

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 11TH JULY 2024

REFERENCE FROM ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 18TH JUNE 2024

“147 PETITION SUBMISSION – SCHOOL CROSSING SUPERVISORS (DCR) –

The Council's new petition scheme was agreed by Full Council on 7th March, 2022, and the scheme was implemented on 5th May, 2022. The scheme set out how members of the public may submit a petition (including e-petitions) and how the Council would respond to any submissions.

On 1st May, 2024, a petition from a P. King was received by the Council entitled "Save our Lollipop Lady". The petition stated: "VOG Council plan cutbacks. Removal of 11 Lollipop ladies' jobs. Making cutbacks in child safety is unacceptable. This is a vital service being provided that families around the Vale require".

Subsequently, a report had been produced which included information from the Director of Environment and Housing setting out the Council's current position and proposals. The Committee was therefore being asked to debate the matter and refer any recommendations on to Cabinet.

As the Lead Petitioner, P. King had been invited to present the petition at the Committee meeting, and in line with the Council's petition scheme, would be afforded 3 minutes speaking time in which to address the Committee. She wanted the Committee and Council to reconsider the proposed removal of her local community school crossing guard due to not only the crucial safeguarding role she undertook for local children in crossing roads within the local community, but also the familiar, friendly and reassuring presence that she and her role provides to local children and residents, including teaching children to cross the road safely. Her removal would mean that the roads would be less safe for children to cross and increase the volume of traffic locally, with children being driven to school by their parents instead. This in turn negatively impact health and the environment, as well as increase the risk of road traffic accidents, particularly for the children. Any savings accrued through removing this service to the Council would be negligible and would be outweighed by the negative impacts already alluded to and child safety. Other unmanned crossings in the locality would be insufficient and even unsafe for local children to cross without supervision.

The Director of Environment and Housing subsequently presented the report to the Committee, with a key update being that there were no plans to remove staff / manned crossing services currently situated in the Vale of Glamorgan. The Council had managed to find £83k of the £100k savings previously identified from other sources. Unfortunately, schools had not been able to undertake such services themselves and therefore the Council would continue to cover these non-statutory

but essential services in order to ensure child safety on local roads. In tandem with this, the Council would review the pedestrian crossing points to see if they would benefit from the use of lights / controls or Zebra crossings, particularly in light of the natural reduction in numbers of school crossing staff over time, and with the introduction of controlled crossings and 20mph zones near schools which had yielded benefits. However, the remaining staff that manned the remaining 11 manned crossing sites had been reassured that their jobs were not under threat. This hopefully would provide reassurance to the members of this petition and the wider communities they represent.

Following the report, Councillor Haines, with permission to speak, welcomed the reassurance provided by the Director of Environment and Housing over the manned school crossings, particularly in relation to his Ward in St. Athan. He wished to remind the Committee and the Director that St. Athan was growing with additional housing to be built in the near future and it was important for the Council to consider that in terms of any review on any school crossings need to look towards the five ways of working and to future development with any savings that would be made on reducing manned crossings being so small as to be negligible. The Director acknowledged the importance of involving the local Ward Members in any discussions around school crossings. He accepted the importance of applying the five ways of working in making such decisions and it would be useful to have controlled crossings in tandem with school crossing patrols in order to provide extra assistance for pupils crossing. Pedestrian surveys were undertaken to see where people actually crossed prior to any decisions being made in tandem with liaising with local Ward Members and taking into account sustainable development principles.

The Chair queried what the cost of a light controlled crossing would be to the Council. It was explained that this depended on the width of the road, but essentially these could cost anything from £100k upwards, particularly if you had a traffic island in the middle and separate signal heads. Zebra crossings were a cheaper option but they were not particularly effective outside schools.

Councillor Franks, with permission to speak, stated it was good to hear that there would be no cut backs on manned school crossing patrols but queried why this cut was proposed in the first place which had caused a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness and concern for local residents, and how the related £83k worth of existing savings had already been achieved and were not identified before the Council's budget was considered by Members. In response, it was stated that the decision in this area was ultimately taken by Elected Members as part of the budget report and proposals as well as the budget that went for approval to Full Council. On the £83k savings, this was found as a result of the end of year financial process, with such savings having then taken time to be properly identified. The Councillor noted that not all Councillors had approved the budgetary savings or cuts.

Councillor Hooper welcomed the Petition and the presentation by the Lead Petitioner at the meeting and irrespective of the change of mind by the Council, this demonstrated a local community that was not prepared to accept things being done to them without their permission. He stressed that as well as infrastructure and other considerations around school crossing patrols, it was also important to note that the

crossing guards represented an essential part of a local community and helped to weave together the social fabric of local communities and residents and improved the local quality of life as well as providing safety. Although there were options around electronic control systems, etc., it was important to protect these manned services at the highest possible level and he would welcome input on the political decision made on this by the relevant Cabinet Member who was in attendance. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services, with permission to speak, stated that the item around the Petition at tonight's meeting was an example of the Council listening to the public and that local residents had the ability to arrange petitions not just to be presented to Full Council but also to Scrutiny, and this was a good example of the Council taking on board the views of local residents and members of the public. He also cited other examples where local residents and Scrutiny Members had been listened to, for example around changes to public toilets and the reversal of cuts in that area. He also stressed that school crossing guards were valuable assets to their local communities, not just in helping people, particularly young children across the road, but also being the "eyes and ears" of their community in the area and would love to work with Scrutiny Members in order to help identify funds and savings elsewhere in order to remove such potential cuts in future.

Councillor Protheroe asked some questions around the actual provision of school crossings, with there being up to 50 primary aged schools in the Vale and wondered what was happening with the other 40 which already had an alternative solution in terms of crossings in place and how these kept children safe. As part of the review with the remaining 11 schools that had a manned school crossing, would a requirement for additional level safety be something that would be considered as well. She also cited the experience from her own Ward with the introduction of the 20mph speed limit which had been a huge benefit and had been welcomed by the Ward but the area nearest to the school had actually been reversed back to 30mph which could impact children who were walking on the very narrow pavement nearby and her hope that this would be reversed back to 20mph eventually as part of a review. It was explained that there was a criteria in place for school crossing patrols whereby a footfall survey would be undertaken in order to ascertain how many people, including young children, crossed, who crossed the crossing at a certain time as well as looking at other provision such as the use of 20mph outside locations such as schools. In addition, other speed controls could be put in place to mitigate traffic. Such reviews and assessments of schools would only take place if a safety issue had been identified and currently only a particular set of schools were being looked at. In terms of 20mph review, this was ongoing by Welsh Government and was in its listening phase for consultation and comments being fed into it. The route raised by the Councillor and other similar ones were being looked at as part of this process and were being factored into the Welsh Government's new guidance on the 20mph routes which was due to come out at the end of July and which could result in a number of changes.

Councillor Ernest referred to the Cabinet decision to cut back on certain areas within Neighbourhood Services, which included not just school crossing patrols but also areas such as potholes and other road maintenance which had not been agreed by all Members. He felt it was important that the Council wherever possible still provided school crossing patrols but where they could not be provided then a

suitable alternative was put in place to ensure safe options such as controlled crossings or reduce speed limits around schools. The Chair reminded Committee that when proposals came in the form of budget reports etc. Scrutiny Committees still had the opportunity to call these in or any related specific issues relevant to the Committee.

The Chair raised a query by Councillor Champion who unfortunately was not able to join the meeting who enquired as to whether the Council had considered any form of sponsorship in relation to picking up the funding costs of school crossing patrols. In response it was explained that the Council had not looked at sponsorship in terms of this service, but such forms of funding had been used in other service areas but with current budgetary constraints such alternative forms of funding could be looked at in order to support school crossing patrols in the future.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following comment / recommendation from the Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration:

- That Committee supports the decision, as outlined at the Committee meeting tonight, that no steps be taken to remove current school crossing patrols until a review has been carried out as appropriate to ensure child safety.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report, the comments made by the lead petitioner, as well as the discussions at the meeting.”

Attached as Appendix: Report to Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee: 18th June, 2024

Meeting of:	Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 18 June 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Environment and Regeneration
Report Title:	Petition Submission – School Crossing Supervisors
Purpose of Report:	To allow the Scrutiny Committee to consider a public petition submitted relating to Council proposals for the removal of School Crossing Supervisors
Report Owner:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Gareth Davies, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	As the report is Council wide, no Elected Members were consulted. Democratic Services
Policy Framework:	This is a matter outside of the Policy Framework and Budget and is a matter for Council.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's new petition scheme was agreed by Full Council on 7th March, 2022, and the scheme was implemented on 5th May, 2022. • The scheme sets out how members of the public may submit a petition (including e-petitions) and how the Council would respond to any submissions. • On 1st May 2024, a petition from a P. King was received by the Council titled - "Save our Lollipop Lady". • The petition states: "VOG Council plan cutbacks. Removal of 11 Lollipop ladies' jobs. Making cutbacks in child safety is unacceptable. This is a vital service being provided that families around the Vale require". • As Lead Petition, P. King has been invited to present the petition at the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting on 18th June, 2024, and in line with the Council's petition scheme, will be afforded 3 minutes speaking time in which to address the Committee. • The Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny is therefore being asked to debate the matter and refer any recommendations onto Cabinet. • The report also includes information from the Director of Environment and Housing setting out the Council's current position and proposals. 	

Recommendation

1. That the Environment and Regeneration Committee considers the petition submitted by P. King on 1st May, 2024 relating to School Crossing Supervisors, and refers any recommendations onto Cabinet.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To allow the Scrutiny Committee to consider the petition and for any recommendations to be referred to Cabinet.

1. Background

- 1.1 Section 42 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, placed a legal duty on principal Councils in Wales to make and publish a petition scheme setting out how the Council would handle and respond to petitions, including electronic petitions (e-petitions).
- 1.2 There was a duty for the petition scheme to set out:
 - (a) how a petition may be submitted to the Council;
 - (b) how and by when the Council would acknowledge receipt of a petition;
 - (c) the steps the Council may take in response to a petition received by it;
 - (d) the circumstances (if any) in which the Council may take no further action in response to a petition; and
 - (e) how and by when the Council would make available its response to a petition to the person who submitted the petition and to the public.
- 1.3 The Council's new petition scheme was agreed by Full Council on 7th March, 2022, and the scheme was implemented on 5th May, 2022. It can be viewed via the following link - [22-03-07 - Petition Scheme \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/22-03-07-Petition-Scheme)
- 1.4 The Scheme sets out:
 - 1) That all petitions will be managed through Democratic Services.
 - 2) The specific information and details that the petition and e-petition should contain.
 - 3) Details of the process for the creation of an e-petition and information required from the Lead Petitioner.
 - 4) The issues that a petition can or cannot relate to.
 - 5) That Democratic and Legal Services will carry out an initial check to ensure that a petition is admissible and respond within 7 working days to all petitions submitted and requests to create an e-petition.

6) If a petition or e-petition meets the threshold of 100 signatories, then depending on the subject matter and advice from the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer, this will be presented to a meeting of the Council, the Cabinet or a Scrutiny Committee.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** On 1st May, 2024, a petition from a P. King was received by the Council titled – “Save our Lollipop Lady”.
- 2.2** The petition states: “VOG Council plan cutbacks. Removal of 11 Lollipop ladies’ jobs. Making cutbacks in child safety is unacceptable. This is a vital service being provided that families around the Vale require”.
- 2.3** The petition received a total of 116 signatures.
- 2.4** As Lead Petition, P. King has been invited to present the petition at the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting on 18th June, 2024, and in line with the Council’s petition scheme, will be afforded 3 minutes speaking time in which to address the Committee.
- 2.5** The Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny is therefore being asked to debate the matter and refer any recommendations onto Cabinet.
- 2.6** In response to the petition, the Director of Environment and Housing has been requested to provide information regarding the Council’s position and proposals. These are set out in the following paragraphs.
- 2.7** Setting a balanced budget for the Council for 2024/25 has been extremely challenging. Following considerable work by officers of all departments, Council agreed the budget for 2024/25 at its meeting of 6th March, 2024, and this included savings and income generation for the Directorate of Environment and Housing to the value of £1.898m.
- 2.8** In setting the budget every attempt was made to protect Education and Social Care services. This was also the case for housing and public protection, thereby assisting in continuing to support the most vulnerable in our society.
- 2.9** There are three large service areas in the Directorate of Environment and Housing, Shared Regulatory Services (where savings of 3% were agreed), Housing and Building Services (where no savings were made due to the wish to support public housing and to seek to continue to address homelessness), and Neighbourhood Services and Transport, where most of the Council’s main front-line services sit.
- 2.10** The inability to levy proportionate savings / income demands across the Directorate, meant that much of the savings / income demands for the Environment and Housing Directorate fell on the Neighbourhood Services and Transport Division, with these representing circa 7% of this Division’s overall budget.
- 2.11** All the services provided by this Division are important to our residents and many are immediately visible front-line functions. Several of the services provided,

such as Highway Maintenance, Waste Management and Traffic Management are statutory services, meaning that the Council has a legal duty to provide them.

- 2.12** The Budget agreed by the Council meeting on 6th March, 2024 featured 34 individual projects for savings and income within the Neighbourhood Services and Transport Division (33 of these savings and income project lines were agreed as part of the budget process). None of the projects identified were straightforward and all of them will have some form of impact either on our residents or visitors, or both.
- 2.13** The numbers of staff involved in the school crossing patrol service has reduced over the past 15 years, with many posts not being replaced when staff have retired or otherwise left the Council's employment. At the time of the reviews there were 11 officers in post at various sites.
- 2.14** School Crossing Patrol services are non-statutory, which means that the Council does not have a legal duty to provide them. Whilst the importance of this service to parents and schools is recognised, the budget decisions were so difficult that the Council agreed to put this service forward for review, with a potential saving of £100k per annum, should the service not be directly provided by the Neighbourhood Services and Transport Division.
- 2.15** Officers wrote to the 11 staff affected by the review and to the Headteachers of the schools, where the staff provided school crossing patrol services.
- 2.16** Staff were advised of the review process, whilst Headteachers were asked, considering the budget challenges for the Neighbourhood Services and Transport Division, whether there was any capacity or wish to directly employ and fund the School Crossing Patrol, should the service review determine that the service could no longer be funded.
- 2.17** None of the schools that responded indicated a willingness to take on the service, though some did request additional information on the services provided and the costs associated.
- 2.18** The review into the service will continue as there remains a possibility that improvements in pedestrian safety arrangements outside the schools concerned could reduce the reliance on manual crossing patrols, there is also the possibility over time of certain schools taking on the service or the service being supplemented by an element of suitably trained and experienced voluntary labour.
- 2.19** There are no plans to progress any actions to forcibly reduce staffing numbers at any of the currently patrolled schools and the Division will now need to find an additional source of income or a saving opportunity equivalent to the £100k sum indicated in the budget report.
- 2.20** The staff concerned were advised of the current situation as regards their future employment at a meeting on 24th May, 2024.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Petition Scheme contributes to the achievement of several aspects of the Council's Corporate Plan and Annual Delivery Plan.

The Petition Scheme and subsequent Guide therefore sit under the continued 'Open' value and Objective 1: To work with and for our communities of the new plan which sets out that activities will reflect the importance of effective involvement, communication and engagement to understand and respond to the diverse needs of the community.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no climate change or nature implications as a result of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** As set out in the body of the report.

Employment

- 5.2** None

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3** None as direct consequence of this report.

6. Background Papers