



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY 2014 AT 5.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair
Councillor Mrs E.M. Aldworth - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, R.T. Davies, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, Mrs E. Forehead, R.W. Gough, Ms J.G. Jones, M.J. Prew, Mrs D. Price, Mrs E. Stenner.

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), P. Elliott (Head of Regeneration and Planning), T. Shaw (Head of Engineering Services), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), M. Lloyd (Highway Operations Group Manager), D. Phenis (Sport and Leisure Services Manager), R. Kyte (Team Leader Strategic and Development Planning), T. Stephens (Development Control Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.J. Cuss, A.G. Higgs and S. Kent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES - 10TH DECEMBER 2013 AND 20TH JANUARY 2014

RESOLVED that the following minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 10th December 2013 (minute nos. 1 – 11, on page nos. 1 – 6) and Special Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 20th January 2014 (minute nos. 1 – 4, on page nos. 1 – 8).

4. MATTERS ARISING – LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT 2014/15 – ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Sandra Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, provided an update regarding the Budget Proposals 2014/2015 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2017. An ongoing consultation process had resulted in some of the initial proposed savings being withdrawn at the request of Members. A report containing a revised list of savings proposals was approved at a special meeting of Cabinet on 29th January 2014, and the report will now go through a further period of consultation prior to presentation to Council on Wednesday 26th February 2014.

Members referred to the Public Convenience Grant Scheme and it was advised that a list of available conveniences was available on the Council's website.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their contribution to the consultation process and Members also extended their appreciation to all staff involved in the process for their efforts.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

6. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

7. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

Councillor D.V. Poole, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, referred to the recent period of heavy rainfall, which had impacted on sports pitches throughout the Authority and led to a number of cancelled fixtures. There had also been an increase in damaged and fallen trees as a result of the poor weather.

Members were informed that the Ystrad Mynach Centre of Sporting Excellence is nearing completion, with the new tenants confirmed as Newport Gwent Dragons and WRU age grade staff. The Cabinet Member referred to the recent film premiere and promotion of "The Good Drug Dealer" which was developed through a partnership between Caerphilly Council, Blaenau Gwent Council and Gwent Police. The Big Spring Clean campaign is due to launch next month, which aims to improve the appearance of open spaces within the borough.

Members queried whether the new sports facility would be limited to rugby and football activities and the Cabinet Member confirmed that the authority has an excellent network of other facilities to assist in its comprehensive sports development programme. Members were pleased to note the release of "The Good Drug Dealer" and felt that it was a useful educational tool in raising awareness of the varying types of drugs available. Members also relayed feedback from the Youth Forum regarding the film.

Councillor K. James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development, advised Members that the successor to the Convergence programme has been delayed but that the Welsh Government is still confident for the new programme to begin in late spring/early summer. A Welsh Government consultation on the new Rural Development Programme was announced on 13th February 2013 and is due to commence in 2015. The Cabinet Member announced that the Urban Renewal Team had recently secured an additional £3.2 million in Welsh Government EU funding to continue the regeneration works in Bargoed and Newbridge Town Centre. Developments are continuing regarding the Nant Llesg surface mine planning application, and tree felling has commenced at Parc Cwm Darran due to the presence of larch disease.

Members asked whether the EU grant funding could be distributed to other town centres and it was confirmed that this funding was allocated to specific towns and could not be transferred. The availability of funding to assist in the renovation of shop fascias was queried, and it was confirmed that this could possibly be obtained via a Business Development Grant.

Councillor T.J. Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering, also made reference to the recent period of wet weather and praised the reactive work of the Authority in minimising possible flooding. Members were advised that the A469 New Tredegar to Pontlottyn was currently closed owing to a burst water main, and that the closure would remain in place until the road was deemed safe by the Authority.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Road Safety Team had recently delivered a presentation on seatbelt safety to all Year 6 pupils in the county borough, as part of the Crucial Crew event taking place over a 3 week period in Llancaiach Fawr. This event brought together 11 agencies with an interest in child safety, including Gwent Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, the Food Standards Agency and British Red Cross.

With regard to the new Energlyn train station, Members were informed that it opened on 16th December 2013 and is now fully operational. The park and ride service at Pengam train station remains well used and improvement works are due to commence at Rhymney and Ystrad Mynach train stations in the next few weeks.

Members referenced a number of recent incidents caused as a result of the poor weather and wished to place on their record their appreciation to the Council's Highways team in particular for their hard work during this period.

Members queried the future of the South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA) and it was confirmed by the Cabinet Member that this organisation would be disbanded in the coming months. Concerns were raised that this would affect future transport network planning within the area. The Cabinet Member confirmed that a replacement organisation was due to be established shortly, with the intention that the collaborative work of local authorities be continued. It was also confirmed that a report would be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee in the near future regarding this issue.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. POSITIVE PLANNING – PROPOSALS TO REFORM THE PLANNING SYSTEM IN WALES

The report informed Members of the publication of the Draft Planning Bill and the Welsh Government's proposals to reform the Planning System in Wales. The report also sought Members' views on the changes and proposals in order for comments to be submitted to the Welsh Government by 26th February 2014. Following this closing date, all responses would be analysed and considered to refine the content of the Bill, with the Welsh Government

intending to introduce the Planning (Wales) Bill into the National Assembly for Wales during 2014.

Members were informed of a number of fundamental changes to the Planning System in Wales and were advised that these changes would impact on the Authority's level of decision-making in relation to Planning processes and issues.

Members' attention was particularly directed to the four main themes contained within the reform proposals – supporting culture change, active stewardship, improving collaboration and improving local delivery. Each of these themes comprise a number of key proposals, with questions from the Welsh Government and Officer responses contained in the report.

With regards to culture change, Members were informed that a National Planning Advisory and Improvement Service was to be established and hosted by the Welsh Government. A competency framework for planners and Councillors would also be developed to ensure that planning becomes a positive enabling activity. In regards to active stewardship, there would be a statutory requirement for the Welsh Government to prepare a National Development Framework, which has led to the proposal for a developmental management hierarchy in order to deal with different types of planning applications.

Emphasis was placed on collaboration between local authorities regarding planning issues, which had been identified as an area for improvement. The reform proposals included a system of Strategic Development Plans and the establishment of joint planning boards, which would enable Ministers to direct local planning authorities (LPAs) to prepare a joint Local Development Plan, and provide an updated legal framework to enable the merging of local planning authorities. Officers clarified how the membership framework of these boards would be compiled and conceded that there were numerous questions regarding the feasibility of such a scheme.

With regards to local delivery, the Welsh Government considered that significant improvements are necessary to increase efficiency and provide consistency across Wales and identified a number of changes to make local delivery more efficient or consistent. These include the introduction of a common performance framework that sets out the requirements of what a good local planning service should deliver, with each LPA being required to produce an annual report on service delivery.

Discussion ensued regarding the report and concerns were raised regarding the impact of the proposals on local communities and that the Authority's democratic involvement in the planning process could be affected. Members requested a copy of the list of developments of national significance, and requested that their discontent regarding the proposals that impact on the democratic involvement in the process be relayed in the comments to the Welsh Government.

Following discussion of the report and consideration of the Officer responses contained within, and subject to the inclusion to the additional concerns raised during the course of the meeting, Members unanimously agreed that the comments be forwarded to the Welsh Government as the formal comments of Caerphilly County Borough Council.

9. GWENT COLLABORATION FUNDING

Dave Phenis, Sports and Leisure Services Manager, presented the report, which provided an update on progress with the Gwent Sport and Leisure Collaboration Project, and asked Members to support the proposed approach for further collaboration.

Members were informed that the voluntary collaboration between Gwent Local Authorities arose due to a lack of formal collaborative arrangements for developing and delivering Sports and Leisure Services throughout the area. A number of key principles for collaboration were agreed, with priority areas for improvement and action identified.

Progress has now been made within many of these key principles, including the sharing of information, benchmarking, workforce development and service delivery, access to services by residents, and the creation of a regional scrutiny board. Progress has also been made within a number of priority areas, particularly with regards to Aquatics, which has already seen success with children learning to swim from a young age.

Members were advised that the project was contingent on funding, with contributions received from SportWales, and an offer of funding received from the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner towards the roll out of the Positive Futures scheme. Members were directed to Appendix 1 of the report, which provided further detailed information as to the collaboration, and provided a comparison of the sports performance of Caerphilly against neighbouring authorities.

Members thanked Mr Phenis for his report and congratulated him on his appointment as Chair of the local Task and Finish Group for the project. Members discussed the report and the involvement of volunteers and schools with the scheme. It was confirmed that volunteers were essential to the project and that the Aqua Passport programme would be launched in April 2014, which aimed for 91% of 11 year olds in the borough to achieve a swimming distance of 25 metres.

Members noted the progress and potential benefits of the collaborative approach, and it was agreed that a further report would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time to provide a more detailed analysis of Caerphilly's performance against the other Local Authorities.

10. PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROTOCOL IN RELATION TO ADVERTISING ON THE PUBLIC HIGHWAY

Marcus Lloyd, Highway Operations Group Manager, presented the report, which proposed the introduction of a new protocol in relation to advertising on the public highway, and sought the views of Members on the proposed recommendations contained therein.

Members were advised that over the past few years, there had been an increase in the number of 'A' Frame Advertising Boards and other speculative advertising features placed on the public highway or attached to street furniture. This practice is in contravention of the Highways Act 1980, and it was intended that implementation of the proposed protocol would provide clarification to businesses in regards to 'A' Frame Advertising Boards.

The draft protocol contained a number of proposals, including a one-off fee for assessment of applications to display such boards, and set criteria relating to the size, content and location of the boards. It was confirmed that the protocol would be monitored by highway inspectors, with breaches referred to the relevant department when appropriate.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation contained therein be adopted. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED that for the reasons contained therein, the draft protocol be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

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

The following requests were received:-

1. Councillor Mrs J. Jones requested a report on legislation in relation to mobile zoos in the county borough.
2. Councillor J. Bevan requested a report on the number of trees cut down as a result of the recent poor weather.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. There were no items brought forward for review.

- (1) Town Centre Improvement Group 2013;
- (2) Gwent Trading Standards;
- (3) Public Consultation on Waste, Cleansing and Parks Services;
- (4) 6 Month Update for Improvement Objective 4 – Improve Awareness, Access, Variety and Use of Leisure, Community and Sporting Facilities in our Borough;
- (5) Budget Monitoring and Trading Account Report 2013/2014;
- (6) Caerphilly County Borough Council's School Crossing Patrol Service;
- (7) The Impact of Fly-Tipping;
- (8) Arts Development Support to Voluntary Organisations;
- (9) Summary of Members' Attendance – Quarter 3 – 1st October 2013 to 31st December 2013;
- (10) Bryn Compost Liaison Group Minutes – 28th October 2013;
- (11) Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel Minutes – 25th November 2013;
- (12) Voluntary Sector Sub-Committee Minutes – 4th December 2013;
- (13) Blackwood Town Centre Management Group Minutes – 25th October 2013;
- (14) Caerphilly Town Centre Management Group Minutes – 19th November 2013;
- (15) Risca Town Centre Management Group Minutes – 26th November 2013;
- (16) Ystrad Mynach Town Centre Management Group Minutes – 3rd December 2013;
- (17) Regeneration and Environment Forward Work Programme.

The Chair referenced the number of information reports presented at the meeting and noted that requests for such items to be brought forward were very infrequent. It was therefore agreed that the existing process regarding the provision of information reports be examined in more detail.

The meeting closed at 6.53 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 1st April 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR