

STATE OF THE AREA DEBATE 2004

REPORT of the State of the Area Debate held on 30th and 31st March and 1st April, 2004 at the Memorial Hall, Barry, the Paget Rooms, Penarth and the Leisure Centre, Cowbridge respectively.

Present at the Memorial Hall, Barry on Tuesday, 30th March, 2004:

Councillor A.G. Powell, Chairman, The Vale of Glamorgan Council
Councillor H.J.W. James, Leader
Councillor Mrs. C.V.L. Clay, Cabinet Member - Legal and Regulatory Services
Councillor G.J.M. Fletcher, Cabinet Member - Visible and Building Services
Councillor A.J. Williams, Cabinet Member - Planning and Transportation Services
Mr. M. Punter, Head of Visible Services
Mr. R. Thomas, Head of Planning and Transportation
Ms. K. Thompson, Operational Manager - Regulatory Services
Mr. J. Harrison, Environment Agency Wales.

The Chairman opened the first stage of the 2004 State of the Area Debate by welcoming all present to the debate which would focus primarily on environmental issues and set out the format for the evening. The Chairman then invited the Leader to give his opening address.

The Leader also welcomed all present. He referred to the fact that decision to hold the debate at 3 venues this year had been in response to comments received at the inaugural event last year and that the decision to focus discussion at each on specific topics had been made to allow participants to receive presentations from the lead officers in their respective fields and to debate those issues more fully. The Leader then gave a brief overview of the Council's activities, focusing on the work of the Vale of Glamorgan Partnership - a body comprising representatives from such bodies as the Council itself, the Environment Agency Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Police and Fire Services, and the Welsh Development Agency - which had ownership of the Community Strategy, the main purposes of which were:

- to improve the quality of life of local communities in the Vale;
- to provide a focus for improved joint working and planning between public agencies and the voluntary and business sectors;
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

The Community Strategy, which had been the subject of widespread local consultation, had informed the formulation of the Council's own Corporate Plan which, in turn, defined the Council's Vision for the Vale as being a place:

- that is safe, clean, and attractive, where individuals and communities have opportunities to improve their health, prosperity, and wellbeing; and
- where there is a strong sense of community in which local groups and individuals have the capacity and incentive to make an effective contribution to the future of the area.

Each of the Council's Services had drawn up individual Service (or Business) Plans which reflected, inter alia, those corporate aims and priorities. The Leader then referred to the improved decision-making processes adopted by the Council which resulted in those decisions being publicised and implemented more quickly than ever before. He referred too to the work of the Scrutiny Committees with their primary focus on improvement and making recommendations to Cabinet on policy development. The increase in e-government would also assist the public by, for example, facilitating the payment of bills, making complaints etc., and he drew attention to the need for a continuing two-way dialogue. The District Auditor had recently commended the positive and enthusiastic approach of the Council to improvement. The Leader stressed that the co-operation of the public in helping the Council to achieve continually improving services and thereby making the Vale a better place for residents and visitors alike was paramount.

The Chairman then set out the agenda for the evening's proceedings and introduced Councillor Mrs. C.V.L. Clay, the Cabinet Member for Legal and Regulatory Services.

Regulatory Services

Councillor Clay gave a brief outline of the diverse services that fell within the remit of Regulatory Services, namely, Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing. Regulatory Services' corporate priority as set out in the Corporate Plan in respect of the environment was "to achieve a quality environment through the promotion and use of sustainable practices, and by making the best use of current and future resources". Since the theme of the evening's debate was the environment, the presentation by the Operational Manager would concentrate on the control of noise, pests, stray and dangerous dogs, and the monitoring of air and water quality. Councillor Clay then introduced Kate Thompson to the audience.

Kate Thompson opened her presentation by referring to the service aim of her Department, namely, to enhance and protect the health, safety, economic welfare and environment for the benefit of residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the Vale of Glamorgan. The services objectives were to be customer focused, accessible and responsive to the needs of the community; to improve the environment through monitoring and regulating air and water quality, noise and contaminated land; to protect the health and safety of the community by ensuring businesses met legislative requirements, controlling infectious disease, encouraging responsible dog ownership, controlling pests and regulating animal health and welfare; and to maintain a fair and equitable trading environment. Since the theme of the evenings debate was the environment, Ms. Thompson's presentation concentrated on:

- Noise control and prevention, commenting that there were proposals in the pipeline to offer an out of hours service in order that a more immediate response could be made to complaints of noise nuisance;
- Air monitoring, commenting that whilst all the Government's air quality objectives were being met within the Vale, monitoring was constant in order that to ensure that standards were maintained and, where possible, improved;

- Water monitoring, commenting that without exception bathing water quality was improving and that regular sampling of private drinking water supplies was undertaken;
- Stray and dangerous dogs, commenting that a high percentage of the 430 stray dogs impounded last year had been found homes and that an immediate challenge was to reduce the number of stray and dangerous dogs through partnership working, education and the effective use of the media;
- Pest control, commenting that the rodent population was increasing nationally, that the co-operation of the public in helping to identify areas of concern were essential, and that keeping the environment free of food sources for rodents would contribute to alleviating the situation.

Ms. Thompson concluded her presentation by re-enforcing the vital role undertaken by Regulatory Services in helping to provide a clean and safe environment which was essential for the maintenance of health and wellbeing whilst balancing the right of businesses to grow against the right of the public to peace and quiet.

The following question and answer session then ensued:

Question	Answer
Appalled that the Council only kept stray dogs for such a short period as 7 days/ considered 14 days to be more reasonable/suggested kennelling costs could be recouped from owners.	7 days was the minimum time that the legislation specified the Council was required to keep a dog and any extension of that period would severely impact on the Council's limited resources. Every effort to trace ownership was undertaken and the point made that, were all dogs to wear collars/tags/microchips, it would be less problematic to return dogs to their owners within the 7 day period.
Noise nuisance from fireworks, the point being made that that this had now become a year round problem and that statutory restrictions relating to the sale of fireworks were required to alleviate the problem.	This year new legislation restricting the sale of fireworks to just a limited period would be introduced and it was hoped that from next year the current concerns would be reduced although it was recognised that there was a real problem with the sale of fireworks on the black market.
Is the fox classified as a pest and is it under the remit of Regulatory Services to control foxes which are on the increase in the Sully area?	No, and very few complaints have been received.

Planning and Transportation Services

The Chairman introduced Councillor A.J. Williams, the Cabinet member for Planning and Transportation Services. Councillor Williams outlined the critical role played by land use planning policy in preserving and improving the environment whilst meeting legitimate development needs and then introduced Mr. Rob Thomas, Head of Planning and Transportation Services, who commenced his presentation by defining the service aim of the Department which was “to provide for beneficial, well designed and safe development whilst conserving the best of the natural and built environment of the Vale of Glamorgan, in other words sustainable development”. Mr. Thomas drew attention to the various display stands situated at the rear of the hall which contained additional information for the public on such diverse aspects of his Department as building control, road safety, and public transport. He referred to the service objectives of the Department as being the development of a sustainable land use planning and transportation framework for the Vale of Glamorgan; to work with stakeholders to develop public transport provisions that met the needs of customers; to preserve and enhance the natural and built environment; and to deliver safe, accessible and sustainable new and existing buildings. He then went on to give a brief overview of the planning process referring in particular to national policy and guidance and to the key local policy document known as the Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

He specifically identified the following five key challenges:

- The Waterfront, Barry - a major brown field site regenerated from former industrial waste and dock land, having good public transport links and proximity to the town centre, the challenges of which included the need to ensure a wide range of uses on the site, improved integration with the town centre and town in general, and good design;
- Barry Town Centre - a key strategy of the UDP was to re-use old and vacant sites and buildings and real progress was now being made in securing the future of the Town Hall and protecting one of the town’s historic buildings by bringing it into beneficial use, thereby revitalising the town centre;
- Transport infrastructure - the re-opening of the Vale of Glamorgan railway line was anticipated in Spring 2005, the scheme having been grant funded in total and which would provide new stations at Rhoose and Llantwit Major together with improved station facilities at Barry; numerous road safety measures, with this Council being one of the forerunner Councils in implementing the Safe Routes to Schools in Wales initiative; and promoting and subsidising bus transport;
- Countryside and environmental protection - with the whole of the Vale being under intense development pressure, the importance of preserving the 19 kilometres of Heritage Coast, the 21 sites of special scientific interest and the conservation areas and rural villages was vital;
- Quality of outcomes from the planning process - ensuring quality of design; the strict implementation of building control requirements, with a new award having

been set up to recognise the worth of local builders; and the constant monitoring of development with enforcement action taken where necessary.

The following question and answer session then ensued:

Question	Answer
When will work on the Town Hall site recommence and be finalised?	Mr. Thomas confirmed that planning permission and listed building consent had now been granted and that progress would continue to be made. The Leader went on to say that the WDA had now reaffirmed its commitment to the project and that the phasing of the work had not slowed down. The contract had been awarded for Phase II which was for the necessary internal work to bring the building back into beneficial use. Work on the development of the library would commence end 2004/beginning 2005 and that the phasing of the entire scheme was very much dependent on the progress of each subsequent phase.
Date of new station at Barry and the erection of the footbridge linking the Waterfront with the Town Centre.	The first stage had now been achieved in that the land for the footbridge had now been made available. Contracts had been let for the bridge design although a planning application had yet to be submitted.
What can be done to improve the down-market image of Barry with its mediocre housing developments given the town's stunning location and huge potential?	The steps that were available were being vigorously pursued and both the WAG and the Planning Inspectorate now placed a greater emphasis on the quality of design in relation to developments than previously. Mr. Thomas quoted examples in Barry where the initial planning application for development at the former Bindles site had been refused on the basis of design and that a new public house on the Waterfront had similarly been refused on the basis of design.

Relating to archaeological remains at the Knap and the procedure required prior to any development taking place.	Guidance related to such matters was available and a tiered approach was adopted with, where appropriate, planning permission being granted in principle subject to further investigation of the archaeological issues.
Any modifications proposed to the road calming measure in Sully Road, Sully which causes peak time congestion and adversely impacts on the traffic flow in Cog Road?	Not aware of any proposed amendments to that scheme but the concerns expressed would be raised with the appropriate officers.
What is the time scale for the construction of the walkway from Penarth Pier to the Barrage?	Consideration of a planning application was imminent in respect of the Penarth Headland Link.
Concern was expressed at the lack of a rail link direct to Cardiff International Airport.	The re-opening of the line was very much seen as a first stage, and discussions were ongoing with the operators of Cardiff International Airport about ensuring effective public transport links between the new station at Rhoose and the Airport.
Is there sufficient discussion of planning matters at the Vale of Glamorgan Council given its Cabinet system of decision making and is this to the detriment of the general public?	It was explained that matters pertaining to planning applications, major developments, emerging policy and processes, etc. were dealt with by the Planning Committee which was independent of the Cabinet.
What can be done about the rubbish in and around areas where development is taking place and on the roads? Cannot the Planning Department require developers to keep sites clean and tidy, to plant mature trees rather than saplings, and to properly maintain the roads and surrounding areas in those developments?	The Planning Department already conditioned planning permissions. Roads, for example, were required to meet the appropriate standards and open space areas similarly. Contributions to the wider community were already sought from developers.

Visible Services

The Chairman introduced Councillor G.J.M. Fletcher, the Cabinet member for Visible and Building Services. Councillor Fletcher outlined the diverse services falling within the remit of Visible Services namely highway maintenance, design and procurement, waste management and collection and recycling, cleansing, parks and grounds maintenance. The benefits of living in a clean and enhanced environment, achieved with the assistance of the public and through the prudent use of limited resources was fully recognised. Once again, since the debate this evening was focusing on the environment the corporate priority of Visible Services in respect of the environment was quoted as “to achieve a quality environment through the promotion and use of sustainable practices, and by making the best use of current and future resources”. Councillor Fletcher then introduced Mr. Miles Punter, Head of Visible Services.

Mr. Punter outlined the objectives of Visible Services as: to provide and maintain a safe highway infrastructure; to collect and manage domestic and commercial waste, promoting waste minimisation through reuse and recycling; to maintain a clean and enhanced environment; to provide, manage and maintain parks, open spaces and play areas; to provide an efficient and effective engineering consultancy in highway structure service; to enforce legislation and to organise remedial works as necessary to minimise pollution caused by private drainage; and to safeguard the appropriate development of the highway network and to ensure timely highway observations to planning applications.

The Wales Programme for Improvement required the Department to consult the public and to shape its services accordingly. Performance was continually monitored and a large public survey undertaken into June 2003 had revealed 86% satisfaction rates as regards to refuse collection service, 55% satisfaction relating to street cleaning and 45% satisfaction with pavement and highway repairs. Measures were already under way, and would continue, to address those satisfaction levels and to ensure that, where possible, services continued to improve.

Current issues and initiatives included:

- The development of a Recycling and draft Waste Strategy, copies of which were available at the meeting and concerning which comments would be welcome
- Waste Resource Park which, it was anticipated if feasible, would come on stream around 2007, the most feasible site identified at present being Atlantic Trading Estate, Barry
- Improvements to civic amenity sites, those at Llandow and at Hayes Road having been identified as too small, but Mr. Punter was pleased to report that in the interim the introduction of a permit system at Hayes Road (introduced to stop commercial waste operators utilising the site) had resulted in additional space for public use

- Bank holiday collections would now be introduced on bank holidays themselves from Easter 2004 following a survey of residents, with the exception of Christmas and Boxing Days
- Litter, fly tipping, vandalism, graffiti, dog fouling, abandoned cars, etc. - the Streetcare initiative, a joint initiative with the police and others had already resulted in the reduction in the incidents of much of the above and had also resulted, for example, in the removal of abandoned vehicles off the streets much quicker than previously
- The plan to achieve Green Flag status in 3 feature parks, through partnership arrangements with the local community by the year 2006, with Romilly Park in Barry, Belle Vue Park in Penarth and Alexander Park in Penarth being selected.
- Waste reduction - approximately 64,000 tonnes of waste was produced annually within the Vale and the Council aimed to recycle 40% of that waste by 2010. The Council had met its target of 15% in 2002/3 largely through the public's participation in its kerbside collection of paper, glass and cans. A green waste kerbside collection would commence from April 2004 and a plastics collection service was currently being trialed in Llantwit Major. 70,000 plastic recycling boxes had been ordered which would be distributed to interested residents by the end of September
- Waste minimisation - the Council had recently initiated a poster campaign urging residents to return junk mail to its source, to compost waste material, and, instead of plastic bag, to use canvass bags, samples of which were available at the display stand at the rear of the hall
- Green Dragon Standard, the aim being to achieve a level 3 of this environmental standard throughout Visible Services by the Summer of 2004
- 'The Big Clear Up', an initiative involving the local community in clearing up an area (with the Castleland ward being imminent for attention), the results in other areas showing that the community had been kept cleaner for longer through the involvement of local residents
- Alleygates, a major initiative undertaken in partnership with the police and others through European funding, the objective being to reduce crime and the fear of crime and to prevent fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour in rear lanes. The Castleland ward had been selected as the first area of benefit with some 80 gates currently being installed.

Mr. Punter emphasised the service's focus on customer satisfaction, requesting the audience to make known their views by completing the survey cards that were available. He referred to the vigorous changes necessary to comply with all new legislation relating to, for example, waste collection and disposal, and confirmed that the Council itself would continue to drive to minimise waste, to be more energy efficient, and to adopt greener policies generally and thereby lessen its own impact on the environment. From May 2004 two new enforcement officers would be employed to deal with littering and dog fouling matters and that, where necessary, the Council

would adopt the principle of the polluter pays. This would be preceded by on-going awareness raising and through education, particularly through the primary schools not only in relation to littering and dog fouling but also improving environmental awareness generally.

The following question and answer session then ensued:

Question	Answer
When would the recycling boxes be made available?	Hopefully by September 2004.
Appalled at the low level of recycling in the Vale of Glamorgan - is it true that nothing is recycled within the Vale? Why has it taken so long to progress the development of a Waste Resource Park?	Whilst Mr. Punter was unable to be categorical as to the uses of all the recycled materials originating within the Vale, he was able to confirm that glass was taken to RMC Quarries and crushed for use in road construction. As regards the Waste Resource Park, the Council had commissioned SLR Consulting to produce a Waste Strategy in order to examine all options - not to have done so would have been remiss.
Will you fine all dog owners who do not "poop scoop"?	That would likely be dependent upon the circumstances.
Why not block off the two subways under Severn Avenue which are used for anti-social purposes, including graffiti?	It was explained that the subways were there for health and safety reasons and their closure could put pedestrians in danger. A better idea would be to locate an enforcement officer in the area with the aim of preventing anti-social behaviour and/or identifying miscreants.
Does the Council have any intention of introducing dog toilets in the parks?	This suggestion was trialed a few years ago in Romilly Park and was unsuccessful.

<p>Given the proliferation of unnecessary and mismatched signs along the public highway, is there an overall design plan for road signs?</p>	<p>Road signs should be of a minimum standard and there are restrictions on the type of signs that are permitted along the public highway. It was possible that signs had been erected without the permission of the Council and Mr. Punter would request a Traffic Inspector to assess the situation, particularly in Redlands Road, Penarth , which had been identified by the questioner.</p>
<p>Would it not be quicker to use machines instead of manual leaf sweepers in Penarth, although the problem of car parking along the roadside makes this difficult?</p>	<p>A review was currently being undertaken relating to the processes adopted for street cleaning, it being accepted that car parking along road edges caused a problem for both mechanical and manual sweepers. Generally, the use of manual sweepers in areas where there are shops was felt to contribute to the sense of community.</p>

At this point in the programme for the evening, the Chairman opened up the floor for questions on any issues from the general public.

Question	Answer
<p>Why have our children not been provided with modern and decent play equipment in our parks?</p>	<p>£129k. had been invested in 2003/04 on play equipment which had yet to be implemented.</p>

<p>Is it possible to pass a by-law to stop the abuse of disabled parking spaces by able bodied persons? There is blatant misuse of those spaces at the multi-storey car park which the car park attendant is well aware of. What about the Leisure Centre?</p>	<p>Mr. Punter would take up the matter of abuse at the multi-storey car park with the British Legion which managed the car park on behalf of the Council. The Leader announced that, because of the tremendous pressure on car parking in the vicinity of the Leisure Centre and the Civic Offices, Cabinet was to receive a report on the management of car parking generally in those areas. The Council was well aware of the problems and was looking for a long term solution which would satisfy all users of those facilities.</p>
<p>Whilst the re-opening of the Vale of Glamorgan railway line was to be welcomed, what action could be taken to mitigate un-neighbourly noise nuisance at night for residents living in close proximity to the line?</p>	<p>Discussions would be held on that issue with the Train Operating Company, Network Rail and the freight train companies.</p>
<p>Could the Council lobby insurance companies on behalf of residents of the Vale given that the falling crime rate within the Vale had resulted in no corresponding decrease in home insurance premiums?</p>	<p>The Leader invited Superintendent J. Jones to respond. Superintendent Jones confirmed that the incidence of burglary had decreased by approximately 20% over the last year and drew attention to the practical benefits in terms of insurance premiums of being a member of a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme - details of which could be obtained from Barry Police Station.</p>

The presentations having been concluded, the Chairman thanked the Panel Members together with the audience for each's contribution to a most interesting and worthwhile debate. He then introduced Mr. John Harrison from the Environment Agency for Wales who, as Chairman of the Environment Sub Group of the Vale of Glamorgan Partnership, re-inforced the message that tremendous progress had already been, and would continue to be, made in ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment for the Vale and thanked the Council and other partners in holding the debate tonight on such an important issue for the entire community. The Chairman then re-iterated his appreciation that the event had been so well received and handed over to the Leader who, in summing up, remarked upon the particular merit of concentrating the debate on just one topic in that it had given an opportunity to present a wide range of issues and to receive the views thereon from the community. The contributions by Superintendent Jones and Mr. Harrison were indicative of the

close working relationships that Council had, and would continue to pursue, with key agencies as well as the wider community.