

# **BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**8 OCTOBER 2015**

### **REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES**

#### **SERVICE LEVELS FOR FRONT LINE STREETSCENE SERVICE DELIVERY**

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

##### **1.1 The purpose of report is to:**

- Set out for Scrutiny Committee the Communities Directorate's current understanding of the potential impact to service standards due to recent and future reductions to frontline streetscene services.
- To debate what are considered to be the minimum service levels that would be acceptable for the residents of Bridgend in the light of further anticipated service reductions over future years of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy [ MTFS] .

#### **2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities**

2.1 The details set out in this report embrace and recognise the objectives detailed in the Corporate Plan under Priority 5 - (Working Together to Tackle Health Issues and Encourage Healthy Life Styles), to maintain, healthy living and vibrant places.

2.2 The content also constitutes part the Communities Directorate response to reconciling the current financial settlement with operational levels of service. This proposal is in accordance with the improvement priorities detailed in the Corporate Plan under Priority 6 - (Working Together to Make Best Use of Our Resources).

#### **3. Background**

3.1 The national austerity measures on all Welsh Local Authorities are now well rehearsed and understood, with Bridgend Council needing to develop recurrent budget reduction proposals amounting to around £49.6 million, this has to be achieved despite council tax income being received increasing due to the overall reduction in grant funding Bridgend Council will receive from Welsh Government over the next four years. What is less understood is the impact these cuts will have on the delivery of visible front line services, which the public have become accustomed to receiving and on which the quality of the street scene and the local environment depends. Visible services for the purposes of this report include the following list but those areas where existing proposals within the MTFS have the greatest impact will be explored in more detail: -

- Litter picking, bin emptying, fly tipping removal, dog fouling removal etc.
- Waste / recycling collection and management of the Household Waste Amenity Sites.

- Childrens play grounds, sports fields, bowling green's, highway grass cutting etc.
- Bereavement services and cemetery maintenance.
- Active travel promotion as required under the active travel act, transport planning, subsidised bus services, safe routes to school and school transport.
- Car parking and car parking enforcement.
- Carriageway and footway repairs, road marking, traffic signalling, Highways planning consultation, Street lighting, Structures (bridges etc) safety inspection and maintenance.
- Flood protection and drainage design inspection and maintenance.
- Winter maintenance/gritting.

3.2 It is inevitable that in the current financial climate significant savings need to be made to services that traditionally have been delivered to a high level by the Council. As part of the response to this, investment in time and resource is being made to develop alternative ways of delivering services, with expectancy that a greater role will be required from Town and Community Councils and where appropriate from user groups such as sports clubs in order for a reasonable level of local service to be maintained.

3.3 In this scenario it is likely that the Council will need to focus its resources on delivering a much smaller core service in the areas identified in the report, focussing on meeting statutory requirements and relying on partnerships/collaborations, and in some case asset transfer or service delivery transfer to other organisations to enhance service delivery beyond that level. This is very clearly different to the historical service provision level provided by the Council.

3.4 However, the proposed changes will require proper assessment of their impact and where appropriate public consultation to go through the processes necessary to make such substantial changes.

#### **4. Impact of budgetary constraints already made and future potential changes to services**

##### **4.1 Highways Staffing Review**

4.1.1 Areas affected already include the Direct Labour Organisation [DLO], Traffic and Transport, Client and Business section, Rights of Way, Engineering Group and Network management.

4.1.2 The Highways department has undergone significant structural reduction and this is planned to continue with a live highways review process underway and targeted for implementation in early 2016. The reviews of the Highways team is contributing to an overall Highways saving of 1.3 million being achieved throughout 2014-2016 years. Savings in the staffing element being generated through a combination of vacancy management, overtime reduction and redundancy.

4.1.3 Whilst reductions have been achieved thus far without significant noticeable external impact due to reorganisation, prioritisation of workloads and efficient working, further savings will inevitably reduce our ability to respond to issues in regard of Highways Services. This situation may be compounded now that Welsh Government's Local Government Borrowing Initiative [LGBI] has ended which has ensured additional

investment in the highway network over recent years. Over the last three years, Bridgend County Borough Council has benefited from investment in the highways infrastructure asset by around £2m per year through the LGBI.

- 4.1.4 As of necessity moving forward, judgements will have to be made on what are considered to be the most important matters. Clearly highway defects in relation to safety defect criteria will require attendance both to assess and repair. However it is likely other matters such as overgrowth will as of necessity become less of a priority. Debris clearance and general highway policing will become less of a priority, having the potential to lead to more general obstructions occurring on the highway from hedges/verge growth/miscellaneous materials etc. Mitigation measures may exist in the form of support of work that Town and Community Councils may be able to provide, e.g. Brackla Community Council have taken on the grass cutting at the roundabouts within their Council area.
- 4.1.5 There will be potentially a reduced ability to advise public builders on site and statutory undertakers of the correct way to undertake works which may affect the highway. Advice will likely become reactive as opposed to proactive. Mitigation measures include the proposed development of a permit scheme to introduce cost recovery to statutory undertakers, and others. This is being discussed with Welsh Government at present.
- 4.1.6 The reduction in the Highway teams could also lead to third party works taking place that cause damage to the highway without our knowledge leading to claims. There may be an effect on the safety inspections and an inability to inspect as frequently which risk increasing third party claims costs and potentially accident rates on the highway.
- 4.1.7 There will be longer timescales to respond/inform /contact public and members and indeed other government departments such as Freedom of Information requests [ FOI ] and Audit, and responding to member and public queries. Members should note that the vast majority of member referrals relate to streetscene services.
- 4.1.8 Also the time taken to respond to developers, house purchase searches, rights of way queries, amongst others will be impacted upon. This will have the potential to lead to disgruntled search companies and complaints.

## **4.2 Reduction in Highway expenditure Budget**

- 4.2.1 Similar to above the reduction in budgets will impact on all areas of highway services. There is a reduction in the ability to carry out planned maintenance and carriageway replacement along with proposed reductions to the road marking budget. This will have an effect of increasing the need to undertake more reactive repairs to the surface of highway. This will in turn lead to more defects appearing that have the potential to result in increased claims and accident rates. Monitoring of claim costs and accident rates will be vital as the expenditure on the highway network is reduced. Currently a business case is being constructed by the Highways team to give a model for the Corporate Performance Assessment Board to consider in regard to the minimum levels of spend required on the highway network asset required in order to mitigate against exponentially increasing claims and reactive repair.

- 4.2.2 A lack of budget for structures will potentially lead to bridges having to be weight restricted or closed (e.g. Brewery Lane Tesco bridge been closed to vehicles for in excess of a twelve month currently/Footway closed at Teify Crescent/ footways restricted at Cowbridge Road). Temporary repairs to footways by removing defective slabs and replacing with Tarmac will become necessary.
- 4.2.3 Bus subsidies are provided by the Council to provide a bus service to those areas where commercial services are not seen to be attractive or indeed at a particular time of day early morning or late evening. Where subsidies have been reduced year on year a risk of leaving either communities isolated or transportation issues acting as a barrier to employment and access to services can exist.
- 4.2.4 Expenditure at the Bridgend Bus Station has been reduced out of budgetary necessity. However the work of the City region metro [integrated transport scheme proposal] may not be as successful if the main bus stations and transport hubs are impacted upon and not open as often. The shortening of the opening hours may negatively impact upon the perception of the service, albeit any changes to hours have been well communicated with advance notices being placed in visible area's of the Bus Station.
- 4.2.5 A reduction of weed spraying of the pavement and highway network from current twice to once per annum have been proposed. General tardiness of the roads/footways/lanes will increase to allow these savings.
- 4.2.6 Winter maintenance: Savings have been achieved with reductions from four main line Gritters to three through amalgamation of routes in the last year. Further savings from better lease agreements are in progress. Our ability to increase routes (current coverage less than all Wales average) is now not an option despite member requests. Reduced workforce and units may cause issues in emergency situations with longer time taken to clear the whole network during whiteouts. Also there will be sections of road that will have to remain untreated in such circumstances where previously efforts we made to open at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.2.7 The removal of School Crossing Patrols is an emotive issue as they have been in existence for several generations and are seen as a positive road safety measure at many schools and within communities. However as a non-statutory function this is an area of saving that the Authority may need to consider further.
- 4.2.8 Works budget; A reduction in this specific budget area may result in a reduced ability to respond to other weather related emergencies, flooding, high tides, high winds. A reduction in the Council's ability to carry out minor improvements to network (Pedestrian aids/Drainage improvements) and a reduction in maintenance of street furniture leading to removal will likely result.
- 4.2.9 Working with local groups to maintain street furniture may offer some protection of provision in Porthcawl a number of benches are being maintained by a local voluntary organisation.

### **4.3 Cleaner Streets**

- 4.3.1 Street cleaning services across the County Borough have been reviewed. The review looked at the service delivery model for street cleaning to establish how and where

savings could be achieved. The review considered how town centres were being cleaned, areas of higher use such as around schools, lower use roads such as housing estate and outlying areas such as rural roads.

4.3.2 Under the previous operating model street cleaning services were undertaken by a workforce who were responsible for the provision of cleansing services as follows: -

- Operatives were allocated an area of the County Borough to clean
- The town centres of Bridgend, Maesteg and Porthcawl were cleaned by an operative and a small manned road sweeper.
- Mobile cleaning teams would collect the red bags of litter picked up by the operatives and clear fly tipping.
- Across the County Borough roads were swept by three large 7.5 tonne road sweepers.

4.3.3 Following the review of the service a new area based operating model was introduced, under these arrangements the workforce was reduced and the shape of the service was changed to reflect the reduction in resources.

- This new model replaced the existing street cleaning arrangements with 5 area based teams, comprising a team leader with 3 operatives who emptying litter bins and pick up litter.
- In addition to the area teams, four mobile teams comprising of a team leader and operative, work across the County Borough, undertaking additional functions including fly tipping removal.
- The street sweeping role undertaken by the three large 7.5 tonne road sweepers remains unchanged.
- The arrangements for the town centres of Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg remain predominantly unchanged.

4.3.4 Outside the main town centres detailed above, street cleaning of small shopping centres and busy places such as schools are given priority and cleaned by the area teams and mobile crews. It is recognised that the removal of litter in these locations may not be to the level previously delivered, however, every effort is made to ensure that standards of cleanliness are maintained to a reasonable level. Regrettably servicing the County Borough to the levels enjoyed historically is not possible given the cuts to the budget.

#### **4.4 Future provision of cleaner streets**

4.4.1 Reducing the budget in cleaner streets by any significant further sum will see a service, which is currently broadly aligned to public expectation, with teams of litter pickers proactively looking for and collecting street litter, reduce to such an extent that it becomes wholly reactive.

4.4.2 Street cleaning operatives will only be in a position to empty litter bins, clear fly tipping and with any time remaining provide litter picking services with this work prioritised on a worst first basis. It is inevitable that with any further deep cuts to the budget that the quality of the street scene will deteriorate from the standards enjoyed historically and that alongside this the statutory indicators relating to street cleanliness will also fall, possibly markedly against other Welsh Councils depending on what happens elsewhere.

- 4.4.3 If the level of service reaches a stage where it drops below certain standards it is possible that the Authority could face a legal challenge for allegedly failing to meet its duty under the Environmental Protection Act.
- 4.4.4 At very low levels of resourcing staff absence due to holidays etc. will become more critical as at times this will further reduce the standards of street cleanliness as insufficient cover will be available to cover absence
- 4.4.5 In mitigation of what is set out above the Council will continue to work closely with Keep Wales Tidy and third sector partners and organisations such as the Probation Service and Town and Community Councils to enhance the provision of litter picking through community litter picks and clean ups. It should be noted that such action while benefiting the local area will not bridge the gap in the service provision left as a consequence of the reduction in service already made and any future proposed reduction in service.
- 4.4.6 Resource levels within the three main town centres of Bridgend, Maesteg and Porthcawl will remain at historic levels, however, the teams which service and support these and assist with one off clean ups and the removal of red bag waste will have been reduced and as a consequence the standards in these areas are also likely to fall from current levels, though not to the extent to which they are likely to fall across the rest of the County Borough.

## **4.5 Public Toilets**

Cabinet have resolved to close, subject to staff consultation and discussions with Town and Community Councils, the public toilets at : -

- The Rhiw Hill
- Derwen Road
- Aberkenfig – Pandy Road
- Blackmill Square
- Pricetown Square
- Kenfig National Nature Reserve
- Grand Pavilion Porthcawl

- 4.5.1 Alongside these closures Cabinet also agreed to changes in the staffing arrangements, hours available to attendants to clean and the opening and closing times of the toilets remaining open following the review.
- 4.5.2 To reduce the impact of the diminishing provision of toilet facilities across the County Borough Cabinet agreed to fund the continuation of the Comfort Scheme. Under this scheme which was previously funded by the Welsh Government, businesses who apply and are able to meet the Councils criteria can receive a grant for making their toilets accessible to the general public.
- 4.5.3 Complete closure of all remaining public toilets not kept open by Community Councils may need to be considered for future years but this will impact on our ability to meet relevant statutory legislation and would also require a full equalities impact assessment to assess the impact on protected characteristic groups.

## **4.6 Parks and Open Spaces**

- 4.6.1 The expenditure for the provision of services provided by the Parks service area is in the process of being reduced by circa 18% in 2015/16. This is a significant reduction in the budget available to the service area.
- 4.6.2 Part of this saving (£132K) was achieved by changes to the frequency of highway and open space grass cutting and the way in which the service was delivered which were approved by Cabinet. Under the new arrangements the frequency of highway grass cutting was reduced from 9 to 7 cuts per year. The impact of the reduction in the number of cuts would have been observed by Members over the summer months.
- 4.6.3 The majority of the remaining targeted saving will be achieved through a review of staffing structures which will focus primarily on management tiers in the first instance and a full review of overtime and working hours currently undertaken by groundsmen.
- 4.6.4 Subject to the outcome of consultation with staff, if implemented in full, the proposed changes to staffing arrangements in the service area will see the Council's ability to respond to requests for service in the area significantly reduced. On a practical level historic work such as litter picking in parks, the preparation of outdoor playing fields and bowling greens over the weekend period will cease.

## **4.7 Parks Pavilions**

- 4.7.1 Members will recall the recent report presented for consideration by Cabinet setting out proposed changes to the operational arrangements for pavilion opening, closing, and cleaning by the caretaking staff and sought approval from Cabinet to make significant changes in this area.
- 4.7.2 Under the proposals the practice of each pavilion being serviced by a caretaker who would service the facility is to end and be replaced by two teams of facility cleaners who will clean the pavilions on a rota basis based on use. The responsibility for opening and closing of the pavilion instead of being the caretaker's role would fall to the clubs and other users under a key holding agreement with the Council.
- 4.7.3 The existing complement of caretakers will be replaced by two teams made up of two cleaners each who would travel between the pavilions cleaning them.

## **4.8 Future Provision of Parks and Open Spaces**

- 4.8.1 With the provision of parks and open spaces falling into the category of neither a statutory function or a corporate priority [in the revised priorities currently being consulted on] this area is currently identified for further substantial reductions in the later years of the MTFs from its already reduced level in 2015/16. In this scenario the service will only have sufficient funding to focus on maintaining its assets in a safe condition so that they do not present a hazard to the public and children.
- 4.8.2 Consequently the Parks and Open Space functions will be focused on inspection and safety critical work such as safety inspections of children's play grounds and where budgets allow undertaking repair works. Where the need outstrips the budget available the playground will unfortunately need to close; cutting and maintaining

highway vision splays; providing and dealing with dangerous trees would need to be prioritised but other standard work may not be possible. Full details of the services that it may be possible to continue to provide if further substantial savings are made to this area of service are contained in appendix 1 attached.

- 4.8.3 The proposed budget reductions as they stand would see the closure on mass of outdoor sports fields for cricket, football, rugby, and bowling. These areas if not looked after will quickly revert to nature and become overgrown and unusable. Bringing such facilities back into use will prove extremely costly and challenging if they are left in this state for any significant period of time.
- 4.8.4 Areas of highway verge not maintained will also revert to nature and very quickly become overgrown with brambles, weeds and trees etc. Restoring such areas in the future will prove very challenging and costly.
- 4.8.5 In the wider context access to outdoor play and sports facilities will all? but have disappeared from the County Borough with the associated loss of social and other benefits such as health and wellbeing. Consequences include the inability of existing sports clubs to participate in leagues and competitions and reduced opportunities for children to participate in sport and active recreation.
- 4.8.6 In mitigation, the Communities Directorate will continue to work with friends groups and organisations such as Town and Community Councils to provide support and assistance to them in taking up the short fall in service provision following these reductions, including where appropriate asset transfer to third sector organisations such as sports clubs and/or Town and Community Councils.; however it must be recognised that the third sectors capacity to fill the gap in service provision is limited. Implementing such arrangements is also not without challenges and issues of double taxation, TUPE and appropriate property agreements being in place will need to be properly considered and implemented. Further exploration will also be necessary of the use of school playing fields for greater community use and maximising the use of all-weather 3 G pitches throughout the County Borough. Substantial charges increases will also need to be considered in some areas.
- 4.8.7 As part of the Councils current proposals for Community Asset Transfer (CAT) the opportunities for the transfer of fixed assets such as outdoor sports pavilions and playing fields to be transferred to sports clubs and other users to operate and run will need to be prioritised to ensure that local service provision is maintained.

#### **4.9 Conclusions**

- 4.9.1 In summary the existing proposals within the Council's MTFS will have a significant impact on the service standards within the vast majority of streetscene services. These services are by their very nature very visible and attract a great deal of interest from both elected members and local residents.
- 4.9.2 Members are invited in the context of the Council's overall budget position to consider what they deem to be acceptable levels of streetscene service provision for the Council moving forward to inform the proposals that will be presented to Cabinet and full Council in due course as part of the MTFS.



4.9.3 Officers have been mindful of the need for the Council to comply with its statutory duties in respect of the measures it has introduced in relation to service delivery and the proposed future changes to service delivery as detailed in Section 4 of this report.

## **5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.**

5.1 There are no effects on the Policy Framework and Procedures Rules.

## **6. Equality Impact Assessment**

6.1 Not required. – Report for information and discussion

## **7. Financial Implications**

7.1 This report is for information and discussion. The financial implications of the budget reduction proposals will be considered as part of the overall MTFS consultation and approval process.

## **8. Recommendation**

8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny committee are asked to note the content of this report.

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**July 2015**

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