in the event that the Festival Park site does not materialise.

A discussion ensued when a Member asked whether it was intended to revisit the option for the project at Parc Bryn Bach.

The Corporate Director explained that one of the problems initially was the lack of ground required for the project. Also the Leisure Trust did not see it as a financially viable project for them in terms of the extensive equipment required and the ongoing maintenance cost of the facility.

CCTV Update

A Member asked whether the Police were able to access the Council's CCTV system.

The Chief Officer Resources said they did not have access and when they require footage we download it and provide it to them. However, access for the Police was being considered but it was a complex in terms of technology.

A Member requested that an update on CCTV be provided for a future meeting.

The Chair agreed that a report would be scheduled into the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme.

Electric Vehicle Charge Points

In response to question raised by a Member regarding the electric vehicle charging points, the Head of Community Services explained that funding was allocated on a Gwent wide basis, and Consultants were appointed to identify the most suitable locations. He understood that the sites had already been determined.

A discussion ensued when the Officer confirmed that the electric charging point in the multi storey car park had been vandalised. He said vandalism of charging points would be a challenge for the Council moving forward and the costs needed for repairs.

LTF Metro Plus

A discussion ensued when a Member expressed concern that Members had not been provided with an update on progress of the LTF Metro Plus, and that the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services should have been in attendance to answer questions.

The Chief Officer Resources said she was unable to provide details on the scheme. She said Appendix 2 identified which schemes had been allocated additional grant funding.

The Chair requested that an update on the LTF Metro Plus be

included as an action.

The Head of Community Services said he understood that the additional money was allocated through City Deal for further consultancy investigation and feasibility study.

Abertillery LC Demolition

In response to a question raised the Head of Community Services explained that legal advice was being sought on the value of the claim prior to submission. A report was intended in due course.

Cemeteries

A Member said a maintenance programme of the Borough's cemeteries had been agreed, and asked why no money had been spent to date.

The Head of Community Services explained that prior to the Christmas period Members went through the capital budget and allocated funding for works to cemeteries for the next 2 or 3 years. Funding of £70k was allocated for year 1, commencing 1st April, 2020, and a list of works was currently being drawn up in line with that funding profile.

The Committee AGEED to recommend that the report be accepted and Members:

- i. Continue to support appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council;
- ii. Note the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team to safeguard Authority funding

No. 7 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - 2019/20, FORECAST OUTTURN TO 31ST MARCH 2020

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources presented the report which provided Members with the forecast financial outturn position across all portfolios for the financial year 2019/20, and reviewed the actions taken forward to move towards a balanced outturn position.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points

contained therein. The forecast end of year adverse variance had increased by £57k since quarter 2. Four portfolios were forecasting adverse variances totalling £0.216m, however, there were a number of cost pressures identified across all portfolios. Appendix 1 highlighted those services where the adverse variance exceeded £15k, and Action Plans to address those cost pressures were highlighted in Appendix 4.

The following points were then raised by Members:

Meals on Wheels

A Member referred to the increase in the adverse variance within Meals on Wheels, and questioned whether the service was being promoted within hospitals etc.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that marketing was being undertaken, as this was identified as part of the review of the service, but unfortunately the amount of meals being requested had seemed to plateau. The adverse variance was a carryover, and was the result of unrealistic income targets.

Littering and Dog Control Orders

A Member asked whether the adverse variance was money owed to the Authority in the way of fixed penalty notices.

In response the Chief Officer Resources explained that the adverse variance was due to the fact that less fines were being generated.

The Member said he understood that Public Protection had agreed to extend the current enforcement contract and asked whether this would increase the adverse variance further.

The Head of Community Services said under the new contract arrangements there would be zero cost to the Authority.

Cwmcrachen Caravan Site

A Member expressed concern regarding the adverse variance, and the Head of Community Services confirmed that measures were being put in place to address the issue.

ICT Service

In response to a question raised by a Member the Chief Officer Resources reported that the updated forecast for the ICT Service was a balanced budget.

Flood Defence & Land Drainage

A Member referred to the recent flooding experienced within the Borough and asked whether a more prudent budget should be put in place for future years.

The Chief Officer Resources said it was predicted that the current budget of approximately £55k would be utilised this year. However, any future issues arising could be considered as part of the budget setting process.

The Head of Community Services said the budget was proportional in terms of the Authority's Flood Management Action Plan which was reported to Scrutiny on an annual basis. In relation to the recent flooding there would be opportunity to bid for Welsh Government funding, and he confirmed that the Action Plan would be closely monitored to establish future requirements.

Grounds Maintenance (Income from letting of playing fields, ground rent & wayleaves)

A Member requested more detailed information on the income generated, and the Chief Officer Resources undertook to investigate.

Environmental Health (Public Protection collaboration with Torfaen CC)

A Member asked whether the end of the collaboration arrangement with Torfaen had attributed to the adverse variance.

The Chief Officer Resources said the revised estimate was based on an income stream of £108k, but it was likely that £86k would be achieved. She undertook to check whether this was the result of the end of the collaboration.

A further brief discussion ensued when Officers clarified points raised by Members regarding various budgets.

Councillor W. Hodgins left the meeting at this juncture.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and noted the action plans attached at Appendix 4, developed to address the forecast adverse variances at the end of December 2019 (Option 1).

No. 8

USE OF GENERAL AND EARMARKED RESERVES 2019/20

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources presented the report which provided the forecast reserves position for 2019/20 as at Quarter 3 (31st December, 2019).

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. She confirmed that the forecast position at year-end 2019/20 was an increase of £0.185m to £6.079m which represented 4.54% of net revenue expenditure, and £0.718m above the 4% target level of £5.361m. This increase indicated some progress towards strengthening the financial resilience of the Council and allowed a buffer to deal with unexpected future issues.

This increase was due to £117k contribution as agreed by Council during the 2019/20 budget setting process; and £132k reduction in the Fire Service Precept charge following additional funding from Welsh Government for the increase in employer's pension contributions.

The Officer concluded that as a result of the positive provisional settlement, the Council had approved an increase to Reserves in excess of £1.5m for 2020/21 to support medium term financial planning and strengthening the Council's financial resilience.

Members commended the report.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and:

- i. Noted the planned forecast increase of General Reserve to 4.54% (above the 4% target level) for 2019/20 and future years strengthening the Council's Financial Resilience;

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">ii. Noted the impact the £0.064m forecast adverse variance for 2019/20 would have on the General Reserve target; andiii. Continue to challenge budget overspends and implement appropriate Service Action Plans, where required. | |
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