



JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY AND HOUSING & REGENERATION)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 15TH DECEMBER 2020 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair (Environment & Sustainability)
Councillor A. Whitcombe - Chair (Housing & Regeneration)
Councillor A. Hussey - Vice Chair (Environment & Sustainability)

Councillors:

Councillors: M.A. Adams, A. Collis, D. Cushing, M. Evans, A. Gair, Ms J. Gale, R. Gough, L. Harding, G. Kirby, B. Owen, D. Price, T.J. Williams, W. Williams

Cabinet Members:

S. Morgan (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Economy & Enterprise), N. George (Cabinet Member for Waste & Public Protection), J. Ridgewell (Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure)

Together with:

Mark S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), C. Davies (Private Sector Housing Manager), M. Woodland (Senior Solicitor), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed and would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that Microsoft Forms would be used for the formal voting on decisions.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, C. Elsbury, C. Forehead, A. Higgs, S. Kent, A. Leonard, P. Leonard, G. Oliver, D.W.R Preece, J. Roberts, M. Sargent, J. Scriven and B. Zaplatynski.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D. Cushing sought advice in relation to Agenda Item 3 (as a Member of Gelligaer Community Council which had provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group) and was advised there was no requirement to declare an interest on this occasion.

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. ENFORCED SALE POLICY

With the permission of the Chair, this item was brought forward on the agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Economy & Enterprise presented the report, which sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on a proposed Enforced Sale Policy, prior to its presentation to Cabinet for approval. This is a mechanism by which problematic, long-term empty private sector dwellings, derelict commercial properties and land are brought back into beneficial use where Council debts have been registered against the property but not discharged.

Officers explained that the purpose of this policy is to set out a framework for Caerphilly County Borough Council to use statutory powers under the Enforced Sale Procedure with a view of targeting long-term problematic empty properties, and to bring these properties back into use where possible. The Council recognises the importance of bringing such properties back into use, as they can be a source of many problems including negative visual amenity, nuisance to adjacent occupiers, and increased anti-social behaviour. An Enforced Sale Policy will aim to free up public sector resources, recoup debts owed to the Authority, improve local communities and may increase the supply of affordable housing. It was emphasised to Members that the proposed policy would only apply to empty properties and only be used as a last resort where all other avenues to encourage beneficial use of a property have failed.

During the course of the ensuing debate, and in response to a Member's query on weighted criteria and policy triggers, Officers gave assurances that the criteria as set out in the policy must be followed and the Council would follow the steps to try to proactively engage with property owners before using this policy. Officers provided clarification on the number of empty properties across the county borough (ranging between 1000-1500 properties per annum) and explained that the Council Tax database which is checked every April will identify those properties registered as empty for 6 months or more. However, the majority of these properties will make their way onto the housing market and it is anticipated that this policy will only apply to a very low number of properties.

In response to Members' queries, clarification was also provided on the Land Registry process in cases where the property does not have a registered owner, with it noted that this is situation becoming an infrequent occurrence due to the requirement to register house sales with the Land Registry. It was also confirmed that the length of time taken to acquire a property and bring it back into beneficial use under the Enforced Sale Policy is likely to vary on a case by case basis but could generally take around 6-7 months to complete. It was highlighted to Members that the proposed policy will be a useful and cost neutral mechanism for the Council. Officers also confirmed that any authorisation in relation to the marketing and sale of an acquired property would need to be approved by the relevant Director.

Having considered the report and provided their views on the proposals, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for approval, and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 13 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) the Enforced Sale Policy as an enforcement tool for Caerphilly County Borough Council be adopted;
- (ii) a figure of £500 be adopted as the level of debt at which this policy can be implemented.

4. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor Rob Gough (Chair of the Car Park Task and Finish Group) presented the report, which informed the Joint Scrutiny Committee of the findings of the joint Task and Finish Group that was established to review car parks managed by Caerphilly County Borough Council. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider a number of recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group as set out in Sections 3.2 to 3.16 of the report and determine its recommendations to Cabinet.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee were advised of the extensive research and work carried out to inform the findings of the Task and Finish Group and placed on record their thanks to all Officers and Members that had been involved in the work of the Group.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee considered each of the Task and Finish Group recommendations in turn and took a show of hands following debate on each item to ascertain a broad view on that particular recommendation. It was noted that once all the recommendations had been considered, they would then be grouped according to general consensus and would be formally voted upon via Microsoft Forms.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee were supportive of a standardised hourly rate at all car parks across the county borough which should be set at the same level as the current 70p starting tariff across the majority of the Council's car parks (with the exception of Oakfield Street in Ystrad Mynach and the Twyn car park in Caerphilly) and were set out in Appendix 1 of the report. Members were supportive of the free use of car parks close to schools for a limited time to relieve congestion and improve safety. In addition, the Joint Scrutiny Committee endorsed the removal of parking charges at the 5 country parks and were also of the view that Cwmcarn Visitor Centre car park should continue to charge for parking.

There were some recommendations that the Joint Scrutiny Committee did not support. These included offering reduced parking permits for local businesses as it was felt that the existing reduced permits were sufficient. Members did not support the introduction of charges at park and ride car parks due to concerns that this would result in increased parking in residential areas. Finally, the Joint Scrutiny Committee did not support the ring-fencing of surplus car park income solely for improvement of car parks due to the potential impact upon budget available to the Infrastructure Department for maintenance in other areas, such as main roads.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee agreed that some of the recommendations should be deferred until the outcome and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is known. These included the removal of Sunday charges at the Twyn car park in Caerphilly, non-enforcement of charges on St David's Day and introducing charges at free car parks. There were two recommendations that were deferred for a report to return to the relevant Scrutiny Committee

on zoning and residential parking areas. The recommendation regarding ceasing locking of the two car parks at night in Blackwood was also deferred for further discussion with ward members upon the retirement of the current post-holder. Members also agreed to remove Recommendation 3.12 on extending free parking across the county borough for a period of 3 months from 31st December 2020 and review thereafter, as this had already been agreed by Cabinet on 9th December 2020.

Members sought an update on the replacement of pay and display payment machines and were advised that more modern machines would allow card payments and there is circa 50% of the funding already available (£170,000 via the WG TRI grant). Members agreed to make an additional recommendation (3.17) to Cabinet asking that the Council proceed with the purchase of the new machines.

Having considered the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, and having agreed the inclusion of an additional recommendation (3.17), it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for approval and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 13 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) Current hourly tariffs at publicly available pay and display highway owned car parks be standardised across county borough for long term and short-term parking respectively. It is suggested that charges are set at a current lower level (Task & Finish recommendation 3.2);
- (ii) Parking charges at the 5 country parks be removed to recognise the significant health benefits to residents (Task & Finish recommendation 3.3);
- (iii) Where car parks in close proximity to school are having parking issues during school drop off and pick up times, Officers be given discretion to allow a free parking concession to parents/carers for a limited time and in consultation with local ward members (Task & Finish recommendation 3.5);
- (iv) The current approach to the use of car parks for trading and events be allowed to continue and Officers be permitted to continue to use discretion in respect of applications that have community benefit (Task & Finish recommendation 3.13);
- (v) Opportunities to improve existing CCTV be explored where grant funding or match funding is available (Task & Finish recommendation 3.16);
- (vi) A programme to upgrade pay and display machines across the county borough be implemented (additional Scrutiny recommendation 3.17).

It was moved and seconded that the following Task & Finish recommendations not be supported. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 12 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the following Task & Finish recommendations not be supported:-

- (i) offering local businesses reduced charge parking permits for their staff to park in car parks (Task & Finish recommendation 3.4);

- (ii) for the charging of Park and Ride facilities to be reviewed by Cabinet (Task & Finish recommendation 3.8);
- (iii) the ring-fencing of all surplus car parking income for maintenance and improvement of car parks (Task & Finish recommendation 3.15).

It was moved and seconded that the following Task & Finish recommendations be deferred pending the outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 14 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the following Task & Finish recommendations be deferred pending the outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic:-

- (i) Remove Sunday parking charges at Twyn Car park on Sundays (Task & Finish recommendation 3.6);
- (ii) That car park charges not be enforced on St David's Day (Task & Finish recommendation 3.7);
- (iii) consideration of charging at free car parks (Task & Finish recommendation 3.9).

It was moved and seconded that the following Task & Finish recommendations be deferred for a further report to Scrutiny Committee. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 14 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the following Task & Finish recommendations be deferred for a further report to Scrutiny Committee:-

- (i) That priority be given in the county wide review for consideration of zoning of residential parking areas of main towns (Task & Finish recommendation 3.10);
- (ii) That the criteria for residential parking permit areas be reviewed to offer a more flexible approach that takes into account areas outside of principal towns where customer parking to access local businesses impacts on residential areas (Task & Finish recommendation 3.11).

It was moved and seconded that the following Task & Finish recommendation be removed as this matter has already been approved by Cabinet. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 13 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the following Task & Finish recommendation be removed as this matter has already been approved by Cabinet:-

- (i) That the current non-enforcement of parking charges at council owned car parks be extended after 31.12.20 for three months and then reviewed to consider if the impact of Covid-19 on town centres is ongoing at that time (Task & Finish recommendation 3.12).

It was moved and seconded that the following Task & Finish recommendation be deferred for further discussion with local ward members upon retirement of the current postholder. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in nothing there were 14 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the following Task & Finish recommendation be deferred for further discussion with local ward members upon retirement of the current postholder:-

- (i) Consideration be given to cease locking the car parks at Thorncombe 3 and Wesley Road Blackwood at night upon the retirement of the member of staff. To be done in consultation with local ward members. If night-time locking ends the impact should be monitored and options to install additional CCTV and/or upgrade the quality are explored if required. (Task & Finish recommendation 3.14).

The meeting closed at 6.56 p.m.