

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT:** **COMMUNITY SERVICE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 2020**

**REPORT OF:** **DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER**

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**PRESENT:** COUNCILLOR J. WILKINS (CHAIR)

Councillors C. Meredith  
G.L. Davies  
L. Elias  
S. Healy  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
H. McCarthy  
T. Sharrem  
B. Summers

**WITH:** Corporate Director Community Services & Regeneration  
Head of Community Services  
Service Manager Community Services  
Team Leader Waste & Fleet Management  
Communications, Marketing & Customer Access Manager  
Ecologist  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received for Councillors M. Cook and G. Paulsen.</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillor W. Hodgins declared an interest in the following item:</p> <p>Item No. 7 Local Nature Reserve Designation and Declaration.</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 5<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER, 2019</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><i><u>Bridging the Gap – Trade Waste Service – Strategic Business Review</u></i></p> <p>A Member referred to the responses listed on Appendix 6 and expressed concerned regarding the number of responses received from Education. The Service Manager Community Services undertook to investigate.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>EXECUTIVE DECISION SHEET</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Executive Decision Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Executive Decision Sheet be noted.</p>	

No. 7

**LOCAL NATURE RESERVE DESIGNATION AND DECLARATION**

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

At the invitation of the Chair, the Ecologist presented the report which sought approval for the designation and declaration of five Local Nature Reserves, namely Beaufort Hill Ponds & Woodland, Central Valley, Garden City, Parc Bryn Bach and Sirhowy Hill Woodlands.

Blaenau Gwent currently had seven designated Local Nature Reserves totalling 120.3 hectares. Declaration and designation of the sites contributed to the Council's Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-22) which was developed in order to comply with the requirements of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

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

A Member said he welcomed the report and supported the proposed areas. However, in designating these areas, public opinion was that the Council was responsible for future maintenance, and with limited resources the Council was struggling to maintain existing rights of way etc.

In response the Officer confirmed that the areas were within Council ownership and already part of our day to day work. The Council were already working in partnership with community groups to maintain and enhance these areas, and Welsh Government were also looking to get more people involved, and promoting nature recovery issues through grant funded projects, e.g. A Resilient Greater Gwent.

A Member said he fully supported the proposals and was happy to support Option 2.

Another Member referred to Parc Bryn Bach and expressed concern that designating the area may have a detrimental impact on any future proposals and subsequent planning applications submitted. He therefore proposed that the report

be amended, and that Parc Bryn Bach be removed at this time, pending discussions with Aneurin Leisure Trust.

The Officer said Parc Bryn Bach was already designated a SINC area so Development Management Procedure 14 would apply in terms of any future planning applications.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services explained that designation of LNR would not preclude any future development. However, such designation would have the advantage of enhancing and protecting the area, and also provide opportunities to access resources to support this work.

A Member referred to the funding secured from the Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Grant to deliver 12 sub-projects across the five Local Authority areas in Greater Gwent, and asked how much had been allocated for Blaenau Gwent.

The Ecologist confirmed that the amount was approximately £210k for the 5 Greater Gwent Local Authority areas. Blaenau Gwent would receive approximately £40k, however, it was a project running on agile terms and the whole project budget had yet to be allocated.

A discussion ensued regarding maintenance when the Officer said designation of LNR was about ensuring protection of these areas. Maintenance of pathways etc., would always be challenging in terms of the budget, but it was about prioritising, and partnership working, and hopefully funding could be directed towards these issues.

The Chair asked whether designation of LNR would be subject to public consultation, and the Officer confirmed that the legislation did not require public consultation, but it would form part of the LDP Deposit Plan process.

The Chair then referred to the Options for Recommendations, and a Member proposed Option 2, with an amendment that Parc Bryn Bach be removed from the list pending further discussions with ALT.

The proposal was seconded.

	<p>A vote was then taken on the proposed amendment and 4 Members voted in favour of the amendment.</p> <p>Another Member proposed that Option 2 be supported, as outlined in the report, and this was seconded.</p> <p>A vote was then taken on Option 2 and 5 Members voted in favour.</p> <p>The Committee therefore AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and Option 2 be supported, as outlined in the report, namely to designate and declare five Local Nature Reserves; Sirhowy Hill Woodlands, Beaufort Hill Ponds &amp; Woodland, Parc Bryn Bach, Garden City and Central Valley.</p>	
<p><b>No. 8</b></p>	<p><b><u>STREET LIGHTING SERVICE REVIEW</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>The Team Leader Waste &amp; Fleet Management presented the report which provided an update on the Street Lighting Review, which was requested following a Members' Briefing in February 2019. The review consisted of three overarching priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority 1 – Financial diligence</li> <li>• Priority 2 – Stock management and assets; and</li> <li>• Priority 3 – Legislative drivers and performance of the service.</li> </ul> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to section 2.4 of the report which outlined the outputs against Priority 2, and asked whether the remaining stock could be used to undertake in-house repairs etc.</p> <p>In response the Officer explained that the Engineering Team had significantly reduced over the years, and the type of work undertaken had changed to more reactive minor repairs, and with major works being contracted out.</p>	

However, he confirmed that redundant stock was used where possible, if it was not obsolete.

A Member referred to insurance claims and asked what process was undertaken previously, and whether the Council had any outstanding claims.

The Officer said there was no system in place previously. The issue was raised at a Members' briefing session, so the Team looked at the system used by Cardiff City Council, and mirrored that approach. The first test case was successful, with almost full cost recovery, and other cases would be looked at.

A Member referred to the Solar LED lanterns introduced in Newtown, Ebbw Vale and the Officer reported that unfortunately the amount of sunlight in the Borough was insufficient to power the lanterns, but alternative technology was being considered.

A discussion ensued regarding capacity within the Team, and the Refit Programme, when the Officer confirmed that moving to LED lanterns would reduce maintenance requirements, and enable the Team to respond to other work.

A Member pointed out that the reduction in maintenance may impact on future staffing levels. He also stated that changing to LED lanterns should impact significantly on the budget.

In response the Head of Community Services said in theory it should, but energy prices were increasing at a faster rate than the return of implementing energy saving initiatives. However, the cost of not undertaking these works would prove more expensive in the future.

A further brief discussion ensued when the Officer clarified points raised by Members.

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

No. 9

**COMMUNITY SERVICES WORKFORCE SICKNESS  
ABSENCE PERFORMANCE**

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

The Head of Community Services presented the report which outlined the Directorate's sickness absence performance and the proposed actions for improvement. He said whilst sickness levels remained high it was important to note that the majority of employees have little or no sickness absence and attend work regularly, and the vast majority of Council employees have excellent attendance levels, as data indicated that 2,463 employees attended work every day during the period from April 2018 to March 2019 with the Council having an attendance level of 94.3%.

In terms of actions for improvement, the Officer said whilst there was evidence of managerial action in managing sickness the Directorate acknowledged that better use of the iTrent system was required. A number of actions had been agreed, as outlined in Section 4.1 of the report, and these would be monitored by the Directorate Management Team, and sickness absence would continue to be a regular item on the Management Team Agenda.

A Member said more information was needed in terms of recording return to work meetings on the iTrent system.

In response the Officer said the report was populated by Organisational Development, and it was the first time for the report to be presented in this format. He confirmed that return to work meetings were taking place, but in some instances were not being reported through the iTrent system. He confirmed that the Member's comments would be raised with OD.

A discussion ensued when the Corporate Director said it was important to note that return to work meetings were being undertaken, and Managers were complying with the Attendance Management Policy. However, there were some areas within the Directorate that were unable to access the system, and this was being looked at, but he assured that

	<p>return to work meetings were being undertaken, albeit not recorded on iTrent.</p> <p>The Chair said the format of the report needed further consideration to ensure we get the information needed, and it would also be interesting to see what other Scrutiny Committees thought of the format.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and having scrutinised the sickness absence performance information and proposed arrangements to improve attendance rates within the Regeneration &amp; Community Services Directorate discussed further areas for improvement in order to drive forward performance improvement (Option 1).</p>	
<p><b>No. 10</b></p>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 27<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled for the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted.</p>	