

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 19TH OCTOBER, 2020**

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

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. MOORE (CHAIR)**

Councillors C. Meredith (Vice-Chair)  
M. Cook  
S. Healy  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
J. Millard  
G. Paulsen  
K. Pritchard  
B. Summers  
L. Winnett

**WITH:** Head of Community Services  
Team Leader Neighbourhood Services  
Team Manager Street Scene  
Team Manager Natural Environment  
Senior Engineer Land Drainage  
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.	
No. 2	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>	

Apologies for absence were received from Richard Crook, Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services (other Council business).

**No. 3**

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

No declarations of interest or dispensations were made.

**No. 4**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2020 were submitted.

A Member referred to Item No. 7 on Page 10 of the minutes, namely a Member's comment that the 'introduction of the new system in 2015 had been a success', and said he did not agree with the statement. He said in his opinion when the scheme was introduced it was a complete failure with many problems being experienced across the Borough, and that the scheme was thrust upon the LA with no time to undertake a pilot scheme. As a result he could not support approval of the minutes with the inclusion of that comment.

The Scrutiny Officer/Advisor undertook to seek advice on this matter.

Another Member then referred to the next paragraph, namely the question whether green waste included the Borough's social housing providers; and said a response had not been reported.

The Team Leader Neighbourhood Services confirmed that this information would be provided.

Following a brief discussion;

The Committee AGREED that approval of the minutes be **DEFERRED**.

**No. 5**

**ACTION SHEET - 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2020**

There were no actions arising from the Community Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2020.

No. 6	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 7TH DECEMBER 2020</u></b></p> <p>The Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 was submitted.</p> <p>A Member said she understood from previous discussions that it was agreed that a report on straying animals would be submitted to the next meeting.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Officer/Advisor confirmed that a request for a report had been received and undertook to discuss with the relevant Officer.</p> <p>Another Member said it was his understanding that it had been agreed to meet with farmers twice yearly to discuss issues, and suggested that an update be sought from the farmers in terms of what measures they have in place, prior to a report being submitted.</p> <p>In response the Team Manager Street Scene explained that it had been agreed to meet with local farmers individually to discuss issues, rather than as a collective, and this had commenced. C2BG also had a list of farmers to contact when reports of straying animals were received. In terms of the report due to be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, he understood that this related to fly grazing, however, if a wider report to include straying animals was required then this could be considered.</p> <p>A Member referred to the report that was submitted to the special Scrutiny Committee the previous week re The Review of Water Supply Quality in Schools, where it was proposed that the Action Plan detailed in the Appendix be applied to all Council buildings. He asked whether this would be included in the Committee's FWP.</p> <p>In response the Chair confirmed that an Executive decision was awaited on the report.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be noted.</p>	
No. 7	<p><b><u>BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE FORWARD PLAN (2019-2022) 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Community</p>	

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Services.

The Team Manager Natural Environment presented the report which provided an update on how the Council was meeting its statutory duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. In order to comply with the Act a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (Appendix 1) was adopted by Council, and the report provided an overview of annual progress against the Plan.

The Officer said the delivery mechanisms for the Plan was Service Area Action Plans; Environment Champions network and advice from the Natural Environment Team. Progress in 2019/20 by Service Area against the delivery mechanisms and activity plan for 2020/21 was shown in Appendix 2.

He confirmed that 4 quarterly Environment Champions meetings had been held, with ten champions in the network representing all Service Areas and Councillors. Councillor Lee Parsons was the Council's Member Champion.

In terms of the review of progress, the Forward Plan (2019-22) had not been changed, however, minor amendments have been made to accurately reflect the Service Area structure, recognising that Organisational Development sits within Commercial Services.

A Member asked whether the funding currently in place was sufficient to continue to progress the Plan.

The Officer said he was confident that working collaboratively with our neighbouring Authorities, that funding would continue to be secured. He was pleased to report that funding had recently been secured through Resilient Gwent to bring in extra resources which enabled recruitment of a Behaviour Change Officer, jointly with Monmouthshire CC, to support the Team, and also a Local Nature Partnership Coordinator was appointed in February and making excellent progress. A lot of work was being done to tackle problem areas and change the way we do things in order to enhance biodiversity. He also reported that the Council's

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Ecologist had moved on, however, another appointment had been made in-house and was progressing well.

Another Member referred to the crisp pack recycling initiative and asked whether Officers could look at options to extend this as a way of reducing black bag waste.

The Team Leader Neighbourhood Services said there were a number of outlets within the Borough that took empty crisp packs, and undertook to consider options.

A Member also referred to an 'eco bricks' project undertaken at a local primary school and asked that consideration be given to extending this initiative further.

The Team Leader Natural Environment said this was an excellent example of recycling the materials we use every day and putting them to good use, and he would be keen to grow this initiative through the schools programme.

A Member referred to grassed areas within residential areas set aside for biodiversity, and said these areas should be identified more clearly.

In response the Officer reported that funding had been secured through Welsh Government's Nature Partnership Funding, for the provision of IT and training that would help to map these areas. He confirmed that grassland areas being used formally for recreational activities etc, would continue to be cut on a regular basis. However, a more relaxed cutting approach would be taken of other areas as much as possible to allow for biodiversity, but the Officer agreed that people needed to know why this approach was being taken.

Another Member referred to the letter received from Welsh Government's Chief Planner, and asked whether the Council had refused any planning applications on the grounds of Planning Policy Wales 10.

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The Officer said the Council's Planners would be able to provide a more accurate response. However, he was not aware of any applications being refused specifically on the grounds of PPW10.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Annual Report and activity recommended this year be approved, to meet the Section 6 Duty (Option 2).

**No. 8**

**FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (2016- 2022)**

Consideration was given to report of the Head of Community Services.

The Senior Engineer Land Drainage presented the report which updated Members on progress of delivery of the Council's Flood Management Plan 2016-2022, and summarised progress made on the objectives and measures since its adoption and approval by Welsh Government in 2016. The Plan highlighted the hazards and risk of flooding and set out how the Authority would work with other parties and local communities to manage the risks.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. He reported that due to the severe storms encountered at the end of the year and early 2020 the Council was unable to complete a scheme anticipated to cost £40,000, with a grant value of £34,000. However, Welsh Government has agreed that this money could be carried over to the 2020-2021 budget.

A Member referred to the repairs needed to be undertaken following Storm Dennis, in particular the repairs needed on the Ebbw Fach River embankment at Duffryn Park, and asked how many of the repairs had been completed.

In response the Team Manager Street Scene confirmed that Welsh Government funding had been secured to undertake repair works. A schedule of works had been established, and the Officer confirmed that the Ebbw Fach River embankment was included.

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The Chair said there had been repeated incidents of flooding recently, which was extremely stressful for residents, and said it would be beneficial for Members to have information on works being undertaken.

In response the Head of Community Services undertook to provide Members with a schedule of works.

A Member referred to the tree planting initiative at Parc Bryn Bach and asked whether any other sites in the Borough had been identified for tree planting.

The Team Manager Natural Environment said it was not easy to find large areas of land within the Borough suitable for tree planting. Tree planting was included in our programme for improvement, and potential sites were always being explored, however, it was also important to maintain our existing stock. The Officer confirmed that work was also being undertaken with the PSB exploring funding to commission a Green Infrastructure Strategy.

A Member referred to section 4.7 of the report, namely removal of rubbish from rivers, and said in his opinion NRW seemed to be pushing responsibility of cleaning rivers, unless in the case of an immediate threat of flooding, onto the Council or volunteers in the community.

In response the Senior Engineer explained that as the law stood, it was the responsibility of the landowner to maintain the stretch of river passing through their land, unless there was information to say otherwise. NRW has responsibility for flood protection, and would place flood defences on the river to protect communities, but in terms of maintenance, i.e. cleaning/removal of rubbish, this was the responsibility of the landowner.

In response to a question raised by a Member in relation to section 4.5 of the report, the Officer explained that the scheme referred to was on the main River Ebbw by Ebbw Vale rugby ground. There

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were 3 culverts in the area that needed repairs, but the severe weather prevented the final culvert repair works being undertaken. However, the Officer confirmed that this scheme had now been completed.

The Member then referred to the fact that SuDS applications were currently being sent to Caerphilly CBC for approval, and the Head of Community Services confirmed that this arrangement was currently under review.

Another Member asked whether the Section liaised with Community Services in terms of maintenance of storm drains, and identifying where cleaning was required in order to prevent flooding.

The Senior Engineer said the Section worked closely with Community Services. Camera equipment was used to survey gullies, and there was a maintenance schedule in place, however, due to the extensive number of throughout the Borough compared to the resources available, focus tended to be on ones that were known to be problematic.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and progress made over the previous 12 months be noted (Option 1).

**No. 9**

**NEW COUNCIL DEPOT PROPOSALS**

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

Consideration was given to report of the Head of Community



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Services.

The Team Leader Street Scene presented the report which provided an update on progress related to the development of a new Council Depot and proposed suitable candidate sites to be explored as part of the next stage, the development of an Outline Business Case (OBC).

The Officer then went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. He confirmed that work on a number of activities had taken place to confirm the requirements for a new depot, which included exploring any recent examples of other councils relocating and building a new depot, and investigating any likely collaboration opportunities. He then referred Members to the options for recommendation, namely Section 3.3 which outlined the preferred option of the Officers Working Group.

A discussion ensued when the Officer clarified points raised by Members in relation to potential alternative sites; electric vehicles and the infrastructure required; and the financial viability of the proposal.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the existing Central Depot, the Officer confirmed that a new site would provide an opportunity for expansion to provide for any future collaborative working arrangements. He confirmed that all Members' comments would be considered by the Officer Working Group.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relation to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and:-

- i. One of the four sites identified in section 3.2 of the report be approved to move forward to a business planning stage.
  - ii. WRAP be commissioned to undertake the business planning stage for the chosen site; and
  - iii. A further report be presented for consideration on the outcomes of the business plan.
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