



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 31ST MARCH 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C.J. Cuss, R.T. Davies, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, Ms J.G. Jones, Mrs P. Leonard, M.J. Prew, A. Rees, Mrs E. Stenner

Cabinet Members:

D.V. Poole (Community and Leisure Services), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering)

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), M. Headington (Principal Officer Outdoor Facilities and Bereavement Services), J. Morgan (Trading Standards and Licensing Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs A. Blackman, S. Kent and Mrs D. Price, together with Cabinet Member K. James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. JONATHAN JONES – DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

The Chair advised that Jonathan Jones, Democratic Services Manager, had accepted a position with the Welsh Ambulance Service, and would therefore be leaving the Authority shortly. Members wished Mr Jones all the best for the future and asked that their appreciation for all the work he had carried out on behalf of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee be placed on record.

4. MINUTES – 17TH FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17th February 2015 (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 reports from Cabinet Members D.V. Poole and T.J. Williams. Councillor Poole also delivered a report on behalf of Cabinet Member K. James.

The report from Councillor K. James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning, advised Members that the six-week public consultation exercise in respect of the Draft Preferred Strategy for the Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) has been concluded. The public exhibitions have been very well attended and there has been a significant response to the consultation document. The Planning Team are now in the process of analysing all the responses received and a report will be presented to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council in due course to highlight the key issues that have been raised.

Members were informed that tree-felling at Cwmcarn Forest Drive in respect of larch disease has now commenced. Another leaflet will be issued around the area to emphasise that it is only the forest drive road itself that would be closed, with all other facilities remaining open for business.

Members referred to a formal response to the LDP that had recently been received from a local MP and they were advised that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning would be best placed to comment on the matter.

Councillor T.J. Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering, presented his report, and advised Members of recent developments in relation to highways improvements. The tender launch for a 'Velocity Patcher' is set for the end of this month, which will significantly increase the Authority's existing rate of pothole repairs, and also has significant proven benefits of implementing non-intrusive highway repairs that prolong a carriageway's surface by reducing water ingress. Delivery of this vehicle is planned for October with a prioritised list to trial and complete before Winter 2015. Members were also informed of highway drainage improvement works in Crosskeys, which will address the flooding below the railway bridge during periods of heavy rain. The works are currently progressing to programme and are due to be completed by the end of May 2015.

The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that in response to the Welsh Government's (WG) invitation for 2015/16 transport bids, Officers have prepared and submitted a number of bids in accordance with the priorities identified in the Council's Adopted Local Transport Plan. These relate to local walking, cycling and public transport schemes, the Safe Routes in Communities scheme and road safety schemes and training initiatives. An announcement from WG on the outcome of the bids is expected shortly and this information will be brought back to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

Members advised that a number of the Safe Routes within the county borough have become overgrown. The Cabinet Member requested that details of the affected routes be passed to him so that this information could be actioned by the relevant Officers.

Councillor D.V. Poole, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, presented his report and informed Members that he had recently attended the eleventh annual Disability Six Nations tournament at the Ystrad Mynach Centre of Sporting Excellence. Over 125 schoolchildren participated and the event was once again a huge success. Members were encouraged to view video highlights of the event on the Welsh Rugby Union's (WRU) website.

Members were informed of the date of the annual Caerphilly 10K Race, which will take place on Sunday 21st June 2015. Entries opened in February 2015 and to date, 614 applications have been received, with the aim to secure over 2000 entries. Prior to the main 10K race, there will be a children's 2K race, which has been developed following interest received from children last year.

The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that the Authority has received a tentative enquiry from the WRU in relation to the Ystrad Mynach Centre of Sporting Excellence hosting its first Rugby International match (Wales Under-16s vs England Under-16s on 19th April 2015). The Authority are also in discussions with the WRU in relation to the Centre hosting next year's 6 Nations Women's Rugby Union home matches.

Discussion took place regarding the importance of rugby as a national sport and concerns were raised regarding a perceived decline in sporting participation levels by Welsh pupils. A request was made for information in relation to the development of rugby in schools, and the Member concerned was asked to reiterate this request later in the meeting upon consideration of Agenda Item 9 (To record any requests for an item to be included on the next available agenda).

Members were pleased to note the return of the Caerphilly 10K and made reference to the training preparation already underway by a number of race entrants.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

7. 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.

8. REVIEW OF EXISTING OUTDOOR RECREATION AND LEISURE FACILITIES

Mark S. Williams, Head of Community and Leisure Services and Mike Headington, Principal Officer for Outdoor Facilities and Bereavement Services, presented the report, which sought the views of Members on a recent review of existing outdoor recreation and leisure facilities across the county borough, prior to its presentation to Cabinet for determination.

This formal review of existing recreational facilities focused a number of elements: Equipped Play Provision, Sports Pitches, Leisure Centres, Allotments, and Amenity Green Space. Members were reminded that Section 3 of the review (Leisure Centres) was considered by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 28th October 2014. The conclusions and recommendations arising from that section of the review were unanimously endorsed by Members subject to user consultation being carried out and the results included in any future report to Cabinet. The review in respect of leisure centres is therefore the subject of a current consultation exercise with leisure centre users and a report on this section will be presented to Cabinet at a future date.

The remaining elements were examined in the second phase of the review, which was summarised in the latest report presented to the Committee. Members were advised that the aim of this review (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) was to establish a way forward in relation to a future long-term leisure and recreation strategy.

The review attributed a weighting and scoring matrix to assess the quantity, accessibility and quality of the facilities, using recognised national standards where they exist. These assessment methods (which varied according to facility type) were applied to all recreational facilities across each Adopted Caerphilly County Borough Local Development Plan up to 2021 (LDP) strategy area of the county borough (Heads of the Valley Regeneration Area - HOVRA, Northern Connections Corridor – NCC and Southern Connections Corridor – SCC).

The review discussed a range of conclusions based on the three LDP strategy areas, and returned thirteen recommendations in relation to outdoor sport, leisure and recreational facilities. These were detailed within the review and summarised within the report presented to Members. In general, the review identified the strategy areas where there was good provision of facilities and, where improvements and expansion were needed to specific strategy areas, made a number of recommendations against each facility type accordingly.

Officers explained that once the long-term leisure and recreation strategy was agreed, any future developer contributions from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or Section 106 agreements would be channelled into identified gaps in existing provision to help meet the needs/requirements identified in the report.

During the course of the ensuing debate, a number of specific ward enquiries were made by Members. Reference was made to Appendix 3 of the report (Equipped Play Provision Weighting), and Officers were informed that one of the sites listed (Clos Y Pant), which was privately managed, had been closed for approximately 18 months. This information was noted by Officers. A query was also raised regarding Cwmfelinfach Allotments in that they were not listed within Appendix 9 (Overall Scoring for Allotments). Officers confirmed that they would make enquiries regarding this site and advise the Ward Member of the scoring accordingly.

A query was raised regarding Section 4 of the review (Page 58) which listed the condition of three allotments in the county borough as 'unknown'. Officers advised that this information relied on the outcome of questionnaire responses, which had not been received for these particular sites. Members suggested that a follow-up visit could be undertaken by Officers to ascertain the condition of these sites.

Reference was made to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) proposals regarding bowling club provision. Officers advised that these proposals related to asset transfer, which was a separate matter to the review of existing outdoor recreation and leisure facilities, and that the bowling club proposals would be brought back to the Committee for consideration at a future point in time.

A Member referred to Section 1 of the review (Page 9) which outlined the location of Equipped Play Facilities within the county borough and sought clarification on a facility in Rhymney, which was identified as a skate park in the review but was believed to be a multi-use games area. Officers confirmed that they would make further enquiries as to the facility type and advise the Member accordingly.

During the course of the discussions, Officers responded to a number of queries relating to future funding contributions from CIL and Section 106 agreements. Officers confirmed that there were a number of locations within the Caerphilly area of the county borough that had been identified as potentially benefitting from CIL funding, particularly those sites experiencing drainage issues. Officers also explained that there were a number of conditions attached to Section 106 agreements, including a proviso that funded sites be developed for community use. They confirmed that Section 106 agreements have a commuted sum for 25 years, which covers maintenance and repair works.

Officers reiterated that the only capital funding available in relation to the review was £30,000 per year for 3 years to alleviate sports pitch drainage issues. Development of other areas identified within the review would be dependent on future funding from CIL and Section 106 agreements, which in turn were contingent on the development of local community schemes. Such funding would be allocated accordingly in line with the needs and requirements identified in the report and review.

A query was raised regarding to the involvement of Community and Leisure Services within the LDP. Officers confirmed that the department contributed towards the LDP in respect of sport and leisure frameworks, including suitable timelines for their development and implementation. Members referred to one of the main aims of the LDP, which requires development *'to contribute to improving public health, by promoting land use developments that contribute to healthy lifestyles and wellbeing'*. Officers advised that the development of healthy living did not necessarily need to be provided via a structured facility, and if funding could not be secured to develop this strategy, other alternatives (such as the benefits of taking exercise using the countryside and natural landscapes) could be used to promote this aim.

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services also advised that the matter of public health issues within the county borough would be the subject of a detailed report which would be presented to the Committee at a future point in time.

Members thanked the Officers for their report.

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 for the reasons outlined in the report, the conclusions arising from the Review of Existing Formal Recreation and Leisure Facilities in Caerphilly County Borough be approved.

9. TAXI TRADE LICENSING REQUIREMENTS AND COMPLIANCE

Jacqui Morgan, Trading Standards, Licensing and Registrars Manager, presented the report, which advised Members of the measures in place to ensure compliance and public safety in respect of Licensing requirements. This report on the monitoring of the taxi trade had been prepared following a Member's request at the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting of 28th October 2014.

The report outlined the legislative Licensing framework in place to ensure compliance and public safety in respect of Licensing requirements. Further detail was provided on the Licensing enforcement and compliance measures carried out in 2014, which outlined the actions taken by Licensing Officers under delegated powers (including vehicle spot checks and other license suspensions), and the role of the Licensing Sub-Committee in the refusal/revocation of driver/vehicle licenses. In addition, Officers outlined the details of two complaints dealt with directly by Licensing Officers in 2014.

The report also outlined taxi licensing enforcement activity carried out by the Trading Standards service, which consists of a mixture of proactive checks of vehicles, drivers and operators, and reactive response to complaints. In addition, the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) (which delivers passenger transport services across the Education and Social Services directorates) routinely monitors contracts, reactively responds to complaints, and works with Trading Standards and School Transport Officers to examine vehicles and check the compliance of taxi drivers and school escorts.

Members thanked the Officer for her report.

The Member who had requested the report outlined the background leading to this request. He explained that in his local ward, there was a stretch of road where he had witnessed a number of instances of poor driving etiquette by some taxi drivers, including illegal turns in the road, use of mobile telephones when driving and smoking in a licensed vehicle. Officers advised Members that in such instances, they should pass on as much information as possible about the driver and vehicle to the Licensing Department, which would in turn be passed onto the police if appropriate.

A query was raised in regards to the number of vehicle spot checks carried out as a percentage of the overall number of licensed vehicles in the county borough. It was explained that whilst overall, these checks represented a small number of those vehicles licensed, these were additional vehicle checks over and above the usual inspections at the time of licensing the vehicle, and take place as a result of information or complaints received where there are concerns about a vehicle's appearance. Members were reminded that if they had any concerns about the safety of a vehicle, then they should inform the Licensing Department.

Members made reference to traffic congestion in Blackwood, which they believed to be caused by a number of taxis continually parking on the highway in addition to the taxi rank. Officers advised that whilst traffic concerns were a matter for the police, they would pass the information on to Gwent Police and consider if any other action is possible.

Discussion took place in regards to the large number of vehicle taxi driver applications to Caerphilly from persons living some distance from the county borough. It was explained that this has been a matter of concern for the Licensing Department but that a number of policies and controls have recently been implemented which should reduce such applications in the future.

Members discussed the issue of unlicensed taxis and the problems these were causing licensed taxi companies in the area. Officers outlined enforcement techniques relating to the detection of unlicensed taxis and asked Members to pass on to the Licensing Department any information that could help in their investigations.

A Member explained that he had been made aware of instances where some taxi drivers in Cardiff were turning off their meter prior to the start of the journey and setting high prices for journeys to the Valleys. Officers advised the Member that they would raise this matter with Cardiff Council's Licensing department, as they believed that the meter should remain turned on for the duration of the journey.

Members noted the contents of the report and the measures in place to ensure compliance and public safety.

10. REQUESTS FOR REPORTS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

Councillor R.T. Davies requested a report in relation to the development of rugby in schools.

11. PRESENTATION TO SANDRA ASPINALL – ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chair noted that the last year had seen some difficult decisions being made across the Authority, and thanked Members and Officers for their hard work and assistance regarding these matters.

The Chair then drew Members' attention to the fact that Sandra Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive) would shortly be leaving the Authority, and that sadly this was the last meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee that she would be attending.

Members paid tribute to the manner in which Sandra has carried out her duties, referencing her busy portfolio, and thanked her for the valued advice and guidance she has provided over the years. She was wished every success and happiness in her future endeavours, and was presented with a bouquet of flowers from the Committee as a token of their appreciation.

In response, Sandra referenced the numerous occasions on which the Committee had praised Officers for their hard work in keeping service areas running, and added that it had given her much pleasure to report this positive feedback to her colleagues in the Directorate of the Environment. She thanked Members for their kind words and sentiments and stated that it had been a pleasure to work with the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th May 2015, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR