

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

**SUBJECT: SPECIAL REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
- 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2020**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HILL (CHAIR)

Councillors P. Edwards
M. Day
G.A. Davies
H. McCarthy
J. Millard
J.C. Morgan
J.P. Morgan
L. Parsons
K. Rowson
B. Willis

AND: Corporate Director of Regeneration &
Community Services
Head of Regeneration & Development
Business Innovation Manager
Marketing Projects Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

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> An apology for absence was reported for Councillor B. Willis, who was experiencing technical difficulties joining the meeting, and the Chief Officer Commercial.	
No. 3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u>	

	<p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>To receive the minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 8th September, 2020, whereupon:-</p> <p><u><i>Llanhilleth Pit Head Baths</i></u></p> <p>A brief discussion ensued when the Chair sought clarity as to why the minutes had been submitted to a ‘special’ meeting of the Committee.</p> <p>A Member expressed concern that the minutes did not give an accurate reflection of the discussion that took place, and failed to capture comments he made expressing concerns regarding the viability of the project. He also understood that a third option was put forward, i.e. to have further discussions with the owner. He also referred to the fact that the report was submitted to the Executive Committee, and then a press release was issued on the matter, and he felt that the Scrutiny process had been devalued.</p> <p>Another Member agreed, and said the minutes did not mention the queries he raised at the meeting, and in his opinion the minutes were not a true reflection of the discussion and he could not support them.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Officer pointed out that the report that was considered was an exempt report, which limited the nature of the discussion that could be recorded in the minutes.</p> <p>A Member said it was his understanding that the Committee agreed Option 2, to progress to the next stage to produce a business plan, and that the next stage would cover all the issues raised by Members. He felt that the minutes were a true reflection of what was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Officer agreed, and confirmed that Officers would take all Members’ concerns on board when developing the business case.</p>	

	<p>In response a Member said clarity was needed in terms of recording discussions of exempt information.</p> <p>Another Member said the Scrutiny Officer had explained why the detail of the discussion was restricted, and in his opinion the minutes reflected what was discussed in the meeting. In terms of the recommendation, he had e proposed Option 2 as outlined in the report, and it was seconded.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services said the minutes stated that Members' concerns would be addressed as part of the next stage, and it was also his opinion that the minutes were accurate in terms of what could be documented.</p> <p>Upon a vote being taken,</p> <p>5 Members accepted the minutes as a true record. 3 Members voted against acceptance of the minutes.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET – 8TH SEPTEMBER, 2020</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 8th September, 2020 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>ECONOMY – POST COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY</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 set out the proposed strategy for Blaenau Gwent in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to support the sectors and businesses in the County Borough, and provided an update on the ongoing work taking place locally, and feeding into the regional initiatives.</p>	

The Officer referred to the recent Welsh Government announcement and confirmed that the Authority was still in response mode, and said it was important to ensure that the Department continued progressing the proactive work being undertaken, alongside recovery activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown had disrupted businesses and employment across Wales and the UK, causing both short and long term issues across many sectors. The report looked at the background of data collated from various organisations and think tanks and applied modelling to look at the possible unemployment figures for BG. It also considered all the businesses that needed assistance, and those that could add most to the local economy for the future.

The Officer went through the report in detail and highlighted points contained therein. In terms of the strategic approach, this contained a mix of short term and longer term actions across a range of sectors and partners to assist with effective delivery. The main areas, listed below, would require a regional or all Wales approach, where Blaenau Gwent would need to influence the economic recovery work:

- Manufacturing tech advice, investment and skills
- Digital skills program across all sectors
- Supply chain support, sites and premises (on-shoring facilitation)
- Specific support for growth companies and R&D in BG
- Identify initiatives for 18-24 post-ed work related training (e.g. FJF)
- Build the Foundational Economy
- Widen accessibility through innovative/sustainable transport solutions
- Enable more start-ups especially town centre and on-line
- Progress with Test Facility as future facing anchor investment to BG

The Officer confirmed that work has already started on a number of initiatives, and also a number of projects had been re-worked to take into consideration what was required post-COVID-19.

The Business Innovation Manager provided a detailed overview of the engagement activity and financial support provided to businesses since 17th March, 2020.

In response to a question raised regarding capacity within the Department, the Head of Regeneration & Development said the Department was currently working at capacity to deliver projects, and the Council's partners had also been assisting.

Another Member asked whether any interest had been received in relation to Tech Valley.

The Officer confirmed that enquiries had been received and discussions were ongoing with Welsh Government to ensure that that interest is not lost.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the units at Roseheyworth, the Business Innovation Manager confirmed that all 4 units had been completed with leases signed on 3 of the units, and active interested had been received on the remaining unit.

The Head of Regeneration & Development said these units had been prioritised as part of the review of the Council's industrial units due to their high market value and income potential.

The Business Innovation Manager said this was Part 1 of the scheme, and confirmed that discussions had already commenced on Part 2, working with local traders to provide opportunities to support foundational economic growth. He said the Borough's industrial estates now provided units covering all the key areas of work.

Councillor L. Elias joined the meeting at this juncture.

A Member sought an update position on TVR, and the Head of Regeneration & Development said they were dealing directly with Welsh Government, however, she understood funding was in place and Welsh Government were progressing with refurbishment of a building on the Rassau Industrial Estate.

In response to a further question regarding the units at Rhyd-y-Blew, Ebbw Vale, the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services confirmed that the scheme was being progressed by Welsh Government

The Corporate Director referred to a Member's earlier question regarding capacity within the Department and confirmed that staff had been diligently working throughout the lockdown period, and beyond, to provide a whole range of support to businesses. He thanked the Team for their excellent work in obtaining grants to support local businesses, and their commitment to driving through this Strategy in order to create jobs and build for the future.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted, and continue working with partners to focus on the initiatives that will bring the most benefit post-COVID to BG. Those that will improve employment opportunities and support businesses to progress with digital improvements and a mix of home, virtual and shared space working (Option 1).