

REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13TH DECEMBER 2005

SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUPS

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To review the role and terms of reference of the Town Centre Management Groups (TCMGs).

2. LINK TO STRATEGY

2.1 A key principle of the Regeneration Programme is to re-establish town centres as foci of economic activity. The Town Centre Management Groups should play a major consultative role in relation to the development of the main town centres.

3. THE REPORT

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The WPI Improvement Plan 2004-05 Internal Regeneration Review had the following recommendation:

“The terms of reference of the TCMGs be reviewed and in conjunction with this review to consider whether it would still be appropriate to establish community partnerships for the areas of Caerphilly and Blackwood central areas. Bargoed has both a TCMG and a community partnership.”

3.1.2 This recommendation arose from a consideration of the roll out of community partnerships to achieve comprehensive coverage of the County Borough. It was questioned whether community partnerships were necessary in Caerphilly and Blackwood where there are existing TCMGs. However, in Bargoed there is both a TCMG and a partnership. Each has been established for a different purpose and by trying to use the TCMG as a dual purpose body risks diluting the purpose of both, although clearly there will be some overlaps on some issues. As the model works satisfactorily in Bargoed it is felt that this is the best way forward but with a clarification of the role and purpose of the TCMGs.

3.2 Historical Development

3.2.1 The existing TCMGs have evolved historically from the practice in the former Rhymney Valley District Council which operated Town Centre Management Committees for Caerphilly and Bargoed town centres.

3.2.2 After Local Government Reorganisation in 1996, a report was presented to Caerphilly County Borough Council advocating that the Caerphilly Town Centre Management Committee be continued in a revised form.

3.2.3 The report advocated that a Caerphilly Town Centre Management Group would act as a

sounding board for proposals affecting the town centre. There was a particular focus on the maintenance of the town centre addressing practical issues such as:

- Traffic orders, street lighting issues
- Car parking
- Collection of refuse
- Vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- Progress with the Caerphilly Development Strategy

3.2.4 The group was to comprise representatives of:

- Caerphilly County Borough Council (including the Chairman/Vice Chairman) representatives are local Ward Members
- Police
- Chamber of Trade
- Community Council
- CCBC officers
- Boots/Castle Court Shopping Centre
- Civic Society

3.2.5 The Council resolved to establish a Caerphilly Town Centre Management Group and this was quickly followed by similar groups in Bargoed and Blackwood. The remit of all three groups was:

“The Town Centre Management Group will serve as a sounding board for opinions and suggestions regarding the town centre, and where financial or policy decisions have to be made these will be referred back to the Council.”

3.3 **Current Position**

3.3.1 There have been a number of significant developments that have an effect on the TCMGs.

3.3.2 In 2004 the Community Strategy was published. This is a high level strategy covering a 15 year period, developed in partnership over 4 years with public, private and voluntary organisations and local communities. The vision covers four themes of regeneration; education for life; health, social care and well being; and the living environment.

3.3.3 A Regeneration Programme, the Smart Alternative, has been adopted by the Council and endorsed by the Regeneration Strategic Partnership. Town Centres as a focus for economic activity is a key principle, and one of the Action Plan priorities was the appointment of a Town Centre Development Manager.

3.3.4 Arising from the Community Strategy was the need to identify priorities for action and this is being tackled through beacon projects. One such project relates to town and village centres. One of the aims of this beacon is to involve communities in the regeneration of their towns and villages.

3.3.5 The introduction by the Welsh Assembly Government of the Communities First Programme has led to the establishment of community partnerships. These have been integrated with the community planning process, and partnerships have been developed in non CF areas.

3.3.6 Vital to the success of all town centres is that they are well maintained and project a positive image. Frequent areas of concern are litter, graffiti, fly posting, broken paving, defective street lamps, anti-social behaviour, traffic problems, taxis, etc. These issues have tended to dominate the agendas of the TCMGs.

3.3.7 Following the appointment of the Town Centre Development Manager, a Town Centre

Improvement Group was established chaired by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and comprising the Chairs of the three TCMGs, senior officers and the police. The primary role of the group is to look at issues that affect the appearance and performance of the town centres and to ensure a more coordinated and responsive approach across the Council. The group meets on a regular basis and a rolling environmental audit is presented detailing how many issues have been actioned and how many are still outstanding.

3.4 Future Role

- 3.4.1 Town centre management is concerned with the effective coordination of action related to the improvement of facilities, environment and safety. The key to success is a partnership between the local authority, retail businesses, other private sector organisations, and others with an interest in the town centres.
- 3.4.2 When the TCMGs were first established there was an underlying assumption of partnership operation. However, ongoing engagement of retail businesses with the TCMGs has been mixed. The local Chambers of Trade in Blackwood and Caerphilly have been poorly supported. Over time individuals or specific interest groups have sought to use the TCMGs to pursue their own agendas or the TCMGs have tended to get bogged down with maintenance issues.
- 3.4.3 With the appointment of the Town Centre Development Manager there is now a regular dialogue with retailers in all three town centres. This has been strengthened in recent months by the establishment of the Caerphilly Independent Traders Partnership and there is the possibility of a Blackwood Traders Group being formed. The establishment of the Town Centre Improvement Group now provides a separate mechanism to ensure that maintenance issues are regularly progressed.
- 3.4.4 It is considered that the TCMGs need to refocus their role to concentrate on wider development issues and the promotion of the respective town centres. The primary purpose of the TCMGs will be redefined as a consultative forum for all stakeholders with an interest in the economic physical and social well being of the town centres.
- 3.4.5 A revised terms of reference is appended to the report.
- 3.4.6 Whilst residents views may still be represented on the TCMGs the agenda should have an economic focus in line with the key principle of the Regeneration Programme. In due course community partnerships may be extended to provide coverage to Blackwood and Caerphilly town centres and these will be a more appropriate mechanism to pursue residents issues. The Corporate Improvement Plan 2005-08 identifies the need to complete geographic coverage of the County Borough subject to the capacity issues to support non CF partnerships being addressed.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Although the TCMGs were not established as executive bodies, it has been the practice to allocate the Area Forums budgets for Blackwood and Caerphilly town centres due to the absence of community partnerships in these areas. In 2005-06 the allocation to Blackwood is £3,370 and to Caerphilly is £7,208. The TCMGs debate and agree the proposed use of the Area Forum budget allocation. Proposals from the TCMGs are subject to agreement with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration. In Bargoed, the Area Forum allocation goes to the community partnership not the TCMG (Bargoed allocation £4,899). Again, proposals are subject to the approval of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration.
- 4.2 In the future if community partnerships are established for Blackwood and Caerphilly, the Area Forum budgets will transfer to the partnerships.

4.3 Given the revised terms of reference with the emphasis on the TCMCs as consultative forums, it is not envisaged there will be executive powers over any delegated budgets. This would only remain as a short term arrangement pending the establishment of community partnerships for Blackwood and Caerphilly.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Servicing of the TCMGs will continue as at present. The Economic Development Division in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the respective Chairman of the TCMGs will be responsible for preparing the agendas. Relevant officers will be invited to attend to address specific agenda items.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 That the revised terms of reference for the TCMGs as set out in the appendix be agreed.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 To ensure that the TCMGs contribute more effectively to the objectives set out in the Regeneration Programme, The Smart Alternative.

8. STATUTORY POWER

8.1 Local Government Act 2000. This is a Council function.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 1 – Terms of Reference