

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b><u>THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u></b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b><u>ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 18<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2024</u></b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b><u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u></b>

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PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. SMITH (PRESIDING MEMBER, CHAIRING)

Councillors P. Baldwin  
S. Behr  
D. Bevan  
M. Cross  
H. Cunningham  
D. Davies  
G. A. Davies  
M. Day  
S. Edmunds  
J. Gardner  
J. Hill  
J. Holt  
G. Humphreys  
E. Jones  
R. Leadbeater  
J. Millard  
J. Morgan, J.P.  
J. C. Morgan  
J. P. Morgan  
L. Parsons  
D. Rowberry  
T. Smith  
G. Thomas  
S. Thomas  
H. Trollope  
D. Wilkshire  
L. Winnett  
D. Woods

AND:                    Joint Chief Executive  
 Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community  
 Services  
 Interim Corporate Director of Social Services  
 Interim Corporate Director of Education  
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer  
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance  
 Service Manager – Accountancy  
 Service Manager – Policy & Partnerships  
 Communications & Marketing Manager  
 Policy Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
2.	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Chaplin, W. Hodgins, J. Thomas, J. Wilkins, Chief Officer Resources, Head of Democratic Services, Governance &amp; Partnerships and Service Manager – Performance &amp; Democratic.</p>	
3.	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>The following declarations of interest were reported:</p> <p><b>Item No. 25: Council Tax Premiums on Long-Term Empty Properties and 2<sup>nd</sup> Homes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Councillors P. Baldwin and J. C. Morgan.</li> </ul>	

The Members remained in the meeting whilst the item of business was considered.

4.

## **PRESIDING MEMBER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Welcome**

A warm welcome was extended to Stephen Vickers, the Council's newly appointed Joint Chief Executive.

### **Congratulations**

Congratulations were extended to:

- Pen-y-Cwm Special School who had received an encouraging Estyn Inspection report. The Head and Governors had been delighted with the positives highlighted by this inspection. A notable highlight from this report was that it had been recognised that Pen-y-Cwm was a highly inclusive school where staff made pupils feel welcome and valued and their successes and achievements were celebrated joyfully.

Pen-y-Cwm had also recently been accredited by Cymraeg Campus and they had been only the special school represented at the Youth Conference held at Swansea City Stadium the previous week.

- Kenny's Vinyl Vault of Abertillery for winning the 2024 Welsh Independent Retail Award for record shop of the year.

### **Condolences**

Condolences were expressed to Councillor Wayne Hodgins on the sad passing of his mother.

Members and officers paid their respects with one minute's silence.

	<p>A condolence letter had been sent to Councillor Hodgins on behalf of the Council.</p>	
<p><b>5</b> – <b><u>DECISION BOOK – FEBRUARY – JULY 2024</u></b> <b>17.</b></p>	<p>The Decision Book for the period February - July 2024 was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be approved and confirmed as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>---</p>	<p><b><u>ORDER OF AGENDA</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that Item No. 18 – Members Questions would be considered as the final item on the agenda.</p>	
<p><b>19.</b></p>	<p><b><u>PUBLIC QUESTIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no questions submitted by members of the public.</p>	
<p><b>20.</b></p>	<p><b><u>TAI CALON RULE CHANGES</u></b></p> <p>The report of Martyn Price, Director of Resources &amp; Company Secretary, Tai Calon Community Housing was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be <b><u>DEFERRED</u></b> pending further information.</p>	

21.

**BLAENAU GWENT NET ZERO 2050 FRAMEWORK AND SUPPORTING LOCAL AREA ENERGY PLAN 2024**

Consideration was given to the joint officers' report.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the following Options be endorsed:

**Net Zero 2050 Framework**

**Option 1a:** The Blaenau Gwent Net Zero 2050 Framework be adopted.

**Blaenau Gwent Local Area Energy Plan**

**Option 2a:** The Local Area Energy Plan and the actions for the Council presented in Appendix 3, be endorsed.

**Annual Reporting**

**Option 3a:** The reporting on progress against the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) would be via the existing Net Zero Annual Report.

22.

**WASTE AND RECYCLING FLEET RENEWAL**

Members considered the report of the Service Manager – Neighbourhood Services.

It was unanimously,

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

- the replacement of Waste & Recycling fleet with the more efficient, cleaner diesel-powered vehicles until such time the appropriate vehicles and infrastructure was in place to transition to ULEV's, be supported; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the appropriate funding for the like for like replacement of its Waste &amp; Recycling fleet be provided.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>23.</b></p>	<p><b><u>REVISED LDP DELIVERY AGREEMENT TIMETABLE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Development Plans Team Manager.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the Revised Delivery Agreement and timetable for the preparation of the Replacement LDP be supported.</p>	
<p><b>24.</b></p>	<p><b><u>BLAENAU GWENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY</u></b></p> <p>The Council considered the joint Officers' report.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the proposed Engagement &amp; Participation Strategy 2024-28, including the recommendations noted by Scrutiny for the supporting action plan, be approved;</li> <li>- a trial whereby a meeting(s) be held later in day be considered; and</li> <li>- a working group be established with appropriate elected member involvement to continue to ascertain and develop how the public would like to see the Council engaging in communities.</li> </ul>	

25.

**COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS ON LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES AND 2<sup>ND</sup> HOMES**

Councillors Peter Baldwin and John C Morgan declared an interest in this item but remained in the meeting whilst it was considered.

The report of the Service Manager Revenues & Charging Assessments was submitted for consideration.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the following Options be endorsed:

**Option 1a**

The details of the discretionary powers that Councils had relating to council tax premiums be noted, discretion be exercised and the introduction of council tax premiums within Blaenau Gwent for long term empty properties (from 1 April 2025) and second homes (from 1 September 2025), be agreed.

**Option 2b**

A premium on 2<sup>nd</sup> homes of 100% be implemented and for empty properties, a premium ranging from 100% to 300% (maximum) be implemented, the rate would depend upon the length of time the property had been empty:-

<b>Length of time Property Empty (from 1 April 2024)</b>	<b>Premium</b>
Between 1 – 2 years	100%
Between 2 -3 years	200%
Over 3 years	300%

	<p><b>Option 3a</b> The suggested local discretions / exceptions, as detailed in Annex 1 of Appendix 5 – Draft Council Tax Premium Policy, be agreed.</p> <p><b>Option 4b</b> The establishment of a Council Tax Premium Appeals Panel be agreed and alternative Membership of this panel would be proposed following discussions with the Section 151 Officer and Leader of the Opposition Group.</p>	
<p>26.</p>	<p><b><u>ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance (Monitoring Officer).</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the following appointment to the Ethics &amp; Standards Committee be approved:</p> <p>That Ms Sarah Manuel be promoted from reserve member to an independent member of the Ethics and Standards Committee in line with the previous decision taken by Council.</p>	
<p>27.</p>	<p><b><u>REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE AND MEMBERSHIPS REPORT</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report prepared by Democratic Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the following changes to Committee Membership be noted as follows:</p>	



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**Place Scrutiny Committee** – Councillor G. A. Davies to replace Councillor G. Humphreys as the Independent Member on this Committee.

**People Scrutiny Committee** – to increase the committee numbers from 9 to 10 and for Councillor G. Humphreys to be provided a place on this Committee.

**General & Statutory Licensing Committees** – Councillor M. Day to replace Councillor G. Humphreys on the General & Statutory Licensing Committees.

**Freedom of the Borough Working Group** – Councillor L. Parsons to replace Councillor G. Humphreys on the Freedom of the Borough Working Group.

**Fostering Panel (Social Services) – Substitute Member**

The appointment of Councillor J. Millard as the substitute Member on the Social Services Fostering Panel be endorsed.

**Advisory Panel for Local Authority Governors**

The following recommendations were made by the Panel on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2024 to appoint in principle:

**Willowtown Primary School** – Karl Jones

**St Mary’s Roman Catholic Primary School** – Sue Baker

**Bryn Bach Primary School** – Ms. Jade Knight

**Tredegar Comprehensive School** – Councillor Tommy Smith

It was, thereupon, unanimously,

FURTHER RESOLVED that the above appointments be endorsed.

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18.

**MEMBERS QUESTIONS**

The following question was received from Councillor Wayne Hodgins, Leader of the Independent Group (presented by Councillor John Hill on the Group Leader's behalf) and was responded to by Councillor Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member for People & Social Services.

**Question:**

“Following the headline in the press, can the Cabinet Member advise Council that if grants are not available from Welsh Government what the wider impact on social services will be?”

**Response:**

The Cabinet Member reported that Social Services was in receipt of a number of grants, not only to support the delivery of statutory services but also to support the delivery of preventative services such as Flying Start and Families First and the impact that cessation of these grants would have on Social Services, had been outlined to the Welsh Minister. It was noted that there were a number of grants that would only run to March 2025 i.e. Regional Integration Fund (RIF) and the Radical Reform Grant.

Currently, an assessment was being undertaken to evaluate the impact on Social Services, if these grants were to cease, the findings of which would be reported to the Scrutiny Committee in September/October. It was noted that if the grants were to cease, in particular, the Radical Reform Grant this would greatly impact the Welsh Government's transition towards not for profit care for children. The Cabinet Member concluded by stating that he was hopeful that these grants would not cease but would be received by local authorities via a reconfigured format.

Councillor G. Humphreys left the meeting at this juncture.

**Supplementary Question:**

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“Would the Cabinet Member ensure reducing staff in the department will be avoided, even if a contribution from reserves has to be used?”

**Response:**

The Cabinet Member said that he would do his utmost to avoid reducing staffing levels. The Interim Corporate Director of Social Services added that if there was a requirement to make further cuts to Social Services, this would be implemented to ensure clarity around the impact and all would be done to mitigate the risks that would this inevitably bring.

The Interim Corporate Director advised in terms of the cessation of grants that she was hopeful that the grants that were due to cease in March 2025 would still be received by local authorities albeit via a different format and this was currently being closely monitored.

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