

# ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2019

## ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT 2017/18:

*“Review the maintenance provision of Highway Hedgerows and Verges”*

### To consider and comment on the following issues:

That consideration be given to the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group’s recommendations, which are outlined within the executive summary and the attached full report.

### Reasons:

- At its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017, the Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group to review the maintenance provision of the highway hedges and verges.
- The Task and Finish Group presented the final report to the Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018. It was resolved to refer the report to the Executive Board for its consideration.
- In accordance with the Constitution – Part 4.5-Scrutiny Procedure Rules, following the Executive Board Members informal discussion, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group agreed to refer the comments raised to the Task and Finish group for further consideration.
- The Task and Finish Group have amended the report to provide further clarification following the comments raised by the Executive Board Members.
- In response to a referral from Council on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (minute 8.3 refers), the Task and Finish Group have included a section on late-cut verges and subsequently included an additional recommendation (2c).
- The recommendations contained within the report have been formulated by the Group following the consideration of a range of evidence over a series of meetings held between January and November 2018.

**Relevant scrutiny committee consulted:** YES

**Scrutiny Committee and date:** Environmental & Public Protection – 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019

**To be referred to the Executive Board for decision:** YES

**Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Hazel Evans (Environment)**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Chair of the Task &amp; Finish Group:</b><br>Councillor John James | <b>Designations:</b><br><br>Chair of the Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee | <b>Tel Nos. / E-Mail Addresses:</b><br><br>01267 224028<br>JohnJames@carmarthenshire.gov.uk |
| <b>Report Author:</b><br>Janine Owen                                  | Democratic Services Officer   | 01267 224030<br>JanineOwen@carmarthenshire.gov.uk   |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2018

### Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group Final Report 2017/18:

*“Review the maintenance provision of Highway Hedgerows and Verges”*

#### 1.0 Review Background

The Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee has a key role to play in monitoring services, development of key policies and strategies, as well as identifying areas for improvement or development.

At its meeting on 17th November 2017, the Environmental & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group to research the maintenance provision of highway hedgerows and verges.

#### 2.0 Objectives and Scope

The Group agreed that its main objective for the review would be to:

- To review the current provision for the maintenance of highway hedgerows and verges and if appropriate make recommendations for service change.

The Group agreed that the main aims of the review would include:

- The current maintenance provision and programme for County roads. Including the nature, timing and equipment used for cuts.
- Information on the current maintenance provision and programme for Trunk roads.
- The balance between in house and external services and procurement of those services.
- The number of staff carrying out the service.
- The number of times roadside hedges and verges are cut with particular focus on hedges around junctions.
- How much contact demand the Council receives about this issue and the request for services process for hedge cutting demands from the public. To include both requests to cut and not to cut.
- The budget allocation and the impact of any changes to the provision.
- Consider landowner responsibilities and enforcement powers of the Council.
- Consider the environmental impact including biodiversity.

### 3.0 Corporate / community objectives and well-being objectives

The Group agreed that this review would contribute to achieving the following corporate / community objectives and well-being objectives and outcomes:-

County Council's Corporate Strategy 2015-20:

- People who live, work and visit Carmarthenshire are safe and feel safer
- Carmarthenshire's communities and environment are sustainable
- Carmarthenshire has a stronger and more prosperous economy

The outcomes of this review would also directly link to the following Carmarthenshire County Council Well-being objectives:-

In a Healthy & Safe Environment:-

- Objective 12 - Looking after the environment now and for the future
- Objective 13 - Improving the highway and transport infrastructure and connectivity

### 4.0 Approach

A total of 8 meetings were held between January 2018 and November 2018, during which the Group considered evidence and information from a wide variety of sources. The sessions were designed to provide the Group with the relevant information, context and background to the topic.

The Task and Finish Group's membership was as follows:

- Cllr. John James (Chair)
- Cllr. Alun Davies
- Cllr. Andrew James
- Cllr. Penny Edwards
- Cllr. Jeanette Gilasbey
- Cllr. Dorian Phillips

The Democratic Services Unit based in the Chief Executive's Department, provided research and general support to the Group.

The following officers provided specialist advice and support during the Group's review:

- Richard Waters, Highways and Transport Manager
- Darren King, Highway Services Manager
- Dan John, Environmental Services Manager
- Nicolas French, Grounds and Cleansing Manager
- Rosie Carmichael, Rural Conservation Manager
- Isabel Macho, Biodiversity Officer

## 5.0 Recommendations

The Group recommends that:

1. That the County Council's Environment Directorate should largely continue with its current provision for maintaining rural highway verges but considers adopting greater flexibility to:
  - a) facilitate further environmental enhancement for biodiversity, such as late or biennial cutting of selected areas, or other appropriate management provision;
  - b) consider the early cutting of minor roads in instances where the safety of main roads is not compromised.
2. That the County Council's Environment Directorate raise public understanding of highway verges as important areas for care, maintenance and habitat by:
  - a) providing a Carmarthenshire County Council guide to highlight the roles and responsibilities of the highway authority and adjacent landowners.
  - b) programming targeted campaigns to discourage the littering of verges and promote public awareness of highway verges and hedges as valuable natural habitat.
  - c) including clear information on the Council website with specific regard to the conservation and management of roadside verges.
3. That the County Council seeks to safeguard the highway maintenance budget as far as possible to ensure the safety of the travelling public, reduce future liability and protect key habitats.
4. That the County Council's Environment Directorate promotes opportunities to encourage local farmers/contractors to tender for work and engage with potential bidders to explain the tendering process.
5. That the County Council's Environment Directorate work collaboratively with Town and Community Councils to promote a more proactive role in managing and maintaining verges, hedges and landscaped areas, equally in both urban and rural areas.

**DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?**

**YES**

# IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Signed: **Linda Rees-Jones** Head of Administration & Law

| Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities | Legal       | Finance     | ICT         | Risk Management Issues | Staffing Implications | Physical Assets |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>YES</b>                              | <b>NONE</b> | <b>NONE</b> | <b>NONE</b> | <b>NONE</b>            | <b>NONE</b>           | <b>NONE</b>     |

## 1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

Key strategic policies have been considered throughout the review. This review contributes towards achieving the corporate / community objectives and well-being objectives and outcomes as follows:

- People who live, work and visit Carmarthenshire are safe and feel safer
- Carmarthenshire's communities and environment are sustainable
- Carmarthenshire has a stronger and more prosperous economy

The outcomes of this review also directly link to the following Carmarthenshire County Council Well-being objectives:-

In a Healthy & Safe Environment:-

- Objective 12 - Looking after the environment now and for the future
- Objective 13 - Improving the highway and transport infrastructure and connectivity

# CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below:

Signed: Linda Rees-Jones Head of Administration & Law

1. Local Member(s) – N/A

2. Community / Town Council – N/A

3. Relevant Partners – N/A

4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – Officers from the Environment Directorate have contributed to and supported the work of the Task & Finish Group.

## Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW:

| Title of Document  | File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection  |
|--|---|
| Task & Finish Group Planning and Scoping Document – E&PP Scrutiny Committee (17th November 2017) | <b>Draft Planning and Scoping Document / Minutes:</b><br><a href="http://democracy.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&amp;MId=1005&amp;Ver=4">http://democracy.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&amp;MId=1005&amp;Ver=4</a>            |
| County Council's Corporate Strategy 2015-2020  | <a href="http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/consultation-performance/well-being-objectives-2017-18/#.Ws4iMuaosjY">http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/consultation-performance/well-being-objectives-2017-18/#.Ws4iMuaosjY</a> |
| Carmarthenshire County Council Well-being objectives   | <a href="http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/consultation-performance/well-being-objectives-2017-18/#.Ws4iMuaosjY">http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/consultation-performance/well-being-objectives-2017-18/#.Ws4iMuaosjY</a> |