

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

**SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVIRONMENT, REGENERATION &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE –
15TH MAY, 2019**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR P. EDWARDS (CHAIR)

Councillors L. Parsons
W. Hodgins
J. Millard
M. Moore
J.C. Morgan
G. Paulsen
K. Rowson
T. Sharrem

Social Services Committee (without voting rights)

Councillors S. Thomas
K. Hayden
S. Healy
K. Pritchard
T. Smith
B. Summers

WITH: Councillor H. Trollope

**AND: Corporate Director Regeneration & Community
Services
Corporate Director of Social Services
Integrated Services Team Manager for Children &
Families**

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
---	<p><u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</u></p> <p>The Chair reported that Members of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee had been invited to the meeting without voting rights. He pointed out that this was the last meeting of the Environment, Regeneration & Economic Development Scrutiny Committee prior to the Annual Meeting of the Council on the 23rd May, and took the opportunity to thank Liz Thomas the Scrutiny Officer for her support during the year.</p> <p>Members also took the opportunity to thank the Chair for his work during the year, and the manner in which he conducted meetings.</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>The following apologies for absence were reported:-</p> <p>Councillors D. Hancock, M. Holland, T. Sharrem and D. Bevan.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest and dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>ALL WALES PLAY OPPORTUNITIES GRANT – BLAENAU GWENT SPLASH PARK</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the joint report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services and the Corporate Director of Social Services, which provided the background and the current position regarding the development of a children’s splash park in Blaenau Gwent.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Social Services presented the</p>	

report and stated that in January 2018 Social Services were notified that Welsh Government had allocated £14,669k via slippage from the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant to spend by the 31st March, 2019. Officers were aware that a number of Local Authorities would not be claiming their allocation, and in light of this, Officers approached Welsh Government for additional funding to create a splash park similar to the provision at Cyfartha Park, Merthyr Tydfil.

The bid for additional funding was subsequently approved by Welsh Government on the 7th February, 2018 and a shortlist of suitable locations for the splash park was established. The Corporate Director explained that the criteria for consideration was sites with high level security, full closure after hours, car parking, café, toilets and other play facilities, and based on this criteria, Parc Bryn Bach and Bedwellty Park (both managed by Aneurin Leisure Trust), and Festival Park were shortlisted as potential sites, with Park Bryn Bach being considered the preferred option.

However, at this point it was recognised that the scheme could not be delivered by 31st March, 2018, and following discussions with WG it was agreed that the funding would be transferred to Aneurin Leisure Trust (ALT) with agreement that the splash park be completed by the end of July 2018.

The Corporate Director said a number of meetings were held with ALT, however, from a Council perspective progress was slow in order to meet the required timescale. From an ALT perspective there were frustrations with the additional complications relating to the requirement for a sustainable recirculation water system and associated costs of £100k, Meetings were held with ALT during May and June to discuss the technical issues, and also options for raising the extra money needed to deliver the scheme. However, on the 8th June 2018 not the 27th July, 2018 as indicated within the report ALT returned the funding to the Council, without any discussion with Officers, indicating they would not be able to deliver the programme citing concerns regarding the technical issues and additional funding required to meet the escalating cost of the new design, and also the ongoing maintenance and running costs. As a result of these concerns then Bedwellty Park would not be

an option either.

The Authority were then left with the third option, i.e. Festival Park to achieve a splash park and Officers approached the Managers who were keen to take on the project. However, at that time the Festival Park was up for sale and it was not until the purchase was completed in October that Officers were able to enter into discussions with the new owners of the site. He confirmed that the new owners were also keen on the idea of a splash park, and felt that it could be incorporated into the bigger planned improvements for the site.

The Corporate Director concluded that WG had been continually updated on progress, and they remained supportive of the project. That they had given us three options outlined in 2.21 of the report. The preferred option was a full business case be submitted to Welsh Government by the 31st March, 2019 and was subsequently approved by them. The of Festival Park had agreed during our discussions to meet any additional capital costs and the ongoing revenue costs associated with the running the splash park.

A Member commended the Integrated Services Team Manager on her efforts in obtaining the additional funding for the facility. However, he expressed concern that Members of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee had been invited to the meeting without voting rights, when the funding came through Social Services in the first instance.

He also reported that he had discussed the matter with Officers of ALT and their view of the situation was contrary to that outlined in the report, and he was of the opinion that they would be willing to further negotiate the possibility of additional funding. He pointed out that Festival Park was under private ownership, and felt that the funding should be used to support Council facilities like Parc Bryn Bach. He also expressed concern regarding the delay in this being brought to Scrutiny, and the lack of consultation undertaken with Members on the proposal for the splash park to be located at Festival Park.

Members concurred with the concerns raised regarding the

lack of consultation with Members.

In response the Corporate Director of Social Services said early on during negotiations with ALT it was intended to bring a report to the Social Services Scrutiny Committee, however, when negotiations broke-down Officers were in the position of trying to establish a way forward in order to keep the funding and accommodate a splash park for the Borough.

A Member said it was at this point that Members should have been informed. He was extremely disappointed that Parc Bryn Bach would be losing out an opportunity to improve the existing facility.

Another Member said the whole communication process was of most concern. She had learned that the funding was going to Festival Park in the local press, and there still seemed little urgency to arrange a meeting to explain the situation to Members.

The Corporate Director of Social Services said a meeting was suggested, however, it was difficult to arrange a suitable date prior to the 31st March, 2019, which was the deadline to retain the funding. The Chair said arrangements could have been made for a Special Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee but he was never contacted by Officers.

A Member referred to the fact that the funding had to be spent by the 31st March, 2019, but pointed out that a report on this was requested at the Joint Scrutiny (Budget Monitoring) meeting held on 11th February, 2019. He also referred to the announcement in November 2018 that Parc Bryn Bach had been designated Discovery Gateway status, and asked whether Officers had gone back to ALT and Welsh Government regarding the possibility of securing additional funding for the splash park via this opportunity.

In response the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services said the announcement was made in November, however, the details and criteria for funding was not received until March/April. He pointed out that the opportunity for investment for Parc Bryn Bach was still strong particularly through the Valleys Task Force.

He said one of the challenges for ALT was the capital required to build the facility and ongoing running costs, and during the design phase and discussions with Officers from Merthyr Tydfil CBC it became clear that the real costs of providing the splash park outweighed the initial funding bid. At that time Officers were aware of another developer willing to deliver the splash park, as part of its wider plans and investment in the Borough.

A discussion ensued when the Integrated Services Team Manager clarified points raised by the Chair regarding funding. She explained that the bid for £110k, which was the cost of the splash park installed at Cyfartha Park, Merthyr, was approved but with an 8 week deadline to spend the money. The problems Officers had overcome to invest this money had not been insignificant.

A Member said whilst he supported investment in the Borough, he said the Council had a duty to protect the Authority's assets and investing this money at Festival Park would be in direct competition to other facilities, and felt that other opportunities could have been explored for the funding, e.g. updating of existing play area facilities. He also referred to the current review being undertaken by ALT and asked why this had not been incorporated into the review process.

In response to the Member's comment regarding existing play facilities, he pointed out that only 3 sites within the Borough fully met the criteria for a splash park.

A Member commended the Officer for securing the funding, but said a report should have been brought to Scrutiny and Executive when the shortfall in funding was identified. He also asked why there were no representatives from ALT invited to today's meeting.

In response the Corporate Director said this was an oversight and ALT could have been invited to the meeting. However, he said today's report was about providing Members with a summary of the position, and to outline a potential way forward.

A discussion ensued regarding the ongoing running costs for the splash park, when the Corporate Director of Social Services confirmed that there would be no income generation as it was free to use. However, Members pointed out that the splash park would generate more visitors who would possibly spend money in the café.

A discussion ensued when a Member commented that if this had been brought to Members' attention earlier, they would have had the opportunity to lobby Welsh Government regarding potential additional funding through the Discovery Gateway Site status.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the technical advice provided regarding the water system, the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services explained that both sites would require a sustainable system to manage the water, but this was costly, and proved a challenge for ALT. However, Managers of Festival Park have committed to taking on the additional funding to ensure development of the splash park and also the revenue costs associated with running the facility.

The Integrated Services Manager pointed out that ALT were given the opportunity to develop a smaller scheme to reduce the capital costs, but they said this would not work for Parc Bryn Bach or Bedwellty Park.

A Member suggested that the report be deferred and a meeting be held with Aneurin Leisure Trust and Officers from the Technical Services Department regarding a possible way forward.

Following further discussion a Member proposed the following alternative Option:-

In light of Parc Bryn Bach being designated Discovery Gateway status, that Officers liaise with Welsh Government and the Valleys Task Force regarding the possibility of additional funding, and re-enter negotiations with Aneurin Leisure trust; and following these further discussions that both sites (Parc Bryn Bach and Festival Park) be reconsidered on their merits.

The proposal was seconded.

Upon a vote being taken the

Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, the alternative Option (3) be accepted, namely that in light of Parc Bryn Bach being designated Discovery Gateway status, that Officers liaise with Welsh Government and the Valleys Task Force regarding the possibility of additional funding, and re-enter negotiations with Aneurin Leisure Trust. Following these further discussions that both sites (Parc Bryn Bach and Festival Park) be reconsidered on their merits.