

ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

26 May 2016

Chairperson: Councillor I.D.Williams

Vice Chairperson: Councillor A.J.Siddley

Councillors: M.Crowley, D.W.Davies, Mrs.R.Davies,
S.K.Hunt, E.E.Jones, S.Rahaman and
C.Morgan

Officers In Attendance D.Griffiths, P. Jackson and N.Evans

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors E.V.Latham and Mrs.S.Miller

1. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

The following Member declared an interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr. E Jones Report of the Head of Engineering and Transport and the proposed traffic order for Maes Y Pergwm and Addoldy Road, Glyneath as he is the local Member who requested the order.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 APRIL 2016.**

Members noted the minutes

3. PRE SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

i. Engineering and Transport Business Plan, 2016-2017

Members considered the business plan for the Engineering and Transport Service for the period 2016-2017.

Members raised an issue in relation to car parking services and the lack of staff and asked officers when the business case for additional staff would come to scrutiny. Officers advised that there had been some issues in relation to sickness absence in the division and with people also leaving it had affected performance. Officers further confirmed that they had now received permission to advertise externally for the current vacancies.

Members asked whether PCSO's could assist the Council and issue parking tickets. It was confirmed that they did not have the power to do so and that only full time Police Officers can. Members suggest the use of parking enforcement vans, Officers explained that all the traffic orders in the County would need to be digitised together with appropriate software, training and the purchase cost of a van would be cost prohibitive.

Officers confirmed that the business case for more enforcement officers would be brought back to committee when it had been developed in the Autumn.

Officers advised that programme management had now been merged with the engineering service as one manager had taken ER/VR and that the unit had been strengthened by introducing a cost management function and some financial services functions incorporated within the unit to manage the preferred list of contractors.

Members asked how had staffing reductions affected the unit. It was confirmed that within the integrated transport unit there was now one manager covering all the functions of three managers previously. Officers confirmed that the parking service had seen many changes

and was currently investigating the introduction of a virtual permit system along the same lines as the Road Tax permit system.

Members noted the risk score in relation to Bridge Strengthening was high and officers confirmed that this was among the top five on the Council's corporate risk register.

Further information was provided in relation to bridges. Officers advised that there are 457 bridges on the county highway network. These are general inspections are undertaken every two years and principle inspections every five years. Last year 10 principle inspections were undertaken and £3.5m of essential works were identified. Members were advised that Alltwen Bridge would be the next priority.

Members queried the sickness absence figures and Officers advised that the figures are currently better than those published. Although there were two areas that were quite high but work is being undertaken to address the long term sickness absence issues. Overall sickness has improved within the division reducing from 10.4 days of sickness per employee to 7.9 days and below the Council average of 9.3 days.

Members asked whether the savings plans were achievable and would it cause additional pressures for the service. Officers confirmed that for 2016/2017 the service would have to find £356k and £290k in 2017/2018. This combined with further staff savings of £189k in 2016/2017 equates to overall savings of £835k. The department are bracing itself for further financial savings which are yet to be identified for 2017/2018.

Officers highlighted the success of securing funding in region of £2.8m for this year.

A business case has also been submitted to the Welsh European Funding Office to match fund the Port Talbot Transport Hub. Subject to the outcome and a planning approval the project could commence on site this year.

Members stated that they agreed with the service purpose, vision and values but quite often found it difficult to speak with staff when the workforce has shrunk. Officers advised that the communication channels are there but recognised it is a problem on occasions.

Following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board

ii. Welsh Government Grant Approvals – Highways and Transport 2016-2017

Members considered a report on the Welsh Government Grant Approvals and were advised that the majority of the funding was linked to the integrated transport hub.

Officers advised that additional work on the strategic bus corridor was planned to replace bus shelters between Briton Ferry and Neath would be undertaken initially followed by replacements from Neath to Skewen via Coed Darcy. Members asked about the ongoing maintenance costs of the new shelters and it was confirmed that an arrangement was in place that the relevant advertising agreement would cover the costs and that any vandalism would be rectified.

Officers highlighted that electronic timetables would be available in the main bus stations shortly including Pontardawe if power could be sourced. Officers stated that the team had done well to secure this funding in the short window of opportunity that was available to them.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

iii. Proposed Taxi Ranks, Orchard Street, Neath

Members asked whether the taxi rank would replace the taxi rank currently situated by Wilkinsons. It was confirmed that it would but only as a temporary measure until the multi storey car park is demolished.

Members raised concern in relation to the opening times of the multi storey car park particularly when there are events on in the town. Officers stated that venues such as the Gnoll and Gwyn Hall had been provided with the costs for opening the new multi-storey car park late into the evening and had been advised to contact the Parking Services if they have a specific event.

Following scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

4. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS TO RESOLVE TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FOR THE FOLLOWING ITEM(S) PURSUANT TO SECTION 100A(4) AND (5) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE RELEVANT EXEMPT PARAGRAPHS OF PART 4 OF SCHEDULE 12A TO THE ABOVE ACT.**
5. **PRE SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following private urgent matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

- i. Public Transport Tenders (Exempt under Paragraph 14)

Members considered the report on Public Transport Tenders.

Officers advised that to allow the majority of the tenders to be accepted that two tendered routes should be removed from the process and finalised through a mini competition, with a view to maintaining all services.

Members noted that some buses often had very few customers. Officers advised that most services were commercially operated and that they could not influence the bus companies to use smaller vehicles.

Following Scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

CHAIRPERSON