

Committee: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **1st March 2021**

Report Subject: **Use of Consultants**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J Wilkins, Executive Member Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Richard Crook, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services
Clive Rogers, Head of Community Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	17.02.21			1/3/21			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with the information requested, relating to expenditure incurred during 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 on the use of consultants to support, supplement and complement the work of Officers across the Council.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Consultants are widely used across the whole public sector including Welsh Government for a number of different purposes. At Blaenau Gwent (BG) we use consultants in a number of ways:

- To provide assistance in specialist areas where there is no or limited expertise or experience within the Council e.g. treasury management, VAT, Legal
- To provide independent advice and a different perspective (challenge)
- To supplement resources where there is insufficient capacity to undertake a specific, identified task e.g. because the work has come into the Council unexpectedly, or where the work needs to be progressed within a specific / limited time period.
- To provide training to BG staff to enhance their own expertise e.g. changes to legislation
- A substantial amount of the consultant costs are associated with project delivery and funded through external grants

- 2.2 The advantage of engaging Consultants is also that they are only needed for a shorter period of time enabling an organisation to pay for that skill on demand only when they need it. This is often an effective use of the Council's resource and avoids / replaces the need to employ additional staff, with specialist knowledge & skills, on a permanent basis.

- 2.3 During 2018/19 and 2019/20 the Council spent a total of £0.7m & £1.1m Consultants across all services, the attached appendix identifies those Consultants, the costs and the reason for engagement relating to the Environment portfolio.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

Option 1:

3.1 To note the use of consultants and accept the report.

Option 2:

3.2 To note and challenge the use of consultants.

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

Corporate Plan 2018-22, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

This proposal supports the amendments made to the Outcome Statements within the Corporate Plan in its review in July 2020.

Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Statements:

- Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities
- To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

5.1.1 The attachment at Appendix 1 details the cost of consultants commissioned by the Council for the period 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 for the Environment Portfolio.

5.1.2 The costs incurred are summarised below:

Funding Stream	2018/2019 £	2019/2020 £
Capital:		
Internal	23,598	3,457
External (Grant)	33,065	35,206
Total Capital	56,663	38,663
Revenue:		
Internal	6,537	141,514
External (Grant)	138,012	31,892
Total Revenue	144,549	173,406
Total Expenditure	201,212	212,069

5.1.3 The table above highlights that for the Environment portfolio 58% of the expenditure incurred on consultants over the 2 years, have been funded externally either by grant or contributions from partner organisations

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

The risks associated with not engaging specialist consultants when needed could result in negligence, poor project outcomes, insufficient resources, unable to draw down external funding, existing staff under excessive pressure and the Council being taken to court.

5.3 *Legal*

No legal issues associated with this report.

5.4 *Human Resources*

The HR impacts are included in the risks but will include excessive pressure on staff if consultants were not available. Specialist expertise missing in certain areas of the service which could also lead to legal liabilities for the Council or opportunities missed for progressing projects to support the local communities or economy.

6. *Supporting Evidence*

6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

Performance data is attached at Appendix 1.

6.2 *Expected outcome for the public*

6.2.1 The use of Consultants is key in supporting the Council to deliver both capital and revenue projects, the outcome of which is new, improved, quality services and facilities for the residents of Blaenau Gwent.

6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*

6.3.1 The procurement of consultants will comply with the Council's approved Standing Orders for Contracts.

6.4 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*

6.4.1 When considering future projects/schemes, professional fees/Consultancy costs are built into the outline project costs / Grant application.

6.5 *Preventative focus*

6.5.1 The use of Consultants supports the Council to deliver on specific projects and initiatives. In some instances, this may result in the Council missing out on where otherwise the Council may miss out on opportunities, funding or project delivery.

6.6 *Collaboration / partnership working*

N/A

6.7 *Integration (across service areas)*

N/A

6.8 *EqIA*

Screening has been undertaken and no full assessment is required.

N/A

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Monitoring will form part of the Project Management arrangements.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 – Analysis of expenditure incurred on Consultancy Costs*