

Cabinet Response to the Recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on the Valleys

1. Transport

Transport is acknowledged as a key strategic issue that needs to be addressed.

However, the Welsh Government funding streams (Concessionary Fares, Bus Service Support Grant, etc) have witnessed sharp reductions since 2012. This has resulted in a significant loss/reduction in services particularly perhaps in the evenings and on weekends:

- Funding to support local bus services in NPT has reduced from £717k in '11-'12 to £312k in '16-'17;
- Concessionary travel in NPT has reduced from 2.2m journeys in '11-'12 to 1.9m in '16-17. An average of 6,000 less journeys made each week; and
- On routes subsidised by the Council the reduction in concessionary card use is even more significant. From 409,553 in '11-'12 to 151,568 in '16-'17. A reduction of 37%.

Taken in the round, the current arrangements are not fit for purpose in terms of providing comprehensive services (and the difference between cost and subsidy represents a growing budget pressure for the Council). However, we understand that the Welsh Government recognise this and are considering reform of the current arrangements including the introduction of regional Joint Passenger Authorities. This should be supported. It should also be noted that AECOM Consultants have been appointed by the City Region to develop a feasibility study on the future of transport in the Region, including rail connectivity. In terms of the local feasibility study into rural transport in the county borough being developed by TAS, this must be set in this context.

In the immediate future, the Council will be bidding into the fund announced by Welsh Government to extend the active travel routes in line with the Integrated Network Map approved by

Members. In terms of youth transport, officers have already been working with NPTC Group to promote the Welsh Government Youth Card.

Future Actions

- a) Ensure applications are made for funding to implement the Integrated Network Map proposals. (DENV)
- b) Formally endorse the Welsh Government's proposal to develop Joint Passenger Transport arrangement. (DENV)
- c) Ensure good take up of the youth card by young people resident in valley communities. (DENV)

2. Access to health and well-being services

Health services are essentially a matter for ABMU Health Board. Some developments are in hand (e.g. a new facility in the Upper Amman Valley) however, there is a UK-wide shortage of GPs prepared to work in valley communities and the ABMU area is no different. Alternative options to meet some health needs are being developed, eg pharmacy-based schemes. The Director of Primary Care for AMBU has indicated her willingness to meet with Members in early 2019 to discuss the current position and to outline the Health Board's approach. The Western Bay Partnership Board is also developing a new strategy on Mental Health Services. More emphasis on Community Transport as a solution to community access to health services should also be factored into the equation. However, previous attempts at this were unsuccessful due to lack of patronage.

On the broader well-being agenda, work to develop an asset based approach (to be reported separately to Members) is being taken forward within the Public Services Board environment, led by the Council. Within this approach, Local Area Co-ordinators are beginning to work in communities to map existing assets and to work with local people to connect them with what already exists. This work is supported by the new on-line community directory, Dewis. The Older Persons Council is also considering how it can play its part in encouraging new and existing approaches to combating loneliness and isolation.

Future Actions

- a) Issue an invitation to the Director of Primary Care, ABMU Health Board, early 2019, to address elected members on future health service provision for residents of valley communities. (ACE/CDO)
- b) Bring forward a report on the development of the Safer, Resilient Communities work in the Briton Ferry, Melin and Amman Valley areas, making clear recommendations for the further development of the asset based approach. (DSSHH)
- c) Ensure elected Members have an opportunity to comment on the draft mental health strategy for the county borough before it is formally signed off by the Regional Partnership Board. (DSSHH)

3. A sustainable voluntary sector

The revised Third Sector grants scheme was endorsed by Cabinet on 31 October 2018 with a view to addressing capacity issues and sustainability within the voluntary sector, particularly those organisations who act as community anchor organisations. Following approval of the new Scheme, the Director of Neath Port Talbot CVS is convening meetings of the network of organisations who currently receive funding from the Council to encourage mutual support and greater collaboration. There is scope to further develop the role of community anchor organisations as part of the wider work on asset-based community development and this has already been agreed as a priority area of work in the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum

Development of other services (such as youth provision and adult community learning) is largely dependent upon funding. However, the first phase of the Child Care Offer roll out is underway which includes the following wards: Blaengwrach, Bryncoch, Cymmer, Glyncorwg, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, Gwynfi, Lower Brynamman, Onllwyn, Pontardawe and Resolven. Eligibility is for children aged 3 or 4 where the household earns on average a weekly minimum equivalent to, or more than, 16 hours at national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW) but less than £100,000 per year. There is a clear commitment to work with existing providers as the rollout is completed across the Valley communities (and elsewhere).

The criteria for community benefits funds is being examined through the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee. It is acknowledged that many funds want to see bids for new projects, leaving gaps in funding for core costs and maintenance activities. On sporting facilities, provision is an integral part of the Council's modernisation programme for schools under the 21st Century Schools Programme, where possible.

Future Actions

- a) Build on the work done through the revision of the Third Sector Grant Scheme to clarify the Council's approach to community anchor organisations/community hubs, with specific reference to the emerging work on asset-based community development. (ACE/CDO)
- b) Continue to roll out the Welsh Government Childcare Offer, working closely with existing child care providers in the valley communities. (DELLL)
- c) Complete the review of community benefits fund criteria, explicitly considering whether fund criteria can be modified to allow bids for maintenance/replacement/core costs. (DELLL)
- d) Bring forward proposals for sports facilities as part of the Strategic School Improvement Programme Band B proposals for Cefn Saeson and Pontardawe. (DELLL)

4. Employment and Employment sites

The Cabinet agrees that there is a demand for additional development of industrial units to support start-ups and to enable existing businesses to develop. Funding is being actively sought to increase the availability of commercial premises. This will also dovetail with the emphasis placed on income generation by the Cabinet. The review of the LDP will also provide an opportunity to consider options further.

The Cabinet also agrees there is potential to grow jobs through tourism development and has reinstated the tourism unit with this objective in mind.

Consideration is being given to how the Council's own expenditure can be used to maximum effect in delivering community benefits within valley communities. This will include exploring how we could practically embrace a procurement policy based upon the Bevan Foundation's "One in a Million" proposal. A working group, chaired by the Head of Legal Services has begun work to review the Council's Procurement Strategy. That work will include dialogue with the local voluntary and business sectors. A further report for Members will be brought forward in 2019.

The feasibility of establishing a local employment/training offer connected with the services that the Council delivers in valley communities will also be explored and will be reported in 2019.

On childcare training, the Council's adult community learning service already provides childcare training at Level one and Level two. Courses running in the Neath Valley will be continued this year. Training is also delivered to the childcare workforce and this is arranged as close to providers as possible to ensure accessibility. The Childcare Sufficiency Group keeps the training provision under review.

Training for adult social care and personal assistants – Local people meeting local need is central to the future delivery of adult social care.

Future Actions

- a) Explore funding opportunities with Welsh Government to develop additional industrial units in valley areas. (DENV)
- b) Continue to encourage Members to engage in the process for reviewing the Local Development Plan. (DENV)
- c) Deliver the Destination Management Plan and create a Destination Marketing Plan to support the work. (DENV)
- d) Ensure the current review of the corporate procurement policy explicitly considers how the Council's expenditure can benefit valley communities, basing the approach on the Bevan Foundation 1 in £1 million model, or similar. (DFCS)
- e) Explore the feasibility of a local employment/training offer for valley residents. (DFCS)

- f) Identify a suitable model for providing advice to organisations who wish to set up as social enterprises. (DENV/ACE/CDO)
- g) We will develop a scheme to identify, attract, train and recruit more local people to work in the local care sector within valley communities, piloting the approach initially in the Amman Valley (DSSHH)

5. Community Regeneration

The Cabinet is promoting a range of projects/programmes to meet these objectives including:

- Securing a share of the £25m of capital investment announced in the Welsh Government for the Neath strategic hubs to link with the priorities of the Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys focused on attracting investment, and job creation.
- Similarly, a bid has been submitted for the further development Cefn Coed as part of the Valleys Landscape Park (£7m of capital investment announced by Welsh Government).
- Work is progressing with the Friends of Pontardawe Arts Centre and the Arts Council for Wales to secure the future of the venue to include the feasibility of a cinema offer at the site.
- A planning application has been received for the Afan Valley Adventure Park.
- Work to restore East Pit is progressing. There is potential for the site to be used for tourism led regeneration in due course and the support of Celtic Energy will be needed to progress this.
- The Council is working with RCT Council on the possible reopening of the Rhondda Tunnel
- Tourism work is progressing within the framework of the agreed Destination Management Plan 2015-2020 and there

will be a Destination Management Marketing Plan established to strengthen the work further.

- Discussions are taking place through the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee to explore the potential for community renewable energy schemes.
- In June 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy announced that Onllwyn/Nant Helen was the preferred site for a major investment in a national rail test track facility. The Council is actively participating in developing the next stage of the business case and the development of a planning application.

Rheola - The council continues to work with NRW, WG and the private sector to resolve complex land issues and pursue a leisure based development at Rheola.

Future Action

- a) Continue to work with Welsh Government and wider partners to develop the range of propositions for developing jobs and services within valley communities as identified above. (CEX and DENV)

In terms of culture and inclusion:

- The Cabinet has already approved a Welsh Language Promotional Policy with the intention that there will be clear links to this action plan.
- Digital Inclusion has been identified as a priority by the NPT Public Services Board. The development of this work can be reported back to Members on a regular basis. Community Anchor Organisations within valley communities are already involved in developing the detail of work to be taken forward.

Future Action

- a) Provide a regular update to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on the progress being made in implementing the Welsh Language

Promotional Strategy and the development of work to address digital inclusion, drawing out the benefits being delivered in valley communities. (ACE/CDO)

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6. Impact Assessment/Monitoring

Report templates already provide for the areas impacted by proposals to be clearly set out. These arrangements will be amended to make clear which areas are valley areas.

Scrutiny committees could also consider identifying valley champions within their membership to assist in examining proposals for change from a valleys perspective and to track the progress of the work identified in this paper. The Cabinet would welcome the scrutiny committees helping to sustain active dialogue on this agenda.

Future Action

- a. Update report templates to make impacts on valley communities clearer in reports. (ACE/CDO)
- b. Identify valley champions in each scrutiny committee. (ACE/CDO)