

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	18 th April 2023
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Service Area	Regeneration & Public Protection
Committee Date	2 nd May 2023

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Night-Time Economy

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Regeneration, Housing & Public Protection (inc. Crime & Disorder) Scrutiny have requested a report which will provide an overview of the priorities and progress made in relation to the night-time economy of Merthyr Tydfil since the previous Scrutiny report in 2020.
- 1.2 A joint report has been made between Public Protection and Regeneration outlining key aspects of the night-time economy and the work undertaken to date and the proposals to develop further.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 2.1 Scrutiny to receive this report and consider its content.
- 2.2 Scrutiny to offer any recommendations/feedback/observations to support the officers with future planning (where appropriate)

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In March 2020, a report was presented to Scrutiny with plans on the development of the Town Centre Evening economy.
- 3.2 Scrutiny have requested a follow-up report to review current arrangements relating to night-time economy with the County Borough and how it impacts on services/departments whilst considering public views on the arrangements. This will allow Members to provide critical friend challenge and explore opportunities for improvement.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

Public Protection

- 4.1 Following presentation of the previous report, Members will be aware that the Covid-19 pandemic hit the United Kingdom resulting in restrictions and lockdowns on business and completely changing the focus of Public Protection Services.
- 4.2 Funding had been found to upgrade CCTV cameras in the Town Centre, however, pro-active Policing of normal night-time economy work was stood down.
- 4.3 Throughout the pandemic, Public Protection Services took on a supporting role for business and set up dedicated Facebook channels for business along with online seminars to assist businesses operating under tightly controlled restrictions.
- 4.4 Efficiency savings were proposed with a view to a reduction in manned coverage of our CCTV service.
- 4.5 CCTV was restricted to static based cameras.

Regeneration

- 4.6 Within the last report it was identified that an Evening Economy Board has been established to develop a 'Merthyr After Dark' Strategy and that the intention was to work towards Purple Flag status that provides national recognition for a varied and safe night-time economy.
- 4.7 The Report also identified the new Merthyr Tydfil Strategic Valley Hub Placemaking Plan 2019-2035 and the opportunity to further enhance evening economy, diversify the economic base and further develop opportunities for Merthyr Tydfil to become a regional destination for shopping, business and leisure.
- 4.8 The Town Centre Support Officer referenced in the previous report remains a first point of contact for businesses and co-ordinates responses to any issues, works closely with the businesses to identify needs, works in partnership with the BID and St. Tydfil's Shopping Centre Team to provide support and also, provides support for event management and delivery.
- 4.9 It was reported in 2020 that the Town Centre function had been incorporated into Strategic Regeneration which had impacted on the progression of the Strategy, due to existing priorities and the key focus would be to re-establish the Partnership.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

Public Protection

- 5.1 The CCTV infrastructure in the Town Centre has been completely upgraded with new hi spec cameras. The control room has been upgraded to benefit operators manning the system.

- 5.2 The efficiencies proposed on reduction of CCTV operators was not pursued and the control room remained manned. In addition to Corporate resources, the Home Office Safer Streets Grant enabled us to upgrade mobile CCTV coverage with a bespoke CCTV vehicle and mobile deployable cameras.
- 5.3 A new CCTV database has been developed which allows data analysis on hotspot locations and crime trends. A quarterly report is provided to Corporate Leadership Team. Our CCTV footage has been used to assist South Wales Police on a number of incidents occurring in the night-time economy.
- 5.4 Since the launch of the new system in August 2022, the following provides a breakdown of CCTV statistics –
- 5.4.1 Over 944 incidents recorded.
 - 5.4.2 76% of incidents identified from our officers proactive viewing.
 - 5.4.3 Over 436 incidents reported to Police from our proactive viewing.
 - 5.4.4 67 downloads provided to partners for evidential purposes.
 - 5.4.5 CCTV assistance provided to Trading Standard and Licensing operation work.
- 5.5 Through the Governments Levelling Up Funding additional resources have been allocated to extend the number of hours that our CCTV control room is manned. These additional hours will be focusing on the late-night economy.
- 5.6 Following the end of Covid restrictions, part of the Licensing Department's service delivery plan for 2022/23 was to begin a programme of inspections at licensed premises. In the last financial year, 44 businesses were inspected. Only 3 businesses were found to be fully compliant. 14 were found to have 1 minor non-compliances. The remaining 27 were found to have multiple non-compliances. 30 businesses have been brought into compliance and work is ongoing with the remainder.
- 5.7 Two test purchase operations were carried out in relation to the sale of alcohol to under 18s. In May 2022, 8 shops were visited and two sales of alcohol were made to our underage volunteer. Subsequent investigations showed that one business had sufficient due diligence in place and they were issued with a warning. The other business submitted an application to add conditions to their licence to ensure a more robust process was in place. In February 2023, 8 shops were visited and two sales of alcohol were made to our underage volunteer. Investigations are currently ongoing with those two businesses.

Regeneration

- 5.8 The Merthyr Tydfil Strategic Valley Hub Placemaking Plan 2019-2035 was adopted by Full Council in September 2020.
- 5.9 The priority for the Strategic Regeneration Team in 2021, was to re-establish the Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Partnership ensuring it was fit for purpose, had the right membership and aligned to the Merthyr Tydfil Placemaking Plan. The Partnership was re-established in January 2021 and the priority for the Partnership over the past two years was to understand the Placemaking Plan opportunities, development being led by key stakeholders and to enhance engagement with the private sector.

- 5.10 A Private Sector Forum was established in March 2023, with the key purpose being to identify and understand any risks and issues from a private sector perspective to improve both the day-time and evening-economy, to encourage partnership working, for the representatives on the forum to become ambassadors for the Town and to discuss any new development/inward investment opportunities.
- 5.11 As the priority over the previous two years was to re-establish the Town Centre Partnership and create the Private Sector Forum, the 'Merthyr After Dark' Strategy has not been progressed further. This will be the priority for the Partnership for the remainder of the year – to review the Strategy and consider Purple Flag Status.
- 5.12 The Town Centre Support Officer provided a significant amount of support to businesses through the pandemic (ensuring provision of PPE, supporting operations and grant management), provides event support and delivers events to enhance the local economy, leads on all Town Centre consultations aligned to Placemaking Plan delivery and provides general day to day support. The event component has been a significant part of the role for the past two years, along with the general business support and consultations, therefore resources to progress with the 'Merthyr After Dark' Strategy and Purple Flag status have been limited. A Strategic Events Officer will be appointed in summer 2023, which will allow additional resources for the strategy to become a key focus.
- 5.13 Enterprise support is a key part of the evening economy development and over the past three years significant financial and officer support has been provided to businesses to further enhance the evening economy and attract high profile inward investors into Merthyr Tydfil, which has had a positive impact on the Town Centre. The developments have helped towards reducing the number of vacant properties, increased footfall and improved the perception of the Town Centre.
- 5.14 The Mine at CF47 and Castelany's officially opened in Pontmorlais on 3rd December 2021, and the transformative project was made possible by an investment from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and its Meanwhile Scheme – which supports new enterprises to open premises in vacant buildings in the Town Centre. Additional funding was received from the Townscape Heritage Scheme, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Cadw and WG's Targeted Regeneration Investment Fund. The Mine at CF47 and Castelany's both reside on the top floor of a formerly derelict building in Bowen's Court – with the ground floor playing host to an Italian tapas bar, wine bar and music venue. It has been a success since opening attracting large numbers of customers.
- 5.15 The Milbourne Chambers building is a well-known site in Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre – with its recognisable clock tower and central location and Casa Bianca is the first eatery to occupy the space. The new venture was made possible by an investment from the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Placemaking Scheme and by the business owner's own investment. Restaurateur Andreas Christou initially made contact with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to explore the possibility of bringing a restaurant to Merthyr Tydfil. The Abergavenny and Monmouth restaurants were already thriving and with much of his customer base travelling from Merthyr Tydfil, Andreas saw an opportunity to expand. Casa Bianca has been extremely popular since opening and is fully booked every night.

- 5.16 Support was also provided to Walts and the Cocktail Club and the Enterprise and Regeneration Teams are continuing to identify further projects for delivery such as Woodfired and Scala – in which initial discussions are being held to potentially progress with capital works and allow these premises to re-open.
- 5.17 Howfields will be the next building to open. RWP Properties are currently re-developing the former Howfields building, creating 9 boutique hotel rooms, 13 self-contained flats and two commercial units on the ground floor. RWP Properties has secured Haystacks as a tenant and the lease was signed in March 2023. Funding has been secured by the tenant through MTCBC Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Programme. It is anticipated the project will be complete by June 2023. This will create an exciting new opportunity at the lower end of the High Street and its opening is greatly anticipated.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Public Protection

- 6.1 Continue to provide a proactive manned CCTV Service and utilise the additional funding to recruit additional officers.
- 6.2 Utilise the improved data recording of incidents to make intelligence led decisions and analysis data to establish trends.
- 6.3 Continue to provide CCTV evidence to law enforcement partners to pursue and prosecute offenders where appropriate.
- 6.4 Integrate the work of CCTV into other services within the Local Authority.
- 6.5 Continue a programme of operations and inspections at late-night venues to ensure Licensing conditions are met.
- 6.6 Continue our work on underage sales protecting those most vulnerable.
- 6.7 Provide guidance and best practice to licensees via seminars and forums such as Pubwatch.
- 6.8 New taxi ranks specifically for the late-night economy.
- 6.9 We are hoping to strengthen our working relationship with South Wales Police Traffic to carry out more joint taxi check operations and tackle the illegal drivers/vehicles operating within the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough.

Regeneration

- 6.10 An improved events programme for Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre with additional resource to support delivery.
- 6.11 An improved offer for the evening economy creating a diverse range of businesses.

- 6.12 Adopt a ‘Merthyr After Dark’ Strategy for Merthyr developed by the Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Partnership on which key representatives sit such as Public Protection and South Wales Police.
- 6.13 That Merthyr Tydfil is nationally recognised as a safe, secure environment with a rich mix of entertainment and activity for all by securing Purple Flag recognition.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

Public Protection

- 7.1 Appoint CCTV staff specifically for the late-night economy and look at longer term growth to keep these posts.
- 7.2 Continue to develop analytical tools to respond to trends identified via CCTV.
- 7.3 Agree priority areas with Policing partners and implement operations into the night-time economy.

Regeneration

- 7.4 Appoint a Strategic Events Officer.
- 7.5 Revisit the ‘Merthyr After Dark’ Strategy and Purple Flag accreditation.
- 7.6 Work with inward investors and developers to further enhance the evening economy.
- 7.7 Continuation of business support to existing and new businesses.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 Public Protection, Community Safety and Regeneration duties contributes to the ‘Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil’ objective and uses sustainable development priorities.

**DIRECTOR/CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S NAME
TITLE**

**PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR’S NAME
PORTFOLIO TITLE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
List the Background documents which have been relied on in preparing the report. E.g. previous minutes of relevant committees		
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council’s Constitution?		