



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair
Councillor Mrs E.M. Aldworth - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, C.J. Cuss, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, S. Kent, Ms P. Leonard, Mrs P. Marsden, Mrs D. Price, A. Rees, Mrs E. Stenner

Cabinet Members:

N. George (part of meeting) (Community and Leisure Services), K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering)

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Corporate Director – Communities), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), D. Whetter (Interim Head of Regeneration), M. Headington (Acting Parks Manager), H. Jones (Principal Waste Management Officer), D. Owen (Cluster Manager), E. Saunders (Cluster Manager), T. White (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), B. Davies (Solicitor), J. Williams (Solicitor) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Adams and M.J. Prew.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 28TH JUNE 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th June 2016 (minute nos. 1 – 11) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the reports received from Councillors T.J. Williams, N. George and K. James, which had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. Questions and comments were invited on the report contents. In the absence of Councillor George at this point in the meeting, the contents of his statement (which had been circulated to Members in advance) were noted and presented in detail in the reports later on the agenda.

Discussion took place regarding the update from Councillor K. James (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development) regarding the Council's recent successful bid for £0.5m of capital loan funding under the Welsh Government's (WG) Town Centre Repayable Funding Scheme. Although it was originally intended that the funding be used to target empty and underutilised properties and land parcels in and around Rhymney town centre, there have been very few opportunities to do so, and therefore WG have recently indicated that the funding can be extended to a further 2 town centres within the county borough if a reasonable justification is presented to them. The Cabinet Member explained that on 5th October 2016, Cabinet would consider a report on WG's offer to extend the Town Centre Repayable Funding Scheme to other areas. The Cabinet Member also advised that he was due to meet with the WG Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to highlight Members' concerns regarding the WG offer of repayable loan funding, rather than the grant funding that has traditionally been offered.

Members referred to the recent emergency closure of Pontygwindy Road following a collapsed culvert, as highlighted in the report from Councillor T.J. Williams (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering). Members placed on record their thanks to all staff involved for their efforts in repairing the culvert in a matter of days and minimising the impact to users of the busy road.

6. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) presented the report, which outlined details of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP).

Members were advised that the FWP includes all reports identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th June 2016 and outlines the reports planned for the period September 2016 to April 2017. Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet Work Programme as appended to the report and to suggest any changes prior to it being finalised and published on the Council's website.

Consideration was given to a Member's request for a report to reconsider the Authority's grass-cutting frequencies within memorial gardens (previously set by Council as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan). This request was not supported by the Scrutiny Committee, and it was agreed that the Member who had requested the report would need to discuss alternatives (such as voluntary maintenance schemes) with the local community.

Discussion took place regarding the items listed on the Forward Work Programme. It was agreed that the City Deal Update scheduled for 13th December 2016 be replaced with a report on the Council's Tree Policy (prior to its consideration by Cabinet). It was also agreed that a report relating to the Environment Act - Ecology Plan be scheduled for 28th March 2017.

It was agreed that subject to the foregoing amendments, the final version of the Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

7. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

8. INTERMENT OF CREMATED REMAINS

The report sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the fee structure for the interment of cremated human remains, prior to a further report being considered by Cabinet.

It was noted that on 28th June 2016, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the introduction of a new scale of charges for additional service provision across the Community and Leisure Services division. During the course of the debate, Members requested further information on the fee for the interment of cremated remains in re-opened earthen graves, together with the 50-year period for the Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial. An information report on these matters was circulated to the Scrutiny Committee following the meeting, and one of the Members subsequently requested a further report relating to the charges for the interment of cremated remains in grave spaces where there were previous interments.

Officers referred to the current charging structure for the interment of full coffins and cremated remains as outlined in the report, which were agreed by Members at the inception of Caerphilly County Borough Council in 1996 and have been incremented annually in line with Members' approval. A comparison with neighbouring Authorities' fees for the same services was included in the report.

In view of Members' wishes to review this particular aspect of the Authority's burial fee structure, a number of options were set out for consideration by the Committee; namely retaining the existing fee structure for all interments of cremated remains within full graves, (currently set at £505.00), or reducing the reopen fee to £250.00 for interments within cremated remains plots and full graves (where there will be no future coffin burials). Members were also asked to consider whether the reopen fee should be set at £100.00 in the case of additional interments within the new cremated remains vaults. Further details associated with each option (including the financial implications) were set out in the report.

During the course of the ensuing debate, it was noted that the report was due to be considered by Cabinet the following day. Officers explained that if the Scrutiny Committee recommended a reduction to the reopen fee for interments within cremated remains plots and full graves, this would be considered by Cabinet as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan proposals for 2017/18. Members were advised that should they be minded to recommend the introduction of a new reopen fee for additional interments within the new cremated remains vaults, this would be implemented with immediate effect, subject to Cabinet ratification.

Members discussed the financial implications associated with reducing the reopen fee, and Officers explained that the potential loss of income (approximately £38,000) had been calculated based on current burial trends, which were outlined in the report. Discussion also took place regarding a previous recommendation by the Cross-Party Task and Finish Group that fees should be increased annually by 18.5% plus inflation for five years to ultimately make the service self-financing, and some Members expressed the need for the Bereavement Service to maintain this self-financing position in future years.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the reopen fee for interments within cremated remains plots and full graves (where there will be no future coffin burials) be reduced to £250.00. By a show of hands, this was agreed by the majority present. It was also moved and seconded that the reopen fee be set at £100.00 in the case of additional interments within the new cremated remains vaults. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) the reopen fee for interments within cremated remains plots and full graves (where there will be no future coffin burials) be reduced to £250.00 and that this be included in the Medium Term Financial Plan proposals for 2017/18;
- (ii) the reopen fee be set at £100.00 in the case of additional interments within the new cremated remains vaults and that this be implemented with immediate effect.

9. COMMUNITIES FIRST: CURRENT STATUS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROPOSALS POST 31ST MARCH 2017

The report provided a review of the Communities First (CF) programme to date and highlighted key changes which have arisen in the past delivery year (2016-17), together with challenges and uncertainties in developing proposals beyond 31st March 2017 within the current national political context.

Members were advised that the new phase of CF commenced on 1st April 2013, with Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) the Lead Delivery Body (LDB) for the programme and as such the accountable body for all funding relating to the programme. CF continues to have a geographical focus, with the overall aim of the programme being to tackle and reduce poverty in the most deprived communities in Wales, and is based on 52 Clusters which are identified through the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. There are four such Clusters within CCBC (Caerphilly Basin, Mid Valleys East, Mid Valleys West, and Upper Rhymney Valley).

Since 2013 there have been a number of changes to the programme requiring budget re-allocations and staff re-structures, including a 5% budget cut in April 2015. Further details of these changes were contained within the report. Members were advised that despite these challenges, outcomes in recent years have been largely positive, with Welsh Government observing at their last annual review visit in November 2015 that Caerphilly is consistently performing well and is one of the best performing Authorities in Wales.

Members were asked to note the impact of the programme changes on the Senghenydd Youth Drop In Centre (SYDIC). Two posts that did not contribute to CF programme delivery were removed from the 2016-17 delivery plans, producing savings of £66,215. In light of the reduction in CF funding, the Council agreed to directly fund this shortfall for one year only to 31st March 2017. CCBC Officers are providing ongoing support to SYDIC to identify potential long-term sustainable solutions for the centre's future, including reducing costs and/or increasing income.

The report also outlined the renewed CF programme, including its overall aim, associated delivery outcomes, performance indicators and monitoring framework set by the Welsh Government. Additionally the report set out an overview of the processes for developing the CF proposals post 31st March 2017 and the considerations to be taken into account when developing these proposals, whilst also highlighting the many uncertainties which currently exist.

Officers explained that whilst final confirmed budget cuts were at the lower end of the potential scale for the current year, it may be reasonably anticipated that further cuts will be required post March 2017. The ongoing potential for further changes to the programme each year presents considerable challenges to staff in terms of planning for future delivery, and ongoing rigorous monitoring and evaluation of projects will therefore be essential to informing budget decisions. Members were advised that once Welsh Government confirms the 2017/18 funding allocation, an update report will be presented for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

During the course of the ensuing debate, a Member referred to the percentages of successful outcomes as listed in Section 4.13 of the report and suggested that it would be useful to report on the destination of participants not included in these outcomes (such as the destination of Employment Support participants who did not gain employment or an employment-related qualification). Officers explained that whilst they track the progress of all participants, the data provided is only intended as a snapshot of performance (in line with WG guidance) and that of the numerous performance indicators within Communities First, only a selection had been included in the report. Officers also explained that interventions take place for those participants identified as requiring additional support.

Discussion took place regarding the work carried out between Communities First and partner agencies and Members commented on the success of schemes such as the LIFT project. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for the Local Ward Members within each Cluster to meet as a group in order to be kept informed of Communities First developments relating to their Cluster, and Officers confirmed they would make the necessary arrangements in this regard.

In response to queries regarding the future of the Communities First programme, Officers explained that there is potential for the programme and its associated funding sources to be realigned in future years (via a single delivery plan from the four Local Delivery Boards) in order to meet the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act. WG also recently announced plans for a shared budget between the anti-poverty programmes of CF, Flying Start, Families First and Supporting People. Collaboration between the anti-poverty programmes in Caerphilly are already well established, placing them in a strong position to adapt to any further alignment by Welsh Government.

Following consideration of the report and after due debate, Members noted the update in respect of the Communities First programme, and further noted that once Welsh Government confirms the 2017/18 funding allocation, an update report will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

10. WASTE COLLECTION REVIEW AND PROPOSED MINOR CHANGES TO CURRENT COLLECTION ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOOD/GARDEN WASTE

The report updated the Scrutiny Committee on progress made with the Collaborative Change Programme (CCP), detailed the outcome of the recent Wales Audit Office (WAO) Review of Waste Management, and also sought the views of Members on proposed minor changes to the current collection arrangements for food and garden waste, prior to its presentation to Cabinet for approval.

Members noted that the CCP was established by Welsh Government to facilitate the delivery of more sustainable waste management services across Wales by offering strategic and tailored support to help local authorities achieve the outcomes of the Towards Zero Waste Strategy. Caerphilly Council has been engaged in the CCP since early 2015 and is currently reviewing its waste collection/disposal options. The CCP is not yet complete and there are no firm recommendations to consider at this present time, although considerable progress has been made.

In May 2016 the WAO undertook a high level review of the Council's progress in considering changes to the waste and recycling service to meet future statutory targets. Based on the review WAO are "*reassured that the Council is taking a measured and mature approach in considering options for its waste and recycling service and recognised areas that require strengthening*". The WAO letter (included at Appendix 1 of the report) also identified some areas for consideration in order to strengthen/develop these arrangements.

Officers summarised current weekly collection arrangements as outlined in the report, involving the collection of approximately 11,000 tonnes of co-mingled food and garden waste per annum which is processed via in-vessel composting (IVC) at Bryn Compost in Gelligaer. However it is recognised that in the longer term, food waste needs to be collected and treated separately from garden waste via Anaerobic Digestion (AD) in accordance with WG policy. In January 2016, Cabinet agreed to the commencement of a food/garden waste treatment procurement process. In the meantime, under the existing contractual agreement with Bryn Compost there is the opportunity to utilise their new AD plant, but to do so would involve a change to the Council's current collection methods.

Members were also advised that a door-stepping campaign to encourage the recycling of food waste was implemented in August 2016 and a follow-up monitoring exercise will be undertaken in order to assess its effectiveness. It is anticipated that this form of communication will have a positive effect on recycling behaviour and improve the current low food waste recycling rate across the county borough.

In view of these findings, a number of collection options for food and garden waste were presented for Members' consideration, with the Scrutiny Committee asked to recommend a preferred method to Cabinet. The considerations and implications associated with each option were included in the report at Appendix 2.

Option 1 proposed the winter suspension of green waste collections, weekly green waste collections (spring/summer only) and all year round weekly food waste collections. This option would incur additional summer collection costs for the separate collections but would realise savings in treatment costs (circa £94,000 per annum). **Option 2** proposed the use of twin pack collection vehicles to collect food and garden waste weekly all year round, involving £1.62m of capital investment in new vehicles, which would achieve savings of approximately £340,000 per annum in collection and treatment costs.

Members were advised that the earliest delivery date for such vehicles would be Spring 2017 and therefore an interim option for this 4-month period would be required. **Option A** proposed the continued weekly collection of food waste and interim suspension of garden waste for Winter 2016/17. **Option B** proposed continued weekly collection of food waste and implementation of an interim weekly collection of garden waste for Winter 2016/17. **Option C** proposed continued weekly collection of food waste and implementation of a "request only" collection service for garden waste for Winter 2016/17.

In response to Members' queries, Officers confirmed that the new collection vehicles would have the same narrow chassis specification as the existing vehicles to allow ease of access across collection routes, but would have two sections to allow for the separation of the waste fractions. They explained that if interim Option C was selected (the request-only option for green waste), a new route would be established to allow for green waste to be collected on a specific day according to location for a temporary period during winter 2016/17 only

Concerns were raised that the interim request-only collection for garden waste could lead to fly tipping incidents or increased tonnage at civic amenity sites. Officers explained that garden waste tonnage is significantly lower during the winter months and that a request-only service would allow for the efficient reconfiguration of routes so that vehicles are only travelling down streets where green waste collections are required.

Members expressed the need for residents to be sufficiently informed of these changes and suggested a marketing strategy involving a leaflet and sticker drop. Officers explained that due to time constraints, it would not be possible to produce such literature or publish it in Newline ahead of implementation of the changes, but that all other available communication channels would be utilised (such as social media, the Council's website, and word of mouth via the Council's employees). Additionally, early engagement had taken place with Customer First staff to prepare them for queries from local residents regarding the collection changes.

Following consideration of the report, Members noted the content of the update on the Collaborative Change Programme review and the letter from Wales Audit Office. It was moved and seconded that Option 2 and interim Option C as contained in Section 8 of the report be endorsed and that the recommendation be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) the content of the update on the Collaborative Change Programme review and the letter from Wales Audit Office be noted;
- (ii) the existing collection system for food and garden waste be replaced by the use of twin pack collection vehicles (Option 2);
- (iii) a request-only service for garden waste collection be implemented for the interim period of November 2016-March 2017, with weekly food waste collection being maintained for the same period (Option C).

The meeting closed at 7.16 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2016, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR