



SPECIAL REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY, 8TH NOVEMBER 2018 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, A. Hussey, S. Kent, J. Ridgewell, G. Simmonds, A. Whitcombe,
T.J. Williams, 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:

M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director of Communities), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public
Protection, Community and Leisure Services), J. Reynolds (Sports & Leisure Facilities
Manager), J. Lougher (Sport & Leisure Development Manager), M. Headington (Green
Spaces and Transport Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of
Democratic Services) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

Also present:

Councillor K. Etheridge (Blackwood Local Ward Member)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, A.G. Higgs, Ms P.
Leonard and J. Scriven.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

3. DRAFT SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION STRATEGY 2019-29

Rob Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services) presented a detailed overview of the report, which advised on the outcome of the public consultation exercise in respect of the Council's draft Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019-29. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the public consultation responses and make any recommendations on the updated draft Strategy appended to the report, prior to its presentation to Cabinet for consideration.

It was noted that the draft Strategy document sets out the future purpose and direction for the provision of sport and active recreation in Caerphilly County Borough, and establishes the key principles and vision which will inform future decisions and actions over the next 10 years. For the purposes of the draft Strategy and the Officer's report, sport and active recreation is defined as the range of sport and physical activity opportunities provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council in conjunction with key partners.

Mr Hartshorn summarised the outcome of the ten-week consultation exercise that had been undertaken to obtain the views of residents, existing users and a broad range of stakeholders. Views were sought via a questionnaire and 11 drop-in sessions held across the county borough, and 711 questionnaire responses were received, together with receipt of a further 20 written responses. The full report of the consultation responses is available through the Council's website. In summary, there was broad support for the draft Strategy's Vision and proposed Actions to support the Vision. Similarly, there was support for the 3 Key Outcomes supporting actions identified in the draft Strategy. In the *What Needs To Be Done* section of the draft Strategy, there was both agreement and disagreement with the actions identified and these were considered in more detail in the report.

The Committee's attention was drawn to a number of key findings arising from the consultation as set out in the report. They were also referred to the Report of Consultation appended to the report, which had considered the comments made during the consultation and sets out how these will be addressed. In light of the responses and feedback received during the consultation process, a number of amendments have been made to the Strategy, with a summary of the key changes listed in the report.

It was noted that the draft Strategy proposes adoption of the Welsh Government and Sports Wales' 'Facilities for Future Generations Blueprint' for Sport and Active Recreation together with a decision-making matrix for determining the provision of strategic leisure facilities that are directly managed by the Sport and Leisure Services. This means that over the 10 year life of the Strategy, the Council intends to invest in 4 high class strategic multi-functional facilities, meaning that some other sites may close or be managed by others. The Council is acutely aware of concerns regarding any potential loss of facilities and will give careful consideration to opportunities for alternative provision before any facilities are withdrawn. The impact arising from any rationalisation of facilities has been recognised in the Equalities Impact Assessment also appended to the report.

The report highlighted the longevity of the Strategy (spanning a period of 10 years from 2019-2029) and emphasised that any decisions arising from the Strategy (if adopted) will be taken over this period and will be the subject of separate specific reports to Cabinet. The Strategy also recognises the major challenges facing the Authority, including poor levels of health in certain areas of the borough, reducing budgets, the large number of

facilities across the county borough and the deteriorating quality of the Council's older buildings, and increasing population and customer demand.

Following the Officer's presentation of the report, Councillor Kevin Etheridge was invited to address the Committee in respect of the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy.

Councillor Etheridge sought clarification on the number of responses received from Elected Members during the period of consultation. Officers confirmed that 19 responses had been received via the consultation exercise, with a further 6 written responses also being received.

Councillor Etheridge referred to the consultation responses in respect of the "better health" Outcome identified in the Strategy, whereby the majority (97%) agreed that future generations should be inspired to adopt healthy active lifestyles, and he stated that this should be the overriding consideration in respect of the Strategy. He also made reference to the Strategy Vision to encourage healthy lifestyles and support residents in being more active more often, which was agreed with by 85% of respondents. Councillor Etheridge then referred to the consultation question regarding rationalisation of leisure centres, and highlighted the 52% of responses that felt rationalisation would have a negative impact. In view of this and in having regard to the health implications for residents of the county borough, he asked the Committee to consider recommending to Cabinet that Pontllanfraith and Cefn Fforest Leisure Centres be withdrawn from the Active Sport and Recreation Strategy.

Officers explained that the health Outcome had been addressed within the report, with the Strategy containing a whole section devoted to health, and that "better health" is one of the main drivers of the Strategy. Members were reminded of the difficult financial times ahead for the Authority and that the provision of sport and leisure facilities is a discretionary and not statutory service.

Mark S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities) highlighted the intention of the Strategy in that it will be a high level 10-year holistic approach to serve the whole of the county borough. He acknowledged the focus on Cefn Fforest and Pontllanfraith Leisure Centres in view of previous reports and the petition against closure subsequently presented to Council, but emphasised that there was nothing in the Strategy to indicate that any particular leisure centre has been earmarked for closure. He explained that the Strategy places an emphasis on residents to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and that it should not be dependent on the provision of services by any individual leisure centre. He also reiterated that it is a Wales Audit Office requirement to have a Strategy in place and emphasised that this will be a 10-year strategic approach to the provision of Sport and Active Recreation across the county borough.

A Member referred to the potential for those leisure centres not selected as one of the 4 high class strategic multi-functional facilities to be closed or managed by others, and asked if consideration had been given to community trusts to run leisure centres. Jeff Reynolds (Sport and Leisure Services Facilities Manager) explained that a number of local authorities have adopted their own approach and particular model, and that any consideration and decisions in respect of community management will be included in separate reports to Cabinet, and a specific decision making process will be followed before any facilities are considered for withdrawal.

Clarification was sought on the criteria for the three strategic levels in respect of leisure centre facilities as set out in the draft Strategy. It was explained that Level 1 would relate to a localised and smaller community-focused centre, Level 2 has a more strategic basis, involving travel to get to this leisure centre and with a broader provision of facilities on offer, whilst Level 3 would operate on a far more commercial level and have the potential to impact on tourism and attract visitors on a regional and national basis.

A Member expressed reservations over whether any leisure centre in the borough could be seen as a tourist attraction, cited the amount of investment required to bring facilities up to this standard, and queried where this funding would come from. Officers referred to the framework set out in the draft Strategy and explained that the Centre for Sporting Excellence in Ystrad Mynach has a regional presence given the types of events that it hosts. Caerphilly Leisure Centre also has the opportunity to deliver commercially sustainable facilities given the level of population growth in and around the area.

In regards to costs, it was explained that new build might be a more beneficial alternative to refurbishment works, and potential costs would be addressed via a business case which would explore opportunities for funding including borrowing mechanisms or the use of capital funding. It was reiterated that no decisions have been taken in respect of funding and that the Strategy sets out a number of aspirations. Any such proposals would be the subject of further reports and detailed business cases before any funding is made available

A Member queried whether the population growth of 2155 people across the county borough over the next 20 years, (equating to 100 residents per year) as cited in the draft Strategy was an accurate reflection of the situation across the Authority. He also queried the projections relating to an increasing older age profile and stated that population is not growing to the extent that extra spend is required. Mr Hartshorn confirmed that he would seek clarification from the Corporate Policy team regarding the accuracy of the population growth cited, but explained that the age profile is accurate and added that the Authority does not have sufficient funding to maintain the status quo regarding existing leisure provision. Concerns were raised regarding the aims of the Strategy in view of the need for austerity measures and Officers confirmed that the Strategy had been developed with the financial challenges ahead very much in mind.

A Member cited the consultation response which reported that 52% of respondents felt there would be a negative impact to rationalising leisure facilities, and emphasised that this equated to a fraction of 1% of the county borough population when taking into account the number of respondents and responses. Another Member referred to the location of the strategic sites and suggested that particular leisure centres were being given precedence in view of projected denser population growths. He stated that Cefn Fforest and Pontllanfraith are also the focus of new housing developments and that these leisure centres should be retained in view of the need to support the provision of health and wellbeing for residents in these areas.

Clarification was sought on the spread and location of the consultation respondents. Officers explained that half of the individuals indicated their postcode but that these are not mapped by ward. In response to a query on attendance for the consultation drop-in sessions, it was confirmed that 11 sessions were held with 46 attendees. Officers provided a breakdown of attendance across each session and it was noted that the Bargoed and Blackwood sessions were better attended, but overall attendance was very low and in single figures for some sessions.

Discussion took place regarding the four strategic sites centres referenced in the Strategy. A Member alluded to the creation of a leisure centre in the Bargoed/Aberbargoed area and in response to queries from the Interim Corporate Director of Communities, explained that he had noted this proposal in previous documents. Officers emphasised that the Strategy does not state that it is intended to build anywhere across the county borough or take away facilities from any particular area, and highlighted page 33 of the Strategy in particular, which stated that the 4 strategic centres would be located in Risca, Caerphilly, and Newbridge, and one in the Bargoed/Aberbargoed area to serve the north of the county borough. However, it was emphasised that this referred to areas of the county borough and not specific leisure centre buildings or sites. It was confirmed

that Heolddu Leisure Centre currently serves as the fourth strategic site at this point in time.

A Member highlighted the need for playing field provision to be included in the Strategy and it was explained that this was addressed through the reference to the use of outdoor spaces and playing fields at Page 33, and that there is no shortfall of provision in this regard. Officers added that the Council has 120 sports pitches to accommodate a wide range of teams, and the last few years has seen significant investment in 3G facilities.

The same Member referred to the cost of delivering the Strategy and summarised his own cost analysis based on a number of assumptions. He suggested that these would far exceed the estimates set out in the report and queried whether the Council would seek additional funding in this regard. He also referred to email correspondence between himself and the Interim Chief Executive on the matter. Officers highlighted inaccuracies in the Member's cost analysis and suggested that he had misinterpreted the responses supplied to him. They explained that the cost assumptions in the report had been based on new build quotes and refurbishments previously undertaken. It was emphasised that no decisions had yet been made in respect of the future of leisure sites and whether this investment will entail refurbishment or new build, which will have different levels of cost.

As the Interim Corporate Director of Communities had the correspondence in question to hand, with the agreement of the Committee, he summarised the email responses to the key points raised by the Member. It was noted that the Interim Chief Executive had outlined the facts in respect of the 4 strategic sites set out in the draft Strategy, with 3 of them being attached to secondary schools. Heolddu will remain as the fourth strategic site within the proposals until the review of 6th Form secondary school provision is complete. At this point, Caerphilly Leisure Centre is the only standalone proposed strategic leisure centre but is in need of investment as outlined in the report, which would be subject to approval following a robust business case. The emails referred to the initial draft Strategy report presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 26th June 2018 (and thereafter Cabinet) and explained that, if adopted, the Strategy would be a ten-year plan and the proposals will be the focus of separate reports, funding and business cases.

A Member suggested that there was a need to also address growing population in areas other than Caerphilly town, by retaining and investing in the leisure centres in these areas. He also referred to the level of investment costs required and queried how it would be possible to endorse a Strategy for which the detailed costs are not yet known. Officers emphasised that funding for each proposal would be subject to a separate robust business case.

In response to queries surrounding a potential new build option for Caerphilly Leisure Centre as set out in the report, Officers confirmed that the build timeframe would be site dependent but in the region of 20 months, and in the event of temporary closure, a facilities partnership would be sought with other buildings and included relocation of equipment to other buildings. However, it was emphasised that the costs associated with a new build as identified in the report are indicative figures from 2017 and that the detail would be included in any subsequent business case.

Clarification was sought on the classification of levels across existing leisure centres. It was confirmed that Caerphilly, Newbridge and Risca would be classed as Level 2 and none of the current sites meet Level 1 or Level 3 criteria. It was explained that if a new leisure Centre was developed in Caerphilly, consideration would be given to making this a multi-purpose facility to enhance the customer service offer and reach Level 3 status.

The Committee also discussed a number of other elements within the report and draft Strategy. A Member referred to the 58% of respondents who disagreed that it is no longer feasible for the Council to provide the "same service for all", and queried the

ambiguity of the question and the equalities implications arising from the Strategy. Officers explained that the question is open to interpretation, and that the Equalities Impact Assessment appended to the report recognises the potential for negative impacts, and sets out how these will be mitigated. Reference was made to subsidy levels and the amount per user and Members were advised that detailed information is set out in the previous report on the draft Strategy presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 26th June 2018. It was confirmed that the current subsidy total is just under £2m.

Reference was made to the use of 3G pitches and a Member expressed the need for these to be upgraded given the increase in the number of users. Officers explained that money is allocated to maintenance of 3G pitches on an annual basis and that further investment may take place in the future as a result of the 21st Century Schools programme. Discussion also took place regarding the provision and availability of leisure facilities at school-based sites. Officers confirmed that sufficient collaborative arrangements are in place between the Council and schools to meet the current demand.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be endorsed and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

A separate motion was moved and seconded in that Pontllanfraith and Cefn Fforest Leisure Centres be withdrawn from the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy. By a show of hands, and in noting there were 9 against, this motion was declared lost.

Voting then took place on the substantive motion, and by a show of hands, and in noting there were 3 against with 1 abstention, this was declared carried by the majority present. It was therefore

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the updated draft Sport and Active Recreation Strategy as appended to the report be approved.

The meeting closed at 7.07 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 February 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR