

Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

26 March 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.M.Penry

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.W.Wood

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

Officers In Attendance: D.Griffiths, M.Roberts, N.Headon, C.Plowman,
P. Jackson and A.Lewis

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors M.Harvey and A.Wingrave

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed the newly appointed Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Engineering.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2021 were approved.

3. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet Board items:

Arboricultural Management Plan

An update on the Council's Arboricultural Management Plan was presented to the Committee.

Members were informed that the management plan had been reviewed and updated accordingly; one of the main changes highlighted was that it now included information on Ash Die Back.

A discussion took place in relation to the details of the tree inspections, in particular the interference with overhead cables and

the interference with satellite/TV reception. Detailed in the circulated report it stated that there was a legal responsibility (of the relevant utility companies) to maintain clearance around overhead cables in order to provide an uninterrupted service to their customers; Members asked if a particular street or area was to have issues due to interference with satellite/TV reception, would the satellite companies have the option to cut back on those trees if they so wished. Officers confirmed that this wouldn't be the case, as they did not have the same statutory powers; the statutory powers were put in place for interference with overhead cables in order to protect the structure of the cables.

Following on from the discussion, it was queried if anything could be done if trees were causing an interference with internet or satellite signal to a street, as more people were working from home and relied on these connections. Officers confirmed in these types of circumstances where an area was affected, they would need to work with service providers to identify how they could deliver services to residents e.g. by cable; taking into consideration the current policy, the Council could not cut down trees in order to improve satellite signal as it was under a lot of statutory obligations to protect trees and biodiversity. It was added that there were occasions when residents had concerns around light, leaves, satellite connections and the safety of the trees; the detail of the guidance in the report had to reflect the mentioned obligations to protect trees.

In relation to root systems, it was mentioned that in certain areas the roots of the trees had caused the pavements to lift, some of which obstructed the pathways and meant that residents weren't able to use them. Officers were asked for information on how this type of issue could be resolved; when Officers received reports of these incidents, someone will be tasked to inspect the area, and if necessary the tarmac would be cut out and a process called 'root pruning' would be carried out, before then relaying the tarmac. It was noted that this process wasn't always possible but was what Officers aimed to do as it retained the tree and retained the highway in a workable condition.

Members explained that they had received complaints over time in relation to the interferences of trees which included those not on Council owned land; Members asked Officers to consider who would be responsible for dealing with the reported issues in relation to trees not on Council owned land, whether it be the Council or providers/partner agencies, as this was important moving forward.

The Committee was informed that the Streetcare Team was taking taken on an extra member of staff, as part of increasing the tree inspection work that was being carried out associated with the Ash Die Back; the Tree Officer will also have a broader remit to look at all other areas around trees, therefore increasing capacity in that regard.

Officers were asked if issues were looked at on an individual basis as there could potentially be special circumstances involved, for example, trees blocking views out of windows causing mental wellbeing issues for individuals. Throughout the circulated report, it stated that the information contained within the management plan was guidance; therefore the way in which one case was resolved could differ from another case, depending on the details of the case.

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

4. **Urgent Items**

Because of the need to deal now with the matters contained in Minute No. 5 below, the Chairperson agreed that these could be raised at today' s meeting as urgent items pursuant to Statutory Instrument No.2290 (as amended).

Reason for Urgency:

Due to the time element.

5. **South West and Mid Wales Regional Civil Engineering Services Framework 2021 to 2025 (as enclosed in the Cabinet Board papers)**

Members were presented with the new South West & Mid Wales Regional Civil Engineering Services Framework.

Officers informed the Committee that the circulated report was the third iteration of the South West Wales Civil Engineering Framework; it was introduced originally with just four authorities, however had now been expanded to include Ceredigion Council. It was noted that the framework was essentially intended for a range of civil engineering projects, usually of a larger scale, and was introduced to comply with both European and Welsh Government conditions around grant awards; this would speed up the process as the successful consultants had been through a wide procurement exercise. It was mentioned this also provided Neath Port Talbot Council and colleagues across the region, with flexibility in terms of

consultancy provision; direct awards could be completed, however in most occasions Officers would hold mini competitions amongst those preferred consultants. Officers stated that they had tried to build on capacity, and would be including an element around training for apprentices and professionals, who could either work with the civil engineering firms and/or the consultants when the framework was in place; this meant that young people will have the opportunity to move between different contractors/consultants to get the necessary skills and qualifications. It was added that there were links with local technical colleges' right across the region and across the various disciplines which was a very positive outcome of this arrangement.

A discussion took place in regards to the basis of the framework including the benefits, impacts and the cost effectiveness. Officers confirmed that the reasoning behind introducing the frameworks was linked to streamlining the amount of time and resource it took for the technical staff to prepare tenders each time; there was a great deal of work involved in the tendering process, particularly when staff would have to start again each time on a major project and also the requirement to publish Prior Information Notices (PINs) for each individual project in order to comply with the procurement legislation. It was stated that this process was very long and drawn out, so by doing both an engineering framework and a consultancy framework, it reduced that time significantly. Moreover, it was highlighted that the regional approach meant that the workload could be shared across the five authorities as opposed to having to carry out all the work as one Council; examples of ways of working was provided which included using the other authorities staff and teams to help carry out the process before then completing a joint procurement exercise. Officers added that it also provided some consistency in terms of procurement and management of the contracts for the external consultants and contractors; once they were included in the framework, they could see that they would be guaranteed to have a certain volume and value of work within the region, which meant they could then plan accordingly to build their resources and their supply chains. It was noted that in order for smaller scale projects (those under £100,000 in value) to be completed by the smaller local suppliers within the county, Neath Port Talbot Council would continue to operate their own preferred list of contractors. Members were informed that this multi-faceted approach to the procurement exercise saved the Council a great deal of time in terms of staff resource and allowed projects to progress more quickly, however still

allowed for Officers to carry out project streams which would administer and oversee the projects.

Since having carried out the reiterations, it was noted that Officers only had to tweak the documentation for any changes in procurement rules, specification and health and safety legislation.

Members asked how long the tender response rate was currently. It was highlighted that every project was different, generally there was a minimum period of time that a contractor would be given to price the project; they will vary based on factors such as the scale of a project. Officers mentioned that tendering had been effected over the last 12 months across the industry in construction, both in engineering and property, as a result of the pandemic; it had been difficult for firms to get their costings returned in a set period, therefore in some circumstances it had been required that contractors be given additional time.

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

CHAIRPERSON