

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 NOVEMBER 2020

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, T.A.J. Davies, J.A. Davies, K. Davies, P.M. Edwards,
W.T. Evans (In place of D. Thomas) S.J.G. Gilasbey, T.M. Higgins, E. Morgan,
B.D.J. Phillips, A. Vaughan Owen and A.D.T. Speake.

Also in attendance:

Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Executive Board Member for Environment;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Executive Board Member for Public Protection;
Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Executive Board Member for Resources.

The following Officers were in attendance:

J. Fearn, Head of Property;
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities;
S. Pilliner, Head of Transportation & Highways;
L. Quelch, Head of Planning;
R. Carmichael, Rural Conservation Manager;
J. Edwards, Business Improvement Manager;
R. Edmunds, Consumer and Business Affairs Manager;
D.W. John, Waste Services Manager;
R. S. Waters, Highways and Transportation Manager;
R. James, Group Accountant;
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer;
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting:- 10:00am - 11:35am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D. Thomas and Councillor S. Phillips.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM.

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.
There were no declarations of interest made.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT'S SERVICES COVERED BY THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Members for Environment and Public Protection covering the elements within their portfolio Environment and Public Protection respectively on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Environment Department's services within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee as follows:-

The Executive Board Member for Environmental Services covered the following:-

- "Waste and Environmental Services.
- Building Cleaning (including Schools, where relevant)
- Transport and Streetscene including Highways, Street Lighting, Bridges, Traffic Management, Parking Services, Cycle paths and Rights of Way

The Executive Board Member for Public Protection covered the following:-

- Environmental Enforcement including Litter, Dog Fouling; Abandoned Vehicles etc
- Planning Enforcement
- Biodiversity"

The report described how the Authority managed during the pandemic and covered the service priorities going forward.

The Executive Board Members advised that the pandemic had significantly impacted on the Department's budgets, both in terms of additional costs and loss of income. Some of the costs had been covered by Welsh Government grants but many unfunded areas remained impacting upon on the Council's future budget.

A number of questions / observations were raised on the report. The main matters were as follows:

- An observation was made in relation to the recycling performance which was predicted to exceed the statutory target of 64%. It was asked what advantage was being made of the situation and what plans are in place to maintain the recycling rates? The Executive Board Member for Environment stated that during the lockdown period many homes took advantage of the situation to have a clear out and thanked residents for utilising the recycling provisions. Ongoing work with the marketing media team would take place to help raise the recycling profile and inform residents of what recycling services are available. It was hoped that a performance target of 70% would be achieved by 2024/2025.

- In response to a query regarding the kerbside collection and if there had been any extra provision made during the pandemic, the Executive Board Member for Environment explained that whilst the Council no longer delivered blue bags to individual households the stocks of blue bags in dedicated blue bag stockists had increased, a list of which was available on the Council website. In addition, the annual delivery of blue bags and food liners had commenced and was likely to be completed by March 2021.
- Reference was made to the online booking system for the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC). It was asked if this would continue into the future and what the costs were? The Executive Board Member for Environment explained that in terms of costs the newly developed online booking system, whilst was easier to manage, did require additional staffing resources on HWRC sites to ensure that Covid-19 restrictions were implemented effectively, together with the necessary entry controls associated with an online booking system were adhered to.
- As a result of the closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centres in the initial stages of the pandemic, it was asked if there was any evidence of an increase in fly-tipping? The Executive Board Member for Public Protection reported that unfortunately fly-tipping in general was on the increase and had been for sometime. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities agreed and added that there had been a significant increase in fly-tipping over the summer months likely to be as a result of householders having a clear out during the lockdown period.
- In response to a query regarding enforcement matters during the pandemic, the Executive Board Member for Public Protection emphasised that the priority was the safety of staff and therefore only high priority enforcement cases, where there was an imminent risk to life or the environment, had been progressed as normal since lockdown in March. Investigations in relation to medium and low priority cases as defined in the Enforcement Protocol were largely suspended but work on these had started to gradually re-commence late August. Furthermore, it was reported that during the pandemic it would appear that a great level of potentially unlawful activity had occurred which had put a significant strain on the Planning Division since the follow up work on the potential breaches had started. In recognising that many of the cases would be complex and would also require a multi-disciplinary approach in order to reach a resolution, the Head of Planning stated that it was recognised that additional staff would be required and was currently being considered.

In acknowledging the dedication, commitment, flexibility, and personal resilience shown and applied by staff, the Committee wished to commend their aptitude and contribution of which was invaluable in continuing to provide a service to the Communities within Carmarthenshire.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HOMES AND SAFER COMMUNITIES

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member for Public Protection which provided a summary of how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on the Public Protection services from a service user, staff and Council perspective whilst providing clear information on actions taken.

The report focussed on key delivery issues and future developments in the following service areas:

- Test, Track and Trace (TTP);
- Animal Health;
- Licensing;
- Financial Investigation Unit;
- Trading Standards;
- COVID-19 Team- Advice and Enforcement;
- Pollution;
- Public Health and Well-being; and
- Food, Safety and Health
- Dog Fouling; Abandoned Vehicles etc

A number of questions / observations were raised on the report. The main matters were as follows:

- It was asked if there had been any problems in receiving the correct information from the public? The Executive Board Member for Public Protection acknowledged that whilst there were individuals not adhering to the regulations and the advice provided in order to minimise the transmission rate, the percentages cited on page 45 provided reassurance that the track and trace team set up within Public Protection Services continued to provide a successful Track and Trace Service and providing the necessary advice and guidance. The team managed the TTP process in conjunction with regional and Hywel Dda Health Board colleagues.

The Head of Homes and Safer Communities stated that for the week 16th - 22nd November 2020, the TTP team had successfully made contact with 89% of the 337 individuals who had received a positive Covid-19 result. It was reported that the TTP team had experienced difficulties in contacting some individuals as they were not answering phone calls.

A concern was raised that vital information which helps contact tracing was being withheld by the public. The Executive Board Member for Public Protection acknowledged the concern and stated that the TTP team were doing their utmost to manage the situation in Carmarthenshire. In addition, it was commented that some employees may intentionally be withholding information in order to avoid having to receive sick pay.

Concerns were raised in relation the infectious period of Covid-19 and if this information was being properly broadcasted. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities agreed that in conjunction with Hywel Dda and Public Health Wales the TTP team could deliver clear messages in relation to the infectious period which would help inform members of the public.

In response to an earlier query, the Head of Homes and Safer Communities reported that he had received confirmation from Public Health Wales that the infectious period of Covid-19 was 10-days and therefore a positive test was likely to be the result during this period.

It was commented that the NHS track and trace app was only downloadable on newer smartphones and therefore concern was raised that there were members of the public may be being overlooked as they were not able to partake in the track and trace. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities provided reassurance that as the NHS app was a separate entity to the TTP process. The TTP team make every effort to contact those affected by telephone.

- In acknowledgement to the additional workload that had been placed upon the Trading Standards department, it was asked if there was scope to employ additional members to cope with the demand. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities reassured the Committee that an additional 7 employees would be joining the department in the next week which had been funded by the Welsh Government.

The Committee, together with the Executive Board Member expressed their gratitude to both staff and managers for their commitment in dealing with the most difficult of situations from homelessness, housing management and community engagement through to development and investment the flexibility and adaptability shown was exemplar.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report in relation to the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee services, which provided an update on the latest budgetary position as at 31st August, 2020 in respect of the 2020/21 financial year.

The Executive Board Member for resources explained that the summary position for the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee Services were projecting an overspend of £1,264K on the revenue budget. The variances on capital schemes, detailed within the report, showed a forecasted net spend of £11,088k compared with a working net budget of £14,397k providing a variance of -£3,291K. In addition, the budget included a new allocation of £74k from the Welsh Government for rights of way access improvements.

The Committee was advised by the Executive Board Member for Resources that the budget included a new allocation of £74k from the Welsh Government for rights of way access improvements.

A number of questions / observations were raised on the report. The main matters were as follows:

- Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report [page 63]. In response to a query raised in relation to the temporary vacant post within the Public Rights of Way department the Executive Board Member for Environment stated that this had become vacant due to a recent promotion and the process to fill the post would commence in the near future.
- Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report [page 61]. It was asked when the vacant posts within the Animal safety section would be filled? The Head of Homes and Safer Communities stated that the process of filling the posts had commenced and following appointment the team would be up to full complement.
- Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report [page 62]. It was asked who funded the Dyfed Powys LRF Covid 19 Support 2020/21 Grant and was there potential of receiving this again next year? The Group Accountant confirmed that the Dyfed Powys LRF Covid 19 Support Grant was funded by Welsh Government and would be seeking guidance from Welsh Government as to whether monies could be carried over to the next financial year depending on how much is spent during this financial year.
- In response to a query in relation to future payments of PPE, Cleaning and Morgues the Executive Board Member stated that the Welsh Government would continue to fund all Covid-19 related matters, however it was emphasised that the future funding heavily depended on funds continuing to be received from the Central Government to Welsh Government.
- In relation to the School Crossing Patrols it was explained by the Executive Board Member that all school crossing patrol sites had been subject to health and safety risk assessments prior to schools restarting to ensure that they could operate safely with regard to Covid-19 and requirement for social distancing. The Head of Transportation and Highways reiterated that sites had been assessed with respect to Covid-19 and added that in accordance with budget efficiencies, risk assessments of sites had been undertaken and where a site did not meet National Safety Criteria the Patrol would not be replaced following retirement or officer leaving the Service. Where that happens, the department would engage with the school in terms of whether there were other options which included considering volunteers. However, the Head of Transportation and Highways indicated that some sites could be difficult to recruit even when payment is offered.

- Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report [page 69]. It was asked what the comment 'offset variances in other areas' meant relating to the Road Safety Improvement Schemes? The Head of Transportation and Highways clarified that there was £569k allocated for road safety capital and footway improvements, some of which was from match funding for the grants that had been received enabling a contribution to be made towards capital projects under other budget headings in the report to lever in greater value in terms of road safety outcomes. It was also pointed out that whilst there were challenges in delivering projects due to the Covid pandemic, it was planned to deliver the full programme of grant works.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Committee received for consideration its Annual Report on the work undertaken during the 2019/20 municipal year. The report had been prepared in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution which requires Scrutiny Committees to prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committee's activities over the previous year.

The report provided an overview of the Committee's work programme and the key issues considered during the year. The report also provided details of development sessions and site visits arranged for the Committee as well as attendance data.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2019/20 be received.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for 2020/21, which had been prepared in accordance with the Council's Constitution which required Scrutiny Committees to develop and publish annual forward work programmes identifying issues and reports to be considered at meetings during the course of the municipal year.

The Chair referred to the report which included the reasoning of the absence for the performance reports and business plans in the Forward Work Programme. The Chair explained that Officers had now completed the review of the performance monitoring cycle and suggested that reports would be ready for consideration as follows:-

- Annual Performance Report (Half Yearly) - 1st February 2021
- Corporate / Departmental Business Plans - 5th March 2021

It was proposed and duly seconded to include the Corporate/Departmental Business Plans to the Committee's Forward Work Programme and the Annual Performance Report to be e-mailed to Committee Members for comment.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that subject to the addition of the departmental business plans, the Forward Work Programme for the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee for 2020/21 be endorsed.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 21ST FEBRUARY 2020

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 21st February, 2020 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE