

Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee

(Via Teams)

Members Present:

28 January 2022

Chairperson: Councillor S.M.Penry

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.W.Wood

Councillors: C.Galsworthy, D.Keogh, W.F.Griffiths,
R.Davies, J.Hale, S.A.Knoyle, S.Jones and
S.Lynch

Officers In Attendance: M.Roberts, J Davies, H.Hasan, P. Jackson,
K.Lewis, J.Stenlake, S.Foster, T.Davies and
C.Plowman

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors M.Harvey and A.Wingrave

1. **Maintenance and Management of Public Playgrounds**

Members were provided with information regarding the management and maintenance of Council playgrounds. It was highlighted that 47 playgrounds across the County Borough were within the Councils remit; the circulated report didn't cover those managed by other parties e.g. Town and Community Councils.

Appendix A of the circulated report set out the ongoing process of inspection and review that was in place to ensure Council owned playgrounds remained safe for everyone to use; the report also provided information regarding a mobile ranger who carried out weekly inspections of the playgrounds.

The Committee was informed of the budgets relating to this work; the amount of monies within the revenue budget for Neighbourhood Services was set out in the report, along with the money allocated towards maintenance of playgrounds. It was stated that there was around £30k in the budget per year to carry out replacement of equipment; this was the remaining money after allocating money for the day to day management, inspection, and safety measures.

It was explained that there wasn't a standing capital allocation for renewal of the equipment; therefore Officers had to put in bids, as and when required, in the budget process which gets considered as part of the annual budget rounds. It was mentioned that there was a significant investment program ongoing in the current year; however, Officers had to wait on the supply chain in terms of the equipment arriving. Members were informed that supply chains across a lot of areas of work had been disrupted by the pandemic.

Following on from the above, it was noted that Officers were working with colleagues in other services and looking for match funding opportunities; the Team worked closely with the Project Development and Funding Manager, and Members who were looking to add additional investment and make improvements to playgrounds in their Wards, through the Members Community Fund. It was added that Appendix B of the circulated report highlighted the programmed playground investment that was currently ongoing, which totalled to around £350k. Officers were hopeful for extra monies from the budget process for next year; this extra money was included in the consultation that was currently being carried out on the Councils revenue budget.

Officers updated Members on one of the issues identified in the circulated report, relating to the number of swings that were removed from Council playgrounds during 2020 as part of meeting the national social distancing measures. It was noted that the Team had received all parts for the swings, apart from a handful of chains which were still required in order to rebuild the cradle swings; Officers hoped that the majority will be put back up in the next two weeks, with those remaining by the end of February.

Members raised the need for a strategic plan and vision for playgrounds, and highlighted the importance of play for children. Concerns were voiced in regards to the level of playgrounds that Neath Port Talbot had, particularly the lack of in some areas; as well as the lack of money to spend on maintenance and replenishing the playgrounds. Officers reassured Members that keeping these areas safe and in order was the key focus for the Team, and highlighted that budget was an issue for a lot of other services within the Council; Officers were always happy to spend as much allocated for these types of infrastructures.

Officers were asked if, at present, they had the personnel within the Neighbourhood Services Team for safety, inspection and

maintenance of equipment in playgrounds; to which it was confirmed that they did.

Concerns were raised in regards to the plastic waste bins which were located in some Council owned playgrounds across the County Borough; some of them were subject to vandalism, and had to be replaced numerous times in the matter of weeks. Officers confirmed that they would look into this issue, and provide an alternative to the plastic bins, where appropriate.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

2. **Litter, Fly Tipping and Side Waste Enforcement**

The Committee received a report which outlined the enforcement activity that the Team was carrying out in relation to litter, fly tipping and side waste enforcement

Officers highlighted that this service was an area that had been significantly disrupted by the pandemic; civic amenity sites had been closed, bulk collection services were suspended, and the police and criminal act interview process, which allows evidence to be gathered and prosecutions to be taken forward to court, had been halted. It was mentioned that the figures in the circulated report reflected those disruptions. Previously, it was noted that Neath Port Talbot Council had been the leading Authority for taking fly tipping enforcements; this may still be the case, however the numbers were reduced, as all Authorities would have experienced difficulties during the pandemic. Officers explained that they did not have the current national comparison figures as of yet, however this type of information was likely to be available at the end of the financial year.

A discussion took place in relation to un-adopted roads and areas where land was listed under private ownership, in which fly tipping was an issue. Members were informed that a lot of land owners would respond after being contacted by an Enforcement Officer, and will clear the waste from the area; however, there were others who were more difficult to get in contact with, and Officers had to issue enforcement notices to them. It was mentioned that some land was unregistered, and it was challenging for Officers to identify who owned the land; the Team worked closely with the probation service, who go into the private, unidentified areas and complete community clean-up work. It was added that these types of areas were tackled the same as those which were known and adopted.

It was asked if Local Councillors could assist Officers in identifying 'collection' points where large numbers of black bags were being deposited, as indicated would be the subject of investigation by enforcement. The Head of Streetcare confirmed that this was possible

Members highlighted that it was quite often the case that believed repeat offenders weren't taken to court due to the lack of evidence; therefore, it was asked if witness statements could be submitted as evidence. Officers confirmed that witness statements can play a role, however there may still need to be other evidence dependent on the offence. It was agreed that Officers would liaise with Legal Services to gather more information regarding the use of witness statements for offences.

Officers were asked if they felt that the gated lanes reduced fly tipping, or compounded the issue; and if they would consider a pilot, whereby some gates were removed from these areas. It was recognised that in some areas, the gates had not helped the situation with waste in the lanes, albeit they were put in for other crime issues. Officers stated that this was an area which could be looked into in terms of having a trial, with the help of the Estates Team who manage the gates, although Officers would need to check the legal position and any process associated with the Gating Orders.

It was queried if Officers were in discussions with business such as, KFC, Morrison's, McDonalds and the like, where volunteer residents were seeing an increase in litter surrounding those businesses. The Committee was informed that roadside litter was a national issue; some of the businesses did have their own litter patrols, and in the past enforcement Officers have visited businesses and discussed various ways to try and track the littering. It was noted that the Team would be happy to work with Local Councillors on this issue, and try to make improvements in their areas.

Members asked how much extra was being spent on plastic recycling bins; many residents had reported theirs as broken after their food waste had been collected, and needed a replacement. It was also asked if the plastic from the broken bins was recycled. Officers agreed to carry out an analysis and provide Members with factual details on how much was being spent, outside of the meeting. In regards to the latter part of the question, it was highlighted that historically when the bins had been replaced as part of system

changes, the plastic had been recycled, as well as broken bins which could be recycled.

In regards to the collection of recycling, it was raised that Members had received a lot of complaints relating to the mess left behind by personnel. The Committee was informed that the collection vehicles had CCTV around them, which helped Officers to understand the complaints being made; in some cases the complaints were not justified, however those that were, were followed up by the supervisors. It was noted that extra monies was being allocated to the service for an addition chargehand, which will free up more supervisor time for on-site supervision; this will allow the supervisors to go out into the community and make sure that all aspects of the service were provided to the appropriate standard. Officers explained that 40 members of staff had recently been off work due to the current wave of the pandemic; Officers had to relocate staff to different duties and crews, who weren't normally carrying out this type of work, and had to employ extra agency workers. Members were reassured that the figures were reducing, and the service was starting to stabilise again.

Concerns were raised in regards to the length of time it took for Members to receive a response for information relating to refuse and recycling. It was mentioned that the Streetcare contact list had recently been updated and circulated to all Members; the list showed that the Waste Service Manager was currently vacant. Members were informed that there were ad hoc, interim measures in place, which meant that some of the issues being raised were not getting the level of attention they required, which could lead to delays. Officers hoped that this post would be filled soon to elevate some of the issues.

Members highlighted an issue regarding individuals placing black bin bags in Council owned street bins which were located across the County Borough; this was causing bins to overflow and a growing number of bags being placed next to the bins. It was asked if cameras could be placed in some target areas to try and tackle this issue. Officers confirmed that they could look into deploying a covert camera in some places. The Cabinet Member also added that removing certain bins which were targeted could be an option to resolving this issue. It was noted that this issue also links in with the reasons for waste Officers seeking duty of care notices from businesses in the area, to make sure that all businesses had the necessary contracts and arrangements in place. In terms of residents, it was noted the process of increasing recycling and

reducing waste had been an ongoing, long term process of behavioural change, as a lot of these issues link to those who do not participate in recycling; although there had been positive changes with increasing progress to long term national targets. It was confirmed that Officers will be providing up to date information regarding this matter to the new administration.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

3. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

The Forward Work Programme for the Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee was noted.

CHAIRPERSON