

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
14TH NOVEMBER, 2019**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR L. PARSONS (CHAIR)

Councillors J. Hill
M. Cross
G.A. Davies
G.L. Davies
M. Day
P. Edwards
J. Millard
J.C. Morgan
K. Pritchard
K. Rowson
B. Willis

AND: Managing Director
Corporate Director Regeneration & Community
Services
Head of Regeneration
Service Manager Development & Estates
Team Manager Building Control & Development Plans
Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities
Communications, Marketing and Customer Access
Manager
Enterprise Facilitation Officer
Principal Planning Officer
Scrutiny Officer

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

	It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> Apology for absence was reported for Councillor M. Moore	
No. 3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u> No declarations of interest and dispensations reported.	
No. 4	<u>ENVIRONMENT, REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 23 rd September, 2019 were submitted. Councillor K. Pritchard reported that he had been in attendance at the meeting. The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.	
No. 5	<u>ACTION SHEET – 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2019</u> The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 23 rd September, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:- <i><u>Blaenau Gwent Consumer Brochure</u></i> A Member expressed concern that the Chair had ‘signed off’ the brochure, as Members requested that a draft copy of the brochure be brought back to Committee for consideration. The Chair said at the last meeting Members requested sight of the brochure, and he had ‘signed off’ the draft brochure for circulation to Members for comments. The Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services confirmed that in the Executive Member Briefing referred to, the Chair had ‘signed off’ the document for circulation to Members for comments.	

A brief discussion ensued when the Enterprise Facilitation Officer said the document had been considered by DMT and very positive feedback had been received. A number of changes were proposed and these would be incorporated into the final document. Members feedback had also been noted from previous discussions, and work had been done with the Communications Section around the design to ensure it was in-keeping with corporate branding. The Officer said he was pleased with the overall result.

A Member said he was very disappointed with the brochure and felt it was repetitive of previous publications.

The Chair offered to meet with Members outside of the Committee to discuss the brochure. He said this had been ongoing for some time, but hopefully would be ready for publication by January 2020.

Forward Work Programme 2019-20 (Leisure Services Review)

A Member referred to the request for future reports on the Leisure Services Review to be considered by a Joint Scrutiny Committee and asked whether this had been discussed with the Head of Democratic Services.

In response the Scrutiny Officer said the issue had been raised, and explained that the only constitutional Joint Committees was Safeguarding and Budget Monitoring. However, it was possible to convene Joint Committees to consider other, but voting rights would be restricted to the host Scrutiny Committee.

The Member asked the Scrutiny Officer to look into this, as he believed that at the two Joint Committees convened to consider the Leisure Services Review, all Members had voting rights.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.

**Scrutiny
Officer**

No. 6

**EXECUTIVE DECISION SHEET FOR REGENERATION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

	<p>Consideration was given to the Executive Decision Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Executive Decision Sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>BRIDGING THE GAP – LOW CARBON BLAENAU GWENT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Managing Director.</p> <p>The Managing Director presented the report which provided an update on progress of the Low Carbon BG project to develop an ambitious Low Carbon Plan for Blaenau Gwent. The review was part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Bridging the Gap programme.</p> <p>The Managing Director went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. She said climate change was a really important issue, and clear targets have been set at UK and Wales level to reduce carbon emissions.</p> <p>In terms of progress, some very good work had been identified across the Council, and this project would bring that work together in order to deliver a more efficient Council, and reduce our carbon emissions. It was intended to hold further engagement with Members by way of Member workshops, and present the Low Carbon Plan to Council by the end of March 2020.</p> <p>The Managing Director also referred to the scope of the plan detailed at section 2.5 of the report, particularly the work being done with the community and our partner organisations, through the Public Service Board, with the view of achieving a ‘Whole Borough’ approach to reducing carbon emissions.</p> <p>A Member said he welcomed the report, particularly with the challenges facing future generations around global warming, and said the Council should pledge to achieve a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 in line with the all Wales target.</p> <p>A Member asked whether any calculations had been done to establish the impact of increased traffic as a result of the dualling of the Heads of the Valleys road. Whilst the project was much needed in order to draw investment into the area,</p>	

	<p>it would be interesting to see the environmental impact of the project.</p> <p>Another Member asked whether the Authority would be working with Tai Calon to secure grant funding to support the reduction of carbon emissions.</p> <p>In response the Managing Director said the Council had been following NRW 'Carbon Positive Futures' model to calculate the Council's carbon footprint, but this did not allow for the type of calculations needed to assess the impact of the HoV, however this could be part of the Council's broader work with the PSB. She pointed out that following NRW's calculations, they came out as a carbon positive organisation due to the amount of forestry land they owned; and this was also something that the Council and partners will also explore to ensure that where possible carbon emissions can be off-set.</p> <p>In terms of funding, the Managing Director confirmed that Tai Calon were part of the PSB, so the Council would be working with them and other partner organisations. Internally, the Council would be looking at invest to save initiatives, and Officers would also be exploring various grant funding opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Scrutiny Committee made comments and recommendations regarding the proposed approach (Option 2); and ii. That the Council pledges to achieve a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 in line with the all Wales target. 	
<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>BRIDGING THE GAP – GROWTH PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services presented the report which set out the aims and objectives of the Growth Plan.</p>	

The Corporate Director spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. The Plan had the clear intention to support more people working, earning more money living in Blaenau Gwent and pulled together actions contained in the Council's Housing Prospectus, Skills and Employment Plan (Draft) and Enterprise Framework along with the review of the Industrial Units portfolio. In addition, the Plan looked to take forward the opportunities around the growing interest that the private sector was showing in housing delivery in the Borough, and the growing interest in the Heads of the Valleys corridor following the dualling programme, the proposed increase in frequency of the Ebbw Valley rail link and the initiatives such as Tech Valleys.

The Corporate Director referred to the table at section 2.11 of the report and pointed out that the £170,000 Realigned Council Tax Policy should be in the 2020/21 column.

A Member referred to the aims of the Plan highlighted at section 2.3, namely to increase the Council's Council Tax base/recovery, and enquired as to the current Council Tax recovery figures.

In response the Corporate Director confirmed that these figures were reported through the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee. However, in relation to the Council's current policy of offering a Council Tax discount on vacant properties, a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to support a change in that policy to no longer offer this discount.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the number of vacant properties in the Borough, when a Member asked whether a survey had been done to establish how many of the vacant properties were up for sale.

The Corporate Director said this had not been undertaken, however, the report would also outline work intended to maximise the support available for those residents finding difficult in paying their Council Tax.

A Member said he welcomed the report, particularly looking at growth along the Heads of the Valleys corridor. He also referred to section 2.7 of the report which referred to the

loans scheme available in order to bring empty properties back into use, and hoped this could be offered to first time buyers as they often struggled with mortgage retentions when trying to buy properties that had been vacant for some time and in need total renovation.

A Member referred to the approximate number of vacant properties in the Borough and asked how many of these were privately owned and RSL properties. The Corporate Director said approximately 85% were privately owned, as RSL's had worked very hard to reduce the amounts of voids within the Borough.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Members support the Growth Plan as presented and recommend to Council for approval (Option 1).

No. 9

**REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
PREFERRED STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Building Control & Development Plans.

Team Manager Building Control & Development Plans presented the report which sought approval of the Preferred Strategy, attached at Appendix 1, to be taken forward for consultation. This was a key document in the process and sets the strategic framework for the new replacement LDP.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein.

A Member said there was potential for housing all along the Heads of the Valleys corridor, but stressed the importance of identifying sustainable sites in areas that people wanted to live. He then referred to P.15 of the report, particularly supporting sustainable transport, and expressed concern regarding the lack of transport links to the Borough's Industrial Estates, and said this needed to be addressed particularly when looking to increase growth in the area. He also expressed concern that Members had not had sight of the Nash Report.

In response the Officer agreed that housing sites should be the best sites, and confirmed that a very thorough assessment was being undertaken, and improved transport links were also needed to our employment sites, particularly across the Northern Corridor. In relation to the Nash Report, the Officer confirmed that this would be taken into account as part of the work being done on the role of Town Centres.

The Service Manager Development & Estates said we need to be confident that the housing sites identified within the Plan can be delivered.

A Member referred to section 3.17 on page 18 of the report and it felt it was appropriate that the words 'Circuit of Wales' be amended. He commended the Officer on an excellent report.

Councillor J. Millard left the meeting at this juncture.

Another Member asked whether the Borough's infrastructure and services were able to meet the demands that new housing sites would bring.

In response the Officer confirmed that Aneurin Bevan LHB had been consulted in relation to future needs and requirements and this would be fed into the Plan, and also working with Education to plan for those changes.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and Members support amendments to the Preferred Strategy to be referred on for approval by Council (Option 2).

No. 10

CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION CITY DEAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2018/19 – QUARTER 4

Consideration was given to report of the Head of Regeneration.

The Head of Regeneration presented the performance report for the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal during 2018/19. The report was presented to the CCR Cabinet in June 2019, and highlighted key programmes of work the Authority was engaged in and issues of interest to Blaenau Gwent.

	<p>The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein, and the Service Manager Development & Estates presented the Strategic Development Plan element of the report.</p> <p>A Member referred to section 2.11 of the report and reiterated the need for improved transport links to the Borough's Industrial Estates as this was critical to our plans moving forward. He also referred to the Ebbw Vale Rail Line, and the potential for 2 trains per hour to both Ebbw Vale and Abertillery, and requested more information on the figures.</p> <p>In response the Corporate Director explained that the guidance used was the WelTAG assessment, and the methodology included within that guidance was used across the UK.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Scrutiny Committee considered overall progress and made comments, before the report goes to Council (Option 2).</p>	
<p>No. 11</p>	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 9TH DECEMBER, 2019</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 9th December, 2019.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the Performance Information on the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal had now been considered.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted.</p>	
<p>No. 12</p>	<p><u>BRIDGING THE GAP – INDUSTRIAL PORTFOLIO REVIEW</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.</p>	

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to report of the Head of Regeneration which set out the purpose of the review of the Industrial Portfolio. The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein.

A discussion ensued when the Officer clarified points raised by a Member regarding the Brexit Resilience Fund and the investment in Rosehyworth.

A Member said the profile of our Industrial Estates needed to be raised, and asked whether the monies gained from the sale of some units could be reinvested in others.

In response the Officer confirmed that the monies would be used for existing stock, and it was also intended to move towards full repairing leases in the future. She said a change in the financial management of the units was also needed to ensure they were maintained, and confirmed that all cost effective options were being considered.

Another Member referred to units on privately owned Estates and the Officer confirmed that Welsh Government were already considering options to upgrade a unit on the Rassau Industrial Estate. Hopefully when these improvements were seen others will follow.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted; and continue with the review and actions, and present the recommendations for the Council to consider. To continue the review would allow the Council to make informed decisions that help us move towards a more commercial way of managing the portfolio maximising the income we receive and improving the service for our business tenants (Option 1).

No. 13

EBBW VALE HI TECH TEST FACILITY

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services presented the report which informed Members of the current position of the work around the development of the Hi Tech Facility at the Rassau.

A discussion ensued when the Corporate Director clarified points raised by Members. A Member also asked that future briefings be held jointly with all political groups.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted; and the Executive agree to undertake market testing to identify a private sector partner and develop the scheme in partnership to a position where it can be determined whether there is a business case to proceed.