



CABINET AS TRUSTEES OF BLACKWOOD MINERS' INSTITUTE – 29TH OCTOBER 2020

**SUBJECT: BLACKWOOD MINERS' INSTITUTE – UPDATE REPORT FOR
INFORMATION ONLY**

REPORT BY: INTERIM CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 In January 2020, Cabinet as Trustee of Blackwood Arts Centre (Blackwood Miners' Institute, hereafter referred to as BMI) requested a progress update report in October 2020. Therefore, this report has been prepared to provide an update of the operational activity of BMI, especially in light of Covid-19, as well as an update of the financial position.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 As with the rest of the industry, BMI has been closed since March 17th, 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic with no clear indication of when it will be able to reopen. BMI was forced to cancel all activity, which has had a considerable impact on the income generated and the arts provision for our communities.
- 2.2 The report provides an update on:
- The current financial position of the BMI;
 - Planned and ongoing activities; and
 - The membership review.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet as Trustees consider and note the contents of this report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 This report has been drafted as an update at the request of Cabinet.

5. THE REPORT

Impact of Covid

- 5.1 Due to Covid-19, BMI has not been able to have any members of the public in the theatre since mid-March 2020. Alongside audiences for performances, this includes participants for workshops and classes, room hirers and our resident companies.
- 5.2 Staff have also been asked to work from home except for the technical team who have safely managed to complete the annual maintenance, and a number of improvement projects, including resurfacing the stage and replacing the working lights in the auditorium. Officers are currently exploring opportunities to enhance the WIFI for public and staff use, and for use by visiting companies. In the short term, this will allow the BMI to live stream from the building, either in order to create our own content or as a space for hire for other companies looking to stream content.
- 5.3 During the crisis several staff have been redeployed to other departments in CCBC including the Buddy Scheme, Track and Trace, Free School Meals and helped to assist with the Foodbanks. During October, some staff have been made available to support colleagues in other Regeneration & Planning teams where there have been significant increases in workload, notably in the delivery of Covid-related business grants.
- 5.4 In total, 21 events in the Summer Season were cancelled, including the annual CCBC Dance Showcase. 15 of the events have been re-scheduled and customers have had the option to move their ticket, receive a refund, or donate the price of their ticket to BMI.
- 5.5 Initially CCBC released a statement to say that BMI would be closed until June 2020, however, this has been amended to say until further notice, with events in the Autumn Season are now being rescheduled. The 2020 pantomime has been cancelled.
- 5.6 It is likely and assumed that BMI will not be able to reopen to the public until April 2021 at the earliest. BMI is not unusual in its position. Staff have kept in close contact with colleagues in other arts venues, and all venues are facing closure until Spring 2021 at the earliest. The general feeling is that it is not financially viable to reopen with social distancing in place. However, BMI is in a stronger position than many independent theatres who are facing cash flow issues and staff redundancies.

Financial Impact of Covid

- 5.7 Table 1 compares the current Income and expenditure forecasts for 2020-21 with the original budget forecast at the start of the financial year. The final column indicates the difference between these two forecasts and the final row shows the impact on the Council's contribution required to balance the budget, i.e., the subsidy.

Table 1: BMI Expenditure Forecast for 2021

	1/4/20 forecast	1/10/20 forecast	Difference
Income	480,526	144,119	336,407
Expenditure	783,373	417,940	365,433
Net CCBC Subsidy	302,847	273,821	29,026

- 5.8 As a result of the closure, BMI is estimated to return a reduction in income, but the saving in terms of expenditure is greater. Therefore, the forecast subsidy required from CCBC is some £29,026 less than originally forecast. The revised forecast includes an Arts Council for Wales grant of £89,707, a Welsh Government income grant of £26,508 and a Business Rate Grant of £25,000.

Reacting to Covid and Moving Forward

- 5.9 During closure, artistic activity has thus far focused on a digital provision. BMI ran a successful Sunday Sessions series showcasing local bands and artists on YouTube and Facebook, as well as partnering with The Winding House to produce a series of videos about the history of Caerphilly. In addition, BMI presented the first CCBC Digital Dance Showcase during the week of the 26th August 2020. 13 dance groups uploaded videos tagged with #GetCaerphillyDancing, 4 of whom had not engaged with the Dance Showcase before. The videos received a collective 38,083 views.
- 5.10 BMI is now focusing on developing audiences; re-engaging with existing audiences and developing relationship with audiences who have previously been disengaged. There are several projects planned to enable this as follows:
- Community survey project in partnership with the Audience Agency. The survey focuses on members of the immediate community who are not engaged with BMI and the reasons for that.
 - Llaw/Hand – A Creu Cymru grant that enables BMI to engage a Creative Consultant to develop a community art project.
 - History Project – There is Heritage Lottery money available to run projects that engage communities with buildings. BMI aims to run a project to gather the human history of the 'Stute, which will be presented in a creative way at a later date. The project will enable BMI to start a dialogue with members of the community.
 - Valleys Voices – A project in response to Black Lives Matter that gives a voice to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people living in the valleys.
 - Audience Communication – Harnessing all aspects of the new website and ticketing system to enable regular communication with our audience, and gather feedback.
 - Panto doorstep craft pack – BMI has partnered up with Head4Arts to create craft packs that asks the recipients to create their own panto. Approximately 300 packs will be distributed through the Parent Network.
 - 12 Days of Christmas – A digital project in the lead up to Christmas featuring seasonal posts and videos.

Trustees

- 5.11 Following the Cabinet as Trustee meeting on the 10th July 2019, it was agreed that new trustees would be appointed under the existing trust. It has subsequently been established by CCBC Legal officers that this decision was not legally sound. Therefore, it would be more advisable to establish an Advisory Board that have no legal obligations but would meet to give advice and advocate for BMI.
- 5.12 Work is ongoing to identify potential candidates to act as advisers, but no appointments have been made to date.

Adding Value

- 5.13 The Community Regeneration Team have been regular tenants of the Markham Room on the first floor of BMI since December 2019. Improvements in security and IT were made to the space to accommodate the team, and the move and transition went well. During lockdown the team have also been working from home, but BMI management are in close communication with the team with updates about the building.
- 5.14 The upper bar area had a total refurbishment in February 2020, to change the whole structure and size of the bar and increase the space available. This has resulted in a more efficient service. It is anticipated that the improvements will have a positive impact on our ability to generate secondary spend income.

Business Planning

- 5.15 As part of the Transformation Agenda, BMI's Manager together with the other venue managers have been working with the Transformation Manager to deliver the Council's central message; *social heart and commercial head*. The Managers have met to discuss and develop the Mission and Values for the Visitor Economy Team and to determine how staff across all venues can deliver on these values.
- 5.16 Managers are also developing a training plan to build on the skills levels for all officers. This staff development has a strong commercial and customer focus, designed to improve the customer experience and support the achievement of business objectives.
- 5.17 A review of BMI's Business Plan has also taken place and this will be continually reviewed and updated in order to focus on strategic and operational objectives.

Conclusion

- 5.18 BMI remains in a precarious position due to Covid-19. However, the lockdown is being used to remain engaged with our audiences and to explore innovative ways to engage with new audiences in readiness for re-opening.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 It is assumed that theatres will remain closed until Spring 2021 at the earliest.
- 6.2 It is assumed that beyond the Covid crisis financial pressures on local authority budgets will continue, which will require an ongoing focus on reducing the subsidy that BMI receives from the Council. Therefore, the need for BMI to evolve to increase audiences and operational efficiency remains a high priority.

7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 7.1 The report links directly to the themes of A Foundation for Success – Regeneration Strategy 2018-2023.
- Supporting People – Working to educate through the arts and addressing inequalities in our communities.

- Supporting Business – Providing training and employment opportunities, as well as contributing to the High Street economy.
- Supporting quality of Life – Enriching the lives and wellbeing of our communities through the arts.
- Connecting People and Places – Connecting people of our communities with the 'Stute, and other venues throughout the county borough and beyond through cultural partnerships.

7.2 Corporate Plan 2018-2023.

Despite restrictions BMI aims to remain a creative hub and find ways of enriching the lives of the community, as well as support the Arts Development Team. BMI will also use the months ahead to explore ways in which to become more resilient so that it can be a resource for the community and partners for many years to come in order to support several Corporate Plan Objectives:

Objective 1: Improve education opportunities for all.

Objective 2: Enabling employment.

Objective 5: Creating a county borough that supports a healthy lifestyle in accordance with the sustainable Development Principle within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Objective 6: Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being.

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 BMI plays an integral role in delivering the 7 objectives of the Well-Being Act. Creating a stronger and more viable venue means that BMI can continue to support the objectives in the following ways:

- A Prosperous Wales – Valuable life skills can be gained through the arts, developing confidence and employability skills. BMI is also able to provide employment, personal development and work experience opportunities.
- A Resilient Wales – The arts provide unique teaching methods that can be used to educate audiences about the importance of protecting our natural resources.
- A More Equal Wales – BMI is committed to providing an arts provision for all, regardless of background and circumstances, not only in access to the arts, but also featuring work by and about the full range of human existence.
- A Healthier Wales - This can apply to mental as well as physical health, and the arts have a crucial role in developing people's wellbeing and improving mental health.
- A Wales of Cohesive Communities – BMI is at the heart of the community in Blackwood and is a resource that the community can use to for work and recreation.
- A Wales of Vibrant and Thriving Welsh Language – BMI supports the Welsh language by featuring Welsh language work, as well as hosting Welsh Language youth theatre and supporting staff in their ambitions to learn Welsh.
- A Globally Responsible Wales – As with a Resilient Wales, BMI has a responsibility to use the platform of the arts to inform and educate.

- 8.2 The report is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act:

Long term - The report provides options to ensure the long term sustainability, viability and role of BMI in contributing to the economic prosperity of the region by providing a range of options to meet the financial challenges ahead without submitting to short term objectives that could be detrimental to the long term needs of future generations.

Prevention- Having identified the financial challenges that lie ahead, the report aims to provide a range of options that can be considered that address the issue of sustainability and prevent problems arising in the longer term whilst still allowing the local authority to support the creative industry through the provision of art and cultural provision.

Integration- The Council's well-being objectives for the period 2018-2023 support a number of national objectives and the hosting of the South East Wales Arts & Education Service is an example of how BMI is integrating to the work of the Arts & Education Service in supporting wider learning in schools in the Expressive Arts and the delivery of the new Welsh Curriculum.

Collaboration- There are a number of options identified in the report that provide an opportunity to engage and collaborative with external stakeholders.

Involvement - The Council provides opportunities for our residents to participate and represent their and their community's interest in achieving their well-being goals through participation in the 'Nights out' scheme and 'Get Creative' festival and in relation to Blackwood the bicentennial celebrations planned for 2020, which will probably be rescheduled in 2021.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act became law in April 2015. The Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It makes public bodies listed in the Act think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. It has a significant impact on all Council policies and priorities and has the potential to significantly affect the way we plan and deliver services and how we engage with individuals and communities within the Caerphilly county borough.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Through exploring new ways of working, BMI is striving for increased equality of provision.
- 9.2 Through surveying our community BMI can understand the challenges that face our community and can react and adapt to ensure equality throughout the service.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The forecast for BMI in 2020-21 is currently a £29,000 underspend due to a combined £141,000 in grant awards.

- 10.2 The proposed activity laid out in this report will be primarily funded by external funding.
- 10.3 The proposed activity is designed to keep existing audiences engaged and develop new audiences, which will increase income when the building is allowed to reopen.
- 10.4 The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for 2019/20 will be reported to the Trustees in January 2021 before submission to the Charity Commission.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 During the main lockdown period, staff were asked to work from home, except for the technical team who have safely managed to complete the annual maintenance, and a number of improvement projects. During the past two months, a small number of staff who are not able to work from home have been allowed to work at the venue for short periods, whilst observing social distancing requirements.
- 11.2 Also during lockdown, a number of staff were redeployed to other departments in CCBC including the Buddy Scheme, Track and Trace, Free School Meals and Foodbanks. During October, staff have been made available to support colleagues in other Regeneration & Planning teams where there have been significant increases in workload, notably in the delivery of Covid-related business grants.

12. CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 Only one comment has been received from the consultees (from Mike Eedy, who checked and amended the grant figures in paragraph 5.8).

13. STATUTORY POWER

- 13.1 Charities Act 2011, Local Government Act 1972 and the Trustees Act 1925.

14. URGENCY (CABINET ITEMS ONLY)

- 14.1 There are no decisions to be taken in respect of this report as it is for information only. A full end of year report will be presented to Cabinet in January 2021.

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