



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – FOR INFORMATION

SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP 2016

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Committee on the progress made by the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2016 against the Council's objectives.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of work undertaken by the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2016. The report highlights how the Group works alongside the Council's five Town Centre Management Groups and outlines some of the issues that have been resolved in each of the five principal towns. An appendix to the report list all of the issues resolved in 2016 by the Town Centre Improvement Group using an Environmental Audit process.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 "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 "Prosperous Caerphilly" is identified as one of the key outcomes in the Council's "Single Integrated Plan". The Implementation of the *Unique Places* model of Town Centre Management in the County Borough's principal town centres is one of the actions identified to achieve this outcome.
- 3.3 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out seven Well-being Goals which aim to make a positive impact upon the social, economic, environmental or cultural well being of the area or community concerned. This report aligns with the following Well-being Goals:
- A prosperous Wales
 - A resilient Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A more equal Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities
 - A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
 - A globally responsible Wales.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 The Town Centre Improvement Group (TCIG) 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 County Borough's five principal town centres at Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed, Risca and Ystrad Mynach;
- Benchmark the performance of Council services in the five town centres;
- Demonstrate the commitment of the Council as an authority to the environmental improvement of the five town centres;
- Provide an internal forum for the Council to address issues that blight town centres.

4.3 The TCIG includes representation from all the relevant Council service departments and from the Police Inspectors whose respective responsibilities include Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed, Risca and Ystrad Mynach town centres.

4.4 The purpose of the TCIG 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 TCIG addresses operational issues brought forward from the Town Centre Management Groups for Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed, Risca and Ystrad Mynach.

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

4.6 During 2016, across the five town centres a total of 119 issues were actioned through the TCIG. The Group's strength continues to be built on providing a forum for collaborative working and exchange of information across Council departments. The report provides an overview of the variety of the issues examined in the audit process and highlights the TCIG's role in resolving them. Examples of the issues resolved by the Group during 2016 are outlined in the report.

Common Town Centre Issues

4.7 There are a number of common issues within our town centres, these include:

Increase in Illegal Parking

Since Gwent Police changed their method of enforcing parking restrictions, all five of the principal town centres have experienced persistent and increased problems with illegal parking.

Enforcement of Parking Restrictions

The TCIG has enabled officers to engage directly with the local Police Inspector to discuss how to prioritise the limited Police resources to enforce parking restrictions.

Event Programme

A varied events program takes place throughout the year within the principal town centres. The TCIG meetings provide an opportunity during the event planning and preparation to consult across service areas on the impact of the events and any associated road closures.

4.8 **Caerphilly**

Accumulation of Rubbish - Cleansing

Complaints were received from the Town Council in relation to refuse and similar items being left in black bags on lanes adjacent to the town centre that had been opened by animals and strewn throughout the town. The matter was investigated and local businesses were advised on the need to make appropriate waste storage and collection arrangements.

Refurbishment of the Cenotaph / New Plaque – Parks / Town Centre Management

Following requests by local Members to add additional names to the cenotaph, officers worked across service areas to coordinate a program of works. The monument was refurbished for Armed Forces Day and a new memorial plaque listing the additional names installed for Armistice Day. The TCIG provided a forum to make other service areas aware of this sensitive community issue.

Programme of Painting Works - Highways

During the summer months a programme of works was undertaken throughout the town centre by the Council's "Community Response Team". This involved repainting railings, litter bins and benches. The work plays an essential part in maintaining the general appearance of the five town centres as the shop windows of the County Borough.

4.9 **Blackwood**

Installation of Event Site Demarcation Studs – Highways

In response to an increased demand for promotional space in town centres, designated spaces have been created for use by charities, Council service providers and private companies. The sites, which are managed by Town Centre Management, are marked with steel studs on the footway. The TCIG provided a platform for officers to share information relating to the site's location and the terms and conditions in place to regulate use of the sites.

Cleaning of Interchange Bus Station – Community Safety / Police / Town Centre Management

The Bus Station has experienced a number of anti-social behaviour problems since it opened. To address the problem a multi-agency group was established a number of years ago and is built on existing relationships forged in the TCIG meetings. The multi agency group meets regularly to discuss the problems, exchange information and explore solutions.

Former Guide Hall - Environmental Health / Regulatory Planning / Community Safety /Police

Following complaints by residents it was determined that people were gaining unlawful access to the derelict former Guide Hall. A site inspection found evidence of drinking and drug use. The issue was resolved through the cooperation by officers who attend the TCIG and the consideration of relevant legislation.

4.10 **Bargoed**

Damage Daffodil Artwork - Police / Community Safety / Cleansing

Following the completion of the 'Pocket Park' scheme, a number of instances of graffiti were reported and a large amount of litter was left in the area. The Council worked with the Police to tackle these issues to ensure that the investment in town's public realm was protected and maintained.

Unlicensed Taxis – Police / Licensing

There were reports that social media was being used to offer prearranged 'lifts' to people using the town centre at night. Vehicles used in this way are effectively unlicensed taxis and place passengers at risk. A joint operation was staged by the Council's Licensing section and Gwent Police and the TCIG meetings provided a forum to collate and exchange information.

'Stella' Filming – Town Centre Management / Highways / Police

In recent years the town centre has increasingly been used as a location for film and television productions. The logistical challenge of filming in a busy town centre is considerable. Town Centre Management officers liaise with Location Managers to determine the production needs and use the TCIG group to service any requests the Council can assist with.

4.11 **Risca**

Condition of Land Around Cuckoo Artwork - Urban Renewal / Cleansing

Local Members concerns were expressed at the Risca Town Centre Management Group about the unkempt condition of the land surrounding the cuckoo artwork. It was agreed for officers to work with Keep Wales Tidy to formulate a management plan for the site and for the Environmental Audit process was used to monitor progress of the work.

Damage to Wall Bethany Baptist Chapel, Tredegar Street – Highways / Police / Urban Renewal

The minister of Bethany Baptist Chapel expressed concern that the church's boundary wall, a listed structure, was repeatedly damaged by HGV vehicles whilst they reversed. In an attempt to prevent further damage meetings took place between Council officers and the Police, resulting in new bollards being installed.

Power Washing of Event Space Tredegar Grounds - Parks

The pavements on the event space at the entrance to Tredegar Grounds Park had become dirty and power washing was required to restore them to their original appearance. The works were undertaken following discussion at the TCIG meeting to confirm the cleaning action would not damage the mortar joints.

4.12 **Ystrad Mynach**

Repainting of Roundabout Markings - Highways

Following local reports of some "near misses" on the mini-roundabouts in the town centre, an assessment was undertaken and the roundabout markings were repainted.

Repair of Steps - Transportation

The steps leading from Pengam Road to Oakfield Street car park were identified as being in need of remedial works. Within the work program a number of loose paving slabs were reset and other areas were repointed.

Cigarette Ends / Litter - Cleansing

Complaints were received from Gelligaer Community Council in relation to the collection of cigarette ends and litter under the benches on Siloh Square. One of the audit functions is to identify how issues, which are the Council's responsibility, are expedited both effectively and quickly.

4.13 **Town Centre Issues**

The Appendix to this report summarises the 119 issues resolved within each of the town centres from January to December 2016. The information shows the diverse nature of problems addressed by the TCIG and the commitment from service areas to resolve those issues.

The objective for 2017 is to continue to provide a high level of service in the five principal town centres whilst accepting that budget savings under the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) will continue to be required. As the TCIG has no specific budget allocation, reductions to maintenance budgets within all service areas will impact on the Council's ability to react to maintenance issues as they occur and are identified in our town centres. The challenging situation within the wider UK economy places a significant pressure on all retailers, particularly independents. The low levels of consumer spending mean that jobs within the retail sector remain at risk as national retailers rationalise their store portfolios. The aim for the TCIG and the process of Town Centre Management is to help promote sustainable long-term economic growth across the County Borough by delivering well-maintained and managed town centres which are focal points within the local community.

5. ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

- 5.1 Through the work of the TCIG a number of projects have been delivered which have added value to the street scene offered a visible improvement to the town centres. Many of these have tackled specific issues and sought to resolve long-term problems through collaborative working arrangements between officers and mutual support between organisations.

6. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 6.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above in the following ways:
- *A prosperous Wales* - the retail sector is a significant employer within the County Borough and a substantial number of those retail businesses and jobs are located in the town centres.
 - *A resilient Wales* – developing green space in town centres helps to create a more biodiverse natural environment.
 - *A healthier Wales* – visiting a town centre promotes physical exercise and encourages social interaction.
 - *A more equal Wales* – town centres should strive to celebrate diversity and promote equal opportunity for all people regardless of their background or circumstances.
 - *A Wales of cohesive communities* – relevant, accessible and well managed town centres are vital to sustaining vibrant communities.
 - *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* – town centres contain significant elements of the nation’s architectural and cultural heritage. They are also places where the Welsh language can be taught, used and promoted.
 - *A globally responsible Wales* – providing communities with local shops and services potentially reduces the necessity and frequency of vehicle use and promotes public transportation links.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council’s EqIa process does not need to be applied.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Individual departments have no specific TCIG budget allocation, although they do have budgets for routine works in town centres. In order to fund any “improvement” works which are often identified through the audit process, the Town Centre Management team relies heavily on a combined budget allocation of £39k. The Council’s commitment to its MTFP means that the budget allocations continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 8.2 It should be noted that the reduction in allocated budgets has limited the Council’s ability to address requests for town centre maintenance works. Consequently, there has been a shift towards reactive maintenance rather than the planned enhancements which have been previously undertaken.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The “Community Response Team” is established within and funded through the Engineering Services Division and is an important asset in maintaining and improving the appearance of the principal town centres. The Community Response Team’s work includes preparing and painting street furniture such as railings, litter bins and benches along with sign cleaning and removal of foliage encroaching onto the footway.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 To inform Members of the work of the Town Centre Improvement Group.

12. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 For Members to note the progress made against corporate objectives.

13. STATUTORY POWER

13.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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Inspector S. Drayton (Blackwood / Risca)
Inspector A. O'Keefe (Bargoed / Ystrad Mynach)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Matrix of Issues Resolved Across the Five Town Centres