

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present: 4 December 2015

Chairperson: **Councillor A.Llewelyn**

Councillors: C.P.Golding, A.Jenkins, M.Jones, D.Keogh, Mrs.M.A.Lewis, Ms.C.Morgans, Mrs.S.Paddison and A.Taylor

Officers In Attendance A.Evans, C.Millis, S.Brennan, D.Griffiths, W.John, G Nesbitt and S. Curran

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors M.L.James and A.Woolcock

1. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2015.**

The Committee noted the minutes.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2015.**

Members received the minutes from the Special Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on the 3rd November 2015.

Members asked if there was an update in relation to the planned public meetings with the libraries and were informed of the well-attended meetings that had been held in Baglan and Skewen and that a number of proposals had been put forward which were progressing well.

Members asked for an update in relation to the Cefn Coed Museum. They were informed that the recent public meeting had been well

attended and that options with the Friends Group were being explored.

A discussion was held on the web presence of the museum and that currently the only way to access it is through the Neath Port Talbot Council corporate website. Members discussed the options of considering improving the web presence of the Museum and drew comparisons with the Big Pit National Coal Museum website.

The Committee discussed the possibility of installing brown tourist signs to advertise the Museum along the road network and officers explained the issues in relation to doing this along Motorways and the main trunk roads in terms of costs and restrictions. Members asked if options in relation to this could be explored and fed back to the Committee.

In terms of the ownership of the land at the site, Members were informed that there is a 99 year lease from the Coal Board to the Local Authority which commenced in 1978 and which is now owned by the Welsh Government. Officers explained some issues around the lease such as termination options and liability responsibilities. Members noted that there are significant structural and health and safety concerns with some parts of the building and ongoing discussions are being held with demolition firms.

Members asked for an update position in relation to Cymmer Swimming Pool. Officers explained that plans had been received from an interested party in relation to running the facility but that a provider is required to deliver against the business plan and negotiations are ongoing particularly in relation to the complex Health and Safety regulations that surround the operation of a swimming pool. As it stands, officers continue to work to the agreed to the agreed timescales, not ruling out any viable options which would secure a safe facility. If no proposals are forthcoming, officers confirmed that as of 31st December the full decommissioning procedure would commence as agreed.

Following discussion, the Committee noted the minutes.

3. **COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY SERVICE REPORT CARD.**

Members considered the update on the progress of Community Managed libraries in Neath Port Talbot and the Library Services Report Card as contained within the circulated report.

The report included a breakdown of performance of the community managed libraries compared to when these libraries were managed by the Local Authority. Members were informed that no adverse comments had been received in relation to the community run libraries and Members commended the volunteers who are working in the libraries. Members were informed that internet access is available at all of the libraries except at Seven Sisters and that seven of the community libraries now have their own internet provider and are no longer connected to the Local Authority network.

Members were informed that in the Summer of 2015 only two community libraries took part in the annual Summer Reading Challenge signing up just five children compared to the 1114 children signed up by the Library Service. Members noted that performance has dropped but that it is proving a successful alternative method of service provision.

Officers stated that Welsh Government had issued new guidelines and as of May 2015 they will require Community Libraries to have a paid member of staff onsite for 50% of the time and Members were concerned about the financial and resource implications of this.

Members stated they were disappointed at the reduction of books issued even in the libraries that had retained their number of opening hours and were informed that this is a trend within all libraries. Members discussed the options of integrating libraries into broader service provision and that innovation would be required to drive forward the service and performance of libraries across the Borough.

Members asked if there had been any increase in the issue of electronic books and were informed that there had not been any substantial increases and that the issue of audio books has risen but not proportionately to compensate for the decrease in book issues. Members discussed the rise in popularity of E-Readers and asked if the demand and what libraries are being used for could be considered including figures on E-Books.

Members observed through the Library Services Report Card that whilst traditional book issue numbers had decreased, visitor numbers for other activities had increased. They noted the fall in performance of reservations supplied as well as a reduction in the number of

available computer hours in use although officers explained that this was in relation to static computers whereas the rates of 'BYOD' (Bring your Own Device) had increased.

Members were pleased to note that young volunteers had been recruited throughout the summer to assist with various activities and Members praised the sterling work performed by the volunteers. Members were also pleased to note how the 'Every Child a Member' scheme continued to progress with the aim of signing every Year 4 child up as a member of their local library.

Members noted the lack of sickness absence data in the report card as well as some other key corporate measures, which they would expect to see included such as financial information, levels of Employee Development Reviews conducted and staff satisfaction and engagement levels. Officers noted this and committed to including the information in the next report card that is presented to the Committee.

Members inquired into the process for donation of books and were informed that the post of Cataloguer had been deleted and there is a policy on library donations; Members noted that for example there is a requirement that academic books are current but that local history books are always well received.

Members asked about Welsh books and if Neath Port Talbot coordinate with any other Local Authorities. Officers informed the Committee that there is an agreement with Camarthenshire Council for Welsh books for learners and children and also there is an agreement across twelve Local Authorities to share and exchange books in the Welsh language.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

4. SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16.

The Committee raised the topics of Tourism Strategy and Town Centre Regeneration which they would like added to the existing Forward Work Programme.

The Committee then noted and agreed the Forward Work Programme.

5. PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

4.1 Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2014-15

The Committee received the Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2014-15 as contained within the circulated report.

Members praised the hours given to the service by volunteers and were pleased to learn heard that two volunteers are ex - employees of the Council.

Members drew attention to the financial information included in the report and in particular what the costs to the Authority would be to fully comply with the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS). Officers explained the standards Neath Port Talbot fails on are always resource related and that only one Local Authority in Wales fully achieves all standards currently.

Members noted that performance against the WPLS is expected to decline next year, set against the budget reductions to the library service, in particular resources relating to stock and staffing.

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

4.2 Quarter 2 Performance Management Data 2015-16- Education

The Committee received the Quarter 2 Performance Management Data for 2015-16 for Education as contained within the circulated report.

Members forwarded a question that had been raised in a recent Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee relating to a drop in performance in relation to LCS/002 (b) the number of visits to local authority sport and leisure centres during the year per 1,000 population where the visitor will be participating in physical activity; members queried the drop in performance and asked what was being put in place in an attempt to improve. Officers explained that the Afan Valley Sports Centre had been shut for refurbishment for 6 months. In addition all of the Council's playing fields are now being leased to individual

sports clubs and there has been a demise in local football and rugby teams. Members heard how there is a drive to switch young people on to sport and Neath Port Talbot's Physical Activity and Sports Service (PASS) has a high participation rate.

Members agreed that the new Aberafan Sports and Leisure Complex will be a great opportunity to promote health and fitness in the area and to encourage new visitors to the facility. Members also noted that the new Ysgol Newydd Bae Baglan will have sports facilities such as all-weather pitches which will be open to the public.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

4.3 Quarter 2 Performance Management Data 2015-16- Environment

The Committee received the Quarter 2 Performance Management Data for 2015-16 for Environment as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried the drop in performance in relation to L(ED) 2 number of new business start-up enquiries assisted through business services. Officers explained that performance of this indicator had been affected by changes in the way Job Centre Plus refer clients to the Council's Enterprise Club and new ways of working together are being discussed with additional sources for referrals being developed.

Members raised concern in relation to new Welsh Government regulations that could see the Council having its planning powers taken over by Welsh Government if certain guidelines were not met. Members agreed the importance of ensuring the Planning section is fully staffed to ensure income generation is maximised and the Committee agreed it was important for them to continue to monitor the performance of the service to ensure targets for the future are met and all income generation streams are maximised.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

4.4 Neath Food and Drink Festival

The Committee received an update on the Neath Food and Drink Festival 2015 as contained within the circulated report.

Members were pleased to note the success of the event and would be pleased to explore any further opportunities in expanding the event.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

4.5 Neath Business Improvement District- Ballot Result

The Committee received the result of the Neath Business Improvement District (BID) Ballot as contained within the circulated report. Members were pleased to note that the vote, which closed on 19th November 2015, resulted in 64% of the businesses who voted, supporting the BID proposal.

Members noted that an independent, not for profit organisation known as Neath Inspired Ltd will go live on 1st April 2016 who will meet to oversee specific projects in the programme.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

6. ACCESS TO MEETINGS

Resolved: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Above Act.

7. PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

6.1 Catering Service Contract for Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre.

The Committee received details of the award of a catering service contract for Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre as contained within the circulated report.

Members asked the facility was fully accessible for disabled people and discussed the facilities available such as large formatted menus and hearing loops.

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

6.2 Celtic Leisure-Half Year Performance Review

The Committee received the update on performance of Celtic Leisure in the first half year of the financial year as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted the loss in the half year was £47,000 above their anticipated budget position.

Members noted that public swimming is currently down on target which is line with national trends but the achievement in the Swimming Academy offsets this with income being 3% ahead of budget predictions. Members raised concern at the waiting lists which are now in place for the Swimming Academy and were informed that new measures are being introduced over the next couple of months to increase the number of classes available, reduce waiting lists and improve standards.

Members noted that outdoor facilities are currently not achieving budget predictions but that this usage and income stream is seasonal and it is anticipated that by year end the anticipated budget position would be realised.

Officers informed the Committee that through negotiations Celtic Community Leisure have confirmed that there will be no facility closures over the next two financial years and all budget savings will be realised by reductions in costs and increased levels of income.

Members noted that income through the Box Office in the Gwyn Hall is below target and discussed programming options and the culture of delivery. Members agreed that a commercial focus is required going forward building on the successes of

initiatives such as the live streaming of West End performances.

Members raised concern at the state of repair of Neath Leisure Centre and were informed that this will continue to be monitored with the introduction of spot checks conducted via a ‘mystery shopper’ approach. Members felt it was important that the customer is valued and they have positive experiences in Neath Port Talbot facilities.

Members asked for clarification in relation to the performance data that is presented to them and whether the data is inclusive of Celtic Community Leisure data. Officers committed to bringing back a report to a future meeting of this Committee providing a detailed breakdown of the performance information.

Members queried the more detailed performance monitoring of Celtic Leisure and officers explained that they are held to account on a monthly basis. Members agreed that they would like to see more frequent performance reporting through this Committee and agreed that quarterly performance reports on the Celtic Leisure contract be scheduled into the Forward Work Programme for this Committee.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

6.3 Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre

The Committee received the position on the procurement tender for an operator to provide a catering provision at Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre as contained within the circulated report.

Members noted that the preferred tenderers will continue to be evaluated to ensure full compliance with the Council’s requirements and noted the planned timetable in place to award the contract.

Members queried the pricing structure raising concern about passing an increased pricing structure onto visitors. Officers stated that all businesses require a balanced and considered pricing structure and that it is considered that the prospective operators will have a viable and robust business model.

Members agreed that marketing the facility going forward is important and that a robust social media and web presence will be required.

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

CHAIRPERSON