

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 17TH</u> <u>DECEMBER, 2020</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. MOORE (THE CHAIR,
PRESIDING)

Councillors P. Baldwin

D. Bevan

J. Collins

M. Cook

M. Cross

N. Daniels

D. Davies

G. A. Davies

G. L. Davies

M. Day

P. Edwards

L. Elias

D. Hancock

K. Hayden

S. Healy

J. Hill

W. Hodgins

J. Holt

J. Mason

H. McCarthy, B.A. (Hons)

C. Meredith

J. Millard

J. C. Morgan

J. P. Morgan

L. Parsons

G. Paulsen

K. Pritchard

K. Rowson

T. Smith
 B. Summers
 G. Thomas
 S. Thomas
 H. Trollope
 J. Wilkins
 D. Wilkshire
 B. Willis
 L. Winnett

AND: Managing Director
 Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services
 Corporate Director of Education
 Corporate Director of Social Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Commercial
 Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance
 Head of Governance and Partnerships
 Communications, Marketing & Customer Access Manager

<u>No.</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
2.	<u>APOLOGIES</u> Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Collier, M. Holland and T. Sharrem.	

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

The following declaration of interest was reported:

Item No. 6 – The Appointment of Lay Members to the Audit Committee

Councillor P. Edwards

4. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021/2022 TO 2025/2026**

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

At the invitation of the Chair, the Chief Officer Resources highlighted the following salient points contained within the report:

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), was a key element within the Council's strategic planning framework and provided the latest assessment of the Council's financial position over the next 5 years and guidance on potential short, medium and long term challenges.
- The document included a forward look over the next 5 years to assess the spending requirements the Council was likely to face to deliver the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and highlighted the level of cuts (reducing or stopping services) that would need to be made to ensure the Council could set a balanced budget each year.
- The MTFS proposed the approach that the Council would take to respond to the financial challenges faced over the next 5-year period. This would be an iterative process and one that would be developed and refined as the funding position from Wales Government became clearer and strategic business reviews were further developed and implemented.
- Details of the key financial planning assumptions used for financial modelling were detailed at section 4 of the appendix and this also provided an assessment of the potential budget gaps over the period of the MTFS, building on the current

assessed cost pressures and achievement of the bridging the gap proposals.

- The cost pressures that had been identified could be categorised as existing service pressures, growth items and Covid-19 pandemic pressures. It had been assumed that the Covid-19 pressures would continue to be funded by Welsh Government. It was noted that a residual funding gap of between £8.6m and £11.5m had been assessed over the next 5 years.
- Usually by this time in the year, UK Government would have already announced the provisional and final local government settlement, however, due to the focus on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK spending review had been delayed. This had subsequently delayed the Welsh Government announcement on the provisional settlement and this was now expected on 22nd December, 2020 with the final settlement due on 2nd March, 2021. This delay would have implications for the budget setting process for 2021/2022 and planning arrangements for setting a balanced budget.
- The Council's current MTFS contained a number of assumptions which impacted on the level of its income and expenditure. Changes in these assumptions could potentially have a fundamental effect on the budget gap over the next 5 years. As an example, the impact of a 1% change on the main assumptions had been calculated and was detailed in paragraph 5.2.2. of the report.

Members were then invited to comment/raise questions on the report.

The Leader of the Labour Group commenced by stating that due to the delay in the announcement of the provisional local government settlement, work would need to be undertaken in January, prior to the annual budget discussions taking place and requested that the information which was made available by Welsh Government on 22nd December, 2020 be made available to Members at the earliest opportunity together with any new bridging the gap proposals that would be required to mitigate the budget further.

Transformation Fund - in reply to a question as to whether the Transformation Fund would form part of budget going forward, the Chief Officer Resources confirmed that the draft estimates included as part of the MTFS had assumed that the Transformation Fund would continue in 2021/22 and into future years.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) – The Leader of the Labour Group commenced by stating that the MRP had featured highly in this term of office because clearly without this there would have been an extra £3m budget gap. He continued by referred to a Council report dated October 2017 (considered by Council on 7th December, 2017) and quoted paragraph 4.4 which stated that “During the MRP reduction period, the Authority will have a longer period of time to plan and implement longer term transformational savings that will contribute towards mitigating the MRP increase at the end of year 5” and asked whether any work had been undertaken in this regard and if any savings had been put forward to contribute towards the mitigation of the MRP increase - he pointed out that the level of the financial strain i.e. £1.8m had not altered in 4 years.

The Chief Officer Resources confirmed that the financial strain had not altered at the high level but proposals and savings had been identified that would impact on the budget, which would include bridging the gap proposals and when brought forward would impact on the total funding gap i.e. whilst proposals had not been identified to specifically address the MRP cost pressure, proposals had been identified to address the cost pressure as a whole.

The Leader of the Labour Group expressed his concern that nothing had been done to mitigate the ‘tornado’ which was coming in 2022/23 – a substantial £2m of extra funding (a hidden cost pressure) would be required to be identified and said he would have thought the Council would have made advance preparations – he added that the previous year discussions had taken place regarding the need to be prudent and monies had been included to increase the level of the general reserve fund.

He continued by pointing out that in the last 2 years almost £2m had spent on consultancy fees (almost half the life of the MRP) when it was known that this huge cost pressure would be coming. There were clearly issues with the local authority being able to survive at its current level and this action could be interpreted as borrowing to

pay for provision but going forward the Council may need to look at the services that were not needed or stopping certain services to be able to rectify this position.

Another Member expressed his concern that because no provision had been made to address the MRP cost pressure this could have implications for the next political administration in 2022.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that it was the intention of Council to ensure that the cost pressures were addressed and funded year on year. If cost pressures continued, alternative savings proposals would be investigated to mitigate this going forward. The MRP had enabled the Council to save £15m in the last 5 years and whilst there would be an increase in the MRP going forward, this would be less than what was being paid previously. A conscious decision had been made not to allocate specific savings against the MRP because a cost pressure was a cost pressure whether it was the result of the MRP, lost income or other expenditure - the cost pressures would be dealt with as a collective and savings identified going forward in order that a balanced budget could be set for future years.

In reply to a question, the Chief Officer Resources confirmed that Welsh Government had now introduced legislation that prevented local authorities from backdating changes to their MRP policy – however, backdating provision was allowed at the time the Council had made that decision and implemented its policy change.

The Leader of the Labour Group concluded by stating that the Council could change its policy at any time as long as there was prudent provision but again expressed his concern that nothing had been done to prevent this onslaught and even more concerning was that this on-going cost pressure would have future implications for the next administration.

The Leader of the Council commenced by stating that whilst he understood some of the comments that had been made, his record and approach to financial prudence was well documented and he had no intention of handing over a legacy of a massive financial burden to the next administration. The decision that had been taken had allowed the Council to protect and enhance the services for the council tax payers, without any severe impact on the council tax itself.

He continued by stating that he understood the nervousness around the size of the figure but pointed out that one of the first comments he had made regarding backdating the MRP, was that there should be no major financial burden handed over to future administrations and he was confident that this would be the case and this would be budgeted for accordingly.

The financial prudence during the lifetime of this administration had been sound and pragmatic and everything that had been done had received the endorsement of Audit Wales and other agencies. The Leader concluded by stating that the right decision had been made and he was absolutely determined that there would not be any major financial burden placed on any future administration.

The Leader of the Labour Group reiterated his concern that no mitigation measures had been put in place to address this cost pressure and this pressure would be an added strain for the Council on top of all the other pressures faced. The retrospective nature of the change to the MRP policy had sustained the Council going forward but unless he could be advised how the £1.8m could be ameliorated, it clearly demonstrated that the Council was not considering this prudently at this stage.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the:

- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/2022 to 2025/2026 be approved.
- Forecast funding gap for the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.
- Cost pressures identified at Appendix 1 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.
- Progress update within the Strategic Business Reviews attached at Appendix 2 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.

5. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) BILL:
CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEES (CJCS) AND
PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE OF PRINCIPAL
COUNCILS**

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance and the Head of Governance and Partnerships.

Following on from the Member briefing sessions that had been held, the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance advised that this report sought to inform Members of the two current consultations being undertaken (listed below) on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill and presented a suggested draft consultation response for the CJC consultation element which, if approved would be forwarded to Welsh Government prior to 4th January.

- Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) – consultation response deadline – 4th January, 2021.
- Part 6, Chapter 1 - Performance and Governance of Principal Councils – consultation response deadline – 3rd February, 2021.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill [the Bill] was introduced in 2019 and passed by the Senedd on 18th November, 2020. It was anticipated the Bill would receive Royal Assent early in 2021. The Bill was a substantial piece of legislative reform covering many elements including electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance and regional working and would replace the current improvement duty for principal councils as set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

It was noted that there would be a staggered introduction of the various elements contained within the Bill.

The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance continued by highlighting the following salient points in relation to the CJC consultation element:

Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) - had been the subject of much debate with the Minister during the past 12 months and although called 'Committees', these were corporate bodies,

described by the Minister as ‘part of the local government family’ and were separate legal entities in their own right.

The membership of the CJsCs would be Leaders of the respective local authorities and voting initially would be on a ‘one member one vote’ basis. CJsCs could co-opt other members if they choose, either cabinet members or other partners and these could be in a voting or non-voting capacity. CJsCs would be accountable to their ‘constituent’ councils via their leaders.

There were 4 CJC regions in Wales and Blaenau Gwent would form part of the South East region. CJsCs would have functions relating to economic well-being, strategic planning (Local Development Plans would remain with Local Authorities) and transport. The economic wellbeing power was potentially wide-ranging and significant, but how far it was to be used would be determined by a CJC.

Where there was regional working in place, then these regional arrangements may transition into a CJC format. It was noted that the current city and growth deal strategic functions would be transferred to CJsCs. It was noted that in future, Welsh Government could however, add other functions to a CJC via future legislation.

Although the current draft regulations allowed a degree of regional flexibility, the Welsh Government could constrain or prescribe CJsCs through funding or policy instruments. They could provide funding in support of a function via CJsCs but specify that the funding must be spent in certain way or in line with WG priorities. However, there was no flexibility in terms of the introduction of CJsCs i.e. they were going to be introduced and implemented.

The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance concluded by outlining the options contained in paragraph 3.1 of the report and referred to the consultation responses contained in appendix 3. It was noted that these responses were closely aligned to those that some neighbouring authorities would be submitting.

The views of Members were, thereupon, sought relating to the report.

A Member expressed his concerns regarding timeliness of the report because the Bill was likely to receive Royal Assent within a month’s time and pointed out that another local authority had discussed this

matter back in October. He continued by referring the Corporate Joint Committees and said that whilst this was not exactly another tier of government it was a tear in the fabric of democracy. The Member, thereupon, referred to the following paragraphs contained within the report:

Paragraph 2.7 - Membership - concern was expressed that this proposal would put too much power into the hands of one individual.

Paragraph 2.8 – Voting – would initially be on a ‘one member one vote’ basis but once established CJs could adopt alternative voting procedures should they wish and the Member envisaged that this could potentially mean a greater proportion of the votes being allocated to the larger authorities.

Paragraph 2.11 – Accountability – CJs would be accountable to their constituent councils via their leaders and the Member specifically asked the Leader directly, what mechanisms would be established to ensure that this would happen for example, would there be a Special Council prior to a CJC meeting in order that the Council could mandate the Leader (it was pointed out that if the Council met following a CJC meeting, the Council would have no option to veto any decisions made).

The Leader of the Council commenced by stating that with regard to the issue around membership he had also expressed concerns regarding this aspect. He continued by stating that he had always been against the principle of mandation but clarified that the way the CJs were to be set up was vastly different in terms the functions that were being discussed back in October. In terms of timeliness, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) had only published its briefing note on the Bill on 19th November, so the Council had been as timely as it could have been.

He continued by stating that he had also expressed his concern that the constituent authorities would have to go along with the majority vote and, therefore, as part of the Council’s response it would be important to request that a veto be built into the CJC arrangements. In addition, if people were co-opted onto CJs it should only be the Leaders that should be able to vote as mandated by their councils. With regard to CJs being based on the City Deal footprint, he pointed out that the City Deal as it was currently constituted worked as a corporate body (not politically) but there was some concern as

administrations changed, the impact and effect that this may have on areas like Blaenau Gwent.

For clarification, the Leader of the Council advised that in terms of mandation he was specifically referring to the elements of the Bill for CJsCs – he believed that a Leader should be mandated prior to entering into any discussions.

The Member continued by stating that this needed to be viewed in the context of the failure of successive local government Ministers to reorganise local government - people were aware of the Williams Report to shape local government across Wales reducing the number of local authorities from 22 to between 10 and 12. He believed that local authorities had been failed on this – he recalled that a number of authorities that had submitted expressions of interest proposals to merge (one being Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen) but these had been rejected. He believed that this was a further attempt to reorganise local government and he opposed it absolutely.

The Leader of the Labour Group stated that he believed this was another tier of confusion – City Deal was already established and was working as best as it could and would start to deliver the benefits in due course and, therefore, CJsCs would be replicating much of the work of the City Deal had been undertaking.

He continued by stating that this legislation distracted from the main and core issues in Blaenau Gwent. Given the nature of the local authority i.e. there were issues of size and deprivation to name a few, the area had been badly let down as there was clearly no move in Welsh Government to address these issues going forward. Previously, a considerable amount of work had been undertaken with Torfaen regarding a proposed merger but this had not been accepted by Welsh Government. Blaenau Gwent was left in a situation where it was trying to survive on next to nothing – the authority did not want handouts but wanted to survive and prosper going forward for the area and if this meant being part of wider and larger organisation, the Council needed to have full and frank discussions on how it would endeavour to be reorganised whilst still maintaining proper political support for the people of the area.

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to the earlier comment made by the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance that CJsCs

would be implemented – however, said that this was not necessarily the case – clearly reorganisation had previously been stopped because people had objected to it and he concluded by calling on the Council to object to this particular consultation.

The Chair requested that the debate focus on the report and not stray into political arena. However, it was pointed out that the Council was a political organisation – a Member, thereupon, called a point of order.

Other Members commented as follows:

- This was rushed consultancy and Blaenau Gwent had been badly let down and should be fighting for the electorate. It was felt that CJsCs would not benefit this particular area and would be another ‘quango’. Blaenau Gwent would be joined with 10 other local authorities, therefore, a veto was required in order to ensure that Blaenau Gwent was not out voted by other authorities.
- Concern was expressed that the monies required for the communities within Blaenau Gwent would be diverted along the M4 corridor to deal with flooding issues in the future.
- A Member said that he was very concerned about the CJC element of the Bill and felt that this was reorganisation of local government by the ‘back door’.

The Leader of the Council pointed out that he had never made the statement of ‘being badly let down’ and did not want this comment attributed to him. He stated that whilst he was not in favour of mandation and had spoken against the concept of CJsCs in October when it had been discussed at the WLGA, he would not accept and have any of his comments interpreted as detrimental to any of the other 9 constituent authorities of the City Deal - these authorities worked together in a fair and equitable manner. Whilst there may be some vested interests in the future, as the City Deal which would morph into a CJC was currently constituted and operated, he had confidence there were elements of fairness and he was not prepared to have any of his comments attributed to the blanket complaint that areas like Blaenau Gwent were being railroaded by the other authorities that had been named.

The Member who had made the comment stated that this had been his interpretation of what had been said particularly, in relation to the need for a 'veto' being built into the CJC arrangements.

The Leader of the Council stated he had total faith, trust and respect for the current Local Government Minister. With regard to the issue of the veto this related to future years, at present he had a degree of comfort of how the City Deal was currently constituted but in future years this could not be predicted and said as a matter of political morality a veto should be included as part of the CJC arrangements.

He continued by stating that he had expressed concerns about the democracy being taken away from local government and it had been established during the pandemic, that more than ever that local government had clearly been seen to be the delivery arm of Welsh Government. However, there was an overwhelming appetite in the local government family for CJCs to take place. Therefore, if the Bill was going to receive Royal Assent and be implemented it would be beneficial to capture Members points of views which would form part of the response in order that issues that had been raised including the veto, one authority one vote could be considered.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that he was making similar points to those that had been raised by the previous Member and suggested that instead of replicating what already existed i.e. the City Deal perhaps the name could be changed as an alternative and there should be more of a focus put on reorganisation. He stated that he would propose an alternative recommendation in due course.

Members made the additional comments:

- This was reorganisation by stealth and another extra level of government which would have to be paid for – Blaenau Gwent would be expected to make a financial contribution which would mean less money for the area and concern was raised that could potentially lead to a burden on the council tax payer.
- This was an erosion of democracy.
- Appreciation expressed was expressed to the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance for the briefing that had been provided to Members. Concern was expressed that larger

authorities had the capacity to transfer their staff to support CJsCs and this would put smaller authorities at a disadvantage – however, this could potentially result in conflicts of interest. Without a veto, the members of the public would think that the Council would be agreeing with everything that was discussed within the CJsCs. Blaenau Gwent would become the poor relation.

- CJsCs could set their own budget without it having to be ratified by constituent councils – this would be similar to the precepts paid to other statutory partners.

In reply to several questions, the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance advised that:

- the consultation document had been published on the Welsh Government website but the authority would not be privy to private individual consultation responses (apart from the local government family, City Deal and the WLGA) at this point in time, until the consultation period concluded.
- With regard to delaying the submission of the consultation responses in order to seek views from Blaenau Gwent residents, the officer advised that due to the timescales faced the response would effectively have to be submitted before the Christmas period to ensure it was received before 4th January, therefore, the request for a delay in submission could not be acceded to.
- The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance said she was unable to confirm if the town/community councils had received the consultation document – because Blaenau Gwent was a principal council, the authority was a primary consultee. However, there was an opportunity for town/community councils to respond to the consultation via the Welsh Government website.

At this juncture, a Member pointed out that he had earlier been going to raise a point of order over what he considered prescriptive chairmanship because a fuller debate was being prevented when Members needed to be provided with the context of the topic. He stated that both he and the Leader of the Labour Group (at different periods) had been Leader of the Council at the time of the proposed

local government reorganisation and there were issues that Members should be made aware of in the context of the discussion. He concluded by stating that when a point of order was raised it should be considered accordingly.

The Leader of the Council said that several comments had been made about Blaenau Gwent being the 'poor relation' but felt that this was not the case and in no way was Blaenau Gwent the poor relation in South East Wales – there was a need, requirement and desire to work together to achieve an equitable balance across the region as part of the City Deal arrangement. He concluded by stating that whilst he understood the concerns raised, the only way to influence the consultation would be to endorse Option 1 and he would be proposing that option - the consultation responses were balanced and captured the main points and concerns that had been raised by Members at the briefings.

The Leader of the Labour Group clarified that the comments were not being directed towards the 10 local authorities but towards Welsh Government and the establishment of CJsCs. He requested that this comment be placed on record.

Performance and Governance of Principal Councils - at this juncture, the Head of Governance and Partnerships gave an overview of the Performance and Governance of Principal Councils provisions contained within the Bill, which were framed within the wider sustainable development duties of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This act sets out a legally binding common purpose for the public bodies subject to that Act to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It was noted that this element of the consultation would end on 3rd February, 2021.

The Head of Governance and Partnerships continued by outlining the provisions within paragraphs 2.13 to 2.19 of the report which included the duty to consult, report and keep performance under review, the duty to arrange a panel assessment on performance (it would need to be ensured that this was meaningful and added value to the current processes because there would be cost implications), intervention powers and the role of the Auditor General together with the socio economic duty – this work was being progressed with linkages to the Strategic Equality Plan.

Members raised the following points in relation to this particular section of the report:

- Concern was expressed that most of the duties would be duplicating the processes that had already been established. A Member pointed out that Blaenau Gwent's priorities were linked to the Corporate Plan and if the authority was unable to veto any decisions, this could have a detrimental effect on the priorities for the area.

The Head of Governance and Partnerships advised that as indicated the Corporate Plan which had been agreed, did set out the Council's priorities. The Performance and Governance duty of the Bill would not look to direct priorities but how the Council would implement and effectively deliver its own priorities through a well embedded self-assessment process together with the effective use of resources and performance management to progress and monitor the arrangements in a strong and robust way.

For further clarity, the Head of Governance and Partnerships advised this was a separate provision to the CJC duty. There was already a vast amount of processes in place with regard to performance management and how this information was reported and this point had been made to Welsh Government.

In reply to a statement that was made that Audit Wales would ensure the current procedures were effective, the Head of Governance and Partnerships said that she had also raised the point regarding the relationship with external regulators and Auditor General but further clarity was required regarding the remit of the Audit General and external regulators and this would form part of the draft response.

Concluding Statements/Amended Proposal:

The Leader of the Labour Group said he was concerned about the implications of the Bill and the future of local government and the Council had a duty to the people of Blaenau Gwent. Therefore, a clear message needed to be sent to Welsh Government objecting to the consultation.

The Leader of the Labour Group, thereupon, proposed the following **amendment to the preferred option:**

The Labour Group strongly objected to the creation of Corporate Joint Committees because the Group believed that they formed yet another unnecessary tier of bureaucracy in Welsh local government replicating the already established City Region. The Group felt that the proposals would do nothing to address the long-standing deprivation issues relevant to Blaenau Gwent and would add yet more confusion that obscures the real challenges that were faced.

It was, therefore, proposed that the Council demonstrates its objection by refusing to take part in the consultation.

This amended proposal was seconded.

The Leader of the Council said that the Bill would shortly be receiving Royal Assent and would be implemented. Therefore, he would much prefer the concerns and comments raised incorporated within the consultation response in order that discussions could be entered into regarding the principles of CJsCs and safeguards included (e.g. the provision of a veto) to protect and shape how CJsCs would operate in the future. He concluded by proposing that Option 1 be endorsed.

The Leader of the Labour Group said that he disliked the notion that things would happen – they would only happen if the Council let them happen and it was important to voice concerns and it was time to send a stark message to Welsh Government that Blaenau Gwent was not prepared to put up with the conditions imposed upon the authority.

A recorded vote was, therefore, requested.

In Favour of the amendment – Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, M. Cross, P. Edwards, L. Elias, K. Hayden, H. McCarthy, J. Millard, J. C. Morgan, K. Pritchard, T. Smith, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis, L. Winnett.

Against the amendment – Councillors J. Collins, M. Cook, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, M. Day, D. Hancock, S. Healy, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, J. Mason, C. Meredith, M. Moore, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Paulsen, K. Rowson, B. Summers, B. Thomas, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

The vote on the amendment was not carried.

A recorded vote was, thereupon, taken in respect of **Option 1 (preferred option)**:

In Favour of Option 1 – Councillors J. Collins, M. Cook, N. Daniels, D. Davies, G. A. Davies, M. Day, D. Hancock, S. Healy, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, J. Mason, C. Meredith, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Paulsen, K. Rowson, B. Summers, B. Thomas, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

Against Option 1 – Councillors P. Baldwin, D. Bevan, M. Cross, P. Edwards, L. Elias, K. Hayden, H. McCarthy, J. Millard, M. Moore, J. C. Morgan, K. Pritchard, T. Smith, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, B. Willis, L. Winnett.

The vote in respect of Option 1 was carried.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely:

The approach as set out below for both the CJC and Performance and Governance Consultations be approved.

CJCs

The CJC Regulations have gone out to public consultation with a closing date of 4th January, 2021. Following the all Member briefing session and discussions ongoing within the Region, the Council consultation responses from Blaenau Gwent (attached at Appendix 3) be submitted to Welsh Government.

Performance and Governance

Members provide comment to the Head of Governance and Partnerships and the Council would continue to work with the professional networks and WLGA and, based on these two approaches, construct a response for the February deadline.

6.

APPOINTMENT OF LAY MEMBERS TO THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Councillor P. Edwards declared an interest but remained in the meeting while this item was considered.

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

The Chief Officer Resources spoke briefly to the report and advised that as Members were aware, the previous lay member Mr. Peter Williams had resigned from this position earlier in the year. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 required at least once member of its Audit Committee to be a lay Member (that was not a member of the local authority).

Therefore, a recruitment process had taken place and interviews for the position held on 8th December, 2020. The selection panel, had considered that both applicants met the criteria for selection, having complementary experience and skill sets. Given this the selection the panel recommend that both candidates be appointed as Lay Members to the Audit Committee.

It was noted that a letter of appreciation had been forwarded to Mr. Peter Williams for all the work he had undertaken in this role over the years.

Upon a vote being taken it was,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the appointments of Mr. T. Edwards and Mr. M. Veale as Lay Members to the Audit Committee be approved.

Councillor P. Edwards did not participate in the vote.

SEASONS GREETINGS

The Chair concluded by expressing her best wishes to Members and officers for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.