

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 30TH MARCH, 2023</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. SMITH (PRESIDING MEMBER, CHAIRING)

Councillors C. Bainton

S. Behr

D. Bevan

K. Chaplin

M. Cross

H. Cunningham

D. Davies

G. A. Davies

M. Day

S. Edmunds

J. Gardner

J. Hill

W. Hodgins

J. Holt

G. Humphreys

E. Jones

R. Leadbeater

J. C. Morgan

L. Parsons

D. Rowberry

T. Smith

G. Thomas

J. Thomas

S. Thomas

J. Wilkins

D. Wilshire

L. Winnett

D. Woods

AND: Interim Chief Executive
 Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
 Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
 Head of Organisation Development
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
 O.D. Manager Payroll, Health & Safety
 Service Manager, Performance & Democratic
 Communications & Marketing Manager

WITH: R. Alexander, Chair of the Standards Committee

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
2.	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>The following apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor J. P. Morgan Councillor H. Trollope Councillor J. Morgan, J.P.</p>	
3.	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were raised.</p>	

4.

PRESIDING MEMBER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences

- Condolences was expressed to Councillor John P Morgan on the sad passing of his father.
- Condolences was expressed to the former County Borough Councillor Gill Clark and her family following the sad passing of her husband Roger Clark.

The Presiding Member asked Members and Officers of the Council to hold a one minute's silence as a mark of respect.

Congratulations

- Families First Young Carers project has been successful in being selected through to the final of the judging process of the Social Care Wales Accolades awards under the supporting unpaid carers category. The awards ceremony is taking place on 27th April, and the team are very proud to be finalists and are looking forward to celebrating their achievement during the ceremony.
- Mrs. June Charles of Cwm, who at 87 years young won the Community Award Inspirational Women of Year Award at in Bedwellty House. It was a very emotional event and Mrs Charles was very pleased to receive that award.
- Blaenau Gwent over 60 Indoor Bowls Team has reached the final and play Swansea next week.
- Tredegar Town Band won the Welsh Champions.
- Ebbw Valley Brass Band has won the section championship.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abertillery and Blaenau Gwent RFC have reached Division 3 Cup Final and play at Principality Stadium on 8th April, 2023. - Nantyglo Rugby Club are in the final of the National Cup at Principality Stadium. - Ebbw Fawr Year 9 pupils took part in a mock trial at Swansea Crown Court. The Presiding Member attended the event and although the pupils were not very confident they got through to the next round. It was an excellent competition and the pupils were outstanding. <p>The Presiding Members expressed congratulations to everyone on behalf of the Council.</p>	
<p>5. – 21.</p>	<p><u>DECISION BOOK – NOVEMBER 2022 – MARCH 2023</u></p> <p>The Decision Book for the period November 2022 – March 2023 was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be approved and confirmed as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>22.</p>	<p><u>COUNCIL – ACTION SHEET – 26TH JANUARY, 2023</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 26th January, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the information contained therein be noted.</p>	

23.

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Question 1

The following question was received from Councillor Lee Parsons, and was responded to by Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader of the Council.

Question:

“The current contract with the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board ends in September 2023. Can the Leader inform Council when face to face full Council meetings will commence at the General Offices?”

Response:

“Thanks for the question, Cllr Parsons. Unfortunately, I cannot at this stage, even though I have the same request from members of the Labour Group. Some barriers would have to be overcome before we could resume face-to-face meetings.

Firstly, as you say, the current contract with ABUHB for the mass vaccination centre ends on 31st September 2023. But there is an option to extend for a further six months at that point if agreed by both the Council and ABUHB, dependant upon whether there will be another Winter vaccination programme

Secondly, in the recent Budget proposals for 23/24, both political groups agreed with the business case that referred to a £60,000 saving by renting rooms at the General Offices. A significant part of that saving is the approximate £4,000 a month we receive from ABUHB. If the contract ends, we will have to find the deficit elsewhere.

Thirdly, we have a current Council policy that was agreed upon at the September 29th meeting, namely, the Multi-Location Meetings Policy, which unanimously decided that all Council & Cabinet meetings would be held remotely, and all formal scrutiny meetings could be held on a hybrid basis.

Obviously, if we resume face to face meetings it would not be as it was before March 2020 as legislation has changed post pandemic.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provides that Councils are required to:

Electronically broadcast meetings (with effect from May 2022), and make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee, Sub-Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely (i.e. enabling persons not in the same place to attend the meeting) – also referred to as ‘multi-location meetings’.

The Local Government Act stipulates that Councils cannot mandate physical meeting attendance.”

Supplementary Question:

“Can the Leader of the Council confirm there was no plans to build a political arena in Blaenau Gwent in the future”.

Response:

“The Leader of the Council confirmed that this would be a decision to be taken by full Council and at this point in time there had been no Council decision to create a political arena”.

Question 2

The following question was received from Councillor Gareth A. Davies, and was responded to by Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader of the Council:-

Question:

“Could the Leader confirm or refute the rumours that Bus Services including the Fflecsi Service in Blaenau Gwent are to end soon.”

Response:

“For clarity, there are three types of services being run at the moment – Commercial routes run by private providers; services which we pay private providers a subsidy to run and the Fflecsi pilot, which has been running since June 2021.

Covid 19 devastated bus usage so WG provided funding during the pandemic and continued post-pandemic, through the Bus Emergency Scheme (BES), as of this moment this is due to end after June this year.

This funding enabled private providers to remain viable whilst it was hoped passenger numbers would return to pre-pandemic numbers.

As you can imagine, alongside the other 21 local authority Leaders, I have been lobbying Welsh Government on the impact this funding reduction may have on local bus services.

To be honest, at this point, we do not know fully the impact this will have on private providers; providers are expected to notify their local authority 21st April what their post-BES operations will be, at which point we will have greater clarity.

Regarding the Fflecsi services, this will continue until the end of June 2023; we are currently in discussions with WG and TfW about hopefully continuing this service but perhaps using a different model; we hope to be able to report back on this in the coming months.”

24.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The following question was received from Mr. Phillip Edwards and was responded to by Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader of the Council:

Question:

“At a Special Meeting of the Council on 7th February, 2022 the Council looked at the findings of the Welsh Audit Office report into its relationship with Silent Valley Waste Services Limited.

After discussion, Councillor Stephen Thomas made a proposal which was seconded by myself (as Leader of the Minority Independent Group) and unanimously accepted by full Council that an internal investigation should take place to ensure that the significant concerns highlighted by an Audit Wales report into the relationship between Blaenau Gwent Council and a waste services provider “will never ever happen again.”

Has this investigation taken place and who was on the investigating panel?”

Response:

“The investigation has been carried out in two phases:

Firstly, following the Council meeting and with the agreement of the then political group Leaders, the former Managing Director sought independent legal and employment law advice to carry out "*A preliminary investigation to determine whether, in respect of the current Council employees named in the Audit Wales Public Interest Report (published 27th January 2022), it is appropriate to take action under any of the Council's employment policies and procedures.*"

Considering the legal advice, the then Managing Director progressed the matter with the Monitoring Officer and Organisational Development Department (Human Resources).

An agreed mutual outcome was then shared with Audit Wales, who proffered no objection to the course of action utilised.

Secondly, the other Auditor General's recommendation was to review the Council's governance and oversight arrangements with other companies in which we have an ownership interest.

As a consequence of this recommendation, a review has been completed of the governance and oversight arrangements of Aneurin Leisure Trust, the Gwent Educational Achievement Service, Gwent Archives, and the final one on the Gwent Crematorium should be completed by the end of March 2023. When completed, a report will be coming through the democratic processes in the next couple of months to provide detailed assurances to Members and the public on the existing governance and oversight of these organisations.

Supplementary Question:

“Arising from the Silent Valley Report presented on the 7th February, 2022 and issue was raised in relation to an officers flexible retirement which was agreed at a previous Council meeting in 2018. I believe this is critical information to the report and Members should have been informed. The former Managing Director never revealed if this information had been discussed with the Leadership and Executive Members before the Council meeting. Therefore I ask if the Council could write to the former Managing Director to confirm if this information was shared with the Leadership and Executive at that time.

Response:

“The Leader of the Council advised that he was not in the Leadership or on the Executive at this time and would not be aware of any discussions undertaken”.

	<p>The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance added that this request would need to be considered and therefore a response would be provided in due course.</p>	
<p>25.</p>	<p><u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW REPORT - 1ST APRIL 2022 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2022</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the treasury management activity undertaken during the first 6 months of 2022/2023 be noted and the record of performance and compliance achieved during the first half of the 2022/2023 financial year be accepted.</p>	
<p>26.</p>	<p><u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT – TREASURY STRATEGY STATEMENT, INVESTMENT STRATEGY & MRP POLICY STATEMENT 2023/2024 (INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS)</u></p> <p>Members considered the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely considered the Annual Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement for the 2023/2024 financial year and the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators contained therein (Appendix A) and proposed amendments prior to approval.</p>	

27.	<p><u>CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/2024</u></p> <p>The report of the Chief Officer Resources was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the Capital Strategy for the 2023/24 financial year be agreed.</p>	
28.	<p><u>CORPORATE FEES AND CHARGES 2023/2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the fees and charges for 2023/2024 for Estates and Strategic Asset management attached at Appendix 1 and room hire charges for the General Offices at Appendix 2 be approved; and- the amendment to a fee relating to Waste Services from £574,93 per quarter to £543.66 per quarter for 2023/2024 (paragraph 5.1.4) be approved together with the restated fees relating to Bulky Waste collection included on Appendix 1.	

29.	<p><u>DISCRETIONARY COST OF LIVING SCHEME – SUPPLEMENTARY PROPOSALS</u></p> <p>Members considered the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the proposed amendments to Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme be agreed.</p>	
30.	<p><u>PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/2024</u></p> <p>The report of the Head of Organisational Development was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed namely, that the Pay Policy Statement 2023/2024 be approved.</p>	
31.	<p><u>INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the determinations in the final IRPW Annual Report for 2023/2024 be noted.</p>	

32.	<p><u>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted on the basis that there was sufficient level of support provided for Elected Members.</p>	
33.	<p><u>COUNCIL'S SUITE OF MEMBER DEVELOPMENT POLICIES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 endorsed, namely the suite of Policies as set out in the appendices be approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Member Development Strategy 2022 – 2027 (appendix 1).• Members' Mentoring Framework 2022 – 2027 (appendix 2).• Elected Members Personal Development Review and Competency Framework 2022 (appendix 3).	

<p>34.</p>	<p><u>MEETING SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE EQUALITY ACT 2010: ANNUAL REPORTING AND IMPACT ASSESSING</u></p> <p>The report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Reporting – the progress made against the Council’s Equality Objectives be noted. • Impact Assessing – the new IIA process be noted and a Member Briefing Session be convened for all Elected Members to cover the specific duty for assessing impact to include, the process, examples of its use and its role in decision-making. 	
<p>35.</p>	<p><u>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Members considered the report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance (Monitoring Officer).</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was confirmed that the statutory duty imposed by the Act had been met. • The change of name for the Standards Committee to “Ethics and Standards Committee” be approved. 	

36.	<p><u>PRESIDING MEMBER'S ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT: JUNE 2022 – MARCH 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Presiding Member's Annual Activities Report.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the activities and events attended by the Presiding Member for the period June 2022 – March 2023 be noted.</p>	
37.	<p><u>MEMBERSHIPS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the following:-</p> <p><u>Advisory Panel for Local Authority Governors</u></p> <p>The following recommendations were made by the Panel on 17th March, 2023 to appoint in principle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Glyncoed Primary School – Councillor Chris Smith- Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw – Councillor Sue Edmunds- Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg – Ms. Tracy Dyson- Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community – Mr. Matthew Fowler <p>It was, thereupon, unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the above appointments be endorsed.</p> <p><u>ABUHB Stakeholders Reference Group (SRG)</u></p> <p>It was noted that a decision had been taken to disband the SRG in its current form whilst the Chair of the Health Board reviewed and redesigns the role and constitution of the Group ensuring it was fit for purpose and fully effective.</p>	

A proposal for re-establishment of the SRG would be considered by the Health Board and the Board would then be able to confirm the SRG's membership requirements going forward.

Aneurin Leisure Trust – Community Chest Panel

GAVO – Be Proud of your Community Gwent Awards

It was noted that the above groups had been disbanded.
