



HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 31ST OCTOBER 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe – Chair
Councillor S. Williams – Vice Chair

Councillors:

C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, D. T. Davies, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, H. Pritchard, J. A Pritchard.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor S. Morgan (Leader of Council), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure, and Green Spaces), C. Andrews (Education and Communities) and P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection).

Also in attendance:

K. Alderson (Speaker), B. Roberts (Audit Wales) and S. Byrne (Audit Wales)

Together with:

Officers: M. S. Williams (Director for Economy and Environment), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), H. Jones (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager), J. Lougher (Sport and Development Manager), J. Reynolds (Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager), S. Pugh (Communications Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and (A. Jones (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. James and J. Rao.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ingram-Jones declared a personal interest on agenda item 7 as her project is funded by Families First. Being a personal interest, Cllr Ingram-Jones could remain in the meeting and vote whilst the item was discussed.

3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 19TH SEPTEMBER 2023.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 13 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 19th September 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period October 2023 to March 2024.

A Member requested that a report be added to the forward work programme on homelessness rates and on housing stock with an update on putting empty properties back into use.

Another Member requested that a report on the Community Asset Transfer process with particular emphasis on the Council's terms of conditions and how they compare with other Local Authorities.

Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 16 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION STRATEGY (SARS) IMPLEMENTATION

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces presented the report, which sought the comments of Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the implementation of the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019 – 2029 as detailed in Appendix 1 for inclusion in a report being presented to Cabinet. The Scrutiny Members were asked to recognise the current budget pressures being experienced by the service and understand the steps needed to overcome these pressures. Members heard that SARS was a key component of addressing this issue.

The Head of Public protection advised members that an update was brought to Scrutiny 2 years ago and that this report was a further update at the mid-point of the strategy and highlighted the broad breadth of delivery that the implementation plan outlines. In particular how the council works with partners, maximise the use of the Countryside and the investment in leisure facilities.

The Chair informed the committee that a Member of the Public had requested permission to speak at the meeting and introduced her to the Committee.

The Speaker (K, Alderson) thanked the Chair and Committee for allowing her to speak on behalf of the Leisure Centre Campaigners and stated that the Council was aware of their Social Media Campaign which is on day 118. Members heard how the Campaign is making people aware that Caerphilly County Borough Council wanted to provide a ten year strategy that meant that out of 11 leisure centres they wanted 4 strategic ones based in Risca, Caerphilly, Heolddu and Newbridge.

Members of the committee were advised that the matrix system that is being used in the strategy is the WRU Matrix System from the 2014 module and is outdated. Therefore, it needed to be updated as using this Matrix System will cause chaos as it will mean that anyone who forms a club at grassroot level will not be allocated a slot at any leisure centre facility as they do not qualify under the matrix.

The Committee were informed of difficulties the speaker had experienced personally in accessing leisure facilities as a member of the Blackwood Walking Football Team and she also highlighted that the team have had to move to sites that were not suitable for them. Committee heard how on one occasion they had to host a recent league game outside of the Borough and had to use facilities at Ocean Park in Cardiff as they were not able to secure a slot within Caerphilly County Borough. Ms Alderson outlined how there was concern for all clubs who were not able to train on their local grassroot field pitches.

The speaker raised the importance of leisure facilities to people's health, and well-being was discussed and how it had a huge impact on people's physical, social, and mental well-being. The speaker concluded by stressing the importance of the community and the council working together to provide what is best for now and for future generations.

The Chair thanked the Speaker and invited members to ask any questions.

A Member enquired about the evidence behind using Sport Wales funding for the over 60's on outdoor e-bikes and asked about promoting the benefits of taking a walk. The Sport and Leisure Development Manager provided information on organised walks that were taking place across the County Borough and the 60 plus bike scheme which was developed during lockdown restrictions when leisure centres were closed. The Chair asked officers to note the Member's comments on promoting the benefits of a walk to the elderly.

One Member enquired if the Aaron Ramsey Cruyff Court at Trinity Fields School would be accessible to the wider community. The Sport and Leisure Development Manager advised that this would be the case but highlighted that a lack of floodlights limited its use during winter months. The Member also asked for an update on the installation of equipment in play areas, the relevant specification used and whether all equipment purchased has been installed. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised that to the best of his knowledge purchased equipment had been installed but that he would check with the service area and respond to the Member outside of the meeting.

A Committee Member questioned if the focus was still on the four strategic centres as originally outlined given the investment at other sites. The Member also questioned the assertion that users of the indoor space at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre had relocated to other sites. In addition, it was queried if the sports facilities at the Centre for Vulnerable Learners (CVL) was a replacement for the leisure centre, as it was initially described as an additional facility for residents. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised that it was never the intention to invest solely in just the four strategic leisure centres. Members also heard that the CVL was included in the report as it was part of the whole offer in terms of leisure facilities across the County Borough. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment highlighted that most leisure facilities were linked to schools and therefore inextricably linked to the Schools Strategy. It was outlined how the CVL was described as an additional facility at the planning application stage because at the time a decision had not been reached on the future of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager gave examples of clubs who had relocated from the indoor space at the centre, one example given was Oakdale Badminton Club which had moved to Islwyn High School. The Member welcomed all investment in leisure facilities and outlined that they knew of some clubs who thought the relocation was a temporary measure whilst the centre was being used as a vaccination hub.

One Member had concerns that by recognising current budget pressures and steps that may be taken to overcome them, as outlined in the recommendations, Members might be sanctioning future closures of leisure facilities. The Member also queried if a struggling leisure centre in the future could be considered for a Community Asset Transfer. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services highlighted to Members that if a leisure facility was experiencing financial challenges transferring to a community-run model would not necessarily remove those challenges. Committee heard how the recommendation acknowledged the pressure on public sector finances. Members heard how savings of £48M would have to be made over the next two years, and the overspend identified in the report due mainly to increased energy costs was also highlighted by officers.

A Member raised the issue of disability sports and queried the role of CCBC in facilitating this sport. The Sport and Leisure Development Manager advised that the "Insport Series" was run by Disability Sport Wales in collaboration with the 5 Local Authorities in the Gwent Region. Information on sports available was promoted on the Council website and the officer agreed to share further information with the Member outside of the meeting.

The Council Leader welcomed the Strategy and highlighted the brave decision made by Councillors in 2018 to keep leisure services in-house rather than outsourcing the service like other Local Authorities.

Having noted the content of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations are supported and should be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms and with one verbal vote (and in noting there were 13 for, 2 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee provided their comments on the progress of the Implementation of the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019 -2029 as detailed in Appendix 1 for inclusion in a report being presented to Cabinet
2. Scrutiny Committee Members recognised the current budget pressures being experienced by the service and understand that steps will need to be taken to overcome these pressures. The SARS is a key component of addressing this issue.

8. WASTE MANAGEMENT REVIEW REPORT FROM AUDIT WALES

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces presented the Report which explains how Audit Wales have carried out a review of the Council's approach to recycling waste including its performance against key indicators and its plans to drive improvement in its performance. The audit did not examine in detail all the waste management services provided by the Council. Audit Wales noted that the Council's waste management performance had deteriorated in recent years with the percentage of waste reused, recycled, and composted lower when compared to other councils in Wales. The Audit Wales review focused on the extent to which the Council understood the reasons for the decline in its recycling performance and its plans to address this. The high-level summary from the review was that "Overall we found that the Council understands why its performance has declined but has been slow to address this; and whilst the Council is developing a draft strategy there remains significant risks to its successful implementation". The Report made 2 recommendations for improvement as noted in section 5.3.

The Chair invited the Officer from Audit Wales to provide the presentation.

Audit Wales confirmed that the report sets out the findings from the review which was carried out due to the Councils approach to recycling waste and how it plans to improve performance. It was identified that the Councils waste performance had deteriorated in recent years and had failed to reach statutory targets and members were advised that Welsh Government can levy penalties for non-compliance of targets, however Welsh Government have not yet imposed any penalties on the Council.

Members were advised that the content of the report and recommendations have been agreed and the Council are seeking to understand the root causes and address them to improve performance. Positive action taken by the Council has been set out in the report and areas for improvement are set out on page 12 of the report. Audit Wales are aware that the Council are working on producing a draft strategy and that it is intending to implement communications and engagement campaign across the County Borough for specific changes. The committee were advised that the Council have had costs for the draft strategy in the short term but will need to consider the costs for longer term and will also need to consider performance measures and think about the value for money aspect, which are included in the recommendations within the report.

The Chair thanked Audit Wales and invited the committee to ask questions.

A Member requested confirmation on what were the reasons for the decline in recycling over the periods 2017 – 2018 and 2021-2022 and confirmation that the Council are learning lessons. In addition, the Member sought confirmation that other Councils were using enforcement to a greater extent than Caerphilly Council was doing at present.

Audit Wales confirmed that Council officers would be best placed to confirm the reasons for the decline. In relation to the Council learning lessons question, it was confirmed that the Council has been looking at what other Authorities are doing and are working on improving their performance which demonstrates that lessons are being learned. Members heard that with regards to enforcement relating to collection services, this was not investigated in detail, but it was noted that other Councils have successfully introduced enforcement measures, but Caerphilly had previously chosen not to. However, this has been looked at recently by the Waste strategy review cross party group members. Following this a report has been presented to Cabinet and the use of the relevant enforcement powers has been agreed.

The Director for Economy and Environment advised that there were a multitude of factors that contributed to the decline in performance such as including an initial contractual problem with certain waste streams followed by the covid pandemic. Members were made aware that Caerphilly has more residual waste than any other authority in Wales and do not have as many restrictions on household recycling centres compared to other authorities. In relation to enforcement the Council has not used this approach to date and confirmed that a report was presented to Cabinet earlier this month and a decision was taken to only use enforcement if all else fails. Members were advised that the decline coincided with other authorities making changes which Caerphilly did not and the Council is now in the process of bringing a new waste strategy forward and has a cross party waste strategy group who are working on its development with officers. Members heard how there is a Joint Scrutiny Committee scheduled in the New Year for the new Waste Strategy to be discussed and then Cabinet will be asked to endorse a consultation process before the strategy is introduced.

The Chair thanked the Director of the Economy and Environment and confirmed the report had been duly noted.

The meeting closed at 18:43 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2023, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR