

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 - WEDNESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2017

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON WEDNESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2017 AT 9.30 AM**

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

SE Baldwin
DRW Lewis
JE Williams

N Clarke
G Thomas

P Davies
E Venables

DG Howells
CA Webster

Apologies for Absence

A Hussain, RL Penhale-Thomas, RMI Shaw and RME Stirman

Officers:

Sarah Daniel	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Andrew Hobbs	Group Manager - Street Works
Satwant Pryce	Head of Regeneration and Planning
Andrew Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities

Invitees:

Andrew Hobbs	Manager - Street Works
Satwant Pryce	Head of Regeneration and Planning
Councillor CE Smith	Cabinet Member Education and Regeneration
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director - Communities

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N Clarke declared a personal and prejudicial interest in paragraph 4.45 of agenda item 4 – Bridgend as a Place to Work, Live and Visit as her husband is a director of the Harbourside Community Interest Company and advised that she would withdraw from the meeting should this development be discussed.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 of 17 July 2017 be approved as a true and accurate record.

8. DEVELOPING BRIDGEND AS A PLACE TO WORK, LIVE AND VISIT

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report of the Corporate Director Communities on Developing Bridgend as a place to work, live and visit. She stated that the report contained information on tourism and events, street scene and cleansing the public realm.

The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the report focused on the delivery of services in street scene (public realm cleaning; public toilet provision and green spaces) and tourism and events which were set within the context of significantly reduced resources and how it impacted on the public and businesses in the County Borough.

Street Scene (Public Realm Cleaning)

The Committee questioned the time the mechanical road sweeper operates in the town centres and why Pencoed town centre was not included within the town centre street sweeping programme. The Group Manager Street Works informed the Committee that the Council has three mechanical road sweepers which were deployed to town centres early in the mornings, usually between 7.00am – 7.30am and are used as and when required. The Council also deploys smaller mechanical street sweepers which are used to clean the streets of town centres on a daily basis, however there was no particular time when they would be operating.

The Committee referred to the targeted approach adopted for street cleaning/litter picking and asked whether there is a minimum number of times when street cleaners would be deployed to residential streets which are cleaner. The Group Manager Street Works stated that cleaner streets were cleaned on a demand led basis and where street cleaning crews identify streets which require particular attention. Some streets in the county borough would be cleaned if a complaint is received but may not necessarily be cleaned if the service was not aware of complaints.

The Committee questioned the action taken each autumn to deal with falling leaves and tree branches. The Group Manager Street Works stated that large sweepers are deployed to sweep leaves, whilst highway maintenance would be deployed to remove tree branches and trees which have fallen which pose a concern to safety. The Committee asked whether there is a schedule in place to tackle known hotspots. The Group Manager Street Works stated there is no specific schedule in place but the service would target known areas where problems often occur. The Committee questioned what steps would be taken when branches obscure warning lights at Pencoed level crossing. The Group Manager Street Works commented that highways maintenance will prioritise removing branches which would obscure warning lights based on public safety. The Committee questioned the steps that would be taken to remove or cut back trees which obscure directional and warning signs on highways. The Group Manager Street Works commented that this would be dealt within available resources, but due to financial constraints the Council could no longer carry out maintenance to the extent it could previously. The Cabinet Member Communities informed the Committee that it was right to be concerned; however the Communities Directorate's budget had been squeezed affecting the ability of the service to clear and cut back branches to the extent it had done previously. He stated that due to the large cuts to the budget the service had to react to requests as opposed to being able to carry out regular maintenance.

The Committee questioned whether the Council only responded to referrals or complaints from the public to clear footways. The Corporate Director Communities stated that the service no longer has a cyclical maintenance programme and had to move to a service which was more demand led due to the large number of cuts to the Communities Directorate. He informed the Committee that the Directorate was having to manage its resources in the most effective way having regard to public safety as the main priority. The Committee questioned whether this approach could lead to an increase in the number of claims received. The Corporate Director Communities stated that the Directorate has inspectors who look at safety and that it was a matter of prioritising and making the best use of available resources.

The Committee requested clarification of when and where the wet van is deployed and are there incidences of graffiti in certain areas. The Group Manager Street Works clarified that the wet van is used to remove graffiti; the vehicle is also used to clean car parks and remove litter from roads and operated on a demand led basis. The Group

Manager Street Works stated that graffiti was not a large problem in Bridgend and was not concentrated to any particular area. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that swift action is taken to remove graffiti which is offensive.

The Committee expressed its concern at what seemed to be a reluctance to prosecute people who fly tip and drop litter. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the bar to gaining a successful prosecution is high due to the proof required. He stated that some local authorities have procured external companies to assist in enforcement and prosecutions for fly tipping. He also informed the Committee that limited resourcing in Legal Services and the Communities Directorate affected fly tipping being the subject of prosecutions. The Committee asked whether the Council worked closely with large scale fast food outlets to prevent the public littering and whether the consequences of littering could be displayed on their packaging and highlighted in the local media. The Corporate Director Communities stated that the Council works, for example, with McDonalds who have staff who litter pick around their premises. The Council also attempts to engage with other retailers in respect of littering which emanate from their premises. The Corporate Director Communities also informed the Committee that he sits on a Welsh Government Ministerial Board and one of the matters under consideration is to whether it is possible and desirable to levy a tax on retailers in respect of littering.

The Committee questioned the lack of data showing the number of fly tipping incidents reported from December 2016 to March 2017. The Corporate Director Communities undertook to provide the data on fly tipping figures to the Committee.

The Committee questioned whether officers responsible for educating the public on recycling in the waste contract could also take on the role of enforcement. The Corporate Director Communities stated that enforcement would be in the last resort and officers would prefer to educate the public in respect of compliance with recycling. However there would be a time when enforcement would have to take place where there was a wilfulness not to comply and officers would take enforcement action, but there remained the burden of proof to achieve a successful prosecution. A member of the Committee stated that Neath Port Talbot Council undertake more enforcement and prosecutions than all other local authorities in Wales combined. The Committee requested that it be provided with data on enforcement action taken by the Council.

The Committee referred to Valleys to Coast (V2C) taking street cleaning services back under their control from the Council and questioned the arrangements the Council had with V2C to ensure those streets were cleaned to the required standard especially in streets where there were properties in private ownership. The Group Manager Street Works stated that under the stock transfer, V2C took over responsibility for cleaning their land and that they would also have responsibility for setting the standards they wished to adhere to for cleaning. The Committee questioned whether the Council had recourse to hold V2C to account. The Group Manager Regeneration, Development and Property Services clarified that V2C would have responsibility for land in their ownership. Levying service charges on owner occupiers is one course of action V2C could take for litter and grass cutting.

The Committee questioned whether the use of technology could be made via an app and bins requiring emptying on a more frequent basis could be numbered akin to lamp standards to assist Members and the public in making more accurate requests for emptying. Some local authorities use an app which allows for more targeted intervention and creates greater civic duty. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the Council has a programme of digitisation and the application of technology for reporting requests for service could be considered in the future. The Committee considered there is a knowledge gap on which bins need

emptying on a more regular basis. The Group Manager Street Works informed the Committee that the application of a digital platform would prove useful, the support of ICT would be crucial to developing the use of technology. The Corporate Director Communities stated that the digitalisation programme has a list of priorities for services to move to a digital platform. The Group Manager Street Works confirmed that a targeted approach would prove a good use of resources and that he was constantly looking at achieving best value and the best outcomes. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee there is an intelligence system in place to prioritise bin emptying etc. but it was not digitised.

The Committee questioned whether there is a media campaign in place regarding littering. The Corporate Director Communities confirmed there is an earmarked reserve for a one-off media campaign associated with the role out of the Councils new waste services contract but that there was no separate budget for litter campaigns.

Street Scene (Public Toilet Provision)

The Committee requested details of the amount of take up in the comfort scheme by businesses and questioned how businesses would be aware of the existence of the scheme and how the public would know which premises are participating in the scheme to enable them to use the facilities. The Group Manager Street Works stated that the comfort scheme had recently been re-introduced but take up by businesses had been limited. The maximum £500 grant was based on a points system. A member of the Committee stated that Porthcawl Town Council had awarded two businesses in Newton £500 each due to the absence of public conveniences. The Cabinet Member Communities reminded the Committee of the role Town and Community Councils can play in taking responsibility for public conveniences through the Community Asset Transfer process, which would enable the facilities to remain in the public domain.

The Committee questioned the reason for the early closure of the public conveniences at Maesteg Bus Station and the reason for the facilities being closed altogether on occasions. The Corporate Director Communities stated that facilities had been closed early on a temporary basis due to staff shortages which had been since addressed. The facilities being closed altogether was attributed to water leakage, a limited amount of work was carried out to make the facilities operational pending the redevelopment proposals in the town hall in the centre of Maesteg taking place.

The Committee expressed concern that urinal facilities across the County Borough had been removed resulting in a lack of facilities being open to the public. The Group Manager Street Works stated that the urinal facilities had been removed due to their poor condition. The Committee also expressed concern that the sites of former public conveniences had been sold prior to the facilities being offered to Town and Community Councils. The Group Manager Street Works confirmed that Town and Community Councils were consulted prior to any decisions of the public toilets being demolished or sold. Public convenience provision in the County Borough had been reviewed and consultation taken place with Town and Community Councils on their possible transfer. He stated that the urinals would firstly have been offered to Town and Community Councils prior to the disposal or demolition of the sites.

The Committee questioned the impact the White Paper on public health could have on the provision conveniences whereby Town and Community Councils have taken responsibility via a Community Asset Transfer. The Corporate Director Communities stated that his understanding was that there is a requirement on local authorities to ensure there is adequate provision and that there is a strategy put in place for public convenience provision, but that Local Authorities did not necessarily have to directly provide public conveniences. In response to a question as to whether bus companies

pay fees to the Council to use bus stations, the Corporate Director Communities stated that this was the case. The Committee questioned whether the Council would consider charging for the use of public conveniences. The Corporate Director Communities stated that charging may be considered as one option as part of the public conveniences strategy.

Street Scene (Green Spaces)

The Committee questioned the reason for the height of grass cutting being specified to 50mm since the service had been outsourced as opposed to cuts being 25mm previously as cutting grass shorter would result in less cuts having to be made and less complaints being received. The Group Manager Street Works stated that grass cutting in open spaces had been market tested and an external contractor appointed to carry out the service on behalf of the Council. He explained that a specification had been prepared based on a 50mm cut following advice that better rates would be received and that it was necessary to procure services within the parameters of the available budget. The lower the cut more expensive the service would be. The Corporate Director Communities stated that market intelligence suggested that a cut to 25mm would take longer and result in a greater frequency of cuts. The Group Manager Street Works stated that externalising grass cutting was a consequence of budget cuts. The Committee questioned whether a specification of a 25mm cut had been requested. The Corporate Director Communities stated that the advice received was to tender based on a 50mm cut and was about managing the resources available. He also stated that V2C had determined that it would grass cut more frequently. The Committee considered that if the service was delivered in-house there would not be a need for specifications for grass cutting. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the evidence was that operating the grass cutting service in-house would prove less efficient. The Cabinet Member Communities stated that he would prefer for the service to be delivered in-house, however cuts would have to be found elsewhere in the Directorate in order to do that. The Corporate Director Communities stated that when an analysis was carried out on the grass cutting service, it was found to be cheaper to externalise the service.

The Committee questioned whether the service was tendered on a like for like basis to that when it was delivered in-house. The Group Manager Street Works stated that outsourcing the service allowed for indirect savings to be made such as the rationalising of the depots, the levels of plant and equipment and the number of supervisors and managers had been reduced. He stated that a balance had to be struck in the use of resources and that horticultural services had been retained in-house. The Committee expressed its concern that the contractor was not providing the same level of service to that provided previously in-house. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that the point was that the purpose of outsourcing was to make a saving and in order to do so a service reduction was necessary. A comparison was made on a 'like for like' basis and that saving was overall significantly greater with the service carried out externally. A member of the Committee stated that the level of service had improved. The Committee commented that it had been necessary to increase the payment made to the contractor in the second year of the contract. The Committee expressed concern that the tender placed a greater emphasis on price than quality. The Group Manager Streetworks commented that this was a reflection on the current economic conditions where savings had to be achieved, but that the quality of the service was also important and was monitored.

The Committee expressed its concern at the introduction of a more relaxed regime of maintenance to roundabouts and believed that the meadow effect had resulted in non-native flowers and plants being introduced and it was questionable whether it had

improved biodiversity value. The Group Manager Street Works stated that both practices of meadow and herbaceous regimes had been introduced.

Tourism and Events

The Committee expressed concern that staffing of the tourism section had been reduced from eleven to one officer and they questioned the decision to do this in light of tourism playing a significant part of the economy in the County Borough and particularly the need to review the Destination Management Plan (DMP). The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that the DMP is to be reviewed this year and due to the lack of resources in the tourism section a light touch review was proposed. There was a need to review the DMP in order to draw external funding. The Committee commented on the importance of reviewing the DMP due to the emphasis placed by the Welsh Government in the Visit Wales National Tourism Strategy. The DMP was also important in attracting investment and visitors to ensure the vibrancy of the town centres in the County Borough.

The Committee asked whether the Council collaborated on tourism with neighbouring authorities and other partners such as Visit Wales. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that the Council works with Vale of Glamorgan Council on the heritage coastline. It is also in collaboration with eight local authorities with officers promoting the region at trade events and coach tour operators. She stated that the one member of staff in tourism deals with local issues, such as signage for events and operational matters. The Authority has a contract with a PR company that ensures the County Borough's name gets into the press on a regular basis.

The Committee questioned whether collaborative work was being undertaken to promote heritage. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that a great deal of work is done to conserve historic buildings. She stated that the recent conservation work carried out in Porthcawl had been funded through THI. There had been less focus on heritage and more focus on the coast as it drives economic numbers and spend. She stated that deriving money from visitors to heritage sites was more difficult as investment would need to be made in developing eating and shopping facilities to enable spending to be made by visitors. The Committee congratulated officers for securing THI funding to add to the vibrancy of the town centres.

The Committee requested an explanation of Bridgend Bites. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services informed the Committee that she could provide the Committee with a report on Bridgend Bites which is a promotional site. The report would include data on its usage by businesses and the public.

The Committee congratulated officers on attracting major events such as the Urdd Eisteddfod, Senior Open Championship and the Elvis Festival and questioned the return on each £1 of investment. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services informed the Committee that the return in investment was variable. She stated that the 204 Senior Open Championship had seen an economic impact of £2.16m on the Welsh economy, whilst television coverage had brought in media value of £5m. The return by the Council had proven worthwhile as the Council had invested £50k in the event, with the Welsh Government having invested significantly more. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that the Council does not provide direct investment to the Elvis Festival but incurs the costs of road closures and traffic orders. The Committee questioned the reason why the Council does not invest more in tourism and not reduce staff given the return on investment. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services concurred that more investment was

made the greater the return, however due to budget constraints she tried to deliver the best service possible with the resources available. The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that one of the challenges is that the overall benefit to the local economy would not be reflected in the Council's accounts.

The Committee requested an update on progress on the Salt Lake car park. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that officers are working on a marketing plan and negotiations on an owner's agreement with the Evans family as previous attempts to attract a large scale superstore had fallen through due to a fall in that market. However, since then, officers had moved on to other projects with the development of the marina and THI funding to deliver the harbourside project. The Committee questioned whether the Salt Lake car park had been considered for hotel developments which would add to the number of bed spaces available in the area during the Senior Open. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services informed the Committee that she had recently become aware that Stockton Council had recently developed a hotel in partnership with the Hilton group. She stated that the market for hotels was currently weak, but commented that local authorities were starting to become involved in delivering commercial developments; however the consequences of failure would affect the reputation of the local authority. The Corporate Director Communities advised that delivering a hotel on that site could only be achieved with the mutual agreement of the Evans family as part of the overall Owners Agreement. The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services stated that a mix of public and commercial development would create employment and apprenticeship opportunities.

The Corporate Director Communities informed the Committee that the Directorate was having to operate with significantly less staff and resources than previously and having to make difficult choices and that any further cuts to its revenue budget would have very serious consequences in terms of the delivery of valued public services.

The Committee thanked the invitees for their contributions.

Conclusions

Comments

Members thanked Officers for their attendance at the meeting and congratulated them and their colleagues on their continued efforts in attracting events to Bridgend County Borough such as the Urdd Eistedfodd, the Senior Open Golf and the Elvis Festival in Porthcawl.

Members were concerned that there were many overgrown trees, branches and hedges in the Borough obscuring road signs, directional signs and road warning signs that warn motorists of road dangers ahead making for potentially hazardous driving conditions for the public

Members remained concerned that BCBC were not actively prosecuting people who drop litter and fly tip their rubbish. Members appreciated that Officers were instead focussing on anti-litter campaigns but urged officers to use their powers and prosecute repeat offenders which they thought would also act as a deterrent for future offending

Members encouraged the update of the Destination Management Plan to fulfil Welsh Government requirement in terms of accessing funding opportunities

Members encouraged joint working with other Local Authorities to promote tourism opportunities and were pleased to hear of BCBC's collaboration with Visit Wales on

tourism projects and asked that Officers continue this work to promote the heritage of Bridgend County Borough.

Members were concerned that subject to budget reductions over recent years, there was now only one member of staff that worked on tourism for BCBC. Members stated that they felt this was a service that should be invested in to make Bridgend a better place to work, live and visit and improve the economic prosperity of the Borough.

Recommendations

The Committee recommended:

- That officers explore with colleagues in the IT department, the development of an app for the public to use, to easily report incidents such as bins needing to be emptied in specific areas, therefore allowing officers to be more effective and take a targeted approach with budgets being reduced.
- The numbering of all public bins for ease of reporting when they need to be emptied and to easily identify trends
- That officers work collaboratively with Town and Community Councils to promote the Comfort Scheme to businesses and make the public aware of which businesses are signed up to the scheme. Members also recommended working on communications with Town and Community Councils to take over the running of public conveniences under the Community Asset Transfer Scheme to enable them to stay open.
- A full review of the grass cutting contract for Highways services to ensure the service we are receiving is of the standard set out in the contract. They recommended Officers explore the costs of bringing the service back in house on a like for like basis to ensure the Authority were receiving a quality service.
- A review of the Biodiversity Value in open spaces and highway grass verges as Members were concerned at the introduction of a more relaxed regime of maintenance to roundabouts and believed that the meadow effect had resulted in non-native flowers and plants being introduced and it was questionable whether it had improved biodiversity value.
- That no further cuts are made to this Directorate. Members were concerned that the Directorate had taken unproportioned budget reductions when compared with other Directorates. Members were extremely concerned that further cuts would result in the deterioration of public facing services and some services not being able to function at all.

Further Information requested

Members requested to receive data of incidents of fly tipping in the Borough from December 2016 to date.

Members asked to receive data on the enforcement action that had been taken by BCBC officers for incidents of fly tipping and littering, including how many incidents of each had been prosecuted in the last year and if they had comparable data with other Local Authorities.

Members requested to receive information on the success of the Bridgend Bites and Social Media pages for Bridgend Council including how the information is promoted to the public, the response from the public, and traffic visiting the site.

9. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer reported on the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee which included the next item delegated to this Committee to consider. She also presented a list of further potential items for comment and prioritisation requested the Committee identify any further items for consideration using the pre-determined criteria form.

Conclusions

- (1) That the Committee identified additional information to be provided under the next item delegated to it in the Forward Work Programme as well as any invitees it wished to attend to assist in the investigation;
- (2) That the Committee identified further detail for inclusion on the other items in Table 2, namely, Town Centre Regeneration and the Economic Prosperity of Bridgend County Borough;
- (3) The Committee prioritised Town Centre Regeneration; the Economic Prosperity of Bridgend County Borough; Empty Properties and Community Asset Transfer for formal prioritisation and for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to designate back to the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- (4) Identified Waste as a suitable item for Webcasting from the overall Forward Work Programme;
- (5) Agreed to use the criteria form for any additional items for future consideration on the Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes.

10. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 1.00 pm