

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 14TH APRIL, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT:

**Leader of the Council/
Executive Member Corporate Services**
Councillor N.J. Daniels (CHAIR)

**Deputy Leader/Executive Member –
Regeneration & Economic Development**
Councillor D. Davies

Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins

Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins

Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason

WITH:

Managing Director
Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Chief Officer Resources
Interim Chief Officer Commercial
Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Press Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
	<p><u>ONE MINUTE SILENCE – HRH DUKE OF EDINBURGH</u></p> <p>The Leader acknowledged that last Friday, it was with great sadness that we heard of the passing HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. The Leader felt that this marked the end of a long and distinguished era in history and on behalf of Blaenau Gwent he wished to offer condolences to the Queen and the wider members of the Royal Family.</p> <p>In the absence of a formal Council meeting the Leader asked the Executive Committee to observe a one-minute silence as a mark of respect to HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.</p>	
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:-</p> <p>Councillor S. Thomas, Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee Councillor S. Healy, Chair of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Councillor J. Hill, Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Councillor G.A. Davies, Vice-Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee</p> <p><u>INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME</u></p> <p>The Leader welcomed the recently appointed Luisa Munro-Morris, Head of School Improvement and Inclusion to the Executive Committee. The Leader advised that both himself and the Executive Member for Education felt it appropriate for the Officer to attend to ensure she felt part of the team straightaway.</p>	

	<p>The Leader expressed his congratulations to the Officer on an impressive interview and was delighted that the position was accepted. The Leader felt confidence that the Authority could be assured that the schools improvement programme was in safe hands. The Leader noted from conversations with the Executive Member for Education that the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion would complement an already strong and committed team.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest and dispensations were received.</p>	
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>	
No. 4	<p><u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 24th March, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
	<p><u>DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS</u></p>	
No. 5	<p><u>GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS</u></p> <p>No grants to organisations were received.</p>	

No. 6

**PUBLIC SPACE CCTV SYSTEM ANNUAL
MONITORING REPORT 2020**

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Chief Officer Resources (SIRO CCTV), Head of Community Services and Interim Chief Officer Commercial.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the report outlined the Council's draft Public Space CCTV Annual Monitoring Report 2020 which covered the period 1st September 2019 – 31st December 2020. The report which was detailed in Appendix 1 was the first of what will be Annual Monitoring Reports in line with the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's Code of Practice, to support the development of a holistic approach to raising its standards and compliance.

The Chief Officer further spoke to the report and noted the progress made in conjunction with the compliance with the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's CCTV Codes of Practice. The successful engagement sessions with Members were acknowledged and it was reported that the feedback from these meetings would be included in the Forward Work Programme.

It was also reported that the report had been considered by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee who supported Option 2 with an additional recommendation for consideration by the Executive Committee. The Scrutiny Committee further recommend that the Executive Committee investigate the possibilities of extra funding for the system in liaison with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and a paper be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee to review the equality of provision across the County Borough.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services added that there were technical challenges around cameras in terms of download speed and Wi-Fi connections. However, he stated that this did not result in any loss in footage and further work was needed to address this matter.

The Managing Director referred to previous discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioners Office where it had been confirmed that additional funding would not be available as the system did not include live monitoring. It was felt that without this function the investment could not be supported.

There had been further proposals that this be taken forward on a Gwent wide basis, however since the pandemic in March 2020 priorities had been placed in other areas. Therefore, the Managing Director advised that should these discussions be recommenced the Authority would participate in order to reach a solution.

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration felt it was important that the Council had adequate Wi-Fi connections across the Borough to support improving systems. The Executive Member felt that the Police and other partners had vested interests in CCTV in towns, particularly around covert cameras which would be more beneficial in some instances.

The Leader supported the recommendation brought forward by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and concurred that the Authority needed to be involved in discussions going forward to be part of a Gwent wide working arrangement. The Leader hoped that CCTV would feature highly on the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme over the coming 12 months as it was important to our communities and therefore to ensure we protect and enhance our communities the infrastructure needed to be in place.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Annual Monitoring Report (including its supporting appendices) be approved following which the report would be published and sent to the Surveillance Camera Commissioner. The Executive Committee further supported the recommendation from Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee to investigate the possibilities of extra funding for the system in liaison with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to review the equality of provision across the County Borough.

DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS

No. 7 EAS BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022 (DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION)

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director, EAS.

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which outlined the full contents of the draft EAS Business Plan 2021-2022 and referred the Executive to the Education Aims as detailed in the report.

The Corporate Director Education added that the report had been fully supported by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive Member for Education noted the report which was self-explanatory and concurred that the Education Aims which had been co-constructed was exactly what the Authority needed coming out of the pandemic. The Leader concurred with the comments and stated that these were areas that there was continued dialogue.

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

No. 8

**BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION ADMISSIONS
POLICY FOR NURSERY AND STATUTORY
EDUCATION 2022/23**

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

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which detailed the outcome of the annual review and consultation process associated with the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education and outlined the primary changes made to the document for the 2022/2023 academic session.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report and was pleased to see that as a Local Authority we would be able to work with Abertillery Learning Community in terms of admissions.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and agreed it be published by 15th April, 2020.

**DECISION ITEMS –
REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS**

No. 9 DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services gave an overview of the Destination Management Plan update and summarised the context of the Plan. The Corporate Director advised that Blaenau Gwent had a strong manufacturing links, however there was also strong links to tourism and the Plan ensured that both organisations, businesses and people work together to deliver agreed targets. The Corporate Director further noted the cross cutting themes and five main themes as detailed in the report and reported that the Scrutiny Committee had supported the Plan.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development advised that the industrial areas in South East Wales over the years had not been viewed as a tourism or attraction to come and visit Wales, however there was now a turning point. The Executive Member added that he had recently attended a Valleys Regional Park meeting with other authorities and there was now an opportunity to sweat the historical assets and green spaces of our valleys. There was a vast majority of green spaces in Wales, although Wales was normally promoted via our beautiful costal paths and beaches. Although these are available, there was also green areas such as Cwmtillery Lakes, Bryn Bach Parc which was available in Blaenau Gwent and led to other green spaces across the Valley.

The Executive Member felt that going forward there was a need to look at accommodation and transport in the Borough as well as out of Blaenau Gwent. The Leader concurred with the comments raised and welcomed the transport aspect as it was vital in achieving the aspirations of the Plan

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the BGDMP 2020-25 be endorsed.

No. 10

CIVIC CROWDFUNDING

Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Connected Communities.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services provided a detailed overview of the report and informed that the report had been supported by the Scrutiny Committee who welcomed that this was a different way in accessing funding and supporting local community groups.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development welcomed this new structure which provided community groups with an opportunity to work together and access funding in a different way. It was hoped that this would bring groups together from across the Borough and gave the Council a key role to play in working with local groups. The Executive Member noted dialogue undertaken around crowdfunding and felt it was a new and positive way to access funding for communities.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely the submission of a CCRCF Challenge Fund application for a civic crowdfunding platform be approved, acting as the lead authority. The implementation of a regional crowdfunding platform, inclusive of Blaenau Gwent, to support solutions to locally identified projects and challenges; subject to funding award also be approved.

No. 11

ADVANCED ENGINEERING CENTRE & MTC REPORT

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services noted the report which had two components, firstly manufacturing technology catapult (MTC) UK Centre for Excellence of future of manufacturing. The Corporate Director added that as part of work with Tech Valley it was asked where Blaenau Gwent's skill base was needed to be competitive over the next 10 years. A survey was undertaken which identified that "SME businesses are not currently in a financial position that would encourage any significant investment in either staff training or new equipment.

As a result of the survey it was reported that it had been recommended that the Advanced Engineering Centre offered a range of technology awareness programmes that would allow SMEs to explore, at minimal cost, the benefits of deploying a range of technologies with the potential to improve the efficiency of their business, while also developing additional revenue streams via diversification into additional products and services. It was with these recommendations that the teams at Coleg Gwent and the Local Authority have considered carefully the equipment purchases for the facility and a vision to develop an Advanced Engineering Centre which would create an environment that would attract hi-tech inward investors within the Advanced Manufacturing sector.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services welcomed the involvement of Coleg Gwent who wished to work in partnership with the facility and would underpin the revenue funding to deliver the range of skills required. The Corporate Director noted that the former Monwel building would be converted to the training facility with the Council being the owner with a long lease to Coleg Gwent. A bid had been submitted to Tech Valleys to fund capital works and these costs would cover equipment as it was expected to be a state of the art facility.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development welcomed the report and referred to a report published upon the closure of the Steelworks where one of the key statements was that the way out of poverty was through education. The Executive Member felt that the Council was achieving this with the reports that had been presented. There had been many mentions of Blaenau Gwent not having the skill base or abilities in certain areas, however that was no longer the case, via teams in schools and Coleg Gwent working closer together than we have been in many years. This Centre would be part of a bigger picture and although these skills were the top end there was still a need for electricians and bricklayers and Coleg Gwent had these training facilities which needed to be promoted.

The Executive Member concluded that as the Authority moved forward as partners with Tech Valleys and the City Region, it was anticipated that businesses would look across the valley to Blaenau Gwent and it gave him great pleasure to present this welcomed report.

The Executive Member for Education concurred with comments raised and share the enthusiasm for apprenticeships which are important. This was a fantastic opportunity and partnership between Education and Regeneration which provided exciting opportunities for our young people.

The Leader advised that this report was collectively welcomed by the Executive which set Blaenau Gwent and the Region on a different level one that should have been tackled years ago. The Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration's passion for his area, his push, drive and his insistence that these areas come to the fore should be recognised and appreciated. The Leader expressed a great credit to the Executive Member and concurred that the report provided exciting opportunities for our young people.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely

- the MTC report and associated recommendations be endorsed; and
- the TV submission for the refurbishment of Monwel into the AEC be noted and endorsed.

DECISION ITEMS – SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 12 REVISED SAFE REDUCTION OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STRATEGY 2020 – 2025

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

The Corporate Director Social Services spoke in detail to the report which provided a revised Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy. The Corporate Director noted that the initial Strategy had been in place for 3 years and due to the good work in reducing the number of children being placed into care it was felt that it would be beneficial to refresh and review the Strategy. The Corporate Director further noted the main recommendations, objectives and stated that the impact had not only been in reducing the number of children needing to be brought into care, but also on the budget pressure on the Social Services Directorate and the Council.

It was reported that an overspend of £2.5m was reported in 2016/2017 and had reduced significantly to an underspend of £75,494 in the 2019/2020 financial year, therefore it was hoped that the continuation of the Strategy would further enable Children's Services to manage their budgets going forward.

The Executive Member for Social Services welcomed the report and noted the major decision taken in 2017 when there was an increased rise in children coming into care. The Executive Member advised that the Edge of Care Team, which had been part funded by Social Services and a grant from Welsh Government, was put together to tackle the rise in children coming into care. In July 2018 the numbers were approximately 237, however the Executive Member was pleased to report that today in 2021 the number was 199. The Executive Member felt that this was a great achievement and reflected the excellent work achieved by the Team over the years.

The Executive Member noted other work which had also been undertaken in partnership with colleagues in Monmouthshire with children with more complex needs in care. This work also saw a decline in numbers from 18 to 12. These reductions demonstrated that our Social Services Team was fully committed to looking after children in our communities and was performing well. The Executive Member expressed how pleased he was with the excellent work undertaken by the staff in Social Services.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development concurred with the comments raised and recognised the fantastic work being undertaken in Social Services.

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

DECISION ITEMS - ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

No. 13 POSITION REPORT FLY GRAZING HORSES

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

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely that the Executive supported the existing process for the removal of horses set out in the report with the use of contractors and the costs associated with this and that the Council look to work with partners, and be granted permission to pursue enforcement with regard to the Control of Horses Act in prolific areas in line with the Wellbeing Plan Objective 2.

MONITORING ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES

**No. 14 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING -2020/2021,
FORECAST OUTTURN TO 31 MARCH 2021
(AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2020)**

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

The Chief Officer Resources spoke in detail to the report which provided the Executive with the forecast financial outturn position across all portfolios for the financial year 2020/2021 as forecast at 31st December, 2020. The Chief Officer outlined the key points of the report and gave an overview of the impact on the budget as detailed in the report.

The Leader thanked the Chief Officer for the overview of the report and requested that a Cost Pressure Sub Group be arranged in order to give consideration to the Action Plans. The Chief Officer Resources confirmed that the Team was currently working on the provisional outturn in order to provide a more updated position to the Cost Pressure Sub Group.

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

No. 15

**CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR
2020/2021 FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2020)**

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

The Chief Officer Resources outlined the report and referred to the projects which had reported significant overspends, as follows:-

Household Waste recycling Centre - £204,095
Lime Avenue Business Park - £234,710

The Chief Officer Resources advised that both overspends have been identified as relating to increased costs caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, discussions with funding bodies are ongoing to request additional funding

It was also reported that Welsh Government confirmed financial support for costs incurred as a result of flood damage during March 2020. As a result, the quarter two forecast over-spend of £24,000 in relation to Flood Recovery Works was now expected to be mitigated. Therefore, the Council's own resources would not be required for the repair works on Aberbeeg Road, therefore it was proposed that the £405k allocation be reinstated to the Big Arch project as agreed by Council on 23rd July, 2020.

The Leader advised that these issues had been considered at the last Council meeting and the capital programme had been realigned accordingly.

The Leader also referred to the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Roseheyworth where delays had been due to the pandemic, however it was hoped that these additional costs would be superseded due to the imminent opening and invited the Executive Member for Environment to provide an update.

The Executive Member for Environment was pleased to report that the second Household Recycling Centre at Roseheyworth would be opening on Monday via the online booking system. It was advised that residents could ring or book online and this had been very well received so far. There had been some issues and queries in terms of what could be accepted, however, it was hoped that these issues would be addressed via a press release which was due to be published ahead of opening.

The Leader welcomed this good news and noted that it was another project that this administration had been committed to deliver.

The Leader also referred to additional monies for highways works and advised that a meeting would be arranged in the coming weeks to develop a programme of works on residential roads and streets to continue the work commenced in 2017. It was hoped that following these discussions a series of works could begin in the coming months.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report be provided; continued support for the appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council; and the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding be noted.

No. 16

USE OF GENERAL AND EARMARKED RESERVES 2020/2021

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

The Chief Officer Resources outlined the key points of the report and advised that although the reserves were in line with targets set by the Authority it was critical that Council ensure an appropriate level of reserves to support its financial sustainability. In comparison to other Welsh Authorities, Blaenau Gwent still had one of the lowest levels of general and earmarked reserves.

The Leader noted the appropriate level of reserves and advised that the Authority still had some way to go in comparison with the overwhelming majority of local authorities throughout Wales. It was important that there was that additional financial resilience behind the Authority as there would be added pressures on Local Government in the months and years ahead. The Leader reiterated that the stance that this Authority take financially at budget setting times was the correct one as it was about the long term benefit of the Council.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and

- the forecast use of general and earmarked reserves for 2020/2021 be considered;
- consideration be given to the impact of the £0.552m favourable variance for 2020/2021 would have on the budgeted contribution to the General Reserve;

- the forecast increase of the General Reserve in 2020/2021 to £7.151m, being 5.28% of net revenue expenditure (above the 4% target level) be noted; and
- challenge to budget overspends and implement appropriate service Action Plans, be continued where required.

Maintenance of general reserves at an adequate level is crucial to the Council being able to meet future liabilities arising from risks for which specific provision has not been made.

MONITORING ITEMS – EDUCATION

**No. 17 ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW –
BLAENAU GWENT’S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

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

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which related to the Estyn Thematic Review report which outlined narrative on the corporate response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period. The Corporate Director noted that the Thematic Review letter was attached at Appendix 1 and stated that the letter was positive overall and referred to the highlights of notable practice. The Corporate Director advised that the Review findings provided assurances that the Council/Education Directorate had handled the emergency response well in supporting schools, but clearly there are also areas to learn moving forward.

At the invitation of the Leader, the Corporate Director Education provided the positive feedback received from the collective meeting undertaken with the Council’s Regulators.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the information presented by Estyn was constructive in terms of where the Directorate and the Council was currently placed. It was pleasing to note that they identified strong corporate collaboration and work across the Council as the Estyn Local Government for Education Services (LGES) Framework was based on the Corporate work of the Council, the Corporate Director noted that it was not solely the work of the Education Directorate but importantly the way the Council supported learners across the board. The 3 areas Estyn identified for the Council to concentrate on was known to officers, there was acknowledgment that the Council knew schools well and were in a good position to support schools who needed support. It was anticipated that where schools were identified as underperforming, there are encouraging signs with the potential to be removed from an Estyn Category in the future.

The Executive Member for Education noted positive report and felt that the emergency response had been handled well with effective and strong collaboration work across the Authority and with schools which demonstrated the good relationships. The Executive Member wished to extend thanks to the Education Directorate and Departments across the Council as well as school based staff who worked together effectively during this pandemic for the benefit of our learners.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development concurred with the comments raised and stated that the work across the board had been excellent and he felt that these links with schools have become stronger.

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

No. 18 **WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS (WPLS)**
ANNUAL RETURN 2019/20

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

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

MONITORING ITEMS - SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 19 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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

The Corporate Director Social Services provided an overview of the report which gave information on how Children's Services changed the way in which services have been delivered throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Department had approached the pandemic on a regional basis and both Adults and Children Services heads of service met on a Gwent wide basis and determined how to address the pandemic. The Corporate Director further spoke to the report and highlighted how the regional working was taken forward in Blaenau Gwent.

In terms of the recent meeting held with the Council's Regulators, the Corporate Director Social Services advised that CSIW were positive of managers and staff and how they continued to deliver services for the communities in Blaenau Gwent and how well we worked with partners, both corporately and with other colleagues during the Covid-19 pandemic. The CSIW had assurance and confidence in Social Services in continuing to provide services going forward.

The Corporate Director Social Services added that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee had supported the report and noted their appreciation of staff across the Social Services Directorate for their work undertaken with families during the pandemic.

The Executive Member for Social Services wishes to reiterate his thanks for the work undertaken during the pandemic. The joint working undertaken across the Council had been outstanding and the positive comments received by CSIW had been welcomed.

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

EXEMPT ITEM

DECISION ITEM – SOCIAL SERVICES

No. UPDATE ON LEGAL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDREN’S SERVICES

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

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

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

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and Option 1 as detailed in the report be approved.