

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5TH DECEMBER, 2019

REPORT OF:

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. HEALY (CHAIR)

Councillors G. Paulsen (Vice-Chair)
P. Baldwin
M. Cook
G. L. Davies
P. Edwards
J. Wilkins
D. Wilkshire

WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Chief Officer Commercial
Chief Officer Resources
Service Manager - Accountancy
Head of Community Services
Head of Partnerships and Governance
Service Manager: Policy and Partnerships
Communications, Marketing and Customer Access Manager

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Meredith, L. Parsons and J. Hill.</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 19TH NOVEMBER 2019</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee held on 19th November, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><u>CCTV</u></p> <p>A request was made for Members to view the quality of the images produced by the new CCTV system. The Head of Partnerships and Governance advised that this could be arranged as long as the relevant legal and data protection processes had been followed.</p> <p>Another Member referred to a visit arranged for Members to the call centre in Newport who at that time operated CCTV for the Authority. The visit allowed Members to have sight of the quality and images from all areas of the Borough. The Member recognised the need for legal and data protection check, however he advised that Elected Members are subject to confidentiality pledges when they are elected and therefore felt that Members could be trusted to view images.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources stated that there was not an issue with trust, however due to data protection laws individuals were permitted to have their information protected. The Chief Officer added that the images were not 'live streaming' and could no longer be viewed at a call centre, therefore the recording would need to be downloaded to a DVD and any individuals in the footage would need to be pixilated out by IT officers before it was viewed. The Chief Officer agreed to give consideration to the request to ascertain what could be provided to Members.</p> <p>This course of action was AGREED.</p>	

	<p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BRIDGING THE GAP</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources and the Chief Officer Commercial.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report which outlined the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and provided the proposed approach the Council would undertake to address financial challenges over the next 5 years. The Chief Officer added that the MTFS was a key element in the Council's strategic planning work which supported the Council's financial resilience and sustainability. The MTFS together with the Bridging the Gap Programme proposed the approach the Council would take to address financial challenges over the next 5 years.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources informed that there had been a delay in the announcement of the Local Government Settlement due to the General Election on 12th December, 2019. It had originally been expected at the end of November, however the final settlement was now due on 16th December, 2019. This delay had caused implications for the budget setting process and planning the actual budget reductions to set a balanced budget for 2020/2021, however the MTFS would be revised following the announcement.</p> <p>The Chief Officer referred Members to the information detailed in the report and appendices which outlined the budget gap of £16.2m over the next 5 years. Also, the progress against the Strategic Business Reviews was noted with the overall financial achievement towards the budget gap currently assessed between £5.4m and £7.9m over the period of the MTFS. The Chief Officer further noted the estimated financial achievement of the Strategic Business Reviews would result in a residual funding gap at between £8m to £10m over the next five years. However, for 2020/2021 proposals had been developed across all portfolios to mitigate funding gaps.</p> <p>A Member raised concerns around the continued reduction in the budgets and felt that the Council services and frontline staff could not be reduced any further. The Member noted the Council's</p>	

commitment to prioritise Education and Social Services and had hoped that the monies provided to schools could be increased or at least maintained. The Member further reiterated his concerns around the reductions in staff and advised that the reduced budget settlements would be a concern to staff as in some cases jobs had been lost.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that job losses were a concern to everyone, however it was paramount the Authority lived within its means and spend prioritised accordingly.

The Committee AGREED the report be accepted and Option 1; namely that the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee:-

- considered and agreed the MTFS;
- noted the forecast funding gap for the period of the MTFS; and
- agreed the proposals within the Strategic Business Reviews attached at Appendix 1 of the MTFS.

No. 6

STAFF SURVEY 2019 - SUMMARY RESULTS

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director.

The Chief Officer Commercial advised that the report outlined the high level findings of the 2019 Staff Survey along with management actions related to the results. The Chief Officer added that the Authority had undertaken staff surveys every two years since 2014 in order to ascertain levels of staff engagement with the priorities of the Council. It also provides an opportunity to monitor their levels of well-being. During 2019 the survey was carried out between January and March and it was noted that participation this year has increased. The Chief Officer Commercial further outlined the activities which had been undertaken following an analysis of the data from the results.

The Chief Officer Commercial further noted the headline findings from the survey as detailed in the report which included an improved response rate, improvement in staff satisfaction with staff feeling more motivated in their role and more informed. There was an increase in communication across the Authority, staff felt they were more able to strike a work/life balance and staff felt more

inclined to speak positively about the Council to others outside work.

The Chair asked the reason there were some signs of a reduction in frequency of staff 1-2-1s and team meetings.

The Chief Officer Commercial advised that the 1-2-1s should be recorded and therefore there was a need for managers to be aware that when performance conversations are carried out that they are recorded. Part of the employment deal with employees is that they are entitled to have those discussions.

A Member referred to the high number of staff within the Regeneration & Community Services and Social Services Departments who would not have access to email to participate in the survey and asked how these employees were encouraged to complete the survey.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services advised that the Department had a number of the workforce on split work patterns and discussions had been undertaken on how these employees could be engaged. The Corporate Director Social Services added that it was difficult to reach some staff that were not office based and a number of ways in which both Departments could engage with these employees were being considered.

The Chief Officer Commercial added that although the survey suits some staff there was a need to look at how it could be offered in different ways to accommodate all staff.

The Vice-Chair welcomed the positive report and was encouraged to see that staff were happy and empowered. He asked if the Authority engaged with school based staff.

The Chief Officer Commercial advised that school based staff were not included at the moment, however there was no reason they could not participate and added that discussions could be undertaken with schools to ascertain best way to circulate the survey for completion.

The Committee AGREED, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely the Committee endorsed the report prior to the report being presented to the Executive.

No. 7

QUARTER 1 AND 2 (APRIL TO SEPTEMBER) JOINT FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Governance and Partnerships.

The Head of Partnerships and Governance advised that the Joint Finance and Performance report outlined quarters 1 and 2 which covered April to September 2019. The Officer advised that the report had been enhanced to provide a more user friendly format and it would continue to be a 'live' document to take into account feedback received.

At this juncture the Chair went through and the following questions/points were raised accordingly.

A Member referred to the alignment of the Public Service Board and Regional Partnership Board and asked if the Public Services Scrutiny Committee had been aligned appropriately to give the appropriate timelines for matters being considered.

The Head of Partnerships and Governance advised that the cycle of meetings had been developed to align the Scrutiny Committee with scheduled Public Service Board meetings which were held on a quarterly basis this gave a coherent reporting path. The alignment of Public Service Boards and the Regional Partnership Boards were around how their work streams being aligned to the Integrated Well-Being Programme. This was a good example of where two boards could come together and discussions would progress via the Public Service Board and once approved be presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

The Member further noted the collaborative work in the report which referred the joint working arrangements of the SRS and advised that this was not the only collaborative work being undertaken across the Council.

The Managing Director advised that the report captured work for quarters 1 and 2 and did not document all partnership work only areas where work had been carried out in the specific quarters. The Managing Director added that there was a great deal of collaborative work across the Council and in all services including City Deal, Tech Valleys and the Valleys Task Force. It was felt that it would be beneficial to report all collaborative and partnership

working, however it was noted that progress reports on the City Deal were regularly presented to Scrutiny a report was scheduled to be presented to the next Council meeting on 12th December, 2019.

Further to a request made for a Members Briefing on collaborative and partnership work arrangements across the Council, it was advised that a regeneration member briefing session could be arranged, to discuss collaborative work undertaken by the Directorate. A further request was made for late morning start and the Head of Partnerships and Governance agreed to accommodate this request.

A Member noted the capital bid achieved for Social Services and asked if a report would be presented to inform Members on the project being pursued.

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the capital bid had been around the childcare offer and schools had been identified to work with in their existing settings. The Corporate Director confirmed that a report would be presented to the Social Services Scrutiny Committee at the appropriate time.

The Member recognised the amount of good work undertaken in Social Services. The Chair concurred with these comments and expressed thanks to the Corporate Director and staff on the work undertaken.

The Corporate Director Education referred to the persistent absenteeism in schools and noted the primary school levels of 1.6% was below the Wales average which was positive and in terms of secondary schools of 4.1% this equated to all Wales average. The Corporate Director also noted the increase in green schools within Blaenau Gwent.

In response to a question raised in relation to the amount of red schools, the Corporate Director advised that there were two red schools, however the Authority was working intensively with these schools. The Member added that work on these schools had been ongoing for 2 years and there had been a number of head teachers in post over this period.

The Corporate Director advised that the current head teacher was focussed and would continue the work put in place. The Corporate

Director advised that a good discussion had ensued as part of the Improving Schools report presented to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

A Member wished to compliment the Corporate Director Education on the work she had achieved. The Member noted that he had worked closely with the Corporate Director and was aware of her commitment for change in Education in Blaenau Gwent.

The Member further asked how Blaenau Gwent compared to the family of schools within our area.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the Education system in Wales was going through a significant system of reform around the curriculum and qualifications. The family of schools were developed to compare data with similar schools, however this was no longer being used and although performance information could be compared it no longer identified schools. However, the Corporate Director advised that schools in Blaenau Gwent were performing similarly to schools across the region.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services advised that there was a number of community groups who worked in specific areas which supported the delivery of the Authority's strong and environmentally smart communities. There was also work ongoing around the biodiversity and low carbon agenda which also linked to the active travel initiative.

In response to a question raised around the use of solar panels, the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services advised that there was currently a £4.1m refit programme to install solar panels in new builds and existing buildings if the appropriate space was available.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services also referred to the increased number of start-up businesses coming to Blaenau Gwent which placed Blaenau Gwent in the top quarter in terms of performance for this area.

A Member referred to the Regulatory Proposals section and asked for the reason eight updates/reports had not been received.

The Head of Partnerships and Governance noted that the information related to external regulatory work and advised that there could be a number of reasons. If the matter had been closed

or incorporated into normal business planning and activity. However she noted the point and would make sure it was updated for the next quarter.

Another Member referred to the Corporate Risk Register presented and noted the 2 schools currently in receipt of Council Intervention which had failed to make progress for 2 years.

The Corporate Director Education advised that this had been identified as a risk and progress would be identified and reported accordingly.

The Committee AGREED, that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely the information be accepted as presented.

No. 8

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 8TH JANUARY 2020

Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair reported that the meeting scheduled in January 2020 would be cancelled, therefore the items presented on the Forward Work Programme would be presented to the February Committee with the exception of Organisational Development Policies which was scheduled to be presented to the March meeting.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted.