

**ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

23 October 2015

Chairperson: Councillor A.Llewelyn

Vice Chairperson: Councillor I.B.James

Councillors: A.Jenkins, Mrs.S.Paddison, S.Rahaman and
A.Taylor

**Officers In
Attendance** S.Brennan, Mrs.N.Pearce, C.Morris, S.Ball,
P.Walker, C.Barnard, Ms.L.Willis, N.Evans and
Ms.C.Brettle

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors M.L.James

1. **DECLARATION OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

The following Member made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:-

Cllr A. Taylor -

Private Report of Head of Property and Regeneration as Chair of Governors at Sandfields Primary School; Member of Governing Body at Bae Baglan School; Member of Margam Joint Crematorium.

2. **MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Members considered the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 September 2015 and enquired if the cycle path on the promenade would be part of the Aberavon Seafront Regeneration. It was confirmed that this would be included in the programme of work which will be brought to the Committee at a later date.

The minutes were noted by the Committee.

3. **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AND POLLUTION CONTROL REPORT CARD**

Members considered the report cards for Development Control and Pollution Control. Members were advised that the report cards had been developed in line with the Council's revised Performance Management Framework.

Members asked how difficult it was managing the department and to achieve the targets. Officers raised the following difficulties they now face:

- Reduced capacity through loss of experienced staff through ER/VR
- Having to meet savings targets year on year is impacting on service delivery
- due to the nature of the work it is difficult to predict what work will be obtained
- Changes made to the Welsh Planning Act and secondary legislation coming from the Welsh Government are making things more difficult to get developments off the ground.
- Welsh Government have introduced penalties to local authorities who do not determine applications within specified time periods whereby the application fee must be refunded to the applicant. This will have a big impact on the department as income levels determine the number of staff in employment
- Despite the challenging times, the breadth, intensity and variety of work, the department has maintained a consistent performance.

Members asked if they could make a representation on the issue of penalties to local authorities who are unable to determine applications within time. Officers assured Members that the department are addressing procedures to try and prevent this from happening as it would have a significant impact on the team. The Welsh Government had consulted all local authorities on this and all authorities had objected.

Officers informed Members that a training event for Members will be held in November 2015 regarding information on new legislation, fees, and risks.

Members commented that the Welsh Government seem to have disconnected with local authorities.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted and that a letter is forwarded to the Welsh Government on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee expressing concern with regard to the impact financial penalties will have on the resources of Local Planning Authorities going forward.

4. **PLANNING POLICY REPORT CARD**

Members considered the report cards for Planning Policy. Members were advised that the report cards had been developed in line with the Council's revised Performance Management Framework.

Members were informed that Planning Policy now comprises of the Planning Policy Team, Countryside and Wildlife Team and Planning Service Technical Support. The challenges they now face include;

- Planning Policy are governed by legislation and delivery agreements
- Two Planning Policy Officers posts have been removed due to ER/VR and another post will be lost in March 2016
- Increased challenges from budget cuts
- The Countryside and Wildlife Team are finding it increasingly difficult to meet statutory requirements

Despite the difficulties the department are on track to achieve the key actions.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

5. **BUILDING CONTROL REPORT CARD**

Members considered the report cards for Building Control. Members were advised that the report cards had been developed in line with the Council's revised Performance Management Framework.

The Building Control Team are on target to achieve measures despite losing three experienced members of the team as contribution to the Council's Forward Financial Plan

Building Control currently has a number of large developments underway such as the second campus in Jersey Marine, Neath Town Centre Regeneration and the new leisure complex on the Aberavon seafront. Members were informed that the Building Control team had achieved the statutory requirements for checking plans and have received excellent feedback from customer satisfaction surveys. The current market share is growing and the key actions are all on target.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

6. **ARCHITECTURAL REPORT CARD**

Members considered the report cards for the Architectural Design Team. Members were advised that the report cards had been developed in line with the Council's revised Performance Management Framework.

Members were informed that the Architectural Design Team face the following challenges;

- The Team has lost eight experienced members of the team to ER/VR, plus one member of staff has been lost to another authority due to the lack of development opportunity within this authority
- Low staff morale
- Due to budget reductions the team are only able to undertake reactive maintenance at present to Council buildings

Members asked if the vacant post will be advertised or deleted. Officers advised Members that the post will be replaced although it is not easy to recruit people as the salary is not competitive. In the past, the Council would take on a trainee but once they are trained there are no incentives such as market supplements to keep them here.

Staff development reviews are underway.

Members asked if the results of the staff morale survey could be brought to Committee and requested advice on how to respond to the results of that survey. Officers explained that morale is low because there has not been a pay rise for the last four years, increasing workloads, no progression in-house and concerns over the future of the department. Officers do what they can to share work out.

Members enquired about the status of Sandfields Comprehensive School as it will lie vacant for approximately one year. Officers reiterated that they will only carry out reactive maintenance to the school while plans are looked at and an agreement made with Education regarding its future. The Team will aim to keep it in a manageable state during this period.

Members asked how the team deals with changes in a contract once work has started as this could result in added costs. Officers stated that in the early stages of the application Officers will predict and cost changes so that when it goes out to market most of the changes are covered and waste is limited. This however is getting more and more difficult. Changes made at an early stage are more manageable. Any delays will cost the authority more.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

7. **EUROPEAN REPORT CARD**

Members considered the report cards for the European and External Funding Team. Members were advised that the report cards had been developed in line with the Council's revised Performance Management Framework.

The European and External Funding Team have reduced from four down to two team members. One team member is currently actively seeking employment elsewhere so the team will soon be reduced to one member.

Members asked if funding can be reserved for future need. Officers explained that funding is given for the period of the grant only. Once the project is finished it is up to the local authority to cover any further costs.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

8. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15.**

The forward work programme was noted by the Committee.

9. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

i) Neath Business Improvement District

Members were provided with an update regarding the Neath Business Improvement District (BID). Voting papers had been distributed and the ballot will be held on 19 November 2015. If businesses vote yes, a not for profit organisation will be established called Neath Inspired Ltd who will deliver targeted projects and services to improve Neath Town Centre.

Members commented that the work surrounding the BID's programme is very positive and will create a better experience and improve accessibility for local people and visitors alike. Members commented that improvement around public transport and a review parking charges would be favourable.

Members expressed concern regarding trade being diverted from Port Talbot Town Centre once work in Neath has been completed. Officers reminded Members that a significant amount of work is underway in Port Talbot, for example, the regeneration work at Station Road and the Plaza, the new leisure centre, gym facilities and regeneration work on Aberavon Seafront.

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

ii) Fabian Way Innovation Corridor Supplementary Planning Guidance

Officers outlined the proposal of the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to Members and highlighted the potential benefits of the development of the Fabian Way Corridor;

- Better integration of communities to the north and south of Fabian Way
- Re-use and redevelopment of brown field land
- Improved employment opportunities
- Improved sustainable travel options and connectivity
- Joint collaboration with City and County of Swansea

This will be subject to a six week public consultation exercise in November 2015 which will be promoted through press release, engagement events, libraries, websites and social media.

Members asked if the delay to the proposed Tidal Lagoon will effect this proposal. Officers reassured Members that there should be no reason for the delay to effect this proposal. SPG control is required in this area to ensure the right development at the right time and protect against unfavourable development.

Members queried what is classed as unfavourable development and were informed that there are private land owners along the corridor who want to apply for residential development expanding to the West. This would not be favourable as it would cut off the corridor and undermine any future expansion of the University.

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

10. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

Resolved: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

11. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

i) Expressions of Interest for Twyn Yr Hydd House, Margam.

Members were provided with an update on expressions of interest received for Twyn Yr Hydd House, Margam. Officers explained Twyn Yr Hydd House is an important Grade 2 listed building and is unique in terms of its location within Margam Park. Officers advised Members of two particular applications of interest of which officers would like to explore further.

Members expressed concerns that both applicants are proposing a venue which would compete with facilities that are already in place. Officers explained the applicants will be consulted in detail over their proposals which hold potential income and investment for the Council. The successful applicant would be liable for maintenance costs on the building, will bring employment and assist with enhancing the profile of Margam Park.

Members were advised that the Caravan Club have applied to use the Park for caravanning, camping and glamping. This may clash with proposals from one of the applicants.

Members asked if the local authority could run the hotel as part of the Orangery. Officers advised that the local authorities are not allowed to run a hotel as it would compete with local businesses.

Members agreed the recommendation for further consultation on two of the applications.

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

ii) Celtic Leisure Annual Report 2014/15

Members received a presentation on the Celtic Leisure Annual Performance Report by the Chief Executive and the Executive Management Team. The presentation provided information on changes, management structure, and financial summary of 2014/15, underlying performance and finance Key Performance Indicators (KPI), achievements

and future challenges. It was explained that Celtic Leisure will continue to look to improve their performance and consult with customers in order to monitor and ensure viability.

Members requested more digital access for customers but also to bear in mind users who do not wish to use digital methods. Officers stated they would consider this.

Members asked what measures had been put in place to ensure all users can be part of a class as in some instances classes are fully booked. Officers responded that they will put on extra classes where demand is high.

Members queried whether the issues of cleanliness at some of the Celtic Leisure facilities had been addressed. Members were advised that Managers have increased the focus on standards to improve the customer experience. Managers encouraged staff to take ownership of their roles and cleanliness was an important aspect. Staff members are required to update checklists and supervisors check that the jobs have been completed and performance will be monitored as part of the KPI's of that individual.

Members asked what loyalty incentives would be in place for its members. Officer's agreed that retaining a customer base was important and the Management Team are looking at tangible rewards for example free passes to a class, t-shirts, via a points reward system.

Members queried the cost of one adult membership per month. Officers informed Members that one adult membership will cost £35 per month which is competitive. Following scrutiny, the presentation was noted.

CHAIRPERSON