

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

14 May 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.L.Taylor

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

Officers In Attendance S.Brennan, N.Headon, N.Jones, L.Beynon, K.Davies and P. Jackson

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Wingrave and P.Rees

1. **Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 – Update on progress implementing and revising the Council’s ‘Active Travel Network Map’ (ATNM)**

Members were presented with an update report on the progress being made implementing and revising the Council’s Active Travel Network Map.

A discussion took place in relation to the active travel routes. It was stated that a consultation was undertaken in January 2021 which received a great response from the public, with over 1,040 people contributing. However, there were certain areas that did not participate, particularly the rural areas, Croeserw and the Upper Afan Valley; Officers had spoken to the local Councillors in those areas to try and promote and raise awareness of the consultation as it was important to obtain feedback from the communities to ensure that particular issues could be identified. It was added that the first phase consultation response will feed into the second phase, which will be a formal consultation taking place for 12 weeks from July 2021 to October 2021. Officers mentioned that if there was a need for change identified from the consultations, they would always look into it.

Members were informed that Officers had been using the Welsh Government engagement tool 'Commonplace' to map out the locations of issues and what those issues were. It was noted that the tool enabled Officers to review the issues and identify if they were easily resolved; these would then be passed onto the relevant departments in the service and the response would be coordinated with active travel.

It was highlighted that Officers were currently looking at the outcomes from the first consultation and working with Sustrans to map out new routes; the new routes were identified from the consultation as some of the public had identified gaps in the system, and Officers had taken that on board and started to map where those gaps were. The Committee was informed that the new guidance was also being taken into consideration and would be fundamental in the work going forward.

Officers added that they had used radio, social media and South Wales Evening Post to promote the consultations, however more work needed to be done around this to promote it further; infographics were being used to show the areas which didn't provide a response in order to try and get those communities involved.

In some areas of the County Borough, it was noted that there were issues with barriers and it was a priority for Officers to try and remove those barriers that prevent people, especially those with disabilities, from accessing the routes; in this financial year the team was going to look at elements such as removal, replacement of access, control measures and seating.

Members emphasised the need to consider the longer term vision of active travel, which may need to include longer and bigger routes and those used for recreational purposes.

It was asked if the Council had the capacity to carry out all of the work included with the new guidance and maps that were issued, and if there were plans to build up the team in anticipation of this.

Members were informed that the active travel function within the authority was split between the Officers responsible for producing the active travel network map and Officers responsible for applying for the funding and working with engineers to design and implement the routes; there was different funding available for active travel, which could potentially fund extra staff if needed. It was added that the Council had received some monies from the active travel funding to commission consultants (Sustrans).

Members asked for an update on the consultation timescales as they had appeared to have changed. It was explained that there was originally three consultations programmed, however the amount of responses received from the first consultation was larger than anticipated, which led to carrying out an intensive mapping exercise which took a great deal of time; this resulted in the second consultation not being able to take place, and instead Officers will now be moving straight onto the formal consultation. It was added that Officers had informed Welsh Government of this and they were understanding; however, it highlighted the need for extra resource. Officers confirmed they would be bringing a report to Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board in June 2021, which will include the responses from the first consultation and the revised maps.

Officers were asked if it had been considered keeping a tool like Commonplace on an ongoing basis in order to keep up with the smaller jobs that need to be carried out more regularly, or if any consideration had been given to how the Council receives feedback from the public on highways issues. It was highlighted that the Objective tool was currently used in services such as Planning Policy; there was a function within this tool whereby the Council could interactively engage with the public. Members were informed that Officers were currently looking at the mapping element and how tools could be used to engage through maps. It was noted that corporately, Officers were looking into using Commonplace as Welsh Government promote this tool and the facility within it was very good.

Concerns were raised in regards to those who were inactive due to accessibility issues. When looking at the detail of the consultation responses, it was stated that a large number of older people and younger people had not responded. Officers mentioned that they would need to re-think how to engage with these groups of people to obtain their views and understand the issues they were having. In regards to younger people, it was noted that staff had not been able to engage through schools, which could be a contributing factor to the low number of responses. It was added that a large proportion of the population within the County Borough were classified as older people, therefore it was important that their views were incorporated into the plans on how active travel could be more accessible; utilising electric bikes and scooters could be useful for this. Officers mentioned that it will be essential to look into the surfaces of the routes to ensure they were smooth, flat and accessible for all; the revised guidance was

much stricter on how the routes were scored, so a lot of the routes will need to be looked at.

The Committee discussed the need for a linked network between bus services and active travel, and collaborative working with the relevant sections within the Council as there were multiple benefits of this. The Integrated Transport Manager explained that Transport for Wales were already looking at this and have commissioned consultants to assist; they were looking at integrated responsive transport where community transport car schemes will be available to help people get to the main bus routes and fill in the gaps that were appearing in the transport network. The discussions and analysis that were taking place should link in with the active travel routes.

In relation to suggestions for routes, it was stated that Officers were currently reviewing and assessing the many submissions that they received as part of the first consultation; the report that will be brought to Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board in June 2021 will detail what routes were included from this.

It was queried how Neath Port Talbot compared to the other Local Authorities in Wales in terms of how much funding had been received. Officers noted that it was a publically available document with regard to how much Welsh Government funding went to each Authority; it was agreed that Officers would find this document and circulate to Members.

Members asked where they could access the active travel maps. Officers stated that they will re-circulate the Commonplace link to Members so that they were able to see the updated maps.

A discussion took place in relation to the new mesh density requirement which Officers confirmed was 250 meters in urban areas and 500 to 1,000 meters on the outskirts of urban areas; the guidance suggested that this would need to be worked towards by the third submission of the map, and Officers were currently on the second submission.

It was noted that there were many other activities that should be considered when looking into the accessibility of certain routes, including skateboarding and roller-skating; Officers stated that they would feed this information back to try and ensure that the routes were suitable for these types of activities as well as cycling and walking.

Members asked if Officers had used any other social media platforms, besides Facebook, to engage young people to take part in the consultations. The following work was currently being undertaken to try and increase engagement:

- Identifying how to utilise a range of social media platforms including TikTok, Instagram and Twitter; Officers had been working with the Media team to discuss the best methods of engagement;
- The Road Safety and Business Performance Manager and the team had been looking at speaking with schools virtually to engage; there were different functions available to do this, an example was Google Classroom;
- Researching into local influencers on YouTube, such as the Chair of NPT's Youth Council, who could help to promote the consultation;
- Used some of the active travel money allocated to buy ten Fitbits which will be used as prizes;
- Filming videos of peoples experiences using different routes to publish online;
- Using cameras on Segway and Drones to capture video footage to advertise routes.

In regards to the consultation responses, it was asked if there were plans to provide feedback to the public in order for them to find out which suggestions had been included in the plans and for them to understand the reasoning behind the decisions that had been made. It was explained that the responses would be collated into a spreadsheet and Officers were working with Sustrans to produce a mechanism online to allow the public who submitted a response to search for the information they require. It was noted that this will need to include the suggestions, the response from the team and how they were going to be dealing with the particular suggestion.

Officers were asked what processes and procedures were used to determine how funds were allocated and what projects would be undertaken. As part of the active travel guidance, it was highlighted that projects needed to be prioritised into short, medium and long term; Officers will work with the engineers and Senior Officers to go through the suggestions and slot them into the relevant timescale. Members were informed that the criteria requires Officers to identify what improvement would be needed and apply the Welsh Government prioritisation matrix, which is how the timescales and

level of priority would be decided. Following this, it was noted that Officers then needed to bid for the projects as part of the Welsh Government funding process.

Given the high deprivation and issues in the valley areas, it was asked what more could be done to try and consider projects in these areas to help develop and promote suitable transport links. Officers highlighted the importance of obtaining the input from those in the valleys communities via the consultation, so that their concerns could be included on the map and to provide a fully comprehensive view.

The Committee thanked all Officers within the team for their continuous hard work.

2. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet Board item:

Examination by Audit Wales into the Council's Regeneration Service as part of its Well Being Objectives

Members were informed of the findings and recommendations of the Audit Wales report.

It was highlighted that the Audit Wales report was issued in August 2020; Members asked why it had taken this amount of time to be brought to the Committee. Officers explained that although the report was issued at a particular date, it takes a while to finalise the reports.

In regards to engagement with consultation, it was noted that this had always been an issue; unfortunately the times that Officers were given between the information coming out and when the submissions needed to come in, were incredibly short. It was added that even if there was plenty of resource within the team, it would not be possible to get to consultation due to the tight timescales.

Members were informed that there was a Local Strategy Board for Economic Regeneration and the Public Services Board (PSB) in which Officers work through to try and obtain as many consultations as they can; local Member representation was very important to make links between the Council and the communities.

Officers were asked if the recommendations contained within appendix 2 of the circulated report had been completed. It was highlighted that all of the recommendations were at various stages; staff resource had effected completing some of this work due to

temporary re-location of staff and staff that had left and not been replaced.

A discussion took place in relation to stakeholders and the importance of having contact with both internal and external stakeholders. Officers mentioned that the Council could always do more with the stakeholders, however often timescales and capacity affect the ability to do this. It was added that Officers will identify gaps following informal and formal consultations.

Members asked if there was comparative information available on the Audit Wales reports across the Local Authorities in Wales. It was highlighted that this information wasn't available; however, Neath Port Talbot Council was well regarded and had a number of schemes that were seen as innovative and will have a significant impact within the community.

It was queried if there were any penalties to timescales in completing the recommendations and if the Council had to comply with all of the recommendations provided by Audit Wales. It was confirmed that there were no penalties, however if Audit Wales felt that the Council was not performing well enough then it might potentially impact on the ability to access grant funding. Officers took on board all of the points raised by Audit Wales and were more than happy to comply and address these points; Officers had to work with the resources at hand, therefore a lot more could be done if the resources were available.

It was agreed that the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee would be provided with an update report in relation to the recommendations from Audit Wales which were contained within appendix 2 of the circulated report: Delivering Strategic Regeneration Programmes – Well-being of Future Generations Examination – Neath Port Talbot Council Action Plan.

Members also asked that a report in relation to one of the recommendations contained within the report be added to the Forward Work Programme: An internal and external communications and stakeholder engagement strategy.

Following scrutiny, the Committee noted the report.

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

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme for 2021/22 and Officers noted the points raised by Members during pre-decision

scrutiny on the Cabinet Board item 'Examination by Audit Wales into the Council's Regeneration Service as part of its Well Being Objectives'.

CHAIRPERSON