

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 22nd SEPTEMBER, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

**PRESENT: Deputy Leader/Executive Member –
Regeneration & Economic Development**
Councillor D. Davies (CHAIR)

Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins

Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins

Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason

WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Education
Head of Organisational Development
Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance
Communications, Marketing and Customer Access Manager
Corporate Procurement Manager - Commercial Services
Service Manager - Customer Experience & Benefits

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
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>The following apologies for absence were received:-</p> <p>Councillor N. Daniels Chief Officer Commercial and Customer</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations raised.</p>	
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>EXECUTIVE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 21st July, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 26th July, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 1st September, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	

GENERAL MATTERS

No. 7 CONFERENCE, EVENTS AND INVITATIONS

Wales Festival of Remembrance 2021
6th November, 2021

RESOLVED that Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion be approved to attend.

Reserve and Cadets Association for Wales Event
7th October, 2021

RESOLVED that Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion be approved to attend.

Merchant Navy Day
2nd September, 2021

RESOLVED that Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion be approved to attend.

DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES

No. 8 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 10TH NOVEMBER, 2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 9

GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS

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

The following grants were received following publication of the report:-

ABERTILLERY

Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor N. Parsons

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|------|
| 1. | Abertillery Belles FC | £100 |
|----|-----------------------|------|

Six Bells Ward - Councillor M. Holland

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|------|
| 1. | Alzheimer's Research UK | £400 |
| 2. | Friends of Six Bells Park | £300 |
| 3. | Six Bells Over 50's Club | £100 |
| 4. | Six Bells Bowls | £300 |
| 5. | Six Bells Community Centre | £200 |

EBBW VALE

Badminton Ward - Councillor C. Meredith

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------|
| 1. | RTB Ebbw Vale FC | £100 |
|----|------------------|------|

Badminton Ward - Councillor G. Paulsen

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------|
| 1. | RTB Ebbw Vale FC | £100 |
|----|------------------|------|

Rassau Ward - Councillor D. Wilkshire

- | | | |
|----|--------------|------|
| 1. | Beaufort RFC | £150 |
|----|--------------|------|

RESOLVED accordingly.

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 10 **ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE 2020/21**

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

The Managing Director advised that the report presented the Council's Assessment of Performance 2020/2021 and informed that the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 had been replaced by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Therefore, the Managing Director advised that this would be the last Assessment of Performance under these regulations. The Council would still be required to develop reports on the progress made against the Corporate Plan and also implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and reports would be presented to Executive accordingly.

The Managing Director further noted Appendix 1 which detailed the progress the Council had made during 2020/21 and an assessment of the work undertaken as part of the response to the COVID 19. The Managing Director recognised that 2020 had been a challenging year for everyone including the Local Authority and it was a credit to the workforce that this performance was achieved against such challenges. There had been some issues in service areas due to the effects of the pandemic, however all services had picked back up in the summer.

The Managing Director referred the Executive to the options which sought to ensure that it fulfilled all required statutory legislative requirements before being submitted to Council for approval.

The Deputy Leader concurred that the workforce, communities and businesses had all been affected by the pandemic and extended thanks and admiration on the work achieved during this period.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the retrospective progress made be endorsed and included within the Council's Assessment of Performance for 2020/21 and be assured that it fulfils all required statutory legislative requirements before being submitted to Council for approval (Option 1).

DECISION ITEM – EDUCATION MATTERS

No. 11 **HOME TO SCHOOL AND POST 16 TRANSPORT
POLICY REVIEW 2022 – 2023**

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

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which sought the views of Executive in relation to the review of Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy for the 2022/23 and summarised the changes and additions made.

In response to comments raised at the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee it was reported that the Policy was reviewed on an annual basis and there was an opportunity for the review, if required. The Corporate Director Education also added that it would feature on the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme and it would be brought back for consideration in 12 months.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and approved the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy 2022/23 as outlined in Appendix 2 (Option 1).

**EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY AND
ACTION PLAN REVIEW**

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

The Corporate Director Education advised that the report provided an overview of the Education Accessibility Strategy Review process and associated timelines. The Corporate Director outlined the key points as contained in the report and pointed out that Blaenau Gwent had been recognised by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales as being one of the only Councils in Wales to have a published Accessibility Strategy and associated action plan.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report which reflected well on the Local Authority and reiterated that Blaenau Gwent had been recognised by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales as being one of the only Councils in Wales to have a published Accessibility Strategy.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).

INCLUSION STRATEGY AND REVIEW (2021-2022)

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

The Corporate Director Education outlined the report which detailed plans to review the Inclusion Service during the period of September 2021 – August 2022 in line with the requirements of Welsh Government’s Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The Corporate Director felt that Blaenau Gwent was well placed to take forward the review and referred the Executive to the key priorities of the Strategy.

The Deputy Leader advised that schools had made good progress during these challenging times and the Strategy would give further support to pupils with special needs. The Executive Member for Executive concurred with the comments raised and welcomed the common approach to be taken by schools across Blaenau Gwent.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the review of the Inclusion Service be agreed to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act are met, this would include reviewing relevant resourcing, structures, job descriptions and ensuring that relevant arrangements are in place to fulfil the needs of the ALN Act (Option 2).

**DECISION ITEM –
REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS**

No. 14 INVESTMENT IN MICRO-HYDRO DEVELOPMENT

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services advised that the report provided an update on progress of the Micro-Hydro Feasibility Study carried out in Cwm and Llanhilleth and sought approval for the next steps of the Project. The Corporate Director noted the potential eleven areas for investigation and advised that following further research sites in Llanhilleth and Cwm were determined as the preferred locations. Although electricity could be generated at the aforementioned areas it was decided that at this time it was not feasible for the Council to take the work forward further investigations and development.

It was reported that the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee supported the preferred option as the Council had committed to undertake investigations at all eleven areas identified as worthy sites of further exploration for hydro generation.

The Deputy Leader felt that all aspects of energy should be considered in line with work being undertaken around carbonisation and although the commercial element for Council investment was not available, there could be other opportunities to be explored in our communities.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Council choose not to take these schemes forward for further investigation and development. The projects would be closed from the current point and would only be revisited should costs significantly reduce or new technologies become available (Option 1).

No. 15 **PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY APPROACH – TOWN CENTRES**

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services spoke to the report which sought approval to formulate the Town Centre Advisory Boards across the Town Centres of Abertillery, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale to support a partnership delivery approach for future project delivery. It was hoped that the work undertaken in Tredegar could be built upon and rolled out across all Town Centres.

The Corporate Director advised that the report had been considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and it was requested that Blaina be included in the project. It was confirmed that that this course of action was agreed and Blaina would be undertaken once the Abertillery area had been completed.

The Deputy Leader noted the work undertaken with Tredegar Forum and advised that working with our partners and other businesses was vital to improving our town centres and footfall.

RESOLVED that the report accepted and the Executive provided approval for the formation of a series of Advisory Boards for the Town Centres of Abertillery, Blaina, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale based upon the Tredegar Advisory Board approach and acknowledge the draft Terms of Reference as outlined in Appendix One. The Advisory Board shall act as a consultative body to oversee development and delivery of Town Centre Strategies and Plans. Each shall start with a small membership identified by members of the Town Centres Task and Finish Group alongside Officers. The membership can then be expanded and developed further as discussions develop.

MONITORING ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES

No. 16 **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY QUARTERLY
PERFORMANCE MONITORING (APRIL-JUNE 2021)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Commercial and Customer.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy (Option 1).

No. 17 **COMMERCIAL STRATEGY QUARTERLY
PERFORMANCE MONITORING (APRIL-JUNE 2021)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Commercial and Customer.

An overview of the progress made for Quarter 1 against the Commercial Strategy was provided. A detailed overview of the key points in relation to the Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board, Customer Experience, Digital, Procurement Officer Group, Procurement Plans and Contract Management and Procurement Strategy and Policy was provided.

The Deputy Leader welcomed the report and acknowledged that the commercial aspect of the Council was important for this administration and advised that positive feedback had been received on the community hubs. The Deputy Leader also recognised the work of the procurement team which was paramount in achieving value for money

RESOLVED that the report be accepted along with the performance of the Commercial Strategy during the period April – June 2021 as presented (Option 1).

No. 18 **SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE 2020/21**

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

The Head of Organisational Development spoke to the report which outlined 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. It was reported that the overall year end outturn figure for the Council of 11.67 days per full time employee (9.98 days excluding COVID-19 sickness). This was a decrease from the previous year's outturn of 13.91 days (13.48 days excluding COVID-19 sickness). The Head of Organisational Development advised that the outturn exceeded the target set of 10.50 days. It was added that when sickness absence related to COVID-19 had been excluded the outturn figure reduced to 9.98 days which was an overall reduction of 3.93 days bringing the outturn figure below the corporate target. The Head of Organisational Development added that Quarter 1 figures for this financial year are showing an increase in sickness and it was understood that other Councils are experiencing a similar trend in performance.

The Deputy Leader recognised the challenges within the workforce which had been experienced by all Councils due to the pandemic. The Deputy Leader felt that the robust recording and monitoring of sickness in place which was paramount as well as support for staff's health and well being.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the ongoing actions to support improvement in attendance (Option 2).

	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS – EDUCATION</u></p>	
No. 19	<p><u>EDUCATION SERVICES – MAIN SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (SER)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and acknowledged that effective self-evaluation was an on-going process (Option 1).</p>	
No. 20	<p><u>SAFEGUARDING SELF-EVALUATION OUTCOMES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).</p>	
	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS – REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</u></p>	
No. 21	<p><u>REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community advised that the report sets out a range of the activities undertaken across Blaenau Gwent and highlighted work taken forward around housing, skills and enterprise, energy.</p> <p>The Deputy Leader noted the positive work carried out across the Council over the last 12 months, particularly the Regeneration Team who had worked well in supporting and encouraging businesses to Blaenau Gwent throughout these challenging times. The Deputy Leader wished to thank the Team for the work achieved.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and information contained therein be noted (Option 2).</p>	

No. 22 **PROGRESS UPDATE ON DECARBONISATION PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director.

The Managing Director advised that this was the first progress report since the adoption of the Council's Decarbonisation Plan. The Managing Director spoke to the report and outlined the progress made along with the actions of the Board. The Council had made good progress but there was still a significant amount of work to be done to overcome the challenges presented by climate change.

In terms of the next steps, the Managing Director noted that further readiness assessments on the remaining transitions would be undertaken. It was anticipated that all of the readiness assessment will be completed during this financial year and progress on agreed actions would be monitored via the Council's existing business planning process on an ongoing basis with updates provided on a quarterly basis. The Managing Director added that the Council was well placed to respond to the Welsh Government's Net Zero Reporting for Local Authorities.

It was further reported that Blaenau Gwent was the first area in Wales to host a Climate Assembly and referred to the members briefing session which was held and the commitment given to publish a Council Response to the findings. This work was underway and would be reported to the Executive and Scrutiny Committee in due course. The Council was also taking a lead role in developing the response provided to the Climate Assembly on behalf of the Public Services Board which would be completed this autumn.

The Deputy Leader stressed the importance of Climate Change and advised that this report helped us to understand the work undertaken to date and further work to be achieved. The Deputy Leader noted that this matter was a worldwide issue and he felt that Blaenau Gwent would play its part. The work done to date placed the Authority in a good position to play our critical part in climate change and decarbonisation. There was a significant amount of work to be undertaken in our communities and as Elected Members we needed to play a part in this work to assist in reducing Blaenau Gwent's carbon footprint.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted along with the progress made as presented (Option 1).

MONITORING ITEM - SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 23 **UPDATE ON STRATEGY TO SAFELY REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER**

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

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the report outlined progress made on the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy. The Corporate Director noted that a new strategy was in place for 2020 – 2025, however it contained the objectives of the previous strategy with additional actions following the independent review by Worcester University.

The Corporate Director stated that the reduced number of children coming into care had been recognised by Welsh Government as a priority and as a result integrated care monies could be accessed to invest and develop services to safely reduce the number of children coming into care. The Corporate Director advised that this had enabled the Council to fund family group conferences, support special guardians and enhance resources in our Supporting Change Team and Enhance the Young Person’s Mediation Service.

The Corporate Director further noted the impact of the joint team with Monmouthshire which had resulted in a significant underspend in our children residential budget at the end of 20/21. This was due to the hard work of the My Support Team and 14 plus Team who worked to reduce the numbers of children in residential care and worked to prevent children entering residential care. The Corporate Director noted the reduction in numbers and advised that today the number was 12. Further reference was made to the work undertaken and the Corporate Director informed that as at Monday our children looked after numbers was 189. Although these figures could change at any time there is a continued downward trend in the right direction.

In conclusion the Corporate Director noted the number of vacancies in the Team which made the figures even more remarkable and showed the excellent work of the staff in Blaenau Gwent. The report was positive and showed the continued progress of the Strategy and the positive impact for the children and families of Blaenau Gwent and allowed families to stay together when it was safe to do so as well as reduce the budget pressures.

The Executive Member for Social Services welcomed the report and wished to thank staff in Social Services for their excellent contribution in reducing looked after children in Blaenau Gwent. The Executive Member informed that the CIW had acknowledged Blaenau Gwent's way in which the safe reduction of children Strategy had proved successful.

The Executive Member also reported that there was today 187 looked after children in Blaenau Gwent which was a further reduction since Monday's figure as reported by the Corporate Director.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information therein be noted (Option 1).