

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5TH MARCH, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. HEALY (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook (Vice-Chair)
P. Baldwin
G. A. Davies
L. Elias
J. Hill
H. McCarthy
C. Meredith
G. Paulsen
T. Smith
S. Thomas
B. Summers (substituting for Cllr J. Holt)

WITH: Corporate Director of Social Services
Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
Corporate Director of Education
Interim Chief Officer - Commercial
Chief Officer - Resources
Head of Community Services
Service Manager, Policy & Partnerships
Professional Lead – Community Safety
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Collier and J. Holt.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 22nd January, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT – TREASURY STRATEGY STATEMENT, INVESTMENT STRATEGY & MRP POLICY STATEMENT 2021/2022 (INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources which was presented to give Members the opportunity to scrutinise the Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (including prudential indicators) to be adopted for the 2021/2022 financial year, prior to formal recommendation to Council.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Leader of the Labour Group referred to page 45 on Appendix A, regarding the MRP and capital receipts and commented that in 2018 a decision was made to stop retrospective straight line MRP, which was essentially to stop councils banking up debt for the future. However, the Council now finds itself in a position that for 2022/23 it would need to find a substantial sum. He raised concerns that the Welsh Government had now undertaken to put in place a peer review of Performance Management systems and moving forward this could lead to searching questions regarding how local authorities manage their finances. He felt that work needed to be undertaken ahead of the peer reviews and a</p>	

separate fund was needed to take away some of the impending debt from 2022/23 onwards.

The Chief Officer Resources noted the Members comment.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Annual Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement for 2021/2022 financial year and the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators contained therein (Appendix A) be recommended for formal approval at Council.

No. 6

CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021/2022

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources which was presented to give Members the opportunity to consider the Capital Strategy (attached at Appendix 1) following the annual review, to be adopted for the financial year 2021/2022.

The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein and advised Members that this report was closely linked to the Treasury Management Strategy report that was previously considered.

A Member referred to the table at paragraph 4.2.3 on page 60 regarding the financing of the forecast capital expenditure and the large increase from 2020/21 to 2021/22. The Chief Officer Resources explained that the expenditure that was forecast in each of the financial years reflected the current capital programme. The increase was mainly due to the significant investment on the Council's 21st Century schools programme, Band B investments, there was an expectation that the capital programme levels would increase for those years, but Welsh Government funding received for those projects would also increase.

With regard to the WG Tech Valleys investment of £100m over a 10 year period, a Member enquired how Members could scrutinise and monitor this investment. The Chief Officer Resources said that any allocation of the £100m made to the Council would be reported via the Council's Capital Programme and Capital Monitoring reports that were presented on a quarterly basis to the Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee. She suggested that the Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services could

offer further information on this and also the Tech Valleys Board was also involved with the Welsh Government in an advisory capacity on how best to invest that money within Blaenau Gwent.

The Member felt it was important to monitor the investment to see what projects it was used for. The Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services said that progress on Tech Valleys projects was reported to the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, some projects would then appear in the Capital programme such as Lime Avenue Business Park, which would not necessarily have Tech Valleys funding as a headline attached to them.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services would provide the Member with more detailed information regarding any allocations outside of the meeting.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Capital Strategy for the 2021/22 financial year (attached as appendix 1) be recommended for adoption at Council.

No. 7

PUBLIC SPACE CCTV SYSTEM ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2020

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources (SIRO CCTV), Head of Community Services and the Interim Chief Officer Commercial which was to present the Council's draft Public Space CCTV Annual Monitoring Report 2020 covering the period 1 September 2019 – 31 December 2020.

The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein, the Interim Chief Officer Commercial and the Head of Community Services would supplement and respond to questions where necessary.

A Member raised concerns with regards to proportionality, stating that there were no cameras in Nantyglo and he felt that cameras needed to be more equally distributed. The 2020/21 revenue budget set aside for CCTV was £84,000 and he felt this was insufficient. The Member also raised concerns in relation to confidentiality and Health & Safety issues with officers homeworking and dealing with CCTV enquiries. The Member knew of other Members with similar concerns and proposed that a

cross party group be established to review these issues in more detail and to increase the CCTV budget as he felt the current system was not fit for purpose.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial said that in relation to homeworking, under the current regulations Officers needed to work from home wherever possible. Appropriate arrangements had been put in place and only those officers who had undertaken the relevant training were allowed to view the CCTV footage. She assured Members that the arrangements put in place during the pandemic had followed the proper protocol. In relation to evidence gathering and location of cameras, current locations were based upon police statistics, however, during recent Member engagement, Members had commented on wider look evidence to give a richer picture and as part of the Forward Work Programme for CCTV could look at how to bring in wider evidence gathering. With regard to the CCTV budget the Officer acknowledged that previous budget setting processes had reduced the CCTV budget.

The Member asked for clarification regarding Officers operating the CCTV system from home. The Interim Chief Officer Commercial clarified that the system was not located in an Officer's home, the system was in a Council building with restricted access and only the appropriate Officers who had undertaken the relevant training had clearance to view the CCTV footage. However, during the pandemic, there were some cases where Officers had to use laptops and on occasion may have to attend the Council building to download extra footage, this was all undertaken within current protocol arrangements.

The Member referred to damaged vehicles in his Ward and reiterated that all areas of the Borough should have coverage. He felt it should be a monitored 24 hour system to help police catch offenders in the act. The Interim Chief Officer Commercial said that the move to this system had been in partnership with police colleagues, this was a live recording system but not 24/7 monitoring. Regarding the wider evidence base, work with Members could be undertaken to get that wider evidence base outside of the police crime statistics.

The Member reiterated his concerns and felt it was important that Members, Officers and external agencies get together to review the CCTV system to make it fit for purpose.

In response to a Member's question regarding deployable cameras, the Head of Community Services said that four deployable cameras were purchased as part of the capital expenditure, two were currently deployed and two were available for deployment. There were rules and regulations around the use of deployable cameras and these policies and processes were covered in the report.

The Member referred to Appendix J - Proposed Forward Work Programme 2021/22 and proposed that timelines should be included in the document so Members could scrutinise progress. He felt this would help in the roll out of deployable cameras and ensure they were located in the areas of most need. The Head of Community Services explained that the regulations around deployable cameras was a complex process, there were covert cameras and overt cameras each followed a different process, overt cameras needed to be visible and covert cameras did not, there was the further issue of technical placement, deployable cameras needed to have an energy supply and be in locations that allow Wi-Fi or other means of transmission. As well as the regulatory processes that needed to be followed regarding hard evidence there may also be potential technical constraints where cameras could be deployed.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial said that in relation to the Member's comments around timelines, work could be carried out to add key milestones via the Forward Work Programme for Members to monitor progress.

The Leader of the Labour Group commented that this was a service for all partners including the Police, Council and others, the reality was that the Police did not have funding for the service and due to reduced budgets and the SLA, the new system had been introduced in 2018. He felt that the service could only improve and move forward if additional investment was made. In a recent budget meeting the Member had requested an additional £300,000 be invested in the CCTV system to maintain and enhance the service which was not supported, and expressed his disappointment at the missed opportunity.

Another Member commented that the current arrangements were not adequate to combat anti-social behaviour and criminal damage, he and other colleagues had met with the Police Inspector for Blaenau Gwent and felt that the system was not fit for

purpose. He felt that moving towards a Cloud system should be considered so the Police could access the system remotely. Alternatively, operate on a 24/7 monitored basis as other local authorities.

A Member said that when the new system was introduced in 2018 two cameras for the Rassau Ward had been promised and were still awaited. The Member enquired if the deployable cameras were overt or covert. The Head of Community Services explained that the four deployable cameras were overt, predominately used in town centres and needed to be visible with appropriate signage as per the regulations, covert cameras were predominately used by public health for fly tipping etc. in remote areas and were smaller and not visible to the public.

The Officer would provide information regarding the number of covert cameras used by public health and other areas of the Council via the action sheet.

With regard to the CCTV system a Member said he had been made aware that some of the camera positions had blind spots, they recorded 24/7 but there was no access to live situations. The Police were unable to fund additional cameras for town centres, however, they had indicated there may be the possibility of funding for a Cloud system so that the Police could have access to live images of incidents as they occurred. He believed that other local authorities were already using the Cloud system with live situations and felt that additional money was needed to review and improve the service.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial thanked the Member for his comments and said that she would pursue the possibility of funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to see where they could invest and support some aspects of the service. She offered to speak with Members outside of the meeting to progress this matter.

Another Member referred to the equality of provision across the county borough and raised the issue of additional funding needed to improve the CCTV system going forward.

In response to a Member's question regarding technical difficulties referred to in paragraphs 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 of the report, the Head of Community Services explained that cameras were checked every

week to ensure they were receiving power and were recording. Faults were reported immediately to the contractor for investigation and could include supplier power network failure or water ingress which could cause power drops. The Officer felt that most of the technical challenges had been overcome, however, there were some ongoing issues such as connectivity of the network and the connectivity from the server in the Civic Centre to homeworking at the moment. Connectivity and Wi-Fi transmission in certain areas and power drops would always be outside the control of the system.

It was noted that a Member of the Scrutiny Committee was also a member of the Crime and Police Panel and he would feedback any issues raised on this item to the Panel to be addressed and requested that he be invited to any meetings taking place in relation to this item.

The Leader of the Labour Group proposed that the Executive Committee investigate possibilities of extra funding in liaison with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and a paper be prepared to review the equality of provision across the borough.

The Service Manager Policy & Partnerships pointed out that in relation to the equality of provision any changes to the camera system had to be in line with the regulations set out in the Surveillance Commissioner's Code of Practice. Changes needed to be evidenced based and in line with due process based around the Surveillance Commissioner's recommendations.

The Leader of the Labour Group commented that this was an important issue for Members and most Members had agreed that the current CCTV system was not adequate and repeated his proposal that the Executive Committee investigate possibilities of extra funding in liaison with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and a paper be prepared, to include all the relevant legislation, to review the equality of provision. This proposal was seconded.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Annual Monitoring Report (including its supporting appendices) be recommended for approval at Executive Committee, following which the report be published and sent to the Surveillance Camera Commissioner, and further recommend that the Executive

Committee investigate the possibilities of extra funding for the system in liaison with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and a paper be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee to review the equality of provision across the County Borough.

No. 8

USE OF CONSULTANTS

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

The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

The Chair advised Members that a report on the Use of Consultants for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 had been presented and accepted at each Scrutiny Committee and recommended that the report be accepted at this Committee.

The Leader of the Labour Group requested further information regarding AMEO Professional Services Ltd. The Chief Officer Resources said that AMEO were consultants brought in for support during the initial review of third party payments. The consultants had helped to develop a structure and framework to review contracts that were already in place and identify those contracts that could be renegotiated to potentially achieve savings or better value for money. As a result of the work undertaken, this had helped to achieve targets on third party spend as part of the Bridging the Gap proposals.

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to software upgrades by Northgate Public Services. The Chief Officer Resources explained that Northgate was one of the Council's primary providers of financial software packages, one of those software packages was used to administer the Revenues and Benefits service which periodically needed software upgrades. If the software developed any issues they had the expertise to correct those issues and ensure that the software was operating as effectively as possible. Occasionally it was necessary for companies to undertake general maintenance, monitoring and upgrades to the systems.

A Member referred to Midland Software Limited and enquired if this was linked to the iTrent system. The Chief Officer Resources confirmed that it was linked to the Organisational Development's iTrent system and any upgrades or developments to the system would need to be undertaken by the consultants.

A Member commented that the report on the Use of Consultants had been considered by all portfolios and this report provided a good example of how the use of consultants could lead to saving money. He felt there were several instances where the use of consultants could be beneficial.

The Leader of the Labour group agreed with the Member's comments and added that the previous administration had used PriceWaterhouse Coopers consultants to look at the whole Authority, which had led to significant savings towards some difficult budget settings. He felt this was the right and proper way to use consultants.

The Chair commented that there were occasions when the use of consultants was beneficial due to their expertise and this report highlighted the savings that could be achieved by the Authority.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report on the Use of Consultants be noted.

No. 9

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 16TH APRIL 2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee which presented to Members the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 16th April 2021 for discussion and agreement.

A Member expressed his disappointment that the report on the new organisational ways of working was not included on the agenda for today.

It was noted that the Interim Chief Officer Commercial had advised Members that the Workforce Strategy report was currently going through a consultation process with professional networks and may be delayed until the April meeting of the Committee.

A Member requested a report be prepared on the Track, Trace and Protect system to include the numbers of people involved and results of cases to show progress made. The Interim Chief Officer Commercial would prepare the report for a future meeting.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Forward Work Programme for the meeting on the 16th April, 2021 be agreed and a report on the Track, Trace and Protect system to include the numbers of people involved and results of cases to show progress made be prepared for a future meeting.