

**Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny
Committee**

**(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft
Teams)**

Members Present:

19 July 2024

Chairperson:

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: C.James, L.Williams, R.W.Wood, C.Clement-Williams, G.Rice, A.Dacey and R.Davies

Officers In Attendance D.Griffiths, J.Stevens, T.Rees, A.Havard and S. Owen and T. Rees

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hurley, S.Jones and Leader

1. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to scrutinise the Annual Report and the following items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

Item 5a: Part Night Street Lighting Pilots Report

Item 5b: Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Plan

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on the 10/01/24, 09/02/24 and 22/03/24 and 19/04/24 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. **Annual Report**

This item was omitted was omitted due to an administrative error.

5. **To consider items selected from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme**

Members considered items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

(a) **Part-Night Lighting Pilot**

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene Cllr Scott Jones gave the committee some background on the report. Members were advised that there was a substantial energy rate rise in the last two years which has put a large pressure on departmental budgets. Members were informed that that during 2023/24, the Public Street Lighting Department highlighted 3 potential energy saving strategy to limit the overspend.

3-Watt trimming of power levels was applied to every street light column and following cabinet approval on the 22nd of March 20, 2024, 25% dimming was implemented across 10,000 LED lanterns. Prior to cabinet approval of 25% dimming a public consultation was then undertaken alongside a successful trial in 2024.

The Cabinet member advised that the third option of part night lighting was postponed pending a pilot study to gain a better understanding of the impacts of saving strategies and thereby to enable evidence-based decisions to be made in the future, if need be.

Members were reminded that they as a committee, prior to a trial taking place, had requested to the Cabinet Board that a further report containing details of geographical locations, duration of the trial period and the off and on times of the lanterns as presented in the report.

The Cabinet member noted that in the March Scrutiny meeting members had advocated concerns around turning street lighting off at 9:00 PM in the evening, which could impact the vulnerability of women and girls and explained that concern had been taken that on board, and that it is reflected in the timings and reflection of the concerns that was raised previously.

It was also stated that the consultation would be undertaken as part of a pilot study prior to the commencement of the trial and will include an assessment of the impact upon women and young girls in terms of violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The Cabinet member confirmed that consultation with those partners has commenced and that if the proposed part night lighting pilot is approved by the cabinet it will run for the duration of November, which includes in its totality of 133 lanterns over seven locations.

The lanterns will be switched off between the hours of 1:00 AM and 5:00 AM and following completions of the pilot results and feedback from stakeholders will be gathered ready for any future discussions or any larger trial.

Members were advised that as part of the consultation process that agencies and affected residents will be informed prior to the start of the pilot scheme and Scrutiny and member feedback will also be considered as part of the finalised report due in September.

Officers explained that picking the locations have been a difficult process as it is a sensitive issue but has had to be done as a part of the trial.

Members were advised that this could be a prequel to a further trial at a later date of more lighting switch offs and that will incur further consultation.

Officers explained that they have also arranged meetings with a local group called 'Thrive' commencing next Friday and officers have been in discussions with the community safety team which have provided officers with antisocial behaviour hotspots which officers have tried to keep away from during the trial.

Members were advised that if a further trial and or a larger trial was deemed appropriate, it would likely be more widespread because it would be 133 lights total which is on average 19 lights per location.

Officers noted that most people would not want their lights switched off and that makes it difficult to choose the locations. Officers stated that they have tried to do it honestly and openly with a good heart and without any intervention from anybody.

Members suggested that the trial should be done in some very rural areas to get the proper reflection and asked how it will affect those areas.

Officers advised that they have spoken to the police and believe that to make this a worthwhile trial they have looked at more urban areas rather than rural areas because they believe there potentially could be more problems with urban locations rural.

Members noted that there is only one valleys community included in the trial and asked how that will produce a geographical spread view of the authority of 34 wards when there's mainly urban areas chosen? Members also noted that locations 5 & 6 in the trial are within the same ward of Margam and Taibach and asked if there is there any reason behind this?

Officers stated that they had been in consultation with the police, and they indicated through that there was more likelihood of problems associated with the urban areas and there are a lot more lights to be switched off in the urban areas and because of this, officers have decided on an even split throughout the county borough.

With regards to the scenario of the two areas in Margam, it was advised that it is an officer decision there's been no reason other than they feel that it's the right thing to do at that location.

Members asked where was the data established from for the crime rates and enquired if by choosing low crime areas, did that mean there is no confidence in the policy and if implemented in full and if so, could the authority be putting the safety of its residents at risk?

Officers stated that they wouldn't want to put anybody at risk and that the trial must be placed at certain locations throughout the county. Officers are in consultation with the community safety team, and they will be in communication with Thrive. Members were informed that the trial makes up less than 1% of the lights within the authority.

Officers stated that the outcome of the trial and the information gathered will factor into what happens next. Members were also informed that the benefit of the scrutiny meetings prior to cabinet, gives officers 7 weeks to make things more robust and try to come back to the committee in September with some details of the consultations that officers have taken place.

Members asked if any other factors been taken into consideration relating to location 6 (Margam and Taibach) because the cul-de-sac in particular has an elderly demographic where a lot of outreach staff and ambulances attend. Members also asked how that could impact those residents if there is no lighting during their most vulnerable hours of the evening?

Officers noted the information and advised that possibly between now and September following feedback they may be able to tweak the appendix slightly.

Members asked for more detail in terms of the consultation, specifically on how residents will be contacted and what form officers will be going to collect the feedback from residents.

Officers advised they intend to do a letter drop to all the residents to inform them of the proposals and on the letter, there will be information of how they can feedback and if necessary, there will be face-to-face discussions with them.

Members asked if residents affected will have a discount on their council tax as they're having a reduction in service? Officers advised that they do not think so.

Members asked who will be monitoring the effect of the trial and what is in place if necessary for it to be halted if bad weather does occur leading to an accident or anything similar in the trail areas.

Officers explained that once these potential switch offs become a reality, officers will have ongoing discussions with the Police, Community Safety Team and Thrive. A lot of the areas that have been chosen are not high-speed roads, and it will be stopped if needs be.

Officers noted that switching the lights off for even for a short period of time, means it's going to be difficult for officers to understand whether an incident or a crime may have been committed because of the light switch off or whether it would have happened anyway. Officers will have close consultation with all concerned parties and if anything needs to be done, it'll be done, and it will be reported back as necessary at the end of the trial.

Members asked if there will there be a fund set up for victims of any consequences of the council's actions in relation to these trials? Officers weren't aware of one.

Members asked the Cabinet member if this was a case of the council playing Russian roulette with the lives of residents to save money and stated that it doesn't bode well when the residents of Godre'r Graig, are looking for a new school to be built and the authority is in the process of switching lights off up in that village to save money.

The Cabinet Member Scott Jones replied that this is to do with money, and it's been very clear from day one that this is part of a

savings exercise. The Cabinet member advised that he would much rather be spending his time working with the scrutiny committee, looking at ways of how they all can improve the quality of services as opposed to be spending time of what needs to be cut across the authority.

The Cabinet member noted that there has recently been a change in government, and stated that he hoped that at this stage in time, not expecting miracles within a matter of weeks, that between now and the next budget settlement that councils across Wales will receive the investment that they need and therefore maybe we'll be having different discussions in scrutiny meetings going forward.

Members asked how much work has been done with other councils who have trialled this, for example Powys and what feedback have they had and how was that affected the plan?

Officers explained that consultation has commenced prior to the Cabinet meeting in September with local authorities throughout Wales and officers are waiting on information to come in on that.

Officers explained that there is quite a high level of activity delivering projects. This along with the Officer only taking charge of the Lighting section in April, means that things have been a little bit slow, however, officers advised that they have got another eight weeks to go until the finalised report and they will have a lot more information by the Cabinet meeting in September.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations.

(b) **Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Plan**

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene Scott Jones gave members an update on the report. he advised that the Council is acting as a lead local flood authority for the region and has a statutory duty to produce and develop a local Flood Risk Management Strategy and plan as stipulated under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

Members were advised that the authority published its first Local Strategy in 2014, setting out the overarching approach to managing local flood risk and that alongside the local strategy, the Flood Risk Management Plan was published in 2015.

Members were advised that the Flood Risk Management Plan developed the objectives, measures and actions outlined in the Local

Strategy into a more detailed plan for managing flooding in the authority's communities based on political wards.

The cabinet member explained that the document is the second Local Strategy and whilst the authority previously published the Local Strategy separately, this new Local strategy and plan integrates the two documents into one, reducing the complexity and duplication.

Members were advised that this document will work alongside other strategic plans for shoreline management, infrastructure and planning and to set out the direction the authority wants to take it.

Members were informed that the document explains how flooding will be managed across the Local Authority area consistent with the objectives, measures and related policies and legislation set out in the National Strategies.

The Cabinet member explained that the document was written in a way that it's usable and referable for both the wider public and flood risk practitioners.

The Cabinet member stated that it is the authority's intention that a strategy and the plan will be reviewed every two years, and the action plan will be updated accordingly.

Officers advised members that this is a very important area within highways and drainage. A lot of investment has been made to the authority and staffing and forward planning through succession planning. Members were made aware that officers are in discussions with Welsh Government on a regular basis and that officers currently have a 10-year pipeline planned for schemes throughout the county borough based on need, which has a total value of £35,000,000.

Officers explained that these are dependent on Welsh Government funding because currently in the authority's capital budget the authority only have an allocation of £300,000 per year, which has been eroded by inflation. Officers feel that the authority are at the forefront of flood risk in Wales and maybe in the UK and has a great team of individuals and are building for the future, but a lot of it will depend on grand funding going forward.

Members were advised that the authority has undertaken large amount of works throughout the county borough and that while Welsh Government supplies 85% of the funding, 15% of the funding must be found internally by the local authority. Officers advised that for the

£35 million mentioned, the authority will need to find around £5.1 million over the next 10 years.

Officers stated that they think that the authority is in a far better position today for flood risk than it was years ago.

Members were advised that there are approximately 64,000 properties within the authority and there is a potential flood risk to around about 24,500 properties within the authority from different means and of different risk levels.

Officers explained that the hydrology associated with sewerage, is capacity lead and through sustainable urban and drainage systems, the authority is trying to take water out of the main drainage systems. The misconception is often that the public often think the drains are blocked, but it is just a capacity issue.

Members noted that in the report, the actions that are listed are reliant on the Welsh Government and internal funding, but it doesn't say if these are aspirational projects or deliverable projects. Members were informed that funding had already been identified for the authorities 10-year action plan has been in theory agreed by Welsh Government.

Officers advised that these are not aspirational plans, and they should be able to be delivered as long as the funding streams continue. If the funding streams do not continue, they will be aspirational.

Officers gave the example of a scheme that was proposed to go on to a full business case this year, however the authority didn't receive the funding for it from Welsh Government so that's been put back onto the plan for next year.

Members noted that in 2018/19, the authority was able to secure funding to help protect the seawall in Aberavon and a ramp was built. Members raised their concern that at the point that the seawall ends, the erosion at the side of the seawall has continued quite severely in recent times and with the likelihood of sea levels rising and the erosion continuing, members wanted to know if officers had a specific plan in place with Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government. Members also asked if the authority could push to try and bring in funding to extend the promenade or the sea defences from where it ends now to what is termed the 'Naval Club'.

Officers advised that they are aware of this and explained that there is a 'hold the line' strategy which is associated with the seafront as it is the promenade there is a natural management which is associated with the rest of the seafront, which is that it erodes over time.

Officers noted that Scarlett Avenue would be impacted, and they will make representations to Welsh Government on this, however, funding streams have ceased since 2019 and that it relies on whether the Welsh Government funding is available to undertake further works.

Officers believe that Welsh Government are trying to balance coastal erosion and flood risk from a multitude of areas and officers will keep up the pressure on them, but there is no funding available.

Members highlighted that on page 211, it says that significant additional internal funding is required for this plan and asked if that's the £35 Million referred to by officers.

Members were advised that the £35 million is the investment required to undertake the schemes over the next 10 years and currently the authority needs to find 15% of that. Officers have had discussions with finance and there are provisions in the budget for this currently.

Members felt it would be useful to have this clarified in the report and felt that there was a lack of detail of how much things are going to cost and where the money is going to come from.

Members also asked if they could have an idea of the costs of not carrying out the schemes in the report and used the example of likely costs of businesses and households being flooded, or other damage.

Members acknowledged that the authority will likely be fighting for funding and that is why it would be important to be able to put a financial number on the cost and savings that would come from it.

Members noted that the money from the Flood Revenue Grant is going to be subsumed into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), and the report states that it's hoped that the authority will still get the same level of funding. Members asked how realistic it was once the money has gone into the RSG.

Officers advised that they have been assured that the money that's gone into the RSG will remain within the highways and drainage services budget.

Members were informed that officers have got a broad outline of the schemes and have got priorities based on the calculations made by the team on potential flood risk with within the authority. Members were advised the assessments are based on a 1 in 30 years flood, a 1 in 100 years flood and a 1 in 1000 years flood.

Officers explained that calculations based on cost is difficult to do because assessing the cost to flooding in a community is not just financial but also the impact that it has on the social aspects such as people having to move out of houses etc. Officers did feel this would be useful to include as an appendix what the authorities 10-year pipeline looks like and what the associated costs are. Members were told that three years have passed and they have had some success delivering projects of over £3 million in localities and over the next 10 years they will deliver larger schemes the benefits these will bring long term will be immense to the locality and to the catchment as well.

Officers explained that it's not a case of us just go into Welsh Government and asking for the money for a scheme. Officers must do an outline business case, then a full business case. Then they must do another report which gets to funding, and these can take years.

Members were advised that in the plan, rather than looking at it in terms of political areas, they have decided to look at it in catchments instead. Members were given the example on how rainfall in the Cimla ends up at the sea just outside Britton Ferry. This means officers have got to look at all wards and all communities that it impacts on the way down, whether there's enough resilience in the grids or channels that the authority has there and then have to apply these calculations based on those flooding types. Members were advised that the 1 in 30 year flood is becoming quite regular and 1 in the 100 year flood is also becoming more prevalent as well.

Officers aren't so concerned about continuous rain but they are seeing a lot more flash flooding, which puts a strain on all drainage systems wherever they are and there is run off in places we see in underground water where they have never seen it before.

Officers added some information to the issue of the cost impacts if the authority weren't to do the protective measures and advised that with the seafront coastal protection scheme that it's more about the cost and value to the assets protected as opposed to social impacts.

Members were informed that while there are social aspects generally if the flooding took place, the consequences would far outweigh that capital investment with damage to property and all of the social aspects associated with people having to move.

Officers advised that without doing the mitigation works, the costs would be massive compared to the capital investment. Members were advised that every local authority has got a set of schemes and as part of that cost benefit analysis, Welsh government tend to take a prioritisation view when looking at all the schemes.

Officers used the example of Sandfields area where 6500 properties are affected. That was a major impact and that scheme got quite close to the top of the investment being made available. This means it's about value of assets protected as opposed to consequential cost impacts, but they would be huge.

Cllr Hurley Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economic Growth provided feedback that the authority has a robust plan with everything in place ready to apply for the funding and stated that the only restriction on the works in the authority to protect the area and the borough is Welsh Government funding.

The Cabinet member advised that members need to lobby and help officers try to achieve that funding.

In relation to the seafront Cllr Hurley advised that they also have to take into consideration that beyond the 'Naval Club' is the old British Petroleum site, which is now Welsh Government land and is possibly earmarked for the Freeport and development, the cabinet member advised that the authority needs to raise the protection there otherwise that land will be unusable and that's going to be a huge loss to the area for region as well.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations.

6. **To Consider Items From the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

There were no items selected from the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.

7. **Performance Monitoring**

There were no Performance Monitoring reports for consideration.

8. **Selections of Items for Future Scrutiny**

The Democratic Service officer confirmed that Members had decided to add the VIVA Port Talbot Renewal Ballot Report to the Scrutiny Committee Forward work programme to consider the item at the 20th of September Scrutiny meeting.

9. **Urgent Items**

There was none.

CHAIRPERSON