

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 - MONDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3
HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2021 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor JPD Blundell – Chairperson

P Davies	DK Edwards	DG Howells	DRW Lewis
JC Radcliffe	JC Spanswick	G Thomas	MC Voisey
JE Williams			

Apologies for Absence

N Clarke, JR McCarthy, RMI Shaw, RME Stirman, LM Walters and A Williams

Officers:

Meryl Lawrence	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director – Communities

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr JC Spanswick declared a personal interest in item 4 as he had benefited from Employability Training.

15. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 dated 28 June 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

16. THE BRIDGEND COUNTY ECONOMIC FUTURES FRAMEWORK

The Corporate Director – Communities introduced the report, following which the Group Manager – Economy, Natural Resources & Sustainability presented the report and drew Members' attention to Section 4 expanding on the economic futures framework, in particular the 4 main themes before highlighting Section 8 of the report. The Committee then received a presentation from the Director of Perform Green Limited, some strategic context from the Director - Industrial Communities Alliance Wales and context in respect of innovation across the Capital region from the Head of Innovation and Cluster Development – Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD). Members were asked how well the key themes from stakeholders and data, resonated with them.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration thanked the Director of Perform Green Limited, Director – Industrial Communities Alliance Wales and Head of Innovation and Cluster Development, CCRCD. He added that from the schemes he would pick out skills, as a priority as well as connectivity including the metro. He also highlighted the creative industries recognising that once film crews had left, there was the tourist potential. He explained that there was a need for the high-level strategy in order to assess priorities and what could realistically be provided.

Following the presentation of the report, Members of the Committee asked the following:

A Member thanked Officers for the report and advised that it certainly resonated. He noted the issues in the Community of Caerau, as mentioned in the report and asked why

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it had gone up from 35th in 2005 to 5th currently, in term of deprivation, having received millions of pounds of European funding and asked about the outcomes for funding. The report was comprehensive, detailed and highlighted the issues which local councillors were aware of, however he felt outcomes, funding, and more importantly, the management, of that funding, would be key to success.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that the information in front of the Committee was the start of the economic strategy, which captured all the variables and the strengths as well as weaknesses, which it was important to acknowledge. This was almost a gap analysis, which showed where the county borough was doing well and then looked at the areas it needed to specifically focus on. It didn't, at this stage, identify the direction of travel or what the funding mechanisms were in order to do the work because that work came next. Work was being done with all key stakeholders and those views and an understanding of the correct position would inform an action plan and funding road map. There was a reliance on external funding sources, and a number of them because European funding had ended, so there was a need to look at other mechanisms for funding initiatives going forward. This was all about partnership and a pan Wales approach but focusing on regional issues.

In terms of management of funding, there was very robust governance in place, but what was clear, was that previously the local authority may not have got to the heart of some of the issues. This was not to excuse the situation, but the local authority had worked tirelessly over the last 10 to 15 years to make differences to communities and still were, with a number of initiatives highlighted, although the Corporate Director – Communities acknowledged that this wasn't the panacea, but strategies were being put in place and it was important that areas were targeted where a real sustainable difference could be made going forward. The pandemic had really reset the economic landscape and what was being attempted to do, with the strategy, was to reset that and move forward in a more positive way.

The Member acknowledged the initiatives and asked how the Community benefited work wise. While he welcomed what was going on, the Ewenny Road site was a lost opportunity as housing did not replace employment and that was the primary employment site.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained in terms of the Ewenny Road site, that it had a number of key components including much needed housing, for the Valleys' community and an employment hub. Additionally, something that was quite important as well, was connectivity and there would be a Metro transport hub as part of the development, to connect buses and the train service, which was very important to move people to jobs, because not all jobs would be within the Valleys' community. There would also be some ULEV electric charging points, as well as active travel so the development itself, hopefully, was not just housing and had a much wider brief to play in regeneration.

The Director – Industrial Communities Alliance Wales explained that in terms of the point about the efficacy of European funding, there had been examples where it hadn't hit the spot, but they weren't always properly supported with complementary national policy initiatives and of course there were enormous counter economic forces at work. There was little support for the manufacturing sector over the years, which meant not being able to capitalise fully on the European funding. This was not to say the clock could not be reset with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Bridgend's Economic Framework, and there was genuine opportunity now to have a wide-ranging strategy that encompassed housing, education, health and wellbeing, and all those other factors, that contributed to the prosperity of an area.

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The Leader stated that it was obviously disappointing and frustrating that progress had not been made in some of the most disadvantaged communities but reminded colleagues, particularly about Caerau, about the investment in education that had taken place including construction of a new primary and secondary school for the community. The development of the Caerau Construction Skills Centre and the Bridgend Employability Scheme had one of the best records, in terms of getting people into work, with at least 100 people having been helped. This was an important route out of poverty, although on its own, it was not always enough, but it certainly made a big difference, acknowledging the issues with low pay, and trying to work on that through the commitment to the real living wage and developing the skills for people, so that they could secure better employment opportunities. There were growing sectors, in terms of the life sciences, but there was a need to also support existing industries. A key employment site for the Llynfi Valley, and indeed the whole of the county borough, was Bridgend paper mills, securing high quality, high skilled, permanent, secure employment there. There was however, a need to do more and put a spotlight on where it wasn't working to identify what to do more of, in the strategy. Part of today's exercise was to listen to members, to the points made, and also listen very carefully, to what partners in the business sector and business community were saying was needed, to secure the environment and the conditions for support in jobs.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration explained that EU funding was underpinning the development of Maesteg Town Hall and the Marina in Porthcawl had been built by EU funding but acknowledged that there hadn't always been good monitoring of Objective 1 funding and there hadn't been a clear assessment of the extent to which it would contribute to raising median incomes per head, which should have been the prime objective. It was export led growth in goods and services, that was the key to economic development, and he hoped the partnership and the strategy being set up would focus on boosting trade whether in traditional industries, the creative industries, or other.

A Member highlighted the issues of transport and the last mile in particular, explaining the cuts and changes to bus services and reduction in taxis. He also noted that there were two empty school sites in the Caerau area and asked if this was part of the connectivity problem or part of the deprivation and so not seen as a place to build, noting that a neighbouring authority appeared to build on the site of empty schools much quicker.

The Cabinet Member for Communities explained that social housing grant didn't necessarily follow as quickly as a site became available so there was always a time lag. There was a planned program that needed to be developed and needed to be built into programs to allow that to happen, although he acknowledged the need for housing north of the M4.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that there were regular meetings with First Cymru buses and they had been responsive in the past especially during the pandemic. Discussion had taken place around some of the routes that had ceased, and those conversations would continue. There were other things being done including active travel and looking at increasing trains to Maesteg, in respect of the Metro plus link, although she took on board the comment about connectivity with buses. There was a need to reduce the reliance on cars and be more sustainable in the approach.

The Leader explained that the local authority, as a matter of course, looked to redevelop former schools sites e.g., former sites in Ysgol Bryn Castell and Pencoed Primary School, that had provided new homes for local people. At the former site of Brynmenyn Primary School, the local authority was about to start construction on a new hub for children's services. The capital receipt had been important in terms of funding for Band

A and band B schools and had also been a way of developing new homes. In terms of the Caerau sites, it was something that had been raised previously and the Leader would pick this up, but one of the difficulties was that there wasn't the same level of interest from developers as in other sites, although he was certainly prepared to make sure that the development was supported through, for example, considering providing the sites without any charge and also assisting any developers with securing funding through WG streams, that were sometimes available for Valleys' sites. Whilst the local authority had a track record of developing housing in the Valleys', the scheme was very heavily oversubscribed for social housing. In terms of the allocation of the social housing grant, in part it was a requirement from WG to target the areas and sites with the highest level of housing need and that was, at the moment, other places. That wasn't to say that there wasn't a housing need in Caerau, and a lot of housing need, but there were even higher levels of housing need elsewhere in the county borough. It was a good point and there were other sites across the borough that the local authority would need to revisit as part of the housing regeneration strategy and economic strategy as well.

A Member explained his question was linked to the previous comment on housing and explained he was trying to understand, on a practical level how the local authority could help fuel poverty through the green economy and the way houses were built e.g., the 14 eco homes built by Wales and West Housing Association in Brackla. The roofs themselves were photovoltaic panels, which he believed were made in Treforest. So, there were marvellous industries within the whole of the south east Wales region, but there didn't seem to be any encouragement to people, when they were building new houses, and would like to hear a bit more about how the Local Authority could work with developers to offer incentives to build the eco homes. If social housing could build them with the grant, then private developers should be able to build them. Therefore, it was understanding that whole sector better, the green economy and how this could link back to fuel poverty and give people a bit more money to spend in their pockets in the local economy.

The Corporate Director - Communities referred to the 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy for Bridgend, with a critical point of that being about energy use and trying to get to the net zero carbon position, not only for fuel poverty, but to decarbonise people's homes. There was quite a lot of work going on including retrofit to 19 schools across the borough, with regard to fuel costs, whether the mine water heat could heat the primary school in Caerau, the Tudor Estate, working with Valleys to Coast (V2C) to consider groundwater and air source heat pumps and using a private wire from a wind farm for reduced cost electricity, which was part of the Caerau scheme and looking at homes in Cornelly, to create a small district heat energy network there. In addition, the Bridgend District Heat Network scheme was currently being tendered for, with phase 1 to have a sustainable network that heated the Bridgend Life Centre, Bowls Hall and the Civic Offices.

It was a very early start on this work but Bridgend, compared to other local authorities in South Wales, were really leading the way with some of the low carbon heat technology. There was a desire to go further, in terms of the LDP strategy, with low carbon buildings and low carbon heating, being the norm for Bridgend moving forward. The local authority was mandated by WG, as a public sector, to get to net carbon zero by 2030, so there was a need to ensure that any new homes being built in Bridgend, adopted those low carbon heating schemes, and looked to be net carbon zero, in their build and materials. There was more that could be done to use locally sourced sustainable products, as well as using low carbon heat technologies and putting ULEV electrical charging points in houses. In conversations with house builders, in respect of the LDP, a number had asked what they could do to make their properties more attractive to buyers, with some moving towards those low carbon technologies and also in the materials they use, so those conversations were taking place with house builders about bringing those technologies forward, in respect of new housing. The more difficult piece

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was the old housing stock, with a large number of Victorian terraced houses across the borough.

The Member acknowledged that there were some great things in the pipeline, but the need was there now. There didn't seem to be any encouragement for people to invest in retrofitting their properties themselves. In terms of the social housing grant, he assumed that conditions were built in.

The Corporate Director - Communities confirmed that the local authority was working with RSL's, who all had decarbonisation strategies to make sure that everyone was on the same page and using the same techniques in order to get buy-in power, using consistent approaches.

A Member referred to the CCRCD, which had been mentioned and asked how could the perception be stopped that Bridgend would lose out because it was on the periphery of both City Deals, although it wasn't a member of the Swansea Bay growth deal.

The Head of Innovation and Cluster Development, CCRCD, acknowledged that Bridgend was a member the CCRCD and not the Swansea Bay growth deal. The CCRCD very much looked at all 10 local authorities collectively, in terms of the innovation and cluster strategies, there were those definite strengths within Bridgend, which were actually core to some of the clusters. This was very early work, on the cluster strategies, but what was wanted was to grow from positions of strength, so identifying those positions and building from them, was core to what was trying to be achieved. As a personal reflection, he agreed, that there was an opportunity, being sat between Swansea and Cardiff, particularly in respect of medical devices and diagnostics. There were incumbent businesses in Bridgend, with good transport links into Bridgend, from Swansea and Cardiff to draw on the very best talent. It was a surprise then that those businesses weren't growing and thriving, picking up some of the points about not potentially shouting about the strengths of Bridgend, because it was very commutable from Cardiff and Swansea, both of which had very strong advanced manufacturing, engineering and medical schools. The growth of that life sciences piece around Bridgend seemed to be quite a low hanging fruit, as it were, in the cluster strategy and something to work on immediately, on how to grow them.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration made the following points regarding the Cardiff Capital Region metro project:

- Proper recognition for Pyle Station in metro maps could build some confidence that the metro is going to benefit Bridgend.
- Metro stations and bus stops needed to have the same frequencies and fare deals.
- The Cardiff Capital Region metro project could assist with lobbying UK government for the further electrification of the South Wales main line.
- The ambition of reconnecting Porthcawl back to the train system could be achieved through integrating buses with trains.
- Brackla park and ride links and integrated transport could also serve some of the highly densely populated suburbs of Bridgend.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that she provide a response to the Member about the school piece and education in the Valleys' and the Member about the vacancy school sites in Caerau. She thanked the external attendees for their contribution.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the work to date to develop an Economic Futures Framework for Bridgend County, including the interim findings based on stakeholder engagement and data analysis to

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date, which would be developed further to support a creation of a new Economic Strategy.

17. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

There were no requests to include specific information in the item for the next meeting.

There were no further items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.3, and this could be revisited at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approved the Forward Work Programme in Appendix A, noted that the Forward Work Programme and any updates from the Committee would be reported to the next meeting of COSC and noted the Recommendation Monitoring Action Sheet in Appendix B.

18. **URGENT ITEMS**

None