

Dear Colleague,

I hope you are all keeping safe and well. It's week two of 2021, and there is such a lot happening. I don't know about you but Christmas seems such a long time ago already!

I wanted to offer a quick update on the budget proposals for 2021/22, which will be presented at Cabinet tomorrow morning before being considered by Full Council in February.

The Leader and her Cabinet has unveiled an ambitious draft budget that will allow us to continue on our journey of improvement and transformation following the priority focus upon Covid over the past 12 months.

Despite us being one of the more robust Council's financially, you will be aware that our finances have been under significant pressure over recent years and we have all been required to deliver difficult savings in order to achieve a balanced budget. I'm sure you will be pleased to hear that the budget settlement for 2021/22 is better than previous years, which means we can maintain our current service provision and incorporate some growth into some service areas.

Whilst this is most welcomed, we can't be complacent as we anticipate that future years will be challenging and we must progress our transformation journey at pace as to avoid future salami slicing of our budgets.

A key part of the budget, which normally gets much coverage in the local press is the council tax proposals. The draft budget includes a proposed increase of 3.9% which equates to an increase for Band D properties of 89p per week. We anticipate this will be one of the lowest in Wales and whilst none of us want to see an increase in council tax, it plays an important part in balancing our budget.

More information about the budget proposals can be found here – <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/News/News-Bulletin/January-2021/Positive-budget-proposals-unveiled>

In terms of the ongoing coronavirus position, you will be aware that we opened up Penallta House as a vaccination centre last week and the initial sessions on Thursday and Friday went very well. We have been advised by our health colleagues that the operating days will be reviewed on a weekly basis depending on the availability of supplies and resources. We are delighted to be supporting the Health Board with this venture and look forward to seeing the vaccination programme gain pace and momentum over the coming months. The Health Minister, Vaughan Gethin, set out the vaccination plan for Wales yesterday. This information is most welcome but it is highly dependant upon the supply of the vaccine meeting the demand.

We have also facilitated the opening of the region's first 'Local Testing Centre' in Rhymney over recent days. This new facility will be a more permanent feature than the 'mobile testing units' that are currently being deployed across our area. Residents will be able to access quick and convenient testing facilities in the heart of

the community and I hope to see it widely used by the local population in our ongoing response to the virus.

Finally, I have attached a letter about the emerging vaccination programme which will be distributed to every home in the county borough shortly. It is a joint letter from our Leader and the Chief Executive of the health board and contains important information and advice which I hope you will find useful.

A further update will follow later in the week, covering some other key areas.

In the meantime, please keep yourself safe with the basics – good hygiene, social distancing and mask wearing!

Take care,  
Christina