

ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

5 January 2017

Chairperson: Councillor I.D.Williams

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: Mrs.K.Lloyd, M.Crowley, D.M.Peters,
D.W.Davies, Mrs.R.Davies, S.K.Hunt,
E.E.Jones and C.Morgan

Officers In Attendance D.Griffiths, Mrs.N.Pearce, M.Roberts S. Owen,
A.Lewis, G.Bowtell, Davies, H.Jones,
Ms.N.Headon, Miss.C.Davies and N.Evans

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors E.V.Latham and A.J.Taylor

1. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2016**

The Committee noted the minutes.

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

The forward work programme was noted by the Committee.

3. **PLANNING POLICY SERVICE REPORT CARD**

Members considered the service report card for the Planning Policy Service area.

Members noted that within the report card there was specific mention of the regeneration of Port Talbot town centre and concern was raised that other areas of the County Borough may be missed out. Officers confirmed that this was not the case and work was ongoing in other towns also.

Members asked for clarity on public rights of way and in particular the maintenance of the paths. Officers stated in 2016/2017 a one off amount of £100k was made available to undertake maintenance on the most regularly used footpaths. Officers continued that the works were undertaken that provided value for money on footpaths within urban and urban fringe areas.

Members asked what was the current maintenance budget and officers confirmed it was circa £50k and this again was used on commonly used routes and generally as a response to complaints.

Members enquired whether there was any collaboration ongoing in relation to rights of way maintenance. Officers confirmed there are agreements in place with 3 Community Councils of Pontardawe, Cilybebyll and Blaenrhonddan.

Officers asked Members to note that there had been other agreements in place with other community councils but these had ceased for various reasons including councils thinking they were undertaking too much maintenance compared to what funding they were receiving.

Members were concerned that the disrepair will get worse as funding diminishes and Officers confirmed that was the reason to allocate the additional £100k so that as much work could be done as possible.

Members asked whether officers were speaking with the companies who have pulled out of roundabout sponsorship. Officers confirmed that the company which had the contract for organising this (Immediate Solutions) were in the process of speaking to the businesses and the Authority would be informed of the outcomes of these discussions in due course.

Clarification was sought as to whether the sponsorship signs needed to be bilingual and it was confirmed that they did not.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

4. **NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES REPORT CARD**

Members considered the service report card for Neighbourhood Services.

An update was requested in relation to the leasing of the office space within the Gnoll Park and officers confirmed that there would be problems in leasing the space whilst the building is not internet enabled. Officers continued that work was originally planned to have been completed by October 2016, in tandem with anticipated local superfast broadband provision as any prospective businesses will require such access. Officers stated that work will continue with the Council's ICT Department to take this forward.

Members asked what the current position was with regards the Gnoll Country Park as it had been raised that more can be done inside the park for example at Christmas on a wonderland theme. It was confirmed that a company had a three year licence to provide the fairground rides within the park.

Members asked for more information on cemetery memorial inspections and officers confirmed that these are ongoing as the Council has a responsibility to make sure cemeteries are safe.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

5. **WASTE SERVICES REPORT CARD**

Members considered the service report card for Waste Services.

Members asked whether the Council had invested in smaller vehicles that could collect from areas that had small access routes. Officers advised that there were no small freighters within the fleet but there are three 'narrow track' vehicles to assist with collections and where there are particular access issues then a tipper truck is sent to collect the refuse. Officers noted that 11% of the County Borough residents were still on a black bag collection as opposed to wheeled bins due to access issues.

Members raised concerns that in the previous week over the Christmas and New Year break there had been some issues in relation to non-collection of waste which had seen a high volume of complaints due to the amount of waste that had been generated. Members asked for a response on what had happened.

Officers stated that all refuse was collected as this was prioritised but with respect to recycling there were two issues. Firstly, there were exceptional amounts of recycling presented, particularly cardboard. Secondly, that collection operatives are currently not contractually obligated to catch up on weekends after Bank Holidays when historically has been voluntarily. On this occasion a number of staff who had volunteered to work did not turn up on the relevant days which equated to three crews. Members were advised that these staff would be dealt with in a relevant manner but officers also asked them to note that on 11 January 2017 a formal 45 day consultation with staff will begin with a view to making working after bank holidays contractual.

Members welcomed the response and asked that in future any issues or changes to collections should be communicated to Councillors and the general public at the earliest opportunity.

Officers were asked whether the Council was going to target the residents of the County who do not recycle at all. Members were advised that work was being undertaken with those who have placed more than three bags of waste for collection which is against the side waste policy. It was also noted there was some additional money in the draft budget for next year to increase the amount of enforcement/promotion work.

Members were asked to note however, that it would take time to change the culture of those households that do not recycle. Officers continued that during the Christmas and New Year period there had been no restrictions on the amount of waste that could be placed for collection in line with adopted policy.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

6. **HIGHWAYS AND DRAINAGE SERVICE REPORT CARD**

Members considered the service report card for the Highways and Drainage Service.

Members began by asking for their thanks and gratitude be recorded for the staff who undertake this activity which in general will be in poor working conditions.

Officers were asked whether there was an opportunity to engage with a private company in the autumn when leaves fall to the ground causing problems in culverts. It was further suggested that a company could collect the leaves and then have them recycled. Members were advised that Neighbourhood Services currently hire in two additional sweepers with drivers in the Autumn. .

Members stated that the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority would be interested in assisting with any future problems. Officers confirmed that there was already a signed partnership agreement in place in relation to culverts and that was working well.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

7. **PRE SCRUTINY**

The Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

7.1 **Enforced Sale Policy**

Members considered a report in relation to an Enforced Sale Policy that had been developed to deal with long term problematic empty properties and bring them back in to use.

Officers advised that this policy was not being developed in isolation but there was an additional policy in development that linked and that was the Empty Property Strategy.

Members were advised that the officers had identified a specific number of properties that would be dealt with in the first instance and this would be circulated outside of the main meeting. Officers continued that once there had been successes in dealing with the empty properties it will hopefully act as a deterrent and spur property owners to sort out their empty properties.

Members raised concern in relation to the demand for this and whether it would be a budget pressure. Officers confirmed that any successes would see any monies reinvested in the service. Officers asked Members to note that generally the empty properties were not owned or ownership could not be identified and this makes the process longer.

Members asked whether there was a problem in relation to squatters in the County Borough. Officers confirmed that there was not a problem and there were only isolated cases.

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

7.2 Environmental Health and Trading Standards Food and Feed Service Delivery Plan 2016/2017 the Food and Feed Law Enforcement Review 2015-2016.

Members considered the report from the manager of Environmental Health and Trading Standards.

Officers advised that the review was required to be undertaken by the Food Standards Agency and had been sent on to them in the summer of 2016.

Members asked what the link was with the Port Health Authority and Officers stated that the Council works with many agencies within the County Borough and in relation to the Port Health Authority there did not appear to be any day to day contact but there was communication when required.

Members asked for clarity on what constitutes a “food registered premise” and officers confirmed that it could be places such as school kitchens, burger vans and community halls for example. If Members wished to have a list of the registered food premises for their ward then the officers will circulate information outside of the meeting.

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

7.3 Bus Services Support Grant Agreement

Members considered the report in relation to a joint agreement with the three South West Wales Authorities for the administration of the Bus Services Grant.

Officers stated that this was previously undertaken by the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) and was purely an administrative function. Officers stated that the scheme would be administered by the City and County of Swansea.

Members asked whether there would be an impact on contracted services and officers confirmed there would be none. However, Officers stated that Councils must maintain costs within the grant.

Concern was raised in relation to fraudulent claims that could become a possibility and officers stated that transport officers do check the routes and that any fraud generally is not in relation to length of routes but on the use of concessionary bus passes although it should be noted that this has not been a particular problem for Neath Port Talbot.

Officers did state that there had been an occasion to withhold a payment to an operator due to discrepancies.

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

7.4 List of Approved Contractors

Members considered a report in relation to the amendment of the Approved List of Contractors.

Officers advised that the previously the list would need to be re-advertised every 4 years but this has subsequently changed and contractors can be added on an ad hoc basis.

Members asked was there ever a reason why someone should be precluded from the list and it was stated that on occasions contractors could not be considered due to issues such as insurance e.g. a small contractor may not be able to undertake works on major developments because they do not have sufficient insurance cover.

Officers stated that it would be beneficial to consolidate the list down. Currently there are 111 categories and some suppliers who have not undertaken any works. Officers continued that they required advice from Legal and Procurement before the list can be amended and once this work has been completed a further report will be brought back to the Committee.

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

CHAIRPERSON