

Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

22 July 2020

Chairperson: Councillor S.M.Penry

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.W.Wood

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

Officers In Attendance N.Pearce, M.Roberts, D.Griffiths, C.Furlow-Harris, S.Burgess, S.Blewett, C.Davies, T.Davies and C.Plowman

1. **Recovery Strategy**

Members were presented with a draft strategy on stabilisation, the period between response and recovery, following the COVID 19 outbreak. The strategy set out a general framework that would support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as the Council moved towards recovery. It was noted that the draft strategy was being presented to all Scrutiny Committees for comments before presentation to Cabinet on 30th July 2020 for approval.

Officers gave a brief overview of the content of the strategy, explaining that it was split into three sections which consisted of looking back at what the Council did during the response phase of the crisis, looking forward as the UK moved out of the response phase and a road map of actions.

When looking back at what the Council did during the response phase, it was highlighted that a number of key actions were undertaken including setting up a seven day a week communication service so that guidance from UK Government, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales could be sent out as and when it was available. It was added that the Council closed down services to assist in reducing the spread of the virus and changed the way some

critical services operated in order to operate safely, for example the refuse service. Officers mentioned that the first part of the strategy also set out the changes that were made in relation to leadership and governance, including the use of the Urgency Action provision set out in the Constitution, to ensure that key decisions were still being taken during the response phase.

The second part of the strategy was explained to Members, which consisted of looking forward as the UK moved out of response phase into a stabilisation period which is the stage before moving into the recovery phase. It was explained that there were three areas identified as a focus as the Council moved forward:

1. The Test, Trace and Protect Programme
2. Standing up of Council services and functions
3. Understand and respond to the effect and impact that the virus has had on citizens, organisations and businesses across Neath Port Talbot

It was added that the second part also set out the changes required to be made in terms of leadership and governance, as well as some of the risks and issues identified that will need to be managed as the Council goes through the implementation of the strategy.

The third part of the strategy was presented as a road map of actions which was framed on the basis of a traffic light system, which set out how to move from a position of total lockdown, through the traffic light system, to a position where services are back up and running. It was noted that a number of services on the road map fall within the remit of the Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee including transport, parking fees, parking enforcement and refuse and recycling.

Members asked how long the Llandarcy Field Hospital would be in situ, to which it was answered that Officers weren't able to give a specific date at the moment, as they would be responding to Welsh Government Policy as and when it is published, however the initial contract that the Health Board had with the land owner ran up until September with provisions in place to extend the contract should the need arise. It was mentioned that the hospital is capable of operating, but hasn't operated to date.

Officers were asked why the Local Area Coordinators (LACs) were pulled from their roles in the Safe and Well Service, and where they went following this. It was noted that the LACs went back to Social Services to help the Directorates' response with the increase of pressures there. In relation to the roles that the LACs undertook when they went back to the service, Officers agreed that they would find out and circulate to Members.

2. **Streetcare - Current Service Delivery & Recovery Planning**

Members were provided with an overview of the current service position in Streetcare and how service delivery was proceeding as the Council moved towards the recovery phase from the coronavirus emergency.

Officers presented the Committee with a graph of COVID related absence in the Streetcare service area, contained within Appendix A of the circulated report. It was highlighted that COVID related absences were required to be recorded and collated on a weekly basis, which Officers had been doing since 13 March 2020. The graph illustrated how the COVID absences had varied and in particular, how the rate of absences was progressing towards the end of March before lockdown was then introduced. As evident in the graph, it was stated that the biggest element associated with COVID absences for Streetscare was those shielding which now made up the majority of absences. However, it was noted that the next review for those shielding was due on 16 August 2020, with letters due to be sent out the week before that, which would provide a better understanding of the impact.

Following this, the Committee was presented with the Streetcare service delivery position, contained within Appendix B of the circulated report, which covered the A-Z of services within the Streetcare remit. Officers briefly went through some of the comments on the existing status and updated Members where necessary.

In relation to beach cleansing, it was mentioned that the service was operating as normal, however more resources were being utilised as the service was trying to keep up with the clearing up of waste due to more people were visiting the beach and not disposing of their rubbish.

Members were informed that the recycling centres opened on 26 May 2020 with a booking system introduced in which the public could book

a 15 minute time slot to drop off their recycling. It was noted that the system was working very well, and that other Councils across Wales were thinking of keeping their booking systems in place for the future. Officers highlighted that Neath Port Talbot Council could also look into keeping their booking system in place.

The Committee were made aware that the £1million street lighting project was going ahead, in which more LED lighting would be introduced and the high energy consumption lights would be removed. It was mentioned the contract started the week commencing 13 July 2020 and the contractor had started to complete the electrical testing before lights start to be replaced.

It was highlighted that recycling and waste collection was an area that the Streetcare service had prioritised, with staff working very hard over the lockdown period to keep the service going and to deal with the increase of waste and recycling that had been generated.

Stores and purchasing was mentioned to have played an important role in helping with PPE and equipment, not only for the Environment Directorate but also assisting other areas across the Council.

Officers explained that tree maintenance had an additional service pressure to cut back overgrown trees along highways due to additional double decker buses, as a lot of the single decker bus routes had been changed to double. It was noted that a lot of work had to be completed in a short period of time to make those routes safe for the public.

Members were informed that waste enforcement was up and running, but there was a 72 hour delay before opening bags of waste as it now needed to be a much more measured and calculated process due to the virus. It was also mentioned that due to the ban of the public using the Council buildings, PACE interviews had not been carried out, however staff were currently looking into arrangements to utilise the facilities in Neath Civic Centre so that the interviews could be continued.

In relation to land and highway drainage development control, it was stated that Mike Roberts and Dave Griffiths would be reviewing the land drainage enforcement function to identify if it would be better placed, for efficiency, with the highways and drainage section. It was noted that following the review, the necessary procedures would take place for the function to move if required.

The main issue affecting services was noted to be the 'three in cab' issue; set out in a report on the precautionary principle, it was moved so that no more than two operatives could be in a cab, with most other Councils in Wales putting the same procedures in place. In terms of waste collection, this meant that the third operative needed to be in another vehicle which was stated to have had a significant impact on resources available for other service areas; however it was noted that the positive factor from this had been the maintenance of the critical waste collection service, throughout the lockdown period. Officers stated that with the easing of lockdown restrictions and more services opening back up, the demands on internal resources were getting higher which meant limited resources for certain service areas such as grass cutting, fly tipping removal and litter picking. In conclusion, Officers stated that they were in communication with the Trade Unions to identify whether three operatives could be put in a cab which would relieve the resources; however, it was stated that ensuring safety of staff was the upmost important factor, therefore risk assessments and mitigation measures would need to be reviewed.

Members asked whether the service had received many complaints regarding herbicide treatment, to which Officers answered that they had not but had a few inquiries earlier on in the season, in relation to the use of pesticides and roadside verges. Following the inquiry regarding roadside verges and how they had been managed, Officers stated that they were in discussion with colleagues in Planning and Biodiversity about expanding the number of verges that were managed by biodiversity. It was added that it had become harder to supervise contractors and provide resources to herbicide treatment due to the virus.

Officers were asked whether operators at recycling centres would be provided with any form of shelter, following observations that there wasn't currently any shelter for them from the rain and cold weather. It was noted that the contractor was satisfied with the welfare arrangements for staff through the summer, however there was a new contract due to start on 1 October 2020 which included a booth for operatives at the entrance of the centres.

Members showed interest in viewing the data from RDF waste and recycling during the lockdown period. It was mentioned that Members will receive figures in an upcoming quarterly performance report, which will show waste figures and the impact that COVID has had on

those figures. Officers stated that from looking back at last years figures (2019/20) compared to the data that they had recently been collating, they were aware that COVID has had an impact on the figures since March 2020. It was added that the Quarterly performance report will provide an overall picture as well as being able to look into each individual impact.

A discussion took place in relation to clothes waste and the benefits of reusing clothes by taking them to shops or using Cash for Clothes instead of recycling. It was mentioned that it was particularly important to spread awareness of the benefit of reusing as there had been an increase in the number of people wanting to get rid of clothes.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

The Committee thanked the Streetcare service for all their hard work during the COVID 19 crisis and asked Mike Roberts, Head of Streetcare, to pass the message onto the his teams.

3. **Engineering and Transport- Current Service Delivery & Recovery Planning**

Members were provided with an overview of current service provision across the Engineering and Transport Service and how the service will look and function as the Council moves into the recovery phase.

Across the five service areas, it was stated the Highway Development Control (HDC) and Passenger Transport and Home to School Transport were fully enabled to effectively carry on as normal as far as being able to deal with correspondence and day to day operations, following the announcement of the closing of offices.

In regards to the Highway Development Control team, it was noted that they had progressed with some planning applications that had been dealt with during the lockdown period and the SAB (SuDs Approval Body) that went live earlier this year had initially been slow in the uptake, but work is now progressing in that area. It was added that all risk assessments were in place for necessary site visits to enable SAB applications to move forward.

Officers highlighted that staff, particularly the Structures team, had been heavily involved with responding to the three recent storm events, including storm Dennis. Following this, a great deal of inspections were undertaken of Neath Port Talbots structures and

bridges. It was noted that one bridge in Blaengwrach was severely affected by structural damage, however following Cabinets support of its replacement, the new bridge was now in fabrication and work was underway for it to be completed by the end of summer.

It was explained to Members that some areas within the Road Safety and Business Performance were affected by the results of COVID 19, mainly due to the closure of schools. Officers stated that a lot of the training programmes were delayed and staff had to re-think how they could move forward with the programs; however, programmes were now being developed that would be delivered online via the hub and classrooms talks completed via whiteboard technology through Microsoft Teams. Dave Griffiths, the Head of Engineering and Transport, gave thanks to their links with Education and IT, as they have helped to maintain important training programmes for young people.

Members were informed of the new cycle to work scheme that was launched at the beginning of July, in which the uptake had been very good. It was mentioned that around 73 people had taken up the opportunity of purchasing bikes through the scheme (33 electric and over 40 traditional bikes ordered) with both Members and Officers within the Council, taking up the benefits of the scheme. It was added that there would be a training programme delivered over the summer so people can learn how to ride a bike.

In terms of business performance, it was noted that some employees within the area had been deployed into Track and Trace service to support the workload and that a number of new ICT driven arrangements had been introduced; due to the positive outcomes of these new arrangements, it was stated that the business and secretarial teams were going to be reviewed to identify if the service could be provided in a more efficient and productive way going forward. It was added that Joy Smith, the Road Safety and Business Performance Manager, and supervisors would be reviewing this and Members will be provided of the changes in a future meeting.

Officers explained that the Parking Services team had been suspended during the outbreak of the virus, as on street and off street enforcement ceased. It was confirmed that on street enforcement started back at the beginning of July, off street parking enforcement would be commencing on 1 August 2020 and on 1 September charges and enforcement would be reintroduced in town centre car parks; it was mentioned that this would provide town centres and

retailers with additional support to recover and town centres begin to open.

The introduction of new virtual parking permits was raised, with Officers clarifying that 1,400 staff and all of the local Councillors were set up to date and from 1 September 2020, paper permits would not be required. It was added that the vehicle registration numbers could be interchanged online if multiple vehicles were being used and if anyone had difficulties with this they could contact Ian Rees, the Parking Enforcement Supervisor.

Members were informed that the whole team who made up the Community Transport Service had been re deployed to help set up the food distribution centre that was set up to support the Safe and Well Scheme, which has been operating throughout the pandemic. It was added that the shielding position for vulnerable residents was due to be changed on 16 August 2020, and from that date there would no longer be food packages provided.

Officers confirmed that should staff need to go into the offices for any essential work, a rota had been set up for this to be done safely and maintain social distance measures. It was mentioned that some administrative support staff had started to go into the office to provide support for the Directorate.

Councillor Simon Knoyle thanked Dave Griffiths, Head of Engineering and Transport, and the rest of the team for the work that had been completed on the bridge that linked between Glynneath and Cwmgwrach.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

The Committee thanked the Engineering and Transport service for all their hard work during the COVID 19 crisis and asked Dave Griffiths, Head of Engineering and Transport, to pass the message onto the his teams

CHAIRPERSON