



CABINET AS TRUSTEES OF BLACKWOOD MINERS' INSTITUTE – 27TH OCTOBER 2021

SUBJECT: BLACKWOOD MINERS' INSTITUTE UPDATE REPORT

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND
ENVIRONMENT**

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet as Trustee a progress report on the operational activity at BMI, and to outline the proposal to set up an Advisory Group for Blackwood Miners' Institute.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Blackwood Miners' Institute has remained closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Income and artistic output have been severely impacted due to this, however, Blackwood Miners' Institute reopened in September with a reduced season to allow for flexibility and enhanced cleaning. Changes in legislation will be monitored closely and any adjustments will be actioned appropriately.
- 2.2 The report will also outline research that has been undertaken in respect of the creation of an Advisory Group for the BMI and provides a recommendation on how to proceed.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet as Trustee consider, note and endorse the contents of this report.
- 3.2 It is recommended that Cabinet as Trustee approve the establishment of an Advisory Group.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 This report is intended to keep Cabinet as Trustees aware of operations within Blackwood Miners' Institute.
- 4.2 The creation of an Advisory Group would assist with the growth of Blackwood Miners'

Institute.

5. THE REPORT

Ongoing Impact of Covid on operational issues

- 5.1 Due to government legislation, Blackwood Miners' Institute has remained closed for performances. As regulations began to ease BMI could have reopened for performances, however, the decision was taken that it wouldn't be financially viable to stage performances without a full capacity audience.
- 5.2 However, some regular dance classes were welcomed back prior to the summer holidays. Capacity was limited and the classes were relocated to the auditorium to allow maximum capacity whilst still retaining social distancing. Classes have again returned after the Summer holidays and are now using the dance studio and lower bar spaces.
- 5.3 Staff continue to predominantly work from home, although there has been some return to the office. A return to face to face working, albeit limited, has been very important for staff's wellbeing and motivation.
- 5.4 In order to welcome back audiences safely, as well as keep front line staff safe, the BMI has implemented several measures. These include:
- The use of face-coverings in indoors areas for staff and members of the public.
 - A one-way system around the building.
 - Increased cleaning regime.
 - Contact free ticket sales and checking.
 - Hand sanitiser provided throughout the building for use by staff and the public.

These measures will be reviewed and evaluated throughout the autumn season. BMI management will monitor changes in legislation closely and will adapt safety measures and risk assessments accordingly.

Financial Impact of Covid

- 5.5 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: Income and expenditure forecasts 2020-21

	Original Budget Forecast (£)	Forecast as at 10/09/21 (£)	Difference (£)
Income	483,248	336,274	-146,974
Expenditure	789,203	654,289	-134,914
CCBC subsidy	305,955	318,015	12,060

- 5.6 BMI has not benefitted from any NDR or loss of income grants this financial year, despite 5 months of lost income. The autumn season will be a lighter, more flexible season; however, it will not generate the income either from ticket sales or secondary spend, that a fuller programme of events would.

Staffing changes

- 5.7 The Theatre and Arts Services Manager is leaving the authority on 15th October 2021. The job advert for a replacement Manager has already been placed with interviews due to take place mid-October. The aim is to minimise the disruption to the organisation during this transition.
- 5.8 The Sales and Audience Development Manager also left BMI at the end of September. This is a vital role for Blackwood Miners' Institute and will be filled as soon as possible; however, the change of personnel is an opportunity to review the role, and its place within the Destinations portfolio. In the interim, freelance Marketing staff will be used to assist BMI.

Local Members

- 5.9 Officers at the Blackwood Miners' Institute are developing a strong working relationship with local members. The management at BMI will continue to have regular meetings with local members and town councillors, the first of which took place on the 21st July 2021. These meetings will provide updates on BMI activity and explore opportunities for joint working.

Artistic Activity

- 5.10 BMI has continued to work with various partners during the pandemic to produce artistic output in a variety of mediums.
- **Digital tours.** BMI hosted and supported three digital tours in the last 12 months; *Winners* was an audio play produced by Nova Theatre. *First 3 Drops* by Taking Flight Theatre Company was a school and family performance that integrated captioning, BSL and audio description. *Buttons Undone* by Rainbow Valley Productions was an online performance of the ever-popular adult panto from Owen Money's production company.
 - **The Anarchists Mobile Library** produced by Tessa Bide Productions, was a bilingual digital 'choose your own adventure' production aimed at children aged 6+. The production 'toured' throughout Wales, supported by Blackwood Miners' Institute, Pontardawe Arts Centre and Carmarthen Theatres.
 - **Social media Christmas content.** BMI commissioned a local storyteller to record three festive short stories in Welsh and English. These were put out on Facebook and Twitter. In conjunction with Blackrat Productions, BMI also recorded a special version of *The Night Before Christmas* featuring many of the actors that BMI has worked with over the years.
 - **Doorstep Craft Packs.** Head 4 Arts delivered 295 panto packs to families throughout the Caerphilly County Borough.
 - **Drive in Panto.** BMI worked with Rainbow Valley Productions to put on a drive-in performance of *Peter Pan*. 7 performances were planned for Christmas week however, only one of those performances took place due to Wales going to Alert level 4.
 - **Love Locks.** At the beginning of 2021 BMI partnered with NoNaff Arts to create a community project to bring the community together and keep BMI fresh in audience's minds. The Love Locks project saw members of the community decorate padlocks. These have been added to a structure that has been erected in Blackwood Town Centre. The community engagement

was huge; 400 packs were issued, with even more requested. The number of locks had to be limited because of the weight limit on the final structure, but BMI and NoNaff Arts are discussing reproducing the project in Risca and Bargoed.

- **Trwbwl Mawr yn Trymyglyd.** BMI has supported the first phase R&D of a new Welsh language script. The R&D week in July was the first artistic activity that had taken place at BMI since the closure in March 2020. The script is now being redrafted, with another R&D planned for 2021.
- **The Great Adventures of Olive and Eira.** BMI commissioned Flossy and Boo to create an audio trail around Parc Cwm Darran throughout August. Families used QR codes to follow the story and take part in tasks around the park, and there was an activity pack available.

Advisory Group

- 5.11 Following the conclusion that independent Board members could not be recruited onto the board of trustees, research has continued into the feasibility of an Advisory Group.
- 5.12 The research has focused on the model used at Aberystwyth Arts Centre (AAC) which has an Advisory Group that has no legal influence but acts as support, advocate and critical friend.
- 5.13 With Cabinet as Trustees approval the BMI propose to replicate the AAC's Advisory Group model. Open recruitment would take place to recruit 8 independent members, although particular focus would be placed on diversity (diversity is not limited to the protected characteristics; it also includes diversity in language, and diversity in socioeconomic background). The purpose of the board is to gather members with particular expertise to support the growth of BMI, therefore experts in disabled and d/Deaf access, Welsh speaking members and experts in diversity would be sought, as well as members of the local community, and local artists. In addition to recruited members, there would also be a representative of BMI management, the Visitor Economy and Destinations Manager, and the Cabinet Member for Customer, Performance and Enterprise in the group. The ACW lead officer should also be included.
- 5.14 Each meeting would have the following budget;
- **Travel - £120**
The roles will be voluntary; however, travel expenses will be paid. Once the make-up of the board is known the travel budget can be more accurately estimated, plus there is the option to move the meeting to different locations to minimise travel expenses (although that will be offset by a hire cost).
 - **Interpretation - £270**
As a minimum there will be a Welsh translator at every meeting, plus access interpreters will be available where required.
 - **Tea and Coffee - £10**
 - **Room hire - £100**
As outlined above, Room Hire may not be a necessary cost, however, AAC have advised that they have found it useful to hold at least one meeting 'outside the Aberystwyth bubble'.

The total meeting budget would be £500. As this is part of the development work of

BMI, the Advisory Group would be funded from the Arts Council of Wales annual grant in the first instance. However, it should be noted that the Advisory Group is a necessary tool for growth, therefore if the Arts Council of Wales grant were ever to be withdrawn, consideration should be given to funding the Advisory Group from core BMI funding. The belief is that the group will benefit the income generation of BMI and therefore offset its own costs.

- 5.15 Proposed discussion points are:
- The business plan and reducing the Council's subsidy.
 - BMI's co-production and artistic output.
 - Community engagement.
 - BMI's programme.
 - Participation.
 - Promotion of the Welsh Language.
 - Accessibility at Blackwood Miners' Institute.

These are only initial suggestions, and there is scope for the Cabinet as Trustees to influence this.

- 5.16 If approved the Terms of Reference for Members and advertisement to recruit would need to be finalised to enable recruitment to take place. Recruitment take around 4 weeks therefore the first group meeting should be scheduled for 10 weeks from the point of approval.
- 5.17 The group is intended to support and work in conjunction with Cabinet as Trustees. By having the Cabinet Member for Customer, Performance and Enterprise involved with the Advisory group it provides a tangible link, meaning that neither party are working in isolation. Minutes from each meeting would be fed back to Cabinet as Trustee at the subsequent Cabinet as Trustee meeting.

Conclusion

- 5.18 BMI is beginning its post-Covid recovery period. This continues to be a difficult year for the industry, and as venues and companies rebuild their audiences, BMI is no different. Despite the challenges, BMI is still committed to reducing its subsidy.
- 5.19 In light of the pressures of Covid recovery, an Advisory Group is even more important as a tool for support and advice.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 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. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 It is considered that an Advisory Group will have a positive impact on the development, growth and resilience of Blackwood Miners' Institute. A stronger Blackwood Miners' Institute means that it can deliver on the Council's Well-being

objectives and The Well-Being of Future Generations Act objectives and ways of working. The group itself presents opportunities for diversity, the promotion of the Welsh language and developing employability skills. There is precedent from other organisations that shows this model can be a success, and it is a reasonable assumption that this success can be replicated at BMI with good management and monitoring.

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out to ensure that no-one will be adversely affected by the establishment of an Advisory Group.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The forecast for 2020/21 is an £12,060 overspend, predominantly due to the loss of income for the start of the financial year.
- 8.2 Audience and programme development continue to be a priority to reduce the subsidy that BMI receives from the Council.
- 8.3 The Advisory Group will have a maximum budget of £1500 per year which will initially be funded from ACW grant.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The positions of Theatre and Arts Services is a crucial for the growth of Blackwood Miners' Institute, therefore it is imperative that appointments are made as soon as possible. The role of Sales and Audience Development Manager is also an intrinsic role, so the review of the job description must be an efficient process to prevent any unnecessary delay in recruitment.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The comments from consultees are included in this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

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

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