

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1ST MARCH, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. MOORE (CHAIR)

Councillors C. Meredith (Vice-Chair)
P. Baldwin
M. Cook
M. Day
P. Edwards
S. Healy
W. Hodgins
J. Holt
J. C. Morgan
G. Paulsen
B. Summers
L. Winnett

WITH: Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
Head of Community Services
Team Leader Neighbourhood Services
Team Manager Street Scene
Team Manager Environmental Protection
Team Manager Estates & Strategic Asset Management
Engineering Manager
Marketing Projects Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u>	

	It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>No apologies for absence were reported.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 7th December, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 7TH DECEMBER 2020</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 7th December, 2020 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><u><i>Activities Report – Littering and Dog Control Order Enforcement for Financial Year 2019/20</i></u></p> <p>In response to a question raised by a Member the Service Manager Public Protection confirmed that the litter and dog control enforcement service was still suspended due to the Covid pandemic, and Officers had been redeployed to undertake duties in response to Covid. This work would continue for the foreseeable future, subject to funding.</p> <p>A Member requested figures on the number of fines issued in relation to dog fouling and also for litter and fly tipping.</p> <p>The Officer explained that the report submitted to the previous meeting provided data for 2019/20. There had been no activity during the current financial year, since March 2020, as the service</p>	

had been suspended. However, he confirmed that a report on fly tipping would be submitted to Scrutiny later in the year.

Civil Parking Enforcement

A Member referred to his comments made at the previous meeting and reiterated that the Council should consider the approach taken by a neighbouring Authority in relation to resident parking permits, and allow the option for a second permit for a charge per annum.

He also expressed concern that Enforcement Officers were moving from Town Centres into wider residential areas, and requested that a review of 'yellow lines' be undertaken subject to funding being available within the budget.

Another Member asked whether Civil Parking Enforcement Officers undertook checks of blue badge holders were complying with the criteria.

Another Member asked whether the Civil Parking Enforcement Officers checked that the conditions of blue badges were being complied with, in terms of the length of parking time and whether the eligible person was in the vehicle.

In response the Engineering Manager said he was not aware that these checks were being done, but undertook to liaise with the Enforcement Officers regarding this matter.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.

No. 6

DISUSED SPOIL TIPS UPDATE

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

The Engineering Manager presented the report which provided an update on the current position in relation to disused spoil tips within Blaenau Gwent, and detailed the implementation of key

actions and tasks in line with Coal Tip Safety Policy Taskforce. The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.

A discussion ensued regarding the landslide incident in the Rhondda last year and the Officer explained that in Blaenau Gwent there was a number of small tips, and many had been reclaimed or built upon. He was unaware that there were any tips in Blaenau Gwent on a mountainside or on the side of a river, and nothing significant like the type seen in the Rhondda.

A Member said an Officer should be assigned to inspect the tips in the Borough on a regular basis.

In response the Officer said there was new legislation coming into force in May/June 2021 that may require that work to be undertaken.

A Member asked how it was intended to categorise tips on unstable land, and the Officer pointed out that unstable ground was different from coal tips and identified on a different register.

A Member said following the Aberfan disaster the NCB undertook extensive inspections of all the tips throughout South Wales, and he expressed concern that over time those records had been lost, and he felt that LA's were now being asked to pick up that task. He said there were also a number of tips in the area as a result of iron ore mining and asked whether the new legislation would be extended to cover those.

In response the Officer explained that any mining adits were still the responsibility of the Coal Authority. However, in terms of the new legislation he was unaware of the content until it was received for comment.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the key actions and tasks set out in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.9 be noted (Option 1).

No. 7

UPDATE CEMETERY INFRASTRUCTURE CAPITAL WORKS

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Streetscene.

The Team Manager Streetscene presented the report which Provided an update on the current and future expenditure related to the capital funding (c£200,000) available to undertake some cemetery infrastructure works in financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. He was pleased to report that the Council was currently out to tender for all works associated with the pathways infrastructure within the cemeteries. It was likely that those works would come under budget, which would enable the Priority 2 works to be progressed.

A Member referred to the list of works highlighted in Appendix 1 and said he would have expected 'cut back vegetation' to be undertaken as part of normal day-to-day maintenance.

He said he had made visits to all the Borough's cemeteries and questioned why the following had not been included within the report:

- Blaina – remedial works or removal of the shelter.
- Brynmawr – removal of the canopy attached to the old Chapel of Rest.
- Ebbw Vale – removal or remedial works to the shelter. He also questioned the need for a cattlegrid and felt that money would be better spent on drainage.
- Brynithel – sought clarity on whether the shelter would be removed or repainted.

In response the Officer said he would be happy to meet with local Members on site to discuss the works to be undertaken. In terms of the Member's comment regarding 'cut back vegetation' he agreed that this was 'good housekeeping' and confirmed that discussions had been held with the Team regarding this.

In relation to Brynmawr cemetery, the Officer confirmed that the old chapel of rest building was subject to a separate piece of work,

and a report would be submitted on this in due course.

The Member pointed out that there had been a vast improvement in the maintenance of cemeteries in the Borough.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding benches, the Officer confirmed that a review was being undertaken to identify any that needed replacing etc. He also confirmed that as a result of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Task & Finish Group a policy was adopted to include certain specifications and a maintenance period for anyone wishing to donate a bench.

A Member enquired as to the timescale for the Priority 1 works and the Officer said hopefully within 3 months the infrastructure works would be completed.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained in Appendix 1, (cemetery maintenance priorities) be noted.

No. 8	<p><u>POSITION REPORT FLY GRAZING HORSES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Environmental Protection.</p> <p>The Team Manager Environmental Protection presented the report which provided an overview on the issue of fly grazing horses within the County Borough. The report outlined the scale of the issue, including identifying geographical locations where the problem was often reported, and set out the legislative and policy framework used to resolve incidents.</p> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member reported that the green area in West Side, Blaina was subject to numerous reports of fly grazing, but had been omitted from the report. She also said the figures seemed quite low and</p>
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questioned how they were recorded, as complaints were reported through various routes, i.e. environmental health, animal welfare and also estates.

The Member also referred to the legislation and said there was concern that the Council would be responsible for any welfare issues of horses fly grazing on Council owned land. She then referred to section 2.6 of the report and asked what costs the Council had incurred for the joint operation. In terms of the proposals outlined within the report, she felt that the investment in taking action would hopefully prevent repeat offenders.

In response the Officer undertook to liaise with the Member regarding the green area in West Side, Blaina. However, in relation to the legislation and concerns regarding responsibility for landowners, the Officer confirmed that the horse owner would be ultimately responsible for their welfare. He said if the report was approved it would enable Officers to progress with instant removal of horses from land, in the case of long term persistent offenders; and assured the welfare of horses in this action.

The Officer then referred to the costs for the joint operation undertaken in 2013/14, and confirmed that this was approximately £3k and fully funded by Welsh Government. He said the joint operation was achieved through the co-operation and support of horse charities and animal welfare rights groups, and was very successful. No significant issues had arisen since that date.

In relation to the Member's comments regarding the figures, the Officer confirmed that all complaints of fly grazing on Council owned land was logged with the Estates Section.

The Team Manager Estates & Strategic Asset Management said the data was compiled from records within the Department and knowledge of Officers dealing with complaints of illicit grazing. More accurate records were now being kept, and there seemed to be a number of instances of illicit grazing per year and repeat offenders.

A discussion ensued when a Member suggested that discussions also take place with Tai Calon regarding the possibility of a partnership approach to the problem of straying animals.

Another Member said straying animals had been a problem for many years, and said a review of the Council's contract with Powys CC was needed.

A Member proposed the following addendum to Option 1 of the report:

'And recommend that the Council look to work with partners, and be granted permission to pursue enforcement with regard to the Control of Horses Act in prolific areas in line with the Wellbeing Plan Objective 2'.

The proposal was seconded.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and:-

- i. Members support the existing process for the removal of horses set out in the report with the use of contractors and the costs associated with this (Option 1); and
- ii. Recommend that the Council look to work with partners, and be granted permission pursue enforcement with regard to the Control of Horses Act in prolific areas in line with the Wellbeing Plan Objective 2.

No. 9

USE OF CONSULTANTS

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

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services presented the report which provided information requested in

relation to the expenditure incurred during 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 on the use of consultants to support, supplement and complement the work of Officers across the Council.

He said the advantage of engaging Consultants was also that they are only required for a shorter period of time which enabled the Council to pay for a particular skill on demand and only when needed. This was often an effective use of Council resources and avoided the need to employ additional staff, with specialist knowledge and skills, on a permanent basis.

During 2018/19 and 2019/20 the Council spent a total of £0.7m & £1.1m on consultants across all services, and the Appendix attached to the report identified those consultants, the costs and the reason for engaging consultants in relation to the Environment portfolio.

A Member asked how often the engagement of consultants had resulted in projects being taken forward.

In response the Corporate Director said the Appendix identified a number of areas where the use of consultants had led to additional external funding being secured.

The Member said a breakdown of the figures would be beneficial in terms of the amount spent on consultants compared to projects taken forward.

The Corporate Director undertook to provide a breakdown of the figures in relation to the Environment Portfolio to the next meeting of the Committee.

A brief discussion ensued when the Corporate Director explained that where external funding was secured, this may be part of a larger project that the Council may also be contributing to.

A Member referred to the Appendix and sought clarification on the Waste Project. He also expressed concern regarding the risk in

using earmarked reserves for a test track facility.

In response the Corporate Director said the Waste Project was a joint project with Torfaen CBC and Monmouthshire CC. He said the cost was a one-off spend in relation to specialist legal advice required in setting up the joint arrangement and was funded by WG. In relation to the test track project, he felt that the specialist advice had been useful and necessary to deliver a project of that scale, and Members also felt it was the right approach to identify any opportunities for the Council. The spend was from earmarked reserves not to the detriment of any other projects.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the use of consultants be noted (Option1).

No. 10

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 12TH APRIL 2021

The forward work programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 12th April, 2021 was submitted.

The Chair reported the following requests had been made by Members:

- Review of the Council's current disused coal tips register.
- Information on the number of fines issued in relation to fly tipping.
- Review of traffic orders (yellow lines) in residential areas.
- Review of the Council's contract with Powys CC in relation to straying animals etc.
- Information on enforcement of Covid Regulations.
- Information on illegal racetrack in Georgetown, Tredegar.
- Update on Silent Valley Business Case.

A Member pointed out that the Portfolio Holder should be amended to read Joanna Wilkins.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted (Option 1).