



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 29TH MARCH 2016 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs A. Blackman, C.J. Cuss, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, S. Kent, M.J. Prew and A. Rees

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

C. Harry (Corporate Director – Communities), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), T. White (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager), S. Ead (Solicitor) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, Ms J.G. Jones, Mrs P. Leonard, Mrs D. Price and Mrs E. Stenner, 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.

A Member sought clarification on whether he was required to declare an interest as he is a governor at a school referred to in Agenda Item No. 11 (Scoping of the Countywide Review of the Operation and Management of Highway-owned Council Car Parks). Officers advised that as the report was seeking views on the scope of the review, there was no requirement to declare in this instance.

3. MINUTES – 16TH FEBRUARY 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16th February 2016 (minute nos. 1 – 12) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

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

Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services) presented his report and advised Members that the Authority is likely to achieve the Welsh Government Statutory Recycling Target of 58% for 2015/16, with a report on this matter due to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee later in the meeting.

Members were informed that a celebratory event was recently held in Newport to mark the success of the "Positive Futures" Partnership Programme between the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), local authorities across Gwent, the Home Office and other partners. The PCC and Home Office have provided significant levels of funding for this initiative which uses sporting activities to divert youngsters away from potential opportunities to become involved in anti-social behaviour and crime. Gwent Police have reported a 20% reduction in anti-social behaviour calls across Caerphilly county borough as a result of the positive engagement arising from this programme. The initiative also operates a day-time alternative education programme, for which there are 11 individuals currently engaged.

The Authority recently hosted its annual Disability Six Nations rugby tournament at the Centre for Sporting Excellence in Ystrad Mynach. Over 200 schoolchildren participated and the event was once again a huge success. The Cabinet Member expressed his thanks to the sponsors for their generosity and to the Caerphilly Sports Development Team and Trinity Fields School for their hard work in organising the event.

Councillor T.J. Williams (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering) presented his report and outlined the relining works recently carried out on a major culvert in Penyrheol by the Engineering Projects Group. Full integrity has now been restored to this culvert.

Members were informed that the street lighting LED gear-tray replacement programme is due for completion at the end of the month. This has already led to a reduction of nearly £100,000 in Caerphilly's annual energy costs for 2015-15, and will further reduce costs in 2016-17.

The Scrutiny Committee were advised that a major exercise to re-tender the supported bus service contracts is currently underway. The new contracts are expected to be in place and operational for July 2016. At the same time, bus operators continue to review their commercial services in the difficult operating climate. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee would be informed of any significant changes to these services.

The report from Councillor K. James (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning) outlined the latest funding developments in respect of the Community Regeneration division. The indicative annual budget of £2.9m for Communities First (CF) in Caerphilly remains at the same level as the previous year (although it reflects a decrease in real terms). The Council's draft delivery plans for proposed Communities First projects for 2016 were recently approved by the Welsh Government (WG). Funding for the LIFT programme, which enables employment support for workless households to continue in the Caerphilly Basin and Upper Rhymer Valley cluster areas, will continue at the same level to 31st March 2016.

The new WG European Social Fund (ESF) Programme under Priorities 1 and 3 to deliver employment support across all CF areas have also been approved, with Caerphilly receiving an additional £1.3m of funding to support long-term unemployed and help young people gain employment. Additionally, applications for the next round of Vibrant and Viable Places funding will open later this year and Cabinet have agreed that the Council's bid will focus upon improving poverty in deprived areas.

Members were updated on developments in respect of town centre management, including the Go2MyTown website, which has been updated to include a range of information under the "Choose The High Street" banner. The Council's Facebook page is highlighting independent retailers in town centres and receiving a very positive response. Additionally, and in line with the Council's work to create 'Dementia Friendly Town Centres', the Bargoed Sight Centre has received training on how to offer a better service for people living with dementia.

The Cabinet Member provided an update in respect of the Deposit Replacement Local Development Plan and explained that recent public consultation events regarding this matter have generally been well attended. The consultation period for the plan has been extended to 22nd April 2016 which affords stakeholders additional time to make representations to the plan, and the findings from the consultation are scheduled to be reported to Council in November 2016.

The Scrutiny Committee were also informed that Caerphilly Council recently signed up to the Cardiff City Deal, which will entail over £1.2 billion of investment across the region over the next 10 years in order to improve its economic vitality. This is an exciting opportunity for the Council and its residents, and progress reports will be presented to Council as further developments arise.

During the course of the ensuing debate, Members expressed a need for investment arising from the City Deal to be allocated proportionally to local authorities across the South East Wales region. Officers confirmed that the City Deal is an equal partnership of the 10 local authorities and any investment made will need to improve GVA (Gross Value Added). It is expected that projects will be allocated across the region and that the Interim Chief Executive and Director for Communities would be representing the Council at an Officer level in any such discussions.

Discussion took place regarding the Communities First scheme and a Member referred to a past report which outlined previous Communities First funding allocations, targets and objectives. Officers confirmed that they would make arrangements for an update report to be placed on the Forward Work Programme for consideration at a future meeting.

In referring to the ESF Programme, a Member raised several queries, including the location of this training, if the programme is linked to the benefits system, and whether non-participants have benefit sanctions imposed on them for non-participation. Officers confirmed that they would make enquiries regarding these matters and respond to Members accordingly.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

6. 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.

7. UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AGAINST WELSH GOVERNMENT STATUTORY RECYCLING TARGETS

Tony White (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager) presented the report, which provided Members with the latest update on the Authority's projected performance against the Welsh Government statutory recycling target for 2015/16, and highlighted key issues in relation to the 2015/16 waste tonnages.

Members were advised that the Welsh Government (WG) has operated a statutory recycling target (SRT) regime for several years, with specific years being designated as key target years and with fairly large increases in the level of recycling to be achieved. 2015/16 has been designated as the next target year with a WG SRT set as 58% (in 2014/15 Caerphilly achieved 57.2%) and is one of the most challenging target increases that Local Authorities have faced to date. Previous targets were outlined in the report, all of which have been achieved by the Authority. There are further increases in the level of recycling required over the next 10 years, which will rise to 64% in 2019/20 and 70% in 2024/25.

Members were referred to Table 1 within Section 5 of the report which outlined the quarterly performance for 2015/16 for the various waste streams and the percentage of recycling/composting per quarter. Officers explained that these tonnage projections are conclusive for Quarters 1 and 2, provisional for Quarter 3 and projected for Quarter 4. The latest analysis is projecting a year-end performance of 60.4%. Whilst this is above the WG SRT of 58%, it is recognised that this is very close to the WG target and could fluctuate within the Quarter 4 period. Officers also outlined details of the fines that can be imposed by the Welsh Government for falling below this target.

Reference was also made to Table 2 within Section 5 of the report which outlined details of the 2015/16 projected year end recycling/composting tonnage by waste stream compared to actual result for 2014/15, and commented on any significant differences between the two years. Members were advised that the Authority has contacted residents in low-performing areas to encourage increased use of household recycling collections. Officers also explained that Incinerator Bottom Ash (IBA) recycling has been included in the tonnage projections for 2015/16 for the first time. Although there were costs associated in recycling this waste stream during 2015/16, future costs will be included in the relevant recycling contract from 1st April 2016 onwards.

Members were informed that the projected achievement of the challenging 2015/16 target has only been made possible following the implementation of some key interventions throughout the year. These include the introduction of a civic amenity wood recycling contract involving a fibreboard manufacturer, carpet and mattress recycling from civic amenity waste, and recycling of IBA from the Project Gwyrdd Plant. Details of the additional costs arising from these interventions were contained in the report, together with the 2015/16 service budget for each type of waste stream.

Consideration of the report ensued and a query was raised regarding the flexibility of WG sanctions in the event of an emergency incident within the Authority which could cause recycling tonnage to fall below target. Officers confirmed that no fines had been imposed to date for falling below target but that should they be enforced, they would come from the Authority's budget.

Discussion took place regarding potential strategies to achieve the increased recycling targets in future years. Officers explained that they are currently working with WG regarding possible changes to recycling collections, and are also examining options relating to the processing of recycling and commercial waste recycling. Food waste recycling is currently underperforming but it is acknowledged that this is an issue across the whole of Wales. Officers advised that a waste collection review is currently underway and that its results will be presented to Members in September 2016.

Members referred to the benefits of co-mingled recycling versus kerbside sorts and Officers confirmed this would form part of the waste collection review. A query was also raised as to whether the cost of food waste caddy liners contributes to the low uptake in food waste recycling. Officers confirmed that a comparison with other authorities indicated that this is not the case, and that a number of measures to encourage food waste recycling are currently being considered as part of the review. Discussion took place regarding home composting methods across the Authority and Officers also responded to general queries relating to bulky goods recycling and the processing of street waste.

A Member queried the feasibility of current non-recyclable items being recycled in future. Officers explained that they are governed by what items are accepted by contractors and that it can be difficult to procure firms that accept specific items (such as polystyrene and tetra packs). Discussion also took place regarding recycling processes within other countries, with Officers referring to European Union targets and explaining how these are exceeded by Welsh Government targets.

A Member queried whether it would be feasible to allow businesses to dispose of waste at civic amenity sites (for a nominal charge) in an attempt to increase recycling tonnage. Officers explained that whilst this would add to the total tonnage of waste processed, there would be no guarantee that the amount of recycling tonnage would be increased as it would depend on the type of waste disposed of by these businesses.

Having thanked the Officer for his detailed report and following consideration of its content, Members noted the projected performance against the 2015/16 SRT and the future challenges in terms of increasing SRTs.

8. SCOPING OF THE COUNTYWIDE REVIEW OF THE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHWAY OWNED COUNCIL CAR PARKS

Clive Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager) presented the report, which sought the views and support of Members on the scope of the proposed review on the operation and management of the Council's Highway owned public car parks and the potential for future changes to the current parking regime and charging tariffs.

Members were advised that following discussions relating to savings proposals for Highway owned off street car parks at the Special Regeneration and Environmental Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2014, Members raised a number of issues related to the budget saving proposals and wider operational policy issues. Subsequently a number of related issues have also been raised by Members for which Officers have proposed the scope of a review for discussion and agreement with Members.

Members were referred to Section 2.2 of the report, which proposed the list of key issues to be included in the scope of the review. Members were asked to consider whether all the issues previously raised were encapsulated within the proposed scope, together with the process and timescales proposed in order to complete the review. Officers explained that in order to undertake the review it is proposed that a Task and Finish Group be established to discuss and agree how the review will be undertaken and the timescales for it to be completed.

During the course of the ensuing debate, clarification was sought on Section 4.2.7 of the report, which outlined the scope of the review and proposed consideration of whether the current parking situation across the county borough continues to meet the Council's objectives. Officers gave examples of these objectives, including supporting local towns in attracting visitors and meeting the needs of workers. A member queried whether the review would address a need for extra car parks to be created across the borough and Officers confirmed that this could be included within the review if Members so wished.

Reference was made to a lack of free parking within Blackwood Town Centre and a Member expressed a need for pay and display locations to be spread more evenly over a wider number of car parks in the county borough. Discussion also took place regarding the suitability of the enforcement regime in place across pay and display car parks. Officers explained that free car parks could be examined with a view to charging in the future but that these free locations are generally ones where there is little demand for parking. Officers also explained that should the review establish a need for additional free parking spaces within town centres then there would be a need for the Authority to purchase additional land for these to be created.

A Member proposed that concessions for schools as listed within the report be removed from the scope of the review and it was confirmed that this would be a matter for consideration by the Task and Finish Group. Members also indicated that they would wish for Park and Ride facilities to be included in the scope of the review. A Member expressed a need for police representatives to be invited to participate in the Task and Finish Group. Officers explained that this review will focus on off-street parking but that a working group has been set up between the Council and Gwent Police to discuss issues relating to on-street parking, and that a summary of such meetings will be reported to the Scrutiny Committee.

Having given due consideration to the report, Members welcomed the review and thanked the Officer for his informative report. Members noted the proposed scope of the review as set out in Section 4.13 of the report. It was unanimously agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to undertake the review and agree the details of how it will be undertaken and the timescale within which to complete it.

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

The following requests were received:-

1. Councillor S. Kent queried the cleaning schedule of CCTV cameras across the county borough. Officers confirmed that they would raise this matter with the Head of Public Protection and respond to the Member accordingly.
2. Councillor M. Prew queried the use of certain areas of common land within the county borough by professional dog-walkers, and was advised by Officers that there are no restrictions in place regarding this matter.

10. 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) Bryn Compost Liaison Group Minutes - 3rd September 2015;
- (2) Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel Minutes - 25th November 2015;
- (3) Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee Minutes - 2nd December 2015;
- (4) Caerphilly Local Access Forum Minutes - 11th December 2015.

The meeting closed at 6.54 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 May 2016, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR