

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 7TH DECEMBER, 2020

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT:

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

WITH: Councillor L. Parsons, Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Champion
Item No. 9 South East Wales Resilient Uplands

Mr. Nicholas Alvin – Item No. 9 South East
Wales Resilient Uplands Project

AND: Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Head of Community Services
Team Leader Neighbourhood Services
Team Manager Street Scene
Team Manager Natural Environment
Team Manager Built Environment
Team Manager Environmental Protection
Team Leader Estates and Valuations
Senior Engineer Land Drainage
Marketing Projects Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

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 reported for Councillors M. Moore (Chair) and M. Cross.</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 21st September, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the special Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 13th October, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee held on 19th October, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	

No. 7

ACTION SHEET - 19TH OCTOBER 2020

The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 19th October, 2020 was submitted.

Item No 6. Forward Work Programme

It was reported that the date should be amended to read 1st March, 2021.

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

No. 8

CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT – SERVICE UPDATE

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

Team Manager Built Environment presented the report which provided an update on Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) since its introduction in 2019.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. He said the CPE service was suspended for 4 months from 20th March to 20th July, 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, and this had impacted against the forecasted number of penalty charge notices issued this year (estimated at 3,500 per year); with a potential reduction over the four-month period of approximately 1165 PCN's. However, an 88% PCN collection rate was higher than the financial modelling estimate. To offset the income lost as a result of the suspension of the service, £27k has been received from the Covid-19 Welsh Government Hardship Fund, and the latest budget monitoring was forecasting a £4k budget surplus for this financial year. This would be monitored and reviewed going forward.

A Member asked whether the number of Enforcement Officers and the hours worked was sufficient to undertake the number of patrols required.

In response the Officer confirmed that Enforcement Officers were

visiting key schools and town centres once or twice a week. He referred to the issues raised at the Members' Briefing held in November, e.g. town centre market days and confirmed that these have been taken on board and visits would be undertaken.

In response the Member said there were problems on most days, particularly people parking on pavements by ATM's, and he felt that patrols should be undertaken 3 or 4 times a week in town centres.

The Officer said town centres were a priority, however, additional patrols would impact on resources.

Another Member expressed concern regarding the low number of PCN's issued in Nantyglo and Blaina compared to the problems being experienced, and asked how many visits were being undertaken in those towns. She understood the difficulty in catching offenders, particularly with people posting on social media when the Enforcement Officers were in the area.

A Member agreed with his colleague's comments, and said the figures for Nantyglo and Blaina should be split per town. He also referred to the review of traffic orders being undertaken, and said whilst the removal of yellow lines would provide more parking, it could also cause problems for bus routes etc., and asked whether this was being monitored by the Enforcement Officers.

In response the Officer said it was difficult to police, particularly with the use of social media, but confirmed that visits were being undertaken in Nantyglo and Blaina, albeit not as much as the larger town centres. He was aware of the problems at High Street, Blaina and confirmed that more regular patrols could be undertaken. In relation to the traffic order review, this work was currently ongoing. The Officer also undertook to provide the Member with a breakdown of the PCNs issued for Nantyglo and Blaina separately.

In response to a question raised, the Officer explained that the

larger town centres were visited a minimum of once per week, and the smaller towns a minimum of once a fortnight. However, the Enforcement Officers would also respond to any issues or complaints received if possible.

A Member referred to an initiative undertaken by Monmouthshire CC to offer a second residential parking permit for a one-off yearly charge, and whether this could be considered for Blaenau Gwent.

The Officer explained that the rationale for one parking permit per household was because many of the streets surrounding our town centres were terraced houses, and increasing this could be problematic. However, he undertook to look into the matter.

Another Member asked whether the Enforcement Officers undertook checks to ensure that 'blue badges' were being used by the eligible person.

The Officer explained that the Enforcement Officers did not have the authority to undertake checks, however, if they were aware of an issue they would pass the information on to the relevant Department.

A discussion ensued when a Member referred to the low number of PCNs issued outside schools, and another Member said a zero tolerance should be adopted.

In response the Officer confirmed that a zero tolerance approach was now in place. He said the number of PCNs was low considering the number of visits undertaken, but they were only able to issue PCNs in contravention of a traffic order. He also pointed out that patrols were not undertaken of all schools, only those deemed a particular problem as agreed with Members and colleagues within Education. The majority of schools within the Borough did not have any traffic orders in place, and as a result the Enforcement Officers were powerless to act.

A Member commended the work undertaken by the Senior Engineer Road Safety on the review of Traffic Regulation Orders and the ongoing consultation. However, he asked why some schemes had been completed prior to the Borough's town centres being considered.

The Officer explained that the two schemes which had been completed were commenced prior to CPE coming into force. He confirmed that following the initial review, all defective signage had now been replaced, however, 'yellow lines' was an ongoing maintenance issue as part of the annual highway inspections undertaken.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted the update on progress relating to Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) since its introduction in 2019 be noted (Option 1).

No. 9

SOUTH EAST WALES RESILIENT UPLANDS – WALES RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT SCHEME

The Chair welcomed Mr. Nicholas Alvin, the Project Officer, to the meeting.

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

The Team Leader Natural Environment presented the report which updated Members on the ongoing regional South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU) project and the Council's work in supporting delivery of the 3-year project (2018- 2021).

The South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU) was a collaborative project, involving Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils, Natural Resources Wales, Police, Fire and Rescue Services, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Brecon Beacons National Park. Torfaen CBC was the project Lead for the collaboration, and the focus of the SEWRU was to deliver priority

actions from the Landscape Institute award winning Natural Resource Management Plan for South-east Wales Uplands (NRMP) produced in 2015. Detailed delivery plans were attached at Appendix 2.

The Officer reported that to date the project had identified and completed several peatland restoration projects, produced common land management plans (including a detailed management plan for Mynydd Llanhilleth), restored many kilometres of commons boundary stock fencing, installed physical barriers to reduce landscape crime on commons, and managed important upland heathland to reduce fire risk and facilitate conservation grazing. SEWRU was currently working with Gwent Police and other partners to update the NRMP and produce upland-focussed landscape crime management plans for each common within the project.

A Member welcomed the report, and asked whether Manmoel was included in the common land management plan. He expressed concern regarding the on-going problems of off-road vehicles using the common to access an illegal bike track, and the detrimental impact on the protected landscape.

The Officer said he was aware of the issues with off-road vehicles and the bike track which was on private land outside the common. Work was done to try and secure the common against the vehicles, but unfortunately they continue to find ways to get through. Also the road leading to Manmoel village was open for public use so it was difficult to try and reduce their activity, as they were able to use the road to get to the bike track facility, the legality of which was under question.

Mr. Alvin explained that the funding arrangements was based on commons above 200m, so rather than rural wards the funding was targeted at essential upland areas of Gwent that are registered common land and peripheral areas around those, including Manmoel.

Councillor Lee Parsons thanked the Chair for extending invitation to the meeting and said he welcomed the report. He asked whether Welsh Government had given any indication of proposals for a wind farm at Mynydd Llanhilleth.

In response Mr. Alvin said he had not been consulted on any proposals to date, however, it would not impact on what the SEWRU was seeking to do, e.g. developing landscape management plans for every common land, including Mynydd Llanhilleth.

The Team Leader Natural Environment confirmed that any proposals for a wind farm would be subject to a landscape visual impact assessment and environmental impact. Renewal energy was a pressing issue for Welsh Government in its carbon neutral approach, however, he confirmed that he had not had sight of any application to date.

A Member thanked the Officers for the work undertaken on the commons, and also the commoners for their involvement and work to improve the areas.

A brief discussion ensued when the Officer explained that there was some rarity of species in Blaenau Gwent, particularly the Silurian Moth which was only found in the Brecon Beacons and one other site in Dorset. He said this was an indicator species, i.e. if the uplands were managed correctly the numbers should increase, however, failure to manage them properly could see the species lost altogether.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and noted the activity taking place within the South East Wales Resilient Uplands Project and continue to support the collaborative working approach as programmed (Option 1).

No. 10

ACTIVITIES REPORT – LITTERING AND DOG CONTROL ORDER ENFORCEMENT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2019/20

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager

Environmental Protection.

The Team Manager Environmental Protection presented the report which updated Members on the progress of the Litter and Dog Control Order enforcement initiative in operation in the Borough since October 2011; and detailed outcomes for the 2019/20 financial year. During 2018/19, Blaenau Gwent CBC was one of the top performing LA's in Wales for the issuing of Litter and Dog Control fixed penalty notices, however, the national figures for 2019/20 are yet to be released.

The Officer said during the third quarter of 2019/20 there was initial concern about the end of year net- cost of the service arising from on-going financial monitoring, and as a result, the service level agreement (SLA) for 2020/21 was re-negotiated with LA Support Limited. The new SLA provided a guaranteed zero cost service for the Local Authority with LA Support Limited now retaining all income received from fines generated and not charging the Local Authority for any staff costs.

The Officer confirmed that the service was suspended in March 2020 due to the Covid pandemic and the need to minimise human to human contact. The situation was under constant review, and it was anticipated that the service would be reinstated when the legal and public health restrictions are eased to allow the service to return in a viable form.

A Member expressed concern that the amount of dog fouling had increased during the lockdown period, with more people walking their dogs, and said extra patrols would be needed when the service resumed.

In response the Officer it was acknowledged that dog ownership had increased during the Covid pandemic. He pointed out that the number of complaints received about dog fouling had reduced significantly during 2019/20 and was the lowest recorded since enforcement began. Progress was being made in challenging the problem, but unfortunately patrols had not been undertaken since

March so inevitably the problem had increased.

The Member suggested a social medial campaign be undertaken to reinforce the risk to public health, and that it was an offence to not pick up after your dog. The Officer undertook to liaise with the Communications.

A Member referred to the new SLA arrangements, and the Officer confirmed that the principles of the SLA would continue to be monitored. He had a very good working relationship with the company, and it provided stability in terms of experienced Officers working in the Borough.

Another Member said the amount of FPNs issued for dog fouling was very low compared to FPNs issued for litter offences, and suggested that this was due to the timing of patrols. He felt that patrols early in the morning and around 6 p.m. would be more productive.

The Officer confirmed that regular patrols were undertaken of 'hot spot' areas, and more targeted patrols based on intelligence received, but the offence was very difficult to police. He also pointed out that the vast majority of dog owners were responsible.

A discussion ensued when a Member expressed concern regarding the Council's ranking on the street cleanliness indicator highlighted in Keep Wales Tidy annual report for 2018/19. He said dog fouling and litter was a major problem and said he wondered whether the reduction in complaints being received was due to 'reporting fatigue'.

In response the Officer said the main factors in providing clean and pleasant streets to live in was enforcement; the ability to respond reactively and pro-actively; and also society attitude to their surrounding area. From an enforcement perspective the Council was one of the better performing LA's in Wales for issuing FPNs and undertaking patrols of areas where issues are identified.

In terms of the Member's comment that the public have 'reporting fatigue' he said the social media campaign could be used to reiterate the fact that the Council would not tolerate dog fouling and litter offences and will issue FPNs.

The Team Leader Streetscene confirmed that work was currently ongoing with consultants to develop a litter strategy for Blaenau Gwent. The strategy was in draft form and it would be included in the Committee's FWP February/March next year.

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

No. 11

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 18TH JANUARY 2021

It was reported that the Community Services Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on the 18th January, 2021 had been **CANCELLED**.

A Member requested a report on the use of consultants across the Portfolio to include a breakdown of costs and outcomes over the last 2 years.

He also requested a report on rear lane recycling collections, particularly use of the new vehicles, to include the reason for not progressing removal of communal collection points.

The Team Manager Neighbourhood Services confirmed that both these issues formed part the route optimisation exercise currently ongoing, and undertook to provide an update on this work.

A brief discussion ensued when the Head of Technical Services undertook to provide a review of operational arrangements over the last year

No. 12

UPDATE CEMETERY BURIAL CAPACITY

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.

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).

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Streetscene.

The Team Manager Streetscene presented the report which updated Members on current burial capacity across all cemeteries in Blaenau Gwent, and provided information on progress made to redress the issues raised in consideration of the report considered at the February meeting of the Committee.

A Member referred to recent discussions at the Joint Scrutiny (Budget Monitoring) in relation to capital monies identified to undertake improvements to the Borough's cemeteries, and sought assurance that this money would not be used for the proposals set out in this report.

The Team Leader Streetscene assured that the capital monies referred to by the Member would be utilised for infrastructure improvements in the Borough's cemeteries.

A discussion ensued when the Officer clarified points raised by Members in relation to potential land acquisition.

A Member referred to the funding requirements highlighted at section 5.2.1 of the report and asked why the figure for 2021/22 had increased from the previous report submitted in February.

In response the Team Leader Estates and Valuations explained that this was in relation to potential CPO's. Appendix 1 provided a breakdown of costs.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relation to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and Members support the following:

- The appointment of external legal advice to provide the

necessary legal information necessary to move forward with land acquisition.

- To support the use of CPO powers to purchase land as required based on the legal advice provided.
- An application be made to the Council's Capital programme for funding to support the land purchase costs and cemetery infrastructure works necessary over the next three years 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24.