

**ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

28 October 2016

Chairperson: Councillor A.Llewelyn

Councillors: A.Jenkins, D.Keogh, Ms.C.Morgans,
Mrs.S.Paddison, S.Rahaman and A.Taylor

Officers In Attendance Mrs.N.Pearce, P Hinder, S. Curran, P Walker,
C.Morris, W.John and C.Barnard

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A Rees and A.J.Taylor

1. **MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY
REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON
SEPTEMBER 16TH 2016**

The Minutes were noted by the Committee.

2. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17.**

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

3. **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & FUNDING UNIT SERVICE REPORT
CARD**

The Committee were presented with the Service Report Card for the Project Development and Funding Unit as contained within the circulated report.

The role of the unit is to seek out grant aid for a range of client groups which include the Voluntary Sector, Schools, Town and Community Councils and the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning (ELLL) Directorate as a whole. The service is non-statutory and manages 12 separate Community Benefit Grant Schemes which originate from Wind, Solar, Biomass and Opencast Planning Consents.

Members were pleased to note that a recent Customer Satisfaction Survey indicated that 98% of respondents indicated that the citizen

centred service provided was efficient and effective. Members queried how many respondents this related to and were notified that 100 customers had been surveyed.

Photographs were distributed to give a flavour of the range of grants that have been developed throughout the County Borough and examples of successful projects were discussed.

Members complimented the service on the fact that there has been no sickness absence within the staffing compliment of 1.8 FTE's this year.

The Committee felt it had been beneficial to have had the overview and the scale of work undertaken by the Unit.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

4. **ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES SERVICE REPORT CARD**

The Committee were presented with the Service Report Card for the Architectural Services Unit as contained within the circulated report.

The service is a multi-disciplinary in house consultancy responsible for the innovative design and procurement of community and consultancy buildings and for the repair and maintenance of the Council's extensive building portfolio. The Committee received further detail in relation to the significant developments that the Team had been involved in including Ysgol Bae Baglan, Neath Town Centre Regeneration and Aberavon Leisure and Fitness Centre.

Members noted that sickness absence levels in the team had decreased this year from last year to 15 total service FTE days lost in the period.

It was discussed that customer satisfaction measures are difficult to obtain; Members were pleased to note that targeted client questionnaires will be conducted going forward in order to obtain meaningful responses.

Members commented that through the construction phase of Ysgol Bae Baglan there had been very few complaints from members of the public and extended their compliments to all involved.

Members observed that the regeneration work in Neath needed to progress in order to keep momentum.

It was noted that whilst informal appraisals have been carried out with staff members, formal appraisals will commence over the next few months. Members felt it was important that feedback is received in relation to issues raised in the informal appraisals as they felt it was important that they be made aware of issues being raised by the staff.

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

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Annual Planning Performance Report

Members received the content of the Annual Planning Performance Report as contained within the circulated report.

The Committee were notified that the decision in relation to this item would be for immediate implementation.

Officers explained that the Welsh Government requires all Local Planning Authorities to submit an Annual Planning Performance Report relating to the operation of their planning functions. The report is required to identify the position of the service corporately, a narrative explaining the local context for Neath Port Talbot, the staff structure and how that has changed over time, the income and expenditure levels for the service, the pressures experienced by the service, its achievements over the past year and priorities for the year ahead in addition to its overall performance in relation to a set number of different measures.

Members noted that the report was overall very positive in terms of performance particularly in light of the fact that both income levels and staff numbers have reduced over time; 80% of applications are determined within the statutory determination period putting the Council in the Top 3 performing Councils in Wales.

It was observed that the report highlighted two areas where the section could concentrate on improving performance. The first was 'Determining applications for 'major developments' which officers explained is very time and resource intensive and in order to address this, the service is proposing to undertake a minor restructure to ensure that resources are best placed to address the demands associated with major applications.

Members asked if the delays in determining major applications is linked to delays in obtaining information from other departments and external organisations and officers explained that major applications are heavily reliant on expert advice from internal sections such as Highways or Drainage departments as well as external organisations like Dwr Cymru who can be slow in providing responses to the Council. Members noted the reduction in staff in all teams across the Council.

The other area identified as being below average relates to the number of applications overturned by Members at Committee which is 15% of applications reported to Committee for determination by Members are determined contrary to officer recommendation. Officers explained that while this number appears high it should be noted that only 3 applications were determined contrary to officer recommendation during 15/16 from a total of 20 applications hence the high percentage rate. Members were asked to note that the remaining 793 applications were processed that year under delegated powers. Members commented that this process indicates the success of the delegated powers arrangements that exist within the Council and the confidence they have in the Democratic Process. They inquired if any representations had been made to the Welsh Government on the Council's views on this and if there had been any response. Officers outlined that the Welsh Government's review of Delegated Powers is ongoing and the Council is feeding into this review.

Members commented that despite the difficulties faced in terms of resource and budget the section is performing very well and in particular praised the innovative ways of working and the reduction in sickness absence within the team.

Members asked if there was a greater reliance on using volunteers in relation to areas such as maintenance of public rights of way. Officers explained the difficulties in relation to

obtaining indemnity insurance and the relationships with some Community Councils being better than others. It had been welcomed that due to a better than expected settlement from Welsh Government last year, the Streetscene Department had been granted a lump sum which had been used to make improvements to public rights of way which now meant that priority can be given to other areas of the network.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

5.2 Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) - Consideration of the responses and recommendations to the representations received following consultation on five Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents and the adoption and publication procedures to be implemented.

Members received the responses and recommendations to the representations received following consultation on five SPG documents as contained within the circulated report.

It was noted that the Committee had received the Planning Obligations, Affordable Housing, Baglan Energy Park Development Framework, Pollution and Parking Standards SPG's which had then gone out to formal consultation. Following consultation, the Council had received a total of 148 representations on the content of the SPGs from 13 different individuals or organisations.

Members discussed the comments that had been received in relation to the SPG's and the proposed changes as included in the circulated report.

Members discussed the 'Parking at Educational Establishments' whereby the standard has been amended from 1 space per 5 children as opposed to 1 space per 3 children as the adjustment would result in a smaller land requirement. Members asked if the standard applied to other educational establishments such as Day Nurseries and officers confirmed the standard applies to new build schools only.

Members asked if Community Councils had been consulted particularly in relation to the Planning Obligations SPG and it was confirmed that they had been.

The Committee discussed the difference between Planning Obligations and Community Fund Benefits and requested that the Cabinet Board consider the inclusion of an explanatory paragraph explaining the difference between a community fund benefit and a planning obligation.

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

5.3 Ysgol Bae Baglan- Community Benefits

The Committee received details on the outputs and results from the delivery of local community benefits throughout the construction of the new Ysgol Bae Baglan as contained within the circulated report.

Members were pleased to note that contracts totalling over £12m were awarded to local businesses based in the Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Bay area. In addition, companies based elsewhere in Wales secured over £16m worth of work meaning over 85% of the contracts were awarded to businesses in Wales.

Members queried if a record was kept of the type of business the Council had to go out of County to obtain as this would be a way of focussing the work of the business development team in the future. It was discussed that there are various reasons for having to look out of County for service providers but it was positive that 85% of the contracts in this case had been awarded to Welsh businesses.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

5.4 Delegated Power Property and Regeneration

Members received details of the property transactions authorised by the Head of Property and Regeneration under delegated powers as contained within the circulated report.

Members' attention was drawn to Delegated Power 15 PO38 of the report and they were informed that the incorrect date had been included against this. The year should read 2015 and not 2000.

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

5.5 Library Strategy 2016-2021

The Committee received the Library Services Strategy for 2016-2021 as contained within the circulated report.

Officers explained that Neath Port Talbot is required to produce a library strategy so that it complies with the core entitlements as set out in the Welsh Public Library Standards. Members heard that the Strategy provides a new vision for the delivery of a library service that will ensure Neath Port Talbot provides a strong, sustainable network of public libraries both statutory and community managed. Officers explained the Strategy also highlights current best practice and incorporates current legislation and ensures our statutory obligations are met as well as taking into account current changes in library provision and financial pressures.

Members observed that numbers of visits to libraries have increased in the last year while numbers of book issues have reduced and presently there are 82,249 registered members of the service.

Members discussed income streams to libraries and in particular Cwmafan Library who receive income from Communities First and Officers informed the Committee that they are awaiting confirmation of the situation post Communities First.

In relation to income generation, Members noted the main streams were from room rentals and photocopying charges and there has been a significant reduction in DVD and CD rental income. It was noted that more information in relation to income generation will be brought to Committee in the future report on the Welsh Public Library Standards.

Members asked if those Libraries in Community Ownership had been included in the compilation of this strategy. Officer

explained that this strategy was in relation to statutory services only but that there are strong links with the community owned libraries and committed to circulating the strategy them for their comment.

Members asked for further information in relation to the age profile of volunteers in community libraries. It was explained that it is a mixed demographic made up mainly of retired people and students.

In terms of seeking alternative venues proposed in the strategy for some key library provisions, Members queried if any actual venues had been located. It was discussed that this is a 5 year strategy and none of the proposals in the document are imminent and that any proposals would be carefully considered for viability before being brought back to this Committee for approval. Members stated that other community buildings could be considered such as Mid and West Wales Fire Authority owned buildings and agreed there were considerable options to consider.

It was agreed that Ystalyfera be added to the list of Tier 4 Libraries included in the strategy.

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

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 12 A to the above Act.

7. **BAGLAN COMMUNITY CENTRE**

The Committee were presented with information in relation to the management of Baglan Community Centre as contained within the circulated report. Members had requested this report at the last meeting of the Committee.

Members were pleased with the findings of the report and thanked officers for following up the Committee's request.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

8. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

8.1 Adventure Golf Course at Aberavon Sea Front

The Committee received information in relation to the Adventure Golf Course at Aberavon Sea Front as contained within the circulated report.

Certain Members noted that whilst the report stated that 'local Members have been consulted and support the proposal' they had in fact not been contacted. Officers committed to feeding this back to the departments involved.

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

CHAIRPERSON