



## COMMUNITY COUNCIL LIAISON SUB-COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON THURSDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2009 AT 7.00PM

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PRESENT:

Community Councillor C. Roberts - Vice Chairman – presiding

Councillors:

Mrs. E.M. Aldworth, M.H. Newman, J.A. Pritchard, J.E. Roberts, A.S. Williams,  
Mrs. L. Williams

Aber Valley	- Mr. J.S. Humphreys (Clerk)
Argoed	- G. Lewis
Bargoed	-
Bedwas, Trethomas & Machen	- Mrs. S. Chick (Clerk)
Blackwood	- Mr. J. Hold (Clerk)
Caerphilly	- Mrs. U. Newman, Mr. K. Williams (Clerk)
Darran Valley	- C.R. Roberts
Gelligaer	-
Llanbradach	- K. Chooyin, Mr. W.M. Thompson (Clerk)
Maesycwmmmer	- Mrs. J.H. Rao
Nelson	- Mrs. B. Miles
New Tredegar	-
Penyrheol, Trecenydd & Energlyn	- Mrs. A. Nash, Mrs. H. Treherne (Clerk)
Rhymney	- D.T. Williams
Rudry	-
Van	-

Together with

N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance), G. Bowes (Invasive Plant Species Officer),  
H.C. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

#### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.A. Andrews, J. Bevan, D. Bolter, Mrs. A. Collins, D.G. Carter, A.G. Higgs, C.P. Mann, Mrs. K. Presley and Mrs. D. Price, Community Councillors Mrs. E. P. Prendergast, Mrs K. Halvey, D. Barry, A. Farina-Childs, A. Angel, D. Woodman and Mr. G. James, Mrs. L. Tams, Mrs. C. Mortimer, Mrs. G. Thomas and Mr. A. Hoskins (Clerks of Argoed, Bargoed, Gelligaer, Maesycwmmmer and Nelson Community/Town Councils respectively).

**2. MINUTES - 20TH MAY 2009**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th May 2009 (a copy had been sent to each member) were received and noted.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**3. Revenue and Capital Budgets 2009/2010 (minute no. 5)**

Reference was made to an announcement by the Welsh Assembly Government earlier in the year of the availability of a £60 million investment fund to support the delivery of more effective and efficient public services as part of an 'invest to save' fund and a query was raised as to whether the county borough would be able to benefit from such an initiative.

Mrs. Scammell reported that the monies available were in effect an interest free loan and not a grant and as such it had been determined that no significant bids should be submitted at this point in time.

**4. Charter - Subjects for Consultation (minute no. 8.)**

Concerns were expressed that on occasions community/town council were not being consulted on the specific subjects as detailed in the approved charter. It was agreed that Officers be reminded of the requirement to consult on the subjects contained therein.

**TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS LIAISON COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to the following items raised by the community/town councils.

**5. UPDATE ON INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES PROJECT**

Mr. Gethin Bowes (Invasive Plant Species Officer) attended to give an update on the invasive plant species project and confirmed that a project has been running throughout the county borough since October 2005 and its aim is to limit the spread of invasive plants and reduce and control areas currently colonised by three of the most problematic invasive species, Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed. The invasive plant species project has been split into three tasks, a fine detail survey to identify colonised areas, responding to enquiries and giving advice and undertaking control measures.

Those areas identified as having Japanese Knotweed are being plotted onto the GIS arcview package. This survey data gives the location, approximate area of the stand, land designation, proximity to watercourses, owner data and any recommended control measures. In addition, once control works have been completed in an area this data can also be stored and accessed for future reference.

The project was initially financed by Objective 1 funding but when this came to an end in 2008, funding was secured through the Heads of the Valleys project in partnership with the five other authorities. An element of the project included an environmental study, survey techniques and community involvement (via training).

A consultant had been appointed, Richards Moorehead and Laing and Corscadden Associates, could this be added please and as a result an evaluation of invasive plant species within the Heads of the Valleys had been produced. With the aid of a slide presentation Mr. Bowes gave an evaluation of the project to date, detailed the specific objectives set by the

brief, outlined the benefits of the scheme, detailed the survey methods used, highlighted comparisons of treatments used elsewhere, identified time and funding required, referred to the procedures for monitoring treatment effectiveness, the role of volunteers and the review of awareness-raising activities.

Mr. Bowes highlighted the benefits of treating invasive plants and of a regional approach. He referred to the surveying and current recording methods and the advantages of plotting the sites on the GIS system. It was noted that a GPS survey system under development would allow trained staff and volunteers to contribute to surveying work.

Reference was then made to the treatment and costs and it was noted that from experience the best time for spraying is late autumn although work is ongoing to find the earliest start for the effective treatment window. The timing and effectiveness of the programme was raised as was the procedures for monitoring treatments and effectiveness and the necessity to ensure good land management practices are in place. It was noted that if the treatment programme is not completed, knotweed will regenerate and undo the progress made to date. Three seasons' treatment is generally the minimum required, with 1 - 2 years' follow-up inspections.

It was confirmed that it is not illegal to have the plant species present on a property however the Countryside and Wildlife Act 1981 makes it an offence to spread or cause to grow wild Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed. The Environmental Protection Act and Regulations of 1990 and 1991 seeks to ensure Japanese Knotweed is disposed of properly by classing it as controlled or special waste. Giant Hogweed is the only plant from those identified that causes harm to human health.

All Japanese Knotweed waste, be it the plant itself or materials containing its rhizome, is classed as controlled/special waste and therefore must be disposed of in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Environmental Protection Act Duty of Care Regulations 1991 by a licensed waste carrier. It was pointed out that the plant has an expansive system of rhizomes that is thought can extend in excess of seven metres laterally and to a depth greater than 2 metres. In view of its ability to spread via the rhizome (as little as one gramme is sufficient to allow a plant to grow) it is now a common site on the roadside, riverbanks and a wide variety of habitats.

Mr. Bowes then detailed specific control measures that are undertaken and reported that treatment has been carried out nearly exclusively on land in the ownership of the county borough. Works that have been carried out on privately owned land have been completed to allow a strategic approach which enables straddling boundaries to be treated in their entirety, herbicide application is only undertaken with prior permission of the land owner. It should be noted however that whilst advice on invasive plant species can be readily given it is very much the exception to undertake treatment on private land as the project concentrates on areas in public ownership.

Members were pleased to note the number of enquiries that are being received and the advice that is given on controlling spread and eradication to members of the public and developers. Reference was then made to the chemical and non-chemical controls which are available. Non-chemical being achieved by large scale excavation whereby the plant and its rhizomes are remove (and buried on site to a depth of at least 5 metres), chemical being to the use of herbicide. Homeowners with knotweed in their gardens are advised to purchase glyphosate based herbicide which will provide control. He pointed out however that it is essential that regular treatments are undertaken and that the area is monitored for new growth for at least three/four growing seasons to ensure it does not re-establish itself (although it was noted that it can lay dormant for up to thirty years waiting for suitable growing conditions).

Mr. Bowes referred to the contribution from volunteers and the assistance from the public in identifying sites and requested that details of any sites that are found are forwarded to him for

inclusion on the data base. He confirmed that as part of the Heads of the Valleys initiative volunteers had been trained to undertake spraying but there is further potential for volunteers to survey and collect site data and it is hoped to attract further funding to continue this practice. Every opportunity is taken to raise awareness amongst staff as well as the public to encourage the reporting of invasive species infestations.

Case studies and examples have found that property values and rentals have been reduced as a result of knotweed presence and it has been noted that mortgage companies also take it into consideration. There is evidence of a general reduction in value of properties due to the appearance of knotweed and property blight has been associated with its presence.

Mr. Bowes reported that some progress has been made in isolating a natural controlling aphid, Psyllid, which so far has been tested on 200 similar plant species, although further testing and consultation is required to ensure that they will attack only the knotweed before any further developments can be made. The Psyllid will not eradicate the species but will assist in controlling it.

Mr. Bowes then responded to a number of questions raised (use of herbicide near water courses and on river banks, access to sites, importation of soil, the imposition of planning conditions, advice given to the public and developers) over and above those which were considered during the course of the presentation.

Members thanked Mr. Bowes for his informative presentation and for responding to questions and issues brought up during the course of the debate.

## **6. INVOLVEMENT WITH PLAY SCHEMES WITHIN THE COUNTY BOROUGH**

It was noted that Sian Sealey GAVO (Holiday Scheme Co ordinator) was unable to be present but would attend the next meeting scheduled for 18th November 2009.

## **7. FINANCIAL OUTLOOK 2010/2015**

Mrs. Nicole Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance) attended to give an outline on the financial outlook for the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2015 and highlighted the severe constraints and the significant challenge in delivering the required savings and efficiencies. It was noted that the current recession is already having an impact on local government finances as income levels continue to reduce whilst demand for many services continues. It is predicted that this situation will become worse in the coming years. Funding for local government and the public sector is projected to fall and the forecasts for the county borough suggest that for the five year period (2010/2015) there will be a need to reduce the revenue expenditure by approximately £25m in real terms. Funding for any growth in services to meet inescapable demand is likely to only be available by increasing this cuts target further.

Mrs. Scammell explained that forecasting is difficult, but the requirement to achieve savings of circa £25m over the period of 2010/11 - 2015/16 has been identified. She detailed the key assumptions that had been made in order to arrive at this figure and pointed out that forecasting is always unpredictable as year on year assumptions change and forecasting five years ahead is difficult, particularly given the volatility of the economy at this time. However, based on current known information, the projections do not seem unreasonable and are assessed as a middle banding, i.e. neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but it must be recognized that there is a margin for error.

Whilst the county borough continues to stay within budget and find efficiency savings in excess of the Welsh Assembly Government's 1% target, the magnitude of the savings required in future years will require even more radical strategies, if the impact on critical

services to the public is to be minimised. Inevitably, however, there will be no getting away from the fact that services will need to be reduced or indeed withdrawn in some instances in order to protect critical services.

Mrs. Scammell pointed out that capital funding will not escape the recession and funding is also predicted to reduce (£5m reduction over the five-year period). An asset management review has been undertaken and has determined that the level of funding required to maintain all of the existing community assets over the same period has identified a shortfall. This is at a time when the possibility of realising additional income from the sale of assets is also problematic.

With regards to articles in the press relating to the Icelandic banks investments, Mrs. Scammell indicated that the information they contained was misleading and not factual and had no bearing on the £25m savings required over the next five years. She confirmed that monies have been set aside within the statement of accounts for 2008/09 to deal with any potential losses and it does not in any way relate to the current financial position that the county borough finds itself in.

It was reported that a Budget Advisory Group is considering strategies to tackle the problem and will bring financial proposals as part of the budget strategy discussions for Members' consideration in the autumn. A seminar had also been held for all Members to enable them to engage in the process at an early stage. There will be consultation with the Trade Unions on the implications for staff and with the View Point Panel to seek views on priority service areas where it is thought spending should be increased and areas where it could be reduced. Views expressed in this consultation process will be considered by elected Members as they formulate the budget in the new year. The representative asked that they also be included as part of the process.

Those present noted the financial difficulties facing the Council over the next five years and accepted that the size and scale of this challenge will require a significant change in strategy to ensure statutory services to the public can be protected and as such the Council will have to consider a range of strategies which in order to achieve this.

It was noted that the announcements on the provisional settlement is not due until 13th October 2009. However, given that there is a general election next year, there will in all likelihood be no indicative three-year funding announcement until at least the autumn of 2010.

In noting that community/town make provision within their estimates for partnership schemes, a request was made that details on proposed areas where there are likely to be economies be notified as soon as possible in order that it can be utilised elsewhere. Mrs. Scammell confirmed that unfortunately this will not be possible until the budget is set in February but confirmed that any changes to assets would be the subject of a consultation process. She reiterated the requirement to consider a longer-term strategy over the five-year period in order that any proposed changes can be properly implemented during that time and that the concerns raised by the representatives would be taken into account at that time.

Mrs. Scammell then responded to a number of issues raised over and above those which were considered during the course of the presentation and Members thanked her for her for the detailed information and for responding to the questions brought up during the ensuing the debate.

In responding Mrs. Scammell indicated that she would be happy to receive and consider any proposals received as part of the consultation process.

## **8. LITTER ON PRIVATE LAND**

Consideration was given to the report which provided information on the formal powers available to the Public Protection Division to deal with litter and rubbish on privately owned land. It was noted that the Division undertakes of a wide range of protective and regulatory functions that seek to protect, promote and improve the health, safety and the economic wellbeing of the community. Enforcing public protection legislation is a statutory duty and links to the Living Environment Strategy by seeking to improve peoples' lives through targeted actions and regulation.

There are a range of legal powers and duties that may be relevant to litter and rubbish on private land. The practical application of an individual legal power is often informed by additional interpretation within the legislation itself, guidance and case law. The choice of the most suitable course of action in relation to any particular piece of land will, of course, depend upon the circumstances of each individual case.

Members noted the range of powers available and requested that details of action taken and any successful prosecutions be reported to the next meeting for information.

## **9. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND THE TENANCY ENFORCEMENT SECTION**

Details of the report which provided information on anti-social behaviour of council tenants and the work the Tenancy Enforcement Section have undertaken were noted. The Section was created in October 2005 in response to the requirements of Section 12 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 as ratified by the Welsh Assembly Government. That section of the Act, required all social landlords to produce and publish a policy, procedure and summary of how it would deal with anti-social and nuisance behaviour in their properties. In response to this statutory requirement the county borough established a team to specifically deal with these issues. This team became the Tenancy Enforcement Section. A copy of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure was appended to the report for information.

Members noted the details of the most common referrals (verbal abuse/harassment and noise nuisance) and that the Team deals with on average 330-350 referral cases over a twelve month period. The various legal actions taken in order to remedy problems and the process which has to be undertaken to get to that stage were detailed and it was noted that the Tenancy Enforcement Section spend a lot of time discussing issues with the perpetrator to try and determine why they are behaving in an anti-social manner. The Officer dealing with the case will assess the information and make appropriate referrals to different organisations/agencies (with the permission of the perpetrator) to try to assist them to resolve the issues and thus improve their behaviour.

It was requested that an officer be invited to attend the next meeting in order for a general discussion on the problem experienced and the process followed.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm