

ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

7 July 2016

Chairperson: Councillor I.D.Williams

Vice Chairperson: Councillor

Councillors: D.W.Davies, Mrs.R.Davies, S.K.Hunt,
E.E.Jones, S.Rahaman and Mrs.A.Wingrave

Officers In Attendance Mrs.N.Pearce, M.Roberts, D.Griffiths,
Mr. S Cook, N.Evans, A.Lewis and M. Thomas

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors E.V.Latham and Mrs.S.Miller

1. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 MAY 2016.**

Members noted the minutes.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2016/2017.**

Members noted the forward work programme.

3. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

i. **Environment and Highways Performance Indicators for Quarter 4 of 2015/2016**

Members considered the joint report on performance management and noted the waste services department had achieved the statutory target of 58% and were advised by officers that work will now continue to work towards the next targets of 64% and 70%.

Members noted that later on in the meeting there were reports in relation to footpaths and asked what the budget situation was for the maintenance of footpaths in the County Borough. Officers stated that the budget had reduced annually and the funding that was now available was purely for maintenance only. In recent times footpaths near urban areas have been targeted and tarmacking had been undertaken, this will allow the service to target well used routes in rural areas.

Officers also advised that footpath maintenance is now a reactive service which responds when particular complaints are received and also prioritises the footpaths that are more frequently used. Officers continued that there were currently two officers available to undertake the maintenance across the County Borough.

Members asked whether the Community Benefit Funds could be used for the maintenance of footpaths and officers replied that the allocation of the funding was out of their control although money cannot be spent on revenue projects.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

ii. Asset Sponsorship

Members considered a report in relation to asset sponsorship and the need to vary the existing contract with Immediate Solutions and the procurement procedures necessary to address the longer term position.

Officers highlighted that the current contract had been in place since 2011 and it helps deliver £96k that can assist with the delivery of the Council's Forward Financial Plan. The requirement for a new contract will look to extend the positions available for sponsorship to include street lighting and grass verges for example.

Members noted that there was a fine balance between generating income that is not detrimental to the environment or safety. Members asked if barriers were allowed on pavements and if not is it enforced. It was confirmed that as it stood there were several sites in use and if Members had specific examples of other sites then they should inform officers who could make arrangements to remove them.

Members requested that the location of the sites be circulated for their information.

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

iii. Environmental Health and Trading Standards – Changes to Officer Delegation

Members were reminded that previously the functions of Environmental Health and Trading Standards had moved to become the responsibility of the Head of Planning.

This report sought to add the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to the list of legislation that is enforced by the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Service.

Members noted that this was an important area as the Council now had powers to deal with private sector landlords and derelict housing which will be an important area to monitor going forward.

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

iv. Business Improvement District

Members considered a report that sought approval to introduce free car parking in Neath Town Centre Multi Storey Car Park after 3pm.

Officers highlighted that the initiative would be trialled for a 12 month period with the Council reviewing whether the initiative had had an adverse effect on the Council's parking income.

Members raised concern that there has been an effect on footfall in Neath Town Centre due to revised traffic orders and how could this be quantified. Officers stated that it would be very difficult and costly to undertake a survey to identify any changes in footfall to shops.

It was noted that officers within the property section would have information on how all town centres are performing. The last survey indicated that Neath town centre was performing well.

Officers suggested that if a footfall survey was required, then the Chamber of Trade or BID could fund it.

Members continued to speak about the issues on a Sunday following previous agreement to amend Traffic Orders and there are suggestions that the town centres were quieter but in contrast to this it was suggested there had been little change to how busy the town was and the main difference was it was now safer. However, it was noted that there remains a potential problem with street furniture and it was agreed that the Head of Planning bring the policy on street furniture and street traders to a future meeting of the Committee.

Officers stated that the parking initiative cannot be implemented until the Neath Business Improvement District is legally constituted.

Members noted that the third recommendation contained within the report should read "that the enforcement of the top level car park during the 12 month period be suspended after 3pm".

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

v. Foot Golf within the Gnoll Country Park

Members considered the report that highlighted a potential income stream for the Council through the introduction of foot golf at the Gnoll Country Park.

Members welcomed the additional facilities to generate income and stated that given all the changes to the park over the last couple of years in response to Forward Financial Plan Challenges it was suggested that the next meeting of the Committee due to be held on 1st September be held at the Gnoll Country Park and provide Members with an opportunity to visit the special visitor attractions on the park.

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

vi. Operational Business Plan for Waste Services 2016/2017

Members considered the Business Plan for Waste Services which highlighted that there was now a new statutory target of 64% waste not sent to landfill. Members welcomed the work of recycle plus and were advised that a review would be undertaken in the autumn of 2017 of recycle plus and any additional initiatives that are implemented.

Members questioned Trade Waste and a previous report that originally highlighted an overspend of £68k but in another forum a figure of £35k was highlighted. Members were advised that the reports were each reporting on slightly different things. Income from trade waste had fallen which is reported as an overspend.

Members were advised that potentially there will be changes to the terms and conditions of refuse staff and a consultative meeting had been held with trade unions and this was in relation to catch up days following Bank Holidays.. Currently catch up days are done on a voluntary basis but although gaps can potentially be filled by agency workers if it is not made compulsory then there is potential for service failure.

In relation to agency workers Members questioned whether this affected service delivery. Officers confirmed that the impact is generally limited as driver roles are covered internally and agency staff are only used as loaders..

Members asked for an update on the number of applications made for an exemption to the side waste policy. It was confirmed that currently there had been circa 750 applications some of which are being visited where the requests seem excessive. Crews are recording where some individuals are putting out too many bags and these properties are being visited also.

Members asked for clarity on the hygiene service budget and officers confirmed that it is part of the overall waste budget.

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

vii. Operational Business Plan for Neighbourhood Services

Officers presented the operational business plan for Neighbourhood Services.

Members questioned the cleaning regime for bus shelters and were advised that it was generally ad hoc and on request. Further information stated that some bus shelters are not owned by us and are cleaned by the advertiser who has funded the bus shelter or Community Council.

Members asked why the figure for parks/playing fields was so high considering the Council had disposed of a large number of

parks/playing fields. Members asked for a breakdown on the funding at a future meeting.

Following scrutiny the committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

CHAIRPERSON