

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Margam Discovery Centre, Margam Park, Margam, Port Talbot)

Members Present:

19 June 2015

Chairperson: Councillor A.Llewelyn

Vice Chairperson: Councillor I.B.James

Councillors: C.P.Golding, A.Jenkins, M.Jones, D.Keogh,
Mrs.M.A.Lewis, Ms.C.Morgans and
Mrs.S.Paddison

Officers In Attendance: Mrs.N.Pearce, S.Brennan, Mrs.J.Woodman-
Ralph, M. Wynne, N.Thomas, I. Williams, N.
Evans and Mrs.J.Woodman-Ralph

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.J.Taylor and E.V.Latham

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

Declarations of Interest

The following Member made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr. I. B James

Reports of the Head of Property and Regeneration in relation Vibrant and Viable Places Progress Report and the Integrated Territorial Strategies for Port Talbot and Neath as he is an employee of Arriva Trains Wales who lease Port Talbot Parkway Railway Station.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 MAY 2015**

Members noted that the minutes stated that an update report on European Funding was due to be presented to this meeting but was not on the agenda. Officers confirmed that this will now be presented to the meeting to be held in September.

3. **TO SCRUTINISE INFORMATION AND MONITORING ISSUES BEING REPORTED BY THE HEAD OF TRANSFORMATION :**

A. **MARGAM COUNTRY PARK**

Members received a presentation highlighting how aspects of the park had been developed and what future development works were planned and required.

It was suggested that a play area for the younger children was required and that the Council was missing an opportunity by not providing appropriate equipment. Members were advised that there is a play area for small children with the living willow cathedral. Funding is a barrier to introducing any additional areas but officers stated that they will consider this if any additional funding becomes available.

Members asked what the situation was in relation to the trading of venison that was reared on the park. Officers advised that previously the sale of the venison was to members of the public or dealers of game meat, however, discussions have been held with a producer on how this can be utilised more. The Council has submitted an expression of interest for the next round of RDP funding in order to develop a farm shop which will be an important part of the park when the caravan and camping site opens.

Members noted that the train within the park had had its track shortened and they wished to know why. It was confirmed that officers were unsure but continued that as with public rail transport the park's train was subject to the same rules and maintenance regime. It was also important to note that the Council needs to ensure that the train is financially viable and this is why it is best for train to only operate when the park is at its busiest to ensure viability.

Members asked why the park closes in October when as a result of the changing climate sometimes the weather is nice. Officers stated

that it was difficult to provide the flexibility to open longer on an ad-hoc basis and as it currently stands it is also unaffordable.

Reference was made to an event at the park that had not gone so well and Members asked for an explanation on the reasons behind this. Members were advised that there was a problem with the traffic management because of the pure volume of visitors which was unexpected.

Members asked whether the park worked with any volunteers and it was confirmed that there was a strong commitment from "Friends of Margam Park" to be involved more in the future to assist the Council.

Members raised concern in relation to previous concerns that the park could be franchised out. Members were advised that this is not currently being discussed as the Officers are happy with the model going forward to continue to run an effective business. Franchising was market tested some years ago but there are a large number of limitations including the deer herd and listed buildings for prospective applicants to raise an interest.

Members asked why has the maze disappeared and it was confirmed that the Council was successful in obtaining funding to develop the area into what it was now.

Members asked whether the Council could tap into the fans of the television shows that have been filmed on site and it was stated that there is an app that shows people where programmes have been filmed.

Following scrutiny the Committee noted the report and asked for similar reports in relation to the Gnoll Country Park and Afan Argoed.

4. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

THE COMMITTEE SCRUTINISED THE FOLLOWING CABINET BOARD ITEMS:-

i. **Planning Services Business Plan 2015/2016**

Members considered the business plan for the Planning Services for the period 2015/2016. Members were advised that aspects of this business plan would also be considered by the Environment and Highways Scrutiny Committee.

Members noted that the service whilst being income generating had managed to maintain the budget even though staff had left.

Members asked how the arrangements of the new planning committee were developing and it was confirmed that this was working well.

Members welcomed the inclusion of an action which allowed managers to ensure that the relevant actions were implemented. It was also confirmed by officers that the relevant scorecards will be presented to the scrutiny committee over the course of 2015/2016. This will allow Members to consider in depth the performance of the business units. It was confirmed that sickness absence information would be included within the scorecards and members asked whether there were any issues of concern within the department in relation to sickness absence. Officers stated that there have been some issues but they individuals have been managed in line with the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy and the employees have had no sickness absence since.

Members asked what the options were with regards outsourcing of the service and it was confirmed that whilst it may be seen by some as an opportunity this wasn't the thoughts of the majority. It was further stated that 2 major developments had allowed the funding of temporary officers whilst the developments were ongoing. The officers are taken on as part of the Council's staff and they may work on other projects when their time allows. Members were advised that developers pay for the process and not the decision.

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

ii. **Neath Port Talbot Destination Management Plan**

Members considered the report that stated the Destination Management Plan is a 'shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a period of time'. The plan covers all areas of activity linked to improving the 'destination' taking into account the needs of visitors, local businesses, residents and the environment.

Members asked whether it was a public sector initiative or whether there was input from the private sector. Officers confirmed it was a

joint approach and designed to bring all the ideas together from all interested parties.

Members stated that they were aware that there was a website dedicated to tourism but it was not updated as often as necessary.

Following the consideration of the earlier report on Margam Park members asked whether the Twyn yr Hydd building couldn't be developed into some sort of clubhouse once the caravan and camping site is opened or developed into hostels for people to stay. Members were advised that it was all about co-ordination and that is the reason behind approaching different market sectors to identify any potential opportunities. This will be achieved via expressions of interest in the first instance.

Members stated that they welcomed the report but suggested that other areas should be contained within the plan including Glyncorrwg Ponds, Iron Age Hill Fort and the work on river Afan to improve it as a fishing river.

Members asked what involvement has there been with 3rd Sector partners and it was confirmed that there has been engagement with groups and in the future annual feedback will be put in place. Members were informed that this was a live document and that additional items and areas will be added to it as time progresses.

Members were concerned that following the loss of the tourism unit within the Council there was a danger that people are being stretched too far with diverse workloads. Members suggested that to assist the situation the Council may wish to consider offering space to Wales Tourism in the new Plaza development when completed.

Members requested that a future report be presented to the meeting once it has been further developed and should include a list of the 3rd sector groups that have been consulted. Members asked for the results of any relevant consultation that has been undertaken.

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

iii. Vibrant and Viable Places – Progress Report

Members considered a report in relation to the Vibrant and Viable Places regeneration programme for Port Talbot. Members were

reminded that nearly £10 million grant allocation was provided for a 3 year period up to and including 2016/2017.

A presentation was given on the different projects within the overall programme including the development of the Police Station, Integrated Transport Hub and the Plaza Cinema.

Members asked whether the bus station was going to move and become the integrated transport hub. Officers stated that this was not the case and that main station would remain. The transport hub was being introduced so that the visitors who come to Port Talbot on the train do not have to worry about ongoing transport as this would act as a link for taxis and public service buses.

Members stated that governance of the project is key to ensure its delivery and implementation and requested that a further update report be provided at a later date in the civic year.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

iv. Integrated Territorial Strategies for Port Talbot and Neath

Members considered the report on the draft Integrated Territorial Strategies for the settlements of Port Talbot and Neath.

Members were advised that the strategies had been developed to facilitate transparency to accessing European Structural Funds (ESF). Members noted that plans were linked and covered a number of issues including Economy, Place and Transport.

Members noted that there was a possibility of exploring issues such as water taxis to Swansea City Centre which will be a welcome additional transport option. However, Members were advised that there were additional plans to increase the traffic in and out of the port of Swansea.

Members asked what the timescales for the implementation of the strategies was and it was confirmed that it was likely to be 2020 but that regular updates would be provided particularly when any changes were identified.

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

CHAIRPERSON