



CORPORATE AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 7TH NOVEMBER 2023

**SUBJECT: REVISED TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT MODEL –
UPDATE REPORT**

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Scrutiny Committee on the pilot of the Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings which were originally approved for a 12-month trial, and to ask Members to recommend to Cabinet to adopt this new Town Centre Management Model on a permanent basis and formally disband the old Town Centre Management Groups. The revised format has been proposed to encourage greater stakeholder participation and communication, especially that of businesses.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The existing Town Centre Management Groups (TCMGs) were introduced from 1996. Their original purpose, to focus on practical issues, still remains, but over the past few years it has been recognised that there has not been an appropriate level of business representation and engagement via the TCMGs and the timing of these meetings were not conducive to attracting business involvement. Town centres are evolving, and the way in which local authorities manage them needs to become more effective to fulfil town centre regeneration / support objectives.
- 2.2 Having regard to available resources and the need to support post-Covid economic recovery across our town centres, Cabinet approved a proposal to trial an alternative model of the TCMGs on 10th November 2021. This recommendation was also unanimously agreed by scrutiny before the commencement in Jan 22.
- 2.3 This trial was originally approved for a period of 12 months to November 2022, but in view of staffing changes within the Town Centre Management Team and the time needed to implement the new model and assess its effectiveness in view of post-Covid retail recovery, the trial was extended under delegated powers for a further 12 months.
- 2.4 Three rounds of Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings (two in Caerphilly) under the

new format have been held over the last 18 months. Meetings are now held at venues within each town centre to make attendance more convenient and at a time more desirable for businesses. Often the venues are private businesses not only to support town centre businesses but to encourage the business community to come together and support one another.

- 2.5 The new model of meetings has been positively received by town centre stakeholders and there has been a noticeable increase in business attendance and engagement at these meetings since the pilot was implemented.
- 2.6 The Stakeholder Meetings form part of the new Town Centre Management Model, which incorporates a Town Centre Audit, an audit report (quarterly) and communication with stakeholders, Officers and Elected Members.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider the reported outcome of the trial and as a consequence recommend to Cabinet to:
 - 3.1.1 Approve the adoption of the new Town Centre Stakeholder meetings as part of the new Town Centre Management Model.
 - 3.1.2 Agree to formally disband the old Town Centre Management Groups.
 - 3.1.3 Approve the new Terms of Reference for the Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings as set out in **Appendix 1** of this report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The new format of Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings will encourage greater attendance and engagement of businesses and other town centre stakeholders.
- 4.2 The new format has made stakeholder engagement more efficient, transparent, and effective.

5. THE REPORT

Background

- 5.1 Following local government reorganisation in 1996, the Council resolved to establish a Caerphilly TCMG. This was quickly followed by similar groups in Bargoed, Blackwood, Ystrad Mynach and Risca. The full background relating to the formation of these groups is included in the report submitted to Cabinet on 10th November 2021.
- 5.2 Originally, it was agreed that the TCMGs would act as a consultative forum for proposals affecting the town centre, with a particular focus on practical issues. In the early 2000s, the primary purpose of the TCMGs was redefined as a consultative forum for all stakeholders with an interest in the economic, physical, and social well-being of the town centres.

- 5.3 The engagement of retail businesses and other stakeholders within the TCMGs has been mixed. Chambers of Trade in our principal town centres are currently inactive, and in their prior format, only constituted groups were invited to attend and participate. This led to a noticeable lack of business representation at these meetings.

Proposed new Business Engagement Model

- 5.4 Given the success of business events held with other partners as a suitable forum for information-sharing and consultation with business, it was considered that this format should be replicated for business partners and other stakeholders in our town centres as an alternative to the Town Centre Management Groups model. A report was presented to Cabinet on 10th November 2021 (which was approved), for an alternative operating model of town centre engagement to be trialled and for the TCMG meetings to be suspended during the trial/pilot period. Terms of Reference for the pilot were also approved by Cabinet, including a more informal meeting structure to encourage participation from businesses in wide group discussions or via conversations in the post-meeting networking. Speakers and other organisations would be invited to engage in the meeting and respond to queries.
- 5.5 This trial was originally approved for a period of 12 months to November 2022, but in view of staffing changes within the Town Centre Management Team and the time needed to implement the new model and assess its effectiveness in view of post-Covid retail recovery, the trial was extended under delegated powers for a further 12 months.

Town Centre Support

- 5.6 The Principal Officer for Town Centres and Business Support left post in January 2022, and their replacement was appointed in late Summer 2022. Two Town Centre Support Officers were also appointed at the end of the calendar year 2022.
- 5.7 The new Town Centre Team recognise business and stakeholder engagement as a priority and have worked extensively with town centre businesses to obtain up-to-date contact. A tremendous amount of engagement has been carried out, including face to face visits, telephone calls and follow up emails. A new town centre database, a working document that is constantly updated by having the presence and support of the town centre team, now gives us the ability to effectively communicate, and keep abreast of what is happening in our Principal Towns,
- 5.8 In line with the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns the Regeneration Service is developing a series of Place Making plans for a number of our town centres, based on the Approved and Emerging Master Plans to regenerate these town centres. Place-making is the process used to shape our public spaces and buildings to improve a community's cultural, economic, social and environmental situation with community-based participation a critical part of the process. The Town Centre Support team therefore has a key role in the development of Place Making Plans by utilising the new town centre management model proposed to engage with the business and local community to aid the place making plan process.

New Town Centre Management Model

- 5.9 As part of the alternative operating model of town centre engagement agreed by Cabinet, a new Town Centre Management Model was implemented in late 2022. A

flowchart detailing the process is set out at **Appendix 2** of this report.

- 5.10 The new process aims to encourage greater participation of businesses and other stakeholders, to improve dialogue, to create more of a collaborative way of working, to assist in the development of the towns and to feedback ideas and suggestions that could be implemented. A Town Centre Audit is undertaken in each principal town centre twice a year and monthly meetings are held with Officers and the Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change to progress actions against the audit items. The audit is a working document whereby anything reported either via email or face to face is updated and discussed in the monthly meeting enabling the entire process to be more efficient and reactive as well as proactive.

Briefing notes summarising the progress made against the town centre audits are also circulated to Elected Members and town/community councillors on a quarterly basis.

- 5.11 A survey on the new Town Centre Management Model process was conducted in July 2023. Responses were received from Elected Members, town/community councillors and CCBC Officers and a summary of the responses is set out at **Appendix 3** of this report.
- 5.12 In conjunction with the town centre audit process, a series of business networking/stakeholder meetings were arranged, which commenced in early 2022. A summary of the meetings and the feedback received to date are set out in the following sections.

Business Networking Events – Spring/Summer 2022 – Round 1

- 5.13 Invitations for the first round of meetings (initially referred to as Business Networking Events) were sent to existing members of the TCMGs as well as the wider town centre business community (within the relevant town centre boundary as identified in the Local Development Plan). All town centre businesses were invited wherever contact details were held, although it should be recognised due to the Covid-19 pandemic and business movement during that time, many of the contacts had become outdated. The meetings were also advertised on the Council's website and social media channels. Administrative support for these meetings was provided by the wider Business Enterprise Renewal Team (BERT) due to the vacancies within the Town Centre Management Team at that time.
- 5.14 The initial round of meetings were held in Spring/Summer 2022 and comprised a mixture of morning and evening evenings. It should be noted that attendance for these meetings was low (Appendix 4).

Business Networking Events – Autumn 2022 – Round 2

- 5.15 The second round of meetings was arranged for Autumn 2022 (Appendix 4). Invitations were again sent to existing members of the TCMGs as well as the wider town centre business community (wherever contact details were held). The meetings were also advertised on the Council's website and social media channels.
- 5.16 The meeting agenda followed the same format across all five town centres. Attendees received a presentation from Adrian Emmett (a community-minded local entrepreneur based in Treorchy) who outlined the collaborative work undertaken to make Treorchy a thriving town centre, culminating in them winning "High Street of the

Year” in 2020, with an emphasis on business and community engagement and a sense of ownership across the town, and how this model of good practice could be applied to Caerphilly County Borough’s principal town centres. Attendees also received updates from the BERT team and were introduced to the new Town Centre Management Team.

- 5.17 Attendance at the round two events was much better. There was an average of around twenty participants per meeting, which allowed productive discussions to take place. It was recognised at these fora that business attendance levels could be improved further, and it was anticipated that with the introduction of the Town Centre Team, this would be naturally progressed.

Survey - Business Networking Events - 2022

- 5.18 A survey covering both the Spring/Summer and Autumn 2022 Business Networking events was sent out to attendees in January 2023. Unfortunately, the response rate was low on this occasion, with only twenty surveys completed across the 5 towns, despite the best efforts of Officers to obtain further responses. A summary of the responses received is included at Appendix 4 of this report.
- 5.19 The responses varied across each town centre and were largely dependent on the discussions held at each individual meeting.

Question

- *“The purpose of the event was to engage with local businesses in our Town Centres. To what extent do you feel the event achieved its purpose?”*

Table 1 – Responses to Question on Engagement

Town	Fully	Partially	Not at all
Bargoed	-	83%	17%
Blackwood	40%	40%	20%
Ystrad Mynach	-	50%	50%
Caerphilly	25%	75%	-
Risca	100%	-	-

It was evident from the responses that further work needed to be done in this area.

- 5.20 Many respondents referenced the low attendance levels at the event and expressed a need to improve awareness of these events amongst local businesses. The full Town Centre Team were not in post until December 22 and therefore did not have the opportunity to maximise business engagement. The responses around the purpose and content of the event were generally positive, with the guest speaker from Treorchy being particularly well-received. Several responses referenced the overall tone of the meeting, with some businesses feeling that there was too much negativity expressed and there was a lack of constructive ideas and solutions during the ensuing discussions.

One comment made was *‘enjoyed the meeting in regards to VZTA, not to get caught up in Caerphilly politics and be super focused on moving forward’*.(Caerphilly)

Another comment from a Town Cllr was *'less input from Cllrs and more input from businesses'*.(Blackwood)

Officers recognise this feedback and are working on meeting formats that will reduce negativity and encourage greater business participation.

- 5.21 The feedback was generally positive regarding the engagement activity carried out to date and was appreciative of the expertise of the BERT team whilst also recognising the collective experience of businesses, traders and residents and the need to work collaboratively.

Survey – Future Meetings and Events – February 2023

- 5.22 After reflecting upon the feedback results of the meetings in 2022, a follow-up survey was sent to businesses and other stakeholders in February 2023 to gauge what topics would be of interest for future meetings, what days and times would be preferred and questions on town centre events.
- 5.23 46 responses were received, with the main topics of interest being town centre developments, town centre events, funding/grants, and community safety. There was a high level of interest in digital development, training opportunities, business-to-business networking, and advertisement/promotion.
- 5.24 There was no discernible preference on which day would be most suited for stakeholder meetings. The majority of respondents favoured a meeting time after 6pm (31%), although 25% did state between 3pm-6pm as a preference.

Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings – Spring 2023 – Round 3

- 5.25 With the above feedback in mind, a third round of meetings was arranged for Spring 2023 (Appendix 5). The meetings were re-named “Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings”, to better reflect the collaborative nature of these meetings.
- 5.26 Invitations including the agenda were sent to all businesses and other stakeholders where contact details were held. Reminder emails were sent closer to the time, and the Town Centre team also visited retailers to remind them of the meetings and to encourage attendance.
- 5.27 The meeting agenda followed the same format across all five town centres. Attendees received a presentation from a guest speaker, updates from the CCBC Business Team, Regeneration Team, Community Safety Team, and an update on town centre events. The Caerphilly and Bargoed stakeholder meetings also heard from two local business owners who spoke passionately about the need for all stakeholders to work collaboratively, to take ownership and to have pride in their towns and encouraged the formation of Business Community Groups.
- 5.28 There was a noticeable increase in attendance at some of the 2023 meetings as illustrated in the table below:

Table 2 - Comparison of Business Attendance at Meetings:

Town	Spring/Summer 2022	Autumn 2022	Spring 2023
Bargoed	4	1*	12
Blackwood	7	5	6
Ystrad Mynach	6	4	8
Caerphilly	n/a	5	14
Risca	1	2	2

*1 town centre business but 6 stakeholders from the wider business community also in attendance.

Survey – Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings – Spring 2023

- 5.29 A survey was sent out to attendees following the Spring 2023 stakeholder meetings. The survey response rate was more favourable on this occasion, with forty-four surveys completed across the 5 towns. A summary of the responses received is included at Appendix 5 of this report.
- 5.30 Business attendance continued to be a key theme; respondents expressed a need to improve awareness of these events to maximise participation from local businesses. Overall, respondents welcomed the presentation from the guest speaker, although some attendees felt they did not have the opportunity to discuss other agenda items in detail or raise town centre issues which they felt to be important, due to time constraints. Some suggested that workshop or focus group sessions would be beneficial to future meetings.
- 5.31 Responses around the purpose and content of the event were generally positive. Some participants expressed a view that the negative comments were not conducive to the meeting and became political in nature. Respondents commented upon the benefits of bringing businesses together in this new meeting format.
- 5.32 The results of this survey suggest that the increased level of engagement with businesses is beginning to have a positive impact on these meetings, a main indicator being in response to the question:
- *“The purpose of the meeting was to engage with local businesses in our Town Centres on matters of interest to them. To what extent do you feel the meeting achieved its purpose?”*
- 5.33 The majority of respondents selected “Fully” or “Partially, compared to the majority selecting “Partially” or “Not at all” in 2022. See table below.

Table 3 - Feedback on Meeting Achieving its Purpose

2022 Meetings				2023 Meetings			
Town	Fully	Partially	Not at all	Town	Fully	Partially	Not at all
Bargoed	-	83%	17%	Bargoed	79%	21%	-
Blackwood	40%	40%	20%	Blackwood	73%	27%	-
Ystrad Mynach	-	50%	50%	Ystrad Mynach	50%	50%	-
Caerphilly	25%	75%	-	Caerphilly	71%	29%	-
Risca	100%	-	-	Risca	50%	50%	-

- 5.34 The responses regarding the meeting arrangements were also noticeably more positive compared to the 2022 survey. The majority of respondents now appear to be very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the meeting overall:

Table 4 – Overall Satisfaction Levels with Meetings

2022 Meetings

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Bargoed	-	66%	17%	17%	-
Blackwood	40%	20%	20%	20%	-
Ystrad Mynach	-	33%	17%	17%	33%
Caerphilly	25%	75%	-	-	-
Risca	-	100%	-	-	-

2023 Meetings

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Bargoed	50%	43%	-	-	7%
Blackwood	45%	45%	-	10%	-
Ystrad Mynach	40%	40%	10%	10%	-
Caerphilly	71%	29%	-	-	-
Risca	100%	-	-	-	-

It is clear that the way in which we have adapted our approach has seen rising satisfaction levels within the business community. (Table 4)

- 5.35 In response to the question “*How did you hear about the meeting?*”, a high percentage of respondents referenced the Town Centre Team by name, suggesting they were made aware of these meetings through face-to-face engagement which demonstrates the positive impact the town centre team is having.

Conclusion

- 5.36 The business community is at the heart of our town centres and the proposed Town Centre Model facilitates more business involvement and collaboration between all Officers and stakeholders.
- 5.37 From the engagement with stakeholders and the survey responses, the revised format is encouraging greater business and stakeholder involvement, compared to the old style of Town Centre Management Groups.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 It is assumed based on the evidence to date that the new Town Centre Management Model encourages greater participation of all stakeholders and improves dialogue

and service demand. This creates a more collaborative way of working which will improve the sustainability of town centres.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The proposed changes to the format of the TCMG meetings will have a neutral impact on protected characteristics and people who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

The proposals will contribute to the existing delivery of the well-being objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Corporate Plan. The recommendations in this report will assist the Authority in its duties as a public body under the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015 to contribute to the following well-being goals:

- A prosperous Wales.
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; and,
- A Wales of cohesive communities.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out the sustainable development principles against which all public bodies in Wales should assess their decision-making. The aim of the legislation is to ensure the well-being of future generations through maximising the contribution public bodies make towards the well-being goals. The principle is also known as the five ways of working and the following are relevant in relation to this report:

- Long Term – Developing long-term aspirations and improvements to our town centres requires effective engagement with the town centre community.
- Prevention – Business and community concerns with town centre problems or issues can be raised quickly and effectively to prevent escalation and long-term implications.
- Integration – Private and public sector partnership is more effective through active engagement, which can be achieved through effective forums such as the Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings.
- Collaboration – The Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings are inherently collaborative groups when operating effectively.
- Involvement – The Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings aim to involve all interested parties in consultation and engagement. The new format, location and timing of the meetings is anticipated to lead to better attendance and engagement with businesses and other key stakeholders.

[Link to full Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The cost of hiring appropriate venues and any other requirements for the stakeholder meetings will be met through the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team's core

Town Centre Management budget.

- 8.2 The town centre team comprises of three officers, a Principal Town Centre Officer and two town centre support officers, these posts are funded from the core budget. The town centre Principal Officer has been in post for 12 months and the two support officers have been in post for approximately 10 months. It has been recognised, from various stakeholders and staff, that there has been an increase in productivity, communication and collaboration that has already seen benefits within our town centres. The new management model will be managed by the existing team so there will be no management costs associated with the new model.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The organisation and running of the meetings will be incorporated into the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team's work programme. Officers from other departments may be required to attend stakeholder and town centre audit meetings, but this is an ongoing commitment from the established and long-term operation of the TCMGs.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The draft report has been circulated to the consultees listed below and all comments incorporated into this version of the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Local Government Act 2000. This is a Cabinet function.

Author: Joanne Hillier-Raikes, Principal Officer – Town Centres and Business Support, raikej@caerphilly.gov.uk

Consultees: Cllr. Jamie Pritchard, Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change
Councillor G. Johnston, Chair of Corporate Services and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Councillor A. McConnell, Vice Chair of Corporate Services and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Rhian Kyte, Head of Regeneration and Planning
Allan Dallimore, Regeneration Services Manager
Paul Hudson, Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer - Equalities and Welsh Language
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Councillor Tudor Davies, Aberbargoed and Bargoed Ward Member
Councillor Dawn Ingram-Jones, Aberbargoed and Bargoed Ward Member
Councillor Dianne Price, Aberbargoed and Bargoed Ward Member
Councillor Carol Andrews – Gilfach Ward
Councillor Nigel Dix, Blackwood Ward Member
Councillor Kevin Etheridge, Blackwood Ward Member

Councillor Andrew Farina-Childs, Blackwood Ward Member
Councillor Marina Chacon-Dawson - Cefn Fforest and Pengam Ward
Councillor Teresa Heron - Cefn Fforest and Pengam Ward
Councillor Shane Williams - Cefn Fforest and Pengam Ward
Councillor Anne Broughton-Pettit, Morgan Jones Ward Member
Councillor Shayne Cook, Morgan Jones Ward Member
Councillor Colin Elsbury, St Martins Ward Member
Councillor James Fussell, St Martins Ward Member
Councillor Steve Kent, St Martins Ward Member
Councillor Christine Forehead - Van Ward
Councillor Elaine Forehead - Van Ward
Councillor Nigel George, Risca East Ward Member
Councillor Arianna Leonard, Risca East Ward Member
Councillor Philippa Leonard, Risca East Ward Member
Councillor Bob Owen, Risca West Ward Member
Councillor Ceri Wright, Risca West Ward Member
Councillor Alan Angel, Ystrad Mynach Ward Member
Councillor Martyn James, Ystrad Mynach Ward Member
Councillor Donna Cushing - Hengoed Ward
Councillor Teresa Parry - Hengoed Ward
Bargoed Town Council
Blackwood Town Council
Caerphilly Town Council
Gelligaer Community Council
Risca Town Council

Background Papers:

[Cabinet Report – Town Centre Management Groups – 10th November 2021](#)

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings – Terms of Reference
- Appendix 2 Flowchart – New Town Centre Management Model Pilot
- Appendix 3 Summary of survey responses - Town Centre Management Model Pilot
- Appendix 4 Summary of survey responses - Business Networking Meetings - 2022
- Appendix 5 Summary of survey responses - Town Centre Stakeholder Meetings - Spring 2023
- Appendix 6 Summary of responses - Consultees