

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE
REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 9TH
FEBRUARY, 2022**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HILL (CHAIR)

Councillors G. A. Davies (Vice-Chair)
M. Cross
M. Cook
P. Edwards
H. McCarthy
K. Hayden
S. Healy
W. Hodgins
J. C. Morgan
L. Parsons
G. Paulsen
K. Rowson
B. Willis

WITH: Head of Regeneration
Service Manager Business & Regeneration
Team Manager, Regeneration Opportunities
Skills Development Manager - Aspire Blaenau Gwent
Marketing & Communications Officer
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.	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>No apologies for absence were reported.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>Councillors G. Paulsen and W. Hodgins declared an interest in the following item:</p> <p>Item No. 8 Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 8th December, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 8TH DECEMBER 2021</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 8th December, 2021 was submitted.</p> <p><i><u>Trinity Chapel</u></i></p> <p>The Service Manager Regeneration Opportunities provided a verbal update, and undertook to circulate a briefing note for Members to include costs.</p> <p>Following discussions at the last meeting and Members' request for information on the costs of the project, the Officer reported that the acquisition costs for the building in 2009 was £95k, and was undertaken because the building was in disrepair and was becoming an issue within the Town Centre. The building was originally acquired with a view to accommodate an indoor market on the ground floor and business incubation units on the upper two levels.</p>	

The project was developed and the tender price was £740k. Funding was secured via the Convergence Programme along with match funding from other sources. However, the Officer reported that two significant issues had impacted on the timescale and costs of the project, i.e. the requirement for a build-over agreement with Welsh Water which delayed work for 5 months, and discovery of a further water main on site which delayed the project for a further 6 weeks. These unforeseen issues resulted in the original tender price increasing to £1.2m total cost. The deficit was grant funded through the Vibrant and Viable Places Programme.

In response to a question raised by a Member the Officer confirmed that the costs for the next phase and the library building was £900k.

A Member expressed concern regarding the escalating costs of the project and felt that the drainage issues should have been identified sooner if more research of the building had been undertaken.

Members said the costs were significant and felt that the original plans for the building would have been more appropriate for the Town Centre. A Member also asked whether the initial cost of £740k included internal works.

In response the Officer confirmed that the £740k was intended to cover internal and external works, but did not include the costs for the fit-out of the building.

A Member said this was the second occasion where the Council had incurred additional costs for trunk sewerage or water mains issues on major developments and questioned Welsh Water's responsibility in terms of keeping records.

Another Member asked when completion of the project could be expected.

The Officer confirmed that discussions were ongoing with

Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Council were pushing for the programme to commence as soon as possible. She said in terms of Welsh Government's budget profile the majority of spend was expected in the next financial year, so completion of the project was expected in 2022.

The Chair referred to the briefing note to be circulated to Members and asked that a timeline of the project to date be included.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.

No. 6

LEVELLING UP FUNDING BID REQUEST

Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Business & Regeneration.

The Service Manager Business & Regeneration presented the report which sought authority to submit Levelling Up Funding (LUF) bids during the second call in line with the UK Government LUF timetable.

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

A Member said he understood that in the first round of bids only a few projects in Wales had been accepted, and stressed the importance of the Council having a breadth of projects available to move on.

The Officer agreed, he said the challenge was identifying projects that were deliverable and supported by Central Government, and this required a significant amount of work in terms of consultation and also the application itself.

Another Member said he was disappointed that this would fall outside the political process due to the pre-election period and asked whether there was a longer list of projects that could be considered.

The Officer said the purpose of the report was to highlight the opportunity and the challenges of identifying projects that fit the specific criteria. Officers were unable to do anything about the timeframe, but he assured that any projects submitted for bids would add value in terms of the regeneration of Blaenau Gwent, but also projects that were likely to succeed.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the Car Park in Ebbw Vale the Officer explained that the Car Park had been identified as a key project within the Placemaking Plan for the Town Centre, albeit there was work to be done to develop delivery models and negotiating with current owners. However, since the additional guidance on LUF had been issued there may be other projects that would be more appropriate in terms of deliverability within the timeframes and specific criteria in the next round of funding. He said the Car Park had been provided as an example but pointed out that timeframes could preclude that type of funding.

A discussion ensued when the Officer explained that the Team were developing Placemaking Plans for Town Centres and these were very much focussed on Welsh Government funding. However, work had already commenced in terms of policy documents and providing evidence for the rationale and framework for projects, and this would provide the evidence and information required to feed into whatever opportunities come forward.

The Service Manager Regeneration Opportunities pointed out that this was not the only funding opportunity, and the reason for developing Placemaking Plans for each Town Centre was to have a series of projects and delivery plans in place to take forward should funding become available.

A Member said the report would allow Officers to continue their work, but provided flexibility around schemes and funds that could be accessed.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be

	accepted and applications be prepared for the next LUF round of bidding for the schemes identified in the report in paragraph 2.7. (Option 1)	
No. 7	<p><u>ANEURIN BEVAN DESTINATION STRATEGY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Business & Regeneration.</p> <p>The Service Manager Business & Regeneration presented the report which sought endorsement of the Aneurin Bevan Destination Strategy, and provided a summary of the content of the Strategy and the Themes around which a range of projects are based.</p> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member said he felt there was not enough diversification within the report in recognising the achievements of other prominent figures from across Blaenau Gwent compared to Aneurin Bevan.</p> <p>Another Member said the people of Tredegar were very proud of the achievements of Aneurin Bevan and the creation of the NHS from an idea founded in Tredegar. He said when considering development of Tredegar Town Centre it was recognised that there was no building that people could visit and learn the historical background of the town. He said 10 The Circle was an integral part of the development of the Town Centre and would not only provide a place for people to visit and learn the history of the NHS, but also increase footfall in the Town Centre. However, he agreed there were other key areas in Blaenau Gwent that needed focus and he believed that tourism could be a strategic way forward for the Borough in the future. He welcomed the report and said the new concept in Tredegar was already proving its worth.</p> <p>Another Member said he welcomed the Study, however, he felt some elements were out of date as a number of schemes had now been developed. He said since the report was prepared a series</p>	

of Town Centre Partnership Boards had been established which included a number of partners, and he suggested that destination management form part of the work of those Partnership Boards which could then feed into the overarching Destination Management Board.

The Officer agreed with the suggested approach. He said things had progressed in terms of project delivery, and the framework for overseeing regeneration had also been updated.

The Chair of the Destination Management Group confirmed that the Group was already considering how Blaenau Gwent could celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the birth of the NHS next year, and was looking at partners to be involved in that work. However, he also agreed with previous comments and confirmed that the Group was mindful of the fact that Blaenau Gwent had an extensive heritage of famous people that should also be celebrated.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Aneurin Bevan Strategy be supported with the amendments requested, prior to approval by the Executive Committee. (Option 2)

No. 8

ASPIRE SHARED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

The Skills Development Manager presented the report which provided performance information on the Aspire Programme and associated external business engagement; and also performance information on the BGCBC internal apprenticeship programme.

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

A Member asked whether Registered Social Landlords in Blaenau Gwent were involved in the Programme.

The Officer confirmed that they had not recruited any apprentices to date. However, they did provide excellent work placements for looked after children on the Traineeship Programme in the construction sector.

The Member also asked whether apprenticeships could be offered within the Council's Business Support Section.

In response the Officer explained that this had not been pursued due to limited capacity within the Team, as current efforts were focussed on supporting and filling apprenticeship vacancies within the Social Care Team.

Another Member commended the Aspire Team on the success of the programme. He then referred to the shortage of staff within the Social Care Team and asked how it was intended to fill those vacant posts.

The Officer confirmed that the Team worked closely with Organisational Development to identify current vacancies that would be suitable for an apprenticeship. There were currently five Level 2 vacancies within the Social Care Team, and work was ongoing with the training provider secure training and NVQ support for those posts. However, in terms of identifying vacancies for apprenticeships, it was crucial that training providers have the funding capacity to provide training. The Officer said Social Care was a priority area with the vast majority of Officer time dedicated to filling vacancies within the sector.

A Member commended the work of the Aspire Team and said there was a need for the Programme to be expanded moving forward, particularly in the automotive sector.

The Officer confirmed that discussions were ongoing with Cardiff City Region and Welsh Government to look at opportunities to develop the Programme and widen the scope across other LA's. The Officer said the automotive industry was a key sector to

consider, particularly with the maintenance of electric vehicles etc., and the Team could work with training providers to develop pathways into that sector. However, she pointed out that Aspire was a Programme Management Team and without sufficient capacity within learning providers then the Team would be unable to facilitate those opportunities, and she urged Members to lobby Welsh Government to ensure a sustainable future in the growth of apprenticeships and funding for learning providers.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding funding, the Officer confirmed that discussions were ongoing with Welsh Government and Cardiff City Region to develop a proposal post 2022 and she hoped to provide an update on this in the near future.

A Member said College Gwent had a significant amount of money to develop the Monwel site and asked whether the Aspire Programme was involved in that work.

The Officer confirmed that Aspire was very much part of that work and had been working closely with College Gwent and Tech Valleys on this for a number of years. In terms of the proposal itself, she confirmed that College Gwent had received funding to purchase equipment to develop programmes of learning in preparation for the opening of the Hive in September 2023. She said apprenticeships were at the forefront of industry within Blaenau Gwent many years ago, and it was intended to bring back a more modernised apprenticeship that would fill future skills gaps, looking at technology within the manufacturing industry. Hopefully a report would be presented in due course and Members would see significant development of that work.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted. (Option 2)

No. 9	<u>TRANSFORMING TOWNS EMPTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT FUND</u>
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	Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer
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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, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

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

The Service Manager Regeneration Opportunities presented the report which provided an overview of the Transforming Towns Empty Property Management Fund and sought support of the list of properties to include within the action plan submitted to Welsh Government.

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

A discussion ensued when the Officer replied to questions and clarified points raised by Members.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relation to the business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and that the Council endorse and fully support the Enforcement Action Plan. Once the action plan has been approved by Welsh Government, the Council would then be invited to prepare and submit business plans for each of the properties that they need funds for. (Option 2)

The Chair reported that this was the last meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee prior to the local elections in May, and took the opportunity to thank Officers and Members for their support during the year.
