

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

**(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft
Teams)**

Members Present:

9 February 2024

Chairperson: Councillor S.Pursey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: C.James, L.Williams, A.Dacey, R.Davies,
N.Goldup-John, S.Thomas, R.W.Wood and
J.Jones

**Officers In
Attendance** D.Griffiths, C.Plowman, M.Roberts, J.Stevens,
T.Rees, S.Brennan, J.Davies, O.Gavigan,
K.Lewis, C.Saunders, B.Suddell and L.Willis

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths and S.Jones

1. Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted that Item 15 of the Cabinet board agenda had been deferred to a later meeting to gather further information and that members of the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to scrutinise the following items from the Cabinet Board agenda:

- Item 7: Swansea Bay City Deal - Neath Port Talbot led projects update (Supporting Innovation and Low Carbon Growth & Homes as Power Stations)
- Item11: Vehicle and Heavy Plant Fleet Procurement Programme 2024/25
- Item12: Public Space Protection Order: Aberavon Beach and Promenade.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held 12/01/24 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Item 7: Swansea Bay City Deal - Neath Port Talbot led projects update (Supporting Innovation and Low Carbon Growth & Homes as Power Stations)

Officers provided a presentation updating members of the projects as mentioned in the report.

Members discussed the Net Zero Centre of Excellence (Training Facility) specifically in relation to the news about TATA Steel. They referred to the requirement of additional training at TATA and the funding TATA have said is available for training. Members enquired about the potential for upskilling people and if officers were looking at accessing that funding?

Officers advised that they were actively working with the TATA transition board and have put the National Net Zero Skills Centre of Excellence down as a project they would potentially seek funding for. This funding would support phase 2 of the facility.

Members clarified if the TATA news would negatively impact any of the projects.

Officers noted that the news from TATA is disappointing as they are a major employer in the area both directly and indirectly. Officers are trying to assess the supply chain and who is affected both indirectly and directly within TATA. Members were informed that the transition board are working hard to understand the impact of the TATA proposals.

Officers explained that these projects become more important because of the TATA news and highlighted the Switch Project as an example which looks at materials and Research and development (R&D) in the steel industry. Members were informed that if TATA go down their suggested path of an electric arc furnace, then there will a lot of R&D in working out if the materials, they are putting out are correct for the market, which would

mean the Switch facility would be an important part of that. Officers advised that the Advanced Manufacturing Centre is scheduled to go onto Baglan Energy Park and that will allow local companies to diversify their projects and get involved in new markets, particularly those who are involved with TATA supply chain, and they may be able to shift production and get support along with that and help to kick start the Baglan Energy Park. Officers advised that there is a significant tract of land there and they are hoping the Advanced Manufacturing Centre can be part of that and the technology centre offers space for new buildings and spin outs to develop and there are the supply chain opportunities with Homes as Power Stations.

Officers advised that in terms of diversifying the economy and expanding the economy, alongside the new work from the Celtic freeport, these are very important projects that will help underpin the new parcel of work.

Members asked if there is any funding to look specifically at terraced houses in terms of R&D to find solutions for EV charging connections so the authority can help to decarbonise, especially given the challenges that terraced houses and older properties will have with charging solutions.

Officers explained that Nigel Morris, who's leading on this project, organized an event back in November at the Tata Steel Training Academy where the authority invited several companies who produced the various options for on-street charging. This included options such as running underneath pavements, or with arms that the reach across a pavement as well as fixed charging points in the road. Several companies spoke to officers about the variety of options available and Welsh Government who were also in attendance said that there was funding available to set up a couple of trials within the local Authority. Officers advised that they could install a couple of these different technologies to run trials and see which performs the best. Officers are actively pursuing different routes of funding to support this activity as quickly as possible.

Members noted that City deal was announced 7 years ago and asked what the timescale was on the spend as many projects haven't started and the costs of many of them have gone up in that time. Members wanted to know if these should be kickstarted now?

Officers clarified that whilst the budgets and details of projects were set in 2017, it wasn't until 2022 that funding agreement between Carmarthenshire County Council and Neath Port Talbot was signed, so

although it looks like a long period of time, there has been a lot of steps taken to get to officially launch these activities. Officers agreed that it is difficult with large projects where budgets are set years before they start because it wasn't possible to have predicted the events of Brexit, inflation, materials cost increases and wars that have affected materials supplies.

Officers also advised that there is long lead in periods with projects like these when working with partners and getting project agreements, final designs, and specifications. Officers explained that the Technology centre was delivered quite quickly because they jumped the gun a little bit as they had other funding that they had to use within a set time. Members were advised that it's about making sure they are the right projects and are developed in the right way.

Members asked a question on Homes as Power Stations (HAPS) relating to what elements of the Neath Working Men's Club Project are being funded from the £300,000. Members stated they were not aware of any green or environmental credentials to the project and asked if it is this an additional element of the project that's being funded?

Officers advised that all the applications that were put forward, wouldn't have been HAPS houses without this funding. So, the funding that's been allocated, will enable the houses to be cleaner, greener and more cost effective. Officers didn't have the specifics of that scheme but would come back to the members with the specific technology that will be put in at the development.

The chair asked if the slides from the presentation could be circulated following the meeting and felt it would be very helpful on the three projects that have been funded, if members could have a bit more in-depth information.

The report was noted.

Item11: Vehicle and Heavy Plant Fleet Procurement Programme 2024/25

Members noted that a lot of vehicles are being replaced on a like for like basis and the committee had spoken previously about the transition to zero emissions vehicles. Members asked officers if the like for like replacements were because zero emissions vehicles of that type aren't available or is it, they are available but prohibitively expensive. And what life span do officers anticipate for these replacement vehicles so that members can get an idea of the delay of transitioning to zero emission vehicles it will bring.

Officers advised that life cycle is 7 years for diesel replacements for refuse and recycling vehicles and 5 years for shortened mid-range sweepers. Officers advised that it would be 9 years for small/medium vans, lorries, 4x4 pick-ups, and cars.

In future officers said they will look at the life cycles again, so vehicles are purchased over the life of battery warranty on vehicles. That will vary on the type of the vehicle.

Officers clarified that some low emissions vehicles are available on the market, and some aren't. The fleet review will include an assessment of the current and future lifecycles in line with the transition programme. The small and medium vans will be on course to be transferred over to zero emissions by 2025. In terms of larger vehicles particularly the recycling vehicles, officers are looking at the replacement of them for low emissions vehicles, but the cost factor must be considered, as well as securing grant funding streams to facilitate the transition.

Members acknowledged that the refuse trucks will likely not be replaced by zero emissions vehicles for another 7 years due to the lack of availability of that type of vehicle.

Officers advised they have trialled refuse freighters and haven't found one that can cope with the authorities' geographic circumstances in terms of being able to cope with going up and down hills regularly and the weight associated with these vehicles. Members were advised that there are some hydrogen refuse trucks emerging, but it is early days for this technology and having a significant supply of green hydrogen available to run them was essential.

Officers drew attention to the difficulty they are getting with heavy to medium vans is that there are issues with payload in relation to carrying lots of tools and equipment and the increased weight isn't quite there yet for the battery capabilities. The same issue is there for 4x4s.

Members asked what happens to ride on mowers or smaller vehicles when the authority replaces them. Officers advised that in line with audit processes they get two or three valuations from auction houses and then select the best valuation and send them there to be sold. The money then comes back to the authority to offset the uplift in costs of new vehicles.

Members questioned what the ratio of owned vehicles vs leased vehicles was in the fleet. Officers confirmed that only 3% of the fleet is on contract hire and that is only done as shorter-term contracts.

Members welcomed the information provided on the lack of availability of the equipment and noted it was not for a lack of trying that the authority has had issues when transitioning to low emissions vehicles.

Members also requested a column in future reports of like for like replacements, stating why it is like for like as it would answer a lot of questions in advance. Officers noted the suggestion.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

Item12: Public Space Protection Order: Aberavon Beach and Promenade

Members noted the exemptions for disability and impairments in the report and asked what was being done to advertise these legitimate exemptions. Officers advised that they have advertised at the access points to the beach for guide dogs. They clarified that in terms of support and assistance dogs, officers have had queries from schools and other individuals in relation to autistic children etc who have support dogs. Officers have spoken to those owners about when they are likely to be at the beach and let enforcement officers know.

Officers explained that they have looked at advertising more widely and having advertisements on the exemptions on the beach front but that does bring difficulties with enforcement as enforcement officers have no way of disproving if someone has a support dog or not.

Officers advised that they are aware that they would be heavily criticised if someone did have a support dog and were not allowed to take it on the beach. Officers will be reaching out to the 13 UK approved assistance dog organisations to see if they have a passport scheme with a card so that people can show officers that the dog is a support dog.

Members felt that reaching out to those organisations would be a good starting point. Members appreciated the lengthy consultation carried out and the considerations taken to the time limits and exploration how they could have been implemented even if they didn't get included as a recommendation of the report.

Members commented that more enforcement officers were needed to combat unscrupulous dog owners and asked if there is any scope to have more officers there. Officers advised that they have a small team and that it is one of their priorities and they will be doing focussed enforcement activities for a large part of a week in the summer months however this is one part of the whole borough that the team covers.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

5. **Urgent Items**

There was none.

6. **Forward Work Programme**

The Members of the Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

7. **Access to Meetings**

The Private item had been deferred.

8. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

The Private item had been deferred.

CHAIRPERSON