

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 23RD FEBRUARY, 2022

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. HEALY (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook (Vice-Chair)
P. Baldwin
G. A. Davies
L. Elias
J. Hill
W. Hodgins (substitute Cllr J.P. Morgan)
J. Holt
H. McCarthy
C. Meredith
G. Paulsen
T. Smith
S. Thomas

WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director of Social Services
Corporate Director of Education
Head of Organisational Development
Service Manager Performance & Democratic
Service Manager Accountancy
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Collier and J.P. Morgan.</p> <p>Chief Officer Commercial & Customer Head of Governance & Partnerships</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 10th December, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 10TH DECEMBER 2021</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee held on 10th December, 2021 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>BLAENAU GWENT COVID 19 RECOVERY PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services which was presented to set out and seek the views of the Scrutiny committee on the approach to be adopted to monitor the Recovery from the Covid 19 Pandemic across Council Services and the wider community.</p> <p>In the absence of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services, the Service Manager Performance and Democratic presented the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to the 2018 town centre footfall numbers for Brynmawr and enquired if the data was accurate. He felt that if the intention was to increase footfall numbers to pre-pandemic levels</p>	

the data needed to be accurate. The Service Manager explained they had taken the data from the football counters in each of the town centres but would undertake to check the accuracy of the figures with Environment colleagues.

As the Government's furlough scheme was ending in March a Member enquired regarding the Authority's consultation and engagement with local businesses. As Regeneration Officers had been unable to attend the meeting, the Service Manager Performance and Democratic responded that the economy had been identified as a key area of focus and an action plan led by economy colleagues was in place to support businesses across Blaenau Gwent. With regard to actual dialogue with businesses she would need to consult with the theme leads. She advised Members that this was a starting point and moving forward future reports presented to scrutiny committees could include more detail in relation to specific areas.

A Member suggested that a progress report be presented to the relevant scrutiny committee to consider what support packages may be needed as a result of the furlough scheme ending. The Service Manager agreed that a progress report on identified themes could be put forward as a potential agenda item for the new committee cycle.

The Managing Director suggested that as Regeneration Officers were not in attendance at the meeting the Member could raise his concerns with the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services after the conclusion of the meeting to gain a better understanding of the work being undertaken with local businesses.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely to recommend to Executive Committee that the approach set out to manage recovery from the Covid 19 Pandemic across Council Services and the wider community is taken forward.

No. 7 **FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTERS 1 AND 2 (APRIL 2021 TO SEPTEMBER 2021)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Performance and Democratic which presented the Finance and Performance Report for Quarters 1 and 2 (April 2021 to

September 2021).

The Service Manager Performance and Democratic presented the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member commented that it was disappointing that not all senior officers were in attendance to represent their service to address Members comments and felt that the report was overly positive. He felt that to give a true picture the report should include a synopsis at the start of each section compiled by the individual Corporate Directors. With regard to financial pressures, he felt that even with the improved funding received from the Welsh Government over the last five years, the Authority was still struggling financially and had to resort to the MRP to balance the budget. He referred to the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and the Abertillery rail link and felt that the Authority should use City Deal funding to pursue other opportunities to develop projects.

The Chair also raised concerns regarding senior officers' attendance and felt that advanced notice should be given to the Chair if senior officers were unable to attend scrutiny meetings.

The Managing Director took this point on board and referred to the Members comments regarding the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and advised that there were other projects being developed such as the housing viability project in Tredegar. There were also other City Deal projects coming forward across the region that were in the early stages of consideration with the Heads of the Valleys regions and Welsh Government City Deal colleagues.

A Member referred to the bus service and felt this could form an integrated transport system with the rail link.

Another Member felt that the report needed to be more balanced covering issues the Authority did well and issues that needed further work. He raised concerns regarding several issues i.e. communication with the public when systems were unavailable, IT connectivity, iTrent system, hospital discharges and CCTV. The Managing Director responded that the Authority had invested significantly in IT systems and had a strong partnership with SRS, other local authorities and Gwent police. The switch to homeworking had been almost seamless and a credit to the organisation. Last year Members had agreed an IT investment plan in order to keep IT systems continually upgraded, however,

there would be challenges with systems failing from time to time but importantly there was a robust partnership with SRS to respond quickly to those issues. She felt that the organisation had moved incredibly effectively to working on IT platforms and overall the Authority's IT systems stood up extremely well.

With regard to IT connectivity in schools the Director of Education said there had been some challenges around school connectivity but this had been an all Wales issue relating to the All Wales Public Services Broadband Aggregate which sits outside of direct control of the SRS but had created varying levels of connectivity across a number of schools. The Director advised that the situation had stabilised and there were plans in place to secure connectivity for schools over the summer period and provided assurances that schools would be in a far more stable position moving forward.

With regard to delayed transfers of care the Director of Social Services said Blaenau Gwent was the best performing Authority in Gwent around delayed transfers of care and they were working hard to maintain those standards, unfortunately there was a UK wide issue in relation to recruitment to the care sector. Welsh Government was introducing the real living wage from April 2022 which would help to retain and recruit staff and he felt this was the start of a journey to try and improve wages and professionalism to recruit the right people into the sector. The Director confirmed there had been a waiting list for Domiciliary care packages recently and priority had been given to hospital discharges over the community, currently there were only a few people awaiting domiciliary care packages.

With regard to the iTrent system the Head of Organisational Development reported that the system was currently operating fully and no issues had been reported where managers were unable to record sickness absence.

The Chair commended officers on their outstanding work to keep front line services operational throughout a very difficult period.

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

<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT – TREASURY STRATEGY STATEMENT, INVESTMENT STRATEGY & MRP POLICY STATEMENT 2022/2023 (INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources which was presented to give Members the opportunity to scrutinise the Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (including prudential indicators) to be adopted for the 2022/2023 financial year, prior to formal recommendation to Council.</p> <p>The Service Manager Accountancy presented the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that Members considered the Annual Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement for 2022/2023 financial year and the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators contained therein (APPENDIX A) and did not consider any amendments, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.</p>	
<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>CAPITAL STRATEGY 2022/2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources which was presented to give Members the opportunity to consider the Capital Strategy (attached as appendix 1) following the annual review, to be adopted for the financial year 2022/2023.</p> <p>The Service Manager Accountancy presented the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members considered the Capital Strategy for the 2022/23 financial year (attached as appendix 1) and did not consider any amendments, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.</p> <p>As this was the last meeting of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee in the Committee cycle, the Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contribution and support over the last 5 years.</p>	