

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

SUBJECT: **COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12TH APRIL, 2021**

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

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. MEREDITH (VICE-CHAIR IN THE CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook
P. Baldwin
M. Day
P. Edwards
S. Healy
J. Hill (substituting for M. Moore)
W. Hodgins
J. Holt
J.C. Morgan
K. Rowson (substituting for G. Paulsen)
B. Summers
L. Winnett

WITH: Head of Community Services
Team Leader Neighbourhood Services
Team Manager Street Scene
Team Manager Environmental Protection
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

AND: Mr. Neil Greenhalgh – Red & White Resource

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
-----	<u>CONDOLENCES – HRH PRINCE PHILLIP, THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH</u> The Chair reported the sad news of the death of HRH Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh and the Committee observed	

	a minutes' silence as a mark of respect.	
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>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 1st March, 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 meeting held on 1st March, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p>A Member referred to discussions at the pre-meeting and asked that his disagreement be noted in relation to the Chair's ruling regarding the number of questions allowed by Members at any one time.</p> <p><i><u>Progress Update on Silent Valley</u></i></p> <p>A brief discussion ensued when the Scrutiny & Democratic Officer reported that the FWP was currently being developed, and it was intended to schedule the Silent Valley Progress Report to the first meeting of the new cycle in June.</p> <p><i><u>Review of Arrangements with Powys County Council</u></i></p> <p>Following a question raised by a Member the Team Leader Environmental Protection confirmed that a Member had</p>	

	<p>requested a review of the Council's arrangements with Powys County Council in relation to animal welfare.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>ADOPTION OF LITTER AND FLY-TIPPING STRATEGY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Street Scene.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Neil Greenhalgh of Red & White Resource to the meeting.</p> <p>The Team Manager Street Scene presented the report which sought support for the adoption of a new Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy for 2021-2026. He pointed out that Blaenau Gwent was only the second Authority in Wales to devise such a Strategy.</p> <p>He confirmed that a successful application was made to Caru Cymru for £30,000 pa over a three-year period commencing 2019/20. The Caru Cymru scheme supported projects for environmental improvements within residential areas by developing benefits for people, businesses and their communities. The aim of the project was to improve the quality of the environment with the emphasis on long term behavioural change rather than continuing to rely on just cleaning up. The funding application included the appointment of a Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) Officer who would work with existing Litter Champions and groups, and also engage with schools and community groups to raise awareness, educate and promote local environmental quality issues within the borough. Unfortunately, this work had been delayed due to the Covid pandemic.</p> <p>The Officer said it had been identified that in order for the Council to have a more effective and positive impact on the scheme, a relevant strategy and supporting policies would be required to support management of the project. As a result, the funding application included a specialist LEQ consultant to be appointed to undertake a review of the Street Cleansing Service and draft a Blaenau Gwent Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy. A tender process was</p>	

commenced in November 2019 and the contract was awarded to Red & White Resource Ltd.

The Officer confirmed that a thorough review and analysis of the cleansing service was undertaken, and the feedback from stakeholder meetings and interviews allowed the Consultant to draft an independent and objective Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy for Council. However, due to the Covid pandemic, additional site visits and follow-up stakeholder workshops were unable to go ahead, but it was felt that the information and data obtained up to 20th March, 2021 was sufficient to complete a draft Strategy for adoption by the Council.

In terms of the Strategy, attached at Appendix 1, a number of key objectives have been established that would deliver the recognised environmental improvements, and these were highlighted at section 2.3.3 of the report. Also included within the Strategy was an Action Plan (Appendix 2) with key actions to be undertaken during the 5 year lifespan of the Strategy and associated timelines.

A Member referred to the excellent work undertaken by Litter Champions, but expressed concern that the process currently in place to register as a litter champion should be made easier.

In response the Team Manager Streetscene said there were well over 200 registered Litter Champions in the Borough working closely with the Council. When registered they are able to report their litter picks for collection through the system and they also have direct access to Officers. However, he agreed that the process could be streamlined and better coordinated, and this would form part of the work of the LEQ Officer when appointed.

Another Member referred to the key objectives detailed at section 2.3.3 of the report and asked how the Strategy would be communicated across all age groups.

The Officer said one of the essential areas of work for the LEQ Officer would be engagement with schools. Work had commenced prior to the Covid pandemic, but this would be

further developed as part of the Strategy to ensure robust engagement with schools on a coordinated basis.

A Member referred to the £30k funding obtained over 3 years and asked whether part of this would be used to fund the LEQ Officer.

The Officer explained that this was revenue funding identified to support an LEQ Officer and other work associated with Keep Wales Tidy. The appointment would be on a fixed term basis, however, indications was that further funding would be available in future years.

Another Member referred to an initiative adopted by Monmouthshire County Council where a sign was erected following a litter pick by volunteers, recognising their excellent contribution. He suggested that this approach be considered in Blaenau Gwent, and the Team Manager Street Scene undertook to look into this matter.

A Member who was a registered Litter Champion said in his experience the system was working well. He said his only complaint was with those people who were littering and that a zero tolerance approach should be adopted. He looked forward to the appointment of an LEQ Officer and engagement with schools in order to educate young people and hopefully improve the environment for the future.

In response to a further question raised by a Member regarding the funding, the Team Manager explained that the actions included within the Strategy would be delivered within the existing revenue budget for cleansing. However, additional funding would be explored for anything falling outside of the Strategy.

Mr. Neil Greenhalgh of Red & White Resources then went through the Strategy document and highlighted points contained therein.

A Member said in his opinion not enough fines were being issued in relation to fly tipping. He also expressed concern that some people were using communal collection points to dispose of their rubbish, and asked when it was intended to cease communal collections.

In response the Team Manager Public Protection pointed out that Blaenau Gwent was consistently one of the top performing LA's in Wales for enforcement activity and issuing fixed penalty notices for litter.

In relation to communal collection points the Team Manager Streetscene explained that the Council had two strategies in place, one to deal with litter and the other to deal with waste. However, the issue of side waste enforcement/fly tipping was recognised, particularly in Town Centres but a review was needed to determine whether it should be come under the remit of litter or side waste enforcement.

A brief discussion ensued when the Team Manager Neighbourhood Services confirmed that a number of communal collection points had been removed, and work was ongoing to reduce them further.

A Member asked whether as part of the Strategy it was intended to work with fast food companies in the Borough to try and stop the litter being generated from these outlets.

The Team Manager Streetscene confirmed the Council would be engaging with local businesses to work together to reduce that type of litter.

Another Member asked whether the cost of litter and fly tipping to the Council had increased in recent years.

The Officer explained that the revenue account associated with cleansing was £1.1m for cleaning operations and operations associated with litter and fly tipping. However, the work of the Litter Champions in terms of man hours and collections etc, is not measured and said this could be considered as an indicator moving forward.

A further discussion ensued when the Team Manager Environmental Protection said the majority of fly tipping in remote locations was done for commercial gain by small operators advertising services, rather than individual householders.

Mr. Greenhalgh agreed and said this was a problem throughout the UK.

The Team Manager Streetscene said the online booking system for HWRC sites needed to be more streamlined, and the Council also needed to consider whether it intended to retain the booking system which was put in place as a result of the Covid pandemic. However, he pointed out that the new HWRC would be open shortly and hopefully this would have a positive impact.

A Member said a 'pay and go' facility at the Council's HWRC sites may encourage those small operators to utilise the sites rather than fly tip. He also reported that some businesses were putting their trade waste out alongside communal collection points, and asked whether the Council was engaging with those businesses to inform them of the correct procedures, and that they should not employ unscrupulous trade waste operators.

In response the Team Manager Environmental Protection explained that commercial businesses have a duty to ensure they have arrangements in place with a legitimate waste disposal contractor. He urged Members to report any issues to Environmental Health if they were aware of commercial operators depositing waste at communal collection points designed for domestic waste.

The Team Manager Neighbourhood Services confirmed that the Council's new trade waste service would be launched in due course for our customers. However, he said some work could be done with those businesses who do not employ the Council's services, but he pointed out that they had a duty of care to dispose of their waste appropriately.

A discussion ensued regarding the booking system currently in place at the HWRC site, when the Team Manager Neighbourhood Services said the system would remain in place until such time as the Covid regulations changed. He said there had been some benefits to the booking system in terms of providing data on usage and the type of materials taken to the site. Also running costs in terms of manpower had reduced and the queues once seen at the site had also

stopped. However, whether we continue this approach would be subject to further consideration.

A Member expressed concern that people were leaving their recycling/refuse bins on the footpath causing obstruction. In response the Officer said waste receptacles should only be put out early on collection day, or late the night before. He confirmed that letters had been sent out in certain streets requesting that they be removed, and wider scope for enforcement was being developed moving forward.

A further brief discussion ensued when the Team Manager Environmental Protection explained that the process for reporting fly tipping had recently changed. The first point of contact for fly tipping on public land was now the Cleaning Team, and an operative would respond to the incident and undertake an investigation prior to clearing. Any evidence would then be forwarded to Environmental Health. He said the arrangement was working very well and prevented duplication of effort, with greater focus on investigation and enforcement.

A Member said education was a key element for the success of the Strategy, and said there may be scope for this to be built into the new curriculum for Key Stage 2. In terms of enforcement, he asked whether Waste Wardens could issue fixed penalty notices.

Mr. Greenhalgh said in terms of education and engagement with schools, Keep Wales Tidy already engaged with Key Stage 2 through the Eco Schools initiative. However, more work was needed with Secondary Schools, as from experience, engagement with older children was more challenging. The LEQ Officer would provide the resource for the Council to engage with Secondary Schools to try and influence youngsters' behaviour through interactive sessions highlighting the negative impact of litter on the community.

In relation to fly tipping, a Member said there were 'hotspots' in all areas of the Borough, and asked whether there was opportunity to utilise CCTV to catch offenders.

In response the Team Manager Public Protection said there were a number of locations identified as prolific 'hotspots' throughout the Borough, and CCTV was being considered, but there were technical issues in some areas. Funding had also been secured from Welsh Government to look at utilising the new 5G network and discussions were ongoing regarding the development of a permanent provision in rural areas. However, this was in the very early stages but he assured that work was ongoing to secure a solution to the problem in the longer term.

In response to a question raised, the Team Manager Streetscene confirmed that a litter and dog bin policy would be included in the FWP for consideration by Members.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and adoption of the draft Blaenau Gwent Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy 2021-2026 be supported (Option 1).