

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **20th July, 2023**

Report Subject: **Civic Centre Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Place and Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Ellie Fry, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	x		21.06.23				20.07.23	Audit Wales

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To supply an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to accompany the process of closure of the Civic Centre and the move to the Hubs model for public access to services.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic the Civic Centre was vacated as part of the lockdown instructions from Government. At that point, the Council was looking at five years or less of the useful life of a large proportion of the infrastructure of the Civic Centre building. At the same time, as the pandemic was affecting communities an initiative to move services closer to communities was rolled out.
- 2.2 During the next few years the Council was one of the first to formally move to an agile working arrangement. It made sense from an operational perspective, following the pandemic shutdown of the building, to then formerly close the Civic Centre as the timeline had moved closer to the end of the five-year deadline. At this point the maintenance required to fix the problems in the building was disproportionate to the benefits.
- 2.3 Reports were written and taken through the Council process on the new operating model and working arrangements for the Council and included the recommendation for the closure of the Civic Centre and the development of the hubs model. The report for the new Council Operating Model was taken to Council on 25th March 2021 whereby Council agreed for the new Operating Model based on Agile Working, Democratic Hub and Community Hubs, and confirmed work could proceed to decommission the Civic Centre. [CO2103D7 Council Report TOM 25032021 Final 003.pdf](#)
- 2.4 One of the key aims, the development of the Community Hubs model located in libraries has brought access to council services closer to the heart of the communities.

- 2.5 As part of their 'Springing Forward' Review, covering the 2021/22 year, Audit Wales found that the Council made significant changes to its assets and the way that its workforce operates, but identified that further work is needed for the Council to understand its future asset and workforce needs and to ensure that future Council decisions are appropriately informed by Equality Impact Assessments and the sustainable development principle.
- 2.6 As part of this the Council received the following recommendation for implementation: *'Ensure that all decisions are informed by a timely equality impact assessment where required'*.
- 2.7 The attached retrospective IIA sets out the benefits and dis-benefits of the two schemes that were undertaken in parallel. There are a number of services that have benefited by being delivered closer to the customer at the BG Hubs although the Civic Centre was a well know centre and it has taken some time for communities to use the hubs as their main contact points as opposed to the civic building. Overall the changes have resulted in a positive approach to Customer Service delivery, with services moving closer to customers from the six hubs.
- 2.8 Transport is limited in Blaenau Gwent but as the Hubs are closer to the communities and are based in the local towns, it is felt from the IIA evidence that overall it is generally easier to travel to access services from Hubs than just from the Civic Centre. Lastly, the services being offered from the Hubs have encouraged other activities like children doing homework from the Hubs which wouldn't have happened if they had been delivered from the Civic Centre.
- 2.9 In terms of the civic centre building itself, there was significant concern about the integrity of the existing structure. The steel reinforcement framework that would have been embedded within the concrete construction was aging and failing. This would not have been included within the findings of the Condition Survey undertaken in 2018. Recently a piece of the external concrete fell away from the steel reinforcement.

3. **Recommendation**

- 3.1 This report has been agreed by Corporate Leadership Team and the Governance and Audit Committee.
- 3.2 It is recommended that Council consider and accept the retrospective Integrated Impact Assessment, completed in line with legislation.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The report subject matter supports both:

- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place.

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.

5. Implications Against Recommendation

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

There are no further implications on the budget further to those identified in the reports already taken through Council process on the demolition of the Civic Centre and the development of the Community Hubs reports.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

The risks around this project have been set out in the previous reports. The residual risk is that the site remains empty following demolition of the building for a longer period than is acceptable.

5.3 *Legal*

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.4 *Human Resources*

There are no HR implications associated with this report.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

The supporting evidence is provided in the Appendices.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendices 1 - 8*