



CABINET AS TRUSTEES OF BLACKWOOD MINERS’ INSTITUTE – 15TH JUNE 2022

SUBJECT: BLACKWOOD MINERS’ INSTITUTE UPDATE REPORT

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

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet as Trustees a progress report on the artistic and operational activity at Blackwood Miners’ Institute, and to update the Trustees regarding the Advisory Board process.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Blackwood Miners’ Institute (BMI) reopened in February 2022 following a long period of closure during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, BMI’s income and artistic output has been impacted and it is still in a recovery phase. Covid-19 restrictions have now been lifted but it is not clear as yet whether audience and participant numbers will recover or how people feel about returning to the theatre.
- 2.2 The recruitment for an Advisory Group has been advertised and the deadline for expressions of interest was 3rd June 2022.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 This report is intended to keep Cabinet as Trustees aware of artistic activity and operations at Blackwood Miners’ Institute.

5. THE REPORT

Recovery Period following Covid-19

- 5.1 Blackwood Miners' Institute reopened to the public in February 2022 with family theatre show *The Girl Who Couldn't Pretend*. Since then, BMI have held 23 performances, ranging from live music to community showcases. Generally, audience numbers have been higher than expected with an average of 60% capacity per performance. Attendance is not yet at pre-pandemic levels, but is gradually rebuilding.
- 5.2 Classes and other engagement work have also restarted. BMI experienced a significant decline in the number of participants following the pandemic and officers are dedicating time, energy, and resources to promoting the classes programme in order to boost numbers and connect with new people.
- 5.3 Now that BMI is open, staff are working mostly from the building, but are continuing to follow social distancing and hygiene advice to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Staff are advised to work from home and test if they show any symptoms.
- 5.4 Despite restrictions being lifted, BMI continues to implement the following measures to keep the public safe:
- A one-way system around the building.
 - Increased cleaning regime.
 - Hand sanitiser provided throughout the building.
 - Staff testing regularly and advised to stay home if they show symptoms.

These measures are reviewed monthly or on the announcement of updated guidance from Welsh government. There have been very few reported instances of Covid-19 in the building.

Financial Impact of Covid-19

- 5.5 Table 1 compares the actual income for 2021-22 with the original budget forecast at the start of the financial year.

Table 1: income 2021-22

	Original budget forecast (£)	Out-turn for 2021-22 (£)	Difference (£)
Income (ticket sales)	213,200	202,393	-10,806.56
Income (bar sales)	33,000	5,709.65	-27,290.35
Income (hires)	37,000	17,667.88	-18,782.12
Income (vending)	18,500	14,483.17	- 4,016.83

The restrictions throughout 2021/22 clearly had a significant impact on BMI's ability to generate income through ticket sales, bar sales and hire charges.

- 5.6 BMI have continued to receive support from Arts Council Wales during this period but have not benefitted from any NNDR or loss of income grants this financial year. Ticket sales and secondary spend income is likely to increase now that BMI is fully open and delivering activity, but it will take time to recover financially. Officers are keen to diversify BMI's income streams and identify other sources of funding.

Staffing changes

- 5.7 Eloise Tong, the new Theatre and Arts Service Manager started on 1st February 2022 to replace Marina Newth who left in October 2021. Eloise has confirmed the artistic programme for 2022 and has settled in well.
- 5.8 Craig Clark joined Blackwood Miners' Institute on 1st March 2022 as the new Marketing Officer having transferred from another Caerphilly Council team. Craig has already begun to implement a new marketing strategy for BMI and is also providing some marketing support to the other destinations, namely Llancaiach Fawr, Coffi Vista and Cwmcarn Forest. Craig is managing Lacey Read who joined BMI as part of the Kickstart Scheme to provide digital marketing support.
- 5.9 BMI are currently recruiting a third Technician and maternity cover for the Arts Development Officer who is going on maternity leave from July 2022.

Local members

- 5.10 Blackwood Town Council have recently started meeting again following the pandemic. The Theatre and Arts Service Manager has reached out to the Clerk to arrange a meeting so that BMI and the Town Council can resume their collaborative and positive working relationship.
- 5.11 The Theatre and Arts Service Manager will also arrange a meeting with Blackwood Miners' Institute's 3 local Councillors: Cllr Nigel Dix, Cllr Kevin Etheridge and Cllr Andrew Farina-Childs now that the local elections are complete.

Artistic Activity and Programme

- 5.12 BMI has continued to deliver high quality performances, projects and support to artists and companies during this challenging period as follows:
- **Autumn 2021 Season** – the Autumn 2021 season was cut short due to Covid-19, but 11 events from Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra to the annual pantomime were delivered.
 - **Spring 2022 Season** – BMI reopened in February 2022 and 31 performances are planned for this season including Ed Byrne, Lipstick on your Collar and the annual CCBC Dance Showcase. So far, attendance figures have been higher than anticipated.
 - **The Invisible Man** – an adaptation of HG Wells' sci-fi horror and co-produced by BMI and Black Rat Productions, BMI supported a residency in February 2022 and a sharing to an invited audience. The feedback received was outstanding. The performance is due to premiere at BMI in October 2022 and will then tour to 16 locations across Wales.
 - **Trwbwl Mawr yn Tremyglyd** – following a successful first phase R&D, BMI is supporting a second phase R&D in September 2022 which will culminate in a sharing to an invited audience. This is an original Welsh language script written by Chris Harris with original music from Mari Mathias.
 - **Lasso the Moon** – BMI are supporting the development of a family theatre show by Leeway Productions told in Welsh, BSL and English. The second phase R&D will take place in October 2022.
 - **Summer 2022** – BMI is delivering 2 outdoor performances in August 2022. The Rascally Diner at Llancaiach Fawr and Great Insect Games at Cwmcarn Forest. Outdoor workshops and live music are also planned.
 - **Autumn 2022** – there are 27 performances planned for Autumn 2022 ranging from family theatre to classical music. The BMI comedy nights are also to be

relaunched once a month in the lower bar. The full programme will launch in July 2022.

- **Classes** – in partnership with Arts Development, BMI have relaunched the classes programme to provide dance and drama classes for all ages plus Tea Dance and Dance for Parkinson's.
- **Workshops** – as part of the Autumn 2022 season BMI are offering one-off workshops led by professional artists, sharings and Q&As.

Arts Development Priorities 2022-23

Wellbeing

- 5.13 During Covid-19, Arts Development made connections to the integrated wellbeing networks and have secured Arts Council funding to develop community-led projects that tackle local wellbeing issues in New Tredegar, Bargoed, Risca and Rhymney. Other work includes Dance for Parkinson's, intergenerational work with care homes and moving in nature. In addition, a county-wide Arts & Health network is being developed that will eventually see GP referrals to projects run by Arts Development and organisations around the county borough.

Regeneration

- 5.14 In addition the Arts Development Team have worked with the Aber Valley to secure funding that uses creativity to engage with the community for projects that bring people together and address local issues. This is an 18-month project that looks at both physical and community regeneration. The Team are also supporting work that develops the look and increases the footfall of town centres with an initial focus on Bargoed and possibly Rhymney by working with communities and local business.

Creating opportunities

- 5.15 In partnership with BMI, the Arts Development Team will develop theatre provision across all age ranges and connect the work with Its My Shout films that will give opportunities for people to work in TV. The Team have a drama apprentice who will coordinate this work that has seen several people go on to get paid work within the industry. The Team have created a National Arts & Education Network which is delivering high quality training for teachers in the new curriculum with courses developed according to need. A number of young writers' squads have been set up to create opportunities for talented writers to get support in developing their writing and career possibilities.

Advisory Group

- 5.16 The recruitment for the Advisory Group was advertised in April 2022 and the deadline for applications is 3rd June 2022. Applicants have been asked to submit a short expression of interest outlining their skills and experience and their interest in the position. The next step is an informal conversation with the Theatre and Arts Service Manager to find out more about the candidates followed by a more formal discussion with several members of the team.
- 5.17 BMI are hoping to engage between 8 and 10 Advisory Board members to ensure a diverse range of views is represented.

Conclusion

- 5.18 Despite the severe impact of the pandemic, BMI have continued to deliver high quality projects, performances and support. BMI's recovery will inevitably take time. The Team remain committed to diversifying BMI's income streams to reduce the subsidy.
- 5.19 The introduction of an Advisory Group will help the team tackle some of these key issues and ensure that the BMI becomes a more sustainable and resilient charitable organisation.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 It is assumed that financial pressure as a result of the pandemic, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis will continue to impact on audiences and participants disposable income as well as local authority budgets. Therefore, BMI will need to focus on increasing income generation and reducing running costs where possible.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report is for **Information Only** so a completed IIA is not required.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The final out-turn for 2021-22 shows an underspend of £51,252.56. However, BMI also saw a reduction in earned income as outlined in table 1 above. This underspend is largely due to reduced running costs with severe staffing shortages and the building being closed for the majority of the financial year. BMI expenditure is therefore likely to increase in 2022-23.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Apart from the vacant Technician role, there is a full team at Blackwood Miners' Institute that will ensure that it operates smoothly and efficiently.

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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Consultees:

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