

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

14 January 2022

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.L.Taylor

Councillors: D.Cawsey, S.M.Penry, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman, N.T.Hunt, S.Bamsey, J.Evans and S.A.Knoyle

Officers In Attendance S.Brennan, K.Davies, C.Jones, T.Davies and C.Plowman

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Wingrave and L.Jones

1. **Declarations of interest**

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

Cllr S Rahaman

Re: Tourism Update Report 2022 as he works in a restaurant on the Aberavon Seafront in Neath Port Talbot

2. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

Tourism Update Report 2022

Members were provided with an update report on Tourism within Neath Port Talbot County Borough.

Reference was made to the engagement, reach and likes on social media. Members were interested to see the reach the marketing campaign had outside of the County Borough, and asked if there was a breakdown, geographically, of some of that data, in particular in relation to social media followers. Officers confirmed that they would

look into what data could be pulled together; however, Members were asked to keep in mind that the campaign had only been running for four months during the winter period. Officers would circulate the data once it had been collated.

The circulated report detailed that Members and stakeholders would be invited to take part in workshops as part of the process, to devise the new Destination Management Plan; and subject to procurement, the new plan should be in place by summer 2022. Members asked when the workshops would be taking place. It was highlighted that the contractor for the workshops had yet to be appointed; once appointed the arrangements would be put in place in terms of timescales. Officers explained that if restrictions were still in place, the workshops would be held online; if possible, they will be held face to face.

The Committee asked if Officers could monitor the use of the electrical hook ups that were in place across the County Borough; and if it was identified that they were used frequently, asked if it would be possible to look into other places across the County Borough, which could benefit from electrical hook ups.

In regards to the public transport links to tourism, it was asked how the Council was encouraging visitors to get to Neath Port Talbot (NPT) via public transport, and how the Council was engaging with the various transport operators. Officers highlighted that public transport both to travel to, and around, the destination was a key consideration for visitors, however there were various issues with availability and frequency of services for a lot of Councils. It was stated that there were significant costs involved in subsidising services, and difficulties in persuading people to use the public transport network, as sometimes it provided difficult to get to places and/or it would take a very long time; the provision needed to meet the needs of visitors and be convenient for them to use. Despite the issues, Members were informed that the Council had worked with Bay Trans who had put together a series of 'Walks by Bus' using public transport within NPT; the Council was also currently working with Great Western Railway, and the area was to be included in their forthcoming campaign, both with posters at train stations/on trains and on social media. It was highlighted that these issues were not unique to NPT; a lot of other areas in Wales were in a similar position, especially where Authorities have a mix of various rural landscapes.

Officers were asked to provide information regarding the responses to the Destination Marketing Campaign, from journalists in and outside Wales; it was also queried if there were any plans to extend the promotion to other online publications/services. It was confirmed that the Team was currently working on obtaining national press coverage. However, Members were informed that the campaign was aimed at engaging directly with audiences; it was difficult to track progress on this by releasing articles in papers, instead Officers were tracking and measuring success by using social media and website analytics etc. Some examples of the paid for advertising included Bristol Live and Birmingham Live with Reach PLC; Officers had also been engaging with publications such as Active Traveller Magazine who appeal to a key target market. Officers reassured Members that they would take every opportunity to market the campaign, and were in discussions with various outlets who send out press releases; Golwg recently published an article on the campaign after showing interest in the work that was being undertaken. It was mentioned that the campaign was in the early stages, and Officers planned to market this work up until the end of 2022; a lot more take up was expected in the upcoming months.

Members asked if the Council was marketing the campaign within Wales, as well as outside Wales; as some people in the area, and surrounding areas, may not know what NPT had to offer in terms of tourist destinations. It was noted that although Wales residents were part of the target market, there wasn't an allocated budget to actively target local media as the purpose of the campaign was to encourage short breaks/ overnight stays; local media would assist in targeting day visitors but this wasn't currently an objective of the campaign. Officers mentioned that encouraging short breaks and overnight stays were a key objective, and the reason why the Tourism Team was re-established; 91% of NPT's visitors were already day visitors, and it was known from research that, although day visitors were welcome and will be encouraged, the overnight visitors make a significant contribution to the local economy. Although Officers were not actively targeting local press, it was highlighted that they would be aware of the press releases and news that was published regarding this work; if any opportunity was to arise, Officers would proceed with it, although it wouldn't necessarily be paid for marketing by the Council.

A discussion took place regarding camping provisions and electric hook up facilities across the County Borough.

Following mention of Gnoll Country Park, Officers stated that there was sensitive planning conditions associated with the area due to it being a listed landscape; this meant that there were limited accommodation options that were permissible. The Committee was informed that the work around the Gnoll Masterplan included looking at various accommodation options for the Gnoll; it was concluded that the provision of pods/self-catering accommodation was suitable and would meet visitor demand. Officers mentioned that they were looking into funding options to take this forward.

In regards to the provision of camping and caravanning, it was highlighted that the Council had received a number of enquiries from individuals with land, looking to set up sites for this; the process included Officers taking these enquiries to their fullest potential, and supporting them through the financial aid that was available. However, it was explained that there was various planning criteria that these sites would need to meet, which wasn't always appealing to the land owner. Officers were aware of the demand for camping and caravanning facilities, and would help to facilitate them where possible; however, this was only achievable if the private sector come forward with the land in order to deliver on it.

Members asked if it was possible to put these provisions in place on Council owned land, and if so, could a feasibility study be undertaken for this. Officers explained that infrastructure would need to be put in place in order to facilitate camping and caravanning; it was also important to ensure that the provision was in the right place and accessible for visitors. It was noted that the Council had previously looked at Margam Park as a potential area to cater for this type of accommodation, which could be looked into again in the future once the current proposals for the park were completed.

Following on from above, Officers stated that the provision of camping and caravanning would not necessarily provide a financial return for the Council; these sites needed to be efficiently managed, which would include having employees on site on a continual basis to answer customer queries and resolve any issues. Members were informed that the Council was not in a position to be able to do that at this current time; however, Officers were able to help encourage the private sector to look at the various opportunities available.

The Tourism Manager stated that the provision for camping and caravanning could be a scoping exercise to complete, however it would be beneficial as an action within the new Destination

Management Plan rather than a separate piece of work; the Tourism Team was a small Team and this type of work would take up significant resources if it were to be done separately. Officers highlighted the need to look into this provision, and had included reference to it in the circulated report

It was mentioned that there were areas across the County Borough which could accommodate self-contained caravans, which would require very little in terms of infrastructure; this could be an option to explore. Officers confirmed that electric hook ups weren't always needed to cater for the camping and caravanning market; this was an area of the market that the Team was keeping an eye on. It was added that where funding opportunities arise, which would allow the Council to facilitate this on its land, Officers would investigate further.

Members asked if land near the Metal Box, Milland Road, Neath could be used to facilitate camping and caravanning accommodation. Officers stated that this land was a commercial area, and the vehicle movements over the bridge was difficult; therefore, the Council would not be looking at using this site for the purposes highlighted.

The Local Member for Sandfields East confirmed that the Ward Members close to the Aberavon Seafront area, had been liaising with Officers regarding the use of land around the Seafront for camping and caravanning purposes; and they would continue to discuss the various possibilities going forward.

Officers concluded that they had been, and would continue to, explore various sites across the County Borough to identify potential for camping and caravanning facilities; however, it was important for Officers to understand the servicing of them, and what commitment and infrastructure would be required. It was noted that any proposals from Members could be included in the new Destination Management Plan, as this would provide a coherent and strategic view of what the Council was trying to achieve in the County Borough.

The potential opportunities that could arise from the Global Centre for Rail Excellence was raised. Officers confirmed that as plans developed further for this, the Team would take advantage of any opportunities to engage and increase the tourism in the County Borough.

A discussion took place regarding the Levelling Up Fund and the future Shared Prosperity Fund. Members mentioned that there was opportunities for transport investment in the Levelling Up Fund, and

that it would be useful to undertake a feasibility study around the Shared Prosperity Fund, in order to achieve the full potential from that round of funding. It was highlighted that the Levelling Up Fund was a capital fund, and the Shared Prosperity Fund will be revenue based; Officers didn't have the full details regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund, as they had yet to be released, but would update Members when this information became available.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development encouraged all Members to lobby for funding relating to Tourism, in order to better improve the resources within the Council.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Western Bay Area Planning Board - Governance Framework and Financial Governance, and Risk Sharing Agreement

The Committee was presented with a report which was proposing to endorse the Western Bay Area Planning Board's Governance framework and seek approval to enter into a Financial Governance and Risk Sharing agreement with the responsible authorities to the Area Planning Board (APB).

Members were informed of an error included in the circulated report, which was that part of the standard reporting writing template had been left in the report from pages 32 to 34.

Officers provided a brief overview of the report, as requested by the Committee. It was noted that the APB was not a legal entity in its own right, therefore could not carry out certain work in the name of Western Bay Area Planning Board; this meant that one of the responsible Authorities was required to take the role of banker for the APB. Members were informed that NPT Council had taken on this role; the Council would receive any funding, pay the funding to providers and would also be responsible for any contracting or commissioning. It was highlighted that over the years, on behalf of the APB, NPT Council had only been paying out on historical and legacy contracts; which Officers had been able to amend, however not change fundamentally. It was stated that if the Council was to go out to tender or similar, currently it would bare all of the risk of challenge across the Region.

It was stated that Officers had continued to monitor and evaluate services, and ensure the quality of the services that had been delivered; as well as working within the legislative provision to create new services and mitigate risks for the Council. However, it was

explained that they had not been able to regularise or formalise existing contracts; this wasn't ideal for the Authority. The Committee were informed that for a number of years, Officers had been trying to work on various agreements whereby it was either agreed to share funding or agree to risk sharing; it had taken a considerable amount of time to get to this point in which a Governance Framework and Financial Governance and Risk Sharing agreement had been adopted by the APB.

Officers explained that the Governance Framework sets out how it will operate the decision making, to ensure that it behaved in a business-like manner, it understands the remit in which it can operate and the powers that it has. It was added that the Financial Governance and Risk Sharing agreement ensured that existing contracts could be regularised, services could be re-commissioned and the tender process could be utilised going forward; this document will be signed by all responsible organisations to the APB, who likewise will need to seek approval through their respective governance structures. It was added that this will ensure that the risk relating to contracting was shared across all partners, and not held solely to NPT Council.

Members queried why it took so long to establish the framework and agreement. Officers acknowledge the length of time it took to get to this point, and highlighted that discussions had been going on for a number of years, with various agreements having been considered; some of these agreements had progressed to a certain point, and then pulled, therefore the process had to start again.

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

3. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

Reference was made to the workshops for the Destination Management Plan, and how the Committee would be involved in this work going forward; Officers were asked to keep Members informed of this.

A discussion took place regarding the matter of air quality, which was a topic included in the remit of this Committee. Members were asked to email the Head of Planning and Public Protection to clarify their concerns, and to highlight what further information could be added to the annual report on air quality.

Members noted the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

CHAIRPERSON