

**ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

11 March 2016

Chairperson: Councillor A.Llewelyn

Councillors: M.Crowley, A.Jenkins, Mrs.M.A.Lewis and Mrs.S.Paddison

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, S.Brennan, C.Millis, P.Walker and S. Curran

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors M.L.James and A.J.Taylor

1. **MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD ON 29TH JANUARY**

Members received the minutes from the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 29th January 2016.

Members asked if there was an update in relation to TATA Steel and were informed that the proposal to create an enterprise zone in Neath Port Talbot encompassing the TATA Steelworks site had been finalised and been submitted to Welsh Government.

In relation to Cymmer Swimming Pool the Committee were informed that the third party group is still interested in taking over the pool and discussions are ongoing whilst the position of certain grants are confirmed and during this period the insurance of the pool has been extended.

The Committee noted the minutes.

2. **SWANSEA BAY CITY DEAL**

The Committee received information relating to the submission of a Swansea Bay City Deal proposal to the UK Government as contained

within the circulated report and received a presentation from the Chief Executive which accompanied the information.

Members noted that the City Region Board has brought forward a proposition based upon three key themes: the development of “Future Energy” systems, the establishment of an international internet gateway and the use of web based technologies to develop the health and social care sector. Other strands include skills, the development of regional transport networks and the regeneration of Swansea City Centre.

The Committee were enthusiastic about the proposal and the opportunities that the infrastructure will create and discussed further the effect it will have on our communities locally to bring about real change. The Committee noted the use of digital technology in Health and Wellbeing and for Businesses is vital and robust internet access is now a necessity. Members discussed how there is an opportunity now to engage with local businesses to encourage them to utilise the internet more, for example in retail whereby businesses retain their shop presence but also offer an online retail option and this includes looking at employment in a different way.

The Committee discussed the launch of the Council’s Digital by Choice Strategy and how this improved infrastructure will be a robust basis for continuing engagement with the public and the communities.

Connectivity was discussed and Members agreed the importance of having robust access throughout the County Borough. Improvements in Margam Park were praised by the Committee and issues within rural areas were mentioned.

Members asked for further information in relation to the bandwidth of the proposed internet gateway and if the proposed spurs from the Cable into the region will reduce the bandwidth proposed for London. Officers confirmed that the spurs would not negatively affect the bandwidth position in London and that our region would be providing resilience with competitively priced land.

In practical terms, Members were informed that the Welsh Government First Minister has welcomed the proposal and it is now for the UK Government to make a decision on the City Deal proposal and a 2018 date has been set for the arrival of the pipeline with the time scale for the entire project running over a 20 year period.

Members asked if there were any links to the Tidal Lagoon project and although Officers confirmed that there were some links, various other energy infrastructure are in place throughout the region and this City Deal is concerned with bringing them all together.

The Committee agreed that diversifying the economic base of the Borough is important, maximising different career options for the next generations other than traditional manufacturing options and into growth sectors.

Members asked for further information in relation to the costs associated with the City Deal proposal and they were informed that £100m from four Local Authorities over twenty years has been proposed.

The Committee reiterated their enthusiasm about the proposal and the opportunities that the infrastructure will create and looked forward to continued updates on the Swansea Bay City Deal.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted and the recommendation to hold an All Member Seminar for more detailed briefings to be made available was approved with timescales to be agreed directly with Democratic Services Staff.

3. **ASSET MANAGEMENT, ESTATES AND FACILITIES REPORT CARD**

Members considered information in relation to the Asset Management, Estates and Facilities Team as contained within the circulated report.

The team is made up of 72 FTE's (Full Time Employees) with catering and cleaning staff making up the largest proportion. There have been two unplanned employee departures and three employees have recently retired which has had an effect on the work load of the team and staff morale and the jobs are out for recruitment currently. Sickness absence has increased due to one instance of long term absence.

The Committee asked for further information in relation to the financial savings achieved by the team. Savings have been achieved thus far without the closure of any facilities and an option of claiming back some elements of VAT on takeaway sales is being considered which will further contribute to the budget savings in the section.

Members asked why the Neath Civic Centre Solar Panels project did not proceed and were informed that the payback from the project was low and a greater payback was being achieved from investing the money from this project elsewhere.

The Committee referred to the 2011/12 Catering and Cleaning Review where certain amalgamations of the service were made and officers explained that work is ongoing to better understand the need of the service going forward.

Members commented on the improvement in the number of category A and B buildings (those buildings 'performing as intended and operating efficiently' and 'performing as intended but showing minor deterioration') and a corresponding drop in the number of C and D grade buildings (those buildings that are 'exhibiting major defects and/or not operating as intended' and 'life expired and/or at serious risk of imminent failure'). The Local Authority has approximately 310 sites and 1100 buildings within its ownership are they are all graded impartially on a rolling programme. Members were informed that taking category C and D properties out of these categories is difficult and expensive and they are usually sold or transferred to community organisations; if the latter is done the Local Authority is responsible for sensible and reasonable 'snagging' repairs. The Committee expressed their gratitude to the team who have performed well throughout difficult circumstances this year and praised the cross directorate working of the team.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

4. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16.**

The Committee considered a Task and Finish Inquiry into Tourism, the regeneration of Town Centres and the attendance by CADW at a future meeting to be added to the Forward Work Programme of the Committee for the 16/17 civic year.

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring, Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning.

Members received information in relation to the Quarter 3 Performance in Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted the slight increase in the number of people using the public libraries during the year and praised the extra work the staff are doing to attract audiences to activities and events.

The decrease in the number of materials issued and the number of reserved items supplied within 7 days was noted.

The use of e-readers and digital services was discussed and Members commented that the public are looking to use library services in different ways.

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

5.2 Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring, Economic and Community Regeneration.

Members received information in relation to the Quarter 3 Performance in Economic and Community Regeneration as contained within the circulated report.

The Committee observed that the performance in the percentages of householder planning applications and all other planning applications determined during the year within 8 weeks had improved. It was hoped that this improved performance would put Neath Port Talbot into the top quartile but this has not yet been realised.

It was noted that the number of new business start-up enquiries assisted through Business Services had reduced.

The Committee commented overall that there is difficult job market locally with losses at this Council and at TATA steel and their wider supply chain and considered the effect that this is likely to be having on staff morale generally.

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

6. 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 paragraph 12 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

7. PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

7.1 Quarter 3 Performance Review-Celtic Leisure.

Members received information in relation to the Quarter 3 Performance Review of Celtic Leisure in comparison to the 10 year submitted business plan as contained within the circulated report.

Attention was drawn to the trading deficit in the first three quarters of the year is £104,844 above the profile deficit of £37,133 which is being covered by company reserves.

It was noted that Gym Direct Debit income was 16% below budget but that the figures from the new Aberavan Leisure and Fitness Centre figures were not yet included in the overall data. Furthermore, the Gwyn Hall box office income was 75% below the budgeted position.

Members expressed disappointment that the figures were below what was expected and queried if the forecasted budget positions were realistic. Officers explained that Celtic had undergone a period of significant change with a new Chief Executive and three Heads of Finance being in post and previous budget predictions had not been realistic. Whilst Members expressed concern that this information had not been made available at the time Officers explained that there is now strong confidence in the Celtic Leisure Senior Management Team. A new performance management structure has been put in place where monthly meetings are held with a focus on the financial plan and any concerns are identified and escalated immediately. This Committee will also receive ongoing quarterly performance review reports from Celtic Leisure.

Following scrutiny it was agreed the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON