

**Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny
Committee**

(Microsoft Teams Meeting/ Hybrid meeting in Council Chamber)

Members Present:

6 October 2022

Chairperson: Councillor S.Pursey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: W.Carpenter, A.Dacey, R.Davies,
S.E.Freeguard, N.Goldup-John, C.James and
S.Grimshaw

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2022 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

3. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Cemetery Rules and Regulations

Members were updated on the revisions to the Authority's Cemetery Rules and Regulations, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members noted the importance of memorial benches for families and said that there was available space in some of the bigger crematoriums for additional benches. In response to queries raised, it was explained that requests for memorial seats had been put on hold; however, this report sought to reinstate having memorial seat installed, but on a community basis. The officer present gave the example of there currently being 30 requests for benches at Margam Cemetery, and 30 individual benches would take up a substantial amount of grave provision space. Whereas, if the report was to be approved by the Cabinet Board, officers were proposing to install

three community benches, with ten commemorative plaques on each. It was confirmed that the families who had made the requests had been contacted to explain that it would be a community bench.

In response to Members' queries regarding which cemeteries the community benches had been installed, it was clarified that benches had been placed where there had been a waiting list of requests for memorial seating. However, the officer confirmed that they could look at placing these in other cemeteries if Ward Members wished to raise this with them.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to the Cabinet Board.

Street Naming and Numbering Policy and Fees

Members were updated on the Council's Street Naming & Numbering Policy document, as officers were seeking approval for the appropriate charges for services provided and to rename existing Streets and name new Streets in Neath Port Talbot, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members noted the importance of ensuring the Welsh translation of the road names were correct, as there had been some mistakes made in the past. It was also noted that the communication within the report, and to Members, had all been in English and it would be preferred to have the Welsh translations available within the reports were possible.

Members raised concern for the lack of consultation regarding the policy, particularly in regards to no longer naming streets after those who have deceased. It was explained that there was no requirement to have consultation regarding this policy, however, the officers were happy to change the policy in regards to naming streets after those who had deceased, or could convert it following consultation if requested by Members. The Committee Members confirmed that their preference would be for officers to consult on the policy retrospectively, and to report this consultation back to Scrutiny Committee.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet Board.

Subsidised Bus Service - Contract Extensions

Officer's notified members on the request to extend the current subsidised bus contracts until the 31st March 2023, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members of the Committee explained that they were supportive of the recommendations, however, they had concerns regarding the wider bus network. The Cabinet Board report suggested there was to be a shortfall in the near future, and that either services would need to be cut, or the council would need to reallocate funding. It was noted that if the council were to achieve a modal shift towards more sustainable and active modes of transport within the borough, these would need to be made more affordable and accessible. Members requested a position statement from officers regarding the Welsh Government's recent publication of *One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket: planning buses as a public service for Wales*. In response, the officers confirmed that the paper had been published in March 2022, and the consultation responses were currently being reviewed by Welsh Government, so the outcomes had not yet been published. However, the officer agreed that improvements could be made to the way bus services were currently operated in Wales. He expressed some concerns about how the changes were to be made in practise and the level of funding that would be available to help address climate change and transport poverty. For now, the officers explained that the report recommended to extend the current contract to address the immediate issue, whilst officers sourced revenue funding within the council to maintain the service from April 2023 onwards.

Members requested further clarity on the prices submitted by the bus companies exceeding the funding available to support the current level of services, as noted in the Cabinet Board report. Officers confirmed that the increases were a result of lack of patronage; during Covid-19, the guidance was for no one to travel, which decimated the local bus industry. Prices were significantly higher in order to compensate the loss of revenue; the contracts had nearly doubled in price since the quotation, being approximately £360,000. Concern was raised, as it was likely that the contract would be for five years from March 2023, and the estimated patronage and profit margins were unknown. The officers noted that from a tendering point of view, they had to give operators some security in regards to the contract, and outlined that this allowed operators to invest in the service and their vehicles. There were termination clauses within the

contracts which could be amended, therefore, the officers were not concerned regarding the contract term.

The Scrutiny Committee Members requested to write to Welsh Government expressing the concerns of Neath Port Talbot, as there were a lot of unknowns with regards to the White Paper, and not having the outcomes of the consultation. It was requested that the letter included an explanation of the need to understand the indicative timescales of the implementations of the White Paper, as it was key for strategic decision making. Also, requesting further detail on the transition of interim funding arrangements; the report noted that the current Bus Service Support Grant (BSSG) was set to finish and currently there was not any information on what the next grant would be.

Officers agreed to draft a letter to Welsh Government with the Cabinet Members, in consultation with the Scrutiny Committee.

Following scrutiny, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet Board.

Gelli Houses Tunnel Report

Members were updated on the condition of the disused railway tunnel and its priority for capital investment, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members requested further detail on the capital investment opportunities, and how this aligned with the council's Capital Investment Program. It was proposed that a report was returned to the Scrutiny Committee within the next 12 months with an options appraisal, which explored potential capital investment opportunities, which reflected the stance in the IIA.

In response to Members, the officer explained that the Gelli Houses Tunnel was now a council asset, as Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council owned the land. The council had received filming requests; therefore, it was requested that this report was brought forward to identify the issues associated with the asset, following an inspection. It was clarified that was not currently on the Capital Investment Program, as there were more pressing matters on the program, as Gelli Houses Tunnel was not on the Active Travel Network, or the adopted network. There were four options outlined in

the report, and the officers were recommending Option 2 to Cabinet Board; this was to keep the asset as it was, in order to enable the council to continue to take relevant inspections, for any future capital investment that might become available.

Officers agreed to bring a report back within 12 months outlining any asset opportunities and the feasibility of these as requested. It would likely come under the new Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture, so this would be discussed with them once the post was appointed to.

It was proposed and seconded by Committee Members to add an additional recommendation to those outlined within the Cabinet Board report.

The Committee agreed to add the following recommendation:

“That a feasibility study for future use be carried out and the subsequent options be brought to the Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny Committee within the next 12 months.”

Following scrutiny, with the inclusion of the amendment above, the recommendations were supported to Cabinet Board.

Proposed Re-development of Catering Kiosk and Public Convenience at Western End of Aberavon Seafront

Members were updated on the proposed re-development of a Catering Kiosk and Public Convenience at the western end of Aberavon Seafront, as detailed within the private circulated report.

Following scrutiny the recommendations were supported to Cabinet Board.

4. Urgent Items

There was none.

CHAIRPERSON