

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 3RD MARCH, 2020**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER**

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PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. HEALY (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook  
P. Edwards  
J. Hill  
C. Meredith

WITH: Corporate Director of Social Services  
Chief Officer – Commercial  
Chief Officer - Resources  
Head of Organisational Development  
Head of Governance & Partnerships / Advisor  
Professional Lead - Engagement, Equalities & Welsh Language  
Communications, Marketing and Customer Access Manager

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Paulsen, P. Baldwin, M. Moore, J.P. Morgan, L. Parsons, J. Wilkins and D. Wilkshire.	

	Corporate Director of Education.	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 5th December, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/2021</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources which was presented to give Members the opportunity to scrutinise the capital Strategy following the annual review to be adopted for the financial year 2020/2021, prior to formal recommendation to Council.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the updated Capital Strategy for the 2020/21 financial year be recommended for approval at Council.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>BRIDGING THE GAP REVIEW - UPDATE STRATEGIC USE OF GRANTS - CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES GRANT</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Governance and Partnerships and the Head of Children's Services which was presented to provide an update in relation to the Bridging the Gap review on the Strategic Use of Grants with a focus on phase one of the Children and Communities Grant (CCG).</p> <p>The Head of Governance &amp; Partnerships spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein, including details of specific work streams.</p> <p>A Member enquired if extra funding would be available for parts of</p>	

the borough not included in the Flying Start programme. The Director of Social Services said that the Welsh Government Minister had confirmed that no extra funding would be available, however, a pilot project was to be carried out on a wider area and the findings would be presented to the Welsh Government to see if this could be rolled out across Blaenau Gwent.

A Member welcomed the £23m grant funding received but had concerns regarding the continuation of that funding after the Welsh Government elections in 2020/21. He commented that Blaenau Gwent had pockets of deprivation not being covered.

With regard to Council Priorities, the Head of Governance and Partnerships said that the Council Priorities feed into the Corporate Plan and extensive work around the assessment of wellbeing had been undertaken to produce an overarching plan for the area.

In response to a Member's question regarding grants, the Head of Governance and Partnerships said that the Integrated Care Fund had a big impact on Blaenau Gwent. She explained that some grants were rigid and the criteria for the grant included levels of deprivation, monitoring of grant usage and value for money and were tied into what communities needed. The Chair commented that it was important that grant funding was going to the right places.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that the Scrutiny Committee:-

- Considered the progress made to date and the proposed next phases of the Strategic Use of Grants review;
- Considered the progress made to date on the Children and Communities grant;
- Receive further updates on the Strategic Use of Grants review and CCG as part of the Committee Forward Work Programme; and
- The CCG Steering Group continues to oversee and implement the delivery programme and provides an annual report on progress to Scrutiny, Executive and the PSB. Six monthly reporting will be made to the Corporate Leadership Team.

No. 7

**TREASURY MANAGEMENT - TREASURY STRATEGY STATEMENT, INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND MRP POLICY STATEMENT 2020/21**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources which was presented to give Members the opportunity to scrutinise the Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision policy (including prudential indicators) to be adopted for the 2020/21 financial year, prior to formal recommendation to Council.

The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member enquired if changes to the Treasury Strategy Statement could be made at any time throughout the year. The Chief Officer Resources responded that changes were normally made at the start of the financial year, but confirmed that changes could be made during the year and would go through the normal Scrutiny and Council process. The Officer continued that in some instances urgent changes were reported to Council in retrospect.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2, namely that the Members considered the Annual Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement for 2020/2021 financial year and the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators contained therein (Appendix A) and do not consider any amendments, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.

No. 8

**STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2020 TO 2024**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Governance & Partnerships, Service Manager, Policy & Partnerships and the Professional Lead for Engagement, Equality & Welsh Language which presented the Council's proposed Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-24.

The Professional Lead for Engagement, Equality & Welsh Language spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. This was the Council's third Strategic Equality Plan on a 4 yearly cycle.

The Chair commented on the Member's Working Group and the

positive progress that had been achieved to support the development of the equality objectives and plan.

Members commented on the excellent engagement work undertaken with the Children's Grand Council and the Youth Forum.

The Head of Governance and Partnerships informed Members that the 8th March was International Women's Day and the Equalities Team were engaging with the public to raise awareness regarding this campaign. Important engagement work had also been undertaken with the Youth Mayor who was preparing a Body Positive Image report to support the National Campaign.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members support the proposed Strategic Equality Plan and recommend approval at Executive and Council.

**No. 9** **CORPORATE SERVICES WORKFORCE SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director and Head of Organisational Development which was presented to provide Members of specific scrutiny committees the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge relevant Portfolio sickness absence performance and the proposed actions for improvement.

The Head of Organisational Development spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

In response to a Member's question regarding Business Support, the Head of Organisational Development said that Business Support was identified as a 'hotspot' with 643 days of sickness. A full managerial audit of sickness absence had been carried out and Managers were following the Attendance Policy to the letter. Staff cover was provided for long term sickness absence, over one month, via staff 'acting up' or by agency workers. The Officer continued that the main cause of sickness absence within the Business Support Service was stress related. Policies were in place to support staff along with the Occupational Health Service.

A Member commented that 94% of staff attend work regularly and were doing a good job. The Head of Organisational Development

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said that Corporate Services were under target for both Quarters 1 and 2.

Concerns were raised that staff may be suffering from stress due to capacity issues. The Head of Organisational Development responded that risk assessments were carried out in relation to any changes to services and a Risk Register was in place so that any issues could be identified and escalated if necessary.

A Member enquired regarding the numbers of staff reporting sick in Corporate Services. The Head of Organisational Development said that out of an approximate 200 members of staff in this area 82 had reported sick for Quarters 1 and 2 of this year. Improving attendance remained a key priority for the Council and all employees and leaders had a role to play in helping to reduce sickness absence levels.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Scrutiny Committee endorse the report and proposed arrangements to support the improvement in attendance.

As this was the last Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee meeting in the 2019/20 Committee cycle the Chair thanked Members for their contributions and support over the last year.

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