

## **ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)**

**Members Present:**

**29 January 2016**

**Chairperson:** Councillor A.Llewelyn

**Councillors:** C.P.Golding, A.Jenkins, D.Keogh,  
Mrs.M.A.Lewis, Mrs.S.Paddison, S.Rahaman  
and A.Taylor

**Officers In  
Attendance** S.Phillips, S.Brennan, A. Collins, N.Bulcraig,  
Mrs.J.Davies P.Walker and S Curran

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors M.L.James and A.J.Taylor

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At the commencement of the meeting, the Committee noted the recent passing away of the mother of Councillor Alun Llewellyn. As a mark of respect, the Committee stood for a minute's silence.

1. **TO RECEIVE THE SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME  
2015/16.**

In light of the recent announcements from TATA Steel regarding the loss of 750 jobs at the Port Talbot site the Chief Executive, Mr Steven Phillips attended the meeting to give a verbal update on the TATA situation. The Chair explained that as the topic comes under the remit of the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, the Committee will wish to include all relevant future updates and any forthcoming reports to their future work programme.

The Committee were informed of the working groups that had been established to report to the main TATA Task Force Group which are focussing on issues such as the health and wellbeing of those affected and the wider issues in relation to the supply chain. The Chief Executive reiterated that the main priority was to assist the affected steel workers and their families and highlighted various Welsh Government schemes such as WG React and Workways Plus.

Members were also pleased to note the ongoing discussions from Welsh Government whereby Economy Minister Edwina Hart is proposing to create an Enterprise Zone that encompasses the Port Talbot TATA Steel site.

The prolific issue of steel 'dumping' was discussed in detail and the Committee commented that this was causing material injury to the Welsh Steel industry. Members heard that this, in the main, is an issue to be addressed by the UK Government and that Stephen Kinnock (MP for Aberavon) is heavily involved in the discussions. The Chief Executive also explained the involvement of the European Commission in relation to the effect that the 'dumping' was having on Europe in the wider sense and agreed to circulate to the Committee the letters from the Commission as well as his response for their full information.

The Committee discussed that it is not only the job losses at the Port Talbot site which is of concern but the effect this will have on the 800 plus companies that supply the site with goods and services hence the impact of the job losses is far reaching and it was important to utilise Council services wherever possible to speak to the affected companies in an attempt to mitigate these issues.

The Committee stated that the large amount of investment over recent years in the Port Talbot site was positive and that the quality of steel produced is unquestionable and that the steel produced can be used for a huge variety of purposes.

Member asked if when considering awarding tenders for Capital Works within the County Borough there is discretion to request that Port Talbot Steel is used. The Chief Executive stated that most tender awards require an element of local sourcing of goods and services and the Consortium of Local Authorities in Wales is looking to confirm this as far as possible.

As well as the 'dumping' issues, Members raised concern at wider issues such as carbon tax credits, energy costs and business rates which all need to be considered in relation to maintaining a viable Welsh steel market.

TATA Steel have commenced a 45 day consultation period with staff, which will run to the end of February 2016 and the Committee agreed that TATA have a good record of engaging with staff. The Chief Executive urged Members of the Committee to provide any useful feedback or communication from themselves or their constituents to the Taskforce.

The Committee reiterated the Chief Executive's and the Council's position on the urgency of the situation and thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance as well as welcoming him to future Committee meetings with any further updates on the evolving situation at TATA Steel.

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4TH DECEMBER**

Members received the minutes from the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on the 4<sup>th</sup> December,

Members asked for an update in relation to the budget proposals around the libraries. They were informed that the consultation meetings had progressed well and were ongoing with Coedffranc Community Council in relation to Skewen library. There will be a £54,000 reduction in the budget savings target allocated to Libraries which has been met from the potential part time leasing of the Mobile Library to Cardiff City Council and the use by Neath Port Talbot Credit Union who will share the use and cost of the Mobile Library.

Members were informed that Cefn Coed Colliery Museum will remain open and that proactive consultation will continue with the Friends group on the ongoing viability of the Museum. The Committee asked if the Museum would still be required to deliver budget savings and Officers confirmed that the Museum is being given breathing space and the Manager post is remaining with seasonal vacancies being considered. The Committee reiterated that the building condition was the main issue and requested a full report on the museum as well as a Business Plan to a future meeting of the Committee. Members discussed the involvement of CADW (the Welsh Government's historic environment service) and agreed that representatives from CADW be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an overview of their policies and their involvement at key sites throughout the Neath Port Talbot County Borough.

In relation to Community Centres, Members were informed that public meetings have continued with three external parties coming forward who are interested in the transferred ownership of Taibach and two

for Cwmafan. Meetings with external parties and all involved will continue.

Members asked for further information in relation to Theatres and were notified that a vacant post in the Princess Royal Theatre will be deleted and savings will be achieved by streamlining costs and maximising income.

Members were pleased to note that savings associated with Celtic Community Leisure would be achieved through efficiency savings resulting in no closures of facilities.

Members asked for clarity in relation to the situation at Cymmer Swimming Pool. They were informed that the pool is currently closed but being maintained with a view to being re-commissioned whilst feasibility investigations are being undertaken by a third party. Officers stated that there is insurance on the pool until 12<sup>th</sup> February 2016 so a clear position on the pool's viability will need to be obtained by this date and if no feasible way forward is identified the draining and de-commissioning process will commence.

Following discussion, the Committee noted the minutes.

### 3. **REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT CARD.**

Members considered information in relation to the Regeneration and Economic Development Team as contained within the circulated report and received a presentation which accompanied the information.

Members heard about the team's roles and responsibilities including; areas within the public realm, Harbourside development, Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe Town Centres, tourism and leisure and raising the profile of employment in the Borough. Members were pleased to note that the role of Neath Town Centre Manager was being retained and expanded to include Port Talbot and Pontardawe Town Centres and could look further in future to include other towns such as Skewen and Ystalyfera.

The Committee heard about how the team interact with local businesses, building relationships and responding to requests for advice and support.

Members discussed the strategy for Aberafan Seafront and were pleased to note the significant interest in improving the restaurant presence on the beach. The Committee noted that Aberafan is becoming a destination in its own right and agreed that momentum is key, carefully managing the timings of any new facilities whilst encouraging diverse and varied restaurant options.

Members asked for more information in relation to the houses above the shops on Station Road. They were further informed about the Vibrant and Viable Places project which is encouraging businesses to convert empty spaces above shops into apartments in partnership with Gwalia. There is one site which is being completed as a pilot and there are now 21 sites which have been approved.

The Committee asked for a progress report on the Transport Hub and were informed that certain elements of funding were being finalised but work should start within this financial year. In relation to Port Talbot Police Station the Committee were informed that plans for its demolition this year are commencing but that work with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in relation to flood issues need to be resolved.

The Committee congratulated the team on the work undertaken and praised the Report Card which they felt was the strongest that the Committee had seen. The Cabinet Member echoed his thanks to the team stating that they are very well regarded and provide essential support and value to the wider community.

Following Scrutiny the report was noted.

#### 4. **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.

#### 5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Former Dwr Y Felin Lower School, Heol Penlan, Neath

The Committee received details of the proposed sale of the former Dwr Y Felin Lower School site to Persimmon Homes as contained within the circulated report.

Members were generally concerned that the Council does not sell off too much land too quickly in relation to the current economic climate when the prices of land and property may increase in value in future years. Officers explained that sale of land is always incremental and is governed by the Local Development Plan. Members noted the inclusion in the report of a commitment to return any objections received by the Council to the proposal to a future meeting of this Committee. Members requested that this statement be included in the final recommendations of the report.

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

5.2 Proposed NSA One Day Sense of the Dragon Food Festival at the Civic Centre Square, Port Talbot.

The Committee received details on the proposal from New Sandfields Aberavon (NSA) to hold a one day Sense of the Dragon Festival at the Civic Centre Square, Port Talbot as contained within the circulated report.

Members asked if Station Road could be considered for inclusion in the Festival. The Committee agreed that there were lessons to be learnt from the last Festival put on in Port Talbot and drew comparisons to the very successful Neath Food and Drink Festival. They agreed it must be done well to reflect on Port Talbot Town and NSA.

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

**CHAIRPERSON**