

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 24TH FEBRUARY, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

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

**Deputy Leader/Executive Member –
Regeneration & Economic Development**
Councillor D. Davies

Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins

Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins

Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason

WITH: Corporate Director Social Services
 Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
 Corporate Director Education
 Chief Officer Resources
 Interim Chief Officer Commercial
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Press Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from the Managing Director.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declaration of interest was received:-</p> <p><u>Councillor J. Wilkins</u> Item No. 14 Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme and Town Centre Repayable Funding Scheme</p>	
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>	
No. 4	<p><u>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 13th January, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	

GENERAL MATTERS

No. 5 CONFERENCES, COURSES, EVENTS AND INVITATIONS

Consideration was given to attendance at the following:-

Live Virtual Broadcast Event and Q&A with
The Army Engagement Team

It was agreed that the attendance of Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion be approved to attend.

Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Gwent Awards Ceremony 2021
Virtual Invitation

It was agreed that Councillor Mandy Moore, Chair of Council and Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion be approved to attend.

RESOLVED accordingly.

No. 6 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 14TH APRIL 2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and information contained therein be noted.

DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 7. GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS

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

The Leader reported three further grants which had been received from Councillor L. Elias, Brynmawr Ward, as follows:-

St Mary's Church in Wales	£100.00
St Mary's Catholic Primary School	£100.00
Blaen-y-Cwm Primary School	£100.00

RESOLVED accordingly.

The following additional grants to organisations were received:-

ABERTILLERY

Cwmtillery Ward - Councillor M. Day

1.	Bishop Street Allotments	£100
2.	Chillax	£100
3.	Cwmtillery Luncheon Club	£75
4.	Abertillery Workmens Welfare Institute	£75
5.	Tillery Dragons Junior Netball	£75
6.	Ebbw Fach Choir	£75
7.	Blaenau Gwent Baptist Church	£75
8.	Roseheyworth & Bourneville Comm Woodland Ass.	£75
9.	Royal British Legion Abertillery Branch	£32.28

Cwmtillery Ward - Councillor J. Wilkins

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|----|--|------|
| 1. | BGfm | £100 |
| 2. | Abertillery Excelsiors JFC | £100 |
| 3. | Friends of Blaenau Gwent Village | £100 |
| 4. | Abertillery Workmens Welfare Institute | £150 |

Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor N. Parsons

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| 1. | Abertillery Workmens Welfare Institute | £50 |
| 2. | Aberbeeg Tenants and Residents Association | £250 |

Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor H. McCarthy

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|----|---------------------------|------|
| 1. | Aberbeeg Community Centre | £150 |
| 2. | Swffryd Community Centre | £100 |
| 3. | Zion Chapel, Llanhilleth | £150 |
| 4. | River Rangers | £100 |
| 5. | New Life Community | £100 |

Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor J. Collins

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|----|--------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Abertillery Bluebirds Youth FC | £250 |
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Six Bells Ward - Councillor D. Hancock

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|----|---|------|
| 1. | Six Bells Bowls Club | £300 |
| 2. | Six Bells Over 50's Club | £100 |
| 3. | Abertillery Business & Professional Ladies Ass. | £100 |
| 4. | Abertillery Excelsiors Junior FC | £100 |
| 5. | Abertillery Excelsiors AFC | £100 |
| 6. | Old Tyleryan RFC | £100 |
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Six Bells Ward - Councillor M. Holland

1.	Friends of Six Bells Park	£300
2.	Six Bells Over 50's Club	£100
3.	Abertillery Business & Professional Ladies Ass.	£100
4.	Abertillery Excelsiors Junior FC	£100
5.	Abertillery Excelsiors AFC	£100
6.	Old Tyleryan RFC	£100

BRYNMAWR**Brynmawr Ward - Councillor L. Elias**

1.	Showstoppers	£150
2.	BGfm Radio	£150

Brynmawr Ward - Councillor J. Hill

1.	Calvary Baptist	£100
2.	Brynmawr Town Centre Partnership	£100
3.	Brynmawr and District Museum Society	£100
4.	Friends of Parc Nant y Waun	£100
5.	Brynmawr Historical Society	£100
6.	Brynmawr FC	£100

Brynmawr Ward - Councillor W. Hodgins

1.	Brynmawr FC	£200
2.	St Mary's Church in Wales	£150
3.	Friends of Parc Nant y Waun	£200
4.	Ebbw Fach Interact Club	£100
5.	Brynmawr RFC	£200
6.	Caerphilly Angling (Lakeside Brynmawr)	£150
7.	Blaen y Cwm School	£100
8.	St. Mary's Catholic School	£100

EBBW VALE**Beaufort Ward - Councillor G. Thomas & S. Healy**

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| 1. | Chair of the Council's Charity Appeal | £100 |
| 2. | Beaufort Tenants and Residents Association | £500 |
| 3. | Raglan Terrace WOAP | £100 |
| 4. | Beaufort Hill Ponds & Woodlands Preservation Soc. | £100 |
| 5. | Bethel Methodist Church | £100 |

NANTYGLO & BLAINA**Blaina Ward - Councillor L. Winnett**

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|----|-------------------------|------|
| 1. | Blaina Community Centre | £150 |
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Nantyglo Ward - Councillor J. Mason & K. Rowson

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| 1. | Coed y Garn School | £200 |
| 2. | Bro Helyg School | £200 |

Nantyglo Ward - Councillor P. Baldwin

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| 1. | 1 st Blaina Scout Group | £100 |
| 2. | Blaina ATC | £100 |
| 3. | Nantyglo RFC | £100 |

TREDEGAR**Sirhowy Ward - Councillor B. Thomas**

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|----|---------------------|------|
| 1. | Ebenezer Chapel | £300 |
| 2. | St. George's Church | £300 |

FURTHER RESOLVED accordingly.

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing that the report be accepted and information contained therein be noted.

No. 8

REVENUE BUDGET 2021/2022

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

The Chief Officer Resources gave a detailed overview of the report which had been presented to provide an update on the positive provisional local government settlement for 2021/22 and its impact upon the Council's budget. The report also outlined the proposed detailed revenue budget for 2021/22 and the proposed level of Council Tax increase for the 2021/2022 in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumptions.

The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and outlined the National Position, Blaenau Gwent's position, the cost pressures and growth items along with the Bridging the Gap Programme. The Chief Officer Resources referred to costs pressures anticipated with Covid-19 and advised that there was an assumption that these cost pressures would continue to be funded by Welsh Government, it was expected that confirmation of Covid funding would be announced as part of the Welsh Government's final budget in March 2021.

The Chief Officer Resources further referred to the budget consultation which was currently ongoing and advised that to date there had been 170 responses all of which had agreed that Education, Social Services and the Environment should be the focus for budget in Blaenau Gwent. The majority of respondents agreed with the proposed increase in school budgets, however there was concern around the proposed 4% increase in Council Tax. The consultation period was still open and feedback would be reported at Full Council on 4th March, 2021.

The Chief Officer Resources informed that the report and been considered at length by the Joint Scrutiny Committee and most of the recommendations had been agreed. However, the Joint Scrutiny Committee proposed that the Council give consideration to a lower level of increase in Council Tax and the associated impact on the Council's budget.

The Leader wished to thank the Resources Team and budget holders on behalf of the Executive on the immense work undertaken on the budget. It placed the Authority in a position where politically we support your aims, ambitions and aspirations which would translate to the communities in Blaenau Gwent.

The Leader felt that setting a budget was no easy task and this budget and future budgets would be done in a different way to what traditionalists envisaged, however going forward this way was effective in setting the Council's budget.

The way in which the budget was now set allowed for forward thinking on what the Authority could face and how the Authority would meet those challenges. This budget was a good demonstration of that work and showed the need for the officers responsible for the various areas of bridging the gap schemes that the emphasis of this work going forward to 2022/23 and beyond should not be underestimated.

The Leader had hoped that the Authority could come out of the pandemic looking at newer parts of the Bridging the Gap project which provided alternative arrangements which would assist the Authority on how budgets would be constructed in the future.

The Leader was pleased to see the level of public feedback and the priorities mentioned are the priorities of this administration. The pandemic had put the Authority back a pace in terms of consultation as it was understandably a muted exercise. In normal circumstances the Executive and Corporate Leadership Team would have gone out into communities to physically consult in town centres, supermarkets and community centres. The Leader noted that he had missed these opportunities as it allowed the Council to provide reasons for the way in which certain things needed to be done, however he had hope that this could be done before the end of the year.

With regard to the proposed 4% increase in Council Tax, the Leader advised that this was the marker put down in MTFs as the previous figure was unachievable and the Authority always needed to go in excess of the previous target. This target gave a baseline to set a balanced budget and was agreed by Council. The Leader fully understood some of the views raised at Joint Scrutiny Committee and concurred that the Council Tax increase should be lower than the proposed 4% increase. It was stated that the proposed increase would be discussed fully at Full Council on 4th March, 2021.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely

- a) the Executive recommend to the Council the 2021/2022 revenue budget as detailed in the report;

- b) the Executive provided comments on the outcomes within the overall provisional RSG Settlement and note the potential for further change in the Final RSG Settlement;
- c) the Executive provided comments on the outcomes within the BGCBC provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- d) the Executive considered and recommended to Council the cost pressures and growth items (£2.074m in total) identified in Appendix 3 for inclusion in the Council's budget;
- e) the Executive considered and recommend to Council an uplift of £1.472m which equates to a net 3.3% increase to the ISB. This reflects a gross uplift of 3.6% (which incorporates the Teachers pay grant transferring into the settlement of £84,000) adjusted for a £150,000 reduction in demographics;
- f) the Executive considered and recommend to Council that any achievement of Bridging the Gap proposals which exceeds the in-year budget requirement be transferred into an earmarked reserve to support medium term financial planning, specifically for the later years of the Medium Term Financial Strategy; and
- g) the Executive considered comments from the Joint Scrutiny Committee and recommend to Council that a Council Tax increase below the proposed 4% for 2021/22 be discussed and approved at Full Council on 4rd March, 2021.

No. 9

ICT INVESTMENT MAP

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

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that the report outlined the full set of proposals on investment options required to maintain a stable and resilient ICT infrastructure. The Interim Chief Officer noted the three categories - Desktop estate; Network and telephony estate and Contract register and provided an overview of the work to be undertaken as outlined in the report.

At this juncture, the Chief Officer Resources provided an overview of the Capital and Revenue costs associated with the proposals. The Chief Officer Resources advised that the infrastructure investment proposals required an initial capital investment across the desktop and network estate of £464,000 in the first 2 years followed by an annual investment of £166,000 thereafter.

The recent desktop replacement programme for the initial tranche had been funded by reserves, however, this was no longer sustainable and it was therefore proposed that an annual allocation of £166,000 was agreed as part of the Council's capital programme from 2021-22 onwards with the balance for years 1 & 2 (£132,000) funded from the ICT Reserve.

In terms of the Revenue Costs for the implementation of Teams Telephony & Contact Centre, it was reported that these are estimated to be £77,000 per annum, however this would be funded from the already established revenue budget for the existing services in place with these costs replacing the costs incurred on current services.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial reported that no issues had been raised from the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee who had endorsed Option 1 for recommendation to the Executive.

The Leader noted the report and advised that this was a necessity as the Authority was playing a long term catch up as the infrastructure had been behind many local authorities. This have been highlighted over the last 12 months with more reliance on virtual working. This work would further benefit the different approaches the Council would take and allow for smooth implementation of any future changes.

The Deputy Leader concurred with the comments raised and advised that ICT warrants this review and ongoing reviews as it was an ever changing area. The Deputy Leader felt that going forward there would be monies available to support this area as it would open up greater possibilities.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely that the Executive considered the proposals and recommend the ICT infrastructure investment to Council for approval.

DECISION ITEM – EDUCATION

No. 10 ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS (ALN) ACT READINESS

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the purpose of the report was to provide the Executive with an update on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) and the progress made by the Education Directorate in readiness. The Corporate Director referred to the scope and background which noted that from September 2021 all Councils had a responsibility to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act and accompanying Code was in place to support learners aged 0-25 years.

The Corporate Director outlined the regional and local support and reported that the ALN Act required from January 2021 the introduction of a new statutory post in each local authority of an Early Years ALN Lead Officer. The Corporate Director was pleased to report that this post had been appointed in December and sits within the ALN Service based in Pen-y-Cwm Special School.

It was added that Welsh Government had made the decision not to suspend statutory SEN processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Corporate Director noted that this had not been an easy task to manage during the current circumstances. However, with the regional and local approach in place, the Inclusion team are confident that all that needs to be in place for September 2021.

The Corporate Director Education referred to the budget implications and advised that the impact on the budget from September 2021 was not fully known, however there would be a requirement for a statutory Early Years ALN Lead Officer which would lead to a further cost pressure of £70,000.

The Executive Member for Education thanked the Corporate Director Education for a comprehensive presentation of the report which recognised the amount of work undertaken to ensure the Council was prepared for the ALN Act. The Executive Member was pleased that the Council would be ready for September 2021 to support our ALN Learners.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Blaenau Gwent agreed that the ALN would be ready for September 2021 when the ALN Act becomes operational and appropriate preparations are taking place.

MONITORING ITEMS – SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 11 COMMUNITY MEALS

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult Services.

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that Community Meals was transferred to Social Services in March 2020 and despite the challenges with the pandemic the service had seen an increase in the meals since the transfer. The increase had been due to the pandemic and some internal marketing which had been undertaken.

The Corporate Director Social Services noted that at the end of Quarter 2 the deficit of £25,000 had reduced to £18,000 but this had further reduced to £14,000 as at Quarter 3. It was hoped that this deficit would be further reduced by the end of the financial year.

The Executive Member for Social Services noted the good progress made within the service since it was transferred and wished to express thanks to the Head of Adult Services for her work and determination to turnaround the Community Meals Project. The work achieved had been recognised in the take up and reduced deficit and the Executive Member looked forward to further improving the service for the most vulnerable in our communities.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the recommendations for the long term forward planning of the service as detailed in the report be approved.

MONITORING ITEMS – EDUCATION

No. 12 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS BAND B PROGRESS

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

**MONITORING ITEMS –
REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

No. 13 ASPIRE SHARED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services advised that the report provided Members with an update on the performance of the Aspire programme and associated external business engagement and outlined performance information on the BGCBC internal apprenticeship programme.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services reported that the project had been working well with businesses throughout the pandemic and noted the successful retention rate for the apprentices. There continued to be positive take up by Council Departments of the programme and it was hoped that the scheme could be taken forward with funding in association with the Cardiff Capital Region.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development thanked the staff, businesses and apprentices themselves for their commitment during the pandemic as all parties involved had worked together. The Executive Member welcomed the expansion of the scheme to Merthyr Tydfil and ongoing discussions with Cardiff Capital Region as this would expand the work and opportunities of the Aspire Programme further going forward.

	<p>The Executive Member was pleased to see this programme providing these opportunities and advancing skill levels in Blaenau Gwent.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 14</p>	<p><u>TARGETED REGENERATION INVESTMENT PROGRAMME AND TOWN CENTRE REPAYABLE FUNDING SCHEME</u></p> <p>Councillor J. Wilkins declared an interest in this report and remained in the meeting during discussions, however did not take part in the decision making.</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services spoke to the report and provided an overview of the information contained therein. The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development welcomed the report and noted the great deal of work undertaken across Blaenau Gwent to address long standing empty properties and areas. The Regeneration Team had continued to support businesses during these uncertain times the pandemic had brought to ensure Blaenau Gwent businesses survive.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the progress update be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 15</p>	<p><u>EMPLOYMENT PARK, LIME AVENUE – PROGRESS UPDATE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Business and Regeneration.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>	

**DECISION ITEMS –
REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS**

No. 17 **BLAENAU GWENT METRO PLUS SCHEME DEVELOPMENT**

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.

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 as detailed in the report be approved.

DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 18 **THE METROPOLE THEATRE
ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY PROVIDER**

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).

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 as detailed in the report be approved.