SUBJECT:	Tree Policy
DIRECTORATE:	Operations / Waste & Street Services
MEETING:	Strong Communities Select Committee
DATE:	16th November 2017
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All	

1. **PURPOSE:**

To present to the Select Committee a draft of a new Monmouthshire County Council Tree Policy

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

For Members to note and comment on the proposals for the Tree Policy prior presentation to Cabinet for approval.
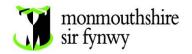
3. **BACKGROUND**

Over the past few years, a range of factors has led to the County Council response to managing its tree stock to become out of date and not fit for purpose. Factors include

- Cuts to funding - changes in staff and structures has led to a fragmentation in responsibilities for trees decision-making process.
- Cuts to funding - Proactive inspections and maintenance has all but gone leading to an increase in risk and potential future workloads and costs.
- Lack of written process/policies - changes in structures and job roles and natural turnover in staff has meant that historic knowledge of council operations and behaviours has been partially lost and without clarity or process and policies, decisions are not consistent
- The introduction of the My Council Services CRM system has made it easier for residents to contact us regarding all issues including those related to trees. This has led to an increased workload.
- Changes in our understanding of the value of trees in our rural and urban environments and the benefits they bring to our society and economy prompts us to think differently about how we care for our trees.
- New legislation relating to the natural environment and the wellbeing of future generations requires us to re-appraise our management of our natural assets.

Given the above, it is clearly time for a policy refresh to ensure that we provide up to date, fair and consistent service to our residents. To ensure that our service response to residents is efficient and that our decisions and actions are transparent and can be held to account, it is also necessary to update our outward facing documentation that explains how and why we are managing our trees and what the level of service they can expect when issues/concerns are raised.

With respect to how we approach this review, in an ideal world we would start with a wider review of our open spaces and natural assets as, in the same way our understanding of trees has improved, so has our wider understanding and approach to managing open spaces and natural assets of which trees are a part. A new tree policy would then, therefore, nest under, and align to, a broader Green Infrastructure Strategy. However, given the lack of clarity and consistency in our current service provision relating to tree safety, it is expedient

to deal with the tree policy with regard to our reactive tree management in the first instance and give due regard to potential forthcoming views on the wider environment.   Therefore, it is proposed that the tree policy be approached in three stages:

1. Production of a Tree Policy outlining our level of service with regard to the reactive management of trees.
2. Production of a proactive strategy for managing trees to ensure that potential tree related risks and future costs are mitigated
3. Incorporation of wider tree related issues in a new Green Infrastructure Strategy

The Tree Policy outlines our actions in response to residents concerns about trees and therefore requires the support and agreement from members.

The tree Policy has been produced in consultation between Waste and Street Services (responsible for the parks, gardens and verges) Highways, (responsible for Highways related tree enquiries) Leisure (responsible for trees in country parks and rights of way), Estates (responsible for trees in cemeteries and other areas of the county land holding). Comments have also been taken from Health and Safety, Legal Services and Insurance Section. The policy has been benchmarked against other Welsh and English Local Authorities and references the National Tree Safety Group (http://ntsgroup.org.uk/)

4. **THE PROPOSAL/POLICY**

Attached

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The adoption of the tree policy has no financial implications in itself. However, as identified above, recent cuts to departmental budgets set in the context of increased number of tree related requests make delivery of the policy a challenge.
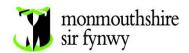
6. **CONSULTEES**

In developing this policy, an internet sweep of publically accessible local authority Tree Policies was completed. Four Policies were selected as similar in standard and approach on which to benchmark the MCC Policy., these were: Newport City Council; Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council; Bristol City Council; Lancaster City Council. The policy also draws on work by the National Tree Safety Group and the publication *Common Sense Risk Management of Trees.*

In addition, the policy has been circulated widely across MCC departments including Wastes, and Street Services; Highways; Estates; Countryside; Health and Safety; Insurance.

7. **WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ASSESSMENT**

A Well-Being of Future Generations Assessment will be completed following comments from the Select Committee

8. **SAFEGUARDING**

There are no Safeguarding issues created by this policy

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Policy will be reviewed 12 months after adoption.

10. CONCLUSION

Members are asked to comment on the policy.

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