



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY,
30TH NOVEMBER 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Ridgewell - Chair
Councillor M. Adams - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, L. Harding, G. Kirby, B. Owen, W. Williams, B. Zaplatynski.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors S. Cook (Social Care and Housing), Mrs E. Stenner (Performance, Economy and Enterprise), A. Whitcombe (Sustainability, Planning and Fleet)

Together with:

M.S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), D. Lucas (Team Leader, Strategic Planning), D. Roberts (Principal Group Accountant), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer), M. Afzal (Committee Services Officer)

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed and would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would take place via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, D. Cushing, A.G. Higgs, Ms P. Leonard, Mrs G.D. Oliver, Mrs D. Price and Mrs M. Sargent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 19TH OCTOBER 2021

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2021 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 1 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19th October 2021 (minute nos. 1 - 9) be approved as a correct record.

Councillor R. Gough confirmed that he had abstained from voting on the minutes as he had not been present at the last meeting.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period November 2021 to March 2022. Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the details of reports scheduled for forthcoming meetings and approval was sought to add two reports to the FWP for the meeting on 15th March 2022, in relation to Local Housing Market Assessment, and Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

It was moved and seconded that subject to the inclusion of the aforementioned reports, the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 11 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to the inclusion of two additional reports for 15th March 2022, the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. DRAFT NEWBRIDGE TO RISCA CORRIDOR MASTERPLAN

The Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Planning and Fleet introduced the report, which sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the Draft Newbridge to Risca Corridor

Masterplan ahead of its presentation to Cabinet for endorsement and prior to a six-week public consultation exercise commencing on 12th January 2022.

Members were advised that Caerphilly County Borough and the wider Cardiff Capital Region is in a period of transformative change, with an urgent need for a strategy to coordinate regeneration initiatives and capitalise upon funding streams to maximise the potential benefits to the County Borough. The City Deal and the Cardiff Capital Region Investment Fund totalling £1.2 billion to support the region's economic growth will be used to take forward a wide range of projects and schemes that contribute toward economic growth.

In terms of the Newbridge to Risca Corridor, the existing employment base and strong tourist economy are the foundation that present opportunities for economic renewal and growth and allied to additional funding streams, can promote the area as a major employment and tourism and recreation area. The Masterplan seeks to integrate the strong employment retail and tourism/recreational base to realise added benefit for economic recovery and growth. The Newbridge to Risca Corridor Masterplan sets out a development strategy and Framework for delivering these outcomes and will form the basis for bids from funding streams for projects in the area. The Masterplan now needs to be the subject of public consultation to get input from local communities on the proposals. Members were therefore asked to endorse the Draft Newbridge to Risca Masterplan ahead of its presentation to Cabinet for endorsement of the draft to allow public consultation to take place.

Mr Dave Lucas (Team Leader - Strategic Planning) gave an overview of the Draft Masterplan and explained that this is the fourth in a series of Masterplans that complement the County Borough's regeneration strategy, 'A Foundation for Success'. The latest Draft Masterplan covers the areas of the Ebbw and Lower Sirhowy Valley, comprising the wards of Abercarn, Crosskeys, Newbridge, Risca East and West and Ynysddu, and includes a vision that seeks to build on the existing strengths of the Masterplan and enhance the area as an employment, retail, leisure and tourism centre.

The Masterplan consists of 8 objectives, which were set out in Section 7 of the Draft Masterplan and summarised to Members. A number of schemes and projects sit under these objectives and are set out in the framework of the Masterplan. The main aim of the Masterplan is to expand on the area's focus of employment, leisure and commercial centres through identifying new projects and enhancements to existing facilities, and equally importantly, linking them together more productively and proactively. The Masterplan has been the subject of engagement with stakeholders, Members and Officers, and input from these events have informed the preparation of this document. Two Members' Seminars have also been held to seek views on what to include in the Masterplan and seeking Member input on the draft document. Subject to Cabinet approval, the draft Masterplan will be the subject of public consultation and then it is intended to present the finalised version incorporating all responses to Council for approval in Summer 2022.

Members placed on record their thanks to Officers for the complex and comprehensive report and for the work that had gone into the preparation of the Draft Masterplan.

The Committee discussed the report and one Member suggested that the photograph on the front of the Draft Masterplan (an aerial view of Risca) could better reflect the whole area under the Plan by possibly using a composite image. Mr Lucas confirmed that he would take this suggestion on board and look into changing the image for the final version of the Masterplan.

Clarification was sought on how the Towns and Settlements areas are described in the document and it was clarified that the terminology used is in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy identified in the Local Development Plan, and the Masterplans are supplementary planning guidance documents to the LDP.

Members welcomed the document and sought clarification on how the consultation will be carried out and how easy it would be for residents to access and submit comments. Officers advised that it is primarily intended for the consultation to have an online presence, but it is hoped that local shops and businesses in key areas will be asked to advertise the consultation as well. Officers stated that they would also welcome suggestions from Members on making the public aware of the consultation. Discussion also took place around the ever-changing situation in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential impact this could have on the consultation.

A Member highlighted the reference at Section 6.73 of the report where it states that the Ty Darren site will be used for affordable housing, and he queried if this was correct as he understood that this had been earmarked for sheltered accommodation. Mr Lucas confirmed that he would clarify the latest position around this site with Housing colleagues on the latest position around this site and update the Masterplan if needed.

A Member asked if the new arrangements for town centre management groups would be in place in readiness for this consultation. The Scrutiny Committee were advised that a town centre stakeholder event could be organised to coincide with the consultation in the area.

The Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the minor amendments that had already been identified by consultees in respect of Wyllie, Babel Chapel and the community gardens in Waunfawr and were assured that these amendments to the Masterplan would be included in advance of its consideration by Cabinet.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) The Draft Newbridge to Risca Masterplan be endorsed to allow public consultation to take place;
- (ii) The Draft Masterplan be the subject of a six-week public consultation commencing on 12th January 2022 until 23rd February 2022.

8. ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT 2021/22 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (PERIOD 5)

The Cabinet Member for Performance, Economy and Enterprise introduced the report, which informed Members of projected revenue expenditure for the Economy and Environment Directorate for the 2021/22 financial year. The report summarised the most recent budget monitoring projections for 2021/2022 based on the latest available financial information and more detailed budget monitoring figures for each of the Service Areas within the Economy and Environment Directorate were set out in the report appendices.

Members were requested to note the contents of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages in respect of the Regeneration and Planning Division which fall under the remit of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. Members were asked to note that the remaining service areas set out in the report (Infrastructure, Public Protection and Community and Leisure) fall under the remit of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and a Member referred to underspends across staffing levels and the extreme pressures being placed on some departments as a result of staff shortages. He asked whether a report providing further information on vacant posts could be brought to a future meeting of Policy and Resources or the Joint Scrutiny

Committee in order to explain whether these posts are being kept open to manage budgets or whether there is a recruitment problem.

Mrs Rhian Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning) gave assurances that posts are not being kept vacant across her service area, and explained that there is often a lag between staff leaving and posts being filled, which will appear in the projections as a staffing underspend. Members were advised that the catering and hospitality field is the only service area within Regeneration and Planning where there are recruitment difficulties, and that the service has a full complement of staff save for those posts that are currently being advertised where staff have left that post. The Member sought clarification on the reasons for posts across various departments not being filled or retained, and whether departments heads are aware of these reasons and what they are doing to address this issue. Another Member observed that the difficulties around recruitment are a national issue and are not unique to Caerphilly Council.

In response, Mark S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment) explained that overall, there are some pressing recruitment and retention issues in various parts of the Authority, particularly around specialist posts in property, engineering, traffic management, IT and project management. The situation is not helped by the attractive pay and conditions available across the private sector which means that professionals with these specialist skills can pick and choose where to work in the market. Members were advised that the Corporate Management Team are looking at a piece of work to address these issues at a corporate level, as it has been acknowledged that without some of these key posts in place, the Council will be unable to deliver key projects. However it was emphasised that this situation is not unique to Caerphilly and is a widespread issue across the whole of Wales.

The Member reiterated a need for a report to provide a better understanding of how far-ranging these issues are and how these recruitment problems are affecting frontline services. He referred to the pressure placed on individual Officers as a result of staff shortages in their department and the impact on their wellbeing. Another Member suggested that a presentation to the Joint Scrutiny Committee on this issue would be advantageous. Mr Williams confirmed that he is aware of these particular cases and outlined the recruitment processes that have been undertaken to fill the vacancies and help support these staff. However it has been difficult to fill one key management post in Property Services and the Authority have now filled the post via an agency employee as a short-term measure. Mr Williams confirmed that he would discuss the Member's concerns with the Corporate Management Team following the meeting.

A Member also referred to the filling of vacant posts across the Planning department. Mrs Kyte confirmed that 8 recent appointments had been successfully made and that the new staff were looking forward to taking up their new roles and working with Members in due course.

Following consideration of the report, the Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages in respect of the Regeneration and Planning Division.

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2022.

CHAIR