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## ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2020.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#)

Present: Councillor Ms. S. Sivagnanam (Vice-Chairman); Councillors, Mrs. P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, G. John, M.J.G. Morgan, A.R. Robertson and L.O. Rowlands.

Also present: Councillors L. Burnett (Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration), E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services) and Mrs. S.M. Hanks.

### 198 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 recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

### 199 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor Ms. B.E. Brooks (Chairman) and V.J. Bailey.

### 200 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 be approved as a correct record.

### 201 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

### 202 COVID BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANT (PRESENTATION) –

The Operational Manager for Exchequer Services and the Operational Manager for Regeneration jointly presented this to the Committee, which provided an update on the support provided to business during the pandemic.

Starting with Grants linked to Non-Domestic Rates during the First Lockdown, the Operational Manager for Exchequer Services explained that as part of the fiscal stimulus to support Welsh business during the pandemic, Welsh Government

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(WG) had introduced two non-repayable grants that were linked to non-domestic properties:

- A grant of £25,000 was available for businesses operating in retail, leisure and hospitality in areas such as shops, petrol stations, garden centres, estate agents, public houses and restaurants occupying properties with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £51,000; and
- A £10,000 grant was available to all businesses eligible for small business rates relief with a rateable value of £12,000 or less. The Grant was limited to a maximum of 2 grants per organisation. For example, if you had a business with a chain of shops within the Vale of Glamorgan, then they would qualify for £20,000 (2 x £10,000 grants).

The Grant scheme opened on the 20th March 2020 and closed on the 30th June 2020, with the Council receiving guidance on operating this scheme from WG on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The Council set up a process in order to progress these applications in a matter of days and made the first payments to businesses on 31<sup>st</sup> March totalling £3.7m. Further payments were made on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> April, totalling £10.9m. As a result, £14.6m was paid to businesses within the first two weeks of receiving guidance from WG. In total 2,061 grants were paid to local businesses for a total amount of £25.7m. The Council delivered the scheme exceptionally quickly, paying the vast majority of businesses within two weeks of receipt of their application. For those small number of businesses where payment was delayed, this was due to incomplete applications, discrepancies with the rating list or further guidance was required by WG.

The next scheme administered was the Non-Domestic Rates Relief covering retail, leisure and hospitality sector properties with a rateable value of £500,000 or below. This scheme provided a 100% discount for eligible businesses from their non-domestic rates bill. In total, 1,007 businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector had received full rates relief amounting to £10.4M.

As recently announced by WG, further grants for businesses paying non-domestic rates had been introduced in order for businesses to survive the economic consequences of the second, national, firebreak lockdown in Wales. Grants of £5,000 were now available for businesses within the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors that had properties with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £51,000 and were forced to close and a £1,000 grant available to all businesses eligible for small business rates relief (SBRR) with a rateable value of £12,000 or less (maximum of 2 per business) – which were described as Grants 1 and 2 respectively. In addition, there were ‘top-up’ grants available, dealing with those businesses that had seen a 50% reduction in turnover or were forced to close during the lockdown. This scheme had opened on the 28<sup>th</sup> October and would close on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Accompanying this, the Council had contacted the relevant businesses via letter and email in conjunction with a social media ‘countdown’ in order to encourage take up of these grants and an email to all Vale Councillors was sent in order to enlist their help in making local businesses aware. 1,293 Grants had been paid so far amounting to a total of £4M, with 212 business supported under Grant 1 and 1,081 businesses under Grant 2.

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In terms of the other grants, a number of these tried to capture those businesses that had originally 'fallen through the net'. These had been a collaborative effort between Welsh Local Authorities, Business Wales and Creative Wales, for example, where some Welsh Counties had grant money that could not be used locally, this was reallocated elsewhere in Wales; these included:

- Start-up Grants – for those businesses that could not qualify for self employed income support due to being relatively new enterprises and so not having the necessary accounting history. 82 such grants were approved with a lot of work undertaken by the Council in order to achieve this.
- Creative Freelancer Grants – co-designed with Creative Wales to support sectors that have not re-started such as makeup artists, media production and so on. It was noted that both the Cardiff and the Vale Counties were oversubscribed in terms of these grant applications. However, WG had agreed to fund the oversubscription through underspend from other parts of Wales. The next round will start on 23<sup>rd</sup> November.
- Discretionary Grants – this grant is for businesses that do not have rated premises or have fallen through several nets for whatever reason. Where businesses had applied to the wrong fund, they could be reallocated here and such applications were being reviewed in order to ensure eligibility. Businesses would need to declare an 80% fall in turnover such as driving instructors, tattoo artists or hairdressers who rent out a chair only at a salon. 63 such grants had been approved to date and despite oversubscriptions, individuals or businesses were still being allowed to apply and placed on a reserve list due to the potential of further WG funding as a result of reapportioning grants from elsewhere.
- WG Economic Resilience Funding (ERF). This was oversubscribed very quickly and WG are looking to provide a further round of funding, with Local Authorities helping to support businesses around their challenges applying for this. The funding aimed to add resilience to businesses such as new equipment, software and diversification.

Councillor John queried if there had been many applications for these grants from Llantwit Major, to which the Operational Manager for Regeneration said yes, there had been, as well as from other areas of the Vale, such as Penarth.

Councillor Robertson asked what the situation was with farms being offered assistance. The Operational Manager for Regeneration replied that a package for farms had been provided by WG but had not been administered by the Council, adding that he would find out more information for Councillor Robertson.

Councillor Sivagnanam queried whether businesses that were unsuccessful in applying to the grants mentioned were being offered advice by the Council and 'signposted' to other relevant areas for help. The Operational Manager for Regeneration replied that applicants were being kept 'on the books' and the Council had also identified businesses that had fallen through the cracks, such as the self-catering industry due to them not paying rates and this had been resolved by including them within the discretionary grant. He added that he could not think of many businesses that would now still be falling through the net. The Councillor

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also asked about the £500 for self-isolation due to Covid-19. The Operational Manager for Exchequer Services replied that this was being dealt with by the Benefits Team and was now on the Vale website for the public to apply for.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration wanted to draw members' attention to the total value of WG grants processed in the Vale which was £42.5m by the new joint Finance and Regeneration partnership which had undertaken a fast turnaround of these whilst carrying on with their day to day work. This was done in tandem with offering other help and advice to businesses such as helping to improve their business models and feeding back any issues with the grant systems to WG in order to improve the process. The Cabinet Member wanted to offer their thanks for the tremendous work done by the teams concerned.

Councillor Driscoll asked if records and surveys were being kept by the Council on grant applicants so if further lockdowns occurred such assistance would focus on those businesses most in need. The Operational Manager for Regeneration stated it had been difficult to judge at the beginning what businesses would struggle during the pandemic, for example, public houses initially struggled but then diversified, such as providing takeaway meals, which also highlighted the rationale behind the ERF grant that also encouraged such diversification. The rates grant(s) at the beginning of the pandemic helped to keep businesses afloat during lockdown and furlough and the newer grants were more nuanced or specific, for example, for the Discretionary Grant businesses had to show an 80% drop in turnover compared to last year. Businesses had also reinvested grant funding originally intended to keep them afloat into new equipment, and so on, and had not required additional funding as a result. He added that the grant system had also helped to build up resilience into the local economy and employment.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the presentation be noted.

Reason for recommendation

To note the presentation.

203 VALE OF GLAMORGAN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2026:  
ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2019/20 (REF) –

Cabinet, on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020, had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The Head of Regeneration and Planning presented the report explaining that the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) was an annual requirement but due to the pandemic, the WG had advised this need not be done for the current year. However, due to its usefulness the Council had decided to produce the report anyway and as the review of the Local development Plan (LDP) would start before the next AMR the report would be useful to flag up that the Plan was on target before the next review of the Plan was undertaken.

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The Head of Regeneration and Planning outlined the key points to note from the report, which were:

- Out of the 61 performance indicators, 59 required no further action and were therefore 'green', 2 required further investigation, with the remainder considered to be proceeding in accordance with the LDP.
- With regard to Housing, the Council was ahead of target for 2020 (LDP).
- However, the Council was slightly behind in terms of employment land, but this was being looked at and was hard to measure at this time due to it being only half way through the period of the Plan, as well as the ongoing impact of Covid-19. These factors would be built into the next review of the Plan.
- This AMR had not triggered an early review of the Plan.

Councillor Robertson wished to ask about the impending LDP review, on how thoroughgoing this would be and what opportunity would there be to make changes to the LDP such as new infrastructure projects and what affect or impact could Councillors make here. The Head of Regeneration and Planning replied that the review of the LDP had to be undertaken by law, 4 years after adoption, with the scope of the review dependant on the current performance of the Plan and therefore focusing on the areas where the Plan maybe failing. To take the example of infrastructure, if the proposals for these were not going to be met or new developments arose within the Plan then these would have to be reassessed and new requirements made. Councillors could affect changes but only within the auspices of the Plan, with consultations undertaken through a 'mini-LDP' type process with all consultees such as Councillors, residents and local Community Councils. Furthermore, the review of the Plan next year would include a review of its constituent parts and any areas that needed further review and consultation would be picked out and this is where Councillors could get involved.

Councillor John asked about the LDP Sustainability Objectives such as 'to minimise the causes and manage the effects of climate change' and 'to protect and enhance the built and natural environment' and what the position was on these, as well as asking what the objective of promoting 'appropriate tourism' meant. The Head of Regeneration and Planning stated that the majority of these targets were continuous and therefore would not be fully met as such. 'Appropriate tourism' included areas such as the conversion of redundant farm buildings to holiday accommodation or agricultural diversification to allow tourism on farm land and conversely, under the LDP criteria other aspects of tourism were deemed inappropriate such as any proposal to develop static caravan sites on the Heritage Coast.

There being no further questions, the Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and Cabinet report, subsequently

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the LDP AMR, after being referred to the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for its consideration be noted and that Scrutiny had no additional comments to make.

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Reason for recommendation

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

204 VALE OF GALMORGAN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2026: BRO TAHAN Y PORTH DRAFT DEVELOPMENT BRIEF PUBLIC CONSULTATION (REF) –

Cabinet, on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020, had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

The Head of Regeneration and Planning explained that this related to a development brief – also known as a supplementary planning guidance – for the development of a gateway site within the St Athan Enterprise Zone (Bro Tathan). Furthermore, the report outlined this brief as consisting of a clear set of principles for the development of the site in question and a starting point for Developers in terms of applications and to provide a framework to assess any such applications that come forward.

The White Young Green Group had prepared the development brief in conjunction with the Council for the Welsh Government. This deals with the entrance to the zone facing St Athan where the new junction would be created, following both sides of the road as you come into the new Enterprise Zone. This was a small but key area for development as it formed the entrance to the main zone and ‘set the scene’ for the rest of the site (near to the Aston Martin site) and therefore required higher quality design and development.

The site was suggesting that a hotel be built on the zone as well with some limited retail use, with the majority of the site being allocated to offices and businesses. The background and history of the site had been looked at as well in order to allocate suitable businesses, and so on.

This report formed part of the consultation process, also including Town and Community Councils with other interested parties and the comments received from all parties (with any suggested changes) would be reported back to Cabinet once the process was over.

Councillor John stated that members of Llantwit Major Council had previously gone to a meeting about the site – organised by David George – due to the site falling under the Llantwit Major Council ward. He was keen that the site be developed due to the potential employment opportunities for the Western Vale which had previously been seen when the RAF had been sited there. He was disappointed that Llantwit Major Council had not been invited to further meetings of the advisory group set up there and asked the Head of Regeneration and Planning to pass his request for representation to David George. Councillor John was impressed with the development brief and hoped it would continue to be moved forward. He also asked about the public art that had been put on the brief and if this would be further discussed and reviewed, which was echoed by Councillor Drake. The Head of Regeneration and Planning replied that the consultation group that Councillor John referred to had been set up by the Welsh

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Government and its consultants but this was not specifically for the gateway development but rather for the wider development of the Enterprise Zone. The Council did not have direct contact with this group but did interact with David George via the Regeneration and Economic Development Team and he would mention to David George that Llantwit Major Council should be included in the consultation group. The proposed public art was only a suggestion at this time and would be subject to a separate consultation with interested parties once any planning application was received.

Councillor Robertson asked in light of the growing opposition towards the Junction 34 road development, if this road development was subsequently dropped what the impact would be on the development for Bro Tathan. The Head of Regeneration and Planning replied that the site had been under development and contained within the LDP long before the proposed Junction 34 road link and the site had been through a traffic assessment previously in order to tackle any potential pressures with increased transport due to the growth in employment, by utilising other alleviating measures, for example the use of sustainable transport (electric powered buses and so on) meaning that the Junction 34 link road was not required for this development.

There being no further questions, Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and Cabinet report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the report and development brief be noted and that Scrutiny had no additional comments to make.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and development brief as well as the discussions at the meeting.