

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4TH OCTOBER, 2021**

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

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

Councillors G. Paulsen (substituting for C. Meredith)  
P. Baldwin  
M. Cook  
J.P. Morgan (substituting for M. Day)  
P. Edwards  
S. Healy  
W. Hodgins  
J. Hill (substituting for J. Holt)  
J.C. Morgan  
L. Parsons  
B. Summers  
T. Smith (substituting for L. Winnett)

**WITH:** Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services  
Head of Community Services  
Service Manager Neighbourhood Services  
Team Leader Environmental Protection  
Engineering Manager  
Senior Engineer Land Drainage  
Engineer  
Estates Manager  
Marketing  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

**AND:** Charlotte Owen (Audit Wales)  
Mr. D. Waggett (Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd.)

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received for Councillors C. Meredith, M. Day, J. Holt and L. Winnett.</p>	
No. 3	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillors B. Summers and M. Cook declared an interest in the following item:</p> <p>Item No. 11 Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd. Performance Report</p>	
No. 4	<p><b><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 19TH JULY 2021</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:</p> <p><i><u>Position Report Straying Animals</u></i></p> <p>The Chair confirmed that a report would be presented to Members at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: REVIEW OF PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITY SERVICES</u></b></p>	

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

The Head of Community Services presented the report Audit Wales report, 'Review of People, Performance and Financial Resilience in Community Services' (attached at Appendix 1). The report also included the Community Services action plan in response to Audit Wales' proposals for improvement.

The Audit Wales representative then went through the report and highlighted the main points contained therein, namely:

- There are opportunities for the Community Services Directorate to build resilience by sharing the learning and good practice demonstrable in specific service areas to further develop its arrangements to manage performance, and strengthen strategic financial and workforce planning.
- The waste service has achieved substantial progress over the period since 2015 through sound strategic planning supported by the adoption of a learning culture to manage change effectively.
- The Council is developing a new corporate workforce strategy and although Community Services understands its key workforce issues and is taking steps to address them, there is scope for closer collaboration with HR to improve workforce planning and resilience.
- Waste and recycling performance has improved significantly but the use of performance data is inconsistent across Community Services and some performance reports lack sufficient detail.
- Robust corporate budget monitoring arrangements have helped manage Community Services' overspends, but the scope and focus of financial planning is overly short-term.

The Audit Wales representative confirmed one proposal for improvement was identified, namely *‘to strengthen its resilience, Community Services should ensure that learning and good practice that exists within its different service areas is shared throughout the directorate. The Council should also consider whether it would benefit from sharing some examples more widely across the Council.’*

The Head of Community Services thanked Audit Wales for their support throughout the review process. In terms of the one proposal for improvement, he felt this was a positive and was more of a celebration of the Department’s successes, and that this message be passed on to other elements of the Council. He also pointed out that the review was undertaken during the last 18 months through the Covid pandemic when frontline services were under immense pressure.

He then went through the report in detail and highlighted points contained therein. In terms of the management response to the proposal for improvement, i.e. to ensure that the good learning and practice is shared throughout the Authority, he confirmed that the Waste Team would be making presentations to the wider environment groups and wider CLT. It was also proposed to present the technical services income generation model to the wider audience in due course. This would be followed-up with business plans and performance reports to the relevant Committees.

A Member said the Council should consider establishing a contingency fund to respond to unexpected pressures, and asked whether any other Local Authorities were taking this approach.

The Audit Wales representative said she was not aware of any other Local Authorities taking this approach, but pointed out that not all Councils would be subject to the same level of overspend as Blaenau Gwent, and contributing factors like the weather and issues of fly tipping varied between Local Authorities. She said the

Council should analyse data to identify trends over a number of years to help mitigate in-year events that are difficult to plan for.

A Member said this was a pleasing report, particularly the 5 apprentices that had been taken on and the career progression opportunities created within the Department. He also agreed with the suggestion of a contingency fund and said this should be considered.

Another Member said this was a positive report, however, he was concerned that the issue of updating the iTrent system had been identified.

In response the Head of Community Services said this was a challenge particularly with the volume of staff in frontline services, and also the technical challenges around the IT system. However, he confirmed that Audit Wales' comments had been noted and the Department was currently working with OD on this issue.

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

**No. 7**

**WASTE AND RECYCLING PERFORMANCE 2020-21**

Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Neighbourhood Services.

The Service Manager Neighbourhood Services presented the report which provided an update on waste and recycling performance outcomes for 2020-21.

The performance data was summarised in Appendix 1, and the Officer pointed out that during the previous 2 years the Council had exceeded the WG statutory recycling target of 58% and 64% respectively. This success was maintained in 2021 and the Council exceeded the target by attaining 64.29%. He acknowledged that this had been achieved through the hard work of the Waste Team, working with partners in WRAP, and also the

Council's Communications, Performance, and Senior Management Team; but most importantly the residents of Blaenau Gwent in what had been a very difficult year. He said through careful prioritisation and engagement with our workforce, the Council was able to maintain all waste and recycling collections throughout the Covid pandemic.

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

A Member asked whether recycling rates would increase if the Council reduced the number of communal collection points throughout the Borough. He felt it was unfair that the majority of residents were expected to comply with number of refuse bags they were able to put out, but residents in communal collection areas were able to deposit as much as they liked. He also asked whether fly tipping collected from Tai Calon's estates were included in the Council's figures.

In relation to the Council's communal collection points he said some progress had been made where possible, however, the Council were unable to remove some collection points due to health and safety restrictions.

In terms of fly tipping on Tai Calon's estates the Team Leader Environmental Protection explained that waste deposited on private land was the responsibility of the landowner to remove. He understood that Tai Calon had their own cleansing team so any fly tipping they removed would not be included in the Council's figures.

He also confirmed that a new Team had been established to look at unofficial collection points causing significant problems. When this work was resolved it was intended to then look at official collection points to ensure everyone complied with the rules.

A Member commended the Waste and Recycling Team for their work during a very challenging year. He asked whether a

contingency plan was in place in the event of a fuel shortage and the lack of HGV drivers, and staff sickness. He also referred to the figures for composting recycling and said it was unfair for Blaenau Gwent to be compared to rural LA's and that WG should consider a fairer approach to this element of recycling.

The Member also expressed concern regarding the increase in residual waste and asked whether this was due to a change of habits and residents mixing their residual waste with recycling. He also asked whether the 'appointment only' approach at our HWRCs was a contributing factor and whether it was intended to return to a non-appointment system post Covid.

In response to the Member's comments regarding a contingency plan the Service Manager Neighbourhood Services confirmed that the Council received a fuel delivery last week which would last 3 weeks on a normal working pattern. There was a plan in place in the event of a fuel shortage and the need to reissue fuel to other services, but to date there had been no impact of the fuel shortage reported in the press.

He said the shortage of HGV drivers was a national issue, but fortunately there had been no impact on the Council's services. He said the Department's priority services continued to be waste collections and winter maintenance operations from 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2021. However, the issue had been highlighted on the risk register in the event of a major spike in sickness and Covid infections.

In relation to the composting recycling figures he agreed that Blaenau Gwent were at a disadvantage with the limited number of green areas compared to rural LA's. However, moving forward it was intended to focus efforts on improving the food recycling element.

With regard to the increase in residual waste he said the fact that enforcement activities ceased for a significant period through 2020/21 in response to the Covid pandemic had contributed.

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However, it was intended to reinstate enforcement activities and hopefully this would help to change behaviour and return to the positive impact prior to the pandemic.

In relation to the booking system put in place as a result of the Covid pandemic the Officer confirmed that the system had been improved. He pointed out the whilst a number of Covid restrictions had been relaxed, the track and trace element was still in place and there was still a responsibility to restrict numbers at the sites. He said feedback from staff was positive, and a significant number of residents who utilised the sites seemed happy with the system in place, however, he acknowledged that some residents saw it as a block to using the sites.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the difference in figures for the 2 sites, the Officer explained that this report outlined performance for 2020/21. Only New Vale was operational during 2020/21 as the Roseheyworth site did not open until earlier this financial year.

In response to a further question regarding the recycling figures for rear lane collections the Officer said he did not have specific figures as this formed part of the overall recycling round. However, additional rear lane collections were intended over the coming months as part of our route optimisation exercise.

A Member asked whether the figures for the recycling materials deposited at our HWRC sites were factored into the kerbside recycling figures.

The Officer explained that all waste streams at our HWRC sites were included in our tonnages. However, the only income generated was from cardboard and scrap metal, and the Council had to pay disposal costs for all other materials deposited at the sites.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the HWRC sites when the Officer stated that the Roseheyworth site was less used than New

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Vale, however, there were no usage figures available prior to the Covid pandemic and the booking system being put in place. He said only a small number of complaints had been received about the booking system, and confirmed that the provision of same day bookings was being explored.

A Member referred to the last sentence of section 5.1 of the report and asked why the budget had not been aligned to the change in recycling habits.

The Officer explained that habits had changed since the significant changes to the service in 2015, and recycling receptacles are more expensive and more in demand particularly following storms in the winter months. The drive to hit Welsh Government's target also meant additional resources were required, but hopefully the policies now in place would offset these additional resources moving forward.

In response to a question raised by a Member the Officer confirmed that a pilot scheme was undertaken of approximately 2k properties to separate glass from cardboard waste. Feedback from the pilot scheme was positive and it was intended to roll this out to over 5k properties Borough wide over the coming months. This would provide additional capacity for residents to recycle more cardboard.

Another Member enquired as to the trial undertaken to recycle plastic bags and the Officer reported that this project was undertaken in conjunction with Merthyr Tydfil CBC, with support from WRAP. The results of the trial had yet to be analysed, and when this was completed it would be brought to Members for consideration as there was costs associated with the scheme.

A Member proposed Option 1, and this was seconded.

Another Member proposed Option 2 with the addition that a review of the budget be undertaken, with a view to establishing a contingency budget.

A Member seconded the proposal.

A vote was thereupon taken, and

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted. (Option 1)

**No. 8**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21**

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

The Head of Community Services presented the report which provided an update on Community Services performance outcomes over the period 2020/21, including the following key service areas:

- Infrastructure Services
- Neighbourhood Services; and
- Property services

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

In response to concerns raised by a Member regarding the limited resources within the Section to undertake inspections, the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services confirmed that the level of resources was a challenge as the service was extremely busy. He said Members would be aware of the funding constraints in the public sector over a number of years, with the public sector being expected to do more work with the same level of resources. However, he confirmed that workloads were cautiously prioritised, and funding opportunities explored wherever possible for jobs, and also apprentices. He confirmed that pressures would continue to be monitored to ensure sufficient resources.

A Member said consideration should be given to instating an impounding service. He also expressed concern regarding the level of fly tipping in the Borough.

The Head of Community Services reported that a decision was taken by the previous Council to cease the impounding service. However, if Members felt that the issue of straying animals was significant to warrant reinstating the service, it would go through the appropriate process of review.

In relation to concerns regarding fly tipping, he said the Litter & Fly Tipping Strategy was adopted approximately 6 months ago, and hopefully improvements would be seen over the coming months.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding Aberbeeg Road and the Big Arch, the Officer reported that a significant amount of work had been undertaken on Aberbeeg Road and this was reflected in the costs. That section of road would continue to be monitored and funding had been secured from Welsh Government to undertake feasibility studies to potentially improve the road in the longer terms. In relation to the Big Arch the Officer confirmed that works were due to commence shortly.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted. (Option 1)

**No. 9**

**SECTION 19 FLOOD INVESTIGATION REPORT, LLANHILLETH**

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

The Engineer presented the S19 Flood Investigation Report for Llanhilleth following the flooding that occurred in Meadow Street and Railway Street during 15-16<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The Officer went through the report in detail and highlighted the key findings of the report detailed at section 2.3 of the report; and the key actions detailed at section 2.4

A Member said he was disappointed that the report was available in the public domain prior to Ward Members having sight of it. However, he thanked all Council staff and other agencies who worked tirelessly at the time of the flooding, and in the days and weeks thereafter. He said while this was a very comprehensive report it did not reflect the anguish of the residents affected.

He then referred to page 112 of the report, namely the DCWW Pumping Station, and said in his opinion the enquiry should have been undertaken by an independent body. He had been informed by residents that the pump was faulty but when they tried to report it to Welsh Water they could only get through to an answer phone.

The Member also asked whether the Council carried out further checks between the date of the incident and the 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2020.

In response the Senior Engineer Land Drainage reported that CCTV surveys were undertaken some weeks after the incident in March. He confirmed that regular surveys were undertaken of culverts, and depending on the classification this would be done every 2 weeks for critical culverts and every 12 weeks for significant culverts.

The Member pointed out that Railway Street would have flooded again on the 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 had it not been for the work of an Officer who located another blockage between Railway Street and Meadow Street. He said 89 properties had been flooded and the Council should look to compensate those residents who have needed to vacate their homes for 10 months, and that the process of compensation should be made as easy as possible.

A Member referred to section c on page 127 of the report and asked whether any remedial works had been undertaken to remove the pipe. He stressed the importance of all remedial works being undertaken as a matter of urgency to alleviate any

problems in the future.

In response the Senior Engineer Land Drainage said the pipe could not be removed, however, investigations were ongoing to determine whether it was possible to install an additional pipe and re-route the main drain. He confirmed that funding had been secured to undertake remedial works, with a deadline to spend the money by the end of March 2022, and site investigations were currently being undertaken.

A discussion ensued when the Engineer explained that the report stated that it was probable that the high intensity and prolonged rainfall saturated the ground, and the 2 blockages identified in the drainage system contributed to the flooding.

A Member suggested an amendment to Option 1, namely that the Council puts in place a scheme to compensate residents affected by the flooding.

A discussion ensued when the Scrutiny Officer explained that it was not within the remit of the Committee to agree compensation.

In response the Member said he would approach the Executive Member Environment and request a public meeting.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the Section 19 Flood Investigation Report, Llanhilleth report be accepted and published in accordance with the FWMA 2010 legislation. (Option 1)

**No. 10**

**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 15TH NOVEMBER 2021**

The Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 was submitted.

A Member requested that the following additional items be considered for inclusion on the FWP:

- A full list of Community Asset Transfers.
- A report on the condition of drainage systems throughout the

	<p>Borough.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Forward Work Programme be accepted.</p> <p>Councillor S. Healy left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
<b>No. 11</b>	<p><b><u>SILENT VALLEY WASTE SERVICES LTD PERFORMANCE REPORT</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, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Neighbourhood Services.</p> <p>The Service Manager Neighbourhood Services presented the report which provided an update of Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd performance outcomes for 2020/21.</p> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</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 contained therein be noted. (Option 1)</p>	