

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 29th JANUARY, 2020

REPORT OF: LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

**PRESENT: Leader of the Council/
Executive Member Corporate Services
Councillor N.J. Daniels (CHAIR)**

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

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

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

**WITH: Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Social Services
Chief Officer Resources
Chief Officer Commercial
Service Manager Public Protection
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Press Officer**

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>Apologies for absence were received for:</p> <p>Councillor G. Collier, Deputy Leader/Executive Member for Environment Managing Director Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services</p> <p>The Leader reported that Councillor S. Thomas had been invited to the meeting to present the views of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee in relation to Item No. 10 (Progress Report – Social Services Assisted Transport Provision). However, he was unable to attend and Councillor K. Rowson, the Vice-Chair was in attendance on his behalf.</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Executive Committee held on 18th November, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
	<p><u>GENERAL MATTERS</u></p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>CONFERENCES/COURSES</u></p> <p>To consider invitations to attend the following:-</p> <p>Reception and Briefing by The Army Engagement Team at Coleg Gwent - Thursday, 13th February, 2020</p>	

RESOLVED that approval be granted for Councillor B. Thomas, Armed Forces Champion, to attend.

Social Services Policy Group (SSPG) Learning Workshop and Meeting - 19th and 20th February, 2020

RESOLVED that approval be granted for Councillor J. Mason, Executive Member Social Services, to attend.

The Leader of the Council reported that since the preparation of the report, the following invitations had also been received. He confirmed that no costs would be incurred for the events:-

Inaugural Concert of the British Legion Band in Wales – 9th February, 2020 – Monmouthshire

Lord Lieutenant of Gwent Award – 12th March, 2020 – Raglan Barracks, Newport

RESOLVED that approval be granted for Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion to attend.

DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 6 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 11th MARCH, 2020

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader/Executive Member for Corporate Services.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the forward work programme for 11th March, 2020 be noted.

ORDER OF AGENDA

It was agreed that Item No. 10 (Progress Report – Social Services Assisted Transport) would be considered next on the agenda, and that Item No. 7 (Revenue Budget 2020/2021 to 2024/2025) would be considered last.

DECISION ITEMS – SOCIAL SERVICES MATTERS

No. 10 **PROGRESS REPORT – SOCIAL SERVICES ASSISTED TRANSPORT PROVISION**

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

At the invitation of the Leader, the Corporate Director of Social Services presented the report which provided an analysis of current demand, and outlined recommendations for future potential charges for citizens accessing transport based on comparable public transport costs. The report followed the introduction of the Assisted Transport Policy from April 2019, with the undertaking of eligibility assessments for new and existing citizens. It was agreed that following completion of these assessments, feedback would be provided to the Executive.

In terms of the background, he reported that in January 2019 Social Services transported 190 citizens ‘to and from’ community options venues, on average 120 citizens a day. Historically, assisted transport was provided to citizens attending community options without any formal assessment of need to use such transport, i.e. there has been automatic entitlement regardless of an individual’s situation.

The Corporate Director said one of the key aims of the Directorate was to maximise citizens’ independence and minimise dependency to enable individuals to live and travel independently within their communities. Social Services does not have a statutory duty to provide transport, but does have a duty to meet that need if the need cannot be met by an individual’s own resources or community resource. Further, in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 we adopted the principle of undertaking a strength based assessment which considered the resources of citizens, including access to their own mobility vehicle, bus pass or benefit entitlement.

The Corporate Director referred to sections 2.4 and 2.5 of the report which stated that in April 2019 demand had reduced, and the Department were able to relinquish 1 vehicle, making the current budget allocation for community options transport £321k.

He said Members will also note that 149 assessments have been undertaken by Social Workers to determine eligibility, and the details of these were outlined in section 7 of the report. However, since the preparation of the report the figures have changed, and there were now 101 individuals accessing community options independently. 24 individuals have been deemed eligible and would have free transport; and 14 originally were deemed as exceptional circumstances, but this had unfortunately recently reduced to 11 due to three people passing away, and it was these 11 individuals we are asking to charge for the use of community options transport.

The Corporate Director referred Members to section 4.3 of the report which captured some of the views of citizens currently accessing the service independently. He confirmed that in order to accommodate this and support parents the opening hours have been extended either side of the day, to make the service more flexible.

He then referred to the options outlined in the report, and recommended Option 1. This was in line with the Council's Income Policy 2014 which recommended full cost recovery where appropriate. He said Option 2 sought to charge a cost equivalent to public transport costs for accessing the vehicles. Both these Options would enable the Directorate to reduce the current fleet from 8 to 4 vehicles and ensure a more sustainable model for the future. However, Option 3 which recommended the 'status quo' prior to April 2019 could result in an estimated additional cost to the budget of approximately £90k should every citizen currently accessing the service through alternative means return to using community option assisted transport.

The Corporate Director concluded that if a charge for the 11 individuals using community options assisted transport was not introduced, then it would be unfair to the other 135 individuals either eligible under the policy for free transport or those currently making their own way to and from community options independently.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor K. Rowson, Vice-Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee reported the reasons for the alternative recommendation presented by the Scrutiny Committee.

He said those of the Committee who voted for the alternative recommendation did so because they felt that the previous decision on Home to School and Home to College Transport had set a

precedent for the administration.

They argued that by voting for Option 1 or 2 they would be unfairly penalising some of the most vulnerable people in our community. They also claimed that the good work undertaken by the Department in compiling the information was not the only side of the story, and that huge pressure would be brought upon some of the families of service users.

Finally, they argued that given the Council's much better financial settlement with a £4 million uplift in funding, the proposed saving of approximately £100,000 could not be sufficiently justified in this instance, as there was the potential for users to stop attending community options completely, and this could affect their wellbeing.

The Executive Member for Social Services said this was a very comprehensive report and was evidence of the level of engagement undertaken by the Senior Management Team in Adult Services. He had followed progress and the discussions undertaken on the Policy since 2017, to ensure that all service users had been treated fairly, and with all questions in relation to safeguarding, isolation and loneliness being answered.

He then referred to the Options outlined in the report, and said whilst Option 1 followed the Council's Income Policy, i.e. full cost recovery, he felt this Option could cause unnecessary financial hardship, and as a result could not support this Option.

In relation to Option 3, the Executive Member said whilst he had taken the views of the Scrutiny Committee on board, he could not support the alternative recommendation, and he said he was surprised that since 2015, there had been no reference at any meetings to revert to the status quo.

He said Option 2 reflected the Council's policy to ensure that our citizens retain their independence, and would assist the most vulnerable people who access our services to travel in a method of their own choosing. As a result, he concluded that Option 2 was his preferred Option, and believed it was a reasonable compromise and recognised the level of engagement and consultation that had been undertaken, and the positive feedback received by the Department.

The Leader commended the Department on presenting a clear and

understandable report. In relation to the comments of the Scrutiny Committee he said it was difficult to compare this with the Home to School and Home to College Transport. In January 2019 discussions were around potential budget cuts and savings that were being submitted year on year for consideration. Following in-depth consultation and lengthy discussions of the outcomes of that consultation, along with other mitigating factors, it was decided that the Home to School/College Transport would no longer be put before Council for potential savings as part of the budget setting process. This decision provided piece of mind to parents and grandparents, but would also save Officer time in having to compile the data in preparation for the budget setting process.

The Leader then sought clarification that in January 2019 when the review of social services assisted transport was undertaken, whether the potential for a charging policy was always intended.

In response the Corporate Director confirmed that when the Social Services Assisted Transport Policy was approved in January 2019, it was also agreed that Officers would look at potential costings for the service on a full cost recovery basis or alternatively costs comparable to public transport, in order to develop charges for those citizens eligible to continue to access transport. If Members did not want to implement a charging system, then the decision could have been taken to not proceed with the review at that time.

The Executive Member for Regeneration & Economic Development commended the way in which the review had been managed. He said the key issue moving forward was to ensure access to the service for the benefit of the community, and he was confident that this would continue.

The Executive Member for Education supported the comments made and said the amount of engagement that had been undertaken was very pleasing, and supported Option 2.

The Vice-Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee confirmed that he also supported Option 2.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive note the progress made in assessing the needs of citizens in line with the

Assisted Transport Policy, including the outcomes of the assessments. The Executive recommend that only those citizens who remain eligible for assisted transport continue to receive support free of charge. Those citizens who are deemed ineligible but have exceptional circumstances continue to receive support but at a charge based on similar costs illustrated earlier in the report, reflecting public transport rates. The charges would be based on the future configuration of transport required to deliver the future model of Community Options services (Option 2).

DECISIONS – ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

No. 8 REVIEW OF BLAENAU GWENT HOMES ALLOCATION POLICY

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Housing Solutions and Compliance.

The Service Manager Public Protection presented the report which outlined the proposed policy and operational changes to the Blaenau Gwent Homes Allocation Scheme, following the recent review of the scheme and consultation process. The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein, the proposed changes to the Policy were detailed in Appendix 3.

In relation to the consultation exercise undertaken, a query was raised regarding Member engagement, and the Officer apologised that all Members had not been directly consulted on the proposals. However, the report had been considered by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee and they fully supported the proposed changes to the Scheme.

The Leader confirmed that the Executive Member for Environment was also fully supportive of the proposals.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive approve the proposed policy changes to the Blaenau Gwent Homes Housing Allocation Scheme for implementation on the 1st April, 2020 (Option 1).

DECISION ITEMS – REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY REVIEW</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.</p> <p>The Executive Member Regeneration & Economic Development presented the report which outlined the key principles and requirements of the guidance from Welsh Government in preparing a Local Housing Strategy, and also highlighted the potential opportunity for collaborative working with other Local Authorities on a regional basis.</p> <p>The Local Housing Strategy set out the Council’s long term housing vision in terms of the type of housing we are looking to build over the next 5 years. He said housing was currently at the top of the political agenda, impacting across all Portfolios, and the Local Housing Strategy was a very important document for the Council. Looking at the longer term there was opportunity to pursue a more regional approach and section 2.12 of the report outlined the opportunities for collaborative working. However, in moving towards a collaborative approach, the Executive Member stressed the importance of ensuring local needs are met.</p> <p>The Executive Member concluded that the Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and endorsed the preferred Option 2.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive endorse BGCBC to work collaboratively with Gwent wide Local Authorities to investigate the possibility of producing a Regional Housing Strategy and local (Blaenau Gwent) action plan (Option 2).</p>	
	<p><u>DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS</u></p>	
<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>At the invitation of the Leader the Chief Officer Resources presented the report which provided an update on the positive provisional local government settlement for 2020/21 and its impact on the Council’s budget; proposed the detailed budget for 2020/21 and indicative budget for 2021/22; and proposed the level of Council Tax increase</p>	

for the 2020/21 financial year in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. The positive provisional settlement combined with the opportunities identified in the Bridging the Gap programme meant the Council would be able to invest in key priorities, avoid cuts to services and enhance its financial resilience. Further details of the specific grants for Local Government would be published alongside the final RSG settlement in February 2020.

In response to a question raised by the Leader, the Officer said there were significant financial challenges in the latter years of the MTFS, therefore it would be prudent to establish a Transformation Budget which could be utilised to invest in projects and investigate potential options for savings in future years, and bridge the significant gaps in funding.

The Leader sought assurance that the grants being transferred into the RSG would become un-hypothecated, and the Officer confirmed that they would become un-hypothecated, and it would be for the Council to decide where this funding would be allocated.

The Leader said he was confident that the Council would make the right decision. He thereupon recommended that the Executive note the report at this stage, and that a formal decision be made at Council on the 6th February, 2020.

RESOLVED accordingly.

MONITORING ITEMS - SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 11 REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD

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

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board be supported (Option 1).

