



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 4TH JULY 2017 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair - Part of meeting
Councillor Mrs C. Forehead – Vice-Chair - Presiding

Councillors:

J. Bevan, R.W. Gough, A.G. Higgs, S. Kent, Mrs P. Leonard, J. Ridgewell, J. Scriven,
G. Simmonds, W. Williams, B. Zaplatynski

Cabinet Members:

N. George (Neighbourhood Services), S. Morgan (Economy, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion), Mrs E. Stenner (Environment and Public Protection)

Together with:

C. Harry (Corporate Director - Communities), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), T. Stephens (Interim Head of Planning), D. Whetter (Interim Head of Regeneration), R. Roberts (Performance Manager), I. Raymond (Performance Manager Officer), P. Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), E. Sullivan (Scrutiny Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME

The Chair welcomed both new and returning Members to the first meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee following the local elections. He referred to the constructive nature of the work undertaken by the Committee and was confident that this would continue in the future.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Elsbury, A. Hussey, A. Whitcombe and T.J. Williams.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES - 28TH MARCH 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th March 2017 (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 Councillors Mrs E. Stenner, S. Morgan and N. George, which had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection) reminded Members that the review of the current LDP has been deferred by Council, pending a decision on the creation of a strategic development plan to provide a land allocation plan for the region. This has implications for the Planning department, who are continuing to receive applications for large housing developments in view of the Council's lack of housing land supply (currently estimated at around 2 years which has improved on last year's calculation of 1.5 years). Moving forward, Officers are playing an active part at City Region level, and once a decision is taken on a statutory strategic development plan or a regional strategy, Members will need to consider the next steps in regards to the LDP. Survey work and other evidence-collection is continuing, in addition to meetings with neighbouring authorities regarding collaborative working. Work has also commenced on a regeneration strategy for the county borough, with workshops held regarding regeneration proposals for the Caerphilly basin.

The Cabinet Member also referred to the work of the Council's Countryside Team, with visitor numbers to country parks increasing year on year and an 85% satisfaction rate for visitors in 2016. The Team is also responsible for public footpaths, more than 80% of which are readily usable, which exceeds the Welsh Government (WG) target of 54%. Additionally, Rural Development Plan Officers are continuing to secure grant funding for local businesses, with a further 13 local projects under consideration (a potential £850,000 in expenditure).

A Member sought clarification on the rationale behind the 13,500 new homes calculated in the LDP as being required (in view of a projected population increase of 2000 people) and also requested further information on the outcomes of previous regeneration strategies developed by the Council and other agencies. It was confirmed that arrangements would be made to circulate the required information to Members in due course.

The report from Councillor S. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion) outlined the updated proposals for the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle project, which will be considered by Cabinet on 19th July 2017. The project will seek European and WG funding to allow the Council to work with Visit Wales and Torfaen Council, to implement a regionally significant, cross-border management project that builds on existing tourism facilities and aims to increase visitor numbers. Cabinet as Trustees of Blackwood Miners Institute will also

consider a report on the arts centre's budget and its operational programme for 2017/18, which will highlight an increase in attendees to in recent years despite a reduction to the net budget and will outline the need for this trend to continue.

The Cabinet Member referred to his recent visits to the tourism and cultural venues across the county borough as part of his new portfolio and explained that each facility presents its own major challenges in consideration of the wider financial climate. The Scrutiny Committee were advised that in the near future, they will be asked to consider a number of difficult proposals regarding these facilities and how these can best be delivered sustainably and within the imposed financial constraints, while still benefitting future generations of residents and visitors to the county borough.

Members were also updated on the South Wales Metro project, which has four bidders competing to run rail transport and improve rail infrastructure. These improvements include increased rail frequency and one of the early beneficiaries should be the Rhymney Valley line. It is hoped that Scrutiny Committee will be updated on the successful bid in the autumn.

A Member referred to limited car parking availability in the proximity of Blackwood Miners Institute and suggested that this could be improved upon to encourage an increase in visitor numbers. The Cabinet Member advised that free parking is already available after 6pm in several nearby car parks.

Clarification was sought on the proposals to be considered and the Cabinet Member confirmed that this would encompass a review of all tourism and cultural venues across the county borough. Members agreed that it would be useful for site visits to these venues to be arranged as part of this review. Officers confirmed that this would be progressed accordingly and gave assurances that this would be a very comprehensive review, which would form part of a wider review of services across the Communities Directorate. A Member also requested that any such reports be circulated well in advance to allow the Scrutiny Committee sufficient time to consider the anticipated in-depth content of the report. Officers confirmed that they would take account of the timescales when preparing such items for consideration.

Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services) referred to the Year End Performance report to be considered later that evening, which shows that the Community and Leisure Services division has again performed well in 2016/17. Key highlights include being well ahead of the WG recycling target, ensuring that the Authority is classed as a "low risk" fleet operator by VOSA/DVSA, maintaining a high level of turnover and customer satisfaction in building cleansing, recovering all burial service costs and increasing the number of direct debit memberships within the Leisure Service. Members were advised of the challenging financial times ahead and of the need for these front-line services to adjust accordingly.

The Cabinet Member also explained that the public and Councillors will need to accept a new level of service delivery moving forward which takes account of the new financial climate. In terms of the Community and Leisure Service there are three key challenges over the next couple of years, including the future shape of the Waste Management Service and resultant level of budget provision, adoption of a Sport and Leisure Strategy and the review/rationalisation of the Leisure Facilities stock, and the continued delivery of crucial front-line services in accordance with the Medium Term Financial Plan. Arising from this, a Member referred to the Sport and Leisure Strategy and spoke of the need for investment across leisure centres to encourage their continued usage.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports and for responding to the queries raised.

7. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Emma Sullivan (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP).

Members were advised that the FWP includes all reports identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th March 2017 and outlines the reports planned for the period July 2017 to October 2017. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet Work Programme as appended to the report and to suggest any changes prior to it being finalised and published on the Council's website. Members were advised that there had been no changes to the FWP since the agenda papers were published, and were encouraged to attend the FWP workshop arranged for 20th July 2017, which will assist them in formulating and prioritising their work programme for the year ahead.

A Member suggested the following potential items for inclusion: the examination of Welsh Government Policy of Improving GDP/GVA Wellbeing of Future Generations, the effects of Welsh Government Policy on Child Poverty, and the Welsh Government Policy of Improving GDP/GVA and the spending deficit currently being experienced in Wales (tax raised in relation to Welsh Government spending), and agreed to forward the details to Officers. The Officer confirmed that the suggested items would be considered by the Committee at the forthcoming workshop and they would take the decision on their possible inclusion in the forward work programme. It was also suggested that it would be useful for a specific email distribution list to be set up for use by Committee Members, and Officers agreed to progress this accordingly.

Having noted the contents of the Forward Work Programme, Members agreed that it be published on the Council's website.

8. 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.

9. YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR ENGINEERING, COMMUNITY AND LEISURE, AND REGENERATION AND PLANNING

Christina Harrhy (Corporate Director – Communities) presented the report, which provided Members with a performance update of the Communities Directorate. The report reviewed performance against objectives, highlighted the exceptions, and set out key objectives/priorities for the next twelve months, including any risks that may hinder performance. Details of performance within each service area (Engineering, Community and Leisure, and Regeneration and Planning) together with their objectives and priorities for the year ahead were summarised within the report.

Members were advised that 2016/17 offered a generally positive year in terms of service performance. However, a number of future challenges have been identified, and action plans have been developed and captured in service improvement plans for 2017/18. Balancing the demands of increasing legislation and rising public expectations against reducing budgets remains the biggest challenge across the service area. However, the service area is well placed to respond to such challenges, but it must be recognised that reductions to some current service delivery standards over the next few years will be inevitable.

During the course of the ensuing debate, queries were received on the indicators displaying the number of jobs created by Business Grants and the number of people supported into employment through the Communities First programme. A Member enquired about the types of jobs and contract types being created or accessed by these schemes, in order to ascertain the quality of employment on offer, and suggested it would be useful for this information to be included in future reports of this nature. Officers acknowledged the importance of ensuring access to good quality jobs and confirmed that they would circulate further information on these indicators to Members following the meeting.

A Member referred to a decrease in visitor numbers at New Tredegar Winding House during 2016-17 and queried whether the vacant marketing and events post for this venue would be filled. Officers explained that this would be unlikely in the future arising from a need to balance the staff cost against the potential income generation and the need for savings going forward. It was also noted that footfall in some town centres had not been recorded in some town centres over a period of several weeks due to equipment breakdowns. Officers confirmed that new data recorders are due to be installed by the end of August, which should provide a more accurate footfall measurement for 2017/18.

Discussion took place regarding the indicators against Parks and Bereavement Services and the impact of reduced grass cutting frequencies across the county borough. Members were reminded of the MTFP savings achieved by reducing the frequency of cuts and that the Council continues to maintain discretionary areas, given that statutory requirements are only applicable to grass cutting along highways. Officers explained that growth rates are subject to unpredictable weather conditions and outlined the adaptability of the programme (in that later cuts can be rescheduled during hot dry spells and applied later in the year as required). Members were also advised that environmental legislation prohibits hedgerow flailing between February and July and that weed spraying is programmed for later in the year to minimise the rate of regrowth over the summer months. A Member raised safety concerns regarding hedge growth along pavements and agreed to send a list of affected locations to Officers.

Following consideration of the report, Members noted its contents, together with the progress made against performance objectives within the Communities Directorate for 2016/17.

10. UPDATE ON THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REVIEW OF THE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHWAY OWNED COUNCIL CAR PARKS

It was noted that this item had been moved forward on the agenda with the agreement of the Scrutiny Committee.

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) presented the report, which outlined the work undertaken by the Car Parks Task and Finish Group to date and sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee in respect of completing the project.

It was explained that the Task and Finish Group was set up to consider the operation and management of highway owned council car parks within Caerphilly County Borough, having been endorsed by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 29th March 2016. At its first meeting, the Group agreed the methodology for its review, including site visits, a workshop to consider enforcement, existing provision, concessions and restrictions, payment methods, a meeting to hear evidence from invited external witnesses and a meeting to conclude and form recommendations. The Group has collated a number of findings to date arising from these actions, details of which were included in the report.

It was explained that in order to complete the review, the Group would need to meet and consider the evidence gathered and come to conclusions and form recommendations. However, due to several membership changes since its inception, there are only two Task and Finish Group Members remaining that have been involved throughout the process, who do not consider that they are in a position to complete the review.

The Scrutiny Committee were therefore asked to consider whether they wished to accept the Task and Finish Group report and form its own conclusions and recommendations (**Option 1**), reconstitute the Group with new membership to complete the review (**Option 2**), terminate the Group with no further action (**Option 3**) or revisit the Group at a later date once civil enforcement is determined and revise the terms of reference accordingly (**Option 4**).

Members were referred to the ongoing proposals regarding the decriminalisation of parking enforcement and were advised that the Council is currently liaising with other local authorities and Gwent Police on how a collaborative service could be delivered. It was explained that consideration will be given to both on-street and off-street parking as part of this matter and would form part of future reports to the Scrutiny Committee once civil enforcement is determined. Members noted the quality of the information already collected by the Task and Finish Group and suggested that this could be incorporated into such reports.

A Member queried whether the Council would seek to take a collaborative or standalone approach to the new civil parking enforcement arrangements. Officers explained that whilst there is potential for the Authority to provide a standalone service for the county borough, there would be a need for consistency across local authorities (as to whether a targeted or balanced approach is undertaken) in order to successfully enforce parking matters. Officers also gave examples of other police forces where parking enforcement has been decriminalised and the ways in which the relevant local authorities administer this function.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that **Option 4** as contained in Section 4.39 of the report be approved. By a show of hands (and in noting there was 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Task and Finish Group be revisited at a later date and the terms of reference be revised accordingly once civil enforcement is determined (Option 4).

11. PRESIDING CHAIR

Councillor D.T. Davies (Chair) gave his apologies to the Scrutiny Committee for his early departure and left the meeting owing to another engagement. Councillor Mrs C. Forehead (Vice-Chair) moved to the position of Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

12. WELLBEING OBJECTIVE: CARBON MANAGEMENT - REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT - ANNUAL REPORT - YEAR END 2016/17

Paul Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer) presented the report, which highlighted key progress against Wellbeing Objective WO4 - Carbon Management: Reduce Our Carbon Footprint for the period April 2016 to March 2017.

Members were reminded that the Local Government Measure 2009 requires all local authorities in Wales to set and publish a set of Improvement Objectives, which are used by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) to evaluate the Council's likelihood of improvement and subsequent level of actual improvement that is achieved for the citizens of Caerphilly. At the beginning of 2016/17, it was recommended that progress of the Wellbeing Objective: **Carbon Management: Reducing our carbon footprint**, would be reported to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee for regular performance monitoring.

In line with the Carbon Reduction Strategy, the Wellbeing Objective focuses on 4 priorities to reduce emissions: Good Housekeeping, Invest to Save, Design and Asset Management, and Renewable Technology. Details of the actions taken against each of these priorities were outlined in the report and its appendices. There has generally been steady progress made

across most of the actions and elements of this objective (with some actions having been strengthened considerably and others sacrificed to boost these weaker areas) and therefore the overall level of progress to date on this objective is deemed to be partially successful.

Officers highlighted improvements in water conservation awareness as a result of guidance and training activities offered to staff, which have resulted in cost savings and rebates in excess of £18,000. The Authority has installed technology through the Invest to Save Scheme that has resulted in carbon and cost reductions, and has implemented projects (such as LED lighting in a number of its buildings) that have reduced annual carbon figures by circa 125 tonnes. With regards to asset management, three energy inefficient comprehensive schools and two primary schools are being replaced with more efficient schools, and guidance is provided to building managers to improve building efficiency. Although there is no specific budget for renewable energy technologies, funding was approved at the end of the reporting period for photovoltaic (PV) panels to be installed at Newbridge and Caerphilly leisure centres and Tir y Berth Depot during 2017/18.

Discussion took place on the sources of funding available for carbon reduction initiatives and Officers also provided further information on the savings and other benefits that can be achieved with the installations of PV schemes (which have a minimum lifespan of 20 years).

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" delivery of the Wellbeing Objective.

The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2017, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR