

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 9TH DECEMBER, 2020

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC AND COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR N. DANIELS (CHAIR)

Councillors J. Collins
D. Davies
J. Mason
J. Wilkins

WITH: Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Corporate Director Education
Chief Officer Resources
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Press Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> An apology for absence was received from the Managing Director.	

<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declaration of interests were raised:-</p> <p>Councillor N. Daniels – Item No. 18 Councillor J. Mason – Item No. 25</p>	
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 14th October, 2020.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October, 2020.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
	<p><u>GENERAL MATTERS</u></p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>CONFERENCES AND COURSES</u></p> <p>The Leader referred to the following course:-</p> <p><u>Introduction to Planning Enforcement - Online Training – 09/11/2020</u></p> <p>RESOLVED that approval be granted to Councillors D. Hancock and W. Hodgins, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee to attend.</p>	

DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 7

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 13TH JANUARY 2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and information contained therein be noted.

No. 8

THE CALCULATION OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR THE YEAR 2021/22

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Resources Officer.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the Council had a statutory requirement to calculate the Council Tax Base for each financial year. The Council Tax Base was a measure of the Authority's tax-raising capacity which was expressed in terms of the number of Band D equivalent dwellings taking account of exemptions reductions.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the Council's Tax Base for the current year, 2020/2021 was set at 20,662.45 and for 2021/22 proposed the Council tax base be 20,794.09 which reflected the increase of 222 domestic properties in the last 12 months.

The Chief Officer further explained that there had been a review of council tax collection during 2019 which resulted in some changes to collection methods. Whilst in 2019/2020 there was an early indication of improved collection rates, the coronavirus pandemic has had a significant effect on current council tax collection rates across Wales and it was anticipated that this would continue into 2021/22. The Chief Officer Resources therefore felt it prudent to estimate the in-year collection for 2021/2022 to remain at 95%.

The report was welcomed by the Executive and the increased housing numbers was pleasing to note. It was advised that despite the pandemic there still remained great interest by developers in Blaenau Gwent.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and approved the Council Tax base calculation for 2021/22 as detailed in Appendix 1 tables 1 to 6 of the report, and that the council tax base for tax setting purposes be 20,794.09.

No. 9

GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The following additional grants were reported:-

ABERTILLERY

Cwmtillery Ward – Councillor T. Sharrem

1.	Friends of Blaenau Gwent Village	£50
2.	Blaenau Gwent Methodist Church	£100
3.	Abertillery BG RFC	£75
4.	Abertillery Belles FC	£75
5.	Abertillery Bluebirds AFC	£75
6.	St Paul's Church	£50
7.	St Paul's Church Hall	£50
8.	Six Bells Bowls Club	£75
9.	Abertillery Bowls Club	£75
10.	Cwmtillery Pigeon Club	£75
11.	Chillax	£50
12.	Abertillery Angling Club	£75
13.	Abertillery Excelsiors	£75
14.	Old Tylerians RFC	£75
15.	Bourneville Community Centre	£75
16.	Blaenau Gwent Baptist Church	£50
17.	Baptist Church Foodbank	£50

Llanhilleth Ward – Councillor J. Collins

1.	Clwb Llan	£150
2.	Llanhilleth Tenants and Residents Association	£300

Llanhilleth Ward – Councillor L. Parsons

1.	Clwb Llan	£150
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NANTYGLO & BLAINA

Blaina Ward – Councillor J. Morgan

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| 1. | Ystruth Primary School PTA | £150 |
| 2. | Blaina Community Sports Club | £500 |

Blaina Ward – Councillor L. Winnett

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Ystruth Primary School PTA | £150 |
| 2. | Blaina Community Sports Club | £500 |

Blaina Ward – Councillor G. Collier

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|------|
| 1. | Ystruth Primary School PTA | £150 |
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Nantyglo Ward – Councillors J. Mason & K. Rowson

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| 1. | Hermon Cemetary Trust | £200 |
| 2. | 1 st Blaina Scouts Group | £200 |

Nantyglo Ward – Councillor P. Baldwin

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|----|------------------------------|------|
| 1. | BGfm | £200 |
| 2. | Hermon Cemetary Trust | £200 |
| 3. | Nantyglo OAP Hall | £100 |
| 4. | Winchestown OAP Hall | £100 |
| 5. | Wesleyan Methodist Church | £100 |
| 6. | Holy Trinity St. Anne Church | £100 |
| 7. | Coedcae Interact Club | £50 |
| 8. | Nantyglo Community Shop | £100 |
| 9. | Nantyglo RFC | £150 |

BRYNWAWR

Brynmawr Ward – Councillor J. Hill

- | | | |
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| 1. | Friends of North Ebbw Fach Interact | £100 |
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TREDEGAR

Georgetown & Central & West Ward – Councillors K. Hayden & J. Morgan & S. Thomas & H. Trollope & B. Willis

1. Tredegar Miners Memorial Gates £200

Central & West Ward – Councillor M. Moore

1. Tredegar Miners Memorial Gates £200

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS

No. 10

360 DEGREE SAFE ONLINE SAFETY POLICY FOR SCHOOLS

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the report sought Executive approval on the 360 Degree Safe Online Safety Policy for Schools. The Corporate Director noted that the proposed policy demonstrated an integrated approach to online safety across all schools and views had been sought from schools through the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), and the policy would need to be approved by the school governing bodies.

The Corporate Director Education felt that the report was timely with schools providing blended learning in response to Covid-19 and the policy had been welcomed by the DSLs. The policy encourages schools to make full use of digital technologies available to engage learners and improve learner outcomes.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein noted.

<p>No. 11</p>	<p><u>LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES SAFEGUARDING POLICY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Education advised that the purpose of the report was to seek approval of the Blaenau Gwent Local Government Education Services Safeguarding Policy following its annual review. The Corporate Director spoke to the report and noted the updates which had been made to the Policy, as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019, replacing previous reference to All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008; • Inclusion of the Blaenau Gwent Youth Service safeguarding policy in appendix 3 of the policy; • Inclusion of the safeguarding data collection protocol; and, • Inclusion of a COVID-19 annex to reflect the current situation and reinforce the procedures for reporting concerns. This appendix can be updated regularly as the emergency situation develops and changes. <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be approved prior to the Education Directorate Safeguarding Policy being distributed to schools.</p>	
	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES</u></p>	
<p>No. 12</p>	<p><u>REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING -2020/2021, FORECAST OUTTURN TO 31 MARCH 2021 (AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2020)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources advised that the report provided the forecast financial outturn position across all portfolios for the financial year 2020/2021 as at 30th September, 2020. There was an adverse variance of £3.402m before the application of Welsh Government Hardship funding which reduced the forecast adverse variance to £0.248m. This was an improved position compared to the forecast at June 2020 which indicated an adverse variance of £1.2m.</p>	

The Chief Officer further reported the financial position across all portfolios and outlined the key points as detailed in the report.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the appendices contained information on fees and charges as well as progress made against the Bridging the Gap programme. The Appendices also detailed actions which are being taken forward by Budget Holders to mitigate any forecast cost pressures.

The Leader was mindful that Executive Members respectively and as a collective monitored budgets on a regular basis and given the current situation felt that budgets had been managed well by Budget Holders. He was of the opinion that the Council was in a reasonable position and had hoped that with the much appreciated assistance from Welsh Government provided to Local Government it would help the Council in balancing the budget.

The Leader advised that next year's budget indication was due to be announced on the 22nd December, 2020 and it was hoped that the Council would continue the excellent work around financial management achieved in previous years.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the appropriate challenge was provided to the financial outcomes in the report.

No. 13

CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR 2020/2021 FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2020)

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the report provided an overview of each Portfolio's actual and forecast capital expenditure against funding approvals for the 2020/2021 financial year as at 30th September, 2020. The Chief Officer spoke to the report and outlined the key pointed contained therein.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the

- appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report be provided.
- Continued to support appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council.
- the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding be noted.

No. 14

USE OF GENERAL AND EARMARKED RESERVES 2020/2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Leader advised that the Council had been criticised in previous years for their low levels of reserves, however over the last couple of years we have ensured that positive action had been taken to restore reserves to an acceptable level.

At this juncture, the Leader invited the Chief Officer Resources to provide an overview of the report. The Chief Officer Resources noted the key points contained in the reported and referred the Executive to the forecast position for the general reserve at year-end 2020/2021 which would be a decrease of £0.048m, to £6.387m. This balance would represent 4.72% of net revenue expenditure, £0.973m above the 4% target level of £5.414m. These figures indicated further progress towards strengthening the financial resilience of the Council and providing a buffer to deal with unexpected future issues. There would be a need to mitigate the forecast year end adverse variance if these had not been addressed, however the level of reserves would still be above the target level which the Council had set for ourselves.

The Leader welcomed the report and felt it demonstrated the Council's commitment to manage our financial resilience. The Leader hoped that Budget Holders would continue to work hard to eradicate the budget deficits to prevent using monies from the Council's reserves.

	<p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considered the impact of the £0.248m adverse variance for 2020/2021 would have on the budgeted contribution to the General Reserve; and • the forecast decrease of the General Reserve in 2020/2021 to £6.387m, being 4.72% of net revenue expenditure (above the 4% target level) be noted. • Continued to challenge budget overspends and implement appropriate service Action Plans, where required. 	
<p>No. 15</p>	<p><u>THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES 2019/2020</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive are informed of the Council's performance with regard to complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and that the report had been referred to the Audit Committee for assurance that the process for the monitoring of complaints is robust and the performance information provided reflects these practices.</p>	
	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS - ENVIRONMENT</u></p>	
<p>No. 16</p>	<p><u>FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (2016- 2022)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the progress made over the previous 12 months be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 17</p>	<p><u>BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE FORWARD PLAN (2019-2022) 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2, that the annual report and activity recommended this year to meet the Section 6 Duty be noted.</p>	

MONITORING ITEMS - EDUCATION

No. 18

OUTCOME OF THE LEISURE REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR THE ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST

The Leader declared an interest in this item, however he was permitted to remain in the meeting during discussions.

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report which would strengthen the working relationship between the Trust and the Local Authority.

The Executive Member referred to Appendix 3 and proposed that the frequency of meetings be on a quarterly basis and not bi-annually as suggested with additional meetings called as and when required.

RESOLVED accordingly.

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 19

OUTCOMES 2019-2020: FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGE 2, KEY STAGE 3, KEY STAGE 4

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education outlined the report and noted that there had been a relaxation in reporting school performance due to Covid-19 pandemic. The Corporate Director was pleased to update that there had been improved performance in KS4 across schools and the results were in line with the target set in the respective School Development Plans.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 20

BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION SERVICES DRAFT SELF – EVALUATION FINDINGS

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report and outlined the ongoing self-evaluation processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners. The Corporate Director further referred to the areas where good progress had been made and discussed areas where further improvements were required.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report and wished to recognise the Blaenau Gwent’s Youth Service. There had been many areas on improvement in the Youth Service and it had aspects of excellent practices. The Executive Member reported that the Youth Service had exceeded an all Wales average and had been joint winners for a National Youth Work Award.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 21

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION OUTCOMES FOR EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS – AUTUMN TERM 2019 AND SPRING TERM 2020

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the report provided performance monitoring information regarding the inspections undertaken by ESTYN of educational establishments and an update of inspection outcomes for schools inspected during the Autumn term 2019 and Spring term 2020. The Corporate Director pointed out that these inspections had been undertaken in 2019/2020 and publication had been delayed due to the emergency response to Covid-19.

The Corporate Director Education further referred to the three inspections which had taken place and provided an overview of the feedback received.

	RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.	
No. 22	<p><u>EDUCATION DIRECTORATE - RESPONSE TO COVID-19</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Education advised that the report gave the Executive an opportunity to review the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period. The Corporate Director spoke to the report and outlined the work undertaken in conjunction with corporate colleagues and schools.</p> <p>The Corporate Director referred to the decision taken by Blaenau Gwent to move to remote learning from the 10th December 2020 and advised that this decision had been based upon evidence of infection rates in Blaenau Gwent. The Corporate Director added that Blaenau Gwent currently had the 3rd highest number of cases across Wales with 574 cases per 100,000. These figures had a significant impact on our schools with 19 out of 25 schools affected, 1300 pupils and 66 members of staff currently off school self-isolating.</p> <p>These figures had significant impact on face to face learning, and therefore, there was a compelling rationale in moving to remote learning.</p> <p>There was a strong political and professional support with unanimous support from head teachers. The Public Health Professor, Head of Public Protection and Disease Control have supported the approach adopted by Blaenau Gwent. The Corporate Director stated that the Authority would provide support to vulnerable learners and free school meals during this period.</p> <p>It was reported that head teachers had felt that remote learning would be more effective in the current circumstances. The Corporate Director Education concluded that the decision to move to remote learning was a local decision based on the local situation, which was right at this time.</p>	

The Executive Member for Education wished to thank the Education Directorate for their outstanding response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Executive Member concurred with comments raised by the Corporate Director and stated that the decision to move to blended learning was based on a strong rationale. The decision had received unanimous support from head teachers and had been particularly welcomed in the Tredegar cluster where schools had been closed due to the rise in infection. The Executive Member fully supported the decision taken by the Leadership of the Council and felt this was a good decision for Blaenau Gwent.

The Leader also supported the decision to move to blended learning across all schools in Blaenau Gwent and advised that it was not a decision which the Council had taken lightly. He felt that the Executive Member for Education and Corporate Director Education had taken a decision which was best for Blaenau Gwent. It had received unanimous support from across schools and had been welcomed by parents

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

MONITORING ITEMS - SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 23

UPDATE ON STRATEGY TO SAFELY REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the report provided a progress update on the three-year strategy to safely reduce the numbers of looked after children. The Corporate Director noted since the strategy was introduced there has been a slow but steady decline in the numbers of Children Looked After from a high of 237 to 205 as at today. The Authority had successfully used additional funding from the Integrated Care Fund which had assisted in enhancing the Strategy and support our objectives of keeping families together and providing support to families on the edge of care. The strategy had been independently evaluated and was currently being refreshed for a new strategy in 2021.

The Corporate Director added that the work undertaken had helped keep families together and also reduced the number of children being placed in residential care. This has helped the Children Services budget, however, legal costs remain high but we have re-opened discussions with a neighbouring local authorities on possible legal support. This work had received a great deal of positive feedback from staff and families.

The Executive Member for Social Services welcomed the report which highlighted the positive work undertaken in Children Services and he wished to express his thanks to the Corporate Director, Head of Children Services and staff on the work behind this positive report.

The Leader advised that there had been some speciesism received when these measures were taken some 3 years ago. The Council was far from complacent and there still was a great deal of work to be undertaken. However, the Strategy was now seeing results and the Leader had hoped that this work would continue.

The Leader reiterated the comments raised in terms of the excellent work achieved in Children Services. The staff in Social Services and across the Council continue to work hard during the pandemic and the public are continually grateful.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 24

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2 that the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board be supported.

EXEMPT ITEM

DECISION ITEMS - REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

No. 26

BRYNMAWR AND NANTYGLO MASTERPLAN

The Executive Member for Social Services declared an interest in this item, however he was permitted to remain in the meeting during discussions.

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and Option 2, to endorse the findings of the Brynmawr and Nantyglo Masterplan and agreed the next steps for work to be undertaken as detailed in the report.