

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE
REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
3RD NOVEMBER, 2021**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HILL (CHAIR)

Councillors G.A. Davies

G.L. Davies

M. Cross

P. Edwards

K. Hayden

S. Healy

W. Hodgins

J.C. Morgan

H. McCarthy

L. Parsons

G. Paulsen

C. Meredith (*substituting for K. Rowson*)

B. Summers (*substituting for M. Cook*)

B. Willis

**AND: Corporate Director Regeneration & Community
Services**

Head of Regeneration

Service Manager Business & Regeneration

Service Manager Development Services

Team Manager, Regeneration Opportunities

Team Manager, Connected Communities

Employment Liaison Officer

Team Leader STEM Facilitation Project

Marketing & Communications Officer

Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u>	

	<p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were reported for Councillors K. Rowson and M. Cook, substitutes attended for both.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 15th September, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>A Member referred to the penultimate paragraph on page 13 of the minutes and asked that the request for information in relation to the costs of the Trinity Chapel project be added as an action point.</p> <p>The Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities confirmed that a meeting was scheduled with Coalfields Regeneration Trust next week, and following this meeting an update would be provided via the action sheet for the next meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET – 15th SEPTEMBER, 2021</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 15th September, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:</p> <p><u>Capital Budget Monitoring Forecast – Appendix 1</u> <u>328340 - Detail to be provided in relation to the Metro Plus funding and the Abertillery Spur and acquisition of land</u></p> <p>A Member said he could not recall the acquisition of land being reported to full Council for decision, as stated in the minutes of the Cardiff Capital City Region meeting held in</p>	

September 2020. He also asked why the Council had borrowed £70m for the railway improvements when it was stated in the minutes of the Cardiff City Region meeting in February 2021 that £50m was needed.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services explained that these were separate issues. The Cardiff City Region looked at how it could fund a series of actions on the core Valley line network, and funding was secured from the Metroplus programme to develop the Abertillery spur.

The Council also submitted a bid to UK Government's 'Restoring your Railway' programme, to include the Abertillery spur. In the interim the Council secured £75m from WG to undertake improvements to the railway corridor. He confirmed that Cardiff City Region was aware of the Council's bid to UK Government.

He said the Council made a decision to work with Welsh Government to develop the railway infrastructure necessary to increase the frequency of trains to 4 trains an hour, as part of the Council's long standing policy for the railway corridor.

In response to a further question raised by a Member regarding the land acquisition, the Corporate Director explained that the railway infrastructure was generally owned by Network Rail. Acquisition of the land would enable the Council to facilitate the scheme, however, when completed Network Rail would operate the railway in line with their policy across the Country. He pointed out that this was the approach taken for the extension of the line from Ebbw Vale Parkway to the Ebbw Vale Town.

A discussion ensued when the Corporate Director said the £70m included enhancement of the signalling system; upgrading of various bridges and structures along the route; and track enhancements from Crosskeys to the south of Blaenau Gwent.

A Member suggested that the Quadripartite Agreement be recirculated to Members. The Corporate Director confirmed that the Agreement formed part of the papers submitted to

	<p>Council in July, however, he agreed to recirculate the information.</p> <p>A Member asked whether any plans were in place should the funding from UK Government for the Abertillery spur not come through.</p> <p>The Corporate Director confirmed that in the event of the bid not being successful, the Council would continue to work with Welsh Government on the overall objective of increasing the frequency of trains to Blaenau Gwent.</p> <p><u>Regeneration and Development Performance - A Member requested that the Welsh Audit of Commemoration be reported to the appropriate committee for discussion</u></p> <p>The Corporate Director confirmed that a report would be submitted to Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee in due course.</p> <p><u>Actions Referred from the Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee – 27th September 2021 Update on the Tredegar Company Shop to be provided</u></p> <p>The Service Manager Development Services explained that as the building was listed and in Council ownership, the application would be decided by CADW and Welsh Ministers. As soon as consultations were completed the application would be forwarded to CADW for decision.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>HYBRID UNITS AND HWB BOCS– PERFORMANCE MONITORING</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Business & Regeneration.</p> <p>The Service Manager Business & Regeneration presented the report which provided Members with an update on the Hybrid Units and the Hwb Bocs developments at the Works Site, Ebbw Vale. The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p>	

A Member asked when the final accounts for the project could be expected.

The Service Manager Business & Regeneration confirmed that the accounts were currently being finalised, and whilst there was a slight overspend due to the Covid pandemic, it was not as substantial as anticipated.

A Member asked regarding the criteria for occupying the Hwb units, and whether they would be available to existing businesses.

In response the Officer reported that they would be available for existing business, however, the Council was keen to promote start-up businesses. He said they provided a flexible space for any businesses, but would appeal to tech based businesses. Officers were working closely with interested companies to see if the units were suitable or whether there were more appropriate premises in the Borough.

A Member asked for an update on the number of units that had been let, and the Officer confirmed that of the 3 hybrid unit buildings, 2 had been let and Officers were working closely with another company interested in the third building. In relation to the Hwb Bocs units, the internal fit was nearing completion and he was confident that with the level of interest they would also be let.

Another Member said this was a very worthwhile project, and asked that an update on future lettings be provided.

A brief discussion ensued when a Member asked whether signs promoting the units could be erected along the Heads of the Valleys road.

The Officer said marketing was being considered and signage along the Heads of the Valleys was an opportunity that could be explored. He said the investment in the Hov would hopefully have a positive impact in attracting investors to Blaenau Gwent.

	<p>The Head of Regeneration reported that the Council received a large number of enquiries for units of different size, and unfortunately we were unable to accede to some of those requests. More industrial space was needed in the Borough, and the Officer confirmed that this was being pursued with Welsh Government and Cardiff City Region.</p> <p>A discussion ensued when the Chair suggested that arrangements be made for Members to visit the units prior to them being occupied.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>STEM FACILITATION PROJECT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.</p> <p>The Team Leader STEM Facilitation Project presented the report which provided information on the performance of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Facilitation Project.</p> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member enquired as to funding opportunities beyond March 2023.</p> <p>In response the Team Manager Connected Communities explained that the initial discussions with Tech Valleys was around a pilot scheme covering Blaenau Gwent to determine the effectiveness of the delivery model and the level of resources required. The outcomes of the pilot scheme would be considered towards the middle of next year.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorsed the project progress made to date (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>KICKSTART SCHEME</u></p>	

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

The Employment Liaison Officer presented the report which provided an update on the progress of the DWP Kickstart Scheme and Blaenau Gwent CBC role as a gateway organisation for local businesses seeking to access the programme.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.

A Member asked who was responsible for providing ongoing support for the young people in placements to ensure a positive experience; and also support for the employers in managing the process, thus providing a good experience for young people.

The Employment Liaison Officer explained that during the initial application employers were required to provide an Employability Plan highlighting what they intended to provide during the placement, and this was monitored by DWP. In terms of the individuals on the placements, they would be supported by the Job Centre and Work Coaches, and we would also keep in touch to ensure they are receiving that support.

A discussion ensued when the Officer clarified points raised by a Member regarding the scheme.

A Member asked whether it was the role of DWP to look for longer term employment for these young people after the placement to prevent them going back into the benefits system; and also what was being done to ensure that the process was not being exploited.

The Officer explained that the Kickstart Scheme was marketed as a 6 month placement. There was nothing to state that an employer had to provide employment following this period. She confirmed that DWP did undertake checks to ensure businesses were able to sustain the number of placements provided.

	<p>The Member said the most important thing was to ensure that young people coming to the end of their placements was to get them into programmes to help them into further work.</p> <p>The Team Manager Connected Communities pointed out that the Council's influence was limited as this was a DWP programme, but the fact that local companies were getting involved was positive and they were more likely to offer sustained employment. She said the Team's engagement with businesses was intensive to ensure the application was developed in a thorough way to ensure employment was sustained at the end of the process. She also pointed out that this was one of many programmes in place in Blaenau Gwent seeking long term sustained employment.</p> <p>A discussion ensued when a Member asked that an update be provided to a future meeting, and the Employment Liaison Officer undertook to provide this information.</p> <p>In response to a question raised by a Member the Officer explained that employers would receive £1,500 for each person to provide relevant training, and uniforms etc.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and noted the contents of the report and outcomes to date (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 8TH DECEMBER, 2021</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 8th December, 2021.</p> <p>A Member referred to the recent announcement that Henley's Buses would be ceasing service, and suggested that a special meeting be convened to look at the implications of this on the Ebbw Fach Valley and Town Centres within the Borough.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that this would be considered.</p>	

A Member also suggested that this could be considered by the Transport Task & Finish Group.

In response to a question raised regarding the Town Centre Task & Finish Group, the Service Manager Regeneration Opportunities confirmed that meetings of the Task & Finish Group would resume later in the month.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for 8th December, 2021 be approved.

A Member reported that the Team Leader Connected Communities would be leaving Blaenau Gwent Council shortly. Members thanked her for her excellent service to the Council and the support provided to Members during her employment, and wished her every success for the future.