

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

18 OCTOBER 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADVISORY BOARD WITH AWEN TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN BRIDGEND

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval to establish an Advisory Board approach to support the governance and partnership working with Awen via a Deed of Variation to the partnership agreement.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:
- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
 - **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
 - **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The partnership with Awen was established in 2015 via the development of an independent charitable trust. Awen now manages the cultural services and facilities that had been operated in-house by Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC). These services include libraries, cultural venues, B-Leaf and Wood-B, community centres and Bryngarw Park and House.
- 3.2 To support the governance of the partnership, a Board of Trustees was established by Awen including 8 independent community trustees, 1 staff trustee and up to 2 BCBC Elected Members. This has remained the case to date but with the success of the partnership and to better align strategic planning between organisations, it is an appropriate time to improve the effectiveness of arrangements and to ensure

that members and officers of the Council are more connected to the partnership arrangement with Awen.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 BCBC and Awen have explored whether the use of an advisory group mechanism would offer more value to both BCBC and Awen as this has proven effective in relation to the Healthy Living Partnership with GLL/Halo. The partners have concluded that an advisory group approach would support increased dialogue and transparency, engagement in strategic planning that is specific to Bridgend, review of progress and performance, identification and sharing of challenges and issues, together with opportunities for ongoing focus and development.
- 4.2 It was identified that following the 2022 local government elections, such an alternative approach to previous practice relating to governance of the Awen partnership could seamlessly be considered from June 2022, allowing for the necessary arrangements to then be put in place. Where Elected Members have occupied board roles within Awen, this has been in relation to the Awen Business Plan for 2015-19 as opposed to a Council specified requirement within the partnership agreement.
- 4.3 It should be considered that when occupying the roles as Awen board members, those individuals are committed to represent the interests of Awen as an independent organisation. As such, the board roles occupied by BCBC Elected Members are not there to manage the interests of the Council or to support issues such as specific contract requirements, concerns or aspirations. There are no specific obligations within the partnership agreement regarding these trustee positions although reports taken to Cabinet on 13th May 2015 for approval to establish a charitable trust and the final report taken to Cabinet on 1st September 2015 identify the two trustee roles.
- 4.4 Both BCBC and Awen have identified that the current arrangement has not routinely encouraged stakeholder engagement and does not foster the opportunity to influence service planning or review of progress by Cabinet Members or Corporate Directors directly. Under the current arrangements, this becomes the role of the client officer in relation to identified contract monitoring processes (which can include Cabinet Members), but there are opportunities for increased involvement by the Council beyond Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) reporting, Welsh Public Library Standards reporting and contributing to a range of other corporate reports. The partnership agreement with Awen identifies the need for Cabinet involvement in the reporting and monitoring of the partnership which would be beneficial in working collectively to develop value for money and well-being outcomes.
- 4.5 The approach for client monitoring prior to the COVID-19 pandemic would have included quarterly service and performance review meetings as per contract and corporate reporting on a range of selected areas as part of the CPA process. There has been frequent engagement and dialogue during the pandemic on modified changes to services but as restrictions have eased, services are now steadily rebuilding and normal contract review can be re-established.

- 4.6 There is an opportunity to put in place a mechanism for broader consideration by BCBC of service planning, progress made or service challenges although a series of client reports on library standards, service changes or asset development plans have been historically provided.
- 4.7 The current arrangements do not support regular, formalised dialogue between Awen representatives and Cabinet/Scrutiny representatives and a more consistent channel for communication would benefit both parties. A mechanism such as the Advisory Board approach has been reviewed positively in relation to contract monitoring and management of risk within the Healthy Living Partnership. It has been recognised in previous audit reports that having such an approach has been able to ensure that Elected Members, including Cabinet and Scrutiny, along with Corporate Directors are engaged in the overview of such significant partnerships and related contracts.
- 4.8 Within Awen, this would create an opportunity to engage in a more structured manner with BCBC while expanding the range of skills and diversity of Awen's board to deliver on outcomes sought from its partnerships. This could see an increased focus on broader strategic opportunities with health and social care, education and cultural sectors and delivery of improved outcomes.
- 4.9 As Awen expands its reach into other locations it will become increasingly important that there is a mechanism to focus specifically on the partnership within Bridgend and its direction and performance. Within BCBC, such an approach would create a more regular and structured approach to reviewing strategic direction, progress and performance of the partnership and management of risks and opportunities as they emerge.
- 4.10 If the proposal is approved by Cabinet, there may be the need for the partnership agreement to be amended to include obligations on both parties in regard to the advisory board structure and approach whilst ensuring the integrity of the partnership agreement in terms of contract monitoring remains intact. This will include increased focus on the partnership and contract governance arrangements and to better engage in joint approaches to achieving outcomes. This may be applicable to service delivery aspects or asset development plans. (e.g. Maesteg Town Hall, Grand Pavilion, B-leaf.) The partnership agreement can stipulate a minimum and maximum number of representatives from BCBC while Awen will reserve the right to include broader stakeholders - an approach successful with the Healthy Living partnership where the Health Board, Sport Wales and Public Health Wales provide supporting insights. A draft Terms of Reference is included at **Appendix 1** for information that would be reviewed and formalised at the first Advisory Board meeting.
- 4.11 An Advisory Board mechanism has proven effective within the Healthy Living Partnership in regard to:
- Stakeholder understanding of progress and performance
 - Collective understanding of challenges and opportunities
 - Collective approach to using resources to impact on local, regional and national priorities

- Development of key strategic approaches, projects and capital developments
- Stronger governance and scrutiny arrangements within the partnership

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was conducted on the establishment of the partnership with Awen in 2015. The continued support by BCBC for the partnership with Awen will ensure that the original outcomes of the partnership can still be progressed and contribute to the BCBC Strategic Equalities plan. An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The well-being goals identified within the Act have been considered in the preparation of this report:

- Long Term The development of an Advisory Board supports a longer term view beyond annual incremental review processes
- Prevention An Advisory Board based on cross sector approaches would allow focus on the impact that cultural services can have on the well-being of vulnerable groups
- Integration The Advisory Board approach would bring a broader range of stakeholders together and support sharing of learning and insight to inform service design
- Collaboration The development of an Advisory Board approach encourages a shared approach to service development and pooling of resource
- Involvement By working together there is the potential to reach a broader range of local people and to support co-design and co-production

8. Financial implications

8.1 The Council provides an annual management fee to support the partnership with Awen and related services and activities. The proposed Advisory Board supports additional scrutiny of value for money but also support for Covid recovery of the partnership and contribution to delivery of corporate and shared priorities.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed change to an Advisory Board approach to better support the partnership and current contractual arrangement and to provide notice to Awen of the agreed change;
- 9.2 That Cabinet determines the representation on the Advisory Board if approved;
- 9.3 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Social Services and Wellbeing to negotiate and agree the final terms of the Deed of Variation and to arrange execution of the Deed of Variation on behalf of the Council, subject to such delegated authority being exercised in consultation with the Chief Officer Legal & Regulatory Services, HR & Corporate Policy and the Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change.

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Background documents:

None