

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 17TH FEBRUARY, 2022</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HOLT (THE CHAIR,
PRESIDING)

Councillors P. Baldwin
D. Bevan
J. Collins
M. Cook
M. Cross
N. Daniels
D. Davies
G. A. Davies
G. L. Davies
M. Day
P. Edwards
L. Elias
D. Hancock
K. Hayden
S. Healy
J. Hill
W. Hodgins
J. Mason
H. McCarthy, B.A. (Hons)
C. Meredith
J. Millard
M. Moore
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
L. Parsons
G. Paulsen
K. Pritchard
K. Rowson
T. Smith

B. Summers
 B. Thomas
 G. Thomas
 S. Thomas
 H. Trollope
 J. Wilkins
 D. Wilkshire
 B. Willis
 L. Winnett

AND: Managing Director
 Corporate Director of Social Services
 Corporate Director of Education
 Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Head of Governance & Partnerships
 Head of Organisational Development
 Service Manager - Accountancy
 Communications and Marketing Manager

<u>No.</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
---	<p><u>CONDOLENCES</u></p> <p>Condolences were expressed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The family of former Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councillor and Mayor, Paul Hopkins who had sadly passed away. <p>Members and officers paid their respects with a minute's silence</p> <p>The Leader of the Labour Group said that this was extremely sad news regarding the sad loss of his colleague, Paul. He advised that Paul had been a committed socialist and one of the finest advocates for Tredegar and the valleys and would be sorely missed.</p>	

<p>1.</p>	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from Councillor T. Sharrem.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declarations of interest were reported:</p> <p>Item No. 7: Interim Arrangements – Vacant Post</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michelle Morris – Managing Director - Damien McCann – Corporate Director of Social Services - Richard Crook – Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services - Lynn Phillips – Corporate Director of Education - Rhian Hayden – Chief Officer Resources - Bernadette Elias – Chief Officer Commercial & Customer - Andrea Jones – Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance <p>It was noted that following receipt of advice, the above-named officers would leave the meeting whilst this item of business was conducted.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p><u>MOTION – REQUEST FOR COUNCIL TO CORRECT AN EQUALITY INJUSTICE SUFFERED BY EMPLOYEES WHO MISSED OUT ON WELSH GOVERNMENT’S FINANCIAL RECOGNITION SCHEME</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the above-named Motion.</p> <p>The Leader of the Labour Group commenced by explaining that the Motion had been submitted to request that Council correct an</p>

equality injustice suffered by employees who had missed out on the Welsh Government's Financial Recognition Scheme and to recognise and recompense the hard work and dedication of employees from Workforce Development, Early Years Childcare and Play, Families First and Flying Start who were all part of the Social Services Directorate.

These diligent and dedicated employees who were some of the lowest paid, had been working at the outset and throughout the course of the pandemic. It was noted that when the Welsh Government's Financial Recognition Scheme had first been announced this cohort of employees had been included to receive this payment but the policy had subsequently been amended to include only health and social care sectors. The Leader of the Labour Group concluded by expressing his concern that this was an injustice, these employees very often worked side by side with their counterparts in health and social care and requested the Council to consider the Motion and recompense these employees of the authority.

The Executive Member for Education said that she had a great deal of sympathy for these staff who had been caught up in this situation and felt that it had been unfortunate that Welsh Government had changed the parameters of eligibility in the way that it did. She expressed her concern that the Motion that had been put forward had the potential to create inconsistencies for the workforce across the Council and was likely to be quite divisive. Within her own portfolio for example, education colleagues had worked tirelessly to either directly provide or support essential frontline services throughout the course of the pandemic and they continued to do so. She also recognised that this hard work and dedication had been replicated across many other service areas of the organisation and was concerned that if the Motion was carried it could have a detrimental impact on staff in those areas.

The Executive Member continued by stating that it was an unfortunate situation of Welsh Government's making and was not sure if it was appropriate for Council to intervene and whilst she was genuinely sympathetic to the staff involved, unfortunately for the reasons outlined above she would be unable to support the Motion.

The Executive Member for Environment advised that her comments were in a similar vein to the Executive Member for Education. Whilst she hugely sympathised with the position these staff that had been put in from her point of view it was the impact and message this would potentially send to other frontline staff that had also been working throughout the pandemic from day one i.e. in her portfolio refuse collectors had continued to provide a service with no interruption, environmental health had been on the front line and housing solutions, just to name a few. For the same reasons she also found it difficult to support the Motion.

A Member said he understood the comments made by the Executive Members and acknowledged that other colleagues had worked on the frontline during the pandemic. However, the Council now had the opportunity to right the wrong that had been done and show its appreciation to the staff (some of the lowest paid) working on the frontline during the pandemic which, had allowed key workers to undertake their roles.

The Executive Member for Social Services commenced by stating that this was very divisive policy that Welsh Government had set out but he referred to the facts:

- 17th March, 2021 – the then Minister for Health and Social Care, Vaughan Gethin had made a statement that all health and social care staff would be paid £735 in recognition of their efforts during the pandemic.
- 24th April, 2021 – Welsh Government issued guidance on the Social Care Financial Recognition Scheme at which point all social services staff including Families First and Flying Start were included and eligible for the payment. This cohort of staff had been recognised twice in that policy.
- June 2021 – Welsh Government updated the guidance stating that Families First and Flying Start Service were no longer eligible for the payment. This was despite evidence that had been provided to Welsh Government that staff had been working with families and children throughout the course of the pandemic.

The Executive Member continued by confirming that he together with his counterparts from across Gwent had raised their concerns with the Minister at meetings and in addition, the Leader and Members of the Executive had written to the Minister requesting that the decision be overturned.

In conclusion, he stated that it was disappointing the Members of the opposition groups at that time had not supported the action taken of the administration against a divisive Welsh Government policy.

The Leader of the Labour Group commenced by stating that this Motion had been brought to Council because it was a particular injustice. He said he differed with the comments made by the Executive Member for Social Services and pointed out that Welsh Government would end up having to pay 200,000 members of staff as part of this scheme and had provided the Council with hardship funding over the last two years.

He continued by stating that his focus was on valuing colleagues in Blaenau Gwent who had worked on the frontline without vaccinations looking after children. These were some of the lowest paid staff who had gone the extra mile looking after children to allow key workers to attend work and they deserved to be treated the same as their colleagues in the health and social care sector. He concluded by proposing that the Motion be supported. This proposal was seconded.

A recorded vote was, thereupon, requested.

In Support of the Motion – Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, M. Cross, P. Edwards, L. Elias, K. Hayden, H. McCarthy, J. Millard, M. Moore, J. C. Morgan, L. Parsons, K. Pritchard, T. Smith, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis and L. Winnett.

Against the Motion – Councillors J. Collins, M. Cook, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, G. L. Davies, M. Day, D. Hancock, S. Healy, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, J. Mason, C. Meredith, J. P. Morgan, G. Paulsen, K. Rowson, B. Summers, B. Thomas, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

The Motion was, therefore, not carried.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the above-named Motion be not supported.

5. REVENUE BUDGET 2022/2023

Members considered the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chair commenced by suggesting that because this report had been discussed at both the Joint Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee previously and Members were familiar with its contents, that attention focus on the options for recommendation, in particular paragraphs 3.1.7 and 3.1.8 and in doing so the Chief Officer Resources would, therefore, not need to provide a summary of the report. As was tradition, the Leader of the Council would be invited to speak followed by the Leaders of the Labour Group and Minority Independent Group.

The Leader of the Labour Group strongly suggested that because this was the budget report it should be debated.

The Leader of the Council commenced by stating that there was some merit in the Chair's suggestion and it was not in any way to negate any discussion or debate around the budget because the key issues were encapsulated within the 8 recommendations.

He expressed his appreciation to all officers for their efforts in providing positive budgetary management throughout the year but in particular, special appreciation to Rhian Hayden, Gina Taylor and their teams for their much appreciated efforts in ensuring maintenance of the high levels of financial management that the Council had come to expect.

The Leader continued by advising that the key issues revolved around the 7 options for recommendation contained in paragraph 3 of the report and said that as a combination of the positive aggregate external funding received from Welsh Government for which the Council was extremely grateful, and the results of the Bridging the Gap Strategy meant that the Council did not have to consider or debate any cuts to services. Therefore, at the appropriate time he

would be endorsing options 3.1.1. – 3.1.6 as presented. It was pleasing to note in paragraph 3.1.6, the Council was in a position to provide schools with a £3.91m budget uplift, that equated to 8.4% increase and this was he was sure would be welcomed by head teachers, staff and governing bodies across schools in Blaenau Gwent.

The Leader continued by referring to paragraph 3.1.7 and advised that taking into account the Bridging the Gap achievements table 5 – paragraph 5.1.30, highlighted that there was a budget surplus of £2.44m. A proportion of this funding, he would propose to be utilised to support pay increases over and above the 2% budgeted for in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) with £950,000 being transferred into a contingency budget to help support increases for 2022/23 over and above the 2% assumption. This was prudent financial management and should there be any residue this could be transferred back into reserves.

Whilst paragraph 3.1.7 recommended that the remainder of the £2.44m following the £950,000 budget contingency i.e. £1.5m be transferred into the financial resilience reserves, Members were aware over the past few years the administration had worked hard to address the acknowledged poor level of Council reserves and this was something he felt had been done with some success and in doing so had significantly improved the financial resilience of the Council. It was a fact that since 2017 both the general and earmarked reserves were at the highest level since 2012. Therefore, on this occasion and mindful of the huge progress that had been made in strengthening reserves, the Leader said he would not be recommending that this surplus be transferred into reserves but to address the recommendation contained in paragraph 3.1.8 i.e. that the remaining surplus be utilised in setting the Blaenau Gwent council tax 2022/23. Therefore, at the appropriate time he would formally be recommending that for 2022/23 that there would be a 0% increase in the Blaenau Gwent element of the council tax and that it be frozen for the forthcoming year.

The Leader of the Council pointed out that there were obviously other component elements that made up the council tax bills i.e. Police and Town/Community Council precepts which the Council had no control over. However, he reiterated that he would be recommending that the Blaenau Gwent element of council tax would not increase. This would allow the Council to present a balanced

and legal budget with no draw from reserves and this would still leave a nominal surplus.

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to the comment made that Bridging the Gap was an achievement and pointed out that clearly with the pending rate increases in the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) he did not feel that this was an achievement. Whilst he was delighted with the council tax proposal he took task with the comments made by the Leader. He pointed out that the previous year when the Labour Group had proposed a 0.7% increase in council tax level (because it was felt that this was correct at that time because of the difficulties the public had suffered during the pandemic and other issues), the Leader of the Council had not supported this proposal and said whilst he had sympathy with the comments a budget was not set for one year but was set with the implications for future years and that it was correct to be pragmatic.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that whilst he did not want to cast aspersions or suspicions he asked whether this had been proposed because it was an election year and said he felt it was a complete an utter scam but clearly the Labour Group would be supporting the 0% increase.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that this was not a scam and there was no eye on the election. He advised that the responsibility of any administration was to ensure a strong financial base and he firmly believed the Council had that strong financial base which, had been created over the last number of years and reiterated that both reserves general and earmarked was at the highest level since 2012. It had come to a point as outlined in his earlier remarks mindful particularly this year that from a public perspective it was a difficult year with cost of living increases and the view had been taken the Council was in a position not to add to these pressures from a council tax level and to implement this comfortably. He continued by stating that if he had felt that it was a necessity for any increase in council tax he would not shirk away from doing this because this was about protecting jobs and services and doing what was best in the interests of the public. He offered no apologies and reiterated this was not a scam. A sensible budget had been presented this year and over the last number of years and this would continue. The Leader concluded by stating that he was more than content that what was being done was for the absolute right reasons for the public of Blaenau Gwent and indeed for this Council.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that if the Council was in such a great position it wouldn't have to dip into Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) again and pointed out that the Council this year had received the largest uplift of funding from Welsh Government that he could ever recall. There were four previous sets of council tax increases that had been proposed in previous years ranging in percentage increases but this year his view was that a freeze on council tax levels had been done purely for election purposes.

The Leader of the Council advised that he had been a Councillor for 31 years and had the highest regard for the public in Blaenau Gwent. The budget that had been presented was a sensible budget and which could be afforded as there would be no significant impact on the Council's budgetary position. He reiterated that he made no apologies for doing this, he did not have one eye on the election, this was the right thing to do at the right time.

The Leader of the Minority Independent Group concurred with the comments made by the Leader of the Labour Group and expressed his disappointment that the report was not being debated. The Chair confirmed that this was not stifling debate, the report had been debated on many occasions with a focus on recommendations contained in paragraphs 3.1.7 and 3.1.8 and if Members had any questions, the Chief Officer Resources was in attendance to answer those questions.

Environment Portfolio Budget: The Leader of the Labour Group pointed out that the Environment Portfolio had overspent again by nearly £1m and had been overspending consistently in every quarter of the last five years. He asked the Executive Member for Environment what plans she had to address this issue.

The Executive Member acknowledged the overspend and said that there had been traditional overspends for a variety of reasons. However, ultimately there was a need to redress the budget including examining how the budget was allocated in the first place i.e. was it a true and fair budget and should she be re-elected this would be something she would wish to focus on in-depth going forward.

The Leader of the Labour Group said he would have thought that those measures should have been in place because this department's budget had not been controlled for the last 5 years.

New Vale/Roseheyworth Household Waste Recycling Centres and Town Centre/Street Cleansing: Another Member said despite one of the best financial settlements received from Welsh Government in a considerable number of years there still remained a large adverse cost pressure for this service area. He asked the Executive Member whether she considered operating two household waste recycling centres i.e. New Vale and Roseheyworth had contributed to this cost pressure whether it was unsustainable to retain the two sites going forward. In addition, given the controversial decision that had been made the previous week to bring the operations of Silent Valley back in house whether this was a step towards closing the New Vale site and asked the Executive Member and Leader of the Council to provide an undertaking that the two recycling centres would continue to operate.

The Executive Member confirmed that bringing the Silent Valley services back in house was a decision of Council and this was not a step towards closing New Vale. She agreed that there was a need for two recycling centres as residents had advised how much they valued the choice of two household waste recycling centres being available in the area. The Executive Member said that the two recycling centres would continue to operate. The Leader of the Council concurred with the comments made by the Executive Member.

The Leader of the Labour Group said it was pleasing to receive the reassurance about the New Vale site but what was the plan for how both Household Waste Recycling sites were to be funded going forward.

Another Member also expressed his concern regarding the budgetary position in relation to the Environment Directorate and advised in 2017 a new cleansing team was created to address issues within town centres and this had worked well for a time. However, the cleanliness of town centres had now deteriorated and fly tipping incidences had also increased. He questioned whether the priorities were correct and asked what the plan was to recoup these losses going forward.

The Chief Officer Resources confirmed that a significant proportion of the cost pressure i.e. £400,000 for this portfolio had been included for prudence on the basis of the pending decision to take Silent Valley back in house. However, it was important to note that a cost pressure for that area existed whatever the decision of Council because the cost of operating Silent Valley was greater than the amount previously the Council paid to the company. The vast majority of the remainder of the cost pressure related to the variable nature of the recycle income stream that the service generated. The Council collected and dispose of a significant amount of recycling and this generated a significant amount of income from being sold on. However, the recycle prices could vary quite significantly and in recent years' prices had reduced. It was hoped that next year that there would be an upturn in the market and additional income generated but the cost pressure was a historic deficit in the budget.

A Member pointed out that the recycling centre at Roseheyworth was now recycling and upcycling bicycles and from April to October 6,713 people had visited the site and it was inevitable that there were some cost pressures associated with a brand new facility, which was making a big positive difference in the area.

The Leader of the Labour Group still pointed out that even though £400,000 was attributed to Silent Valley there still remained an overspend of £500,000. He pointed out that at the time the second household waste recycling centre was muted there was no definite data in the report and no evidence to show that there was a need for a second facility and unfortunately, as a result the levels of cleanliness of streets and towns were deteriorating.

In reply to a question in terms of whether this was a realistic budget for the portfolio, the Executive Member stated that there was a need to bring the cost pressure back on an even keel and accepted with the budget enhancement it was realistic. With regard to cleanliness and fly tipping these statistics were reported through the Community Services Scrutiny Committee and both had improved but this was not saying that there wasn't more work to do moving forward.

A Member reported that in 2017 promises were made that the cleanliness of streets would improve but traders were reporting that they had never seen the streets so dirty. These traders were trying to compete against other towns and were losing trade because of

the cleanliness of the streets. The Member referred to the funding that had been set aside to create additional street cleansing crews during the first few years of the administration and asked if the number of crews had now been reduced.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services commenced by advising that the LEAMS rating measure used across all Councils indicated that the cleanliness rating was improving in a positive direction. It was noted that during the pandemic a different working pattern had been adopted in town centres but Members were advised that the number of crews had not reduced but there may have been a reduction in the number of crew members in each team. The Litter Strategy had also recently been adopted and work was being undertaken to implement a broader approach around street cleaning which included education within the community, engaging volunteer litter pickers in addition to the work of the crews.

The Leader of the Minority Independent Group said that whilst the number of vehicles had not reduced they were not fully manned and felt that the statement made was misleading.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services said that he did not believe his statement to be misleading because he had caveated this by advising that whilst it was the same number of vehicles but the crew number may have decreased the same efficient service was being delivered as previously. There had been some changes in certain service areas but reiterated that these were proving to be effective and efficient.

A Member asked whether a programme of work had been established to undertake a deep cleanse of the town centres. People's spirits needed to be lifted during these challenging times.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services advised that the cleansing arrangements had changed during the period of the pandemic and undertook to pursue the matter and report back to the Member.

In reply to a question, the Leader of the Council gave an assurance that at this point in time there were no plans to revert to a 4 weekly refuse collection – however, future administrations may take an alternative view and dictates may be received from Welsh

Government. The Executive Member echoed the comments of the Leader.

A Member requested an undertaking that both the New Vale and Roseheyworth Household Waste Recycling sites were safe and that there would be no job losses as a result of taking Silent Valley back in house – particular reference was made to agency staff that were currently employed at the site.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services confirmed that the business case did assume that the compliment of staff working at Silent Valley at present would transfer across to the frontline service and this assumed that the same level of staff resources that was used to deliver Silent Valley services would be required by the Council in terms of frontline delivery. However, he was unable to comment on the number of agency staff and how Silent Valley was currently resourced.

The Member pointed out that agency staff were not covered by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) and asked for an undertaking that there would be no job losses.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services reiterated that from a service operational perspective the number of staff required to deliver the service and transfer to the Council frontline service was outlined in the business model and was unable to comment on how Silent Valley currently resourced the services at present.

CCTV: The Leader of the Labour Group said that he had reports of a new CCTV service or service enhancement being implemented for Blaenau Gwent and asked an officer could clarify the current position.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer confirmed that a report relating to proposed improvements to the CCTV function had been considered by Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee in December 2021. This exempt report detailed the work which would be undertaken in conjunction with a delivery partner. The proposed improvements (including technical aspects and improving resilience and fault finding) were being taken forward and this work would be brought to fruition during Summer 2022. In the meantime, the

current operating model would continue and the police were being provided with evidence, when requested. In addition, the key issues identified by various stakeholders and uncovered by the review focussed on the digital element whereby digital evidence could be shared and this was work which had already commenced was being progressed by the Head of Service.

The Leader of the Labour Group alluded to a particular area of Tredegar that previously had a CCTV camera and where there were particular issues being experienced and asked as part of this work whether new cameras would be installed.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer advised that infrastructure such as the installation of new cameras did not form part of the report. The report focussed on the current infrastructure (not changes to camera locations) and how it needed to be improved based on the evidence that had been collated. However, as part of the CCTV operation and policy arrangements, an annual review would be undertaken in terms of where cameras were required to be sited and as part of that process Members views would be sought.

A Member alluded to previous discussions that had taken place regarding funding in terms of the digital cloud with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and for further details of the CCTV proposals including whether the system would be monitored 24/7. In addition, she asked whether consultation would be taking place with Members because not all Members had not had the opportunity to debate the issue at the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer advised that she would circulate the exempt report to Members which contained details of the proposals and pointed out that the proposed improvements and key issues identified had been based on feedback received from Members and partners over time and the digital element formed part of this work going forward. To respond to this feedback work was required to be undertaken with a service delivery partner to secure these improvements and to secure robust and additional capacity.

In reply to a question regarding the adequacy of the monitoring arrangements, the Chief Officer gave an assurance that as part of the development of the service model Members points had been considered and this included appropriate staffing levels and one

thing being considered was the levels of staffing to ensure effective monitoring of the system.

A Member expressed his concern that he felt the progress in terms of CCTV provision had not moved on far enough and there were particular issues with cameras in town centres that were not capturing public order incidences live which meant that the police had to rely on footage a day later. Another Member concurred with the comments made and said the public were not feeling safe within their localities and that additional cameras and monitoring were required. As there was a substantial amount of monies within the reserves, this fund should be used for this purpose and he requested that the matter be investigated and because this issue affected all Members that it be reported back to full Council for consideration and debate.

Another Member advised that he had been informed that CCTV cameras were being installed in Abertillery Arcade due to ongoing anti-social behaviour issues in the area and asked if this could be confirmed.

The Chief Officer Commercial and Customer reiterated that the report which would be circulated to Members detailed the current town centre infrastructure and the location and position of cameras was a separate piece of on-going work which would be informed by Members. However, the Chief Officer confirmed that cameras were being installed in Abertillery Arcade but that this was a separate piece of work (to the work being undertaken in the report) that was being progressed.

General and Earmarked Reserves: In reply to a question, the Chief Officer Resources confirmed as at 31st March, 2021 the current level of general reserves was £10.6m, however, it was anticipated that this would increase by the end of the financial year but she was unable to provide the exact detail of the level that would be at present but the figure was expected to be in excess of £11m. In addition, whilst there would be minor reductions in the earmarked reserves because small levels of funding had been set aside for specific purposes, it was also anticipated that earmarked reserves would also increase by the end of the financial year. It was noted that overall approximately £12m had been transferred into the reserves the previous year.

A Member said that given the level of reserves and the amount that had been transferred into the reserves the previous year there could have been an opportunity at that point to provide a lower than 3.3% increase, however, he endorsed the 0% increase proposed for this forthcoming financial year.

Following a lengthy debate, the Leader of the Council proposed that the following be endorsed:

Paragraph 3.1.1 - The 2022/23 revenue budget as shown in table 2 in paragraph 5.1.13. be agreed subject to following

Paragraph 3.1.2 - The outcomes within the BGCBG provisional Revenue Support Grant (RSG) Settlement and the potential further change in the Final Revenue Support Grant be noted.

Paragraph 3.1.3 - The outcomes within the BGCBG provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.

Paragraph 3.1.4 - The updated cost pressures and growth items (£4m in total) identified in Appendix 2 (paragraphs 5.1.9 – 5.1.12) be agreed for inclusion in the Council's budget.

Paragraph 3.1.5 - The passporting the grants transferring into the Settlement of £265,000 to the relevant services be agreed.

Paragraph 3.1.6 - An uplift of £3.91m which equates to 8.4% increase to the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) be agreed.

Paragraph 3.1.7 - That any achievement of Bridging the Gap proposals which exceeded the in-year budget requirement be transferred into a contingency budget to support pay increases during 2022/23 over and above that provided in the Medium Term Financial Strategy of £0.95m. That the £1.5m **was not** transferred to the Financial Resilience Reserve (paragraph 5.1.32 & 5.1.34) but this figure utilised when setting the Blaenau Gwent element of the 2022/23 council tax.

Paragraph 3.1.8 - A Council tax increase of 4% for 2022/23 (paragraph 5.1.3) as per the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumptions be **not** agreed and by utilising the outstanding balance of the Bridging the Gap achievements proposed a **0% increase on**

Council tax and in doing so would freeze council tax levels for 2022/23.

The above proposals were seconded.

The Leader of the Labour Group on behalf of both opposition groups advised that he supported these measures.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed namely:

Paragraph 3.1.1 - The 2022/23 revenue budget as shown in table 2 in paragraph 5.1.13. be agreed.

Paragraph 3.1.2 - The outcomes within the BGCBG provisional Revenue Support Grant (RSG) Settlement and the potential further change in the Final Revenue Support Grant be noted.

Paragraph 3.1.3 - The outcomes within the BGCBG provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.

Paragraph 3.1.4 - The updated cost pressures and growth items (£4m in total) identified in Appendix 2 (paragraphs 5.1.9 – 5.1.12) be agreed for inclusion in the Council's budget.

Paragraph 3.1.5 - The passporting the grants transferring into the Settlement of £265,000 to the relevant services be agreed.

Paragraph 3.1.6 - An uplift of £3.91m which equates to 8.4% increase to the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) be agreed.

Paragraph 3.1.7 - That any achievement of Bridging the Gap proposals which exceeded the in-year budget requirement be transferred into a contingency budget to support pay increases during 2022/23 over and above that provided in the Medium Term Financial Strategy of £0.95m. That the £1.5m **was not** transferred to the Financial Resilience Reserve (paragraph 5.1.32 & 5.1.34) but this figure utilised when setting the Blaenau Gwent element of the 2022/23 council tax.

Paragraph 3.1.8 - A Council tax increase of 4% for 2022/23 (paragraph 5.1.3) as per the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumptions be **not** agreed and by utilising the outstanding balance of the Bridging the Gap achievements a **0% increase on Council tax be agreed and in doing so would freeze council tax levels for 2022/23.**

6. EXEMPT ITEM

To receive and consider the following report which in the opinion of the proper officer was an exempt item taking into account consideration of the public interest test and that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting (the reasons for the decisions for the exemption was available on a schedule maintained by the proper officer).

7. INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS – VACANT POST

Michelle Morris, Managing Director; Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education, Richard Crook, Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services, Damien McCann, Corporate Director of Social Services; Rhian Hayden, Chief Officer Resources; Bernadette Elias, Chief Officer Commercial & Customer and Andrea Jones, Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance declared an interest left the meeting whilst this item of business was considered.

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 Paragraphs 14 & 15, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

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

It was agreed that this needed to be actioned as soon as possible in order that an appointment could be made prior to the commencement of the pre-election period.

The Leader of the Labour Group requested that the Council in March be convened as an 'Ordinary' meeting in order that the business for the administrative year could be concluded. The Leader of the Council concurred but said that providing the timelines were achievable, however, the ideal solution was for this to be actioned as soon as possible.

Following a discussion when the Head of Organisational Development clarified points raised it was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority) and information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matters arising between the Authority and employees of or office-holders under the Authority be accepted and the following options be agreed:

Option 1 - Re-designation of Managing Director Role

The role of Managing Director be re-designated to Chief Executive to comply with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Option 1 – Managing Director Role Interim Arrangement - Internal Arrangement

- Expressions of interest be sought from the Corporate Directors; Education, Social Services and Regeneration and Community Services and the Chief Officers Resources and Commercial that form part of the Council's Senior Leadership Team. These officers were experienced at a senior leadership level in Blaenau Gwent and have had the experience of deputising/covering areas of work/representation for the current Managing Director.
- Formal interview with the Council's Appointments Committee (March 2022) to appoint on an interim basis

- Appointment on the current salary for the Managing Director post.

This option would support a short transition/hand over period working with the current post holder and the potential candidate would already have established relationships within the organisation.

Option 1 – Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer Local Government Elections May 2022

- The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance who had previous experience to act as the Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer for the Local Government Election in May.
- The Chief Officer Resources to continue in the role of Deputy Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer.