

SUBJECT: POLLINATOR POLICY UPDATE

MEETING: Strong Communities Select Committee

DATE: January 11th 2016

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide the Strong Communities Select Committee with a performance overview of the pollinator policy 22 months post implementation. In particular the perceived implications of the highway verge maintenance policy amendment (Budget Mandate proposal number B4) in relation to MCC's commitment to support WG Pollinator Action Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.2 That the Select Committee consider the performance report.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The pollinator policy was adopted in 2014 and fully supports the Welsh Governments' Action Plan for Pollinators and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities act 2006. The Action Plan recommended new management systems in terms of planting regimes and resulted in reducing the first cut on A & B routes to safety cuts only and reducing the number of unnecessary cuts to large verged areas and elected public open spaces. The change in the management system resulted in a benefit saving of £43,555, whilst actively making the county more desirable to visit, live and work in.
- 3.2 Consultation with Town and Community Councils (T&CC's) was a requirement of the policy and as such, there are now regular and much improved discussions with T&CC's on how to replicate the flowering displays within their areas. Support for the policy has been given by numerous T&CC's, with one council requesting an extension to the safety cuts and reduced cuts in more rural areas.
- 3.3 On April 16th 2014 the Select Committee were presented with a report of petitions received, a petition with 163 signatures – opposed to the verge safety cuts on A&B roads and a 2nd petition with 766 electronic signatures, 74 emails and 6 individual

letters fully supporting the whole policy. This support has since grown with many residents and groups actively asking for reduced cuts to hedges and verges.

- 3.4 The Wales Environment Bill will place an enhanced biodiversity duties on Local Authorities when it receives royal ascent in the spring. This means that rather than just having regard for biodiversity, we will need to maintain and enhance biodiversity in exercising our functions, which dovetails the Council's commitment outlined in the Single Integrated plan to promote, protect and enhance Monmouthshire under the theme "Our County Thrives".
- 3.5 Within the first 6 months of implementing the policy, the Council received over 80 emails and 25 telephone calls in praise and support of the displays. Individual T&CC's and various environmental groups also took time to congratulate us on the work.
- 3.6 In the wider arena, the Council received applause from DEFRA, BBC's Country File, Spring Watch and Horticultural Weekly. Advice was sought from neighbouring Councils including Chard, Somerset and Crickhowell Town Council in addition Council officers have given presentations to a large proportion of Welsh LA's on the subject.
- 3.7 Since the implementation of the policy, officers received only one concern on issues of visibility/ safety from 1 Community Council and one resident and these concerns were addressed immediately.
- 3.8 Currently, highway verges are cut twice, with field hedges and verges receiving a safety cut in the summer, if there isn't a verge, for example within a large proportion of our narrower R and C routes, the hedge is cut to a metre high. It is worth noting that all field hedges are the responsibility of the land owner and are in their ownership as identified within section 154 of the Highways Act.
- 3.9 Mandate proposal Number B14 discussed the introduction of a change to the number of cuts when the new contract is issued, reducing them to one cut per year, with the exception of scheduled Urbanised areas of which will continue to receive two cuts. This will fully support the Pollinator policy and the groups/individuals wishes, which form the majority when commenting on the policy. It is proposed that local Community Councils will have the opportunity to fund additional cuts as required within their individual boundaries. The priority as always will be safety and confidence in this statement can be assured through the immediacy of grounds maintenance response to concerns by highly mobile compact tractor and flail units – this quick reaction will fully support the reduced cuts, in addition the section will continue to carryout out x3 cuts to scheduled visibility fence lines.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 The overwhelming support for this policy can be considered as a statement of approval and as such lends weight to the need to increase sustainability, resilience and the biodiversity of our countryside.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 90% of the Highway verge network is cut by sub contract labour with only 10% cut by our own staff.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Highways Act 1980

Well Maintained Highways – code of practice

National Action Plan for Pollinators

Welsh Government – Managing roadside verges for wildlife in wales

Sustainable Landscape Management (landscape and Environmental Services)

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