

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 24th JUNE, 2020

REPORT OF: LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

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

**Deputy Leader of the Council / Executive Member –
Regeneration and Economic Development
Councillor D. Davies**

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

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

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

**WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Corporate Director Social Services
Chief Officer Commercial
Chief Officer Resources
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>	

	<p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>There were no apologies for absence received.</p> <p>The Leader welcomed everyone to the first formal meeting of the Council since the lockdown measures were enforced.</p> <p>He also offered thanks to officers for the hard work that had been undertaken over the recent months in order to ensure critical services continued to be provided and asked that the Executive's thanks be communicated to staff.</p> <p>The Managing Director responded that she would ensure the message was relayed to staff.</p> <p>The Leader also asked that as an Authority, our respects were given to those people who have lost loved ones in Blaenau Gwent and to those in neighbouring authorities and asked for a moment of reflection.</p>
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The Executive Member for Environment declared an interest in Item 11 - Business Rates Relief – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2020/21 and, having taken legal advice from the Monitoring Officer, remained in the meeting but took no part in the decision in respect of item 11. The reasons for the declaration of interest are recorded on a schedule maintained by the Proper Officer.</p>
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>
No. 4	<p><u>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Executive Committee held on 11th March, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>

DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 5

COVID-19 EMERGENCY – TRANSITION TO THE NEXT PHASE

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director.

At the invitation of the Leader, the Managing Director presented the report which confirmed the Council's strategic response to the Covid-19 Emergency and to outline the next steps as Wales moved to the next phase of the pandemic, with easing of lockdown restrictions and a gradual restarting of services.

The Officer highlighted that in relation to the national emergency, the Council had set up its emergency planning arrangements in March 2020, as detailed in paragraph 2 of the report.

Section 3 of the report detailed some of the work that the Council had been undertaking during lockdown and that the focus had shifted to the delivery of only critical services with other available resources being redeployed to support the emergency response, those of which are detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

The response to the emergency also involved school closures and school hubs were established to provide support to keyworkers. She reported that there had been good partnership working with schools, and the Council had continued to support families eligible for Free School Meals. The Council was currently supporting over 2000 families per week via direct payments.

The Managing Director then referred to paragraphs 3.4 to 3.9 which detailed the decisions the Council had made during the pandemic, e.g. the establishment of locality response teams to support vulnerable people in the community; and the support to the local business community through various Welsh Government grants. As an organisation the Council had also changed the way it operated, e.g. home working and the effective use of new technology, which had also been adopted by Members.

Highlighted in paragraph 3.10 of the report was how the pandemic had affected the workforce in the Council with high levels of absence at the start of the outbreak at around 18%, however, the most up-to-date figures showed that staff absence had reduced and was just

below 3% of staff not available for work, largely owing to those who are shielded and unable to work from home.

Section 5 detailed the transition into the next phase, and how the Council could re-start its services whilst still being aware that the pandemic is not over. A Recovery Co-ordination Group had been established to lead the recovery work in Gwent the first meeting of which is on 24th June 2020 and Blaenau Gwent would then be establishing its own group.

As part of the next steps the Council would undertake a refresh of its corporate priorities to include what had been learnt over the last few months and the good practice to carry forward into the future.

The Managing Director concluded by highlighting that the Council needed to focus on the positive things that had happened, which included working with our partners and communities and referred to the recommendations in Section 7.

The Deputy Leader / Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development commented that the support that had been provided to businesses from the Regeneration Section had been fantastic, however, there was still a lot of work to do, and noted that the differences in the easing of lockdown between England and Wales had been confusing for businesses, e.g. when furlough would cease and the lifting of lockdown measures for those people on the shielded list.

He also highlighted the need for those staff who had been redeployed to be returned to their substantive posts as soon as possible to enable services to restart.

The Leader noted that it was an excellent report, and a brief snapshot of what officers and Members have been undertaking.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive approved recommendation:

- the approach to moving to the next phase of the pandemic and recovery;
- the refresh of the Corporate Priorities to ensure a clear focus on what the Council wants to deliver over next 18 months;

- the proposal to use the disruption of the pandemic to reflect on how we work as an organisation and with our communities, partners, workforce and trade unions, informing a position on the 'new normal' to support delivery of the refreshed priorities;
- supported the development of a wider place-based discussion with partners on the community impact of the pandemic and how the BG Public Service Board could respond and support recovery through its collective priorities and work programme;
- supported the development of an Economic Recovery Plan through engagement with the BG Enterprise Board and Regional Forums – identifying the responding to the impact on local businesses in order to support economic recovery; and
- Continue to ensure that Blaenau Gwent is an active participant in regional forums – such as G10 and Cardiff Capital City Region – to support recovery and development of the Borough.

No. 6

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE 2020/21 REVENUE BUDGET AND UPDATE ON BRIDGING THE GAP PROPOSALS

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

At the invitation of the Leader the Chief Officer Resources presented the report which detailed an initial forecast of the impact of Covid-19 on the 2020/2021 revenue budget and to provide an update of progress made against the Bridging the Gap Programme.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted the detail in Section 5 and referred to Appendix 1 that provided an overall forecast on a portfolio by portfolio basis and noted that the report showed a worst case scenario. The forecast included estimated claims to the Welsh Government hardship fund and the new Social Services hardship fund.

The Chief Officer Resources then referred to Section 5.6 and the overall summary in Appendix 2 - Bridging the Gap proposals and that of the target of £1.465m, the Council is forecasting to achieve £1.2m or 83% of that target. Many of those proposals were income related.

The Officer noted that as a Council we would also need to look to identify if there are areas in our own budgets to mitigate some of the costs that had been incurred and noted that paragraph 5.7.1 of the report identifies some additional income.

The Leader thanked the Chief Officer Resources for a comprehensive report and noted that the finance was an important priority on the WLGA agenda, and the WG, WLGA and Councils were working well together and had one consensus view that was to focus on the financial situation which had prevailed throughout.

The Leader commented that from a positive political view, the interaction and the relationship between WG and LG had vastly improved. However, he noted that the funding sources from WG would not be available in the long term and agreed that the Council needed to look at its own budgets. He noted that the management of the financial position during the pandemic at both a local level and across Gwent and wider had gone very well. He commended the Chief Officer Resources and her team in being able to respond to the demand of the WG deadlines and all returns had been submitted on time.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive considered the current forecast position and provided appropriate challenge to the financial assumptions included in the report; and that progress made against the Bridging the Gap programme for 2020/2021 be noted. (Option 1)

No. 7 **TEST, TRACE AND PROTECT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director.

At the invitation of the Leader the Chief Officer Commercial presented the report that detailed the arrangements put in place to establish Contact Tracing in Blaenau Gwent, as part of the regional response to the Welsh Government’s Test, Trace and Protect Plan (TTP).

The Officer referred to Section 3 and gave an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the service. She also provided information on the operational details of the service.

She noted that the initial work would focus on the testing of staff and residents in Care Homes and to date the level of testing has been quite low, however, it was anticipated that figures would rise as lockdown measures were eased; and it was noted that it was likely that the service would continue until March 2021.

The Leader then, in light of the announcement over the last few days that there would be a strong potential that a testing facility would be placed at the Marine Colliery Site in Cwm, and asked that an officer provide a brief statement.

The Managing Director responded that a request had been made over the last few days, whereby Welsh Government (WG) and the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) had contacted the Council to source potential sites in the borough for a drive-through testing centre. The Council had welcomed their interest to have a testing centre in the area, and WG and ABUHB were showed potential sites and Marine Colliery in Cwm was selected, mainly because of its size. Officers were now working through the plans to make sure the site would be suitable and testing should start next week. She noted that drive-through centres were part of a National approach to testing, through a national system, and it linked neatly into the work of the local contact tracing, any results would be fed into the team. This was positive news for Blaenau Gwent and officers had worked at pace over the last few days and expected a formal announcement over the next few days.

The Leader thanked the Chief Officer Commercial and other officers involved for the work they had done on the Test, Trace and Protect project, which would be crucial to the further easing of lockdown measures.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive noted and endorsed the establishment of Contact Tracing in Blaenau Gwent, as part of the regional approach in Gwent and in support of the national Test, Trace and Protect Plan. (Option 1)

MONITORING ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES

No. 8

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING – 2019/20 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

At the invitation of the Leader the Chief Officer Resources presented the report that detailed the Provisional outturn position at the end of 2019/2020; the significant adverse variances within portfolios; the provisional outturn for Fees and Charges; and the progress on the achievement of the Financial Efficiency Projects for 2019/2020.

The Officer referred to paragraph 5.1.3 which highlighted the overall position across all portfolios.

She noted that the provisional outturn of £0.48m favourable variance was a significantly improved position to the forecast at December 2019; and also highlighted the costs incurred as a result of the severe floods in February 2020.

The Chief Officer Resources then referred to Appendix 1 and gave a brief overview of the variances for each Directorate.

She also referred to paragraphs 5.1.25 – 5.1.27 which detailed the Fees and Charges.

Finally, she drew Members attention to paragraph 5.1.29 and the Financial Efficiency Projects and the target of £3.35m and that 98% (£3.28m) had been achieved.

The Leader thanked the Chief Officer Resources for the report, and noted the remarkable turnaround from December 2019; and reiterated how well the Council had done over the last 2 to 3 years in managing its budget. He continued that it showed that Directorates working together can achieve the targets that were set. The continued commitment to the financial strategy had put the Council in a good position to achieve the budget at the end of the year.

He noted that adverse variances would continue into the current financial year and sought clarification that the Cost Pressure sub group would continue to meet to continually monitor those issues.

The Chief Officer Resources confirmed that the Cost Pressure sub group would continue to meet.

The Executive Member Social Services commented on financial position and congratulated the Social Services Directorate on achieving its favourable variance.

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

No. 9

CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, PROVISIONAL OUTTURN FOR 2019/29 FINANCIAL YEAR

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources. At the invitation of the Leader the Chief Officer Resources presented the report that detailed the provisional financial outturn position to the end of March 2020 across all portfolios (subject to audit); and any significant adverse and/or favourable variances.

The Chief Officer Resources referred to paragraphs 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 that overall budget holders had maintained spending within the overall total for the approved capital schemes; and that future year funding of £59m consisting of external grants and the Authority's own funded would be carried forward into the future financial year.

The Leader noted that this was another very positive report.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive:

- Provided appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report;
- Continued to support appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council; and
- Noted the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding. (Option 1)

DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 10

GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The following additional grants were reported:

ABERTILLERY

Abertillery Ward- Councillor N. Daniels

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| 1. | Old Tyleryans RFC | £100 |
| 2. | Abertillery Belles FC | £100 |
| 3. | Abertillery & District Museum Society | £50 |
| 4. | Bishop Street Allotments | £50 |

5.	Adam Street Allotments	£50
6.	Abertillery Netball Club	£100
7.	Abertillery BG RFC	£100
8.	Abertillery Bowls Club Ltd	£100
9.	Abertillery Cricket Club	£100
10.	Abertillery Town Band	£100
11.	Abertillery Bluebirds FC	£100
12.	Abertillery Ladies Orpheus	£75
13.	Abertillery Excelsiors FC	£100
14.	Abertillery Excelsiors Juniors FC	£100
15.	Ebbw Fach Choir	£75

Abertillery Ward- Councillor J. Holt

1.	Adam St. Community Allotments	£100
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Abertillery Ward- Councillor M. Cook

1.	Abertillery Cricket Club	£100
2.	Abertillery Bowls Club	£100
3.	Abertillery Bowls Club Junior Section	£100

Cwmtillery Ward- Councillor J. Wilkins

1.	Abertillery Excelsiors FC	£150
2.	Abertillery BG RFC	£150
3.	Abertillery Bowls Club	£100
4.	Abertillery Netball Club	£100
5.	Abertillery Belles FC	£150
6.	Abertillery Town Band	£50
7.	Abertillery Business & Professional Ladies Ass.	£50
8.	Wyndam Vowles Community Centre	£50
9.	Abertillery Cricket Club	£50
10.	Six Bells Bowls Club	£50

BRYNMAWR

Brynmawr Ward- Councillor J. Hill

1.	Showstoppers	£100
2.	Ebbw Vale Works Museum	£100

3.	BGFM Limited	£100
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EBBW VALE

Badminton Ward – Councillor G. Paulsen

1.	Ebbw Vale Cricket Club	£150
2.	Ebbw Vale Mini & Junior Rugby	£100

Rassau Ward – Councillor G.A. Davies

1.	Special Movers	£200
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Cwm Ward – Councillors G. Davies & D. Bevan

1.	Waunlwyd OAP Associaton	£300
2.	New Cwm Institute	£300
3.	Cwm Pigeon Club	£100
4.	1 st Cwm Scout Group	£200
5.	Waunlwyd Youth & Community Centre	£200
6.	Waunlywd OAP Luncheon Club	£100
7.	TK's & Community Group	£300

NANTYGLO & BLAINA

Blaina Ward – Councillors J. Mason & K. Rowson

1.	Nantyglo OAP Association	£200
2.	Winchestown OAP Association	£200
3.	Wesleyan Methodist Church	£200
4.	Holy Trinity St. Anne's Church	£200
5.	BGFM Limited	£200
6.	Coed Cae Interact Club	£200
7.	Abertillery BG RFC	£200

RESOLVED subject to the foregoing that the report be accepted and the grants contained therein be approved.

No. 11	<u>BUSINESS RATES RELIEF – RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY RATES RELIEF – 2020/21</u>
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The Executive Member Environment declared an interest in this item and, having taken legal advice from the Monitoring Officer, remained in the meeting but took no part in the decision in respect of item 11.

Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.

At the invitation of the Leader the Chief Officer Resources presented the report for the Executive to consider and adopt, on behalf of the Council, the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2020/21 scheme(RLHRR), as a section 47 discretionary rate relief for 2020/21.

The Chief Officer Resources referred to Appendix 1 that provided the criteria and guidance for the operation and delivery of the scheme.

She concluded that Welsh Government had yet to confirm the actual funding allocation for Blaenau Gwent, but had provided an estimate of £3.5m for delivery of the scheme. It was anticipated that 300 businesses may benefit from the scheme if adopted and that in order that assistance may be given to rate payers the Council must resolve to adopt the scheme at a discretionary rate relief scheme in line with s47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The Leader noted that this scheme would be a welcome relief to a number of organisations.

The Deputy Leader / Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development commented this topic was an area that retail businesses in Blaenau Gwent had campaigned for many years and hoped that the rates relief would continue moving forward.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive adopted the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2020/21 scheme on behalf of the Council, to supplement the Council’s discretionary rate relief scheme. (Option 2)

No. 12 **EXEMPT ITEM(S)**

DECISIONS ITEMS – REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

No. 13 **EBBW VALE HI TEC TEST FACILITY**

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

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.

At the invitation of the Leader, the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services presented the report.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development commented that it had been agreed that this would be done in stages and then the final decision to go ahead with project would be made and noted that the Council had moved in that direction. He noted that in recent days the national government had discussions regarding redesigning of cars, etc. and that discussion fitted with this agenda. Also organisations would be supporting the Council who know the industry, and that there are some unique selling points, not least the area.

The Executive Member proposed option two and agreed that the Council should look for funding to develop the project further.

The Executive Member for Social Services sought clarification on the funds that had been committed to the project and enquired if those figures could increase.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services responded that those figures would increase and the key would be to receive CCRC support for the next stages. Funds would be required for planning applications, etc., it would also be expected that partners would contribute at least equally.

The Managing Director commented that the Council would not be able to undertake this project on its own, it would be about developing

the project in partnership and the next stage would be to submit a Strategic Outline Business Case to the CCRC, the research would provide the project with credibility and expert evidence, and receiving agreement for development funding would allow the Council to develop those partnerships to move forward. This would be a key step on how the project would be received and how much support and funding would be made available.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and Option 2, namely to extend the land Option and to continue with the Soft Market Testing and submit the project to CCRC for development funding.