

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5TH DECEMBER, 2019**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER**

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PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. WILKINS (CHAIR)

Councillors C. Meredith (Vice-Chair)  
L. Elias  
S. Healy  
W. Hodgins  
H. McCarthy  
B. Summers

WITH: Richard Crook, Corporate Director  
Regeneration and Community Services  
Clive Rogers, Head of Community Services  
Matthew Perry, Service Manager  
Dave Thompson, Head of Public Protection  
Liz Thomas, Scrutiny Officer  
Sean Scannell, Press Officer

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.	
No. 2	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  Apologies for absence were received for Councillors G.L. Davies, J. Holt and G. Paulsen.	

<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillor J. Wilkins (Chair) declared an interest in the following item:</p> <p>Item No. 6 – Bridging the Gap – Trade Waste Service – Strategic Business Review</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 11TH NOVEMBER, 2019</u></b></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 11TH NOVEMBER 2019</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><i><u>The Strategic Business Case – Development of a Second Household Waste Recycling Centre</u></i></p> <p>The Chair said it was intended that a report be submitted to the Special Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2019. In relation to the request for a Joint Committee, she said at this stage she had taken the decision to remain with a Special Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, and this decision was based on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If a Joint Committee was held, only those Members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee would have voting rights;</li> <li>• The Ebbw Fach Valley was very well represented on the Scrutiny Committee;</li> <li>• She did not want to undermine the work of the Scrutiny Committee, and this matter sits clearly within the remit of the Committee; and finally</li> <li>• The Scrutiny Committee makes a recommendation not a</li> </ul>	

decision.

Activities Report – Littering and Dog Control Order Enforcement for the Financial Year

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding pest control, the Officer confirmed that the contractor had changed and the new details would be circulated to Members. The Council's website had been updated.

Item Referred from the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

The Chair confirmed that this matter would be included within the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.

No. 6

**BRIDGING THE GAP - TRADE WASTE SERVICE - STRATEGIC BUSINESS REVIEW**

Councillor J. Wilkins (Chair) declared an interest in this item.

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

The Team Leader Waste & Fleet Management presented the report which provided an update on progress of the Trade Waste Service Strategic Business Review, and also provided options in relation to the revised pricing strategy for implementation in April 2020.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding funding of the proposed increase in receptacles to customers, the Officer confirmed that this had been factored into the budget, and some had already been procured.

A Member asked whether there was any benchmarking information available to compare costs with the private sector.

The Officer said it was difficult to compare with the private sector as their costs were commercially confidential. They were able to offer prices on an ad hoc basis, whilst our prices were set and published.

The Service Manager Community Services said one of the requirements of the new Environment Act coming into force next year was that the public sector and the private sector would have to separate the trade waste collected. This placed the Local Authority in a positive position as we were already doing this, whereas the private sector operated a co-mingled collection.

A Member then referred to Appendix 6 and expressed concern regarding the response to the on-line customer survey.

The Team Leader Waste & Fleet Management agreed that the response was disappointing, however, the survey had not been undertaken for a number of years. He said a new Officer had recently been appointed within the section, and part of that role was to go out and engage with businesses and our customers.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted the introduction of a revised pricing strategy for commercial dry recycling, food recycling and residual collections be supported (Option 2).

**No. 7** **BRIDGING THE GAP - ASSETS AND PROPERTY STRATEGIC BUSINESS REVIEW**

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

The Corporate Director presented the report which sought Members' views on the proposals identified as part of the review of the Council's property and land holdings. The review included all Council owned properties and land, and all property used by the Council on a lease/rental basis. He confirmed that the industrial property portfolio would be covered in a separate review.

A Member referred to Table 2 on page 33 of the report and questioned the figure relating to Anvil Court. He also expressed concern regarding the amount of money being spent on the building.

The Corporate Director confirmed that the figure should be amended to read £218,947. In terms of the money being spent he explained that the Council leased the building, and also had an annual maintenance programme in place in order to mitigate any

maintenance costs being incurred on completion of the lease.

A brief discussion ensued when the Corporate Director clarified points raised by Members in relation to Anvil Court and Church Street, Ebbw Vale. He confirmed that relevant discussions were taking place in terms of options and future delivery of Council services.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Proposals 1 – 7 be supported (Option 1), namely:

- Proposal 1 – To dispose of all non-operational buildings currently being held by the Council having regard to any grant clawback or legal obligations that may be in place which may affect its saleability. This could secure capital receipts as well as providing savings to the corporate land budget in holding costs as well as reducing/avoid rates on the premises (short term).
- Proposal 2 – To ensure the rates paid by the Council are minimised by reviewing the accuracy of current rates payments, and the rating of property in the Council's portfolio and to introduce a systematic approach to regularly review the rates paid on Council premises. The Council are currently securing specialist advice in this area in order to manage its rates position more efficiently.
- Proposal 3 – To review the Council's occupation of properties held on a leasehold basis to establish whether there are any opportunities to reduce payments to landlords. The Council are currently securing specialist advice in this area (short to medium term).
- Proposal 4 – To develop a proposal for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Civic Centre/office facility for Council staff in line with best practice space utilisation. This could be based around a single or two site solution and involve partners (medium term).
- Proposal 5 – To increase the income derived for land and other assets. All of the Council's land holdings need to be assessed to identify why land is being held, and the values to the Council in terms of income streams through a series of area reviews. This is an opportunity to not just potentially

	<p>increase income but to divest the Council of land that may have long term maintenance liabilities (medium term).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposal 6 – To utilise capital receipts received from the disposals to crease an investment fund for use in bringing residential sites forward and other income generating opportunities.</li> <li>• Proposal 7 – To secure the energy savings delivered by the ReFit investment in the Council’s estate.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 8</b></p>	<p><b><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES QUARTERS 1 AND 2 PERFORMANCE 2019/20</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Community Services &amp; Regeneration presented the report which provided an update of Community Services performance outcomes for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2019/20. This was the first time the report had been submitted in the new format, and he commended the Performance Team for their support. He then went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>A brief discussion ensued when Officers clarified points raised by Members in relation to fly tipping and highways resurfacing works.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).</p>	
<p><b>No. 9</b></p>	<p><b><u>REVIEW OF BLAENAU GWENT HOMES ALLOCATION POLICY</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Housing Solutions and Compliance.</p> <p>The Team Manager presented the report which proposed policy and operational changes to the Blaenau Gwent Homes Allocation Scheme as a consequence of a recent review of the Scheme and consultation process. The Team Manager, and the Senior Housing Access Manager went through the report and highlighted points contained.</p> <p>In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the</p>	

proposed changes to the quotas, the Team Manager said this had been done so that an applicants' priority for housing better reflected the type of accommodation available, their level of housing need and length of time spent on the waiting list.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the banding scheme, and a Member asked how many properties an applicant was able to refuse.

In response the Team Leader said if an applicant refused three offers, they would be brought before the Local Housing Panel where a decision could be taken to exclude them from the waiting list, however, an applicant had the right to appeal any decision made.

Another Member referred to the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements, and asked whether the Team had any control over private landlords renting to high risk applicants.

The Officer said they had no control over private landlords, but pointed out that high risk applicants usually come through a certain pathway and various agencies would have a risk management plan in place to identify suitable accommodation for them, and they would also be monitored by the Police.

A brief discussion ensued when Officers clarified points raised by Members.

The Service Manager Public Protection thanked the Housing Solutions Team for their work in undertaking a review of the Policy.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and Members considered the proposed policy changes to the Blaenau Gwent Homes Allocation Scheme for implementation in April 2020 and recommend approval by the Executive Committee (Option 1).

**No. 10**

**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 16TH JANUARY 2020**

Councillor L. Elias left the meeting at this juncture.

Consideration was given to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled for the 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.

	The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted.	
<b>No. 11</b>	<p><b><u>SILENT VALLEY WASTE SERVICES LTD PERFORMANCE</u></b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>The Service Manager Community Services presented the report which provided the Committee the performance information of Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd covering the period 2018/2019 (Appendix 1). The report was presented as a result of a recommendation to Council in 2017 from the review of Silent Valley.</p> <p>In response to questions raised by a Member regarding the figures detailed in section 5.1 of the report, Mr. Waggett said a decision was taken in 2016 to support the Local Authority in the midst of financial austerity by not fully recharging the Local Authority. As a result of this the Company was operating at a loss which meant that the reserve position was also deteriorating due to the year on year loss. In terms of the figure held in Company House, he explained that this was different to the figure held in the escrow account, which was held jointly with NRW. The escrow account currently stood at £1.6m and was identified for aftercare of the site. This account was included within the overall figures, but did not form part of the reserves. He concluded that the £1.6m would take the company up to the end of the lease to 2044, however, provision beyond that for the remainder of the 60 year term would have to be provided for.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relating to the business/financial affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and the information</p>	



contained therein be noted.

**No. 12**

**WASTE TRANSFER STATION AND HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE**

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, Part 4, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to report of the Managing Director which presented the findings of the due diligence activity commissioned in relation to the Waste Transfer Station and Household Waste Recycling Centre.

The Managing Director spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. The report sought approval to move to the next stage in the process as outlined in the preferred option at section 3.6 of the report.

A discussion ensued when the Managing Director clarified points raised by a Member regarding the financial implications outlined at section 2.15 of the report.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relating to the business/financial affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted, and Option 1 be supported, namely:

- i. Take forward Option One and carry out soft market testing to better understand the opportunity to achieve a public sector collaboration;
- ii. Should there not be sufficient interest from the public sector to take forward the preferred option, Scrutiny be requested to endorse a proposal for Officers to develop a contingency plan for the delivery of services;

<p>iii. To mitigate against the risks associated with depleting the general reserves that should be retained to cover the costs associated with the aftercare liabilities of the site, it is proposed that the Council explores options for securing sufficient reserves to meet the assessed costs and liabilities up to 2076.</p>	
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