

SUBJECT: Tree Policy
MEETING: Cabinet
DATE: 11th April 2018
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

NON-PUBLICATION

Not Applicable

1. PURPOSE:

This report seeks approval from Cabinet for the adoption of a new Tree Policy that outlines the County Councils responsibilities regarding trees in its ownership.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To approve the tree policy for adoption and publication.

3. KEY ISSUES:

Over the past few years, a range of factors has led to the County Council response to managing its tree stock to become out of date and not fit for purpose.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

- 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.
- 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 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.

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.

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

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

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. We are working on a broader Green Infrastructure Strategy to review our planned management of open spaces and natural assets. Given the volume of work in relation to trees a decision was made to expedite the development of the Tree Policy as the first step in that process. This will provide clarity and consistency in our current service provision relating to tree safety and reactive tree management.

This approach is enabling operational work to be carried out consistently whilst we take a more detailed look at our long-term strategy.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

An evaluation assessment has been included at Appendix A

6. REASONS:

The responsibility for trees sit across several department depending on the land on which they are situated, as such there is no single team responsible for decision making and this can lead to an inconsistent approach when it comes to managing trees and responding to residents and others' concerns about trees. Not all staff dealing with trees are necessarily experts in the area of tree management or have an understanding for the importance of trees in the public realm, wider public policy and drivers around tree management. This policy begins the process of ensuring that our approach is informed and consistent.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The adoption of the tree policy has no financial implications in itself, as its purpose is to provide clarity in decision-making. It is anticipated that the policy will provided a mechanism for controlling the amount of time taken in dealing with requests for tree work outside of our responsibility. However, as identified above, recent cuts to departmental budgets set in the context of increased number of tree related requests make delivery of tree management generally a challenge, and the development of proactive tree surveys will require additional planning and staff training.

The County Council has recently completed an Arboriculture Service Framework Agreement that supports the complaint purchasing of tree work services to ensure that we can, as far as possible, effectively meet cost management controls as a result of policy implementation.

8. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

A Well-Being Assessment is attached.

9. CONSULTEES:

In developing this policy, comments from across MCC departments including Wastes, and Street Services; Highways; Estates; Countryside; Health and Safety; and Insurance on problem areas along with a sense check against service requests made to WSS to ascertain common causes of concern.

This was followed by an internet sweep of publically accessible Local Authority Tree Policies was completed. Four Policies were selected that appeared to address the issues typical to Monmouthshire and were similar in standard and approach to use as 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*.

The Policy was drafted and circulated widely across MCC departments including: Wastes, and Street Services; Highways; Estates; Countryside; Health and Safety; and Insurance.

The Policy has also been scrutinised by the Strong Communities Panel and there comments have been incorporated into the Policy.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Attached:
Tree Policy
Wellbeing Assessment

11. AUTHOR:

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12. CONTACT DETAILS:

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Evaluation Criteria – Cabinet, Individual Cabinet Member Decisions & Council

Title of Report:	Tree Policy
Date decision was made:	
Report Author:	Mark Cleaver

What will happen as a result of this decision being approved by Cabinet or Council?

What is the desired outcome of the decision?

Greater transparency and consistency in deliver of service

What effect will the decision have on the public/officers?

The adoption of the tree policy will provide the public with information related to the level of service that can be expected from MCC and how to approach MCC regarding tree related issues.

Officers across MCC departments will have clear guidelines helping to make consistent, fair and appropriate decisions when considering public request for tree work

12 month appraisal

Was the desired outcome achieved? What has changed as a result of the decision? Have things improved overall as a result of the decision being taken?

What benchmarks and/or criteria will you use to determine whether the decision has been successfully implemented?

We expect to see the time spent dealing with individual tree enquires to reduce.

We expect to see greater consistency in responses to tree enquiries

We expect to see improved handling of tree safety assessment records with the introduction of assessment forms on MCS and later, Mobile Worker platforms

12 month appraisal

Paint a picture of what has happened since the decision was implemented. Give an overview of how you fared against the criteria. What worked well, what didn't work well. The reasons why you might not have achieved the desired level of outcome. Detail the positive outcomes as a direct result of the decision. If something didn't work, why didn't it work and how has that effected implementation.

What is the estimate cost of implementing this decision or, if the decision is designed to save money, what is the proposed saving that the decision will achieve?

No specific cost allocated to this decision as the Policy is designed to provide guidance to officers, members and the public on the level of service provided by MCC

12 month appraisal

Give an overview of whether the decision was implemented within the budget set out in the report or whether the desired amount of savings was realised. If not, give a brief overview of the reasons why and what the actual costs/savings were.

Any other comments