



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 2ND JULY 2013 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chairman

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C.J. Cuss, R.T. Davies, N. Dix, Ms. J.G. Jones, S. Kent, M.J. Prew.

Cabinet Member(s): K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), D.V. Poole (Community and Leisure Services), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), P. Elliott (Head of Regeneration and Planning), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection), I. MacVicar (Group Manager, Operations), A. Dallimore (Team Leader Urban Renewal), M. Lloyd (Highways Operations Group Manager), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs E. Aldworth, C. Elsbury, E. Forehead, R.W. Gough, A.G. Higgs, Mrs E. Stenner and Mrs D. Price.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st May 2013 (minute nos. 1 - 12, page nos. 1 - 6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

4. CABINET REPORTS

There had been no requests for either of the Cabinet reports to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

5. VERBAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER

The Scrutiny Committee received a verbal report from Councillor D.V. Poole, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services.

Councillor Poole complimented the Sports Development Unit, the Events Team, Highways Unit and Community Safety Teams on the delivery of the Caerphilly 10k race on 23rd June. The event had been a huge success attracting over 1700 entrants from across the UK.

One hundred per cent of schools in the Caerphilly County Borough had participated in National School Sport Week. The nearest other Local Authority had only 52% of its schools involved in the activities.

Contractors are well underway at Ystrad Mynach Centre of Excellence. The project was recently boosted with the additional support of a £200,000 grant from Sport Wales. New Tredegar Leisure Centre recently opened its indoor 3G facility - the only one of its type in Wales. It is already proving to be very popular with many new users already booked in. Work at Newbridge Leisure Centre was now complete and the official opening was scheduled for 26th July. The fitness and health suites project at Risca Leisure Centre was due to be completed at the end of July.

The Authority's Waste Management Team had recently won Local Authority of the Year 2013 at The Plant and Waste Recycling Show Awards (PAWRS) for their successful waste and recycling strategy. CCBC is currently one of the leading authorities in Wales for recycling rates with 63.9% of waste being recycled and therefore diverted from landfill in 2011-12.

The Waste Strategy and Operations Section have re-located to Tir-y-berth with the move of the Strategy and Management personnel section from Pontllanfraith joining the Operations Team.

CCBC's Register Office has been recognised in a recent review by the Department of Work and Pensions as one of the best performing offices in the UK. The 'Tell us once scheme' is a voluntary service offering bereaved families the opportunity to notify a number of local and central government departments when they register a death. Nationally take up is around 64 whereas in Caerphilly 96% of clients take up the service.

Catering Services are awards finalists once again, with both meals Direct and the Catering Management Team being shortlisted in this year's UK Local Authority Catering Excellence Awards. Trading Standards will once again be providing free child car seat testing this summer. Testing days have been arranged for 18th July at Asda, Caerphilly and 9th August at Tesco, Risca.

Following the Cabinet Member's informative report, discussion ensued on the 10k race, which had taken place in Caerphilly on 23rd June. Whilst the event had been a great success, some complaints had been received from local residents and others who had been affected by the temporary road closures.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following.

6. PRESENTATION BY DRUG AND ALCOHOL YOUTH SUPPORT (DAYS) CAERPHILLY AND BLAENAU GWENT

The Scrutiny Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from Maria Evans and Anna Lewis, Drug and Alcohol Youth Support, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent. The presentation had also been presented to the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee on 21st March 2013.

CRi had been commissioned to provide a Young Persons Substance Misuse Service across both localities to support service users during the recovery journey. The aim is to provide a Young Persons Substance Misuse Service to engage service users in a continuum of service provision in order to reduce substance related harm and improve access to more rewarding lives.

The YP Service is available to all young people under the age of 18 who reside in the Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Boroughs. Young Person recovery workers offer support to those who take substances at a level where it disrupts the young persons functioning accessing group work or one to one support. The service also targets and prioritises identified at risk groups who exhibit a higher vulnerability to drug and alcohol problems.

The service provides a central information point for telephone enquiries from potential service users, those in treatment and professional and is delivered on the basis of a 'tiered' model approach. Tier 1 services offer facilities such as information and advice, screening for drug misuse and referral to specialist drugs services. Tier 2 services may be targeted to meet the needs of groups who may be more vulnerable to developing substance misuse problems. Tier 3 is drug treatment in the community with regular sessions to attend, undertaken as part of a care plan. Tier 3 services are generally provided by specialist drug workers.

The service has established links with relevant organisations in order to exchange information and form effective working partnerships. This has led to ongoing development of recovering communities within the boroughs. Regular feedback through service users, partner agencies and service providers is collated to enhance service development and delivery of both services. DAFS, Barnardo's, Peer mentoring, Social Services, GP's, community projects, supporting people, Llamau, YOS are all examples of services being accessed.

During the course of the ensuing discussion, Members were advised that the service offers training and education around substances to youth clubs and anywhere where there is a need. Funding has been secured to recruit a full time employee who will visit schools and youth clubs. Referrals can come from a number of sources and the provision of the service is modelled to the different levels of need. Guidance and support is offered to those who use the service and outreach facilities are available where required. Scoping exercises are undertaken to target specific areas.

The Chairman thanked Maria and Anna for their very informative presentation.

7. VILLAGES REGENERATION

The report informed Members of the regeneration of small towns and villages in the county borough.

Physical regeneration activity since 1996 has concentrated strategically on the main towns in the county borough, though there have also been some significant projects implemented in smaller towns and villages. A systematic long-term programme of regeneration of the smaller towns and villages is recommended, in which the physical elements could consist of basic improvements to the centres and approaches to settlements.

Initially it is proposed that settlements be classified, largely on the basis of population, into large and small villages and hamlets and a realistic range of facilities identified appropriate to each category. This would be followed by an audit of facilities, public and private, that are actually present in the various communities complemented by a simple appraisal of the scope for physical improvements in the centre of and approaches to, each settlement.

The categorisation, audit and survey information would be brought together in a report that would form the basis for funding bids for a long-term programme of village improvements in the county borough. In many cases there will be a need for just one or two key projects in a settlement but in the larger villages a Village Action Plan similar to the Town Centre Action Plans that have focussed regeneration spending in the past, may be required.

Current expenditure constraints mean that there is no dedicated Urban Renewal capital budget for either town centre or village regeneration over the next three years. However, officers will continue to liaise with colleagues in other departments and external funders to make best use of monies, which are available. Officers are also currently preparing bids for the new Vibrant and Viable Places regeneration funding available from Welsh Government. First round bids need to be with Welsh Government by 12th July 2013. The outcome of these bids will be known in September. If successful, officers will be in a position to liaise with local members on proposed schemes prior to submitting a more detailed bid.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY WARDEN DUTIES

The report responded to a Member's request for a report on the feasibility of the Community Safety Warden Team undertaking civil parking enforcement duties and having the ability to issue penalty notices for disorder or fixed penalty notices for off-road motorcycle offences.

Members were advised that making the relevant order would result in Gwent Police having no further involvement in parking contraventions. Diverting Community Safety Wardens towards civil parking enforcement would have a significant impact on their ability to maintain current service levels without considerable additional resources. Gwent Police currently employ 65 full time equivalent Community Support Officers who enforce criminal parking contraventions and have indicated that they have no intention of withdrawing from this role.

In terms of off-road motorcycling, the Community Safety Warden Service supports Gwent Police Officers in tackling the problem. This support includes joint operations where wardens assist in target areas by providing additional coverage and using the mobile CCTV vehicle where possible. The CSW's also act as "eyes and ears" in the community in detecting the ownership of off road motorcycles so that intelligence can be passed to Gwent Police.

The local authority's Community Safety Wardens are accredited under Schedule 5 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to conduct certain activities in legislation enforced by Police Officers e.g. confiscation of alcohol, confiscation of tobacco from under 18s, the issue of fixed penalty notices for litter and dog fouling, and control of traffic. The list of legislation does not include Section 59 of the same Act. The legislation does not allow accredited persons to gain these powers and there is no legislative pathway to allow Section 59 powers to be conferred on accredited persons. Consequently Community Safety Wardens can only assist Gwent Police Officers in tackling off-road motorcycles.

During the course of the debate Members expressed concerns in relation to the parking contraventions within their wards and the problems and damage caused by off road motorcycling.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

9. PRESENTATION - RESTRUCTURING OF COMMUNITIES FIRST PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Committee received a presentation and report from the Community Regeneration Manager on the changes to the Communities First Programme and associated staff structure.

The Communities First programme was introduced in 2001 with the aim of “raising the capacity of disadvantaged groups, people and organisations in the most deprived communities to develop activities and projects of communal benefit and to harness mainstream funding to deliver economic and social regeneration”.

A consultation on the future direction of the programme commenced on the 5th July 2011 and ended on 26th Sept 2011. The Welsh Government’s vision being that Communities First would become a community focused programme to support the Welsh Government’s anti-poverty agenda. The new programme aims to contribute, alongside other programmes, to narrowing the education/skills, economic and health gaps between our most deprived and more affluent areas.

The key features in the proposals were fewer, larger CF areas (clusters); Jointly determined geographical boundaries; Local area delivery teams for each cluster; a reduced number of grant recipient bodies with standard central teams (the minimum practicable). The focus of the programme was replaced by three strategic outcomes i.e. Prosperous Communities (Economy); Learning Communities (Education and Skills) and Healthier Communities (Health).

The programme will do this by supporting those individuals, families and groups of people who have the poorest education/skills, economic and health outcomes especially in places where deprivation is most concentrated. Increasing individuals’ life skills, self esteem and self reliance, including their financial capability and supporting and strengthening the local activities, which do most to tackle poverty and deprivation; with community organisations and communities themselves as key partners.

The original staff structure in Caerphilly was based on an area, cross partner team of officers with particular specialities. And it was, in part, the Caerphilly model that informed the future direction of the programme across Wales. As such significant changes were not necessary to ensure the needs of the new programme are met. The staff resource, however, did need to be aligned to the new strategic objectives of the revised programme.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the issues raised within the report and presentation and further information was sought on the benefits that Community First areas might expect. The Community Regeneration Manager explained that whilst there isn't a large amount of funding available the programme aims to address social and economic needs in the community. From a point of view of project delivery, officers work with individuals and partnership boards to identify their needs.

The new programme commenced on 1st April 2013 and was due for review in 2014.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

10. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS - THEATRE AND ART SERVICES (BLACKWOOD MINERS INSTITUTE)

Members' views were sought on a proposed new staff structure at Blackwood Miners' Institute (BMI) to support current operational needs in the newly refurbished building.

The report follows an internal audit of the BMI in the summer/autumn of 2012 and a major refurbishment of the building, which is well underway. The proposed new staff structure offers service efficiencies, budget savings and a structure in keeping with the arrangements in the refurbished building. With the exception of the possible redeployment of the caretaking staff the structure should ensure the continued employment of existing staff. Posts will be ring fenced to BMI staff only and recruitment of newly created posts will be ring-fenced to existing staff within the service.

Until now the BMI has employed one full-time and one part-time caretaker. However, since April 2012 the responsibility for reactive and planned maintenance has transferred to Facilities Management. Thus there is no longer a requirement for these roles and it is proposed to delete the two posts from the establishment. The two caretakers will be offered redeployment within the Council.

In the new structure it is intended to replace the current casual arrangements with two permanent part-time posts of Duty Managers. These posts would cover evening and weekend duties as required. The two new permanent posts will be ring-fenced to the four staff who currently perform the duties on a casual basis. This includes the two part-time cooks who in the past had dual roles. The two new salaries will be covered from the salaries of the part-time cooks posts, which will be deleted from the structure.

Informal meetings had been held with the GMB Trade Union. The GMB wished to express concern for the two affected caretakers although they were content with the process being pursued. Unison had also been consulted and expressed a wish for the new structure to be considered by scrutiny.

Detailed consideration was given to the report and concerns were expressed in terms of the potential for two redundancies and the estimated additional costs of reorganising Duty Manager responsibilities. Members were advised that discussions were ongoing with the two employees concerned and officers were hopeful that alternative employment could be found. The estimated additional costs of reorganising the Duty Manager responsibilities would be met by the deletion of the part-time cook posts.

The Scrutiny Committee requested that the matter be deferred for further information, pending formal consultation with the trade unions and staff involved.

11. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

The following request was received: -

1. Councillor S. Kent asked whether consideration could be given to extending the use of smart cards within the county borough, for example to pay for car parking charges. The Acting Deputy Chief Executive advised that officers are currently looking at this and that a presentation would be brought to a future meeting.

12. ITEM FOR INFORMATION BROUGHT FORWARD FOR DISCUSSION

A request had been made for agenda item 9 (1) Apportionment of Highway Maintenance Budget 2013/14 to be brought forward for discussion.

13. APPORTIONMENT OF HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE BUDGET 2013/14

The Highways Operations Group Manager highlighted the key issues within the report, which provided details of the proposed apportionment of the highway maintenance budget for 2013/14. Members were advised that the figure in paragraph 2.1 should read £8,752,625 and that the street lighting budget allocation included in the figure is £2,170,000, which is inclusive of £1,480,000 energy costs.

Within the revenue allocation there is approximately £1.9m for carriageway surface treatments. There has also been a capital allocation of £500,000 to undertake carriageway resurfacing works. This capital money, when added to the revenue apportionment and the LGBI funding of £1.2m will provide over £3.6M carriageway surface treatments to be undertaken during 2013/2014.

The highway asset is currently valued at almost £2 billion. Using simple comparatives it is evident that a maintenance budget of £7,622,625 (excludes energy costs of £1,480,000) will only allow assets to be renewed approximately every 260 years, well in excess of assets intended lifespan. It is therefore essential that the current strategy is developed to try and preserve the life of the Authority's existing assets. The proposed budget apportionment is detailed in appendix 1 to the report.

A new budget line for £100,000 in relation to Tips Maintenance has been added to the budget apportionment. When significant items of work have been previously identified generally Welsh Government have assisted with funding. Members expressed concern that recent indications are that this funding will no longer be available in the future.

In terms of highway maintenance Members were advised that alternative preservation techniques such as surface dressing, micro asphaltting and slurry sealing will need to be continued in 2013/14 along with consideration of investment in a velocity patching vehicle. These techniques have become more advanced and innovative over recent years and are being widely adopted by authorities for the value for money obtained in preserving the life of the highway network.

In response to concern raised about substandard re-surfacing of sections of the highway that have been excavated by utility companies, Members were advised that the Highway Authority has now placed an embargo of two years to prevent any further excavation of that part of the carriageway by utility companies (unless it is deemed an emergency). In addition, the Highway Authority can now check that any necessary re-surfacing of the public highway that is undertaken by a utility company is up to standard by the introduction of an ad hoc coring programme.

In terms of questions raised in respect of the potential to reduce street lighting costs, officers have trialled various options and were progressing trials using SALEX funding for a dimmer solution that can be controlled from the office. Changes would appear minimal to the naked eye but would provide energy efficiency savings.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

14. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

The following reports were received and noted without discussion:

1. Revenue Budget 2013/2014 - Environment Directorate.
2. Consultation Process within Bereavement Services.
3. Summary of Member Attendance - Quarter 4 - 1st January - 8th May 2013.
4. The Implications of the Flood Risk Regulations 2009 and Flood and Water Management Act 2010 - Updated Flood Maps for Surface Water.

5. Forward Work Programme.
6. Annual Report on the Consumer Advice Service Provided by Trading Standards.
7. Public Protection Enforcement 2012/13.
8. Registration Service Annual Report 2012/13.
9. Trading Standards Enforcement of Age Restricted Products Legislation 2012/13.

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 17th September 2013, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN