



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Thursday, 11 February 2021 at 5.00 pm at the Virtual.

County Borough Councillors - Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Bradwick (Chair)

Councillor T Williams	Councillor M Weaver
Councillor G Stacey	Councillor A Chapman
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor W Treeby
Councillor E George	Councillor S Pickering
Councillor A Fox	Councillor G Holmes

Officers in attendance

Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr D Batten - Head of Leisure, Parks and Countryside
Louise Davies - Director Public Health, Protection and Community Services
Mr S Humphreys, Head of Legal Services
Sarah Daniel – Senior Democratic Services Officer

20 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

21 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 14th January 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting; subject to the inclusion of Cllr Wayne Owen to be added to the attendance list.

22 Forward Work Programme

The Senior Democratic Services presented the report to members which detailed their work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. She advised that members should note that the Forward Work Programme remained flexible and was subject to change taking into consideration the pressures on the service area during any given time.

RESOLVED: Members agreed to the current work programme attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

23 Impact of Covid-19 on Operations of Parks and Countryside

He informed Members however that this year there were 28 play areas on the programme for development this year with a further 9 for next year.

Members were advised that during the pandemic, the Countryside Team were inundated with queries and complaints from residents in relation to Japanese Knotweed Rights. This was most likely attributed to the public being restricted to their gardens. Over 300 sites in RCT were treated as part of the Knotweed programme. In addition, there had been 13 legal claims against the council in relation to Knotweed, compared with zero last year.

The Group Director Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services All services have unfortunately seen a number of staff absent at various times due to Covid related issues with staff either shielding, isolating or symptomatic so the team have had to prioritise work accordingly.

These services however have continued to operate in line with Covid restrictions with a targeted approach to a particular problem affecting trees, namely Ash die-back. General maintenance of trees overhanging highways and street lighting has been undertaken. Tree surveys were also ongoing to identify trees of poor health or condition growing upon public open spaces. Emergency works and responding to requests and complaints have continued with approximately 150 requests/month for trees and allotments

A member asked how many complaints had been received on footpaths being obstructed and asked what was being done about barbed wire on footpaths.

The Group Director replied that he couldn't give an exact figure but it was into three figures. He added that most complaints related to unilateral land owners closing off land during COVID. He added that the Authority didn't own much of the land though, especially where barbed wire complaints were concerned. There was also no legislation in place to allow the Authority to remove barbed wire from a footpath.

A Member asked if the Authority were taking enforcement action against the offenders. The Head of Legal Services advised that there was no restriction, unless it was causing a nuisance to a Highway.

A member asked if the Authority were taking action against those that were obstructing footpaths as this was particularly problematic in the Taff area with people illegally blocking them.

The Group Director responded that 10 warning letters had recently been issued. He added that we do try to avoid taking legal action in the first instance as this is quite a resource pressure and have lengthy timescales and have found that communication is the best approach in the first instance. If this doesn't work, rangers would go out and remove obstructions and we would then pursue legal action if the obstructions were put back

A member asked if there were reports of parks being used by the public when they were closed under Covid restrictions.

The Group Director advised that there were a number of people using them when they were closed and we had a number of reports of individuals using them, as well as the use of Sports clubs opening. He advised that the Authority reacted accordingly when reports were received.

The Chairman asked what the timescale for completion of allotments in Abercynon was and if there was a waiting list for these.

The Group Director replied that there was a waiting list for the plots once they were completed. The funding was agreed two weeks ago and it was hoped that officers would be on site shortly with a vision to complete sometime in March.

A member was concerned at the long waiting list for allotments and noted the current wait for plots was over 400. He asked how we could accommodate this and does the Authority have a plan to purchase any further land as he stated that residents found this activity therapeutic, particularly during the Pandemic.

The Group Director replied that the Authority were not currently looking for any new plots, however this is something that the Climate Change Committee would be looking at. The Chairman advised that there were many private allotments that have plots free and recommended that the Authority work with the private owners to reduce wait times. He added that the Authority could also work with the allotment owners to collect their green waste and therefore increase our recycling figures.

A member asked what the Council strategy was for replacing trees infected with Ash Dieback. The Group Director stated that the Authority were currently reviewing the processes for these. He advised that eventually we would lose the majority of ash trees as it was becoming a more and more serious issue. The wider part of the strategy would be to allow new trees to be planted to replace them.

A Member asked what happens to the felled trees. The Head of Leisure, Parks and Countryside stated that there was no re-sale value associated with them so they were shredded to rot down. He added that contractors who do the work can also take it away. The member asked that members be informed if the trees were cut down and left at the site so they could warn residents of potential hazards.

A Member stated that she had been approached by residents to ask if they were able to undertake litter picks in their local area but was concerned about the potential of large gatherings. The Director Public Health and Protection Services stated that these unfortunately were not encouraged at this time under Covid regulations, whilst the intention was positive it would be a breach of regulations.

24 Consultation Links

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised members of a consultation on litter and flytipping that was currently open and being undertaken by Welsh Government should they wish to take part in the consultation. The Chair added that he had already contributed and encouraged members to take part.

25 Urgent Business

A Member advised the Committee that he had received a letter from a resident commenting positively on the recycling measures and the street cleansing, especially during inclement weather and the global pandemic, the letter commended the team and thanked them for keeping the streets of RCT clean.

The Chairman informed members that it was raised in a recent Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee that a particular ward wasn't clean. He clarified that at this time, this is because officers were having to undertake other

priorities during the pandemic. as well as continuing with their day jobs. The Group Director added that the service area had maintained the service from day 1 of the pandemic and supported areas as best they were able to during COVID whilst contending with staff self-isolating and being redeployed to essential and critical services.

Members agreed with the comments mentioned and commended the teams for their continued efforts throughout the pandemic.

Recycling figures

The Group Director updated members on the recycling figures for first 9 months of the year and was pleased to inform members that they had achieved just over 69% for recycling which was the highest figure the Authority had ever had. He added that 70% is the target for 2024/25. He further advised that flood damaged areas were included in these figures and if it wasn't for the Flood damage, we probably would have gone over 70%

Member raised query regarding rodents in wards and asked what we used to treat the sewers.

The Director Public Health and Protection advised that the Authority undertakes the sewer bating contract on behalf of Welsh Water which was a fixed contract fixed for a number of years. She advised that the Authority were proactive but lead by intelligence. She added that the pest control treatment programme does vary each year but stated we rely on people reporting so we can have a focussed approach.

**Cllr S Bradwick
Chairman**