

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO:** **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT:** **CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2020**

**REPORT OF:** **DEMOCRATIC AND COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

---

**PRESENT:** COUNCILLOR S. Healy (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook  
G.A. Davies  
J. Millard  
L. Parsons  
G. Paulsen

**AND:** Corporate Director Social Services  
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services  
Chief Officer – Commercial  
Chief Officer - Resources  
Head of Organisational Development  
Head of Partnerships and Governance  
Professional Lead – Community Safety  
Head of Community Services  
Communications Manager  
Scrutiny Officer/Advisor

**WITH:** Charlotte Owen, Audit Wales

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor P. Edwards  Councillor J. Hill  Councillor C. Meredith  Councillor K. Pritchard  Councillor D. Wilkshire  Managing Director</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 20<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2020</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p>In relation to the second point on the Action Sheet the Head of Organisational Development advised that the action had not been progressed as officers focus had been on the emergency response to Covid-19. The Officer agreed to look into the request and report back accordingly at the next meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED this course of action.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	

<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></b></p> <p>The Committee AGREED that future meetings be held at 10.00 a.m.</p>	
<p><b>No. 8</b></p>	<p><b><u>PROPOSED SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020-2021</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Chair of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>A Member felt it was important in the current climate the Forward Work Programme was a fluid document to be revised to reflect the ongoing work and outcomes in relation to the Coronavirus Pandemic.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 9</b></p>	<p><b><u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REVIEW 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL, 2019 TO 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH, 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report which provided Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the Treasury Management activities carried out by the Authority during the 2019/2020 financial year under delegated powers by the Chief Officer Resources. The Chief Officer referred Members to the performance information and data and advised that during 2019/2020 the Authority took £10m in long term debt from other public authorities (PWLB) to replace maturing loans or to finance capital expenditure.</p>	

In the past few years the credit rating agencies had downgraded a number of financial institutions as they no longer meet the Authority's required approval criteria. However, the Chief Officer advised that in the current financial climate the Authority had performed well in terms of Treasury Management and outlined the key points:-

- Investment returns of £61,000 had been achieved with an average interest rate of 0.46%. This was slightly lower than the benchmark rate of 0.54% but reflected that the Authority cannot invest in counterparties that pay higher rates due to credit rating reductions. This was in line with the Authority's risk averse policy whereby the security of the capital sum was the number one priority at the expense of more competitive investment returns.
- An average interest rate of 1.09% has been paid on temporary borrowings against a benchmark of 1.00%, minimising as far as possible the interest payable by the Authority. This was despite the increase in market rates following the 1% increase to PWLB rates in October 2019 – this evidenced good performance.
- All of the Treasury limits and Treasury Management prudential indicators set for the financial year had been complied with during the year.
- No institutions in which investments were made during the period had any difficulty in repaying investments and interest in full. Therefore, the Authority was not exposed to any financial loss as a result of the difficult economic climate.

A Member referred to the investment returns which had been achieved and asked if the lower rate would result in any future budget implications.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that there were no anticipated budget pressures from the lower rate achieved, however now officers had a better understanding of the impact of the PWLB changes this would be included in plans going forward. The Chief Officer added that if any budget pressures emerged they would be reported to Members accordingly.

	<p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 2, namely Members scrutinised the treasury management activity undertaken during the 2019/2020 financial year and no comments were provided prior to its submission to full Council.</p>	
<b>No. 10</b>	<p><b><u>POSITION STATEMENT ON THE COUNCIL'S CCTV SYSTEM (APRIL TO AUGUST 2020)</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the joint report of the Chief Officer Resources (SIRO for CCTV), Head of Community Services and Head of Governance and Partnerships.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources outlined the report which provided an update on the Council's CCTV system covering the period during the Covid-19 Pandemic from April to August 2020. The Chief Officer spoke to the report and gave an overview of the performance information and data as detailed in the report. The Chief Officer Resources concluded that although there had been localised operational issues with cameras, the CCTV system was operating in compliance with legislation.</p> <p>A Member noted that the deployable cameras had not been deployed due to the pandemic and asked if these could now be located in areas of high anti-social behaviour or fly tipping within the Borough.</p> <p>The Head of Partnerships and Governance advised that there are protocols and procedures in place in terms of both technical and community safety matters in placing cameras. There needed to be sufficient evidence to deploy cameras to specific areas. It was suggested that if there were areas of concern within respective wards these could be discussed with the Community Safety Officer.</p> <p>In response to further concerns around locations, it was reported that an annual review of CCTV camera sites would be undertaken. This would allow all sites being covered to remain 'live' in line with hot spot areas.</p>	

Members felt that it was important that CCTV was included on the Forward Work Programme and the Officer stated that an Annual Progress Report was scheduled to be presented in February 2021. The reports were agreed to be presented on an annual basis to ensure it captured a good period to gain sufficient evidence.

A Member felt that the annual report should include plans going forward as well as a progress update.

The Chair concurred with the comments raised and was assured the Annual Progress Report was on the Forward Work Programme.

A Member noted that the CCTV budget was underspent and asked if these monies could be used to address issues with cameras which were not working in specific areas.

The Head of Community Services advised that in most cases the issues were not with the equipment it was due to Wi-Fi dropping or network problems. It was informed that each Monday and Thursday a review of the CCTV systems was carried out to identify any problems before and after the weekend. In terms of the underspends, it was reported that in most instances these monies would be spent by the year end to address any issues.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 2, namely the Committee considered and provided comment on the position statement on the CCTV function during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**No. 11** **SUPPORTING FINANCIAL RESILIENCE –**  
**AUDIT WALES FOLLOW UP REVIEW**

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

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the report provided the findings of the follow up review undertaken by Audit Wales on their Supporting Financial Resilience work stream.

The Chief Officer reminded Members of the work undertaken in 2018 by the Wales Audit Office which focussed on the Council effectiveness in terms of maximising funding opportunities and containing spending demands. The Chief Officer Resources advised that the review concluded that the Council needed to develop a stronger financial culture to remain financially resilient and a number of areas for improvement were proposed. The Council had responded positively to the recommendations for improvement and had made progress against the proposals and identified future work to be undertaken. The Chief Officer referred Members to the appendix attached to the report which highlighted the progress that had been made against each of the areas for improvement identified in 2018.

At the invitation of the Chief Officer Resources, the Audit Wales Representative added that the Follow-up Review had been carried out to ensure the Council had responded accordingly to the areas for improvement. A positive response had been received with a clear plan in place going forward. The Audit Wales Representative therefore felt the Authority was in a stronger position to address any financial challenges which may arise.

The Chair welcomed the report which demonstrated the commitment of Members and Officers to ensure the required improvements are made for our residents.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 1, namely, the Committee reviewed the findings of Audit Wales, considered the progress made against the proposals for improvement and accepted the report and appendix prior to it being submitted to the Executive Committee.