



HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE
AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 12TH DECEMBER 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe – Chair
Councillor S. Williams – Vice Chair

Councillors:

C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, D. Cushing, C. Cuss, D. T. Davies, T. Heron, A. Hussey, M. James, D. Ingram-Jones, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, H. Pritchard, J. A Pritchard and J. Rao.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor S. Morgan (Leader of Council), J. Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure, and Green Spaces) and P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection).

Also in attendance:

To present on Agenda Item No. 9: M. Singh, P. Curtis, R. Yousif, D. Parker, C. Johnson, J. Goddard, D. Patterson, and D. Leigh.

Together with:

Officers: M. S. Williams (Director for Economy and Environment), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), J. Reynolds (Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager), J. Davies (Parks and Countryside Operations Manager), P. Cooke (Transformation Manager (Lead) – Decarbonisation), H. Richardson (Project Officer - Decarbonisation), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and A. Jones (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 31ST OCTOBER 2023.

Subject to the inclusion of Councillors C. Cuss and J. Rao to the list of those in attendance it was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 15 for, 0 against and 2 Abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 31st October 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

5. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period December 2023 to March 2024.

Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 17 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports which were taken in the following order.

10. PONTLLANFRAITH LEISURE CENTRE

With the approval of the Chair this item was brought forward on the agenda following a request that a motion to defer discussion on the report be tabled.

The Vice Chair requested that members support a motion to defer discussion on this report until the outcome of the public consultation. The scrutiny committee would then have all the information to consider the proposals.

The Director for Economy and Environment advised that the recommendation in the report was seeking the views of the Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process. The intention was to include the views of the Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation analysis this would then be included in a further report to Scrutiny prior the report being presented to Cabinet.

The motion was moved and seconded that consideration of the report be deferred until the outcome of the Public Consultation. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 16 for, 1 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the report be deferred until the outcome of the Public Consultation.

9. CAERPHILLY LEISURE AND WELLBEING HUB UPDATE. (PRESENTATION)

With approval of the Chair this item was brought forward on the agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces introduced the presentation on the new Leisure and Wellbeing Hub. The scrutiny committee were advised that the Hub will comprise of a new swimming pool, state of the art fitness suite and spa, children's play and activity area, café and community and wellbeing facilities. The 33.6 million, development has been funded jointly through the UK Government levelling up fund and by the Council.

Mr Singh the Project Manager on behalf of Alliance Leisure gave an overview of presentation which explained the timeframe and the various stages of the project. The Committee were advised that the project was currently in RIBA Stage 3 of the process with a final report due to be submitted to Council on the 12th January 2024. This report will provide an update by the design team, following this RIBA Stage 4 can commence when designs will be developed and completed by May 2024. The pre planning application was submitted on the 27th November 2023 and public consultations have ended today. The responses to the consultation will be considered and included within the final planning application by the 22nd January 2024. Contracts should be signed by July 2024 and the estimated date for construction start is July 2024 with completion planned for January 2026.

Watson Batty Architects presented slides of the architect's impression of the building and the services offered.

Slides of the landscape were shown to the Committee, and it was confirmed that the aim was to retain as much as possible of the existing vegetation and enhance it with new plants and shrubs, the Council's landscaping officer and tree officer have been involved in these discussions. There is an Active Travel Route through the site and there will be a Cycling Hub with secure storage for 30 bicycles in place under the main canopy as well as an area for cyclists to fix their bikes. Members were reassured that the bike store and car park would be covered by CCTV cameras and fully illuminated.

The site will be Sustainable Drainage Techniques (SUDS) compliant to ensure that surface water would be collected and stored on site, and this will be used in the Rain Gardens and Swales and Suds Basins. This area will be planted with grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs to create a species rich landscape. In terms of ecology, sustainability, and climate resilience a mixture of native trees with some ornamentals will be planted.

Following the presentation, a Member sought clarification on whether there would be an indoor cafe as the presentation only referred to an outdoor café. It was confirmed that there would be a café on the ground floor overlooking the pool area, and facilities within the adventure play area and the tag active area.

A Member requested confirmation on what renewable energy will be installed. Members were advised that all options have been looked at to provide the best Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) to heat and cool the building in the most energy efficient way. The heating of the pool, hot water generation and handling units would be achieved via a biomass boiler solution, which links with the fuel storage to maintain a consistent supply to the building. The front of house areas will have a Variable Refrigerant System (VRF), to offer simultaneous heating and cooling that maximises the coefficient of performance of the system. Mechanical ventilators will be in place throughout the building, and each of these units will have a high efficiency heat exchanger and coils to allow tempering of the air in the Winter and in the Summer hot air is not being taken out to maximise efficiency. There will be an intelligent Building Management System (BMS), to control parameters and set points and times for everything to operate only when needed. The electric services will be monitored by meters to enable the data to be analysed to see if any changes to the settings are required. The lighting will be LED throughout, which would be on timers or centralized controls, or motion detection so only used when required. In terms of the roof there was 300m² for panels to be installed and the design of the building will be as airtight and as efficient as possible.

Members noted that the presentation highlighted natural light in the design and asked if the roof will be all glass. The Architect and the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services confirmed that the roof would not be all glass, however there will be glass roof lights in the main circulation area and glazing at the front of the building will provide natural light.

A Member asked if some vegetation could be removed and used for more car park spaces. The Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services confirmed that it was about striking a balance between promoting Active Travel Route, to provide enough parking to operate the building, and also having sustainable drainage requirements to contribute to the drainage and planting on site.

Clarification was sought on the number of parking spaces on site and would there be Electric Vehicle Charing Points. It was confirmed that there would be 120 parking spaces, and electric vehicle charging points using 21 kilowatt twin chargers.

A Member sought confirmation as to whether the building is to be developed on a green field site and if the abbreviated terms in the energy update for BMS and VRF could be explained. The Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services confirmed that the site is a brown field site, and the abbreviations are Building Management System, which is an intelligent control system and Variable Refrigerant System, the refrigerant based technology to heat and cool the space simultaneously.

A Member enquired what is the comparable size and depth for the new pool to what is currently in place at Caerphilly Leisure Centre. Officers confirmed that the pool at Caerphilly Leisure Centre is a 25 by 10 standard tank with 4 lanes and the new pool

would be 25 by 15 standard tank with 6 lanes., A standard depth pool depth of 1.1 to 1.2 metres will be used, this will allow more flexibility to program the pool effectively.

Clarification was sought on what Disabled Access will be in place. It was confirmed that the building will be accessible throughout, the main entrance will be automatic, there will be a dropped counter section for wheelchair users, and a level threshold throughout the building. The facilities within the changing areas will be adapted for people with disabilities to allow access to the pool via a pool pod and changing rooms and toilets would be accessible throughout. There will also be a lift for access to the first floor, and the café area, reception and fitness suites will have induction loops.

A Member sought clarification on what plans would be in place to make it safer to cycle to the Hub and in relation to the Eco system drainage, how sustainable will it be and what will be in place to ensure the surrounding areas and residents are safe. The Director for Economy and Environment referred to the Active Travel Network Route Map which is available online and covers all authorities in Wales. It was explained that bids are put in every year to Welsh Government to enhance the Active Travel Network Route and work is ongoing. The connectivity to Caerphilly Town and Transport Interchange is a fundamental part of the development Members can go online to view and, a link can be provided if requested. In relation to the SUDS requirements, Legislation was introduced in Wales 3 years ago which is dealing with surface water drainage using biodiversity and natural methods. There are strict regulations and the SUDS team have been collaborating with the Architects to develop this scheme and ensure the design is fit for the future.

One Member requested information on the solar panel's energy output and what percentage of the energy needs would be met by them. It was confirmed that this information would be provided to officers and circulated to Members.

The Chair thanked the Presenters for the presentation.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the presentation and provided comments.

7. GRASS CUTTING REGIMES

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces presented the report which sought the views of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee in relation to grass cutting regimes across the county borough and proposals to enhance and promote biodiversity.

A Member highlighted that Scandinavian Design is no longer at Aberbargoed and Britannia as mentioned in the report at Appendix 1, the new name is Wild Water. Officers noted the change.

Members stated their support for the proposals, a Member asked that consideration is given to wildflower areas on council owned housing estates and suggested better signage to explain why grassed areas are not mown. The scrutiny committee members were advised that there is an open invitation to propose areas in their wards where wild areas can be developed. Lessons have been learned from the previous year and appendix one has a shorter list to ensure there are sufficient resources to clear the areas at the end of the year.

Members asked how successful the wildflower seeding is and suggested plant plugs might be a better option. The committee was advised that it is important to remove arisings to enable natural flowers to spread and flourish. Officers would like to collaborate with Members and community groups to boost species numbers.

In terms of signage, members were informed that there are plans to put up signs or use message stencils to mark pathways and inform the public.

The Scrutiny Committee asked if there are plans to start collecting grass cuttings going forward, the committee was advised that to collect cuttings additional resources and additional new equipment would be required. The Authority has invested in some new machines that can collect in smaller areas however there is still an aspiration to do this in remaining areas and the intention is to remove grass arisings after cutting at all the locations listed in Appendix 1.

Members asked what the plans are for spraying of weedkiller on roads and pathways. The committee were informed that the council currently engages an external contractor who carries out 2 sprays per annum, they use a glyphosate-based product which is considered the most effective method. The next planned sprays are due in February/March 2024.

A Scrutiny Committee Member highlighted the lack of grass cutting collection in cemeteries which can result in complaints from the public. The committee were advised that officers will look at this and will liaise with the Member concerned.

Members expressed concerns regarding the impact of the loss of senior staff, the committee were assured that whilst it is acknowledged there has been an impact with the loss of their skills and knowledge, that new staff have been recruited and have been developing their experience well.

The Scrutiny Committee asked if the messaging from 'No Mow May' has changed and it was confirmed that we are now prioritising nature.

A member highlighted the number of leaves left on pathways and roads and asked what the planned use of road sweepers is to remove them. The committee were reminded that it is impossible to collect all leaf fall across the County Borough and the priority is to keep "at risk" gullies clear of leaves where possible.

The Corporate Director also advised that many of the items that had been requested at the meeting (for example collection of cut grass, collection of leaves) represented additional revenue costs against the backdrop of a parks and grounds service that has already given up circa £1m in savings over the last 8-10 years and more importantly the requirement corporately to save a further £50m+ over the next few years which represents significant financial challenges ahead for all service areas.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms this was agreed by the majority present.

Having noted the content of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations are supported and should be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms and with one verbal vote (and in noting there were 15 for, 1 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED that: -

1. The approach adopted since the 2021/22 cutting season continue to be the adopted grass cutting standard in relation to our highway verges and by-pass routes where mowing is kept to a minimum, in accordance with Traffic Wales guidance.
2. The Council continues its commitment to the Nature isn't Neat project, which is part of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership, establishing joined-up green space management to create wildflower-rich pollinator habitats

across the Gwent local authority areas, which includes Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, and Torfaen.

3. Visibility splays and sight lines on highways; margins and access on footways/cycle routes; sports grounds; urban areas such as housing estates, municipal parks, older person accommodation, cemeteries; play/recreational public open spaces, be maintained at the current cutting frequencies.
4. The list of areas as set out in Appendix 1, which are to be allowed to flourish during the summer period be endorsed.
5. The Authority continues to develop and enhance areas using bought in wildflower seed as set out in Paragraph 5.11 of the Officers report.

8. DECARBONISATION ANNUAL REPORT NOVEMBER 2023

The Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change presented the report which provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the work undertaken across the authority to deliver the aims of the Decarbonisation Strategy and sought any comments prior to the report being presented to Cabinet in January 2024.

Clarification was sought as to whether any additional staff have been taken on for the five man team or were they taken from the existing workforce, and whether training would be provided to Councillors on the reports proposals. The officer confirmed that the team comprised of a Manager and four others. One appointment came from External Organisation with other officers from within the Council. In relation to training it was confirmed that Councillors would be included.

The Member queried if Welsh Government would be providing guidance to the council and local businesses in the supply chain on how to evaluate emissions and complete the paperwork, It was also suggested that the team liaise with all Community Councils to discuss what can be done to help with Decarbonisation. Members were advised that Welsh Government have taken the lead on this as the first Nation in the World to set up a formal process, and the Annual report is based on the strict guidance. This is the third year that the Council has produced figures, but it has not possible to compare data due to criteria changes but over the next few years ongoing patterns can be measured to allow progress to be shown. In relation to the supply chain 75% of our emissions are related to supply chain or things we buy such as services and goods. Officers would collaborate with suppliers and improve this. Members were advised that the report highlights the Councils direct emissions, and we are required by WG to be carbon neutral by 2030, with residents and businesses by 2050. Members were reassured that this would be looked at soon and in terms of engaging with Community Councils this route has already started and would look to take this further.

A Member sought clarification on how communities would benefit from the proposed windfarms and what money could be expected from the energy companies, in addition what progress had been made in relation to the Bryn Group using food waste recycling to generate power to the Tredomen site. Members were advised that the Community benefits are being considered and an update will be provided on progress. The Director for Economy and Environment confirmed that the Policy Team had been working on a draft guidance document for community benefits and the draft for the energy related projects is almost finalised and will go through the Cabinet process for approval soon. In relation to the Bryn Group the Director for Economy and Environment confirmed that this is currently going through the initial business case process and discussions were ongoing.

A query was raised about an email Caerphilly Council received from a company requesting that Caerphilly Council trial Electric Vehicle Charging in residential streets. An Officer explained that this would be for the Infrastructure team to deal with and advised that this would be passed onto them for a response to be provided.

Clarification was sought on the significant increase in business travel within the report. Officers confirmed that there was an increase due to an omission in the report for 2021/2022 because of missing data from the Hart team. In 2022/2023 the data collection was improved and included that teams' emissions, similarly the same thing happened with commuting mileage. The methodology has also been improved and has factored in the increase in commuting that occurred after returning to the office following covid. The commuting mileage, data is compiled from a travel survey this has been used every year and is dependent on the number of staff that are estimated to come into the office, the survey was undertaken by facilities management and has been reviewed, with an improved survey ready to be implemented this year to provide better quality data for the next reporting year.

A Member asked are we publicising everything that was being done to increase public knowledge to promote good practice. The Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change stated they were happy to have conversations with all members on how best to do this and welcomed Community Councils to have an active role. Officers agreed that this would be an effective way forward and stated they would discuss this with the Council's Communication Team on how to share with the public and engage with our Communities.

A Member queried whether we would continue with the methodology we have been using as comparisons could not be made. In addition, and in relation to procurement will offsetting be included in any service or products purchased via the procurement process, and would a criteria be included so that companies can offset their emissions by planting trees or have low emissions through their production. Officers confirmed that the methodology was set by WG, and has strict terms on how this was done, it was explained that each year there are different things that are requested to be reported on so it was difficult to compare year on year, but the methodology is settling down and we are able to compare much better. In relation to procurement Members were advised this was a difficult area with a lot of factors that need to be considered and needs to be seen as a partnership of us working with our supply chain and work continues. We are collaborating with other local authorities in Southeast Wales and the rest of Wales to look at this on a standardised basis and a streamlined way.

Following consideration of the report the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made to date on the actions set out in the Decarbonisation Annual Report and commented on the approach taken in relation to, and the content of this first annual progress report.

RECOMMENDED that the progress made to date on the actions set out in the Decarbonisation Annual report be noted and the comments on the approach taken in relation to, and the content of the first annual report be noted.

The meeting closed at 19:14 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 13th February 2024, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR