

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017/2018

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY, COMMUNITIES & PROSPERITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22ND MARCH 2018

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress made in advancing the portfolio responsibilities of the Cabinet Member.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members note and scrutinise the content of the report.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To challenge any arising matters or issues with the relevant Cabinet Member and to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On the 22nd January, 2018, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a report regarding the engagement of the Executive at future Scrutiny Committees going forward.
- 4.2 At the meeting Members agreed to receive Cabinet Members at future Scrutiny meetings on a quarterly basis to present relevant information relating to their portfolio areas, alongside the relevant Director.
- 4.3 Such an approach will provide Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to further challenge the Executive, as the Cabinet Members can provide details (both verbal and written) relating to the potential challenges facing the services, as well as the opportunities and policy changes currently being considered. This approach would allow each Cabinet Member the opportunity to update Scrutiny Members on the delivery of their respective areas of the Corporate Plan, reference Key Performance

Indicators and important details of policies being considered for future decisions, which are referenced for future business, or those which have been developed since the last publicised Work Programme.

5.0 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

5.1 The portfolio holds responsibility for a number of Performance Indicators related to the remit of the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Committee. These Indicators can be broadly categorized into three thematic categories – town centres, businesses and employment; and housing - which will be expanded upon to form the basis of this report.

5.2 It is intended that the performance data section of future engagement reports will be enhanced to include further content, and context, around applicable performance information to support these sessions. This will, therefore, improve the involvement of all members in the performance monitoring of key services.

6.0 TOWN CENTRES

6.1 The Council continues to demonstrate its ongoing and unequivocal commitment to provide long-term, sustainable support to local towns and businesses through a number of initiatives and programmes, including:

- Free or reduced car parking charges
- A comprehensive programme of events that run in individual town centres across the year, including the Big Welsh Bite, Aberdare Park Road Races and Christmas events across the majority of towns in the County Borough.
- The introduction of a Town Centre Maintenance Grant, aimed at improving the aesthetic appeal of shop fronts. This has been rolled out in Tonypany and Mountain Ash for the initial 2017/18 pilot.
- A Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, supported by the Welsh Government, that benefits around 60% of small businesses/enterprises in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- A programme of town centre improvements, delivered through the Council's Capital Programme, aimed at creating more vibrant and attractive town centres.
- Trader engagement across town centres to liaise with business in order to more appropriately understand their needs and provide support where necessary.

6.2 Pontypridd

6.2.1 The Council is continuing to invest strategically in Pontypridd, in recognition of the crucial role that the town can play in leading the County Borough forward via the £1.2bn Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, and a number of exciting projects are currently underway and planned to commence in the near future.

6.2.2 Work has continued to progress at pace in the delivery of the Council's flagship Taff Vale redevelopment, with ground works commencing on the 8th of January. The scheme was recently boosted by an announcement made on a recent visit by the Welsh Government's Housing and Regeneration Minister, Rebecca Evans AM, that

£10m has been awarded by the Welsh Government under the new £110m Building for the Future programme.

- 6.2.3 Further plans are in progress that will see the Council supporting external partners to redevelop both the former M&S site, delivered through the Vibrant and Viable Places programme; and the existing YMCA building, with both projects recently successfully obtaining planning permission. These schemes are bringing people to live and work in the town which will help to create a more diverse and sustainable future.
- 6.2.4 The town has seen a gradual increase in footfall year on year since 2011, with the town centre welcoming over 3m visitors in 2017 with over 70,000 visitors recorded during certain weeks. This increasing footfall is bucking the general high street trend witnessed across the UK. A positive impact on town centre vacancy rates has also been witnessed, with the January 2018 rate showing a vacancy level of 7.7%, which is an impressive 3.4% decrease from July 2016 and also better than the all-Wales rate of 13%, which has only improved by 1.1% since 2013.

6.3 Aberdare

- 6.3.1 Like Pontypridd, Aberdare has continued to perform better than the Wales average in terms of vacancy rates at 9.97%, whilst between the recorded period of 2014/15 to 2016/17, the town has also experienced a marked increase in the average number of weekly visitors (19,204 in 2015/16 to 23,465 in 2016/17). This increase has coincided with a sustained programme of investment into improving the visitor offer of town centre and surrounding areas.
- 6.3.2 The Council has effectively utilised a combination of funding streams, to facilitate the major redevelopment of the Boot Hotel, which will not only bring the historic building back into use, but will also crucially provide 12 new homes and create up to 20 new jobs, bringing new activity and residents into the town.
- 6.3.3 Major further investment in the wider Aberdare area has complemented the number of ongoing projects in the town centre, and has contributed greatly to increasing the visitor attraction on offer in the town, with £100,000 invested into the hugely popular Aberdare Park, which has included work to reinstate the boats back onto the lake and restorative work on the Coronation Fountain.

6.4 Tonypanyd

- 6.4.1 Council Members recently approved proposals for the 2018/19 budget which allocated £1.5m towards the progression of the pedestrianisation scheme in Tonypanyd through the Making Better Use programme. The proposals have been subject to an extensive consultation process with both business and residents, who have shown overwhelming support for the Council's plans.
- 6.4.2 Tonypanyd has also been one of the pilot towns for the Council's new Town Centre Maintenance Grant, which seeks to provide financial assistance to traders and landlords to conduct minor improvement and maintenance works to enhance the appearances of town centre property fronts. The initial scheme, funded by £50,000 of Council money, was also trialled in the Mountain Ash town centre retail area.

6.5 Mountain Ash, Treorchy and Porth

- 6.5.1 Town centre programmes are also being carried out in the above areas. Plans are progressing for a new £5m state-of-the-art health centre to be constructed in Mountain Ash town centre, supplanting the current and inadequate healthcare arrangements. Work is also continuing on the proposed delivery of a community hub in the town centre, that will see a range of Council services unified under one roof, thus enabling more streamlined access for residents and a more efficient use of Council property.
- 6.5.2 Council Cabinet Members will shortly be considering plans to progress the Phase 2 development of Porth Park and Ride. If approved, the proposals will take overall investment in the scheme to almost £3m, and will further enhance the potential of the site in capitalising on the opportunities offered by the City Deal as an integral part of the Rhondda Gateway Strategic Opportunity Area. Porth is also set to benefit from the recent announcement that £300m of additional capital funding is to be invested in the County Borough over the course of the next five years, with a portion of the £70m identified for Town Centre and Economic Regeneration reserved for the exploration of opportunities to invest in vacant buildings to create a mix of commercial, retail and housing solutions.
- 6.5.3 Plans are also being progressed in the vital improvement of highway infrastructure in Treorchy, particularly focused on the alleviation of the chronic congestion frequently witnessed in the Stag Square area. To this end, the aforementioned £300m investment has committed to creating a new Treorchy/Gelli bypass to improve commuter journeys throughout the Upper Rhondda Fawr area. The Council is also continuing to liaise with the Arts Council to explore the potential for the expansion of the Parc and Dare Theatre, which would greatly contribute to enhancing the already attractive cultural offer of Treorchy.

7.0 BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

- 7.1 As part of the wider, more concerted effort to support businesses and boost employment locally, the Council has undertaken a number of steps to make Rhondda Cynon Taf an attractive location for prospective companies, particularly in relation to Industrial Estates.
- 7.2 Earlier this year, the Council's Cabinet approved plans to introduce an innovative Local Development Order for Treforest Industrial Estate and Parc Nantgarw. The LDO permits the expansion and development of agreed areas of the Estates to be carried out without the need for planning permission by enabling new or relocating businesses to construct buildings up to six storeys high without the need for planning permission, whilst businesses already on the Estates may be allowed to expand by up to half of their original size. Having initiated the Treforest Growth Forum, the Council continues to work closely with partners to successfully increase collaboration between businesses, HE / FE, and other partners.
- 7.3 The formal adoption of the LDO in August 2017 looks to take advantage of the huge opportunities opened up to Rhondda Cynon Taf by the £1.2bn Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, and also satisfies the Council's own identification of five Strategic Opportunity Areas across the County Borough, with Treforest situated in the 'Wider

Pontypridd - Edge of the City, Heart of the Region area. The four other SOAs identified are:

- The Cynon Gateway - Energizing the Region
- Pontypridd Town - Pivotal in the Region
- A4119 Corridor: Regional Rhondda Gateway
- Llanilid on the M4: Driving the Regional Economy

7.4 Each of the areas identified have the potential to deliver significant levels of regional growth through both private and public sector investment, and the strategies outlined are dependent on the nature of the opportunity that exists, whether on a long or short term basis and the potential for private and public sector investment.

7.5 Further work is taking place to progress the strategic outline strategies for all of the other areas, with the plans for Pontypridd Town already outlined above. The Council has recently committed further funding to progress the key A4119 dualling scheme between Coed Ely and Ynysmaerdy, which is seen as crucial to the development of the Regional Rhondda Gateway; whilst funding has been successfully secured to deliver Industrial Units on the Coed Ely site. The Coed Ely Industrial Units follows on from the previous announcement that RCT had secured a significant amount of European Funding (£2.58m) to deliver modern business units in Robertstown, Aberdare. Crucially, this announcement mirrors the objectives of the Valleys Taskforce in energizing the Cynon Gateway.

8.0 HOUSING

8.1 The Council fully recognises the need for more homes to be delivered across the County Borough in order to meet the needs of residents, and housing at a greater level than in previous years, is being delivered right across our area. The Council continues to work hard and proactively to secure developments as part of the overarching objective of creating an attractive County Borough for the private sector to invest in, and for people to want to work and live in.

8.2 The Joint Housing Land Availability Study (2017) demonstrated that there was no 5 year land supply, with calculations suggesting that this was down to just 1.3 years. The indicator does not however, reflect the current reality, as the continued work with the housing sector in the delivery of developments is good.

8.3 The Council continues to push the progress of developments via mechanisms such as the Developer Forum and Strategy for Enabling Housing Development. It is recognised however there are considerable viability constraints in some areas and these issues have been researched in considerable detail to allow the Council to understand these issues and explore potential interventions.

8.4 Conversions of buildings are taking place in the north and south of the County Borough, with further projects completed in Aberdare and Pontypridd, creating 30 new units. The exciting aforementioned developments at the Boot Hotel, delivered through working with the private sector and Trivallis; and the former Marks & Spencer's site in Pontypridd, which makes use of the Welsh Government's Loan

scheme, will deliver further housing. The Council has made effective use of the VVP programme in Pontypridd, by delivering home efficiency improvements to 310 households.

- 8.5 The Council continues to look for new ways of utilising land and borrowing/lending to lever in private sector investment, and is also the lead on the City Deal Housing Theme, which looks to unlock the huge potential of undeveloped areas of land across the South East Wales Region.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Council is committed to investing in and supporting our town centres, as evidenced by the range of mechanisms in place to boost footfall and the respective local economies. Further investment is planned for 2018/19 and beyond in order to progress these ambitions and deliver the necessary improvements to town centres across the County Borough.
- 9.2 Additional work continues to be undertaken to support businesses in Industrial Estates and outside of town centres in order to realise the full potential the region has to offer in playing a key role in the transformative City Deal programme. Innovation continues to be at the forefront of the Council's considerations in making RCT an attractive and economically important area within the broader South East Wales region.
- 9.3 It is acknowledged that ample housing stock is a foundation for capitalising on economic growth, and firm steps are being taken to ensure that underdeveloped sites are unlocked and capitalised upon.