



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 1ST NOVEMBER 2017 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair
Councillor Mrs C. Forehead - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, J. Ridgewell, J. Scriven, G. Simmonds, T.J. 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. Harrhy (Corporate Director - Communities), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), J. Reynolds (Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager), M. Headington (Green Spaces and Transport Services Manager), M. Eedy (Finance Manager - Environment Directorate), P.J. Harris (Senior Arboricultural Officer), C.B. Jones (Legal Assistant), E. Sullivan (Scrutiny Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

Also present:

Councillor M. Adams (Pontllanfraith Ward), Mr H. Darling (Local Resident)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A.G. Higgs, A. Hussey, S. Kent, Mrs P. Leonard, A. Whitcombe and W. Williams.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services declared an interest in Agenda Item 9 (Proposals to Commence a Consultation Exercise to Close Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre). Details are minuted with the respective item.

3. MINUTES - 19TH SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19th September 2017 (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. PROPOSALS TO COMMENCE A CONSULTATION EXERCISE TO CLOSE PONTLLANFAITH LEISURE CENTRE

In that a member of the public was present to speak regarding the matter, the item was moved forward on the agenda. It was noted that the report was considered by Cabinet on 20th September 2017, who endorsed the proposals to undertake consultation on the proposed closure of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre.

Mark Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services) declared a prejudicial interest in this item, being Vice-Chair of the governing body at Blackwood Comprehensive School, and left the meeting during consideration of the report.

Mr Huw Darling thanked the Chair for the opportunity to speak at the meeting and read out a statement on behalf of local residents opposing the proposed closure of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. Members were advised that a petition being circulated on this matter had gathered 600 signatures in a matter of days. Mr Darling raised concerns as to the impact of a closure on local residents, including a loss of community wellbeing and increased demand on other leisure centres. He queried the rationale for the proposed closure and the value of the potential savings, and raised concerns as to whether Islwyn High School (a proposed replacement venue) had sufficient capacity to host the clubs and organisations that currently use the leisure centre. He also referenced the lack of a Football Association (FA) approved 3G football pitch at Islwyn High School and accessibility issues for those without a vehicle.

Mr Darling expressed concerns regarding the consultation process for the proposed closure, stating that a number of residents had not received any correspondence from the Council in relation to the proposals, and he queried whether the consultation timescale was adequate. In closing, Mr Darling asked the Scrutiny Committee to consider the implications of the proposed closure for local residents.

Councillor Michael Adams (Pontllanfraith ward) was also invited to present the views of local residents. He outlined the lack of public transport available to the Islwyn High School site and referred to the lack of a FA-approved 3G football pitch, which could restrict the level of competitive fixtures that could be played at this site. He also expressed the need for provision of sporting opportunities for young people in the area and for the local community to have access to exercise and sports facilities. Councillor Adams acknowledged the need to make savings during this period of austerity but asked the Scrutiny Committee to seek alternatives to the proposed closure.

Following these representations, Jeff Reynolds (Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager) presented the report, which sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process on the future of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. It was explained that these views would be considered by Cabinet on 13th December 2017 when it receives a further report on the outcome of the full consultation process.

The report set out the business case relating to the proposed closure of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre in conjunction with the opening of Islwyn High School, and for the sale and development of the Pontllanfraith High School/Leisure Centre campus. The Scrutiny Committee were referred to the financial position relating to the proposals as set out in the report, including the current operating cost of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre (£56k in 2016/17) and the details of cost pressures due to maintenance liabilities (circa £150k). The net cost of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre (£81,502) can be realised as a Medium Term Financial Plan saving from 2018/19 onwards, and the sale of the land could see the Authority realise the full capital receipt potential for the site. Should the leisure centre remain open, there would be an initial cost requirement of circa £112k to transfer shared services such as utilities, telephone and I.T. lines (in addition to the ongoing maintenance liabilities).

In the event of closure the indicative cost of relocating the Caerphilly Adventures Service from Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre to Cwmcarn Forest Drive would be circa £75k - £85k. It has been estimated that relocation of the current 3G football pitch to Blackwood Comprehensive School (in order to resolve capacity/competitive level football issues) would be in the region of £500k. However, no funding has been identified at this time to fund this proposal. If the 3G facility remains at Pontllanfraith, then it is possible that the carpet layer would need to be replaced circa 2020-2022 at a cost of £200k. The demolition cost of the Leisure Centre complex is estimated at £325k and potential voluntary severance costs associated with the closure are estimated at circa £9k. A summary of the costs of closure/demolition (totalling £411k-£421k) and resultant savings/avoided costs (totalling £518k in addition to the £500k to relocate the 3G pitch) were set out in the report.

Members noted the details of the consultation process as contained in the report, which was set as 7 weeks with a closing date of 10th November 2017. Targeted consultation has been carried out with sports hall users, other regular users via the Smartcard database, and users of the 3G pitch. General consultation has been carried out via the Authority's website and social media platforms. Local ward members have been contacted by email with the offer of meetings if desired, and emails/letters have also been sent to the Community/Town Councils and Community Partnerships. 164 online consultation responses have been received to date. Two public forums have also been held, comprising of approximately 50 attendees and local ward members, and a third has been scheduled for the following week.

Following presentation of the report, Members sought assurances that all consultation procedures had been followed and that all persons with an interest in the leisure centre had been made aware of the consultation. Officers explained that the Council correspondence referenced by Mr Darling related to an additional public forum meeting as part of the consultation exercise outlined in the report. They confirmed that notices had been displayed in the leisure centre for a number of weeks prior to the commencement of the consultation exercise, and had also been placed on social media and the Council's website.

A Member sought further information regarding the cost analysis for a number of items detailed in the report, particularly in relation to the transfer of Caerphilly Adventurers to Cwmcarn Forest Drive, the transfer of shared services if the leisure centre were to remain open, and the relocation of the 3G pitch. Officers confirmed that these cost estimates have been derived from a number of competitive quotes, and that as Caerphilly Adventures forms part of the leisure centre provision, it has had to be considered within the overall costs.

The Member referred to the potential for the 3G pitch to be relocated to Blackwood Comprehensive School and queried how the community use aspect of leisure centres can be accessed within school sites. He also raised concerns as to the impact of removing leisure facilities on the Council's wellbeing goal of "A Healthier Wales" within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Officers confirmed that many of the leisure centres within the county borough are school-based and that the Council liaises with the schools regarding daytime community use of the facilities. In relation to the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Officers explained that although leisure centres play an important

part in their promotion, large outdoor spaces are widely available for use which also significantly contribute to these goals. It was also emphasised that Caerphilly has more leisure centre provision than any other local authority in Wales

The Member sought clarification on which 3G pitches were endorsed by the FA and how the Council would accommodate future 3G bookings at Islwyn High School, given the high level of interest to date. It was explained that the pitch at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre is endorsed by the FA as it meets certain competitive standards (such as perimeter fencing) but that the 3G pitch at Islwyn High is not endorsed as it does not meet this criteria. It was however emphasised that the 3G facility at Islwyn High School has greater potential owing to the latest dual-use technology on the pitch. Officers confirmed that the level of club demand and the identification of new users would be established as part of the consultation process moving forward and that the Council would continue to work with clubs in this regard.

The Member raised concerns regarding communication of the consultation exercise, explaining that he had not received any correspondence on the matter despite being a Smartcard holder, and that residents had only received notification letters the day before the consultation exercise began. He also queried whether all clubs using the leisure centre had been consulted on the proposed closure. Officers noted the Member's concerns and confirmed that they would revisit this area to ensure that all relevant users are included in the consultation. They added that only Smartcard users registered to Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre would have been contacted.

Another Member queried whether the proposed closure would proceed if the public were against the proposals. Officers gave assurances that Cabinet would take all consultation responses into account when making their decision.

The Scrutiny Committee raised a number of concerns regarding the loss of facilities if Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre were to close and suggested there was a lack of replacement facilities to accommodate certain sports, such as women's competitive football, squash and table tennis. Members were particularly concerned that the closure could undermine the aims of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act and felt that the provision of these sports cannot be guaranteed if they are moved to a school site. Officers confirmed that junior competitive football games can be played at Islwyn High and that they are looking to rehouse the two adult football teams that currently use Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. In addition, the Centre of Sporting Excellence at Ystrad Mynach plays a high-profile role in the promotion of women's football. It was confirmed that the 3G pitch at Islwyn High is able to accommodate rugby as a shock pad is placed under the pitch. Officers explained that racket-ball sports usage was very low and could easily be accommodated at the nearby Newbridge Leisure Centre.

Members suggested it would be useful to have further information on the various venues where the displaced sports facilities could be accommodated. Officers explained that there may be an opportunity following further investigation to retrofit a fence at Islwyn High to bring the pitch up to competitive standard, and that there would be caretaker arrangements in place to allow access to the facilities. The displacement of services will also form part of the further report to Cabinet. A Member also referenced the £300k income total from Caerphilly Adventures for 2015/16 and requested a breakdown of the charging regime and income generated by leisure centre users. It was explained that all leisure centres within the county borough receive a subsidy but that £143k income was generated during the previous financial year.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed that the aforementioned comments from the public and Members should be fed back as part of the consultation process. However, due to the level of concern expressed with regard to the appropriateness of the consultation process and replacement locations, this matter should be revisited by the Scrutiny Committee prior to its final consideration by Cabinet.

In that the outcome of the consultation was due to be reported to Cabinet on the 13th December 2017 and that there was scope for the report to be presented to Scrutiny on the 12th December 2017, Members agreed that this be the case so that they could assure themselves that all these matters had been addressed and any additional comments made at that time could be reported to Cabinet the following day.

Members also suggested that the consultation period and consultee range be extended and Officers confirmed that they would examine whether this was feasible

It was moved and seconded that the comments and concerns of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee be reported to Cabinet as part of the consultation process and that this committee reconsider the matter on the 12th December 2017, prior to its consideration by Cabinet. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the comments and concerns raised be included as part of the consultation process:
- (ii) the consultation period and consultee range be extended if feasible:
- (iii) the outcome of the consultation process be reported to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 12th December 2017 prior to its consideration by Cabinet on the 13th December 2017.

6. 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 19th September 2017 and outlines the reports planned for the period November 2017 to June 2018. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet Work Programme as appended to the report and suggest any changes prior to it being finalised and published on the Council's website.

As discussed earlier in the meeting, Members agreed that the report detailing the outcome of the consultation exercise to close Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre be scheduled for 12th December 2017 (prior to its presentation to Cabinet). The Scrutiny Committee noted the details of the special Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for 13th December 2017 to consider items relating to the Medium Term Financial Plan. Members were also advised that the Regeneration Strategy report scheduled for 15th May 2018 is progressing well and that they may be asked in due course to consider bringing this item forward to 13th February 2018.

Subject to the foregoing amendment in relation to the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre report, it was agreed that the final version of the Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

7. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the reports received from Councillors S. Morgan, Mrs E. Stenner and N. George, which had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. Questions and comments were invited on the report contents.

The report from Councillor S. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion) provided an update in relation to a recent Welsh Government Valleys Taskforce event and details of the new WG Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme (TRIP). Members also noted the annual release of the "Choose The High Street" Christmas voucher booklet, developments in respect of the Pwll y Pant roundabout improvement works, and details of winter maintenance preparations by the Highway Operations Group.

In response to a query on whether measures could be implemented on the approach to the Pwll y Pant roundabout in order to alleviate congestion, it was explained that a public announcement will be made regarding this matter in due course. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that there is some increase to travel times as a result of the works but emphasised that Caerphilly town centre remains open for business. Officers also reiterated the essential need for these improvements in view of the pressures placed on the surrounding highway infrastructure. Members referenced the public strength of feeling regarding the works and requested that their appreciation to the on-site contractors and the Communications Team for the professional manner in which they had handled this difficult situation be placed on record. Discussion also took place regarding the aims and intended outcomes of the WG Valleys Taskforce.

The report from Councillor E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection) referred to a number of Planning-related matters, including the ratification of the Annual Monitoring Report by full Council, developments relating to the Strategic Development Plan, and the progression of a new Regeneration Strategy. In response to a query regarding the Gwern y Doman application, it was explained that confirmation has not yet been received as to when it is likely to be presented to the Planning Committee.

The report from Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services) provided an update in respect of the new recycling collection measures which had been implemented due to the level of contaminated items received by the contractor. The Scrutiny Committee were advised that since the implementation of these measures, contamination levels have dramatically reduced and the quality of recycling has significantly improved. Members were also shown a short video clip and photographs which demonstrated the improvement in recycling quality. Officers provided clarification on the new collection arrangements and outlined a number of case studies relating to contaminated waste.

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

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. THE MANAGEMENT OF TREES

Mark S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services) and Mike Headington (Green Spaces and Transport Services Manager) presented the report, which sought Members' views on current tree management arrangements, the formal adoption of a tree strategy and the current resources (staff and budget) linked to this function, prior to its presentation to Cabinet for consideration.

Members were reminded of the initial report detailing the management of trees and draft strategy, which was presented to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 13th December 2016. At that meeting, Members were supportive of the recommendations and agreed to consider resource requirements to ascertain if the draft strategy can be delivered before progressing further. Since that time, and following further examination of the strategy, Officers have made a slight amendment, which introduces a risk rating to underpin the inspection frequencies included in the original draft.

The latest report set out the position following a review of staff and budget resources, and outlined funding proposals to enable the safe management of its tree stock in line with the proposed Tree Strategy (appended to the report) and its resultant zones/inspection frequencies. Officers explained that due to the escalating number of service requests and the subsequent workload pressures, there is a need to employ an additional Arboricultural Officer and maintenance team to deal with tree inspections and maintenance work. There is also a requirement for additional funding to deal with highway tree maintenance on strategic routes. Also appended to the report was a list of the main legislation and guidance outlining land owners' responsibilities in relation to trees and duty of care.

Queries were received regarding the Council's policy in relation to highway obstructions, tree-related nuisance and leaf clearance. It was explained that trees obstructing the highway are addressed through normal highway safety processes as a matter of priority, whilst issues such as the obstruction of a window within a residential property would be approached through the proposed Tree Strategy. Members were advised that it is not feasible for the Council to clear leaves from steps and footpaths due to the enormity of the task, but that the Highways Department funds an additional sweeper through the autumn to clear leaves from gullies and minimise potential flooding.

A Member sought clarification on the process for reporting tree service requests on behalf of residents and suggested it would be useful for the reporting person to be kept informed of the request status. Officers provided details of the appropriate contact point and explained that view of the high volume of requests being received, arrangements are being made to expand the number of staff who can acknowledge such requests. Discussion took place regarding funding for the proposals and Officers outlined how this would be achieved through a combination of recharging measures for tree related surveys, inspections and works and a reprofiling of budgets within Community and Leisure Services. In response to a Member's query, Officers also outlined the health and safety investigations that would be undertaken in the event of a potentially dangerous tree failing.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) the current tree management arrangements set out within the report be endorsed;
- (ii) the proposed draft Tree Strategy at Appendix 1 and the frequency of proposed proactive inspections be endorsed;
- (iii) the funding proposals set out in the report to meet the associated costs in delivering the tree strategy and complying with the Authority's Health and Safety liabilities be endorsed.

Members also thanked the Arboricultural Officer for his continued efforts and asked that their appreciation be placed on record.

10. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2017/2018

Mike Eedy (Finance Manager – Environment Directorate) presented the report, which outlined the most recent budget monitoring position for 2017/2018 for the Environment Directorate service divisions, namely Regeneration and Planning, Engineering Services, Public Protection and Community and Leisure Services.

It was explained that the most recent projections for 2017/2018 are based on the latest available financial information. Projected outturn figures for the financial year are compared with the budget to show anticipated under/overspends, with more detailed budget monitoring figures outlined within the report and its appendices. As part of the need to apply further budget efficiency savings in 2017/2018 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 £0.904m. The most recent figures indicated a total underspend of £539k, but exclusive of ring-fenced budgets this underspend is reduced to £330k.

The Scrutiny Committee were referred to the key underspends and overspends across each service area as contained in the report, with the reasons for any significant variations within individual departments summarised to Members. The report also included an update in respect of the targeted MTFP savings of £0.904m for the Environment Directorate for 2017/2018. It was explained that the approved MTFP savings introduced for 2017/2018 have or will be achieved or will be achieved by the end of the financial year

In response to a Member's query regarding the allocation of general revenue underspends, Officers explained that 50% of the amount is reinvested in the directorate's strategic reserves and the remainder is allocated to Council working balances. This practice is applied across all directorates. A Member referred to the high level of underspends across the directorate and expressed a need for the setting of more stringent budgets in each service area. Queries were received regarding a vacant post within Parks and Outdoor facilities and it was confirmed that this relates to a grounds supervisor post which is being held vacant as an MTFP saving for next year. It was also explained that this saving will assist the department in delivering the approach outlined in the proposed Tree Strategy.

Discussion took place regarding an overspend against highway maintenance works as a result of additional pothole repairs. A Member queried the proportion of repairs carried out in preparation for the Velothon event and if the Council was able to recharge for these works. Officers explained that such data is not available but emphasised that the same assessment criteria is applied to all potholes requiring repair. Members were also reminded of the Cabinet decision in relation to the Velothon and of the holistic benefits this event brings to the county borough. A Member also queried the reasons for a £181k underspend in Cemeteries, with it explained that this was due to a combination of an underspend across the maintenance budget and income targets being exceeded. It is anticipated that this income level will decrease in future years in line with an increase in the rate of inflation.

Members thanked the Officer for his detailed report and were pleased to note the positive financial position of the Directorate to date.

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

The meeting closed at 7.33 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 12th December 2017, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR