

Working with Torfaen County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent Council is in a process of change. In June 2024, both Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils agreed to share a Chief Executive. This arrangement is the first of its kind in Wales and highlights both Council's ability to forward think and pioneer enhanced collaborative working. This arrangement aims to significantly enhance Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen's organisational resilience, efficiency and innovation.

During this process of change, a nine month 'discovery phase' will be in operation to explore opportunities, the potential for efficiencies, working at scale together and reducing any barriers and risks. Consideration will be given to where joint governance arrangements can be put in place across the two local authorities in order to place a greater emphasis on our performance, processes and, most importantly, culture.

We are at the beginning of a period of organisational change. The decision for two local authorities working more closely together, including sharing a Chief Executive, can offer several benefits that drive efficiency, innovation, and influence. Some of the key advantages include:

- **Cost Efficiency:** A shared CEX can reduce administrative costs with each authority contributing to sharing a single salary and related expenses. There will also be potential to consolidate wider administrative functions and staff in place to support the CEX function.
- **Improved Service Delivery Across Councils:** Collaboration across councils can lead to more coordinated service delivery. It opens greater opportunity to pool resources and expertise that enhances the quality of services provided to the public. This would include sharing best practices, technology, and systems that one organisation alone might not be able to afford or manage.
- **Increased Scale:** Bringing organisations together that share common responsibilities, objectives and challenges has the potential to spread costs, negotiate better terms and lower overall prices (commissioning and procurement for example), benefiting from economies of scale.
- **Enhanced Innovation and Knowledge Sharing:** Working more closely together on common challenges provides the opportunity for sharing innovative ideas and solutions. This can create the right environment to foster a culture of continuous improvement and creativity, leading to more effective and efficient public services.
- **Stronger Strategic Planning:** Unified leadership across councils creates an opportunity for more joined up strategic planning, the alignment of goals and the sharing of resources leading to more effective delivery of long-term outcomes.
- **Increased Resilience and Flexibility:** Joint operations can offer more resilience and flexibility in resource allocation and crisis management particularly during times of economic or environmental stress.
- **Public Perception and Trust:** By demonstrating fiscal responsibility and being increasingly innovative, the trust in local government can be enhanced.
- **Better Staff Development and Career Pathways:** Creating larger combined staff pools and more diverse functions, creates more opportunities for staff development and movement within the organisation. This can enhance job satisfaction, improve retention, and create a more enticing environment for recruitment to the organisations.
- **A Greater Influence Regionally and Nationally:** As two authorities working together with a combined population close to the size of Newport, we can increase our influence both regionally and nationally with a higher profile.

The 'discovery phase' of this proposal will seek to achieve the above and to set out a new long-term plan for Blaenau Gwent.

- Some key areas of development throughout the 'discovery' phase will be:
 - Establishing a set of Characteristics that the Council will follow in order for officers and members to work together to transform the way that we deliver services;
 - Aligning a number of governance processes across both Council's;
 - Developing a Marmot Masterplan for Blaenau Gwent; and
 - Developing a Communities Approach to enable greater resilience within our communities

