

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 27TH FEBRUARY, 2020**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. WILKINS (CHAIR)**

Councillors C. Meredith (Vice-Chair)  
M. Cook  
G. L. Davies  
L. Elias  
S. Healy  
W. Hodgins  
J. P. Morgan  
B. Summers  
L. Winnett

**WITH:** Head of Community Services  
Service Manager Community Services  
Service Manager Public Protection  
Team Manager Natural Environment  
Team Manager Leisure & Streetscene  
Specialist Environmental Health Officer – Commercial Team  
Marketing Projects Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received for Councillors G. Paulsen, H. McCarthy and T. Sharrem.</p> <p><b><u>APPRECIATION</u></b></p> <p>The Chair took to the opportunity to thank all staff within the relevant Teams for their work in dealing with the flooding in the Borough over the weekend, and also extended thanks to Tai Calon for their support.</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 were submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p>A Member referred to the second paragraph on page 8 of the minutes and pointed out that only parts of Parc Bryn Bach was dedicated a SINC area and not the whole park.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 16TH JANUARY 2020</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>EXECUTIVE DECISION SHEET</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Executive Decision Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Executive Decision Sheet be noted.</p>	

No. 7	<p data-bbox="209 241 1326 409"><b><u>WALES AUDIT OFFICE: WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS - IMPROVING ACCESS TO, AND THE QUALITY OF OPEN SPACES FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR COMMUNITIES, BUSINESSES AND VISITORS</u></b></p> <p data-bbox="209 454 1326 533">Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Natural Environment.</p> <p data-bbox="209 584 1326 752">The Team Manager presented the report WAO report which covered the 2019-2020 audit year. The report considered how the Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle public bodies must take account of.</p> <p data-bbox="209 797 1326 1055">He reported that WAO found that ‘The Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle; it collaborates well with others, but lacks a clear long-term, joined-up plan’. WAO identified areas for improvement, and the management response made by the Council in response to these proposals for improvement was attached at Appendix 2.</p> <p data-bbox="209 1099 1326 1480">The WAO Officer said the purpose of the audit was to ensure that the Council was applying the Five Ways of Working as defined in the Welsh Government’s Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of the sustainable development principle in improving access to, and the quality of open spaces for the benefit of the community, businesses and visitors. The Officer reported that workshops had been held with various Members of the Council and partners to explore how they are starting to embed the five ways of working.</p> <p data-bbox="209 1525 1326 1648">The Team Leader Natural Environment said the Management Response recognised that this was a Council objective and all Departments had a role to play.</p> <p data-bbox="209 1693 1326 1861">A Member asked whether there was money set aside within the budget to undertake future maintenance of the Borough’s opens spaces as many were overgrown and there was no money available within the budget to undertake any works.</p> <p data-bbox="209 1906 1326 2074">The Officer confirmed that two funding bids had been submitted under the Welsh Government Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing scheme, designed to tackle specific issues of biodiversity and development of a Gwent Green Grid Partnership.</p>	

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Part of the funding had been successful, and a decision on the larger project was awaited. The funding available was significant and the objectives were specific to cover a much wider area and collaboration with other LA's was key. There were also other funding elements being explored around flood risk management and active travel.

He agreed that for many years the Authority had spent capital monies on reclaiming land etc., but this was very much about managing our existing assets. In terms of collaboration, he confirmed that there were many community groups coming on board who were very interested in protecting the open spaces within their areas, and work was also being undertaken with other Departments to tap into other funding elements.

The Member then referred to page 28 of the WAO report and expressed concern that the Council had yet to assess the impact of the toolkit in preventing anti-social behaviour in the Borough's upland area, and asked when

The Member then referred to page 28 of the WAO report and asked when Members could expect reports on the Council's assessment of the impact of the South East Wales Uplands Landscape Crime Toolkit.

In response the Officer said the Toolkit was developed to address problems of fly tipping and illegal off-road driving. Off-road driving was a problem throughout the Borough, it was a criminal offence and should be managed by the Police.

In terms of the Council's efforts to prevent off-road driving, repairs to fencing was being undertaken and improvements where necessary, however, within weeks of repairs being undertaken the fences were being cut again and there was only a limited amount of resources available.

The Chair requested an update on the South East Wales Uplands Landscape Crime toolkit, and the Team Manager Leisure & Streetscene undertook to provide a report to a future meeting of the Committee.

In response to a question raised regarding the timelines detailed in the Management Response the Officer said these had been included in order to monitor a number of funding opportunities but would become more realistic when funding was in place.

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A Member referred to the Local Air Quality Report in the Information Pack, in particular monitoring of air quality at a number of Primary Schools within the Borough, and the Chair confirmed that this would be brought back to Committee in due course.

The Committee therefore AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the WAO review be accepted and actions to implement the proposals for improvement (Option 1).

**No. 8**

**WALES AUDIT OFFICE: DELIVERING WITH LESS - ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FOLLOW-UP REVIEW - NOVEMBER 2019**

Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Public Protection.

The Team Manager Public Protection presented the report which informed Members of the Wales Audit Office – Delivering with Less – Environmental Health follow-up review. The WAO report was attached at Appendix 1 and included the Authority's Management Response to the proposals for further improvement.

The WAO Officer confirmed that a National follow-up review was undertaken last year, and visits were made to the majority of Councils to assess what had changed since the initial study, in terms of changes to budgets and staffing within the Council's environmental health services, and how it had addressed the recommendations for improvement included in the 2014 national report.

In conclusion WAO found that 'The Council has made progress in addressing the recommendations raised in 2014. Collaborative working with Torfaen CBC to date has contributed to the Council's ability to deliver with less. Following the withdrawal from the arrangement in November 2019 the Council will face additional financial and operational pressures that may affect its ability to continue providing environmental health services to the same standard.'

The Team Manager Public Protection then went through the Management Response attached to the report, and highlighted points contained therein.

A Member referred to page 57 of the report, and asked the reasons why the Council were making limited use of technology and ICT in service delivery.

In response the Team Manager explained that this was an area for improvement within the action plan. The Council was looking at using digital intelligence to predict future patterns of service delivery, and inform decision making around service provision. This would take time and investment to achieve but significant improvement had been made but more was needed.

The Member asked whether there were any capacity issues within the service, and the Officer explained that there had been some growth in demand on the service area, and service cuts had resulted in a reduction in management which had impacted on the coordination and planning of future service improvements.

Another Member asked whether the work being undertaken to bring empty properties back into use would be better placed within the Regeneration Section.

In response the Officer said they worked very closely with the Regeneration Department, but the drive came from Public Protection in terms of enforcement issues and housing related work. There were two Officers within the Section whose main area of work was providing property owners with advice on a range of options, and also processing the empty property loan scheme, and the Officer confirmed that the Authority has an excellent record of bringing homes back into use.

In response to a further question regarding the previous collaboration arrangements with Torfaen, the Officer confirmed that the request to withdraw from the arrangement came from Torfaen CBC.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Scrutiny Committee support the Officer's response to the WAOs recommended proposals.

**No. 9**

**FOOD HYGIENE RATING SCHEME FOCUSED AUDIT**

Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Public Protection.

The Specialist Environmental Health Officer presented the report which provided an update of the findings of the focussed audit of the implementation and operation of the statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme within Blaenau Gwent, carried out by the Food Standards Agency.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the timescales detailed in Appendix 2 the Officer said the majority of the actions were significantly progressed but not fully completed. The Officer said they were in the process of being finalised and assured that they would be completed in the coming weeks.

A Member asked that confirmation of completion of the actions be provided at the next meeting.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the contents of the report and Appendices be recommended for approval to the Executive Committee (Option 1).

**No. 10**

**ACTIVITIES REPORT - PEST CONTROL TREATMENT SERVICE UP TO DECEMBER 2019**

Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Public Protection.

The Service Manager Public Protection presented the report which provided an update on the pest control treatment service currently operated by Rentokil. Appendix 2 of the report outlined the service demand data currently available for 2018/19 and 2019/20 up to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2019.

A Member referred to Appendix 2 and suggested that the figures for the previous year be included in order to identify trends etc. The Officer confirmed that this would be considered moving forward.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted (Option 2).

**No. 11**

**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 30TH APRIL 2020**

Consideration was given to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled for the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2020.

The Scrutiny Officer clarified points raised by a Member in relation to the Highways Capital Works Programme 2019/20 Update report.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the Bridging the Gap – Trade Waste Services the Service Manager Community Services confirmed that consultation had been undertaken with schools and businesses, and a report would be submitted in due course.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted.

Councillor G. Davies left the meeting at this juncture.

**No. 12**

**CEMETERY BURIAL CAPACITY**

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Leisure & Street Scene.

At the invitation of the Chair the Officer presented the report which informed Members of the burial capacity remaining within Council run cemeteries across the Borough, and options to establish a medium to long term approach to cemetery provision in Blaenau Gwent.

The Officer went through the report in detail and highlighted points contained therein.

A lengthy discussion ensued when Members expressed concern regarding the delay in submission of the report. Also discussed at length was funding and options to extend cemeteries, including possible land acquisitions.



In terms of the land needed to extend cemeteries, the Officer explained that any land removed from Common would have to be replaced for inclusion in Common, and this may or may not be in Council ownership. He confirmed that the Estates Section were considering land options.

A Member referred to the very detailed work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group and suggested that this be reconvened to look at capacity within the cemeteries and options moving forward.

In response the Officer said the Task and Finish Group considered issues around infrastructure etc., following which capital monies was made available over the next 3 years to undertake works. The Officer said reprioritising this funding could be an option.

A Member asked regarding the possibility of Welsh Government funding or whether Prudential Borrowing would be an option.

In response the Head of Community Services said a review of reallocation of surplus capital funding had been undertaken, and it was agreed that any potential schemes would be considered against a priority matrix. However, capital monies had already been allocated and it may be necessary to shift the focus of this money and revisit the capital budget for other works in the future. In relation to Prudential Borrowing, this was applied on a 'spend to save' basis, so it was unlikely to be applied in this instance.

The Officer said Option 2 would enable a more detailed feasibility appraisal to be undertaken, including costs and land options, and report the outcomes back to Committee.

A further discussion ensued regarding consultation with Tredegar Members, when the Team Manager Leisure & Street Scene said it was intended to brief Tredegar Members prior to this meeting, but this had been impeded by the recent events in the Borough. He confirmed that this would be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

The Committee AGREED that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and Option 2 be supported, namely:

- i. That a more detailed feasibility appraisal, including costs and land options at cemeteries with limited burial capacity be

	undertaken. This relates to cemeteries with identified capacity of less than 20 years; and	
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|  | ii. Consideration be given to investigate the feasibility of amalgamating the two cemeteries identified as priority 1 and 2 areas and under the greatest pressure for burial capacity. |  |
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