

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

25 June 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.L.Taylor

Councillors: D.Cawsey, C.J.Jones, H.N.James, S.M.Penry, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman, J.Evans and S.A.Knoyle

Officers In Attendance: C.Morris, S.Brennan, C.Plowman, N.Headon, L.Beynon and M.Shaw

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Wingrave and P.D.Richards

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the following meetings were approved:

- 16 April 2021
- 14 May 2021

2. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013: Consideration of requirements for the Consultation Draft Active Travel Network Map (ATNM) for Neath Port Talbot and the publication / consultation procedures to be implemented

The circulated report provided Members with the consultation draft Active Travel Network Map (ATNM) for Neath Port Talbot and the consultation procedures for the forthcoming consultation exercise.

Officers explained that it was a requirement to review the Council's ATNM every three years; the map will need to be submitted to Welsh Government for ministerial approval by 31 December 2021. It was noted that active travel had a specific meaning in Wales; these routes

were for everyday purposeful journeys to places such as work and school, and did not include trips made purely for leisure or social purposes. Members were informed that there were two elements to the map:

- Existing routes – the routes that already met active travel standards set by Welsh Government and what the Council already publicised as suitable routes
- Future routes – the routes that were aspirations of the Council for the next 15 years; they were either improvements to existing routes or identification of new routes to be added to the network going forward

It was highlighted that there wasn't a commitment placed on the Council to deliver the ATNM; instead it was essentially a tool to enhance the forward planning of active travel routes going forward.

In terms of the methodology that had been applied, it was noted that the ATNM had been developed jointly between Sustrans and Local Authorities across the regions; this ensured that there was consistency in approach across administrative boundaries with some of the active travel routes connecting between authorities.

The Committee was informed that the team conducted an initial consultation at the end of 2020/beginning of 2021, which was the first stage of the process; the team received an extremely good response from this (over 2,500 responses were received). It was mentioned that the initial consultation set out to engage and obtain public opinion in terms of what was good and what was bad about the network in Neath Port Talbot currently.

Officers stated that there had recently been an audit of the existing routes in place; 10 routes had been added to the list of existing routes following the audit. It was noted that there had also been an element of information gathering and journey mapping which looked at what journeys were being made and what were the departure and destination points.

It was explained that the last stage of the methodology will be to prioritise the routes, which will be completed after the next consultation; it will set out the scheduled routes in terms of short, medium and longer term aspirations for the Council.

A discussion took place in relation to the fact that the Council was not committed to deliver an ATNM. Members expressed the importance

of clarifying that although the Council was not committed to do this, they would like to see as many routes be delivered as possible. Officers clarified that the Council was committed to improving the network year on year, as part of a long term aspirational plan, which was linked to the production of the map; during a meeting of the Corporate Directors Group, Chief Officers felt that emphasis was needed on the point that the Council was not committed to delivering the full package as the funding for delivery of the scheme was not included within existing budgets and the Council did not have the resources to deliver all of the aspirations included within the plan.

Members also expressed their concerns in relation to cycle route maintenance and the fact that the delivery of the Active Travel agenda was split across different departments. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development acknowledged the point noting that this was not the only area which had cross cutting of departments.

In relation to the potential of receiving revenue maintenance funding, Members stated that it was important to make sure that any additional funding was used in the right places and prioritised correctly, as currently funding was being split quite broadly. Officers explained that funding was a significant issue and maintenance issues created a pressure going forward; the more routes that were added to the active travel network, the more maintenance was needed to be delivered. Officers mentioned that the way in which Welsh Government funding was currently set up, meant that the Council did not receive revenue funding to meet that requirement and only received capital expenditure. In terms of delivery of the schemes, it was noted that the Council was reliant on the schemes being delivered either through development, directly or through Section 106 contributions, or by gaining funding through an annual bidding process from Welsh Government.

It was queried whether more pressure could be placed onto Welsh Government to obtain more funding in order for the Council to meet the aspirations set out in the plan. Officers provided their assurances that they were continuing to endeavour to obtain funding from Welsh Government to deliver the active travel agenda; Welsh Government had provided a lot of committed money over recent years, however the Council would continue to seek capital expenditure and revenue spend. Members were encouraged to liaise with the Cabinet Member for Finance with the view to lobby Welsh Government for additional capital and revenue funding.

Members asked if there would be improvements to some of the public transport routes, following the announcement made by Welsh Government that more money would be allocated to Transport for Wales. It was noted that this particular query would need to be directed to the Head of Engineering and Transport, however in terms of planning and developing sustainable transport, it was essential to integrate the transport elements into the place making agenda; transportation and the active travel agenda needed to be looked at together as an integrated network, opposed to separately. It was explained that larger scale developments required a broader idea of how the different elements would fit together; the connections and the linkages, not just within the site itself but how the site connects with communities around it. Officers confirmed they would be working with the various transport sections within the Authority when bringing forward the replacement Local Development Plan.

The Committee discussed the provision of electric bikes and the expectations of them. It was noted that the use of electric bikes would widen the scope of the routes that could be used, however there was a challenge to obtain significant level of funding from Welsh Government; to date, the focus had been on the built up areas where the greater gains of active travel could be achieved. In terms of Neath Port Talbot's ATNM, Officers realised the importance of looking at how links in built up areas could be improved but also how links between settlements could be improved, particularly within the valley communities; the challenge going forward would be how this would be delivered. It was added that the electric bike could enhance the case and justification to be able to deliver the longer routes.

Following public engagement in the consultation, Members stressed the importance of ensuring that Officers responses were as accurate as possible and contained the relevant detail in order for the public to understand the Council's position in relation to specific routes. Members then went on to ask if there was a priority list for delivering routes, and if so, how was this established. Concerns were particularly expressed in relation to delivering routes in the valleys communities.

Officers confirmed that there was a prioritisation element to the methodology, after the consultation and before the ATNM would be submitted for ministerial approval, the team will look to prioritise the schemes into short, medium and longer term aspirations; there were various elements involved in working out what needed to be at the top of the priority list including assessing the deliverability of a

scheme and costings. It was added that Welsh Government had a matrix to follow which required Officers to look into factors such as the population density, the distance to an education setting, the distance to employment sites, leisure and health. Officers confirmed they could look into the scope of the criteria and determine whether the valleys criteria could potentially differ from those applied in the coastal corridors due to the concerns expressed by Members.

Following Officers responses, a brief discussion took place in relation to the Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE). It was stated that there was potential, albeit outside of the planning process, for communities to seek to agree community benefits from the developer; this could be utilised to help deliver some of the routes that may not be towards the top end of the priority list.

It was stated that it was important to manage public expectations and send out the appropriate messages in relation to active travel. Officers mentioned that they had recently had discussions with colleagues in the Communications Team in regards to promoting the various work programmes; the Communications Team had an important role in ensuring that the public were correctly informed.

In conclusion, Officers stated that they acknowledged the restrictions and Members concerns, and gave assurances that active travel was something that the Council will continue to commit to in order to improve the network year on year; there was clear commitment from within Welsh Government and the Council would try and be as aspirational as possible.

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

3. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

Members noted the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

It was agreed that a Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Forward Work Programme Workshop be arranged for the autumn period.

CHAIRPERSON

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