

STREETSCENE AND ENGINEERING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

20 September 2019

Chairperson: Councillor S.M.Penry

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.W.Wood

Councillors: S.ap Dafydd, A.R.Aubrey, C.Galsworthy,
D.Keogh, A.McGrath, W.F.Griffiths and
R.Davies

Officers In Attendance D.Griffiths, N.Thomas, A.Lewis, N.Jones and
T.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors R.G.Jones and E.V.Latham

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July, 2019, be approved.

2. WINTER SERVICE OPERATIONS

The circulated report provided an update, as requested by Scrutiny Committee Members, on the ongoing preparation to ensure the successful delivery of winter service operations, in readiness for the 2019-20 winter season.

Members noted that although gritting routes had been reduced in previous years due to budget pressures, the current fleet of gritting vehicles were ready for the start of the winter season, and the stockpiles of grit were full. The updated, on board computer equipment continued to provide useful data, such as the areas treated and spread rates.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

3. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet Board items:

Ash Dieback

The circulated Cabinet Board report contained information on the potential future environmental and financial impact of Chalara Ash Dieback disease which was currently affecting a large number of trees on both Council and private land.

Members queried whether the reference to playgrounds in the report referred also to playgrounds owned and managed by Town/Community Councils. Officers confirmed that the figures in the report only related to Council owned playgrounds. It would be for land owners to manage the trees on their land. However the action plan would include how the Council would be cascading information on the disease to other land owners. This would include Town and Community Councils.

It was also noted that where land was leased from the Council, then the terms of the individual lease would determine who would be responsible for any trees on that land.

Queries were raised on the transportation and reuse of the dead wood. It was confirmed that as the Ash Dieback disease was now so widespread, the transportation of the felled material was not subject to restrictions. This meant that the wood could also be used in small scale projects and in log burners and so on. It was anticipated, however, that there would not be much resale value in the wood due to the volume of trees needing to be cut down, and the majority of the wood would be recycled.

Members noted that although Biomass Plants used wood to create energy, ash trees would not be suitable in all cases, as the process was designed to take straight trees such as conifers which were easier to manage with their processes.

Replanting the felled trees with other species, for visual and biodiversity purposes would be included in the action plan, and ongoing meetings had been arranged concerning woodland management.

Due to the scale of the operation, contractors may be used in addition to Council staff to cut down and dispose of the trees.

The following areas were also discussed:

- Larch tree disease,
- Rhododendrons,
- Funding of the project,
- Highway safety.

Following scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

Memorial Testing

The circulated report contained a proposed memorial testing policy which would formalise current procedures and provide a clear and consistent approach to the inspection of memorials within all cemeteries managed by the authority.

Members discussed how often the inspections would take place, and noted this would be every five years, although if a memorial was deemed to be safe, but in need of ongoing observation, then the follow up inspections would be more frequent. It was noted that the laying down of headstones would be a last resort, and headstones would be staked or pocketed (placed in a deeper hole) wherever possible.

Following scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board

Christmas Parking 2019

Members noted that in previous years where free Christmas parking in the weeks leading up to Christmas had been offered, footfall had increased in the town centres – by 11% in Port Talbot, for example. Although it was difficult to get quantifiable information from local traders, they felt that there was a benefit from the free parking.

Following scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

4. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

CHAIRPERSON