



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 17TH MAY 2016 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, J. Bevan, C.J. Cuss, R.W. Gough, Mrs P. Marsden, Mrs D. Price, Mrs E. Stenner

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Corporate Director – Communities), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), D. Whetter (Interim Head of Regeneration), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), G. Parry (Operations Group Manager), R. Roberts (Performance Manager), P. Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer), B. Davies (Solicitor), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. WELCOME – NEW MEMBER

The Chair welcomed Councillor Philippa Marsden to her first meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee, having replaced Councillor Jan Jones on the Scrutiny Committee. Members requested that their appreciation to Councillor Jones for her valued contribution to the work of the Committee be placed on record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs A. Blackman, C. Elsbury and M.J. Prew, and Cabinet Member K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES – 29TH MARCH 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29th March 2016 (minute nos. 1 – 10) 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 Cabinet Members N. George and T.J. Williams. Councillor George also delivered a report on behalf of Cabinet Member K. James.

Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services) presented his report and explained that three service areas within his portfolio (Sport and Leisure, Waste and Recycling, and Fleet Management) have been included within the Authority's new Improving Services programme. This involves project teams examining specific aspects of that service to establish if there are options for delivering that service in a more efficient way, and the Cabinet Member summarised the methods by which these service areas would be reviewed.

A Member referred to a recent non-collection of refuse in his ward, and Officers explained that unfortunately several refuse collection vehicles had broken down in the area that day but that all outstanding refuse was collected the following day. Reference was also made to complaints involving overnight parking of some Council vehicles and the Cabinet Member confirmed that this situation was currently under review.

Councillor T.J. Williams (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering) presented his report and outlined a number of achievements across the Engineering Services Division. These include dredging works to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal at Risca, the commencement of the 2016/17 road surfacing programme, the recruitment of additional fixed term staff within Highway Operations, and successful funding bids for a number of projects within the Transportation Engineering Group.

A Member queried if the fixed term staff within Highway Operations would be retained after the 18-month trial period and it was confirmed that their effectiveness would be reviewed in tandem with a number of new work schemes currently being launched. A Member asked for an update on the proposed A469 bypass between New Tredegar and Pontlloftyn. It was confirmed that a site visit to the area would be taking place shortly and that the Cabinet Member had requested a progress report. Officers also confirmed that a feasibility study regarding the bypass was nearing completion and would be presented to WG thereafter as part of a wider highway network solution.

The report from Councillor K. James (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning) advised Members that Cabinet are scheduled to consider matters relating to the Regeneration and Planning Division's provisional capital budget allocations for 2016/17 on 1st June 2016. Members were also updated on a number of areas across the Communities Directorate. These included Planning matters (the Nant Llesg and Cwmgelli planning appeals and consultation on the deposit Local Development Plan), Community Regeneration (the successful launch of the Communities First Team's "Us Girls" project) and Tourism and Events (funding for Blackwood Miners' Institute, an awards nomination for Llancaiach Fawr, the success of the recent Caerphilly Food Festival, and developments in respect of tree-felling at Cwmcarn Forest Drive).

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

7. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) presented the report, which outlined details of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP).

Members were advised that the draft FWP includes all reports identified at a Scrutiny Committee workshop on 29th March 2016 and outlines the reports planned for the period June 2016 to April 2017. The FWP is made up of reports identified by Officers and Members during the workshop and has been prioritised into three priority areas (priority 1, 2 or 3).

Members were asked to consider the draft 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. It was explained that Scrutiny Committee will review this FWP at every meeting going forward alongside any changes to the Cabinet Work Programme or report requests.

A number of amendments were suggested, and it was agreed that the following reports be withdrawn from the FWP and placed on the Members' Portal as information items: Communities First Delivery 2015/16 and Budget Allocation for 2016/17, Canal Action Plan Update, and Environment Budget 2016/17.

It was agreed that the Viable People Places report be rescheduled to 1st November 2016 and that an Environment Budget Update report be scheduled for the meeting of 14th February 2017. Additionally, it was agreed that the following reports scheduled for presentation to Cabinet be placed on the Forward Work Programme: Winter Maintenance Plan, Community and Leisure Services Division - Various Issues Relating to Fees for Specific Services, Highway Maintenance Plan, and Highway Asset Management Plan.

Consideration was also given to three report requests, a copy of which were tabled at the meeting, and Members noted the scoring total allocated to each set of selection criteria. It was agreed that two of the report requests were localised issues, and that they be referred back to Officers for a suitable resolution to be achieved. The third request related to LED lighting and its impact on pedestrian safety. It was agreed that a Street Lighting Report be prepared in relation to this matter and scheduled for the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting on 13th December 2016.

It was agreed that subject to the foregoing amendments, the final version of the Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR ENGINEERING, COMMUNITY AND LEISURE, 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 2015/16 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 2016/17. 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.

During the course of the ensuing debate, a number of queries were raised regarding performance indicators across service areas. Members referred to the average time taken to rectify highway service defects (37 days against a 28 day target). Officers outlined the current remedial processes in place and explained that a backlog in routine highway maintenance has been caused by recent periods of extensive wet weather precluding repairs taking place, and the non-performance of external contractors, along with the competing resource requirements between reactive maintenance, and localised flooding events. They also explained that this matter will be monitored as a key performance indicator for 2016/17 and outlined the framework processes and resources that will be utilised to improve performance, including the use of fixed term staff, a more proactive engagement with external contractors and a better feedback mechanism for reported repairs.

Clarification was sought on the response rate from Engineering Services to Members' requests (currently 84% against a 90% target). Officers explained that this is an improvement on previous performance and that the response period is dependent on the nature of the reported issue. Assurances were given that this key indicator is being monitored with a view to achieving a 100% response rate in the future. A Member also referred to an ongoing drainage issue in their ward and it was agreed that the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering would liaise with them to provide an update on this matter.

Reference was made to the unavailability of year end data across several performance indicators within Waste Collection Services. Officers explained that this was because financial accounts for 2015/16 had not yet closed at the time of the report, and also because performance benchmarking is carried out over the summer months, meaning that some results are not available until the autumn. Members suggested that it could be useful for this explanation to be included in future performance reports.

A Member referred to a 10% reduction in visitor numbers to country parks during 2015/16. Officers explained that this was due to a number of factors, including the introduction of parking charges at country parks, several periods of inclement weather, and the economy in general. It was confirmed that £49,000 income had been generated from car park charges at country parks against an estimate of £85,000, and Members expressed the need for a more achievable estimate to be produced for 2016/17.

Discussion took place regarding a drop in footfall across several town centres during 2015/16. Officers summarised possible reasons for this decrease, including work relating to regeneration schemes, public realm improvements and reactive maintenance works. There had also been some occasions where footfall had not been recorded over a number of weeks due to problems/malfunctions with footfall monitoring equipment. Officers also confirmed that Town Centre Management Officers regularly visit businesses across the town centres to assess the financial climate and gauge whether there are any significant issues.

A Member queried whether the Council would seek to achieve Green Flag National Status over a greater number of its country parks. Officers outlined the criteria and financial implications associated with achieving this award and confirmed there were currently no plans to apply for an extension of this standard. In response to a Member's query, Officers also explained that a drop in grass cutting/weed control customer satisfaction could be attributable to variable weather conditions (which increase vegetation growth) and outlined details of grass cutting processes.

Following consideration of the report, Members noted its contents, together with the progress made against performance objectives within the Communities Directorate for 2015/16.

9. **IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE: CARBON MANAGEMENT – REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT (ANNUAL REPORT – YEAR END) – 2015/16**

Paul Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer) presented the report, which highlighted key progress against Improvement Objective IO4 – Carbon Management: Reduce Our Carbon Footprint for the period April 2015 to March 2016.

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 2015/16, it was recommended that the Improvement Objective: **Carbon Management: Reducing our carbon footprint** due to energy usage in our non-domestic buildings and street lighting, would be reported to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee for regular performance monitoring.

In line with the Carbon Reduction Strategy the Improvement Objective focuses on 4 priorities to reduce emissions: Good Housekeeping, Invest to Save, Design and Asset Management, and Renewable Technology, which mirror the Carbon Reduction Strategy. Details of the actions taken against each of these priorities were outlined in the report and its appendices. All actions have been progressed well during 2015/16, with some challenges and constraints experienced within that period.

Officers explained that there has been a positive improvement in awareness-raising activities, as a result of targeting key individuals such as head teachers, caretakers and building managers. The key actions taken in respect of the Improvement Objective are having a positive impact on carbon management and have significantly reduced the amount of carbon tax payable by the Authority (previously in the region of £440,000 per annum). Demonstrable energy, carbon and cost savings have been achieved during the lifespan of the Improvement Objective, particularly from the 'Invest to Save Scheme' and therefore implementation, delivery and impact of the objective priorities for 2015/16 have been deemed to be successful.

Members were pleased to note the actions set out in the report and of the progress made against the Improvement Objective. They made reference to a number of schools in the county borough that had seen significant savings in their energy bills as a result of the awareness-raising activities.

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. They unanimously agreed with the Officer's judgement of "successful" delivery of the Improvement Objective and endorsed its continuation into 2016/17.

The meeting closed at 7.02 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 28th June 2016, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR