



## REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17TH FEBRUARY 2015

**SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP 2014**

**REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide information on the progress made within the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2014.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This report will provide information on the work undertaken by the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2014. It will highlight 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 accompanying Appendix contains a full list of the issues resolved in 2014 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 "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.

### **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 2014, a total of 167 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. It provides an overview of the scope of the work examined in the audit process and highlights the group's role in resolving them.

#### 4.7 **Caerphilly**

##### 4.7.1 Air Quality – Environmental Health / Transportation / Urban Renewal / Town Centre Management

The Welsh Government requires the Council to develop an 'Air Quality Action Plan' in order to improve air quality in and around the town centre. The Town Centre Management Group has acted as a consultative body and the TCIG audit has provided a record of the issue's progress.

##### 4.7.2 Lead Removal from Vacant Shop – Town Centre Management

When issues arise in the town centres that necessitate liaison with the private sector, Town Centre Management instigates contact and seeks to find a solution to the problem.

##### 4.7.3 Rough Sleepers – Town Centre Management / Community Safety / Police

There have been a number of instances involving homeless persons in the town centre. The issue is a complex one for which there is no easy solution. To address the problem, a multi-agency group was established building on existing relationships forged in the TCIG meetings.

#### 4.8 **Blackwood**

##### 4.8.1 Car Cruisers - Police

Although the issue of car cruisers has substantially improved since the road closure was introduced, sporadic problems do still occur. The TCIG provides a valuable forum to note these instances and for the Police and officers to exchange information.

##### 4.8.2 Graffiti Removal – Cleansing

On a number of occasions instances of graffiti occurred at the rear of the shops in High Street. Retailers were offered the chance to sign a disclaimer and have the work undertaken at no cost through an arrangement with the Council's Cleansing team and the Probation Service.

##### 4.8.3 Cinema Development – Planning / Town Centre Management

In preparation for the opening of the new *Maxime Cinema*, Town Centre Management worked closely with the owner to facilitate a dialogue between the appropriate Council departments including: Planning, Licensing, Highways and Communications.

#### 4.9 **Bargoed**

##### 4.9.1 **BIG Idea - Regeneration Scheme – Urban Renewal / Planning / Transportation / Highways / Town Centre Management**

The TCIG has given officers not directly involved in the works regular updates on the progress of the new cinema, the unit shops development and the 'Pocket Park' scheme. The aim has been to encourage an exchange of information to assist in managing the change.

##### 4.9.2 **Parking Issues – Police / Urban Renewal**

Since the completion of the new public realm scheme, parking has been a constant problem in the town centre. At the TCIG, officers have engaged directly with the local Police Inspector in order to utilise Police Community Support Officers to enforce parking restrictions. Different public realm solutions were also discussed to resolve the issue.

##### 4.9.3 **New Bus Stop Traffic Flow Issues – Transportation / Police / Urban Renewal**

The disruption to vehicular traffic due to the bus stop located at Royal Square is an issue local members, businesses and the Police have asked officers to consider. The relationships established in the TCIG forum have meant that there has been close cooperation as the matter was debated.

#### 4.10 **Risca**

##### 4.10.1 **Hoe Down Show Down Event – 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 meeting helps officers understand the impact that an event may have on their particular service area.

##### 4.10.2 **Commercial Lane – Police / Regulatory Planning / Urban Renewal / Highways / Town Centre Management**

The issues affecting Commercial Lane were able to be largely resolved over the last year by allocating the correct issue to the most appropriate department or agency. Updates were provided at the TCIG meetings to ensure all parties knew how the situation as a whole was progressing.

##### 4.10.3 **Smoking & Cigarette Ends – Environmental Health / Cleansing**

Both shoppers and retailers notice when the small things are done well in town centres. The accumulation of detritus from discarded cigarettes is a problem in all of our town centres. Through the TCIG a coordinated programme of cleansing and enforcement has been implemented.

#### 4.11 **Ystrad Mynach**

##### 4.11.1 **Siloh Square – Town Centre Management / Highways/ Parks / Urban Renewal / Transportation / Police**

A number of issues have been recorded on the Environmental Audits that relate to Siloh Square. These range from maintenance and repair, to bus stops and parking assessment. The process of the TCIG ensures that these issues are addressed holistically with a view to any wider implications.

##### 4.11.2 **Sign Damage – Highways**

A road traffic accident resulted in a sign being badly damaged and needing replacement. The issue was audited and the sign was moved a few metres so that in the future it would not be susceptible to accident damage.

##### 4.11.3 **Telephone Box Repainting – Town Centre Management**

One of the strengths of the Council's 'Unique Places' Town Centre Management model is that it provides a mechanism to resolve things which otherwise would be left undone. In order to get the phone boxes repainted. Countless phone calls & e-mails were made to BT until the work was completed.

#### **4.12 Town Centre Issues**

- 4.12.1 Attached is an Appendix containing a detailed breakdown of all 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 problems addressed by the group.
- 4.12.2 In December, the 'Unique Places' model of Town Centre Management was recognised by organisers of the *Great British High Street Awards*, which were organised by The Department for Communities and Local Government. The Council was highly commended by judges for its work in town centres and the 'Unique Places' model was recognised as being an "excellent example for other councils who want to help small towns in their area."
- 4.12.3 The objective in 2015 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 contribute to the long-term economic growth of the County Borough by working to deliver well-maintained and managed 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 have offered 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 EqIa process does not need to be applied.

#### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Community Assets Budget in 2014 / 2015 allocated £20,000 for work in the five town centres, a reduction from the previous sum of £40,000. The Enhanced Maintenance Budget, which is used in part for work in the five town centres, has also been reduced from £96,000 to £18,000. With the ongoing budget constraints it is likely that both these budgets will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis. As a direct result of the reduction in budgets the audit has needed to become a more reactive and less proactive tool.

#### **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 important 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. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

11.1 This report is for information only.

## 12. STATUTORY POWER

12.1 Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Andrew Highway, Town Centre Development Manager  
Consultees: Chris Burns, Interim Chief Executive  
Sandra Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive  
Pauline Elliott, Head of Regeneration & Planning  
Cllr. K. James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development  
Cllr C. Forehead, Chair of Caerphilly Town Centre Management Group  
Cllr D.T Davies, Chair of Bargoed Town Centre Management Group  
Cllr N. Dix, Chair of Blackwood Town Centre Management Group  
Cllr N. George, Chair of Risca Town Centre Management Group  
Cllr A. Angel, Chair of Ystrad Mynach Town Centre Management Group  
Cllr D.T Davies, Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee  
Tony White, Refuse & Cleansing Officer  
Rhodri Lloyd, Special Projects Officer  
Lyndon Ross, Senior Environment Officer  
Kath Peters, Community Safety Manager  
Clive Campbell, Transportation Engineering Manager  
Gavin Barry, Assistant Engineer  
Myra McSherry, Licensing Manager  
Derek Price, Parks and Outdoor Facilities Manager  
Simon Beacham, Area Parks Officer  
Tim Stephens, Development Control Manager  
Allan Dallimore, Team Leader – Urban Renewal  
Steve Wilcox, Assistant Town Centre Manager  
Steve Pugh, Communications Manager  
Paul Hudson, Marketing and Events Manager  
Tina McMahon, Community Regeneration Manager  
Inspector G. Jones (Caerphilly)  
Inspector M. Thomas (Blackwood)  
Inspector J. Hill (Bargoed)  
Inspector L. Thompson (Risca)  
Inspector I. Bartholomew (Ystrad Mynach)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Matrix of Issues Resolved Across the Five Town Centres