



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 16TH FEBRUARY 2016 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, C.J. Cuss, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, Ms J.G. Jones,
Mrs P. Leonard M.J. Prew, A. Rees and Mrs E. Stenner

Cabinet Members:

N. George (Community and Leisure Services), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and
Engineering)

Together with:

C. HARRY (Corporate Director – Communities), P. Elliot (Head of Regeneration and Planning),
M. Eedy (Finance Manager – Environment Directorate), A. Highway (Town Centre
Development Manager), P. Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer), B. Davies (Solicitor) and
R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R.W. Gough, S. Kent and Mrs D. Price,
together with Cabinet Member K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable
Development).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 26TH NOVEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny
Committee meeting held on 26th November 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as
a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MINUTES – 8TH DECEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th December 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 11) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

6. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee received verbal reports from Cabinet Members T.J. Williams and N. George. Councillor Williams also delivered a report on behalf of Cabinet Member K. James.

The report from Councillor K. James (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning) gave an overview of the latest position in respect of planning appeals, including one that has been received against the refusal of the surface mine application at Nant Llesg, Rhymney. The Planning Inspectorate are currently considering the validity of information submitted with the appeal, and once this is ascertained, they will issue more information about the timetable and date for the inquiry. Appeals are also forthcoming in respect of proposed housing developments at Pandy Road, Bedwas and Cwmgelli, Blackwood, together with land adjacent to the Axiom factory in Newbridge.

Members were updated on developments in respect of town centre management, including the opening of new businesses/cafes in Bargoed, Blackwood and Caerphilly. It is hoped that these will increase footfall and create a number of new jobs for local residents. A new online Retail Property Directory is also up and running as part of the re-designed Go2 My Town website, which will be used by the Town Centre Management Team to place businesses in vacant town centre properties.

Members were reminded that the Deposit Replacement Caerphilly County Borough Local Development Plan up to 2031 was formally approved for public consultation at a Special meeting of Council on 3rd February 2016. The consultation runs from 11th February 2016 to 23rd March 2016 and is the first opportunity for the public to have their say on the Plan, with everyone urged to get involved.

Blackwood Miners Institute had a very successful year with attendance up 14% on 2014. A record-breaking 14,600 people attended the pantomime over the Christmas period, which was up 17% on last year. Members commented on the high quality of the pantomime and extended their congratulations to all those involved in its production.

Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services) advised Members of the impact that recent poor weather has had on outdoor sport in the county borough on Council pitches. Although 1739 football/rugby matches were played between August 2015 and January 2016, 426 have been cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.

The Cabinet Member recently attended the Sport Caerphilly Volunteer Awards Evening to celebrate the work of the Council's large number of volunteer coaches and clubs. He also attended the Caerphilly Adventures Volunteers Awards at Llancaiach Fawr which celebrated the work of the Council's outdoor adventure volunteers. Both events showcased talent and hard work which enables the successful function of community sport, together with heart warming successes which opens up access to different experiences in the outdoors to those disadvantaged in society.

Members were informed that the 5th annual Pride In Your Place Awards were recently held at Blackwood Miners Institute and were the most successful to date. Over 80 entries culminated in 34 award nominations, which showcase the efforts of local community groups, individual volunteers and schools in looking after their environment.

Following presentation of his report, the Cabinet Member responded to general queries in respect of pitch bookings and the effect of heavy rainfall on pitch conditions.

Councillor T.J. Williams (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering) presented his report and informed Members that Welsh Government have invited bids from local authorities for local transport, road safety and Safer Routes in Communities funding for 2016/17. A variety of bids were submitted from the Council by the deadline of 29th January 2016 and details of the successful bids will be provided at a future meeting, along with an update on what this year's funding has achieved.

Members were advised that over the last four months, over 1000 service requests for culverts and gullies have been received due to instances of severely wet weather. However the number of property flooding incidents (including garages) has been minimal and is testament to the hard work carried out by the Group. The approved Flood Risk Management Plan will identify flood risk areas across the county borough with a view to renovating the existing drainage network and lead the way in minimising future flooding incidents.

The Engineering Projects Group currently have a number of projects out to tender, including re-lining works on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, principal bridge inspections and confined space culvert inspection/maintenance. All these projects are anticipated to begin in March 2016 (weather permitting).

Discussion of the Cabinet Member's report ensued and a Member highlighted a number of issues in the Blackwood area arising from recent excessive rainfall (including damage to bridges and pathways and blockages to culverts). Another Member also outlined a number of highway issues in the Rhymney area. It was agreed that the Members concerned would liaise directly with the Cabinet Member/Officers to provide further information on these matters.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

7. CABINET REPORTS

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE: CARBON MANAGEMENT – REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT (SIX-MONTH PROGRESS)

Paul Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer) presented the report, which highlighted key progress against Improvement Objective IO4 – Carbon Management: Reduce Our Carbon Footprint.

Members were informed that the public awareness of climate change and the link to carbon footprint is high and there is an expectation by local residents for the Authority to take reasonable steps in reducing the energy consumed by its buildings. Caerphilly Council, along

with all other organisations, is also under increasing pressure from UK wide legislation aimed at improving energy efficiency, such as Provision of Display Energy Certificates, Energy Performance Certificates and compliance with the Carbon Reduction Commitment Scheme, which is a carbon tax that costs the Authority in the region of £440,000 per annum.

To assist in reducing carbon emissions and costs, the Authority has a 45% Carbon Reduction Strategy in place. At the beginning of 2015/16, it was recommended that a new Improvement Objective, Carbon Management: Reduce our carbon footprint (within the Authority's non-domestic buildings and street lighting) be reported to the Scrutiny Committee for regular performance monitoring. The Improvement Objective focuses on 4 priorities to reduce emissions: Good Housekeeping, Invest to Save, Design and Asset Management, and Renewable Technology, which mirror the Carbon Reduction Strategy.

Further details of each priority were outlined within the report and Members were referred to Appendix 1 which outlined action taken and progress made against each of these priorities. Officers also highlighted examples which demonstrate how each of these priorities are being achieved.

Training has been key to the Good Housekeeping priority, with headteachers having been provided with Carbon Reduction Commitment training, and caretakers/key staff in selected schools and community buildings trained on the correct use of their building energy management system heating controls. A presentation entitled "Energy Savings in Schools" has been delivered across 5 schools to date and scheduled for a further 6. All existing energy audits have also been re-issued to building managers and head teachers, and many schools contacted the Council's Energy Team as a result seeking further assistance and advice.

A number of technologies are being considered in respect of the Invest to Save priority, including the PowerPerfactor voltage optimisation unit for Tir y Berth Depot (currently installed at Pontllanfraith House) and Officers are evaluating the feasibility of 54 Invest To Save schemes. 4,000 street lights to date have been converted to energy efficient lighting with the remaining stock scheduled for conversion by financial year end. Information has been placed on the Council's staff intranet page to highlight water bill discounts available for low-income households and the water section of the Council's energy audits has also been strengthened. Energy Officers have identified a replacement Light Emitting Diode (LED) light fitting, which will replace 953 lights at Ty Penallta and significantly reduce wattage per light. Staff have also identified lighting improvements at Tir y Berth Primary and Tir y Berth Garage Depot which could be funded through the Invest to Save Scheme.

Regarding the Design and Asset Management priority, there have been two Council properties sold, one leased out and another disposed of. In respect of the Renewable Technology priority, the 7 medium-sized solar PV arrays (on which the Council claims Feed in Tariff payments) all over-performed in terms of input/output, and staff continue to promote such technologies and look for further opportunities. Officers have also surveyed 9 Home for the Elderly properties with a view to installing PV arrays, and a further update on this matter will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee when available.

Members were advised that all actions have progress registered against them and some are already 100% complete or ahead of schedule (such as the reissue of energy audits and awareness activities surrounding renewable schemes). Through the various actions outlined, a positive improvement is evident in awareness raising activities, such as the reissuing of energy audits and awareness activities surrounding renewable schemes. From the progress recorded to date, it is unlikely that any of the red (overdue) indicators will remain as such if the current trend of progress continues to the end of the 12-month period. Members were also informed that during the first 6 months of the Improvement Objective, 42 carbon tonnes (£672 saved in carbon tax) has been achieved from the Invest to Save scheme alone, which demonstrates that energy, carbon and cost savings have been achieved in this period.

The Officer was thanked for his presentation and discussion of the report ensued. A Member raised a query regarding the funding available to the Council in respect of Carbon Management. Officers explained that the Invest to Save fund incorporates £200,000 from Salix Finance and £500,000 from CCBC to provide an Invest to Save Fund (which operates as an interest free loan, which is paid back over 0-10 years, thereby providing continuing funds for re-investment in energy efficiency schemes over coming years).

A Member queried the incomplete performance indicator displayed against the number of street lights converted to LED format. Officers explained that this performance indicator only highlights progress to September 2015 and that the switchover is on schedule to be completed by the end of the financial year. The Chair requested that an update on the switch to part-night lighting be included as part of the next Cabinet Member report to the Scrutiny Committee.

Members were pleased to note the actions set out in the report and conveyed for public information in respect of the Council's stance on carbon management. A query was raised regarding public knowledge of the water bill discount available to low-income households. Officers explained that this discount is specifically for domestic customers and offered to find out how Welsh Water publicise this scheme.

A Member queried whether an audit had been carried out across all Council properties to determine their energy efficiency levels. Officers confirmed that main buildings had been assessed, but explained that Council housing stock was not included, as the Improvement Objective relates to energy usage in the Council's non-domestic buildings and street lighting stock. A Member also queried the methods of energy advice given to small community centres, and Officers explained that this depended on use but mainly entailed a common sense approach relating to heating management and turning off lights when not in use. Energy staff are able to provide leaflets and guidance on such matters and will also go out to visit such sites upon request.

Reference was made to the installation of solar panels on properties across some housing association schemes. A Member queried whether a business model exists for this to be implemented within Caerphilly Council housing stock and it was agreed that Officers would liaise with the Member on this matter.

Following consideration of the report, Members noted its contents and the progress made to date in meeting the actions set out in the action plan, and unanimously agreed with the Officer's judgement of "partially successful" against the Improvement Objective at the six-month point.

9. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2015/2016

Mike Eedy (Finance Manager - Environment Directorate) presented the report, which informed Members of the most recent budget monitoring position for 2015/2016 for the Environment Directorate service divisions, namely Regeneration and Planning, Engineering Services, Public Protection and Community and Leisure Services.

Reference was made to the revenue budget position for each of the service divisions based on the most current financial information available. Projected outturn figures for the financial year are compared with the budget to show anticipated under/overspends, and more detailed budget monitoring figures were outlined within the report and its appendices.

Members were asked to note that as part of the budget efficiency savings in 2015/2016 to meet Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) targets and achieve budget strategy aims, the Environment Directorate were targeted to achieve new budget efficiency savings of £3.861m. The most recent figures indicated a total under spend of £1,578m, but it was explained that a number of ring-fenced budgets (as outlined in Section 4.1.3 of the report) meant this under spend was reduced to £953,000.

The Regeneration and Planning division presently have a projected under spend of £239,000. Within Planning Services, there is an over spend of £6,000 in Development Control and planning application fee income is projected to be £57,000 short of the £571,000 budget target (including pre-application advice income charges of £20,000) but is offset by an under spend in staffing due to vacant posts. There is an over spend of £53,000 in Building Control, where income is projected to be £64,000 below the £307,000 budget. This is partly offset by an under spend in staffing costs due to the delayed filling of a vacant post. Search fee income is £7000 below the £112,000 budget. Planning application fee, building control fee and search fee income is dependent on the number of applications received and this will be monitored closely as numbers of applications and fee levels can vary.

A significant under spend of £363,000 within Economic Development and Tourism has been partly achieved by a number of vacant posts (most of which are proposed MTFP savings for 2016/2017) and savings relating to promotion/publicity and office costs. There is a projected £101,000 under spend against industrial estates due to rental income exceeding targets/reduced maintenance, and a MTFP saving of £100,000 is proposed in this area for 2016/2017. Tourism have achieved a net under spend of £29,000, with additional income from the Big Cheese event being partly offset by one-off costs relating to the Urdd Eisteddfod event. Members were informed that there are indications that the Big Cheese is becoming a self-financing event. At present, tourism venues are reporting an overall under spend of £112,000 due to a combination of above target income generation and reduced operational costs. MTFP savings are being considered across tourism venues in 2016/2017. Members were advised that the financial performance of the venues is pleasing in view of the poor weather conditions over the summer period.

There is also a projected over spend of £58,000 in relation to the Bargoed retail shop units (which are part of the Bargoed Regeneration project) which is due to anticipated under-occupancy of the units in 2015/2016.

The Engineering Services division have reported a net under spend of £655,000 but after excluding ring-fenced budget variations there is an under spend of £262,000. An overspend within highway reactive maintenance repairs has been offset by an under spend in street lighting energy, which has arisen from low energy prices, together with capital investment in low-energy LED lighting as part of previous MTFP savings and a subsequent reduction in maintenance requirements. MTFP savings of £350,000 have already been approved with further a £100,000 saving against street lighting proposed for 2016/2017. The severity of winter weather will have an impact on the overall outturn position. Engineering are reviewing the highway maintenance programme and endeavouring to balance the budget by financial year end.

Public Protection is presently projecting an under spend of £235,000 across a number of its departments on a revised budget of £7.2m. There is a small over spend of £10,000 within Catering Services due to one-off costs associated with the relocation of the Meals of Wheels kitchen to Penallta House, investment in cashless catering and increased living wage salary costs. The financial position will be carefully monitored, as any school closures due to adverse weather conditions will have an impact upon school meals income.

Community and Leisure Services are currently projecting an overall under spend of £449,000, but £232,000 of the budget relates to cemeteries, where any under spend is ring fenced for future improvement and enhancement works, and hence there is an under spend of £217,000 in this area.

Waste Management and Cleansing is presently projecting an overall under spend of £237,000. There is a large projected over spend of £809,000 arising from revised contract arrangements for dry recycling treatments, which has resulted in a higher cost per tonne. There has been an over spend relating to waste treatment and disposal costs, due to a need to divert some residual waste to landfill during close-down periods at the Viridor EfW Plant.

Such costs to the Authority will cease from 1st April 2016 upon commencement of the main contract with Viridor, as it will then be the responsibility of this supplier to absorb the cost of diverting residual waste to landfill during close-down periods. There will also be a one-off payment to Viridor this year for the processing of incinerator bottom ash arising from this waste treatment process, which will assist in increasing the Council's recycling targets and achieve the statutory target required to avoid the imposition of fines.

It is anticipated that the over spend within Waste Management and Cleansing will be partly offset by an under spend in relation to civic amenity site treatment, which has arisen from reduced tonnage as a result of the new permit scheme. There is also an under spend against staffing and operational costs in this area. Volumes of waste tonnage and the treatment costs from the various waste streams are monitored closely as any fluctuations during the year can have a significant impact on the overall financial position, and a £240,000 contingency fund is retained in the event of an over spend in this area.

Leisure Services are reporting an over spend of £77,000. An over spend within Leisure Centres is mainly due to a projected underachievement in income targets, where income generation is subject to variation in consumer demand and also from competition from other private sector facilities. The Leisure Centres have challenging income budget targets as a result of the additional £100,000 MTFP savings applied in 2015/2016. The over spend in Leisure Centres has been partly offset by an under spend in Central Leisure Services due to vacant posts and other central costs, together with an under spend within Sports and Health Development. Income targets will be monitored closely as income generation is subject to variation depending on customer demand.

Vehicle Maintenance and Fleet Management are presently showing a projected surplus of £25,000. The outturn position will be dependent on the value of work through the workshop over the next few months and the ability to finance fixed overheads. Building Cleaning is reporting a small projected budget surplus of £8,000 at present, which includes assumed additional costs for living wage increases from November 2015 of £44,000 and increased sickness absence cover costs. This is offset by a Head Office staffing under spend which is a MTFP saving in advance for 2016/2017.

Officers explained that some service under spends and over spends will be appropriated to ring-fenced reserves for specific requirements. The remaining Directorate under spend (presently projected at £953,000) will be appropriated to the Environment Directorate strategic reserve and 50% of this pooled under spend/profit will then be appropriated to the Authority working balance. Subject to Members' approval, the remaining 50% will be utilised for Directorate-based service initiatives or investment requirements.

Members thanked the Officer for his report and were pleased to note the achievements in respect of income targets and savings. Reference was made to the amount of underspends within the Directorate and Members expressed a need for consistency and for balanced/accurate budgets to be set at the beginning of the financial year. A query was also raised regarding the £250,000 MTFP saving for 2016/2017 for Home to School Transport. Officers explained that this is a planned saving for the next financial year, and demonstrates that the Authority is planning ahead in terms of their budget strategy and that such budget savings are achievable in future years. Members were also informed that under spends have arisen from the new tendered bus contracts that came into effect January 2016 and that the new Taxi Framework contract that began in 2015/16 has also contributed in part to the under spend.

A Member referred to the intention to award Community Assets funding to Engineering for community response teams as outlined in the report, and queried the impact that this would have on Community Partnership Schemes. Officers explained that Community Assets funding had previously been allocated across various budgets but that it would be transferred into individual service division budgets from 2016/2017 and be allocated to the same recipient initiative. Officers agreed that they would circulate background information and the terms of

reference relating to Community Assets funding and Community Partnership Schemes to the Scrutiny Committee following the meeting.

Discussion took place regarding the Area Forum Budget, and it was agreed Officers would circulate details of this budget to the Scrutiny Committee following the meeting (including details of individual ward/town and community council allocations) and liaise with individual Members to address their queries regarding this matter. Reference was made to the 2016/17 MTFP proposal to reduce the grant to Allotment Federations within the county borough, and Officers explained that as a result of the budget settlement information received from Welsh Government, this proposal did not form part of the final budget saving proposals that will be considered by Cabinet on 17th February 2016 (and thereafter Special Council on 24th February 2016).

Members discussed the success of the Big Cheese event and Officers explained that its self-financing status has been achieved through a combination of increased pitch fees, sponsorship, and income from the fairground and bars. The Events Team are currently examining means of increasing income generation for this event so that other smaller events within the county borough can continue to be supported by the Authority. Members discussed the potential for future MTFP savings to be proposed and the increased contribution to these events from other sources (such as Town Council funding).

A query was raised regarding the budget variation against Caerphilly Adventurers as outlined in Appendix 1D of the report. Officers confirmed that they would investigate the reason for this budget variation and respond to the Member accordingly. Reference was also made to the potential for the Council's Vehicle Maintenance and Fleet Workshop to promote MOTs to Council staff as a means of increasing workload and income, and Officers confirmed that this matter is being progressed by the Fleet Manager.

Having given due consideration to the report, Members noted its contents, together with details of the budget monitoring position contained within the appendices.

10. TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP 2015

Andrew Highway (Town Centre Development Manager) presented the report, which provided information on the progress made within the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2015 against the Council's objectives.

The report provided information on the work undertaken by the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2015, highlighted how the Group works alongside the Council's five Town Centre Management Groups and outlined the main issues that have been resolved in each of the five principal towns.

Officers explained that the Town Centre Improvement Group was established in 2005 with appropriate representation from all relevant service areas. The remit of the group is to improve the environment within the county borough's five principle town centres (Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Risca and Ystrad Mynach), benchmark the performance of CCBC services in these town centres and demonstrate commitment to their environmental improvement, and provide an internal forum for CCBC to address issues that blight town centres.

The Group includes representative from all relevant parts of the Council, together with five police inspectors whose responsibilities include the five principle town centres and Mr Highway expressed his thanks to his colleagues within the Group and partner agencies for the valuable resources afforded to the improvement of town centres within the county borough.

Members were advised that the purpose of the Group is to ensure a responsive co-ordinated approach to the maintenance of the town centres via the process of an Environmental Audit.

In addition, the Town Centre Improvement Group addresses items raised within the meetings of the five Town Centre Management Groups and ensures that environmental and maintenance matters are addressed in a effective and expeditious manner.

Officers explained that in 2015, a total of 168 issues across the five main town centres were actioned through the Town Centre Improvement Group, and a summary of the main issues resolved by the Group was outlined to Members. The issues resolved included work to address the problem of rough sleepers and securing of a new tenant for the vacant Tesco building in Caerphilly, road closures relating to the Blackwood Summer Beach Party and work to address anti-social behaviour around Blackwood Bus Station, regeneration works and the resolution of parking issues in Bargoed, changes to the public toilet opening hours and the renovation of a public house in Risca, and parking issues/resources within Ystrad Mynach.

Members were referred to the report appendices which contained a detailed breakdown of all the issues resolved in the town centres over the past twelve months, and which evidences the commitment of individual service areas and the diverse nature of problems addressed by the Group. The objective in 2016 is to continue to provide a high level of service in the principal town centres whilst accepting the constraints of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. The aim for the TCIG and the process of Town Centre Management is to promote sustainable long-term growth across the county borough by delivering well-maintained and managed town centres which are at the heart of the local community.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for his report, and in acknowledging the importance of the Group, requested that their thanks to the multiple agencies involved in its work be placed on record.

Following consideration of the report, Members noted its contents, including the work of the Town Centre Management Group.

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

The following requests were received:-

1. Councillor Ms. J.G. Jones requested a report in respect of Outdoors Bowls Clubs, and was advised that this will be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee ahead of its presentation to Cabinet on 2nd March 2016.
2. Councillor Ms J.G. Jones referred to a Pilot Scheme within the Public Protection division. Councillor Jones was advised that Public Protection comes under the remit of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and was asked to re-direct her request for a report on this matter accordingly.
3. Councillor Mrs A. Blackman requested a report in respect of Leaseholder Arrangements and, in being advised that reports of this nature have recently been presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, was asked to contact the relevant Officer on this matter.

12. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. None of the items were brought forward for review.

- (1) Caerphilly Local Access Forum Minutes – 9th October 2015;
- (2) Caerphilly Town Centre Management Group Minutes – 20th October 2015;
- (3) Ystrad Mynach Town Centre Management Group Minutes – 3rd November 2015.

The meeting closed at 7.04 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 29th March 2016, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR