# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council** |
| **DATE** | **25 February 2020** |
| **BY** | **Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government** |

This statement provides a further update to members of the Senedd on the ongoing statutory support package, provided under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (the Council) following the independent assessment of the Council’s key challenges undertaken during late summer 2019.

At the end of October last year I confirmed my intention to provide the Council with a further focused package of statutory support. As part of this, I agreed, in conjunction with the Council, to establish an Improvement and Assurance Board (the Board) chaired by Steve Thomas to assist the Leader, Councillor Kevin O’Neill, in driving forward the required change and improvement in the Council. I also agreed that I would provide short term and targeted governance, corporate and service support.

To inform the appointment of suitable external advisers I asked Steve Thomas and the external members of the Board to undertake a rapid assessment of the skills and capabilities required to provide this support.

The purpose of the rapid assessment was not to duplicate John Gilbert’s review but to drill down to determine what support was needed. The rapid assessment was also used as an opportunity to take a wider look at other service areas, such as education, to inform the understanding of the improvements required.

The rapid assessment, attached at the annex, is now complete and it recommends a number of short term, targeted governance measures across a number of areas, including what support is required and how it can be best delivered to maximise impact. As a result I have since agreed to provide the Council with external advisers in the following areas:

* **Education and Social Services**

The exact remit and purpose of these external advisers will be developed in conjunction with the relevant external member of the Board and the respective Director of Service/Chief Officer.

* **Corporate Governance**

I have agreed to appoint an external adviser to assist with developing a fit for purpose and meaningful transformation and improvement agenda, as well as an effective performance management and scrutiny system. This should be informed by, but not limited to, responding to the key findings and recommendations from the scoping review and rapid assessment.

* **Leader, Cabinet and Member Development**

An adviser has also been appointed to provide support for political leadership and relations. Running alongside this, a longer term programme of support will also be developed, in conjunction with the WLGA, in relation to wider member development, chairing skills and scrutiny training.

All external advisers will be appointed on a short term basis only (for a period of three to six months maximum) to help the Council address its immediate and longer term challenges. My officials are currently working with the Council and the Board to agree arrangements, which I hope will be completed by the next meeting of the Board in early March.

In addition, the Board will continue to monitor progress and seek assurance from the Council that it has a robust improvement plan in place and is delivering at pace. As I have said previously, there needs to be widespread commitment from all members and officers to achieve a sustainable future for the Council and to deliver good quality services to the people of Merthyr Tydfil.

This will enable the Board to form a view on the Council’s capacity and capability to address its challenges independently and sustainably. I will be looking for a view on the whole Council’s progress at the end of May.

Further details and updates on progress will be provided to the Senedd.