

EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

29 November 2018

Chairperson: Councillor A.L.Thomas

Vice Chairperson: Councillor M.Crowley

Councillors: S. ap Dafydd, M.Ellis, S.Harris, H.N.James, J.Jones, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, M.Protheroe, S.Renkes, A.J.Richards and D.Whitelock

Officers In Attendance A.Evans, C.Millis, A.Thomas, W.John, P.Walker, M.Wynne, W.Pedrick, S.Betsworth and J.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Lockyer and P.A.Rees

Observers C.Galsworthy

1. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

2. **DISCUSSION ON THE OUTCOMES FROM THE CEFN COED COLLIERY MUSEUM TOUR**

The committee were informed of a recent site visit to Cefn Coed Colliery by members of the Leisure and Culture Scrutiny Sub Committee.

Members raised concerns that the public did not appear to be aware of Cefn Coed Colliery and what was on offer at the attraction, including mining heritage. Members stated that the colliery desperately needed to generate its own income. Members commented that in previous years schools used to visit the colliery which would contribute to its maintenance costs, but this had ceased. Members reported that a Cefn Coed Colliery Steering Group had now been set up, but assistance and expertise was required from the

Council. Officers agreed to work with the steering group to look at options to promote and market the colliery.

The committee requested for the item to be placed on the forward work programme for the Leisure and Culture Scrutiny Sub Committee meeting in January 2019.

3. **NPT MUSIC SERVICE – VERBAL UPDATE**

Officers updated the committee on developments in relation to the NPT Music Service. Officers informed members that £2 million would be made available to local authorities to underpin local services; however this money had not been received to date. Officers reported that a feasibility study was currently being carried out by Welsh Government (WG) on how to re-configure music services in Wales. Officers stated that the feasibility study would adopt the principles of the “Hitting the Right Note” policy. Officers emphasised the importance of Councils delivering the music services in Wales and not “arms length” companies. Officers explained that they would wait for the feasibility study to take its course, but would contribute to the study with a service model that suited Neath Port Talbot.

Officers raised concerns if the £2 million from WG was not released soon to local authorities, there was a risk that some services in Wales would be unsustainable, as had already been the case in Wrexham.

Members commented that a local delivery model appeared to work well. Members stated that a letter should be written from the committee to WG supporting the feasibility study, welcoming the short term release of funds to music services, and a request for a response on what further action would be taken by WG to sustain music services in the future. Officers stated that they would be willing to work with the Chair to draft a letter to WG. The Chair agreed to reflect the committee’s comments in a letter to WG with the assistance of officers.

4. **MARGAM COUNTY PARK BUSINESS PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

The committee received a presentation from officers in relation to Margam Country Park Business Plan Progress Report.

Members queried whether the number of bookings for 2018/19 for weddings was actual or aspirational. Officers stated that the figures were actual bookings received, and many bookings had been received for 2019/20.

Members asked how much did the safari cost. Officers reported that the cost was £35.00 per person currently; however arrangements were being made to use a larger vehicle next year.

Members queried whether there were any plans to have a Christmas fayre at the park. Officers stated that this was being considered, but the infrastructure for the car park would need to be in place first to accommodate the potential increase in potential visitor numbers.

Members questioned whether officers were in the process of developing one style of branding for the entire park. Officers stated that this had been considered, but was not practical. Officer explained that the orangery had a different and distinct brand to the castle, and the Council had no control of the branding for Go Ape.

Members queried whether schools were being approached to hold their prom nights at the park. Officers stated that they were doing everything to promote Margam Park as a venue for prom nights to schools, and three schools had recently held their prom nights at the park.

The committee congratulated officers on the developments made in a short space of time, particularly as the park now received a reduced subsidy.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the presentation.

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Performance Report Neath Port Talbot Libraries

The committee received information in relation to the Performance Report Neath Port Talbot Libraries as contained within the circulated report.

Officers informed the committee that the budget savings proposals put forward were at a very early stage, and that a further report including a wider range of criteria and elements would be brought back to a future meeting.

Members referred to the proposal to relocate Port Talbot Library, and queried how long was left on the lease of the unit in the Aberavon Shopping Centre. Officers stated that it was a 25 year lease which ran from 1998 to 2023. Officers added that £40,000 was currently paid in annual rent and there would be a saving by relocating the library. Members questioned whether a suitable alternative location had been found yet, and whether this would also be in a central location. Officers explained that they were currently liaising with the Estates Department regarding options.

Members commented that the data in the Library Strategy 2016-2021 was two years out of date, and questioned whether the most up to date information would be presented at the special budget meeting the following day. Officers explained that the most up to date information would be presented to the committee before any final decisions were taken.

Members referred to the lease of mobile library vehicles, and queried whether the information in the strategy was correct in stating that one lease had expired in December 2017, and another was due to expire in December 2018. Officers stated that the lease due to expire in December 2018 would be extended to February 2019, and would be reviewed next year. Members queried the cost of the annual lease. Officers confirmed that the cost was £10,000 a year.

Members referred to page 71, and commented that they hoped that the Council were still committed to “deliver a high quality service to their local community.”

Members referred to page 46, and commented that if Glynneath’s library was to close that the nearest alternative would be 11 miles away in Neath. Members added that some citizens would have difficulty accessing these services in this scenario.

Members referred to page 52, and asked officers to consider various data other than the number of books issued before determining

whether to close a library. Members added that the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act was a key.

Officers stated that they were currently looking at different models and ways of working to sustain libraries, and understood the value of libraries in the communities. Officers explained however, that the Council were under pressure to secure efficiencies as less money was now available than in previous years. Officers added that all the knowledge, data and facts would need to be collated before making any final decisions in order to understand the impact of any closures on communities.

Members queried whether the long term strategy was to discontinue the mobile library service. Officers stated that this was not the case; however the number of mobile vehicles would need to be reviewed, or possibly the Council would need to use smaller vehicles.

Members questioned whether the strategy aimed to diversify libraries and offer more to communities in partnership with other organisations. Officers concurred that one of the aims of the strategy was to work with third party organisations to share the costs of running the libraries.

Members referred to Cwmavon Library, and explained how it had become a community hub and not only a library. Members added that the community had raised £5,000 at the library for a Christmas tree for the community, and a trip to Bath had been arranged from the library also. Members queried why work had not been done in advance to understand the activities being undertaken in specific libraries before including them in the budget proposals. Members requested that before any library was proposed for closure that an extensive consultation be carried out, and work undertaken by officers to capture data on all services and activities offered by libraries to understand the impact of their closure. Officers made a commitment that consultations would take place before any final decisions were made. Officers re-iterated that the suggestions made for the budget savings were only proposals at this stage and that detailed work would be undertaken if it was decided to proceed with a particular proposal. Officers added that in this situation a report would be brought back to the committee with an opportunity to discuss the matter ahead of any final decision. Officers reminded members that their input and knowledge in this process would be gratefully received before officers decided which proposals to prioritise.

The Chair referred to an e-mail received from a committee member who was unable to attend the meeting. The member in question queried how the usage figures for Glynneath Library had been determined. Officers stated that annual attendance figures were recorded by staff. Members questioned if a library was closed how would citizens be able to access these services. Officers explained that WG guidance stated that citizens would be directed to the nearest library provided that it was within 2.5 miles; however where this was not possible a mobile library vehicle would need to provide this service instead.

Members questioned what was WG's view on NPT's library services. Officers made a commitment to bring back a detailed report at the next meeting on the performance of Council's library services for 2017/18 against the Welsh Public Library Standards via the Annual Assessment Report from WG.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

5.2 Local Authority Partnership Agreement Performance Review 2017-18

The committee received information in relation to the Local Authority Partnership Agreement Performance Review 2017-18 as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried whether there was a disability focus group in being. Officers stated that there was a disability officer for the district who would address any issues.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

5.3 Pontardawe Arts Centre Business Plan And Cinema Development

The committee received information in relation to the Pontardawe Arts Centre Business Plan And Cinema Development as contained within the circulated report.

The committee thanked officers for their hard work.

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

5.4 Expansion of the Childcare Offer in Neath Port Talbot

The committee received information in relation to the Expansion of the Childcare Offer in Neath Port Talbot as contained within the circulated report.

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

5.5 Quarterly Performance Management Data 2018-2019 – Quarter 2 Performance (1st April 2018– 30th September 2018)

The committee received information in relation to the Quarterly Performance Management Data 2018-2019 – Quarter 2 Performance (1st April 2018– 30th September 2018) as contained within the circulated report.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

6. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

The committee requested for a task and finish group to be established to look into the promotion of healthy life styles for school children. The Chair stated that three names had already been submitted, but political balance was required on the group.

The committee noted the work programme.

CHAIRPERSON