



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

1 RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

18TH OCTOBER 2018

VOLUNTARY SNOW WARDENS – NOTICE OF MOTION

JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS & STREETCARE SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet with the findings of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Working Group which was established to deal with 'Voluntary Snow Wardens' following the Notice of Motion considered by Council at its meeting held on the 19th September 2018.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet endorse the recommendations of the Working Group:-
- i. That a dedicated hotline number is set up offering support and advice for all Elected Members during periods of inclement weather ;
 - ii. That a targeted campaign is undertaken to promote community self help (Communities coming together to help each other on a voluntary basis during times of extreme weather) and to encourage residents to become 'good neighbours';
 - iii. That appropriate, practical guidance and good practice in relation to community action in severe weather is shared with the residents of RCT via the Council website (GOV UK - Guidance on Community Action in Severe Weather) ; and
 - iv. That Cabinet is asked to consider the issue of covering the public liability aspect of insurance for voluntary work undertaken in a safe manner.

¹ GOV UK – Guidance on Community Action in Severe Weather - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5909/1789192.pdf

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 On the 19th September 2018, Full Council considered the following Notice of Motion to establish a voluntary snow warden scheme and stood in the names of County Borough Councillors P.Jarman, S.Rees-Owen, G.R.Davies, M.Weaver, E.Webster, D.Grehan, H.Fychan, D.Macey, A.Cox, J.Williams, K.Morgan, J.Davies, J.Cullwick, E.Stephens, L.Jones, A.Chapman and S.Evans:

“That this Council, as part of its emergency planning responsibilities introduces a scheme of voluntary Snow Wardens to assist in snow clearance in the community during heavy snowfall. The snow wardens will be registered with the Council and be properly trained and equipped to undertake snow clearance in their locality.”

3.2 Following discussions it was resolved to refer the Notice of Motion to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee i.e. Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, and that a report therefrom be reported to the Cabinet for its consideration and to a future meeting of the Council.

3.3 At the meeting of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee held on the 27th September 2018, following consideration of a joint urgent report of the Director of Highways & Streetcare Services and the Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services, it was agreed to establish a Scrutiny Working Group to deal with the contents of the Notice of Motion.

3.4 In order to advance the matter at the earliest opportunity the inaugural meeting of the Working Group was subsequently arranged for the 9th October 2018 with an invitation to all Members of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity together with the proposer and seconder of the Notice of Motion, Councillors P Jarman and S Rees-Owen respectively.

3.5 The Working Group Members consisted of County Borough Councillors S. A. Bradwick, A. Chapman, E. George, S. Rees-Owen and G. Stacey.

3.6 At its inaugural meeting the Working Group was presented with a discussion paper by the Director, Highways and Streetcare Services outlining the two options for Members to consider in the adoption of the Voluntary Snow Warden Scheme as well as examples of the types of schemes operating in other parts of the UK such as in Bristol City Council.

3.7 The first option involved recruiting unpaid volunteers from the local community to become voluntary snow wardens; they give up their spare time in periods of severe weather to clear snow under the clear direction of the County Borough Council and act as a point of contact between the local authority and the local community in primarily a co-ordination role. The Working Group learned that to carry out their role effectively, the voluntary snow wardens would need suitable training, agree to work within the

arrangements set forward by the County Council and be physically fit to carry out the role. They would also need to register with the local authority.

3.8 Although the Working Group agreed in principle with the voluntary snow warden scheme, which they acknowledged could add value to the work already undertaken by the Council and encourage local communities to help themselves, they raised concern that the scheme could potentially become a burden to Council Officers who would need to establish the voluntary self help scheme, recruit, register and deliver training to the community volunteers and possibly organise DBS checks. The Working Group felt that the scheme had the potential to impact on the already diminished resources available to the Council to carry out its services during periods of extreme weather. The Working Group also highlighted the possible cost to the local authority in terms of providing the volunteers with the appropriate clothing and equipment to ensure they can carry out their role safely and effectively.

3.9 Despite the concerns raised in implementing the voluntary snow warden scheme, the Working Group were keen to demonstrate a commitment by the Council to encourage communities to come together and help each other during times of extreme weather. They explored the possibility of promoting the principle of volunteering throughout the County Borough via social media and a dedicated, targeted campaign which would advise, support and empower communities to take local action in times of severe weather. It was further agreed that in conjunction with the campaign guidance should be issued on the Council website which would offer simple, practical advice on the types of action that can be undertaken by local communities to support each other during times of severe weather.

3.10 In view of the Working Group's desire to encourage local communities to take action in times of poor weather conditions; it was agreed that the issue of public liability and whether the local authority would cover the public liability aspect of insurance for voluntary work, the volunteers themselves, their property or vehicles should be properly investigated and that this could be progressed by Cabinet.

3.11 The Working Group also acknowledged that Elected Member involvement is crucial in linking with local communities and agreed that a dedicated Elected Member hotline, which can be accessed by all Elected Members for support, advice and up-to-date information on the local situation during periods of extreme weather, should be established.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The Working Group concluded that they fully support the principle of the Voluntary Snow Warden Scheme; however the practicalities of establishing such a scheme brings with it a number of concerns such as the cost and officer time in organising and maintaining a register of wardens who would need to be trained and supported in a number of ways as well as arranging potential DBS checks.

4.2 The Working Group acknowledged that the current arrangements in place across Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to deal with severe weather conditions are effective and considered that the dedicated campaign to encourage local residents to be more proactive within their communities would enhance the Council services rather than distract from them. They agreed that the promotion of 'volunteering' would capture the spirit of the voluntary snow warden scheme and bring together residents and local Members alike during times of severe weather conditions.

4.3 Ultimately, the Working Group felt that a more targeted approach to empowering local communities is required and promotion of practical advice on the Council website and via social media would provide a communication network that would assist volunteers and Elected Members direct support where it is most needed.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Equality and diversity implications will be considered as part of the Working Group's recommendations and any subsequent implementation arrangements

6. CONSUTLATION

6.1 There are no consultation implications arising, as yet, from this report.

7. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial and resource implications will be considered as part of the Working Group's recommendations and any subsequent implementation arrangements