

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL - 29TH JULY, 2021

REPORT OF:

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HOLT (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Day (Deputy Chair)
P. Baldwin
D. Bevan
J. Collins
M. Cook
M. Cross
N. Daniels
D. Davies
G. A. Davies
G. L. Davies
P. Edwards
L. Elias
D. Hancock
K. Hayden
S. Healy
J. Hill
M. Holland
J. Mason
H. McCarthy
C. Meredith
J. Millard
M. Moore
J. P. Morgan
L. Parsons
G. Paulsen
K. Pritchard
K. Rowson
T. Sharrem
T. Smith
B. Summers

G. Thomas
 S. Thomas
 H. Trollope
 J. Wilkins
 D. Wilkshire
 B. Willis
 L. Winnett

WITH: Managing Director
 Corporate Director of Social Services
 Corporate Director of Education
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Head of Community Services
 Head of Regeneration
 Head of Organisational Development
 Service Manager – Accountancy
 Communications, Marketing & Customer Access
 Manager
 Team Manager – Trading Standards

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. Collier, W. Hodgins, J. C. Morgan, B. Thomas, Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services and the Chief Officer Resources.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declarations of interest were reported:</p>	

Item Nos. 59-61 – Longlisting JNC Officers, Shortlisting JNC Officers, Appointments Committee JNC Officers
Bernadette Elias – Chief Officer Commercial & Customer

No. 4

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences

Condolences were expressed to:

- Councillor Bernard Willis and his family whose daughter, Kym Lewis had sadly passed away. Kym had been Bernard's consort during his year as Mayor.
- The family of former Borough Councillor and Mayor, Gareth Morgan, M.B.E on his sad death.
- The family of former County Borough Councillor and Town Councillor, Bob Pagett on his sad death.

Members and officers paid their respects with a minute's silence

Tributes were paid to former County Borough Councillor and Town Councillor, Bob Pagett. It was reported that Bob had served as a Town Councillor for Nantyglo and Blaina since the late 1970's up until the present day and during this time had served as Mayor on several occasions. Bob had cared deeply about his community and would be sadly missed.

The Leader of the Labour Group echoed the comments made and said that Bob had been a very loyal servant to the County Borough. He also paid tribute to Kym Lewis. Kym had served as Mayor's Consort when her father, Councillor Bernard Willis had been appointed Mayor. Kym had been a fantastic ambassador for Blaenau Gwent in this role and would be sorely missed.

RESOLVED that appropriate letters be sent.

Congratulations

Congratulations were extended to:

- The 'A' Level Team at Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, Coleg Gwent. The team had won a prestigious bronze award at

the Pearson Teaching Awards Further Education Team of the Year 2021, for the valuable contribution made by the teaching staff and the difference that had made to young people in the area.

An appropriate letter had been sent to Coleg Gwent.

- Defence Employer Recognition Scheme – Gold Award: Notification had been received from the Ministry of Defence advising that Blaenau Gwent had achieved Gold status under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. This was a prestigious award and Blaenau Gwent was one of only 127 organisations who were adjudged to reach the required standard.

Chair's Appeal 2021/2022

The Chair announced that her chosen Appeal for 2021/2022 would be the Blaenau Gwent Foodbank. This organisation had played a vital borough wide role supporting the vulnerable throughout the course of the pandemic.

No. 5

MINUTE BOOK - MARCH - JUNE 2021

The Minute Book for the period March – June 2021 was submitted for consideration.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved and confirmed as a true record of proceedings.

No. 6

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Agreed.

No. 7

ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Agreed.

No. 8

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Agreed.

No. 9	<u>PLANNING, REGULATORY AND GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE (PLANNING MATTERS)</u> Agreed.	
No. 10	<u>PLANNING, REGULATORY AND GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE (PLANNING MATTERS)</u> Agreed.	
No. 11	<u>PLANNING, REGULATORY AND GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE (GENERAL LICENSING MATTERS)</u> Agreed.	
No. 12	<u>STATUTORY LICENSING COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 13	<u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE</u> Agreed.	
No. 14	<u>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 15	<u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE</u> Agreed.	
No. 16	<u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE</u> Agreed.	
No. 17	<u>EXECUTIVE</u> Agreed.	
No. 18	<u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE</u> Agreed.	

No. 19	<u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 20	<u>AUDIT COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 21	<u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 22	<u>EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 23	<u>JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (BUDGET MONITORING)</u> Agreed.	
No. 24	<u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 25	<u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 26	<u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 27	<u>SPECIAL EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 28	<u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 29	<u>PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u>	

	Agreed.	
No. 30	<u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 31	<u>EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 32	<u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 33	<u>JOINT EDUCATION & LEARNING AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SAFEGUARDING)</u> Agreed.	
No. 34	<u>AUDIT COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 35	<u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 36	<u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 37	<u>GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE</u> Agreed.	
No. 38	<u>MEMBERS QUESTIONS</u> <u>Question No. 1</u> The following question was received from Councillor Hedley McCarthy and was responded to by Councillor Joanne Wilkins, Executive Member for Environment:	

Question:

“Could the Executive Member explain to Council what urgent action was to be taken to ameliorate the unacceptable noise nuisance from Blackwood Engineering at Glandwr Industrial Estate?”

Response:

The Environmental Health Team had confirmed receipt of one noise complaint from a local resident relating to this matter. The Management Team at the company was co-operating with the Council to address some of the specific noise related issues that had been raised and had proposed a series of actions to deal with these matters which, it was hoped would resolve the on-going and outstanding noise issues. However, as this was an on-going investigation it was not appropriate at this current time to comment any further.

Supplementary Question:

No supplementary question was presented.

Question No. 2

The following question was received from Councillor Phillip Edwards and was responded to by Councillor Nigel Daniels, the Leader of the Council:

Question:

“When would the delegating of powers during the pandemic, including the Gold Group, come to an end?”

Response:

The additional delegation to officers came to an end on 24th June, 2020 when the suspension of Council Committees was lifted. However, the Gold Group had continued to operate as part of the national and regional response to the pandemic but since 24th June it had operated in parallel to the normal democratic arrangements. The Gold Group was stood down in May 2021, following the standing down of the Gwent Strategic Co-ordinating Group.

	<p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>No supplementary question was presented.</p>	
<p>No. 39</p>	<p><u>PUBLIC QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>There were no questions submitted by members of the public.</p>	
<p>No. 40</p>	<p><u>PROPOSED COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2021-2022</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the proposed Council Forward Work Programme 2021-2022.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the Council Forward Work Programme 2021/2022 be approved.</p>	
<p>No. 41</p>	<p><u>ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2020/2021</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Performance & Democratic.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely the ‘scrutiny activity’ that had been undertaken by each Scrutiny Committee during 2020/21 be approved and the report published on the Blaenau Gwent website.</p>	
<p>No. 42</p>	<p><u>SCHEDULE OF MEMBERS REMUNERATION 2021-2022</u></p> <p>The report of the Head of Organisational Development was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>In the absence of the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, the Vice-Chair advised that the Democratic Services Committee had considered and agreed both reports and proposed that Item Nos. 41 and 42 be approved simultaneously.</p>	

A Member referred to a previous meeting of the Council held in May whereby she had asked the Leader about the case whereby a Member had been appointed to two paid positions and said at that time the Leader had denied knowledge of this case. The Member concluded by asking whether these monies had now been repaid to the Council as paragraphs 2.3 and 2.6 of the Schedule of Members Remuneration indicated that only one senior salary was payable to a Member of the authority.

The Leader of the Council on a point of correction advised that the Member had misinterpreted his comments and clarified that he had not denied knowledge but had said at that time that he was genuinely not aware of the case. However, he had subsequently been made aware of the area referred to and confirmed that the additional allowance which was being paid to a Chair who was in receipt of a special responsibility allowance, was permissible within the regulations.

The Member said that she found that this was confusing and contradictory to the information contained in the Schedule of Members Remuneration, specifically paragraphs 2.3 and 2.6 i.e. that only one senior salary was payable to a member of the authority and concluded by stating that whilst the Leader indicated that he had been unaware of the case, this could be taken that he was denying knowledge of it.

The Leader of the Council raised a point of order and stated that being 'unaware' and 'denying' were grammatically two different things and could be interpreted differently. He affirmed that he had been unaware of the case and this had been a genuine comment made at that time. However, he had been subsequently assured by both the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Officer Resources that a Member in receipt of a Committee Chair Band 3 (the level that Scrutiny Committee Chairs were paid) could be in receipt of a salary from another organisation.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that he was under the assumption that it was the Leader who made the appointments to these external positions and said it was important that there was transparency, particularly for the public regarding senior responsibility allowances.

The Leader of the Council advised that he was content to go on record that he had recommended that the individual in question be

appointed to that particular body because of his experience and knowledge. The organisation in question was a crucial partner and he believed the Member was the best individual to undertake this role. It was pointed out that this appointment had been wholly endorsed by his colleagues and endorsed when the Committee structure and outside bodies were approved by Full Council.

The Leader of the Labour Group said whether the individual was the best person for the role was not the issue, the issue was that the individual was in receipt of two salaries and if the Leader had recommended that the individual be appointed to the post, then he had been aware of the situation and said he should apologise to his colleague for stating that he had been unaware. He concluded by stating that the public had a right and deserved to know what was happening in the Council.

The Leader of the Council said that in this instance he did not feel he needed to apologise because when he had made the comments at the time, he could not genuinely recall the case and had to be prompted by officers. He stated that his comments at that point in time were honest and truthful and for that honesty and truthfulness he made no apology and said that he also made no apology for the decision taken to appoint the individual to perform that particular role.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely, the Schedule of Members Remuneration for 2021/22 be agreed and published.

No. 43

STATEMENT OF PAYMENTS MADE TO MEMBERS IN 2020/2021

The report of the Head of Organisational Development was submitted for consideration.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely, in order to comply with relevant legislation that the Statement of Payments Made to Members during 2020/21 be published.

No. 44

WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2021 -2026

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Organisational Development explained that the purpose of the report was to seek endorsement of the Workforce Strategy 2021-2026. It was noted that the Council's Organisational Development Strategy 2015 - 2020 focussed strategically on preparing the Council and its workforce for transformation and change, and successfully promoted the 'one Council' approach, supported the transformation of the organisation in response to financial efficiency which included a review of services and the introduction of new and alternative service delivery models.

This 5-year strategy focussed on the future, integrating the Council's vision, objectives and financial planning arrangements. It would link service outcomes with the workforce required to deliver them and would have an on-going understanding of how the workforce should look in the future through continual review, re-alignment and measurement of how outcomes were achieved. It would also support the workforce to transition from responding to the emergency situation in relation to the pandemic Covid-19 and act as a key lever to facilitate cultural change.

The strategy had been developed from workforce information, staff surveys, and engagement and consultation with key stakeholders and trade unions and the suggestions that had been made had influenced the development of the strategy. The Head of Organisational Development concluded by advising that the strategy would have an annual action plan which, would be monitored through the Corporate Leadership Team and the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to paragraph 2.2 of the report which stated that "the New Operating Model would introduce modern working practices, would seek to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation...." and asked whether this statement was reliable.

He continued by explaining that the situation currently being experienced in the Planning and Building Control Sections was

disgraceful. The public were being told that the Council would become a modern local authority, with aspirations to create new housing and become a low carbon authority. However, there were people in the County Borough complaining bitterly about the ridiculous amount of time it currently took for applications to be considered. He requested that Corporate Leadership Team and the political Leadership implement measures to address this situation.

The Leader of the Labour Group concluded by stating that with regard to the report, he had made his comments previously at the Scrutiny Committee and supported endorsement of the recommendation.

The Leader of the Council commenced by stating that he was aware of the current situation being experienced within the service but said he believed that this was the correct strategy for the Council. The Trade Unions had supported the strategy and had raised no reservations regarding the strategy or any other areas of the authority. He continued by stating that he was aware that work was progressing to improve the digital service in relation to the Planning Department which would help support remote and agile working, however, this was being addressed at an operational level at present.

The Managing Director advised that the Leader of the Labour Group had raised some important points. There was work on-going at present with this particular service to provide support to place it on a stronger footing. However, there were very specific circumstances in this service which had caused the issues being experienced which needed to be addressed and the situation improved. The digital solution formed part of this measure together with the provision of support to staff to return to work.

The Managing Director assured Members that work on-going at an operational level to improve this situation but it was important to recognise that this was one service area and this did not, therefore, signify that this was the incorrect service delivery model for the Council but meant that additional support would be required to be provided for that service during this transition period.

The Leader of the Labour Group expressed his appreciation to the Managing Director for her response but pointed out that the situation currently being experienced in section ran contrary to the

report. He urged that temporary staffing arrangements be put in place to ease the situation and address it as a matter of urgency.

The Managing Director advised that the service had employed additional agency staff but there were real challenges in obtaining staff with the required skill sets. However, the Service Manager and senior officers were doing everything they could to address this current situation.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the proposed draft Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2026 be supported and endorsed.

No. 45

DIVERSE COUNCIL DECLARATION

Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Performance and Democratic.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer spoke briefly to the report which presented the Diverse Council Declaration for approval. Members were advised that Welsh Government was committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of public life and this included tackling the barriers which prevented individuals' active participation in local democracy.

Paragraph 2.4 of the report set out the number of expectations on the Council to support diversity within the democratic process and also with political parties to support the process of becoming a councillor and providing support for councillors once they became elected. Paragraph 2.5 outlined the additional expectations as part of the Local Government and Elections Act.

The Chief Officer continued by advising that an action plan would be developed which would span up to and beyond the Local Elections 2022 and this would be presented to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration prior to approval at Council on 30th September. It was noted that in some of the areas, the Council was already making some progress for example, flexibility of business via remote attendance at meetings.

A Member welcomed the report and asked who would be

developing the action plan and whether the public would be consulted on the plan prior to it being presented to the Democratic Services Committee. He pointed out that the Council needed to be actively engaging with people to ascertain what they perceived the barriers were to becoming a councillor were.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer advised that initial discussions had taken place with the Equalities Officers to make those connections with certain under-represented groups to ascertain their views. In addition, the current Digital Democracy Bid included work with 16-25 year olds to understand their experiences and barriers they faced connecting with the democratic arrangements and some of this learning would help support the development of the plan. The Citizens Panel was a further opportunity to engage and engagement would take place through other identified networks as there were various aspects of the declaration that different groups could take forward. It was noted that some initial research had been collated with individuals in the County Borough and all this information would be collated and considered. The Chief Officer added that the views of Members would be considered via the democratic process.

A Member welcomed the declaration and stated to illustrate the Council's commitment requested an undertaking from the Leader that Members would be given an opportunity to discuss the Welsh Audit of Commemoration which had been approved by Welsh Government in November 2020.

The Leader confirmed that he was content for this document to be discussed.

Another Member expressed his concern regarding digital democracy and his experience of virtual meetings as he felt that these were not helpful or practical and said that vigorous consultation should take place with members of the public and Councillors.

A Member said she agreed with the report but would like some form of recognition within the action plan for meetings to be held outside of the working day, especially scrutiny committees because she felt that this would attract a much younger element of the community especially working women with young children to apply to become a councillor.

The Leader of the Council in proposing that the Option 1 be endorsed highlighted that a regular review and staggering of meeting times had been captured in the 'expectations' section of the report and this would form part of the action plan that would be considered.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that Council:

- Sign up to the Diverse Council Declaration as set out in Appendix 1.
- Agree that an action plan be developed to address the required areas of being a diverse Council.
- The action plan be presented to Democratic Services Committee for consideration and sign off before being approved at Council on 30th September, 2021.

No. 46

MOVE TOWARDS REGIONAL GWENT PSB

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director.

The Managing Director spoke in detail to the report which sought approval for Blaenau Gwent to join the other Councils in Gwent and statutory partners to form a Regional PSB. The report also provided an update on the progress made in relation to a regional well-being assessment and well-being plan, the formation of the regional scrutiny committee and the development of a local delivery partnership in Blaenau Gwent to ensure local priorities continued to be a focus in the County Borough.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 focussed on improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act set out a collective well-being duty on specified public bodies to act jointly via Public Service Boards (PSBs) to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of their area by contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals.

The existing PSB structure included within Appendix 1 of the report highlighted that in Gwent currently there were 5 PSB's centred on the 5 local authority areas and those PSB's brought together local authorities and statutory and non-statutory partners

to act collaboratively to produce the well-being plan and assessments as set out in legislation. The next local well-being assessments were due in May 2022 and there was a requirement for the new Well-being Plans to be published by May 2023.

The Act also made provisions for two or more PSB's to merge and proposals for the creation of a Regional PSB for Gwent were brought forward for all 5 PSB's to be merged into one Regional PSB and local PSB's disbanded. However, the PSB had agreed to continue to focus on local priorities through local delivery partnerships.

The Managing Director continued by advising that Appendix 2 of the report set out the proposed structure of the Regional PSB and paragraph 2.9 detailed the benefits associated with this change.

If the proposal to move to a single Regional PSB was approved, the first task to be undertaken would be a Gwent wide Wellbeing Assessment by May 2022 and the publication of a Regional Wellbeing Plan by May 2023. It was noted that there were two years remaining on the current Well-being Plan for Blaenau Gwent and this would continue to be delivered and overseen by the local delivery partnership and the work of the PSB and scrutiny of the existing Well-being Plans would continue through local scrutiny in each individual area until 2023 to ensure that priorities were delivered. Operating parallel to this arrangement, a regional scrutiny structure would be set up in advance of May 2022.

Council was advised that colleagues in Gwent had already considered and endorsed the move towards a Regional PSB and the statutory and non-statutory partners had also endorsed the report. Blaenau Gwent's Public Service Board Scrutiny Committee had considered and agreed the report earlier that week at which debate had ensued in terms of administrative support and cost, the legal basis for the move to this arrangement and Members were keen to receive further information in terms of how the scrutiny arrangements were to be set up. In addition, there was a clear assurance sought that the focus on local priorities would not be lost if this proposal was approved and that Members would be involved in the development of regional scrutiny arrangements. The Managing Director advised that with those assurances, the Scrutiny Committee had supported the report.

The Leader of the Labour Group commended the proposal and

said he was pleased that the local arrangement was to be maintained. However, he had viewed the recording of the Public Service Board Scrutiny Committee earlier that day and expressed his concern that the Chair of the Committee had commented that there were no Labour Members present but did not provide the reason for this.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that he wished to place on record the reason that Labour Group representatives had not been present was because the Majority Independent Group had decided to convene a meeting which conflicted with the original time of the PSB Scrutiny Committee. Whilst this meeting had been rescheduled it then conflicted the pre-arranged Labour Group meeting. He pointed out that he had immediately responded on the day the notice was received to advise of the situation and was told that the meeting would be proceeding. He had then, subsequently written to the clerk and Managing Director to advise them both and said he felt that his Group deserved the same due respect as the Majority Independent Group because it could have been perceived that the Labour Group had decided not to attend this Committee when in fact there had been a valid reason for this absence.

The Chair of the Committee advised that he had already sent an apology to the clerk who had notified him of the reason for the absence on that day but unfortunately, he did not have the opportunity to open his emails until following the Committee meeting.

The Leader of the Council advised that there was no malice intended when the meeting was re-arranged – similar to the arrangements of the Labour Group, the Majority Independent Group also held pre-arranged meetings on a Tuesday prior to each Council meeting. However, he had requested a 30-minute delay on the commencement of the PSB Scrutiny Committee due to the weight of the Council agenda which would not have been dealt with in the allotted timescale. He had not considered that a 30-minute delay was too excessive and it had been diarised a week previously. However, he had not realised that this had conflicted with a Labour Group meeting – no-one had contacted him and only on the day of the meeting it had been brought to his attention. He reiterated that this re-arrangement had not been undertaken with any malice intended.

A Member welcomed the report but had some concerns regarding a Regional PSB. He felt that Blaenau Gwent had been losing out when it came to health, in particular and said he hoped the Regional PSB would have more influence and power to supply the public with the actual services that they required.

Another Member said that he was dismayed that he had been unable to attend the PSB Scrutiny Committee and that this was not the first time there had been clashes of meetings this year. He asked what assurance could be given that Members would have sight of all the minutes of the Regional PSB within a reasonable timescale in order that they could be scrutinised. At present, there was a one-way process with Members only having sight of agendas and not the minutes and said he hoped that the new Regional PSB would operate a two-way process.

The Leader of the Council commenced by stating that this was of equal concern across all partners and said that for such a large strategic body ensuring that scrutiny was correct from the beginning was absolutely essential. Scrutiny managers were jointly considering the rationale behind the formation of regional scrutiny and the local scrutiny arrangements would continue for a period of time. As this was such a large strategic entity, he suspected that scrutiny managers would be considering the effectiveness of scrutiny (whilst not losing local emphasis) because there would be an opportunity to consider and discuss major issues on a Gwent wide basis. He reiterated, that it was absolutely crucial that the scrutiny process was fit for purpose and due diligence be given to the issues that needed to be discussed and, therefore, it was imperative that there were appropriate checks and balances.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer advised that the arrangements for regional scrutiny were being progressed and would be subject to a further report and confirmed that the local scrutiny arrangements would remain. It was noted that as part of the regional scrutiny arrangements there would be a clear connection to the local aspect and connections between the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and Regional PSB.

A Member expressed concern that there needed to be someone with very strong views fighting the corner for Blaenau Gwent to impress the effects positive or negative for Blaenau Gwent, particularly as there may potentially be votes taken at these

regional meetings.

Another Member said that she was dubious regarding a collaborative PSB because she valued Blaenau Gwent as an individual and no two authorities were the same and was concerned that Blaenau Gwent may be forgotten within the main strategic purposes of the group. At present local arrangements would continue and this welcomed which, included third sector representation and she asked whether this third sector contribution would remain within the new scrutiny structural arrangements.

The Managing Director confirmed that regional scrutiny would allow for the voluntary sector representation to continue as it would with the local delivery partnership in Blaenau Gwent.

The Deputy Leader of the Minority Independent Group advised that he had raised questions and concerns at the PSB Scrutiny Committee the previous day about the structure of the Regional PSB and that a move to a larger Gwent Public Service Board could potentially result in job losses affecting Blaenau Gwent staff. He pointed out that he had abstained from voting at this meeting because he felt that by moving to a larger Gwent wide organisation would be a step towards ending another Blaenau Gwent entity. He requested that a recorded vote be taken for the public record.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Option 1 be endorsed. This proposal was seconded.

The Leader of the Labour Group advised that he had previously been appointed to this Board and said that some of the Members may not have so many concerns if they were aware of how the Board operated. He pointed out that the strategic element of the Regional PSB and working with partners could be useful for resolving potential issues within the community and he saw this as a positive.

The Leader of the Council concurred with the comments made by the Leader of the Labour Group. He felt that this proposal would genuinely be of benefit for Blaenau Gwent and Gwent in general particularly, in relation to discussions around major issues and assured Members that all partners were treated equally from a political perspective within the group. He pointed out that the relationship with the Health Board continued to grow strong for obvious reasons and said that these were working links that were

not going to be broken.

The Leader continued by stating that whilst the authority was moving to a Gwent wide PSB, local delivery partnerships would be formed to focus more acutely on the issues that were crucial locally and this mechanism would provide a greater understanding of the overarching work of the PSB. It was noted that a proportion of the work of the local partnerships would feed into the wider picture so there would be a two-way flow of information. It was also equally important that the right people both politically and professionally were appointed to the local partnership and the Regional PSB. There were linkages between the current PSB and the Scrutiny Committee with the Chair and Vice-Chair who had been invited to attending these meetings for considerable period of time, however, a similar process had not been adopted by the other local authorities, therefore Blaenau Gwent had and would continue to influence agendas.

Following a lengthy discussion, a recorded vote was taken for the public record.

The Leader of the Council, thereupon proposed that Option 1 be endorsed. This proposal was seconded.

In Favour of Option 1 – Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, J. Collins, M. Cook, M. Cross, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, G. L. Davies, M. Day, L. Elias, D. Hancock, K. Hayden, S. Healy, J. Hill, J. Holt, J. Mason, H. McCarthy, C. Meredith, M. Moore, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Paulsen, K. Rowson, T. Sharrem, T. Smith, B. Summers, G. Thomas, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, J. Wilkins, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis, L. Winnett

Against Option 1 – Councillors M. Holland, J. Millard, K. Pritchard

Abstention – Councillor P. Edwards

The vote on Option 1 (preferred option) was carried.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the following recommendations be agreed:

Recommendation 1: To move to a regional PSB as outlined in the report with the importance of maintaining strong local

partnerships.

Recommendation 2: To establish regional scrutiny and the developing arrangements, and to receive further details as appropriate.

Recommendation 3: The local assessment of well-being, to be agreed by 5th May 2022, would be part of the PSB Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2021/22.

Recommendation 4: To support the proposed regional PSB terms of reference (Appendix 5), and requirements to make any relevant changes to committee structures and constitution.

Recommendation 5: The development of Local Delivery Partnerships to be considered in local scrutiny work programmes.

Recommendation 6: To continue to support Scrutiny of the [current Well-Being Plans](#) to 2023 through existing local partnership Scrutiny arrangements.

No. 47

UPDATED CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Members considered the report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance.

The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance advised that Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) had produced a model Concerns and Complaints Policy and there was an expectation that public authorities would adopt the model policy to ensure consistency of complaints handling throughout Wales. The policy had been presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 29th June and the comments made by that Committee including the final comments from the Ombudsman had been included in the policy. Therefore, the policy that had been presented was the model policy with slight local adaptations.

It was reported that in future, the Council would need to provide the Complaints Standards Authority with data on a quarterly basis and this information would need to be reported into the Governance and Audit Committee twice yearly i.e. October and April.

It was noted that the reference to complaints within the policy

related to service complaints and the regime relating to conduct complaints remained unchanged. In addition, the Civic Centre address referred to in the policy document would be updated to the service address, which had recently changed.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the Concerns and Complaints Policy be adopted and a complaints report be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on a bi-annual basis in October and April each year.

No. 48

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES
2019/2020**

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Corporate Director of Social Services spoke briefly to the report and advised that it was a statutory responsibility of the Director of Social Services to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Social Services and produce an Annual Report which formed part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework.

Owing to the pressures that Social Services were under to respond to the emergency Covid pandemic, the Welsh Government had agreed to postpone the development of the Annual Report 2019/20. However, it had subsequently been agreed by Welsh Government that the outstanding 2019/20 report be developed and approved as well as a separate report for 2020/21 which would be presented to Council later in the year (autumn).

The headline updates relating to Children's and Adult Services were contained in paragraph 6 of the report. The Corporate Director concluded by advising that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee had endorsed Option 1.

A Member requested that his appreciation be placed on record for the work undertaken by the department throughout the course of the pandemic. Staff had gone beyond expectations and said that the work undertaken by the department was exemplary and

	<p>requested that appreciation be passed onto all staff.</p> <p>The Leader of the Labour Group echoed these comments and said that this had been a magnificent achievement and he also requested that his appreciation and congratulations for a job well done.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the detail contained within the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/20 be approved.</p>	
<p>No. 49</p>	<p><u>LICENSING ACT 2003 - STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Public Protection.</p> <p>The Executive Member Regeneration & Economic Development spoke briefly to the report and proposed that Option 1 be endorsed. This proposal was seconded.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the revised Licensing Act Policy be approved.</p>	
<p>No. 50</p>	<p><u>HIGHWAYS CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME 2021-22</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>The Head of Community Services spoke to the report which provided an updated position and progress on the capital programme 2017/2021 and presented options for the 2021/22 work programme. He explained that to date £4.4m had been made available through Welsh Government grants and prudential borrowing to provide improvements to the highway network and the focus of these works for the last 3 years had been on the residential highways which made up 74% of the network.</p> <p>The overall percentage of poor conditioned un-classified roads</p>	

pre-commencement of works was 17%. As a result of the previous three years this figure had been maintained at 11.4%. To date 82 residential highways had been resurfaced along with priority works to the A & B classified roads.

£602,000 was currently available in the capital programme 2021/22 and it was intended to concentrate on the worst condition residential highways in each ward. Another option along with roads in each ward, was to look at priority A & B roads at a total cost of £912,000 which would leave a shortfall of £310,000. It was noted that the current level of the capital programme contingency fund was £1.26m and if this additional funding was agreed, this would reduce the contingency to £950,000.

The Head of Community Services concluded by stating that the preferred option was Option 2.

A Member asked whether Councillor's recommendations would be considered as part of the process because he had made previous recommendations to the department which had not been acknowledged.

The Head of Community Services said he could only apologise if this had been the case and confirmed that whilst the policy had been adopted, if Members had specific concerns these were considered and the matrix re-evaluated in line with those concerns. To date this had happened on several occasions and he undertook to pursue the specific concern raised by the Member and contact him following the meeting.

Another Member expressed his concern regarding the physical size of certain wards and pointed out that Sirhowy Ward was the largest ward in the County Borough and required more than one road being addressed. However, he felt that some smaller wards were given priority and requested that the process be reviewed going forward.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that ward Councillors had made representations and received confirmation that a change had been made but the current schedule did not reflect this and sought clarification whether this would be changed. The Head of Community Services confirmed that the schedule would be amended to reflect the agreed change.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely:

Option 2: As Option 1 (Highest Priority Residential Road in each Ward [16 total] & Blaenant Industrial Estate Road – Estimated Total Cost £602,000) plus A & B Priority Roads & Highway Safety Works – Estimated Total Cost £912,000

A & B Priority Roads:

- **A4048 Heathfield Full Reconstruction Works**
- **A4046 Cwm Bypass Resurfacing**

Highway Safety Traffic Management Works:

- **Crash Barrier Replacement at A4281 Garnlydan**
- **Crash Barrier Replacement at A467 Abertillery**

No. 51

FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH - CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP

Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 20th July, 2021.

The Leader of the Labour Group proposed that the report and the recommendations contained therein be endorsed.

A Member proposed that the application to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on the Royal British Legion be acceded to. This organisation had supported an army of volunteers for over 100 years and had taken care of the both former and serving armed forces personnel. This proposal was seconded.

Other Members commented as follows in relation to bestowing the Freedom of the Borough on the former Councillors Malcom Dally and Brian Scully:

- Concern was expressed regarding bestowing Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors and that it was inappropriate to reward Councillors for the role that they were paid a salary to undertake because this would send the wrong message out to staff and residents and could be detrimental for staff morale.

- Councillors were remunerated for carrying out their roles and the former Councillors long service could be commemorated instead with a certificate/award.
- These senior former Councillors had not been remunerated during the time they had undertaken the role and this in itself was not much of an argument when the Freedom was bestowed recently on a professional sports person, he had been recognised for his achievements in sport and not for being paid. The Member concluded by supporting the recommendations of the Working Group.
- In previous years, the Freedom of the Borough had been bestowed on a former Councillor for his long service and also a former officer of the authority, therefore a precedent had already been set.
- A Member said he wished to place on record his appreciation to the former Councillors for their long service to the County Borough – over 40 years of service was to be applauded but his view was to bestow the Freedom of the Borough was a step too far. The role of a Councillor was a paid position and this was reward enough. He proposed that the applications to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors Scully and Dally be not acceded to.
- These former Councillors had served the County Borough well for years had been stalwarts and had worked hard during their time in office and, therefore, proposed that the Working Group recommendations be endorsed.
- A Member said she would like to place on record that she did not know or have knowledge of either to the two former Councillors but had listened to the comments made. She said their length of service was to be highly commended but pointed out that the Freedom of the Borough was the highest accolade that the authority could bestow and did not agree with the principle of bestowing Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors.
- Freedom of the Borough had been bestowed on former Councillor Rex Herbert because he had served continuously for 52 years and had been the longest serving Councillor in Wales and the U.K. at that time. He had also served as

Mayor on two occasions. However, times had changed and the reputation of Councillors was perceived differently and the rewarding of Councillors for their service would not be forgiven by the public.

- The Leader of the Labour Group said that these nominations were submitted in good faith and this debate was embarrassing because it was within the public domain. The fact that Freedom of the Borough had been bestowed on former Councillor Rex Herbert had set a precedent as he was a serving Councillor who had also received payment to undertake the role, therefore, there was no differential.

In reply to a question regarding conferring the Freedom of the Borough on the Royal British Legion, the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance advised that this had been conferred previously to another organisation and the honour would be conferred on the corporate body and one of their representatives would accept the honour on behalf of the organisation.

In reply to a further question, the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance advised that the Working Group had only made a recommendation to Council, therefore, no decision had legally been taken at this point, it was a matter for Council to determine.

Councillor Millard left the meeting at this juncture.

Following a lengthy debate,

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the application to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on the Royal British Legion be acceded to.

It was proposed and seconded that a recorded vote be taken in respect of bestowing the Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors Brian Scully and Malcolm Dally:

In Favour of Bestowing the Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors Brian Scully and Malcolm Dally –
Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, M. Cross, P Edwards, L. Elias, K. Hayden, H. McCarthy, K. Pritchard, T. Sharrem, T. Smith, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis, L. Winnett

Against Bestowing the Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors Brian Scully and Malcolm Dally – Councillors J. Collins, M. Cook, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, G. L. Davies, M. Day, D. Hancock, S. Healy, J. Hill, J. Holt, J. Mason, C. Meredith, M. Moore, L. Parsons, G. Paulsen, K. Rowson, B. Summers, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins

Abstention – Councillor M. Holland

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the applications to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on former Councillors Brian Scully and Malcolm Dally be not acceded to.

No. 52

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Consideration was given to:

Aneurin Bevan Community Health Council

- to appoint two representatives to the above.

The Leader advised that he had received no nominations for this position at this point in time.

Advisory Panel for Local Authority School Governors

The following recommendations were made by the Panel on 21st June, 2021 to appoint:

Blaen-y-Cwm Primary School – Stephen Connolly

Willowtown Primary School – Judith Waring

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community – Adam King

Glanhowy Primary School – Councillor T. Smith

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the above appointments be endorsed.

Local Government Association – General Assembly

To note the appointment of the Leader and Deputy Leader to the

	<p>above.</p> <p>RESOLVED accordingly.</p>	
No. 53	<p><u>TIME OF FUTURE COUNCIL MEETINGS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the time of future Council meetings.</p> <p>RESOLVED that future meetings of Council commence at 10.00 a.m.</p>	
No. 54	<p><u>MOTION - 999 EMERGENCY SERVICES DAY 2021</u></p> <p>Due to the need to consider this item as a matter of urgency, the Chair of the Council confirmed that the matter could be considered under the Provisions of Paragraph 4(b), Section 100(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council recorded its support for the UK's annual national 'Emergency Services Day' which would be held on 9th September and which was supported by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. - Council placed on record its sincere appreciation for the two million people who work and volunteer in the NHS and emergency services today. - It was agreed to fly the official flag of the 'Emergency Services Day' above the town hall on 9th September each year to mark 999 Day. <p>A Member requested that the motion should acknowledge those emergency services workers that had lost their lives during the pandemic.</p> <p>FURTHER RESOLVED accordingly.</p> <p>Councillor J. Collins left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	

<p>No. 55</p>	<p><u>EXEMPT ITEMS</u></p> <p>To receive and consider the following reports which in the opinion of the proper officer were exempt items taking into account consideration of the public interest test and that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting (the reasons for the decisions for the exemptions were available on a schedule maintained by the proper officer).</p>	
<p>No. 56</p>	<p><u>CHARITABLE LAND, FORMER YSGOL GYMRAEG, KING STREET, BRYNMAWR</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services.</p> <p>A Ward Member welcomed the report and said that this was long overdue. The area was currently in a dilapidated condition and he looked forward to the development of the site.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority) be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the following be agreed by the Council acting as Trustees:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Trustees apply for a 'scheme'. 2) That any income from the sale of the school site would equally benefit Blaen-y-Cwm school, St Mary's Church in Wales School and St Mary's Catholic School. 	

No. 57

EBBW VALLEY RAILWAY

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).

The report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services was submitted for consideration.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Regeneration spoke in detail to the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein. The officer explained that the report provided details of the Loan Agreement and Quadripartite Agreement. This proposal would be a joint venture between the Council and the organisations named therein.

It was noted that the Quadripartite Agreement detailed the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners to successfully deliver the rail project. In addition, an Implementation Agreement was a contractual document that sat under the Quadripartite Agreement which would deal with the delivery of the project

The Head of Regeneration continued by outlining the roles and responsibilities of each of the partner organisations as detailed in paragraph 2.9 of the report. The document clearly set out that Welsh Government were responsible for the provision of the loan and the financial liability for programme including overspend risks beyond the loan amount. Welsh Government would also continue to lobby UK Government Department of Transport for additional funding to facilitate the Phase II work (Abertillery Spur).

The Head of Regeneration concluded by advising that the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and had supported Option 1.

The views of Members were, thereupon, sought (summarised below) and were responded to by the Managing Director, Head of

Regeneration, Service Manager – Accountancy, Executive Member Regeneration & Economic Development:

- The Leader of the Labour Group expressed his concern that the decision that had been made at the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee had been without full knowledge of the Quadripartite Agreement. He asked, should this proposal be agreed whether a press release would be issued to the public (as this was a confidential report not within the public domain) and if so, whether this would disclose the fact that if there was any shortfall or financial liability associated with the loan that Welsh Government would be responsible.

The Executive Member – Regeneration & Economic Development clarified that the Council would not incur any financial liability for the loan or if there was a shortfall, this would be responsibility of Welsh Government. Discussions would need to take place with Welsh Government regarding the funding aspects but the public would be assured that no financial liability would be borne by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

- The Leader of the Labour Group referred to paragraph 6.1.2 of the report and asked whether Welsh Government would mitigate the impact upon the Council's minimum revenue provision or whether this burden would have to be borne by the Council.

The Service Manager – Accountancy confirmed that there would be an impact on the minimum revenue provision but the Asset Development Fee which would be paid to the Council would offset this cost, so there would be no increase in the minimum revenue provision. Ministers had agreed the annual budget allocated to Transport for Wales would be sufficient to cover the Asset Development Fee in the event that passenger revenue was not sufficient.

- The Leader of the Labour Group referred to the initial report that had been considered by Council in March that made reference to the fact that the modelling demonstrated that the income from 2 trains per hour on the Ebbw Valley line would cover repayments. However, he pointed out that as far as he was aware no modelling had been carried out and as this was public funding there should have been modelling

carried out on the proposal. In addition, he requested information relating to patronage numbers.

The Head of Regeneration confirmed that the economic arguments had been set out in the WelTAG report developed for the Frequency Enhancement and Welsh Government was satisfied that the investment in the dualling was value for money. It was noted that this study had included patronage numbers. It was pointed out that if the Welsh Government was unsure regarding the viability of the proposal, it would not have been included within The Wales Transport Strategy 2021.

The Leader of the Labour Group said he would have liked to have sight of this modelling especially as consideration was being given to a 50-year loan because there could be potential future financial implications that the loan could have on the Council. He also expressed his concern that the Abertillery Spur had not been included as part of the proposal and said that this needed to be lobbied for.

The Head of Regeneration explained that a parcel of land for the Phase II works had been recently been acquired however, Welsh Government would continue to lobby UK government for additional funding to facilitate the Abertillery Spur. It was noted that the line for the Abertillery Spur had been identified as a section of U.K. government line and a final decision was awaited.

- Another Member said he was grateful for the additional information which had been supplied. However, the Scrutiny Committee had made a decision and expressed his concern that it seemed that this decision was being overruled by officers. He stated that if this was standard practice there would be no need for scrutiny in the future.

He continued by pointing out that there should have been public consultation undertaken regarding the proposal and expressed his concern that there was no guarantee that the Abertillery Spur would come to fruition. He added that 60% of travellers using the line came from outside of Blaenau Gwent and asked the reason why Caerphilly and Newport had not been contacted to share some of the responsibility.

The Managing Director confirmed that officers had not overruled the Scrutiny Committee, there had been a clear debate at this meeting and Members had asked to have sight of the legal document given the scale of the project. Whilst legal documentation was normally not provided as part of reports, due consideration had been given to the view of the Scrutiny Committee and this document had been supplied as an appendix to the Council report, therefore, the Scrutiny Committee's request had been acceded to.

With regard to contacting Caerphilly and Newport, the loan had only been offered to Blaenau Gwent. The report demonstrated that assurances had been provided that Blaenau Gwent would not be taking all the risk, any financial liabilities would be the responsibility of Welsh Government.

- A Member expressed his concern that the Quadripartite Agreement had not been reviewed from a legal perspective and that the report did not provide details of an impact assessment on how the proposal would impact on residents, staff, the environment, businesses and the Council including the impact on the bus services in the Ebbw Fawr Valley or in the Tredegar area.

The Managing Director confirmed that a considerable amount of legal work had been undertaken on the proposal. However, she acknowledged the point made regarding the impact assessment but pointed out that 4 trains per hour into Ebbw Vale had been included as a priority within the Council's Corporate Plan and this proposal was being brought forward as an agreed Council priority.

The Managing Director added that the WelTAG process had included very detailed technical assessments and had assessed the impact across a range of measures before Welsh Government had decided to proceed with the proposal.

The Member asked whether the impact assessment could be made available and asked how this proposal would impact particularly on the town of Ebbw Vale as people would travel out of town.

The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance provided an

assurance that external reputable legal advisors had been involved in drafting the Quadripartite Agreement between parties and officers were satisfied that the risk to the Council was the lowest it possibly could be in the circumstances. The agreement had been underwritten and guaranteed by Welsh Government.

- Another Member raised the following points:
 - How 'water tight' was the legal agreement so there would be no financial burden placed on the residents of Blaenau Gwent in the future.
 - Why had there been no collaboration with other Councils on the agreement because these areas would benefit more from the proposal.
 - This proposal would affect the Council's borrowing going forward and asked why hadn't Welsh Government given a grant as opposed to a loan because this would restrict borrowing going forward and loans were less favourable from a credit perspective.
 - Why had the Abertillery Spur not been included as part of the proposal. With the recovery from the pandemic how realistic would it be to receive the funding for the Abertillery Spur from UK Government.
 - Details of the impact assessment should be provided particularly, detailing the impact that this proposal would have on towns.
 - The full documentation should have been provided for Members to peruse at the Scrutiny Committee.

The Service Manager – Accountancy explained that details of the loan including borrowing would be reported as part of the 6 monthly Treasury Management report (the next scheduled report was due in the autumn) and the prudential indicators would also be reviewed to take account of this funding. However, it was pointed out that because funding would be received to repay the borrowing, the impact of the loan would be mitigated.

The Head of Regeneration reiterated that the land for the Abertillery Spur had recently been acquired for the provision of a terminus which had enabled Welsh Government to lobby UK Government for funding for the Abertillery Spur. Funding for these Phase II works had not been included in the loan because UK government owned the line. It was noted that the Burns Report had identified pieces of infrastructure that could be of economic benefit to an area which could be used to environmentally enhance transport across the U.K.

In reply to a concern raised, the Managing Director confirmed that the Abertillery Spur still formed part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal phase 2 proposals. It was noted that the funding from CCRC would be for the design proposals because Transport for Wales would be implementing the scheme itself.

- A Member expressed his concern and reiterated the earlier concerns that Blaenau Gwent would be taking on all the burden and he was unsure why Network Rail could not have bid for the infrastructure and Blaenau Gwent became involved at the stage of the Phase II Abertillery Spur works. He was unsure whether the proposal would be value for money as an assessment had not be undertaken regarding patronage and expressed his concern that more people would travel out of Blaenau Gwent than into the area.
- Clarification regarding the cost of the land that had been purchased in Abertillery was sought together with the implications, if the Abertillery Spur did not materialise.

The Head of Regeneration advised that a transport grant had been used to purchase the land and provided details of the cost, the purchase figure had been included in a report that had been presented to Council earlier in the year. If the Abertillery Spur did not materialise the land would be used for other purposes.

The Managing Director stated that there was a Welsh Government commitment to achieve 4 trains per hour to Ebbw Vale and this was the reason why Welsh Government was pursuing the project and providing the loan. A WelTAG technical assessment had concluded investment into the line

would achieve value for money.

With regard to partnership working, the Council had had a very short timescale in which to respond to the offer of the Welsh Government loan – it was noted that a grant had been sought but at that point in time only a loan was on offer. The loan had only been offered to Blaenau Gwent and due to the imminent start date of the project (this summer) if discussions had taken place with other parties this would have delayed the project. The Managing Director reiterated that Welsh Government would take on any financial liabilities and the proposal had to move at pace to deliver the benefits for the community.

- Reference was made to the creation of Community Hubs and that people were now working from home and yet capacity on trains was being increased.
- This was a once in a generational investment which needed to be considered positively and consideration should be given to the message it would send to the funders if the Council did not want to invest in the people or communities or infrastructure to support the green economy which was the way forward. He was content that the Quadripartite Agreement provided the necessary assurances that the loan would be re-paid.
- A Member said that he resided near a railway line and in his opinion 4 trains per hour were too many and would end up unviable especially with people working from home.
- The Leader of the Labour Group said that there should have been consultation on the proposal to ascertain what the people thought about the increase in the train service.

Following a lengthy discussion, the Leader of the Labour Group, thereupon, proposed that **Option 2 be endorsed for the following reasons:**

- **It was felt that Newport and Caerphilly would benefit (probably more than Blaenau Gwent) and were not being invited to share the risk.**
- **The loan did not include funding for the Abertillery Spur which was promised but was still as far off as it ever**

was, particularly in light of a projected reduction in capital spend as a direct financial consequence of the pandemic.

- The administration had not demonstrated enough clear positives for Blaenau Gwent alone to enter into a 50-year project.
- Blaenau Gwent had a number of other much higher priorities such as the current backlog of much needed repairs to highways and drainage etc.
- The loan had the potential to negatively impact on future borrowings for the Council.
- No data/evidence had been produced to show that the cash box would be sufficient fund the loan, which after all, was public money.
- There had been no public consultation regarding this proposal.

This alternative proposal was seconded.

A recorded vote was, therefore, requested.

The Executive Member – Regeneration & Economic Development proposed that Option 1 be endorsed. He felt that the Council was safeguarded in terms of the agreement and said that this was an opportunity and not a liability. The proposal would not only improve the line to Ebbw Vale Phase I works it would be a catalyst to gain Phase II, the Abertillery Spur This proposal was seconded.

The Leader of the Labour Group raised a point of order and said that he would have welcomed the Executive Member contributing to the debate on such an important issue.

The Executive Member indicated that he felt that the points that had been raised had been covered as part of the report.

In Favour of Option 1 – Councillors M. Cook, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, G. L. Davies, M. Day, D. Hancock, S. Healy, J. Hill, J. Holt, C. Meredith, M. Moore, L. Parsons, G. Paulsen, K. Pritchard, K. Rowson, B. Summers, J. Wilkins.

Against of Option 1 – Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, M. Cross, P. Edwards, H. McCarthy, T. Sharrem, T. Smith, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis, L. Winnett.

As there was no stated intention from any Member present to vote in a different way, it was agreed that the vote be reversed for Option 2.

In Favour of Option 2 – Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, M. Cross, P. Edwards, H. McCarthy, T. Sharrem, T. Smith, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis, L. Winnett.

Against Option 2 – Councillors M. Cook, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, G. L. Davies, M. Day, D. Hancock, S. Healy, J. Hill, J. Holt, C. Meredith, M. Moore, L. Parsons, G. Paulsen, K. Pritchard, K. Rowson, B. Summers, J. Wilkins.

The vote on Option 1 was, thereupon carried.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority) be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that

- (i) That the terms of the Quadripartite Agreement as set out in the report be accepted and the Council entered into the agreement to deliver the works to the Ebbw Valley Railway.
- (ii) The terms of the Implementation Agreement in line with the Quadripartite Agreement be accepted and the Council entered into the agreement to deliver the works to the Ebbw Valley Railway.
- (iii) TfW (Transport for Wales) to provide professional services to the Council in respect of this project be directly appointed.
- (iv) That the membership of the Liaison Committee for Blaenau Gwent be agreed.

No. 58

ADDITIONAL HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE WORKS 2021/22

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).

The report of the Head of Community Services was submitted for consideration.

The Head of Community Services spoke briefing to the report and advised that if Option 2 was endorsed, the cost of £320,000 would be funded from the Council's General Reserve.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report which related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority) be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely that:

The necessary works across all 16 wards be identified and a tendering exercise be undertaken with a private contractor to acquire a cost of highways patching works per sq. metre. Targeting around 400 sq. metres of highways repairs per ward covering residential roads in all 16 wards.

No. 59

SHORTLISTING - JNC OFFICERS

The Chief Officer Commercial & Customer declared an interest in Item Nos 59 – 61 and left the meeting at this juncture.

Item numbers 57 - 62 were, thereupon, considered simultaneously.

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 Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 29th March, 2021.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the decisions contained therein be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 60</p>	<p><u>APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE - JNC OFFICERS</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 13th April, 2021</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the post be offered to Luisa Munro-Morris on a salary in accordance with JNC 3 (£63,742 - £70,115).</p>	
<p>No. 61</p>	<p><u>LONGLISTING - JNC OFFICERS</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p>	

	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 19th May, 2021.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the decisions contained therein be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 62</p>	<p><u>SHORTLISTING - JNC OFFICERS</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 9th June, 2021.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the decisions contained therein be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 63</p>	<p><u>APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE - JNC OFFICERS</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 17th June, 2021.</p>	

	<p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the post be offered to Bernadette Elias on a salary in accordance with JNC 5 (£73,137 - £80,450).</p>	
<p>No. 64</p>	<p><u>APPEAL COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 30th April, 2021.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the decision contained therein be noted.</p>	