

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
8th DECEMBER, 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
 J. Holt (***substituting for L. Parsons***)
 G. Paulsen
 K. Rowson
 M. Cook
 B. Willis

**AND: Managing Director
 Corporate Director Regeneration & Community
 Services
 Head of Regeneration
 Service Manager Business & Regeneration
 Service Manager Development Services
 Service Manager Policy & Partnerships
 Professional Lead Strategic Partnerships
 Policy Officer
 Team Manager, Regeneration Opportunities
 Team Manager, Connected Communities
 Marketing & Communications Officer
 Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor**

| ITEM | SUBJECT | ACTION |
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| ---- | <p><u>CONDOLENCES</u></p> <p>The Committee expressed sympathy on the sad death of Councillor David Wilkshire's wife Helen, and Members observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect.</p> | |
| No. 1 | <p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <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 L. Parsons</p> | |
| No. 3 | <p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declarations of interest were reported:</p> <p>Councillor W. Hodgins - Item No. 10 Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Performance Review 2020/21 Q2</p> <p>Councillor G. Paulsen - Item No. 8 Regional Approach to Employability</p> | |
| No. 4 | <p><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd November, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p> | |
| No. 5 | <p><u>ACTION SHEET – 3RD NOVEMBER, 2021</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd November, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:</p> | |

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| | <p><u>Trinity Chapel</u></p> <p>A Member said he had requested the total cost of the scheme.</p> <p>In response the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities said the figure detailed in the action sheet was the total being sought from Coalfields Regeneration Trust and Welsh Government, and included the internal refurbishment of Trinity Chapel and the existing library building. The Officer undertook to provide a more comprehensive breakdown of costs to Members.</p> <p>A Member asked whether the 'community shop' element was still intended, and the Officer confirmed that the community shop would be located in the existing library building to complement other community focussed facilities.</p> <p>Members expressed concern regarding the escalating costs of the Trinity Chapel project and relocation of the library into the town centre. They also expressed concern regarding the spend on Anvil Court when the Council did not own the building.</p> <p>Another Member pointed out that funding had been secured through Welsh Government and Coalfields Regeneration Trust. In terms of relocating the library, he said Aneurin Leisure Trust who managed the library facility felt that relocation into the town centre would increase footfall not only to the library but also Abertillery Town Centre.</p> <p>A Member pointed out that funding from Welsh Government was public money and in his opinion the escalating costs was a waste of public money.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.</p> | |
| No. 6 | <p><u>NET ZERO REPORTING, CLIMATE ASSEMBLY RESPONSE AND PROGRESSING TRANSITIONS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Managing Director.</p> | |

The Managing Director presented the report which outlined the response to Welsh Government's Net Zero reporting requirements, and sought comments on an initial response to the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly report. The report also provided an update on the action plan development for the Decarbonisation Plan transitions.

The Managing Director spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein as follows:

Welsh Government Net Zero Reporting

The Council had responded to Welsh Government's Net Zero Reporting requirements at the end of October and this would form part of annual report to Welsh Government.

Section 2.5 of the report showed a fall in our carbon footprint of just over 3k tonnes of CO₂e for 2020-21 which equated to a 6% reduction. However, it was recognised that the Covid pandemic had contributed to this reduction, particularly in the way we are now working and delivering services and this would continue to be monitored in future years. The Managing Director said this was a positive start but demonstrated that in order to reach the Net Zero target there was a lot of work to be done.

Section 6 of the report provided a breakdown of the reduction in our carbon across different sections of the Council.

Responding as a Council to the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly

Also included within the report was the Council's proposed response to the recommendations of the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly.

The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was held in March 2021 and was the first of its kind in Wales. A number of residents took part in the Assembly and recommendations were made.

The Council continued to take an active role in responding with our partner organisations from the Public Services

Board, and attached to the report was the proposed response. The Managing Director referred to Section 2.14 and said this was a real opportunity to continue to engage with members of the Climate Assembly, as it was recognised that climate change needed a whole population response and working with the community was very important to bring about change. The report also highlighted the commitment to continue to engage with Climate Assembly members into the future.

Further Progress on Decarbonisation Plan Transitions

The Managing Director said the final aspect of the report was the action plan arising from the Council's latest transition works on electricity, heating and procurement (works), as part of the Decarbonisation Plan which set out how we could reduce our organisation emissions across nine transitions. Section 2.20 detailed the high level actions around energy use and the future of construction.

A Member said this was an excellent report and commended the Managing Director and the Team involved. He referred to page 56 which stated that it was intended to have all public buildings supplied with low carbon heating by 2030. He said this was a very ambitious target and questioned the viability of Anvil Court moving forward, as it was a leased building. He asked what energy category the building was currently in, the life expectancy of the building; and what improvements would be required to achieve the low carbon heating target.

In response the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services said Anvil Court was energy rated 'C'. He said work was being done to determine what works would be required across all our buildings and this would lead to a number of decisions moving forward.

Another Member asked whether funding would be available from Welsh Government to help achieve these targets.

The Managing Director said significant investment would be required across the Council's property portfolio, including schools, as Welsh Government had made a commitment through its 21st Century Schools Programme that any new

school must be built to net zero carbon standard; and there were a number of existing schools that would need refurbishment. Section 2.20 of the report highlighted the work being done to understand the condition of current buildings and what work would be needed to bring them up to standard. The Managing Director confirmed that some of this work would be funded through the Council's capital programme, but she assured that Officers would seek funding opportunities to support our own investment, and while Welsh Government had not provided any indication of funding commitment at this stage this may change during upcoming budget process.

In response to a further question the Managing Director said the work outlined in the report would be undertaken early 2022.

A Member commended the report, but asked whether there was sufficient capacity and expertise within the Council to undertake this significant piece of work.

The Managing Director confirmed that she led on the Decarbonisation Board, and the Team was pivotal to that and included all services of the Council, and recently the Aneurin Leisure Trust. Work was also being done to embed the action plan into the business planning process across all services of the Council moving forward, and make the decarbonisation agenda 'business as usual' in terms of how we deliver our services. In terms of the expertise required, she confirmed that external support would be required in developing parts of the plan and the transformation fund would be used to support and boost capacity for specific pieces of work.

The Service Manager Policy & Partnerships said this was an organisational approach, including Members in their scrutiny role. He pointed out that decarbonisation would form part of the reporting framework for all reports to Committee and provide Members with an opportunity to challenge specific areas. The structures set up in response to Bridging the Gap arrangements had appropriately embedded this work within the Council, and the Team would have corporate oversight moving forward.

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| | <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and support the progress made and supports the response to the Climate Assembly and submission of report to the Executive Committee (Option 1).</p> | |
| No. 7 | <p><u>ENERGY PROSPECTUS ANNUAL REVIEW</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.</p> <p>The Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities presented the report which provided an update on progress for the last 12 months on the Energy Prospectus and emerging opportunities for the future.</p> <p>The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. Section 2.7 of the report highlighted some of the activities that were completed during 2021, and further detail on the projects was contained within Appendix 1 – Energy Prospectus Annual Review 2020-21.</p> <p>A Member said this was an excellent report and commended the approach taken by the Council. He said climate change was one of the biggest challenges moving forward and he was proud to be part of a Council driving in forward. He referred to the role out of the electric taxis and expressed concern that taxi drivers in the area have stated that it would be difficult for them to achieve sufficient fares to cover the cost of an electric vehicle. He also expressed concern that people were parking next to charging points and blocking access and asked whether parking restrictions could be implement.</p> <p>In response the Team Leader Regeneration Opportunities said the cost of the taxis had been recognised as an issue for drivers, and Cardiff Capital Region City Deal was looking at funding opportunities. Following the 2 year programme the taxis would be available to purchase and CCRCDC were looking at potential incentive schemes and funding options for that purpose. She also confirmed that new electricity charging points would be subject to traffic regulation orders to prevent people blocking access.</p> | |

A brief discussion ensued when Members expressed disappointment that a proposal for a micro hydro power project had been rejected. A Member also asked whether there were any plans to install solar panels on our buildings, particularly on our industrial units.

The Officer said it was important to note that other schemes were being considered, and the micro hydro power project may become viable in the future and the background work had already been undertaken.

She confirmed that solar panels had been installed on some buildings as part of the RE:Fit Programme, and a number of potential schemes for our business parks were being considered including an energy sharing scheme.

In relation to the electric vehicle charging points, a Member asked whether the location of these had been advertised, and suggested that they be advertised on the notice boards in town centres. He also asked whether taxi drivers had been informed of the new scheme.

The Officer confirmed that work was currently ongoing to advertise the charging points, and the town centre notice boards could be used as part of that work. She also confirmed that taxi drivers in areas where charging points were up and running had been informed of the scheme, and hopefully by next week all the charging points would go live and all taxi drivers would be informed accordingly.

In response to a further question the Officer confirmed that the public charging points were being utilised across the Borough, and usage had doubled in Ebbw Vale in November.

A Member asked whether registered social landlords had expressed an interest in charging points on their housing estates.

The Officer said this had not been discussed, however, there had been some discussion around charging points for their fleet vehicles moving forward.

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| | <p>In response to a further question regarding charging points at fast food outlets and new developments, the Officer said she understood there were some planning requirements, but this depended on the scale of the development etc.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support and promote and develop the projects within the energy prospectus; and to ensure that the document was updated to reflect any additional projects that have emerged; and • Continue to identify future projects that will also meet the vision and objectives of the Council with respect to energy and decarbonisation. (Option 2) | |
| No. 8 | <p><u>REGIONAL APPROACH TO EMPLOYABILITY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Connected Communities.</p> <p>The Team Manager Connected Communities presented the report which sought endorsement of the regional paper and the principles of a locally delivered, regionally co-ordinated approach to employability (appendix 1). The paper was developed with contributions from each of the 10 Local Authority areas within the Cardiff Capital Region. This report was specific to the regional paper; however, consideration to the “Blaenau Gwent Employability Provision – Position Statement” report, presented separately, should be made.</p> <p>The Officer then went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to section 2.14 of the report and said he would like to see all industries in the HoV area prioritised.</p> <p>In response the Team Leader Connected Communities confirmed that provisional support across the full breadth of employment opportunities would be needed in the HoV region, and the Council would make this point to the CCR.</p> | |

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| | <p>A Member expressed concern regarding the number of employability schemes/providers in the area and whether their performance was being scrutinised.</p> <p>The Officer confirmed that early discussions were taking place with partners to understand how best to deliver on a regional framework, but to ensure that it delivered for us locally.</p> <p>A discussion ensued when the Corporate Director said this was an opportunity to look at what we need in Blaenau Gwent and regionally in terms of employability, and enable us to shape any future funding streams around that need. He said our communities needed that help and support but funding was coming to an end, and this work was about trying to get collective agreement across the 10 LA's to allow us to have local flexibility within the overall regional programme.</p> <p>A Member agreed and said the provision needed to fit locally for the people of Blaenau Gwent. He said a reduction in service providers was inevitable, and enquired as to the Council's position regarding the risk for existing staff in ESF projects that may not continue</p> <p>The Team Leader Connected Communities confirmed that it had been highlighted as a risk and the situation would continue to be monitored. She said it was important to protect staff and retain that knowledge and experience.</p> <p>The Corporate Director said the Council had made the point politically and professionally that we cannot afford to lose the capacity and expertise in this area, and that the Council was keen to know what future programme was intended.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorsement of the regional paper and the principle of a locally delivered, regionally co-ordinated approach to employability. (Option 1)</p> | |
| No. 9 | <p><u>EBBW VALE PLACEMAKING PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.</p> | |

The Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities presented the report which sought endorsement of the Ebbw Vale Place Making Plan.

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

A Member expressed concern regarding the plan and felt that it did not contain anything different from various other plans developed over the years.

Another Member expressed concern that the transport options was an obstacle for people accessing the town centre from Rassau and Garnlydan.

In response to comments made the Team Leader Regeneration Opportunities confirmed that the multi storey car park had been identified as a key site needing action, and options had been modelled and these options would form part of the delivery plan for Members to consider and make decisions on projects.

A Member felt that public consultation should have been undertaken at an early stage.

The Officer explained that Members were involved at the initial fact finding stage, and the Plan was presented to Ward Members. The Officer confirmed that public consultation had not been undertaken at this stage, however, the retail and leisure studies undertaken as part of the replacement LDP had been used, and the Consultants had engaged with businesses within the town centre. The next stage would include engagement with young people and schools and the College.

A discussion ensued when the Officer clarified points raised by Members regarding the options detailed in the Plan.

A Member said the multi storey car park was not fit or purpose and expressed concern that the Council was spending money when it was in private ownership.

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| | <p>The Officer confirmed that discussions were taking place with the landowner.</p> <p>The Corporate Director said he understood Members' frustrations regarding the multi storey car park, however, the arrangement was entered into by the old Urban District Council, and the Council did not have the leverage expected under a normal lease arrangement. He said this work was about find a solution that best fits the.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted endorsed the Ebbw Vale Placemaking Plan, its vision and core ambitions for the future, to enable the draft of the delivery plan to be finalised, and steps towards implementation of the projects that will be contained within it. (Option 2)</p> | |
| No. 10 | <p><u>CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION CITY DEAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2020/21 Q2</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Regeneration & Development.</p> <p>The Head of Regeneration & Development presented the report which provided an update on the performance of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) against projects relating to investment in Blaenau Gwent during over the middle period of 2020/21.</p> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted progress against key targets identified within the CCR Business Plan for 2020/2, with the highlights for Blaenau Gwent including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro Plus Programme - Transport for Wales (TfW) progress • Ultra Low Emission Transformation Fund • Housing Catalyst Fund • Challenge Fund Application • Aspire Roll Out <p>A Member referred to a recent press report which stated that the railway line between Crosskeys and Newport would commence service in the next few weeks, and asked</p> | |

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| | <p>whether the Council would receive payback of the fares when that became operational.</p> <p>In response the Head of Regeneration confirmed that the Agreement and the drawing down of fares would commence upon completion of the whole project. Crosskeys to Newport was not part of the project we are delivering.</p> <p>The Member asked when this could be expected, and the Corporate Director said it was likely 2023/24, but this depended on progress of the contractor. The project would initially enable 2 trains per hour, but the infrastructure would be in place to eventually increase to 4 trains per hour, however, the Abertillery spur would be needed for this.</p> <p>A Member referred to section 2.15 and the number of housing developments currently underway in the Borough, and asked whether any interest had been expressed by RSL's and private developers regarding the use of green energy technology in their buildings.</p> <p>In response the Head of Regeneration confirmed that a lot of work was being done around decarbonisation. There was very limited low carbon housing in the Borough, and refurbishment of old houses was more important than new builds because they were in greater numbers. Building Regulations already had high standards for new developments, but she confirmed that work was being done with RSL's to look at making some of their sites more carbon neutral, and also with private developers, however, we could only ask them to do as much as planning and building regulations required.</p> <p>The Team Leader Connected Communities pointed out that Welsh Government have significant ambitions for affordable housing and the green agenda, and hopefully they will introduce incentives for RSL's with grant funding.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained there be noted.</p> | |
| No. 11 | <p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 9TH FEBRUARY, 2022</u></p> | |

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| | <p>Consideration was given to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 9th February, 2022.</p> <p>A Member asked that Tredegar Member have sight of the Aneurin Bevan Report and Tredegar Place Making Plan prior to it being submitted to Scrutiny.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for 9th February, 2022 be approved.</p> | |
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