

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2015 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

CA Green	RD Jenkins	CL Jones	JR McCarthy
G Phillips	CE Smith	JH Tildesley MBE	R Williams

Officers:

Darren Mepham	Chief Executive
Kym Barker	Scrutiny Officer
Andrew Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Cllr C E Smith	Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development
Cllr H Williams	Cabinet Member Communities
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities
Satwant Pryce	Head of Regeneration and Planning
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Andrew Hobbs	Group Manager - Street Works
Mark Halliwell	Manager Regeneration Funding
Andrew Jones	Manager Regeneration Projects and Built Environment
Ieuan Sherwood	Manager Countryside and Tourism
Sue Whittaker	Manager Local Enterprise Initiatives and Rural Development
Jeff Peters	Team Leader Projects and Business Approaches
Gareth Davies	Director of Development
Phillip Morris	Leisure Partner, E J Hales
Karl Schmidtke	Regional Director, Trecco Bay Holiday Park

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor D K Edwards – Holiday
Councillor D R W Lewis – Other Council Business.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

20. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Community, Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 28 July 2015 be approved as a true and accurate record.

21. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which detailed the items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee and sought confirmation of the information and invitees required.

The Scrutiny Officer also reported that Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the responsibility of a local authority towards looked after children and young people and that all Members have a level of responsibility for the children and young people looked after by the authority. She requested that Members consider how the services within the remit of the Committee affect children in care and care leavers and how it can assist in these areas. The Scrutiny Officer stated that Scrutiny Champions can greatly support the Committee in this by advising of the ongoing work of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee any decisions or changes which they should be aware of as Corporate Parents.

The Scrutiny Officer also reported that the Corporate Resources and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed to set up a Joint Research and Evaluation Panel for Sickness Absence and sought a nomination from this Committee to sit on the Panel.

Conclusions:

- (1) Noted the topics to be considered at its meeting on 18 January 2016 and the invitees to attend to attend the meeting;
- (2) Determined the invitees to be invited to attend the meeting on 27 January 2016;
- (3) Nominated Councillor C L Jones to sit on Sickness Absence Joint Research and Evaluation Panel.

22. **REGENERATION IN THE COUNTY BOROUGH - DELIVERING ON THE CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

The Committee was introduced to the managers in the Regeneration Service and to Mr Phillip Morris, Leisure Partner of E J Hales, Mr Karl Schmidtke, Regional Director, Trecco Bay Holiday Car Park and Mr Gareth Davies, Director of Development of Coastal Housing Group who had been invited to the Committee as external invitees.

The Head of Regeneration and Development presented a report on the alignment between the Regeneration Service's work programme and the proposed corporate priorities. She summarised the main programmes and projects delivered by the Regeneration Service and their connections to delivering the corporate priorities. She stated that the Regeneration Service had changed a great deal and from 2016-17 would cost £1.3m mostly spent on staff. The vast majority of funding for regeneration was levered from elsewhere. She informed the Committee that she was very proud of her staff all of whom perform exceptionally well with most of the work being done with partners.

The Committee referred to the Garw Mountain Bike Trails and questioned what would happen to the project once the current funding had ended. The Head of Regeneration and Development informed the Committee that as resources have shrunk it had been difficult to continue funding many schemes, although there was an opportunity to continue delivering the project through the Rural Development Programme. She stated that as resources have shrunk many future projects would not be project managed by Regeneration and she had invited a representative of the Coastal Housing Group to the

Committee who had been appointed as project managers for the delivery of the Rhiw redevelopment.

The Committee commented that it had been very impressed with the success of the Regeneration Service in drawing down Welsh Government and European funding which had been used to carry out regeneration schemes in the County Borough's Town Centres. The Committee expressed its concern whether the corporate priorities were correct in reducing resources in the Regeneration Service given the emphasis by the Welsh Government on the development of the City Deal which the County Borough is a partner. The Regeneration Service needed to be in a position in order to exploit the City Deal and to maximise its benefits to the County Borough. The Chief Executive informed the Committee that the City Deal which he was personally involved in is in its infancy and could see £1bn invested in the region over 10 years. This would see investment in infrastructure projects such as the development of a metro link across the region. He stated that there was a need to secure the involvement of universities to create the right job and skills among the workforce in the region. The City Deal had advantages that would apply across all Council services. The Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development commented that key to the success of City Deal would be the investment in infrastructure and broadband in order for it to achieve a lasting legacy. He stated that City Deal is seen as a top priority and would proceed according to existing local government boundaries with this Council's interests lying to the East where it was engaged in a number of collaborations. The Cabinet Member Communities informed the Committee that Cabinet is fully supportive of the City Deal concept and the Regeneration Service will play an important role in its development.

The Regional Director of Trecco Bay Caravan Park commended the Council on its proactive approach to regeneration which stood head and shoulders above other local authorities in Wales. He stated that the Council through its Tourism Service had been successful in drawing down European funding which would enable Park Holidays to invest £12m in its facilities over the next 4 years. This had seen record visitor numbers to the caravan park. He expressed concern that bureaucracy was seen as a barrier to making and executing quicker investment decisions.

The Director of Development of the Coastal Housing Group commented on Coastal's experience in Town Centre regeneration and that it would bring a leap of faith with the redevelopment of the Rhiw Multi Storey Car Park which could act as a catalyst for further regeneration projects in Bridgend Town Centre. He echoed the concern of Regional Director of Trecco Bay Caravan Park that bureaucracy was making it difficult to get projects up and running quickly in line with their investment strategy but recognised that both the developer and the Council needed to put in place safeguards prior to development commencing.

The Leisure Partner, E J Hales informed the Committee that investment in smaller scale schemes was less attractive to private sector investors as the timescales involved are off putting due to the fluctuating economy and the need for investors to get in and out of projects swiftly due to increasing construction costs and rental values decreasing. He stated that it was critical to get private sector investment at the right time to enable development to take place.

The Director of Development of the Coastal Housing Group informed the Committee that it would work with the Council to ensure that there were employment opportunities for both skilled local labour and apprenticeships during the construction phase of the Rhiw Multi Storey redevelopment. The Local Enterprise Initiatives and Rural Development Manager informed the Committee that it was hoped to place skilled local and experienced labour on site and that work had been done in relation to the bridges into

Work programme. The Welsh Government had an ambition as part of the funding for the project to create 14 jobs.

The Committee referred to the proposed redevelopment of the Jennings Building, Porthcawl and questioned the reasons why a local estate agent had announced that 11 units had been sold when a planning application had not been submitted. The Head of Regeneration and Development informed the Committee that a planning application had now been submitted and that a great deal of pre-application had been undertaken. She stated that it was not unusual for developers to pre-sell units. The Manager Regeneration Projects and Built Environment informed the Committee that the Jennings Building had come to fruition as a result of a soft marketing exercise.

The Head of Regeneration and Development informed the Committee that the masterplan for the Salt Lake / Sandy Bay site was being revisited which needed to be reviewed in the context of the engineering proposals and there would also be Supplementary planning Guidance for this site. The Leisure Partner, E J Hales informed the Committee that the requirements of the food store operator changed very quickly which prevented the previous development happening, however there may be scope for smaller scale retailers to be part of the development. The Regional Director of Trecco Bay Caravan Park stated that the lack of development had had a negative impact on the operation of the caravan park but was hopeful that development on the site would improve the tourism product. The Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development commented that the development at Salt Lake needed to be right for Porthcawl. The Manager Regeneration Projects and Built Environment informed the Committee that public expectation would be high when the masterplan is revisited.

A member of the Committee expressed concern that services were being externalised to social enterprises and charity trusts and in doing so there would be a lack of public accountability and control and that consideration should be given to looking at in-house solutions and the services remaining in the public domain. The Cabinet Member Regeneration and Economic Development informed the Committee that there is accountability with the cultural trust and this step had been taken in order to avoid losing services such as libraries. The Corporate Director Communities stated that the key plank of this approach is preserving services as due to budget cuts the Council would not be in a position to run these services. He informed the Committee that the Council had invested in a Community Asset Transfer Officer to facilitate Community Asset Transfer of sports pavilions, community centres, bus stops and public toilets. He understood the concerns regarding this approach but stated that it was a means of protecting assets which the Council would not have the funding to run those services. A member of the Committee asked whether APSE could be involved in assisting the Council to transform services and expressed concern that the Council was going down the path of commissioning services. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that a range of models of service delivery was being considered.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Head of Regeneration and Planning stated that the Regeneration Service budget in 2010-11 represented 1% of the Council's budget and in 2016-17 would diminish to 0.71% of the Council's budget.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the report, which provided Members with information on the alignment between the Regeneration Service's work programme and the proposed corporate priorities and focus areas.

- Members were supportive of the work of the Regeneration team and commended their success in obtaining and utilising funding. Members raised concerns that if the

team and the services they provide are diminished there will be a risk that the Authority will not be in a position to maximise the potential of opportunities in future, such as those which City Deal could provide.

- Members raised concerns that local community regeneration projects such as Garw Mountain Bike Trails may be discontinued. The Officer replied that where it was more difficult for the Authority to deliver smaller scale projects alternative ways would have to be found to ensure they continue.
- Members raised concerns regarding services identified in the report for Community Asset Transfer and queried whether consideration had been given to managing these services in-house. The Officer responded that a mixed approach may be used in future.
- Members supported the appointment of a dedicated Community Asset Transfer Officer and stressed the importance of providing a single point of contact to ensure that the transfer process is dealt with as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Members asked invitees from the business community whether anything that could be better with regard to working with BCBC. The invitees were unanimous in responding that they sometimes experience frustration due to the levels of bureaucracy involved. This makes investment in smaller scale schemes less attractive to private sector investors as the timescales involved are off putting due to the fluctuating economy and the need for investors to get in and out of projects swiftly enough to take advantage of the situation when the economic climate is right.

23. SERVICE LEVELS FOR FRONTLINE STREET SCENE SERVICE DELIVERY

The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee of the Communities Directorate's current understanding of the potential impact to service standards due to recent and future reductions to frontline Streetscene services. He stated that services would need to be different, remodeled and resourced differently in view in known cuts to budgets.

The Committee requested a breakdown of costs to enable Town and Community Councils to make an informed decision on whether they could fund litter picking and grass cutting in their communities prior to them setting their precepts. The Group Manager Streetworks informed the Committee that indicative costs could be provided to Town and Community Councils if requested, however there was the issue of double taxation, licences and contract arrangements with third parties to consider. A member of the Committee stated her Community Council would seek to enter into an arrangement with the Council where it would be invoiced for the work the Council undertook on its behalf. The Group Manager Streetworks stated that this raised broader policy issues at how services were delivered in communities. He stated there would need to be a coherent and consistent approach as to the services Town and Community Councils were prepared to fund. A member of the Committee commented that there needed to be a simplified approach in order to encourage Town and Community Councils to come forward with proposals. A member of the Committee requested that they be provided with information of land ownership to enable Town and Community Councils to make an informed decision on its future maintenance.

The Committee questioned whether the 18% budget reduction in the Parks service area included staff. The Committee also questioned whether bowling clubs who enter into an arrangement with the Council to self-manage facilities would receive assistance. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that there would be opportunities for clubs and Town and Community Councils who self-manage facilities to bid for capital funding or transition funding. He stated that the Council is aiming at adopting a flexible approach to the transfer of assets and the Community Asset Transfer process had a 4 stage process.

The Committee expressed its concern at the decimation of the Communities Directorate which are frontline services, contribute to the corporate themes and priorities and are also the subject of the majority of Members' referrals. The Head of Neighbourhood Services informed the Committee that the Council could potentially move forward quickly where Town and Community Councils are prepared to fund or carry out additional work particularly the maintenance of cemeteries, subject to the issue of double taxation being resolved. He stated that there is scope within the Medium Term Financial Strategy to devolve works to sports clubs.

The Regional Director, Trecco Bay Holiday Car Park informed the Committee of the importance of creating the right impression for tourists and ensuring that all Council facilities are open to the public, however businesses needed to be responsible and community minded as well. He stated that staff at the caravan park had also undertaken litter picking.

The Committee questioned whether some sports clubs may not be willing or able to take responsibility for and to maintain facilities such as outdoor sports facilities and playing fields appropriately and asked whether there would be any intervention should this occur. The Head of Neighbourhood Services informed the Committee that some clubs may struggle to manage facilities and that some facilities would go eventually but that some would thrive and that work would be carried out via the Community Asset Transfer Officer to support clubs in the transition process.

The Committee questioned what the 'reactive' service would look like and what the health and safety implications would be if this approach is used. The Group Manager Streetworks informed the Committee that the reactive service is in place now with litter being collected across the County Borough 5 days a week. Town centres were cleaned more frequently and some areas of the County Borough receiving enhanced cleaning. He stated that part of the service would have to absorb other duties such as the clearing up of fly tipping. The Group Manager Streetworks also informed the Committee that safety inspections will be carried out as present and if repairs rather than basic maintenance were required and if the costs for repairing a park to the required level of health and safety standards became too high it may needed to be closed. The Head of Neighbourhood Services informed the Committee that the service would focus on emptying litter bins but a general cleanse of areas would be undertaken on a reactive basis. The Committee commented that the majority of Members' referrals related to the Street Scene service and expressed concern that with a diminishing budget the environment would similarly diminish. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the budget for the Directorate is £17.5m and that some of its services such as highways, planning and housing are statutory, however the parks service is non-statutory and there would have to be cuts in the non-statutory services run by the Directorate. He stated that sports clubs and Town and Community Councils would have to recognise that they would need to take on additional responsible in view of diminishing budgets.

The Committee expressed concern at the potential risks in reducing the gritting service and how would the Council cope in the event of heavy snowfalls. The Head of Neighbourhood Services informed the Committee that the Council would look to be as effective as possible in managing the gritting service mindful of resilience and risk management. He stated that there were now three gritting routes instead of the four routes operated previously. He stated that the level and area of coverage was similar to that operated previously which had been made possible by implementing night runs, extra shifts and by securing better leasing arrangements for the vehicles.

The Committee questioned plans to disinvest in services. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the Council had not reached the point where it had to disinvest in services. He stated that greater use of facilities should be considered such as investing in a network of 4G pitches. The Cabinet Member Communities informed the Committee of the difficulties in finding solutions to the budget when the Council had to reduce its budget by £50m. He stated this budget reductions would be achieved by a mixture of cost recovery, cost transfer, the tapering of grant and the transfer of some services to Town and Community Councils. He encouraged Members to provide him with their ideas for shaping the future of services and options for service provision.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the report on the Communities Directorate's current understanding of the potential impact to service standards due to recent and future reductions to frontline Streetscene services. The report invited Members to consider the minimum service levels that would be acceptable for the residents of Bridgend in the context of anticipated service reductions over future years of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- Members raised concerns that the contribution which frontline community services provide towards Corporate and National priorities is not adequately acknowledged and that the impact of reducing them or ceasing to support them will result in a gradual deterioration of the health and wellbeing of communities within the Authority.
- Members queried whether some clubs may not be willing or able to take responsibility for and to maintain facilities such as outdoor sports facilities and playing fields appropriately and asked whether there would be any intervention should this occur. The Officer responded that there may be some facilities which would go eventually but that some would thrive and that work would be carried out via the CAT Officer to support clubs where appropriate.
- Members asked what a 'reactive' service would look like and what the health and safety implications may be if this approach is used. The Officer responded that the reactive part of the service would cover areas such as repairs rather than basic maintenance and that if costs for repairing a park to the required level of health and safety standards became too high it may need to be closed.
- Members are concerned that information on who owns what land and who is currently carrying out services such as grass cutting does not appear to be available, and asked that a single point of contact is established as this has worked successfully in other services.
- Members were concerned about the potential risks in reducing the gritting service. The Officer responded that, although there were now three rather than four routes, the level and area of coverage was similar and that this has been made possible by implementing night runs, extra shifts and by negotiating better leasing arrangements for vehicles.
- Members asked what the long term cost of ceasing to provide services will be compared to the cost of continuing to run them more innovatively. The Officer responded that this was not easy to answer as it depends on what options may be used to provide and support provision in future.
- Members asked whether information could be made available to Town and Community Councils, possibly in the form of a template, to enable them to make informed decisions on if or how they would like to work with the Authority in future. Members also asked whether consultation had taken place with communities to engage them in seeking options for their own areas. The Officer responded that there may need to be a set of core services set out throughout the County Borough and then to establish what other additional work Councils would like.

- Members asked which options have been explored to help to provide support for Town and Community Councils during the Community Asset Transfer Process. The Officer responded that the CAT guidance suggests that there may be an option to bid for interim funding and support. The Cabinet Member – Communities encouraged Members to provide him with their ideas for shaping the future of services and options for service provision.

Recommendations

- The Committee recommends that clear information on cost and options for Town and Community Councils should be made available and a simplified process set in place to enable them to work with the Authority to improve communication and an understanding of the need of individual Councils and communities and the services and support available from the Authority.
- The Committee recommends that the information presented in the report to this Committee be shared with Town and Community Councils.

24. **HEALTHY LIVING PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

The Committee received the end of year performance report of Halo leisure limited with regard to the eight leisure centres and swimming pools they manage on behalf of the Council within the Healthy Living Partnership.

Conclusion

That the Committee noted the report, which provided information on Halo Leisure Ltd year end performance for 2014/15 and advised Members of performance targets set for 2015/16 and that the report be placed on the Forward Work Programme to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

25. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

26. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as it contained exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 14 and 16 of Part 4 and Paragraph 21 of Part 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007.

Following the application of the public interest test it was resolved that pursuant to the Act referred to above, to consider the under-mentioned item in private with the public being excluded from the meeting as it would involve the disclosure of exempt information as stated above.

27. **APPROVAL OF EXEMPT MINUTES**

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm