

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15TH NOVEMBER, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. MOORE (CHAIR)

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

WITH: Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
Head of Community Services
Service Manager Neighbourhood Services
Service Manager Public Protection
Team Manager Street Scene
Team Manager Built Infrastructure
Team Leader Environmental Protection
Team Manager Trading Standards
Biodiversity Project Officer
Engineering Manager
Engineer
Estates Manager
Marketing & Communications
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

AND: Gavin Jones (Powys County Council)

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received for Councillor T. Sharrem.</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 MINUTES</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 27th September, 2021 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</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 27th September, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><i><u>Revenue Budget Monitoring</u></i></p> <p>A Member referred to the recent increase in recycling income and asked whether this would have a positive impact on the budget moving forward.</p> <p>The Service Manager Neighbourhood Services said the market was volatile, however, the increase in prices would have a positive impact in Quarter 2.</p>	

In response to a further question the Officer explained that Officers within the Department negotiated prices for materials with the support and co-operation of WRAP.

Capital Budget Monitoring Forecast – Appendix 1
327061 – CATs – breakdown of CATs

A Member expressed concern regarding a potential CAT, and the Estates Manager confirmed that discussions were ongoing with an organisation regarding two potential opportunities.

A discussion ensued when the Member said the matter should be referred to the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee for consideration prior to going to the Executive Committee.

The Estates Manager confirmed that no decision had been taken, and that the Education Department was aware of the issue. The Officer confirmed that it would be referred to Education & Learning Scrutiny.

Another Member asked when the CAT for Trinity Chapel would be completed.

The Officer explained that discussions were ongoing and hopefully the process would be completed by March 2022.

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

No. 6 **BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE FORWARD PLAN (2019-2022) 2020/21 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

The Biodiversity Project Officer presented the report which provided an update on how the Council was meeting its statutory duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and provided an overview of annual progress against the Biodiversity and

Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022) for 2020/21.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. Progress in 2020/21 by service area against the delivery mechanisms and Activity Plan for 2021/22 was shown at Appendix 2.

A Member referred to open green spaces not protected as recreation areas, and asked how they were considered during the planning application process.

The Officer confirmed that these type of areas were evaluated in terms of their ecological value and what level of protection they required. If it was felt that an area may have a good ecological value or management was needed to enhance the area, then work would be undertaken across various sectors/services to try and protect those areas.

A Member commended the report and stressed the importance of educating young people on the issues, and asked whether it was intended to involve all schools in the Urban Hedgehog Project.

The Officer said there was significant interest expressed by Blaenau Gwent schools, but only 8 were selected for the pilot project. However, work was ongoing to connect the remaining schools to local community groups that manage green spaces etc.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding SINC's, the Officer said there several sites in Blaenau Gwent. A Greater Gwent project was currently looking at wildlife on those sites and wider management and feedback from survey work was awaited.

The Member requested a list of SINC's be circulated to all Members and the Officer undertook to provide this information.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the annual report 2020/21 and activity plan recommended for 2021/22 to meet the Section 6 Duty, be

approved. (Option 1)

No. 7

CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT – SERVICE UPDATE

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

The Team Manager Built Infrastructure presented the report which provided an update on Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) for the period 1st November, 2020 to 31st September, 2021.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. He said notwithstanding the effects of the Covid pandemic, the CPE operation was performing in line with the agreed business case model.

A Member referred to the 95% collection rate of PCN's, and asked what action was being taken to recover the remaining 5%.

The Officer said there was a process in place to recover unpaid PCN's but this had been suspended during the Covid pandemic.

The Member also asked how the number of PCN's issued in Blaenau Gwent compared with other Local Authorities.

The Officer said he was unable to provide a comparison with other LA's, but stated that the service operated in line with the agreed business case model. There were no targets set for the Enforcement Officers as they could only issue PCN's when they witnessed illegal parking, where traffic regulation orders were in place.

In response to a further question the Officer explained that if a vehicle was parked on a pavement with 'yellow lines' in place then a PCN would be issued. However, if a vehicle was parked on a pavement and causing obstruction, but there were no 'yellow lines' then this would be referred to the Police.

A Member said would he have liked greater detail on the Council's

communication with the Police in relation to pavement parking.

A Member asked what health and safety procedures were in place to protect Enforcement Officers operating alone.

The Officer explained that Caerphilly CBC had a lone working policy which required supervisors to check in with staff, and there were no lone working patrols undertaken in the evenings. He also confirmed that Enforcement Officers had radio connection to local staff whilst out on patrols.

Another Member said he would have liked a breakdown of PCN's issued within Nantyglo and Blaina. He then referred to Section 2.14 of the report which stated that the Council should identify areas where pavement parking should be tolerated, and asked whether this work was currently being undertaken and if funding was available from Welsh Government to undertake this work.

The Officer undertook to provide a more detailed breakdown of the figures. In relation to pavement parking, he pointed out that there was a significant amount of areas within the Borough where pavement parking could be tolerated. However, the guidance on how we set this legislation was still awaited from Welsh Government. He said there were concerns as to how it would be enforced and a consistent approach with other areas was preferred. In terms of funding he was not aware of any further funding being made available.

A discussion ensued regarding parking problems at a number of primary schools within the Borough.

The Officer confirmed that an application for funding had been submitted and a scheme at Georgetown Primary School was being considered.

A Member stressed the urgency of the TRO review for Tredegar Town Centre as traders were concerned that parking in the town centre was impacting on footfall and business.

In response the Officer explained that a scheme had been designed for Tredegar Town Centre to address the concerns of local businesses, however, colleagues within Regeneration were currently considering a longer term plan for the Centre and the TRO review had been put on hold pending the outcome of this work. However, he undertook to liaise with Regeneration Officers regarding this matter.

A further discussion ensued regarding parking problems at schools and the Officer urged Members to report issues. He also confirmed that a meeting was scheduled at Bryn Bach School later in the week to discuss whether further measures could be introduced.

A Member referred to Table 3 within the report and asked whether this included the misuse of blue badges.

The Officer explained that this came under the remit of Social Services as Enforcement Officers did not have the information available to check eligibility of blue badge holders.

Another Member expressed concern regarding the impact of illegal parking on bus routes and timetables.

The Officer confirmed that a more proactive approach was now in place around bus routes and complaints were responded to in a more timely manner.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding consultation with the public the Officer confirmed that consultation was undertaken when traffic orders were introduced, and consultation had also commenced on a number of new schemes. Feedback from consultation on individual traffic orders would not be reported to Scrutiny as there was a statutory process in place.

Another Member expressed concern with the level of Enforcement Officers within Blaenau Gwent and questioned whether the

Council were getting 'value for money'.

The Officer assured that discussions were ongoing with Caerphilly CBC but recruitment in this area was difficult. Unfortunately, there were only two Officers in post so any sickness absence did impact on the service.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the latest annual progress update relating to Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) since its introduction in 2019 and the current business case model be accepted. (Option A)

No. 8

UPDATE REPORT FLY GRAZING HORSES

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

The Service Manager Neighbourhood Services presented the report which provided an update on the issue of fly grazing horses within the County Borough. The report also outlined changes to the current Policy and set out the legislative and policy framework in place and operated by Officers to resolve incidents.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein.

A Member said she welcomed the report and informed the Committee that she had had discussions with the British Horse Society Welfare Officer who had also recommended that the Council appoint an Animal Health Officer to oversee the various issues being experienced, as outlined in the Policy and modelled by Cardiff City Council.

The Officer undertook to liaise with colleagues on this matter.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and Members support the Policy amendment and the existing process for the removal of horses set out in the report with the associated use of contractors and the costs

associated with this. (Option 1).

No. 9

ANIMAL HEALTH, WELFARE & LICENSING SERVICE COLLABORATION – POWYS CC PARTNERSHIP – ACTIVITIES & UPDATE REPORT – OCTOBER 2021

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 Animal Health, Welfare & Licensing work undertaken between by Powys CC on behalf of Blaenau Gwent.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. Appendix 1 outlined the total number of premises in Blaenau Gwent covered by these arrangements, and Appendices 2 to 4 outlined the Service Plans and activities for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 (up to 19th October, 2021) respectively. Section 6 provided a summary of key operations completed and ongoing since the start of the partnership.

A Member asked how many days per week under the SLA were allocated to responding to issues within Blaenau Gwent.

The Powys CC Officer explained that Officers undertook routine planned inspections, and any other work was reactive in terms of responding to issues as and when required. A significant amount of time was also spent on intelligence gathering. He could not provide a definitive answer in terms of the number of days allocated to Blaenau Gwent, but felt that Blaenau Gwent were getting value for money under the SLA arrangement.

The Member said the service should be brought back under the remit of the Council, particularly in light of the new dog breeding legislation coming into force, and the increase in illegal dog breeding in the Borough. She also reported that she had been informed by a well-known animal rescue organisation that there seemed to be a lack of engagement with Blaenau Gwent

compared to other LA's in relation to unlicensed breeders and animal welfare concerns.

In response the Service Manager Public Protection pointed out that the Council entered into the SLA with Powys as we did not have the expertise and resilience in house to provide the service, and that was still the case. To bring the service back in-house would mean a significant growth item for the Council, and leave us with challenges in terms of providing the service with the lack of expertise.

The Team Manager Trading Standards agreed, he said with the service coming under the Trading Standards section, he was grateful for the expertise of Powys CC and would be concerned if this ceased. He said this was a specialised area of work and recruitment was challenging, and he would have concerns to recruit to the level required. In terms of the workload he said this had increased particularly with the issues of illegal dog breeding, but he pointed out that this was an issue nationally, but the answer was not to lose the expertise available from Powys CC.

A Member proposed that due to the significant animal welfare issues and straying animals within the Borough that the Council consider reinstating an animal welfare service.

The proposal was seconded.

A vote was thereupon taken.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the content of the report be noted and Members support the work of the service going forward. (Option 1).

No. 10

ACTIVE TRAVEL AND SAFE ROUTES IN COMMUNITIES 2021/22

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

The Engineer presented the report which provided an update on Active Travel and Safe Routes in the Community (SRiC) works for the Financial Year 2021/22.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein.

In response to concerns raised by a Member regarding the Mechanical Link in Ebbw Vale, the Officer confirmed that Link had been closed through the pandemic due to the social distancing requirements.

A Member said she was disappointed that Cwmcelyn Bridge had not been included in the list for Active Travel Schemes. She said the Bridge provided a link for the community to the local nature area, and was also a route to school.

In response the Officer explained that Cwmcelyn Bridge was not part of the 2021/22 funding programme. She confirmed that other options were being considered, however, it was unlikely that the Bridge would be able to have shared use, i.e. cycle path and footway.

The Officer also encouraged Members to use the commonplace consultation website, as this could be used as evidence gather for future financial years. She was also happy to consult with Members on a ward basis on funding applications for the next financial year.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and Officers consult with Members on the Active Travel Routes (Option B).

No. 11

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 17TH JANUARY 2022

The Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 17th January, 2022 was submitted.

A brief discussion ensued when the Chair undertook to liaise with

the Scrutiny & Democratic Officer regarding potential future items.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Forward Work Programme be accepted.