

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

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

Members Present:

31 January 2025

Chairperson: Councillor S.Pursey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: L.Williams, A.Dacey, R.Davies, R.W.Wood,
J.Jones, C.Clement-Williams, G.Rice,
B.Woolford and H.C.Clarke

Officers In Attendance T.Rees, A.Havard and A. Collins

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors J.Hurley and C.Phillips

Observers

1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that the Members of the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to scrutinise item 4a, from the Cabinet Forward work Programme.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 04/11/24 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. **To Consider items from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme**

Members considered item 4a from the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

5. **Economic Development CRM System - Contract Renewal**

Officers explained that In March 2023, they procured the Evolutive system to support the Business Anchor project, funded by the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund. This decision was based on the successful experience delivering high volume of grants during COVID and feedback from economic development officers in Wales who found the system useful.

Officers initially secured a two-year contract with an optional one-year extension. However, this timeframe no longer aligns with the council's needs for current and upcoming programs, such as the Tata Transition Fund grants and the second round of the Shared Prosperity Fund starting in April.

Officers anticipate further funding from the government's equivalent to the Shared Prosperity Fund starting in 2026. The council has the opportunity to re-contract on a director board basis for three years at a cost of £30,381 plus VAT. This cost can be covered by current SPF projects, but it needs approval, invoicing, and payment by February. Members were advised that as this falls outside the council's contract procedure rules, officers are seeking members' approval to proceed.

The chair reminded members why the committee was scrutinising the report, explaining that the committee can choose what it scrutinises under the current system. Since this report departs from the contract procedure rules, he felt it was important for the committee to review it to ensure the council isn't deviating unreasonably. He noted there are no major concerns but a few questions.

Members had some observations about the format of the report in terms of how the report is written and it's understanding.

Members were confused by the financial impact section stating, "not applicable." They felt it wasn't clear how much the contract would cost or if the council could afford it until they reached the financial information later in the report. Members suggested it would have been more helpful if the report had clarified that the cost would be covered by the programme, rather than stating "not applicable."

The chair noted that there is a brief scrutiny covering report that goes before the substantive cabinet report. He felt that the scrutiny report was a little bit confusing as the impact sections are blank, he asked that this feedback be looked at corporately.

Members noted the graph in the report showing grant funding allocations and expressed that they hadn't been informed about the specific grants were for and felt it would be helpful if they could have details on where the grants were awarded and to whom. While they

hoped for information on individual wards, they felt that all grant details should be accessible to members to facilitate sharing best practices.

Members suggested that it would be helpful to see examples of successful initiatives from other wards to share best practices. They felt that having access to this information, even if not included in this report, would be beneficial.

Members felt that a glossary of terms should be included on reports.

Officers noted the comments and advised that in terms of the grant fund, the SPF project is currently being closed by the end of March. Officers will be looking to do a report on the activity and can report to members on the grant scheme and show it by individual wards so members can see what has been awarded by wards as well.

Members thought it would also be helpful to see grants awarded whilst it's still open and other people in members wards could look at doing the same thing.

The democratic services officer thanked members for their feedback on the report and explained that when scrutiny is looking at a cabinet report, a scrutiny cover report is included with it. Members were advised that the covering report doesn't contain as much information because it directs members to the cabinet report for the substantial content and any recommendations contained within that.

The Democratic services officer confirmed that the feedback and suggestions would be taken back and considered when looking at the templates for scrutiny and cabinet report templates to make it easier to find information when reading reports and also the request for glossary of terms.

Councillor Jeremy Hurley Cabinet member for Climate Change and Economic Growth thanked the team for using this contract to automate the grant application process, which saves time and speeds up grant distribution. He praised their remarkable work and suggested that councillors should be informed about the grants to identify similar opportunities in their wards. With additional SPF funding coming, he emphasized the importance of helping residents and businesses in their wards.

He noted that members had received multiple SPF updates in seminars, with officers providing excellent information on all aspects of the SPF, including spending and project details. The media team has also issued notices as projects, like the Railway Inn in Aberdulais, reached completion.

This project received positive feedback from residents and is good that it has regenerated another building and enhancing the link between the Knoll to Glyn Neath pathway.

The chair noted that seeing successful projects can inspire other businesses. He emphasised the importance of making people aware of available support and funding, even if the council doesn't always know the exact timing or duration. He felt that effective communication, whether through the media team or members informing businesses about opportunities, is crucial.

Members acknowledged the work done by officers and felt that they should be fully briefed on activities in their wards. They commented that, based on the progress so far, this seems achievable and emphasised the importance of ensuring all teams work efficiently given the current budget position.

Members noted the pressure the economic development team is under as well as other parts of the council and felt that if this proposal is allowing them to work efficiently and deal with all enquiries and projects then it is a good thing that the authority is allowing that to happen.

Members felt that it was a fabulous report, and that the contract is worth the money, which was a lot cheaper than they thought it was going to be.

Members felt that this was needed and an easy decision, they were pleased with the transparency and that they are able to see that what's going on. They were glad to scrutinise it as it is slightly outside of the usual procurement process.

The Cabinet member for Climate Change and Economic Growth explained that the council know that there is certainty with the future funding and that the most important thing for members to pass on to residents and businesses is 'plans in place'. He advised that the team is so organised that if it's a good plan in place, then in some instances the grants have been turned around in a matter of weeks.

He felt that it is important to talk to the businesses or third sector organisations and make them aware of what's available and try and get them to put the plans in place or start talking to the business team and the SPF team straight away.

Members advised they had asked in a seminar how much funding was across the area and in wards across the county borough, but members haven't received any information.

Officers advised that they are still currently processing several claims and chasing them down to try and get the money out the door so that council don't have to return anything.

Officers hope that when it comes to an end then there will be certainty and then that would be the best time to report on the final outcomes.

Officers will get as much information to the businesses, especially when the next round comes through, and officers will be fully prepared.

Members were advised that officers have got a database of all town centre businesses so that they can access them directly. This includes 400 businesses that they can get the information straight to.

The chair noted there had been overall positive comments, which was a change as scrutiny can be a bit critical sometimes. He felt that it is useful, for the cabinet and officers to just have an affirmation that things are on the right track and members are happy and content.

And he felt that this was a rare example of that.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet.

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 items.

8. **Selections of items for future scrutiny**

Members noted the Forward Work Programme.

9. **Urgent Items**

There was none.

CHAIRPERSON

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