

## ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2021.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor B.E. Brooks (Chair), Councillor S. Sivagnanam (Vice), Councillors V.J. Bailey, P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, G. John, M.J.G. Morgan, A.R. Robertson, L.O. Rowlands and S.T. Wiliam.

Also Present: Councillors P.G. King (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport), N. Moore (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources) and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services).

### 547 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chairman read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

### 548 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### 549 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor Driscoll declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item 6 – Auditor General for Wales: Review of Town Centre Regeneration in Wales. The nature of the interest was that Councillor Driscoll owned several properties located on Holton Road. Due to the nature of the interest Councillor Driscoll withdrew from the meeting for this item.

### 550 PRESENTATION – COASTAL MONITORING ANNUAL UPDATE –

The item was presented by the Programme Manager for Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre (WCMC), who informed the Committee of the following key points:

- The WCMC was 100% funded by Welsh Government (WG) from the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) budget;
- A business case had been successfully made by a consortium made up of the Vale of Glamorgan, Gwynedd and Conwy Councils with the Welsh

Local Government Association (WLGA) in order to set up the WCMC back in 2017; due to this, two full time staff for this had been employed within the Vale since 2019; the Programme Manager reported back to the consortium, and there was an Advisory Panel including Wales Coastal Groups Forum, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), National Trust, Network Rail, Welsh Government, and the Chairs of the Coastal Groups;

- The staff complement and manpower of the WCMC had been boosted (six staff in total) with the addition of an undergraduate placement scheme in collaboration with Aberystwyth University and the Kickstart Scheme. Due to the two core staff being based within the Vale of Glamorgan Council, close relationships had been built with Council staff and Survey Teams within the Council, who had also been trained up by the WCMC in order to assist on the monitoring of beaches;
- The WCMC's role was ultimately to collect data regarding the status on the coastal areas of Wales in order to serve the needs of the public and to develop a strategic approach to coastal monitoring in Wales, supporting the National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management and the work of other Maritime Local Authorities (MLAs) by providing the evidence base required for coastal risk management and decision making;
- This strategy would be achieved through a cost-effective programme, developing knowledge and skills within local authorities and to have the collated data available on the internet open to both public and university access;
- The WCMC's role was to monitor coastal erosion, coastal response to flooding and 'storm surges' and their impacts in order to help mitigate these;
- There were currently four coastal groups within Wales who managed coasts in a collaborative, cross boundary way as part of their Shoreline Management Plans in conjunction with the appropriate policy units;
- As part of the policy units, a risk-based methodology was used to assess the various aspects of risk on local coastlines, such as coastal erosion, in order to build up an ongoing picture of the status on these coastal areas and the level of intervention (or not) which was required and to identify high risk (i.e., low lying), high population areas. The Vale fell within a relatively low level of risk based on current assessments. This was looked at over a 10, 20, 100-year basis;
- A standardised, integrated model of data collection was now used for all the relevant local authorities regarding coastal erosion, etc. This was in stark contrast to the model previously used by Councils who collected data separately;
- In terms of survey techniques / collaborations, high accuracy but low-cost robots had been developed in conjunction with Aberystwyth University in order to autonomously carry out surveys and collect data on coastal areas, as well as a mobile laser scanner and greater use of electric vehicles;
- Since 2019 surveys had been undertaken and data had been collected on various sites across the Vale, particularly key sites such as Aberthaw, Ogmere by Sea, Llantwit Major as well as Penarth which may be at higher risk from coastal erosion, etc. Although the geology of the Vale meant that the risk of coastal erosion was relatively low;

- WCMC was signed up to the NRW coastal flood warning system as well as collaborating with Plymouth University which also undertook similar monitoring;
- WCMC also worked closely with primary schools in order to inform children about climate change in an informative but less 'daunting' way as part of the National Curriculum.

Following the Officer's presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Driscoll stated that a solution to the high costs involved in having both increased coastal defences and Marine power schemes (with both tending to be situated near each other and to areas experiencing coastal erosion) would be to combine them in some way in order to share costs, etc. The WCMC Programme Manager replied that this was a good idea and had been considered for an area on the English side of the Severn Estuary, adding this could be something for the Vale to consider in the future.
- To Council Wiliam's query on regular reporting on this topic to the Committee, it was confirmed that further reports would be provided. Continued funding by the WG of the WCMC roles meant that the project would go on until at least 2026, providing more time to gather and analyse standardised data around coastal erosion, etc. and to see longer term trends. On the Councillor's follow up query on sand levels within the Vale and any impacts from dredging, the Officer replied that it would take long-term data collection in order to assess properly the variation in natural sand levels.
- On the Chair's question on improved data accuracy, the Officer agreed that this would improve as more comprehensive and standardised data was being collected by the WCMC.
- Councillor Robertson asked what the ultimate policy would be to tackle the Vale's coastal erosion based on the data being collected; would it be a more interventionist approach to combat this, or to accept and adapt thereby letting nature take its course, such as adaptations being applied in coastal areas in parts of England. The Officer replied that the Shoreline Management Plans shown to the Committee looked at such factors and added that ultimately sea levels would continue to rise; fortunately, the Vale was in a relatively good position in terms of coastal erosion and flooding compared to other Welsh Councils. The individual policy units would look at local coastal needs and what defences or adaptations were required, if any.
- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport stressed the importance of the WCMC and its comprehensive monitoring in order to help Welsh Councils make decisions on dealing with coastal erosion.
- The Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources raised the query about previous, historic or legacy data collected by previous coastal groups in the Vale and if these were still being held and used; the Officer replied that such data had been kept and could be used to help inform the WCMC's work, but this was in a wide variety of formats and it would take time to go through. Currently it was planned to

use staff acquired via the Kickstart scheme to help go through this historic data. On the Leader's other point on WG's Technical Advice Note (TAN 15) concerning development, flooding and coastal erosion and if WCMC had been involved with advising on this, the Officer replied that no, the WCMC had not been involved and the tidal flooding risk model used by the WG to inform this notice was also used by WCMC and had been provided by NRW. The Head of Regeneration and Planning added that TAN 15 was separate to WCMC's overview of coastal erosion and looked at the wider impact of climate change and applied this to potential flood risks. There were some question marks on the age and accuracy of the data used to generate the flood maps attached to TAN 15 and this had been passed back to WG .

- Councillor Drake asked if the changes to the quality of the sea impacted coastal erosion, the WCMC Programme Manager replied that he was not aware of any information looking at the impacts to coastal erosion due to water pollution.

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the presentation on the Coastal Monitoring Annual Update be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the presentation and discussions at the meeting.

**551 PROJECT ZERO – DELIVERING THE CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE PLAN (REF) –**

The reference from Cabinet of 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 was presented by the Head of Policy and Business Transformation:

- This was an update on the progress being made to develop the Council's approach to delivering the Project Zero, Climate Change Challenge Plan, including governance and delivery;
- By the way of background, the Council had declared a 'climate emergency' in July 2019; followed by a 'nature emergency' declared in July 2021;
- The Climate Change Challenge Plan had also been approved by the Council in July 2021 which set out the steps on how the Council would reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 but also included the Council's role in providing community leadership and encouragement for wider changes in behaviour within the Vale that will reduce the county's overall carbon emissions;
- Project Zero and the Climate Change Challenge Plan complemented, not replaced, other statutory plans or duties, by setting out what was needed to effect a reduction in carbon emissions across the Council and the wider community as well as the key areas that needed to be addressed around this, such as energy, procurement, transport and green spaces;
- A new Project Zero Board had been set up which reported back to the Reshaping Board and ultimately to Cabinet, as well as being overseen and scrutinised by this Committee and Corporate Performance and Resources;

- There was a project brief included within the report, which set out the structure on how this work would be taken forward, i.e. the eighteen challenges contained in the Challenge Plan have each been assigned to a Senior Reporting Officer (SRO). The SROs will develop specific and detailed plans for their areas and the relevant project board will meet every other month at the Board chaired by the Managing Director;
- A Project Support Team had also been set up in order to coordinate the work and support the commitments including Finance, Training and Energy teams within the Council;
- Work had already commenced and discussions held on how to encourage and create momentum for such changes within Housing and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme, as well as encouraging active travel and the installation of electric car charging points throughout the Vale;
- The teams within Estates had worked extremely hard in completing the first data return to develop a 'baseline' for the Council's emissions using the WG's 'toolkit'. This would assist in identifying where the biggest impacts would be made and would be backed up by external specialist support as required;
- There was ongoing engagement with the wider community, with the Council offering leadership in helping tackling climate change, such as linking in with local schools, community groups ('Green Ambassadors') and local Town and Community Councils (TCCs).

Following the Officer's presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- On Councillor Sivagnanam's question about how often the Committee would be getting further updates on Project Zero and delivery of the Climate Change Plan, the Head of Policy and Business Transformation replied that he would co-ordinate with Democratic Services and Cabinet on providing these. He suggested providing such reports three times per year to Cabinet and then referred on to the relevant Scrutiny Committees;
- On Councillor Robertson's questions:
  - Regarding how the Council would know when net zero had been reached, it was explained that would be realised, firstly, in terms of the Council's impact, through the WG's 'toolkit' by the Council providing the appropriate data to WG in order to assess its carbon footprint and impact both directly and indirectly i.e. through its supply chain. Secondly, at the wider, county level, this would be done via the Council's community leadership role and the Authority would work with others to reduce their carbon emissions, but there was some way to go in measuring this. Details of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) model that could be used in order to measure this would be shared with the Committee.
  - On what the Council was doing in order to tackle other pollutants, it was explained that there were plans, policies and measurements already in place for such issues, such as a Forward Work Programme for Biodiversity and the work being undertaken on air pollution. Also, the Council and City Region were speaking to businesses to promote a move to Carbon reduction, such as through the South Wales Industrial

- Cluster (including Tarmac and Tata) which could access funding and receive support via the public sector in order to reduce their emissions and a move towards a non-fossil fuel based economy, using technologies such as through carbon capture and the development of hydrogen as a fuel.
  - Both the Leader and the Head of Policy and Business Transformation shared hyperlinks on how Net Zero and emissions could be measured with the Committee.
- The Chair reiterated that a recommendation should be made for this report to come back to Cabinet and then the relevant Scrutiny committees on a four monthly (triannual) basis.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T further reports on Project Zero be provided to Cabinet on a triannual basis, with the reports to then be referred to Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee for their consideration.

#### Reason for recommendation

To enable Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee to consider how Project Zero is being taken forward on a triannual basis.

#### 552 AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES: REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION IN WALES (MD) –

The purpose of the report, presented by Head of Regeneration and Planning, was to advise Members of the findings of the Auditor General for Wales' review of town centre regeneration in Wales and the Council's response to its findings:

- The Auditor General Wales' review of Town Centre Regeneration in Wales was undertaken between October 2020 and May 2021 with the findings published in September 2021;
- The review had considered how town centres have evolved over the years, town centres of today and the challenge of regenerating town centres in the future, and concluded that:
  - Past national policy choices, changing consumer expectations and technological advances were now adversely affecting many Welsh town centres;
  - Businesses had been well supported during the pandemic, but some local authorities lacked the skills, capacity and resources to help create sustainable town centres despite significant Welsh Government funding.
- Town centres continued to play an important role at the heart of Welsh life, but local and national government needed to drive an ambitious regeneration agenda to help create sustainable places;
- The report made six recommendations to local government and the Welsh Government:

- Welsh Government to review Non-domestic Rates to ensure the system better reflected town-centre conditions when the payments holiday ended in March 2022.
- Welsh Government to work with local authorities to review transport challenges facing town centres and agree how best to address these.
- Welsh Government to consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy by streamlining processes and grant conditions and keeping requests for information and supporting materials to a minimum; move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations; and rebalance investment from capital to revenue to help local authorities address staff capacity and skills shortages.
- Local authorities to take appropriate action, using existing powers and resources available to achieve the best possible outcome with regard to vacant and derelict buildings in town centres by: using alternative methods of enforcement before using Compulsory Purchase Orders as a last resort; integrating enforcement strategies with wider departmental strategies across housing, environmental health, planning and regeneration teams to make effective use of existing skills and resources; and ensuring there is capacity and the right expertise to use the full range of powers, working in collaboration with other Councils to achieve good outcomes.
- Welsh Government to set out how it plans to deliver its 'Town Centres First' approach in practice, its expectations of partners and the practical steps it will take to make this ambition a reality.
- Local authorities to use Audit Wales' regeneration tool to self-assess their current approaches to identify where they need to improve their work on town-centre regeneration.
- On recommendation 3, WG had realised the need to help Councils by improving and simplifying their funding streams as well as shifting their focus by moving away from targeting specific town centres to focusing on all town centres in Wales, which would benefit all town centres within the Vale that historically had less funding than Barry;
- The Council had produced a response / strategy as a result of this report and was included in appendix B;
- In response to recommendation 2 (concerning parking and transport for town centres), the Council were retaining free carparking for up to 2 hours in all the Council's Town Centre car parks. Charging for longer periods of parking in town centres within the Vale appeared to have created greater 'churn' resulting in greater accessibility for drivers. The Council were also working with WG in order to improve transport and other infrastructure within town centres. Funding and grants were also now being spread throughout all town centres within the Vale, due to greater WG flexibility on how such funding could be distributed;
- Regarding the recommendation on enforcement on empty buildings in town centres in order to put them back into use, work was being undertaken by Planning and Regeneration Officers in order to achieve this, with significant success already having been achieved through the use of loans or working with owners to secure changes to the buildings' use;
- Overall, town centres within the Vale were doing better than many other town centres elsewhere in Wales in terms of vacancy rates, despite the

pandemic. However, those town centres within Vale that may be, relatively speaking, experiencing some difficulties in this area, such as Barry (Holton Road) and Cowbridge would be assisted, for example, by obtaining loans and other funding via WG.

Following the Officer's presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor John commented that despite high occupancy rates many town centres within the Vale were still struggling (despite the work undertaken by local businesses to attract customers) due to out-of-town shopping centres and the disappearance of big stores from the towns. Climate change would require a greater push to buy and to shop locally and consumers and businesses needed to be attracted back into the town centres. The Head of Regeneration and Planning agreed, stating that the report had also made similar conclusions about the impact of out-of-town retailing on town centres, exacerbated by the growth in online shopping. However, the days of the large national retailers in town centres appeared to be coming to an end, with WG recommending a more flexible approach in the use of buildings in town centres and the greater use of these locations for public sector bodies, such as locating further education colleges and health centres there ('mixed use hubs'), which could attract people back to town centres, such as at the Barry Gateway Scheme.
- Councillor Robertson endorsed the report's emphasis on flexibility and adaptability for developing town centres, change of use and transport but contrasted this with the sometimes more rigid approach that the Council took around planning applications. He also cited the issues of the closure of bank branches and post offices in local towns and centres. He felt that the fact that Barry did not have a Business Improvement District (BID) was unfortunate. The Chair and the Head of Regeneration and Planning replied that Barry Council and local businesses had previously turned down the opportunity of creating a BID for Barry, and the Chair agreed about the closure of banks, suggesting that a 'multi-bank' model could be used and housed within town centres. The Head of Regeneration and Planning added that the Council had adopted greater changes and flexibility of use for buildings in town centres over the last two years, with the review of the Local Development Plan taking this further by reviewing the policies protecting the use of town centre properties for purely retail purposes. The Council would be seeking to facilitate an integrated transport policy within the Vale, such as developing an integrated transport hub in Barry. Such changes took time as various bodies and business needed to be involved as well as WG. WG were also looking at town centre business rates which could help to improve the situation as well. In terms of banks, the report did not go into any depth about this, but post offices did offer basic banking services, but this was dependant on them still being open within local town centres too. On Business Improvement Districts, there was a challenge in getting local businesses and other interest groups unanimity in applying for this, which had been seen in Barry, where different locations / centres (Holton Road, High Street) had divergent views.

- On the above point, Councillor Wiliam suggested a united Chamber of Commerce for Barry may help with the issues mentioned above. Furthermore, he would welcome high quality flats above boutique shops in the town centres of Barry, rather than run-down bedsits and emphasised the need to address issues of anti-social behaviour which impacted the footfall on areas such as Holton Road as well as public perceptions of accessibility to shops within these areas. There was also a need for an arm's length marketing authority for Barry. The Head of Regeneration and Planning explained that the issues raised by the Councillor were being addressed, i.e., funding of £500,000 had been secured for new CCTV cameras in Holton Road in conjunction with South Wales Police to make the location safer. Also, a comprehensive events programme and marketing strategy had been undertaken by the Vale of Glamorgan Council in tandem with Barry Town Council for Christmas in order to encourage greater public attendance at Barry centre.
- Councillor Bailey stressed the need to break down the barriers between different town centres such as was seen with Holton Road and High Street and the need to encourage more small, independent, 'boutique' types of shops and quality flats on Holton Road.
- Councillor Morgan outlined the challenges faced by the Councils in trying to engage with local people around developing town centres and queried how consultations could be improved in order to improve engagement.
- In response to the issues raised by Councillors Bailey and Morgan, the Head of Regeneration and Planning explained that a 'Place Board' had been set up in Barry involving various interested parties such as traders from Holton Street and High Street, which was semi-independent from the Council and had helped to steer funding into areas such as signage and lighting for better way finding for the town centres. Relationships between the Council and traders on Holton Road and High Street had also improved, with barriers having been broken down.
- On the Chair's query on improving women's safety in town centres, particularly in connection with the night-time economy, the Head of Regeneration and Planning explained that the Vale's Community Safety Team had been working on schemes with South Wales Police and others in order to improve public safety such as securing funding for CCTV and an update on this could be brought to the Committee at a later date. Councillor Robertson added that as well as CCTV, more police foot patrols were needed in the town centres which would also increase public safety.

#### RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the key findings arising from Audit Wales' review of Town Centre Regeneration (Appendix A) and the Council's response to the review and Audit Wales' recommendations (Appendix B) be endorsed.
- (2) T H A T this report be referred to the Governance and Audit Committee and thereon to Cabinet for endorsement of the proposed actions to address the proposals for improvement.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To ensure the Council responds appropriately to local and national reviews and implements areas of improvement as identified by Audit Wales.