



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019/20

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 DECEMBER 2019

CABINET AND SCRUTINY ENGAGEMENT

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN
CONJUNCTION WITH COUNCILLOR R. BEVAN (CABINET MEMBER FOR
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING)**

Author: Simon Gale (Director of Prosperity and Development). Tel: 01443 281114

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 Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee. These Indicators can be broadly categorised into four thematic categories – town centres, businesses & employment, Planning and housing which will be expanded upon to form the basis of this report.
- 5.2 Key Service Priorities for 2019/20
- 5.2.1 **Modernise our town centres** – by building on their role as centres for social inclusion, local economic opportunity and the provision of services and recognising their changing role from retail centres to social destinations and helping them to adapt to changes in economic and customers' expectations.
- 5.2.2 **Improve the housing offer in RCT** – by ensuring that development happens in the right form in the right places, providing good quality housing options for our residents and for people locating to the area. We need to facilitate more choice for our residents and help people to self-build and help local companies have a greater share of the house building market. We need to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of targeted housing to meet the needs of those who cannot afford to access the housing market and those citizens that need more specialist housing to meet their specific needs.
- 5.2.3 **Develop the overall RCT economy** - by helping to create sustainable communities through access to economic opportunities and services and to increase employment through creating opportunities for investment projects and maximising the potential of the Metro.
- 5.2.4 **Strengthen the visitor economy** – by maximising the potential of our world class landscape, and heritage positioning RCT as a major 'experience' based destination as well as providing an attractive location for major events. By encouraging more visitors to RCT as a key player within the Valleys Regional Park.

5.2.5 **Being ready to deliver** – by ensuring that the service has the right structure, capacity, skills and tools to develop and lead on a suite of strategic projects alongside a large scale investment programme across a broad range of disciplines with high aspirations for success.

6.0 TOWN CENTRES

6.1 The Council continues to demonstrate its ongoing 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
- Continue to run key flagship Council run events
- The Council continues to administer the Town Centre Maintenance Grant Scheme aimed at improving the aesthetic appeal of shop fronts of town centre properties, contributing to a positive impact on the street scene.
- A programme of town centre improvements, delivered through the Council's Capital Programme, aimed at creating more vibrant and attractive town centres.
- A more focussed trader engagement across town centres to liaise with businesses with a results and outcome based approach in order to 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 Llys Cadwyn development and is a key component of the regeneration of Pontypridd town centre and will have a significant impact on growth in the Cardiff Capital Region. The delivery of this investment will provide a major boost to the town centre by developing a major site at a key gateway into the town, providing significant job opportunities, new facilities and services, an increase in footfall with subsequent opportunities for increasing spend in the town centre economy.

6.2.3 The successful delivery of the redevelopment will increase investor confidence in the Pontypridd area leading to further development opportunities resulting in a more vibrant and viable local economy and is on schedule to be completed during 2020.

6.2.4 Construction work for a new footbridge creating an important pedestrian link from the Llys Cadwyn development into Ynysangharad War Memorial Park is also well underway with completion due in 2020.

6.2.5 Plans are being developed for a Green Training Centre and the restoration of key heritage assets within Ynysangharad War Memorial Park which will enhance the learning and cultural offer to residents and visitors.

6.2.6 Funding has been awarded to Ynysangharad War Memorial Park via the Valleys Regional Park initiative for improvements to existing footpaths, uniform lighting along the full extent of the principal and secondary footpaths, including

the perimeter footpath and installation of a changing places facility within the Lido Visitor Centre.

- 6.2.7 The Council continues to work in partnership to deliver and develop schemes such as the former Marks and Spencer store, the former Bingo Hall and the YMCA in Pontypridd. These schemes are bringing people to live and work in the town which will help to create a more diverse and sustainable future.
- 6.2.8 The footfall figures for our town centres are under pressure with decreases compared with previous years although the rate of decrease in Pontypridd, Treorchy and Aberdare in particular is less than national trends and indicates a resilience and potential for improvement for the future.
- 6.2.9 Looking specifically at the key visitor attractions within RCT, it is evident that the popularity of these amongst visitors has increased with footfall rates improving in comparison to previous years.

The National Lido of Wales, Lido Ponty – 75065 (2017) and 75791 (2016)
The Welsh Mining Experience – 40307 (2017) and 34085 (2016)

6.3 Aberdare

- 6.3.1 Like Pontypridd, Aberdare has continued to perform better than the Wales average in terms of vacancy rates at 13% compared to 13.9%, whilst between the recorded period of 2017/18 and 2018/19, the town has also experienced a marked increase in the average number of weekly visitors (23,265 in 2017/18 to 41,536 in 2018/2019). 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 development of major job creation projects has continued over the last year which when completed will have significant job creation potential and further strengthen the local economy. These include the redevelopment of the former Boot and Black Lion Hotels and Exchange buildings in Aberdare along with further detailed design development for the provision of modern business units in Robertstown, close to Aberdare town centre. The major redevelopment of the Boot Hotel 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 The key flagship Council run events show an increase in attendance compared to previous years and this complements the ongoing projects in the town centre. In 2018, the attendance at the Aberdare Festival increased by 1632. The comprehensive programme of Council run events are held in our individual town centres across the year.
- 6.3.4 Close working relationships with the Aberdare town centre forums has resulted in successful applications for Welsh Government funding to develop proposals for a Business Improvement District.

6.4 Tonypandy, Mountain Ash, Treorchy and Porth

- 6.4.1 In 2017/18, the Town Centre Maintenance Grant was introduced in Mountain Ash and Tonypandy. Following the success of this initial pilot, in 2018 the Scheme was rolled out into Treorchy in 2018.
- 6.4.2 Like Aberdare, close working relationships with the town centre forum in Treorchy has resulted in a successful application for Welsh Government funding to develop proposals for a Business Improvement District.
- 6.4.3 The Porth Town Centre Regeneration Strategy has been developed and consulted upon with a suite of projects to be further developed and delivered including a Transport Hub and Station Quarter to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Metro initiative.

7.0 BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

- 7.1 The Council looks to take advantage of the huge opportunities opened up to the Borough by the £1.2bn Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, and also satisfies the Council's own identification of five Strategic Opportunity Areas (SOAs).
- The Wider Pontypridd, Treforest - Edge of the City, Heart of the Region
 - 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
- 7.2 The SOAs are all supported by outline strategies, which incorporate a wide range of short and longer-term activities that will be delivered in partnership with a number of individuals and organisations. They are linked by an ability to deliver significant economic growth and employment opportunities for Rhondda Cynon Taf and the region as a whole.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 The Council continues to work closely with the other ten South East Wales Councils to bring forward regional regeneration priorities for the new Welsh Government (WG) Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme. At the request of Welsh Government and the other Councils based on our skills and experience we are taking the lead on a region wide thematic project worth £13 million which will improve town centre properties for business and residential uses.
- 7.5 Performance of the delivery of business support services has been very strong in relation to grant support for businesses and social enterprises. In the 2018/19 financial year, 167 organisations were financially supported through

the Enterprise Support Programme, Welsh Church Act Fund, and the Town Centre Maintenance Grant. An investment of £793,359 was made and 67 new jobs were created as a result.

8.0 PLANNING

- 8.1 Over the year the service has dealt with some major schemes including commercial development providing new, modern manufacturing and business accommodation as well as some significant residential schemes. The Planning Applications team has also worked closely with colleagues in helping to support the Council's role out of 21st Century school projects and Extra Care facilities. The Council recognise that house building can have significant economic benefits. However, it is appreciated that housing delivery in the valleys continues to be challenging to achieve and in order to help secure a greater range of new housing choice in the northern strategy area officers are currently progressing a number of initiative projects, with an emphasis on trying to help and stimulate the potential for self-build projects.
- 8.2 RCT is playing a key role at both officer and Member level in engaging with neighbouring LPA's and other stakeholders in respect of wider strategic opportunities that could be delivered under the Cardiff Capital Region initiative. These include a central role in helping facilitate and deliver important infrastructure aspects of the South Wales Metro Core Valley Lines (CVL) project and promoting significant strategic development opportunity sites.
- 8.3 The Planning Service includes both the strategic planning and development management functions. Key is the continuing development and monitoring of the Council's planning policy and related initiatives. The Development Management service considers applications under the Planning Act and Building Regulations applying and enforcing the requirements of the Building Act to ensure the health and safety of people in and around buildings. The Service also undertakes activities such as urban design, enforcement, planning obligations, the conservation/protection of historic environments and dangerous structures.
- 8.4 The Service is responding to the Council's drive to shape and transform its delivery of services in the light of continuing reductions in external funding and pressures in demand. The commercialism work stream challenges service areas to highlight opportunities where the development and expansion of discretionary and chargeable services may be possible, both to existing and new clients, and thus contribute to the Council's overall budget position.
- 8.5 The Service during the year took the lead on the City Deal Housing work-stream (although the Service is now supporting the office of the City Deal in delivering this work stream) and at Director level heads a group of housing and planning officers from across the region and Welsh Government. The group is looking to develop potential areas of intervention through the City Deal and wider regional initiatives that will help unlock stalled sites, promote the expansion of the SME sector and increasing housing supply and promoting economic prosperity. The

Service has also worked closely, from inception, with Welsh Government in progressing the Self Build Wales initiative which seeks to give opportunity and make it easier for people to build their own houses in Wales, acknowledging the low proportion of self builds that are currently delivered to the market.

- 8.6 During 2018-2019, a total of 386 new dwellings were constructed in Rhondda Cynon Taf including 79 new affordable homes. This takes the total number of new dwellings constructed in the County Borough since 2006, (the technical start of the plan period), to 6,299. Applications for a further 514 dwellings were permitted through this past year, contributing to a total of 9,192 dwellings permitted since the adoption of the LDP in 2011. Whilst it is acknowledged that housing within the County Borough is being delivered, there has been a significant reduction in permissions and completions during the monitoring year. This is partly due to a lack of viable housing allocations remaining within the LDP, but could also be attributed to the recent slowing of the economy. There have further been a considerable number of windfall sites developed within the Northern Strategy Area within the monitoring year. These have predominantly consisted of former school sites and their contribution has seen the Northern Strategy Area outperform the Southern Strategy Area for the first time since the adoption of the LDP. The housing targets, as stipulated within the LDP, are not being delivered and housing within both strategy areas has not come forward as anticipated. The Council has however been proactive in seeking to ameliorate the situation with intervention methods including the unique Developer Forum, the Strategy for Enabling Housing Development paper and further work to identify the viability of our allocated sites and then identify methods of financial leveraging to enable their development.
- 8.7 The planning service processed 26 major applications within the year facilitating the delivery of some significant developments on the ground. The average time in determining these applications was 127 days, which was the 5th shortest period across Welsh LPAs. In addition there has been a significant improvement in the LPA's appeal success rate over the previous year. The 'good' performance of 67% compares with a performance of 50% in 2017/18
- 8.8 Within the coming year the Service will commence work on the preparation of a formal revision of the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP, with the completion of Review Report and Draft Delivery Agreement reports expected shortly

9.0 HOUSING

- 9.1 In 2018, the Joint Housing Land Availability Study demonstrated that there is a low housing land supply and 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.

- 9.2 The Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) (2017/18 – 2022/23) was approved by Cabinet on the 22nd March 2018. The assessment is a key source of evidence to support the delivery of housing policies in the Corporate Plan, Local Development and Housing Delivery Plan and is used to inform future delivery of services and areas for investment, for example in determining where social housing grant should be invested and developing specific projects to meet the needs of residents. A range of methods are used to develop the LHMA including an online survey, focus groups, citizens' panel, data analysis from a range of sources including housing waiting lists, Land Registry and CACI pay check data.
- 9.3 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 and has led on the development of a Housing Investment Fund for the city region.
- 9.4 The Council has been working in partnership with Welsh Government and Development Bank Wales on a 'Plot Shop' pilot. This concept is essentially a 'one stop shop' approach where a potential custom builder could access land, finance, architects plans, and planning and building regulations approval all in one go through a website to be known as a 'Plot Shop'. Once agreed, Welsh Government will use the RCT pilot to help launch the initiative on an all-Wales basis
- 9.5 During 2017-18, the Council further agreed a Facilitating Housing programme, to allow the loan or grant of funds to help facilitate the delivery of undeveloped Local Development Plan Housing allocations. Further detailed analysis of the sites was undertaken to identify the most suitable sites for development and funding. Owners and agents for the shortlist of sites were duly contacted through the spring of 2018, with meetings undertaken on many. This has raised interest and progressed several sites forward.
- 9.6 The Council's Local Housing Delivery Plan is developed in partnership with key stakeholders and housing organisations and the vision and strategic aims are agreed jointly. The Developer Forum continues to be hosted annually where private housebuilders, social rented landlords along with the Council meet several times a year to discuss their experiences in delivering houses, the barriers to this and possible solutions.

10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no negative, adverse equality or diversity implications associated with this report.

11.0 CONSULTATION

- 11.1 There are no consultation implications aligned to this report.

12.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

12.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

13.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

13.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

14.0 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / SIP / FUTURE GENERATIONS - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

14.1 **Places** -creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live.

14.2 **People** -promoting independence and positive lives for everyone.

14.3 **Economy** -building a strong economy.

15.0 CONCLUSION

15.1 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 2019/20 and beyond in order to progress these ambitions and deliver the necessary improvements to town centres across the County Borough.

15.2 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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16th DECEMBER 2019

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ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING)**

Item: 4

Officer to contact: Simon Gale