

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 16TH MARCH, 2022

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

**PRESENT: Leader of the Council/
Executive Member – Corporate Services
Councillor N. Daniels**

**Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins**

**Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins**

**Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason**

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

WITH: Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Social Services
Chief Officer Customer and Commercial
Chief Officer Resources
Head of Community Services
Service Manager – Public Protection
Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance
Press Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> The following apologies for absence was reported:- Managing Director Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
No. 3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u> There were no declarations of interest and dispensations raised.
	<u>MINUTES</u>
No. 4	<u>EXECUTIVE</u> Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on the 2 nd March, 2022. RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.

DECISION ITEMS – EDUCATION MATTERS

No. 5 **EAS BUSINESS PLAN 2022-2025**

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

The Corporate Director Education advised that the report was presented to the Executive on an annual basis to review the draft EAS Business Plan 2022-2025 as part of the regional consultation process. The Executive would ensure that the plan enabled appropriate support for schools and settings in Blaenau Gwent. The Corporate Director outlined the changes which had been made to the current plan, which included context in response to Covid-19 and a regional statement of intent that moved away from a vision to a formal statement of intent which was well received by Corporate Directors and Chief Education Officers across the region. The Plan also included Blaenau Gwent strategic priorities and from a self-evaluation perspective there was a summary of progress in the main plan and not in the supporting section as in previous plans. The Corporate Director also noted that the Plan captured measures and outcomes up to 2025, which was useful to measure progress.

The Corporate Director added that Blaenau Gwent statistics and stories are included in the appendices of the Plan which reflected well on Blaenau Gwent. It was further added that the draft EAS Business Plan had been well received and supported by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

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

No. 6

BLAENAU GWENT ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR NURSERY AND STATUTORY EDUCATION 2023/24

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

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which outlined the outcome of the annual consultation process, in line with the revised draft of the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2023/24. Executive Committee are asked to provide their views and comments on the document in preparation for the 2023/24 admission round, prior to its determination and publication on the 15th April 2022.

The Corporate Director Education noted that the most significant changes were outlined in the report and summarised the primary changes.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the policy document be agreed. (Option 1).

DECISION ITEM – SOCIAL SERVICES MATTERS

No. 7

CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING POLICY & CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING TRAINING FRAMEWORK

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

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the report updated the Executive on the developments in respect of the Audit Wales recommendations, regarding the development of a Corporate Safeguarding Policy and a Corporate Safeguarding Training Framework which was detailed in the report and attached appendices. The Corporate Director further provided an overview of the key points as outlined in the report.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted (Option 1) and

- the revised Corporate Safeguarding Policy be agreed; and
- the Corporate Safeguarding Training Framework and its implementation plan be agreed.

DECISION ITEMS – ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

No. 8 **DISABLED ADAPTATIONS –
POLICY AMENDMENT PROPOSAL TO REMOVE MEANS-TEST**

Consideration was given to the joint report.

The Service Manager – Public Protection provided a detailed overview of to the report which sought approval from the Executive on a proposed policy amendment that would remove the current means test for grants for disabled adaptations in Blaenau Gwent.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and proposed policy amendment be approved that would remove the current means test for grants for disabled adaptations in Blaenau Gwent from April 1st 2022.

No. 9 **ACQUISITION OF HIGHWAYS ASSETS AT SIX BELLS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Community Services.

The Head of Community Services advised that the report provided the Executive with options for the proposed acquisition of highways assets at Six Bells, Abertillery. The Head of Community Services advised that the Council had been approached by a consortium of residents from High Street, Six Bells, Abertillery who had requested that the Council consider becoming the freehold owner of land currently within their ownership. The land was purchased by the consortium from the National Health Service in December 2019 to protect the interests of local residents and property owners. The group would now like to offer the freehold interest for the highways assets at no charge to the Council. The Head of Community Services noted that there was no apparent reason why these highways assets could not be formally transferred under freehold to Council ownership as maintenance costs are already being funded directly by the council.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the request to make the necessary arrangements to complete and transfer the freehold interest to the Council be approved. (Option 2).

MONITORING ITEM – CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 10 **REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING -2021/2022, FORECAST
OUTTURN TO 31 MARCH 2022 (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2021)**

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

The Chief Officer Resources outlined the report which provided an overview of the forecast financial outturn position across all portfolios for the financial year 2021/2022 (as at 31st December, 2021).

The Chief Officer advised that the overall favourable variance as at December 2021 was £4.65m, after the application of Welsh Government Hardship Funding and noted that there had been an increase in the favourable variance of £1.835m since the September 2021 forecast position (£2.814m). The Chief Officer further provided an overview of the adverse variance across portfolio which was detailed in the report and informed that these were monitored and reported accordingly with actions plans in place to address cost pressures.

The Leader felt that this reported ended the current administration on a positive financial setting. The Leader was of the opinion that this Council had managed the budget really and set a strong platform for the future and an incoming new administration in May. The Leader stated that this Council should be proud of the positive position reported.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive provided the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes detailed in the report. (Option 1).

No. 11 **CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR 2021/2022
FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021)**

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

The Chief Officer Resources provided the Executive with an overview of each Portfolio's actual and forecast capital expenditure against funding approvals for the 2021/2022 financial year, as at 31st December, 2021

The overall financial position as forecast at 31st December 2021 indicated an adverse variance of £227,852 against a total in year capital budget of £20.1m. The Chief Officer further outlined over spends as detailed in the report and informed that discussions with funding bodies are currently positive, therefore, it was not proposed that funding for these schemes would be built in from the Capital contingency at this stage. However, the Chief Officer was mindful that the Council was approaching the year end and there may be a need to look at funding options.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted (Option 1) and:-

- the appropriate challenge be provided to the financial outcomes in the report;
- support be continued against 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. 12 USE OF GENERAL AND EARMARKED RESERVES 2021/2022

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

The Chief Officer Resources informed the Executive of the forecast reserves position for 2021/2022 as at Quarter 3 and highlighted the key points as contained within the report.

The Leader welcomed the report which demonstrated that the Council had gotten to grips with the financial resilience within the organisation. Although the Council had the highest level of reserves since 2012, the Leader advised that the Council was still only part of the way up in the league table relative to reserve levels across all local authorities. However, the Leader felt that the Council was moving in the right direction and placed the next Council at a good point to inherit or exploit.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive considered the forecast use of general and earmarked reserves for 2021/2022 (Option 1) and

- the impact of the £4.649m favourable variance for 2021/2022 would have on the budgeted contribution to the General Reserve;
- the forecast increase of the General Reserve in 2021/2022 to £12.402m be noted, being 9.39% of net revenue expenditure, above the 4% target level;
- the need for ongoing prudent financial management to support the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the financial resilience of the Council be continued; and
- continue to challenge budget overspends and implement appropriate service Action Plans, where required.

No. 13 **BRIDGING THE GAP (BTG) PROGRAMME 2021/2022 –**
PROGRESS UPDATE OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2021

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

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the report provided an update on the progress made with the Strategic Business Reviews during the period October to December 2021, the latest assessment of the financial achievement for the current financial year and the latest estimated achievement between 2022/23 and 2026/27.

The Chief Officer Resources outlined the budget gaps for 2022/23 to 2026/26 and reported that the forecast achievement was expected to exceed the estimated achievement of £0.75m by £0.25m for the current year due to the successful outcome of the appeals on rateable values of Council property and assets and rental income on industrial units.

In conclusion, the Chief Officer felt that this was another positive report on the Council's financial position.

The Leader concurred that this was a positive report and felt that the Bridging the Gap Programme had been a positive piece of work which had protected services in the Authority where the Council had moved away from the traditional way of balancing budgets where the Council looked to Service Areas for cuts. It was hoped that this would be continued, although it was felt that the Programme would need to be refined going forward.

	<p>The Leader noted the ambition and commitment of officers along with majority of politicians who supported the Programme and the Leader felt it would play a major part in the future of budgets.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive provided the appropriate challenge to the Bridging the Gap Programme. (Option 1).</p>
	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS – ENVIRONMENT MATTERS</u></p>
<p>No. 14</p>	<p><u>CONTRACT EXTENSION – PEST CONTROL TREATMENT SERVICE TO 31 DECEMBER 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager – Public Protection.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the service performance and continuation of the contract with Rentokil until 31st March, 2023 be noted. It would then be reviewed and retendered, as necessary, in accordance with Corporate Procurement rules. (Option 1).</p>
<p>No. 15</p>	<p><u>FLY TIPPING ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY 2021/22</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Frontline Enforcement Service.</p> <p>The Head of Community Services advised that report provided an update on the Authority’s enforcement activities in relation to fly tipping and other waste regulation offences and the level of fly tipping activity within Blaenau Gwent for the year 2021/22. The Head of Community Services spoke in detail to the report and outlined the key points to the Executive as contained in the report.</p> <p>The Executive Member for Environment welcomed the positive report that had also been well received by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee. There had been a number of favourable comments raised on the work undertaken by the Enforcement Team.</p>

The Executive Member advised that this had been an area which had long been a source of complaints from members of the public who would not been concerned with the operational side as residents wanted to see action. The Enforcement Team had brought about a different way of working instead of the duplication of the various services across the team incidents were dealt with collectively and their actions are outlined in the report. The Executive Member continued that the Enforcement Team had been an initiative she had aspired to develop to move this Council forward. It was a personal priority and an administration priority and feedback from residents were positive.

The Executive Member further referred to the Roseheyworth Recycling Centre and noted the booking system which had been in place due to Covid-19 restrictions, however as of today there would be a hybrid system in place which allowed residents to just turn up at the site. The Roseheyworth Site had been chosen as it was a bigger site which also had a shop on site for residents to visit. The Executive Member also added that work would commence shortly on an Education Centre on the site which would teach children about litter and recycling.

The Executive Member reiterated that this was a pleasing report which needed to be brought forward in order to highlight the good work undertaken by the Enforcement Team across the Borough.

The Leader reiterated that this administration had aspired to this work for many years. There had been delays due to the pandemic, however the work was now being undertaken and the public had recognised the changes in their areas. The Frontline Enforcement Team are doing an excellent job and the difference in the Borough had been massively improved. The Leader added that there was still a fair way to go with the combination of the Enforcement Team, however the Leader stated lets serve these penalty notices and maintain determination to keep Blaenau Gwent tidy. The progress made and the work undertaken was a huge credit to the Department with the support of the Executive Member for Environment.

In conclusion, the Executive Member added that this report demonstrated the strong start, however there was a great way to go with this initiative and the Executive Member was confident that the Enforcement Team would continue to achieve the best results.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive continued to support the waste regulation work and development of the Frontline Enforcement Service as detailed in the report. (Option 1).

ABERTILLERY LEARNING COMMUNITY

At the invitation of the Leader, the Executive Member for Education apologised for the lateness of reporting this information, however, it had only just been received and it was positive news to share in relation to the Abertillery Learning Community and thereupon asked the Corporate Director Education to provide the appropriate update.

The Corporate Director Education advised that Abertillery Learning Committee had been subject to an Estyn Monitoring Visit in February 2022. The findings had been published today by Estyn and the Corporate Director was pleased to report that the Learning Community had made sufficient progress against the 7 recommendations and had been removed from the Estyn Improvement Category. This was great news for the Learning Community and the Council as well as the children of Abertillery Learning Committee.

The Corporate Director added that a press statement had been developed in conjunction with the Learning Committee and wished to thank them for their prompt action. The Corporate Director felt that this was further good news to conclude the current cycle of meetings.

The Executive Member for Education stated that this was fantastic news predominately for the children, it had been such a journey for the Learning Community and the Executive Member was delighted that it was now in position of such a positive place and would now go from strength to strength. The Executive Member expressed thanks to everyone involved in making the progress needed and the collective support of the Executive in relation decisions to be taken, along with the Education Team and the school staff in getting the School to this position.

The Leader thanked everyone for attending the final meeting closed.
