



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18TH FEBRUARY 2014

SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP 2013

REPORT BY: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information on the progress made within the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2013.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report will provide information on the work undertaken by the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2013. It will highlight how the Group works alongside the Council's five Town Centre Management Group and outline some of the issues that have been resolved in each of the five managed towns. An accompanying Appendix contains a full list of the issues resolved in 2013 by the Town Centre Improvement Group using an Environmental Audit process.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Council has agreed to a five-year regeneration programme entitled "People, Businesses and Places". The proposals within the strategy are based on a number of regeneration principles, one of which is "Strengthening Town Centres".
- 3.2 It is vital that the retail areas within each of the five principal town centres in the County Borough - Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Risca and Ystrad Mynach, are well maintained and project a positive image. Areas that are uncared for can appear dangerous or dirty, deterring visitors and stifling private investment.
- 3.3 The work of the Town Centre Improvement Group links directly to the Regeneration Objective in the Community Plan of supporting town and village regeneration.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Town Centre Improvement Group was established in 2005 with appropriate representation from all relevant service areas.
- 4.2 The remit of the group is to:-
- Improve the environment within the five principal town centres; Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed, Risca and Ystrad Mynach;
 - Benchmark the performance of CCBC services in the five town centres;

- Demonstrate the commitment of CCBC as an authority to the environmental improvement of the five town centres;
- Aid the 'Wales In Bloom' entry for Caerphilly, by showing continuous environmental improvements to the town centre;
- Provide an internal forum for CCBC to address issues that blight town centres,

4.3 The group includes representatives from all the relevant parts of the Council, in addition to the five Police Inspectors whose responsibilities include the town centres of Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Risca and Ystrad Mynach.

4.4 The purpose of the Town Centre Improvement Group is to ensure that there is a responsive and co-ordinated approach to the maintenance of the town centres, through the process of an Environmental Audit. In addition, the Town Centre Improvement Group addresses items raised within the meetings of the five Town Centre Management Groups.

4.5 The work of the Town Centre Improvement Group should be seen as complementary to the five Town Centre Management Groups, ensuring that environmental and maintenance matters, which are the responsibility of CCBC, are addressed in an effective and expeditious manner.

4.6 In 2013, a total of 159 issues across the five town centres were actioned through the Town Centre Improvement Group (TCIG). This Group's strength continues to be built on a mindset of collaborative working across council departments, providing a forum for officers to exchange information. An outline of some of the issues resolved by the TCIG in each of the five managed town centres is shown below. This provides an overview of the scope of the work examined in the audit process and highlights the group's role in resolving them.

Caerphilly

4.7 St David's Day Events – BEST Events Team

Given the number of town centre events that take place across the County Borough, it is important that Council departments and the Police are involved in the planning and staging of an event. The TCIG provides a forum to help officers understand the impact an event may have on a particular service area.

4.8 Refuse from Travellers – Transportation / Police

There have been a number of different instances of travellers accessing the town's car park. In such cases various legal duties are placed upon the Council. The TCIG enables the relevant departments and the Police to work together to resolve the problem.

4.9 Replacement of Water Main – Highways / Transportation / Town Centre Management

These street works significantly impinged on the life of the town centre, by sharing the timetable of the works with businesses and working closely with Welsh Water, disruption was kept to a minimum and the work completed ahead of schedule.

Blackwood

4.10 Poundstretchers Fire – Regulatory Planning / Highways / Town Centre Management / Police

After fire destroyed the Poundstretchers store in High Street, the relationships established between Council officers and the Police in the TCIG meant that there was close cooperation during the initial investigation of the fire and subsequent demolition process.

4.11 Broken Kerbing Northern Retail Park Entrance – Highways

One of the strengths of the TCIG is that it provides multiple retailers with confidence that the Council will rectify issues quickly. The broken kerbs issue was given to the Town Centre Management Team by the ASDA store manager and then passed to Highways under the Environmental Audit process.

4.12 Chewing Gum Removal – Cleansing

Both shoppers and retailers notice when the small things are done well in town centres. The removal of chewing gum is a constant problem and the TCIG is used to coordinate where the work to remove it needs to be undertaken.

Bargoed

4.13 BIG Idea - Regeneration Scheme – Urban Renewal / Strategic Planning / Transportation / Highways / Town Centre Management

The TCIG has given officers not directly involved in the works regular updates on the progress. The aim has been to encourage an exchange of information to assist in managing the change.

4.14 Cleaning of War Memorial – Parks

The Town Centre Management Team requested that the memorial be cleaned in preparation for the centenary commemorations next year to mark the outbreak of the First World War.

4.15 Street Market – Town Centre Management

The request to consider establishing a weekly street market came from the Bargoed Chamber of Trade. Following consultation with officers from the TCIG, a suitable location was identified and the street market operated for a trial period.

Risca

4.16 Tredegar Park Works – Parks

To have a park and children's play area in the centre of a town provides a unique space used by all sections of the community. During the year, events have been staged on the new event site and to ensure the park remains well maintained a list of seasonal works was undertaken.

4.17 Commercial Lane – Police / Regulatory Planning / Urban Renewal / Highways / Town Centre Management

Retailers have become concerned about a number of issues in Commercial Lane, at the rear of their properties. The TCIG was able to assign the correct issue to the appropriate department and ensure that although these issues are separate, they remain grouped together as part of a larger problem at the location.

4.18 Parking Issues – Police

Since Gwent Police discontinued its Traffic Warden Service, all of the town centres have experienced parking problems. The TCIG has enabled officers to engage directly with the local Police Inspector to utilise Police Community Officers to enforce parking restrictions.

Ystrad Mynach

4.19 After the initial launch of the Council's Town Centre Management service into Ystrad Mynach, the 'Unique Places' model of Town Centre Management was implemented. The regular auditing of the town centre highlighted a number of issues, which were resolved through the TCIG. These include:

- Painting of street furniture
- Cleaning of public realm areas
- Installation of lamppost banners
- Repair and repainting of seating

Town Centre Issues

4.20 Attached is an Appendix containing a detailed breakdown of the issues resolved in each of the town centres over the past twelve months. This is evidence of the commitment of individual service areas and shows the diverse nature of issues addressed by the group.

4.21 The support of the managers who make up the group is highly valued and their willingness to recognise the importance of the town centres is key to the group's success. It should also be noted that the participation of senior Police Officers significantly adds to the group's

effectiveness. The work of the TCIG highlights substantial positive contributions to the appearance and development of each of the County Borough's principal towns. This was evidenced in the latest Household Survey undertaken by the Council, which shows that 82% of respondents were satisfied with their neighbourhood and 62% with their local town centre for shopping, an improvement from 2011.

- 4.22 The objective in 2014 is to continue to provide a high level of service in the principal town centres despite growing financial pressures on council budgets. The wider economic situation means that town centres are fighting to retain their customer base as consumer spending weakens, which in turn places local retail jobs at risk. The aim for the TCIG and the process of Town Centre Management is to provide well-maintained, managed, vibrant and viable town centres.

5. ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

- 5.1 Through the TCIG a number of additional projects have been achieved which have added value to the street scene and offer a visible improvement to the town centres. Many of these have tackled specific issues and sought to resolve long-term problems, these may have proved difficult for departments to work through without this collaborative approach and the support of other officers.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report is for information purposes, so the council's Eqla process does not need to be applied.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Community Assets Budget in 2013 / 2014 allocated £59,000 for work in the five town centres, with the budget constraints it is likely that this allocation will now be reviewed on an annual basis.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct personnel implications, although the 'Two Man Team' from the Engineering Services Division, funded through the Community Assets Budget, has been an invaluable asset to the process of improving the appearance of the town centres.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 No there are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To inform members of the work of the Town Centre Improvement Group.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 This report is for information only.

12. STATUTORY POWER

12.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Matrix of Issues Resolved Across the Five Town Centres