

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**SUBJECT: CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE – 10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2021**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT  
OFFICER**

---

**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. COOK (IN THE CHAIR)**

Councillors: P. Baldwin  
G.A. Davies  
L. Elias  
J. Hill  
W. Hodgins (substitute for Cllr Healy)  
J. Holt  
H. McCarthy  
C. Meredith  
J.P. Morgan  
G. Paulsen  
S. Thomas

**AND:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services  
Chief Officer – Commercial & Customer  
Head of Community Services  
Head of Organisational Development  
Head of School Improvement & Inclusion  
Service Manager, Customer Experience & Transformation  
Interim Service Manager - Commercial & Procurement  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

	Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Healy (Chair) and T. Smith.	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p><b><u>CCTV</u></b></p> <p>The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer explained the rationale why the progress report on CCTV was not on the agenda as mentioned in the minutes from the previous meeting. She assured Members that work was progressing in this area and it would be more beneficial to bring forward a report with more substance to a future meeting for Members consideration.</p> <p>A Member raised concerns on the delay regarding the progress report on CCTV as he felt that a report was urgently needed.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (APRIL-JUNE 2021)</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer which presented the quarter 1 update (April to June 2021) against the Corporate Communications Strategy.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member commented that he felt there appeared to be no interaction from leading Members with journalists and the local newspapers.</p>	

	<p>In response to a Member’s question regarding direct contact with the media, the Chief Officer Commercial and Customer confirmed that the Council’s Corporate Communications Team dealt directly with the press and colleagues in the media.</p> <p>A Member pointed out that some members of the press viewed Committee meetings online and in the past there had been some criticism that Members had been issuing individual statements on social media.</p> <p>The Member felt that as publically elected Members they were answerable to the public for the decisions taken and the best way to do that was through the local press and believed that the Leadership of the Council should be proactive in this regard.</p> <p>In response to a Member’s question regarding the rationale behind the decision of which newspaper got which story, the Chief Officer Commercial and Customer explained that sometimes a dual approach was taken, if there was a specific topic they would look to the most relevant network, if a broader approach was needed then that particular article would be shared more widely, however, not all networks may decide to follow through to publication.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the quarter 1 progress update against the Communications Strategy, be endorsed.</p>	
<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>COMMERCIAL STRATEGY QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (APRIL-JUNE 2021)</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer which presented the quarter 1 (April - June 2021) progress update against the Commercial Strategy.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. A Member referred to Community Hubs and raised concerns regarding communication in relation to operating times and the services provided within the Community Hub in Blaina. He felt that the Blaina hub should be open</p>	

weekly, the same as Abertillery, Tredegar, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale, to enable residents to access services more frequently and increase the number of people using the hub. He felt that advertising on facebook did not cover all generations of the public. The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer reassured the Member that they were looking at more traditional forms of communication such as flyers in GP surgeries and shops etc. to reach as many residents as possible to ensure they were made aware of this service. With regard to the operating schedule this was a developmental and live approach and would take account of the amount of queries coming from residents and demand for the service. She advised the Member that a revised operating schedule was planned for quarter 2 onwards.

Another Member commented that Community Hubs were working well and brought services closer to the public. In relation to the Brynmawr Community Hub, he raised concerns regarding privacy and felt that rooms should be available for private discussion. He also pointed out that there was no signage outside the building to indicate that it was a Community Hub. The Chief Officer Commercial & Customer said they were currently operating in a particular space and agreed there may be occasions when a resident may want a more private conversation and would look to ensure that that facility was available to residents. With regard to signage, the Community Hub could only operate on the day that the Library was closed due to national restrictions at the time. Library staff had erected signs indicating when the Community Hub was open and she would look to continue this practice going forward.

A Member commented that Community Hubs were proving successful and felt that they were the front door of the local Authority and individual towns and should cater for the whole of Blaenau Gwent to ensure that everyone has access to services. The Member referred to the Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB) and enquired if investment possibilities would be presented to full Council. The Chief Officer Commercial & Customer said that any investment would go through the democratic process, the Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB) were looking at early opportunities, and all

	<p>democratic arrangements and processes would be followed in line with the Council's Constitution.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Regeneration &amp; Community Services supported the Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer's comments and said that as a Member led Authority any opportunities that arise from commercial activity would go through the democratic process for Members consideration on whether to support and implement them.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the quarter 1 progress update against the Commercial Strategy be endorsed.</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE 2020/21</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development which was presented to provide Elected Members with the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the sickness absence performance for 2020/21, the continued actions to support improvement in attendance and recognise the positive attendance of the majority of the workforce.</p> <p>The Head of Organisational Development spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding Managers use of the iTrent system and what support was in place for staff on long term sickness absence due to mental health issues. The Head of Organisational Development gave assurances that training had been undertaken with Managers and they were now accessing the iTrent system correctly to extract sickness absence data from the system. With regard to support for staff with mental health issues there was a range of support available which included Occupational Health support, the Employee Assistance programme and the Managing Attendance policy for Managers to apply in supporting individuals with sickness issues.</p> <p>A Member enquired if CLT scrutinised the sickness absence reports to ensure the same level of management was consistently applied across the Council. The Head of</p>	

Organisational Development said that all quarterly information and statistical information was presented to CLT to review, and each Directorate had a continuous review of the top 20 long term cases with a view to enable those staff to return to work.

A Member referred to the breakdown of sickness absence by service area on page 43 of the report and enquired regarding provider services. The Head of Organisational Development explained that related to frontline services i.e. domiciliary care, Court Mytton and Augusta House supported living. She advised Members that there were overall figures in the report and figures excluding Covid related sickness absence.

A Member commented on the massive pressures facing health and social care and felt that the figures were a direct consequence of what was taking place across the whole of the country.

The Corporate Director of Social Services said that 2021 had been a challenging year, particularly for frontline Social Services with regard to responding to the virus. Staff had been under tremendous pressure and strain delivering services and trying to keep people safe in the community for a prolonged period. Some staff had also been asked to work in different environments and this may have created more stress and anxiety. Sickness figures were high but there had been significant mitigating factors with regard to Covid and also a national issue around recruitment of social care staff. Currently they were trying to mitigate some of those pressures and working from a Blaenau Gwent perspective were trying to find solutions with Health colleagues who were also facing the same issues and pressures within their services.

The Chair commended the entire Directorate for their hard work and commitment in exceptional circumstances.

The Head of Organisational Development reminded Members that there was an improving picture over the last year with regard to sickness absence, there were hotspots that were being reviewed, but there was an improvement in sickness absence in comparison to the previous year.

	<p>A Member commented that the Appendix showed that all local authorities had improved sickness absence figures and felt that the improvement came from staff homeworking and comparison with the next set of performance figures was needed to see if they would improve further.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the ongoing actions to support improvement in attendance be endorsed.</p>	
<p><b>No. 8</b></p>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME:</u></b> <b><u>22ND OCTOBER 2021</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer advised Members that they would be looking to bring forward two update reports on CCTV progress and the UK Resettlement scheme in the early autumn.</p> <p>A Member requested a Members briefing session be arranged in relation to the Resettlement scheme. The Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer responded that a Members briefing session would be arranged prior to the formal report being presented to Committee so that all Members would be aware of the approach taken.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Forward Work Programme for the meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2021 be agreed and the following two additional reports be presented to a future meeting of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee in early autumn:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCTV Progress Report</li> <li>• UK Resettlement Scheme</li> </ul> <p>and FURTHER AGREED that an all Member Briefing Session be held in relation to the Resettlement Scheme prior to the formal report being presented to the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.</p>	