

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD HYBRID  
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB  
ON TUESDAY, 29 AUGUST 2023 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

H T Bennett	E L P Caparros	C Davies	C L C Davies
B Doughty	M J Evans	P Ford	J Gebbie
RM Granville	J Holmes	P W Jenkins	M R John
S Parker	Pratt	I M Spiller	Unwin
Y Walton-Davies	MJ Williams	R Williams	E D Winstanley
T Wood			

Apologies for Absence

G Chappell

Officers:

Nimi Chandrasena	Democratic Services Officer - Support
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Jonathan Parsons	Group Manager Development
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Cllr Melanie Evans declared a personal interest as a Pencoed Town Councillor in relation to Item 4 - Planning Update – 20 Minute Neighbourhoods
- Cllr Yvonne Walton-Davies declared a personal interest in relation to Item 4 - Planning Update – 20 Minute Neighbourhoods due to the fact that she had restricted mobility and was an Active Travel and Wellbeing advocate.

17. PLANNING UPDATE - 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

This report was presented by The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services, the purpose of which was to provide a briefing on the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which has been incorporated into the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).

He stated that the 20 minute neighbourhoods were designed to allow people to have access to facilities such as schools, shops, recreation space, health facilities, generally within a 20 minute walk or cycle ride from their homes. He stated that the concept was well established in urban planning and was widely seen as a key component to what is described as good place making and good environments.

He added that it was not an new concept. Historically, it had been seen that there was an increased personal mobility in mid 20th century, where traditional neighbourhoods in the UK provided a range of local services that could easily be accessed on foot. Even with the large post war, urban expansion of social housing, shops, schools, health facilities, recreation areas, open space were all built into the fabric of these developments.

He went on to say that the difference was that during the latter part of the 20th century, early 21st century, housing schemes were being developed around increased road infrastructure with travel by motor vehicles prioritised and this had sometimes proven to be at the expense of non-car travel options.

In other examples, not necessarily in Bridgend, there had been entire housing estates equipped with new on-site facilities and could only be accessed safely by the use of car. Such developments were undertaken in line with the planning policies or the deregulated planning policies over the time.

National Planning policy aims to change the approach that had been prevalent over the last 20 years by providing more emphasis on prioritising active travel and public transport options over car-based solution. Part of this is the concept of the 20 minute neighbourhood.

There has been also a great awareness on climate change and a compelling need to reduce dependency on carbon based modes of transport. The Welsh government and local authorities have declared a climate crisis.

The pandemic had a profound social impact on people's environments and the lockdowns provided an opportunity to examine the relationship with the local environment and the need for more local based amenity and open space.

He stated that the quality of the locality is a fundamental part of good quality based placemaking.

In Bridgend, the areas were located on the edge or close to established settlements as this allowed for easy access to existing facilities by active travel.

Also, within these new developments, there should be a provision of facilities including primary schools, open space, green infrastructure as this forms part of the an important aspect of any new development and these facilities will be promoted and controlled through the local development planning process.

The Group Manager stated that the concept should not be treated as a panacea to all problems and was not designed to stop all car-based journeys. He stated that it would take time and had to be supported by good quality public transport infrastructure. The Concept would still require the public to travel to get to work.

He stated that the government was working towards building better and moving away from car dependency for short local journeys thereby reducing the need to travel where it was not absolutely necessary. He stressed that it was not about locking people in their localities or restricting movement but about more about improving the quality of their environment.

A member enquired what the Council were doing to assist Community Councils and tackle rumours, causing suspicion and fear, spread by way of leaflet drops.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that while he was not personally aware of the leaflet drops by various organisations in the borough, he was hopeful that the presentation within the forum would correct misconceptions of the concept. He invited individual community councils to direct any queries/concerns to the Planning department.

He assured the forum that there was no intention to introduce the concept in the borough in its entirety but there were new developments coming forward and these developments were going to be built in accordance with the new National planning policies and the development plan policies, with a view to reducing the need for travel unless necessary.

The Chairperson added that there was a communication sent out in response to the rumours caused.

Another member had a two-part question:

- How much input was received from the Health Board in relation to the concept and
- In relation to affordable housing, would people be able to afford to buy a home within a 20 minute neighbourhood.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that one of the fundamental principles when preparing a long-term plan is that there is significant engagement with outside agencies. The Health Board was one of the key consultees and they were fully informed and fully part of the of the process.

He stated that on wider national scale, there was widespread support for increased active travel as a health benefit.

He stated that he appreciated that the Concept would not apply to everyone. However, there were health benefits associated with increased active travel and the aim of the new residential and the new strategic sites can be implemented through that infrastructure so that residents had a choice. The new sites were on the edge of settlements and therefore not that far removed from the town centres. If and when required, residents would have access public transport hubs and employment within those town centres or within the surrounding areas via the usage of active travel.

In relation to the question on Affordable Housing within the 20 minute neighbourhoods, the Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that it was not directly part of the 20 minute neighbourhood principle. Housing in planning terms, specifically affordable housing in the context of planning was controlled through the land use planning system.

He suggested that it could be a mix of RSL Properties rented, assisted purchase schemes.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services explained that Planning could not control house prices, they provide the infrastructure ie. the land and the mechanisms to secure the degree of an affordable house. He stated the role of the planning system was to allocate the sites, and within that, it could allocate a percentage of those properties to be RSL or assisted purchase. He stated that the controls mentioned were outside Planning and lie with the housing team who work with the RSLs.

The same member asked, in relation to the Group Manager's response, how much input was received from the Health Board, she cited examples to qualify her question.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services explained that the Health board were consultees and they provided input into the development plan. He stated that while Planning could provide the land use designations and sites, it was up to the health board how they wished to operate.

A member expressed his gratitude to the Leader for addressing the issue of spreading false information on social media in relation to the concept of the 20 minute neighbourhoods.

He praised the concept and stated he was looking for reassurance that what is finally delivered would be aligned to the purpose of the concept. He went on to cite examples and queried :

- The possibility of holding Property Developers accountable when critical parts of development plans are not delivered in practice.
- and
- Asked how the Council were going to use that opportunity to upgrade existing communities.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that there were challenges in holding Property Developers accountable, they were however learning how to develop larger sites and there were better national planning policies to help secure that. In addition to this, the department were exploring stricter Section 106 agreements. He mentioned that historically, land had been made available for health facilities, however Health professionals such doctors and dentist surgeries had not come forward to provide their services and the local authority were reliant on Health Boards and other Development Boards when in relation to upgrading facilities.

A member cited an example of an area within his borough and asked how the authority would guarantee the safety of the active travel routes by ensuring that trees and park areas in unadopted land are maintained.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded saying he understood the concerns raised and was only able to comment on aspects related to his service area and would not be able to advise on other service areas and processes.

The Head of Operations, Community Services added that examples relating to specific areas can be taken offline and discussed. He explained that once an area has gone through the adoption process and the developer has met the requirements, the service area take over the maintenance of pathways and routes.

A member asked the possibility of subsidising bus travel.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that, while theoretically Section 106 can be utilised to subsidise bus travel under the current LDP, this had not been raised before. The normal practice would be to utilise Section 106 towards Highway infrastructure improvements, provision of education, provision of affordable homes.

A member asked what had been done to improve the bus services in line with 20 minute towns and the concept of active travel.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development stated bus services were a national issue rather than an agency specific issue. The authority can build on the basis that there will be bus services therefore all of the new sites will have bus infrastructure. He also stated while they can provide the infrastructure, the Authority had no control over how buses are funded and how services operate.

A member raised concerns about active travel routes and asked that there is consideration for those who were less mobile who would have challenges to get through the designated routes.

The Head of Operations, Community Services and the Chairperson both gave their assurance that the multi million pound active travel programme was fully funded by Welsh Government and key to that active travel programme is a requirement, for example, for dropped kerbs and other measures that make it easier for people to walk and cycle. The route is not developed in isolation and need to be part of a network, as they would be costly and limited to implement.

A member asked if the Council would be analysing the potential of single-track network of country lanes which are already in place. As the lanes have been in existence for many hundreds of years can they be brought in to the active travel network with very little extra investment, if required, if they were brought in under the quiet lanes programme

The Group Manager, Planning and Development responded that the concept was not widely promoted through Wales and he did not think it had progressed towards national planning policy stage. He mentioned that it should not be taken for granted that a route is always suitable as they are reliant on segregation. If there was to be development of quiet lanes for active travel and funding was required, then there was an expectation that the routes are made wider to allow traffic and progression. Once the routes are made wider they become more highway-like rather than a lane. He stated that with that came issues such as land ownership issues and drainage.

He stated that the funding received from Welsh Government was restricted in what the Authority could actually do but assured the member that that did not mean it was not possible in the future and could be treated as an alternative.

A member drew the committee's attention to page 39 of the report in relation to good transport links and cited an example of the land east of Pencoed, where there appeared to be an uneven spread of public transport links. She queried what plans were in place to provide public transport links for those far-reaching residents in a community.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development responded that the new sites themselves will have that infrastructure built in, for example bus stops. However, the wider issue of public transport provisions rested outside the authority and outside the development plan process.

A member asked, in relation to previous mentions about Land use and planning, about the additional pupil places awarded by Pencoed Primary school as 60 new places will result in congestion around the school area. The Member inquired if there would be an implementation of school streets to help children access the school safely, promote active travel and reduce pollution.

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated that he saw the positives of the concept, however, there were places where it would practically not work. For example, if the school was on a main road, resulting in traffic caused by people moving to and from work, the scheme would not be suitable. There are schools in the borough where it could

be suitable. The benefit of the school street concept would need to be compared against the investment required to implement such a scheme.

**RESOLVED:** That the Town and Community Council Forum noted the report.

18. **UNITED KINGDOM SHARED PROSPERITY FUND**

This report was presented by The Head of Operations, Community Services, the purpose of which was to update the Town and Community Council Forum on the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund and a series of grant funds available as part of the delivery programme for Bridgend's Local Investment Plan through the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund.

He stated that it was a brief background to the delivery programme for Bridgend's element at the UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme, specifically outlining a number of grant funds that will be made available. He brought the Forum's attention to a number of implications, the UK's withdrawal from the EU on the 31st of January 2020, loss of access to funding programmes, including the European Structural Investment Funds following Brexit.

He also brought to Forum's attention the UK Government's commitment to replacement of lost European funding opportunities to level up opportunity. The creation of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) was one of the main results of that promise with 2.6 billion having been allocated for local investment by March 25 across the UK.

He stated that the report outlined the development steps of the Bridgend Borough Local investment plan for SPF (Appendix 1 to the report referred)

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated that section 2 highlighted how it was being created in alignment with investment priorities and with the themes of the Shared Prosperity fund, along with the Authority's economic strategy and investment plans.

He stated that the authority free main themes of community and place, supporting local businesses and people, in skills being the main crux of the investment plan.

The plans submitted to UK government were made on a regional basis for SE Wales authorities where Rhondda Cynon Taff acted as the lead authority.

Section 3 of the report highlighted how investment areas within the plan can be delivered in several ways and included in-house delivery, commissioning, procurement and focuses on the allocation of grant funds.

He stated that the report highlighted individual grant fund streams and the values set up or being set up to deliver Bridgend's element of the Shared prosperity fund. The grant schemes were brought before and approved by Cabinet in June of this year. Set out in the main body of the report from pages 58 through to 61 the Grant Schemes are Bridgend Valley's Placemaking Property Improvement Grant , The Empty Property Survey Grant the Community Feasibility Fund, The Business Development Grant, The Business Feasibility Grant and finally The Tourism Events Support Grant.

The Placemaking Property Improvement Grant and the Empty Property Survey grant could be found on the Council's website, with guidance on application forms. The business development grant and business feasibility grant were also on the website along with the guidance documents.

A member queried when other grants will be available and what the deadlines would be, she also inquired about promotions that have been done to educate the public of the schemes.

The Head of Operations, Community Services responded that the report was taken to Cabinet in June 2023 and this coincided with a number of media pieces highlighting the contents of the Cabinet report. Publicity was also developed in conjunction with the Business Forum. He said he was concerned that the members were not aware of the schemes and gave them the assurance that the team will do more promotional work to increase such awareness. He also stated that he would provide the members of the forum with a framework of opening, closing and spend by dates for the schemes offered.

A member asked if there was anything within the programme that looked at the amount of money that was available through The Authority to the Town and Community Councils to facilitate open areas, and prepare them, in readiness for walking and active travel.

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated that the report they were referring to dealt grants that going to be made available. However, in the broader shared prosperity fund, there were a number of activities in relation to green spaces, some of them were set to improve and make accessible, relating to the Great Glamorgan route as well.

He referred to a presentation conducted by the Climate Change Response Manager, to the Town and Community Council Clerks, which would have been made available to all Community Councillors, where it alerted all of the town community councils to the work being conducted in particular areas. He stated that while it did not specifically provide Grant Funding to the town and community councils themselves, it alerted them to the work that the Authority was carrying out.

A member asked if the Authority could write specifically to Town and Community councils with what grants they can apply for.

The Chairperson agreed with the Head of Operations, Community Services that this can be done.

A member stated that Porthcawl Town Council had received an e-mail on the 25th of August asking for ideas of where the demand is strong as seen by the Town and Community Council Capital Grant Scheme from the Authority. The details of potential projects were to be returned by the 8th of September and Porthcawl Town Council has had to arrange a special meeting to discuss this. The Member inquired the possibility of the Authority providing more notice for potential projects for town and community councils, especially during recess.

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated the town Community council grants scheme was normally sent out much earlier in the year and decisions had already been made on the funding for 2023 with appropriate notice given. He stated he felt that the email referred to by the member related specifically to a review of the criteria against which approvals are made for the town and Community council grant schemes. He stated he believed that the email was sent out to get an idea of schemes town and community councils may have, in order to inform the review process for the scheme.

There was a discussion between members as to the receipt of emails from Town and Community councils and there was advice given on checking if email addresses were valid and also if emails were filtering through appropriately.

**RESOLVED:** It was recommended that the Town and Community Council Forum noted the report.

19. **CORPORATE SELF ASSESSMENT 2022-2023**

This report was presented by the Policy and Performance Manager the purpose of which was to provide an update on the Council's second corporate self-assessment report and judgements, and to seek comments on the draft report within Appendix 1 of the report.

She stated that the self-assessment was the same as 2022 and aimed to demonstrate 3 things. Namely that the Authority were performing well, improving outcomes and utilising resources as well.

She stated that the process was a bit different in 2023 because it was the authorities second year. Performance had been reviewed as part of the regular annual performance process.

Use of resource templates had been completed and governance had been reviewed as part of the regular annual governance statement. The Policy and Performance Manager stated they had used internal and external evidence, heads of service and member challenges. She mentioned a CPA challenge session in June which was for cabinet members, scrutiny chairs and group managers. She also mentioned that a more formal consultation that had gone out the week before the meeting.

The Policy and Performance Manager stated the report included three wellbeing objectives derived from the old corporate plan.

- Well-being Objective 1 was judged to be good,
- Well-being Objective 2 as adequate and
- Well-being Objective 3 as good.

She pointed out that the scores were the same as the scores in 2022 and explained that this was not because performance has been exactly the same but because other scores have fluctuated.

The Policy and Performance Manager concluded that day-to-day management of resources is good, same as in 2022, utilising clear working models and strong relationships. She stated that the use of resources overall was only adequate, and improvements were happening particularly on workforce planning, asset management and performance management.

She stated that there were detailed improvement plans that followed the judgments received from audit Wales in the regulatory reviews of 2022. She further stated that the authority were keen to implement those recommendations.

She advised that there were still some vacancies and capacity issues in corporate teams and the senior managers who work alongside them and while there was much to improve, such improvements were underway.

The Policy and Performance Manager invited thoughts, ideas and suggestions from the forum around context in the report asking if there was a need to provide additional information.

## TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM - TUESDAY, 29 AUGUST 2023

A Member asked what process was followed in bringing empty properties back into use and asked how the Authority would benefit financially for the efforts in bringing the properties back into use.

The Chairperson responded that, in relation to Valleys to Coast properties, there was a specific agreement in place where the Authority brought properties that had a significant backlog of repairs and required significant modernisation back into use. The properties were then secured for nominations by the Authority from the common housing register. People having the greatest housing need would be housed thereby bringing the property back into use.

He stated that there was a range of different grants and loans available, however, they all had conditions that needed to have been satisfied. When they were brought back into use, the properties have been made available for rent as a form of social housing. It is therefore protected and the grant or loan that has been made would result in a benefit because the authority would be helping to house a person/persons who are in a housing need or indeed homeless.

He stated that quite often that requirement is from the Welsh Government, and there is a partnership arrangement with Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC who administer this on behalf of Welsh Government.

A member suggested including a mention of the positive link with the town and community councils within the report.

The Chairperson agreed with The Policy and Performance Manager that while it is a challenge, when producing such a report, to ensure that the report is succinct and comprehensive, sometimes, assumptions were made and information was taken for granted. He however accepted the suggestion made as a vital one and suggested that it was included in the report for the following year. The Policy and Performance Manager agreed that there was scope to include the suggestion for the current year and that this would be incorporated accordingly.

A member suggested that Council and Public finance were placed on the next agenda because any impact on public finance not only had an impact on the authority as local government, but on all Community councils and town councils. She also suggested that it may be useful to have discussions with all community councillors about an expectation of the borough's residents because there needed to be an understanding of expectations for all public services and responsibilities.

The Chairperson concluded by inviting contributions that members may want to make outside the meeting. He stated that the authority were keen to make the process effective as it could be. He stressed the importance of town and community councils as being the voices of the communities and reminded members that if they wished to place an item on the agenda, then they should submit details prior to the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report and the debate generated from this, be noted

### 20. URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

The meeting closed at 18:02