

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 23 March 2017

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member for Public Realm/
Head of Planning and Public Protection

Report Author: Head of Planning and Public Protection

Title: Corporate Approach to managing “seagulls” across the County

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 It is generally accepted that “seagulls” represent something of a nuisance, not just along the coast, but also in our main towns. There are limitations to what actions are open to the Council to control/manage the “seagull” population. The Senior Management Team (SLT) of the Council has considered what appropriate, affordable and proportionate actions could be implemented. This report looks at those considerations and conclusions.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To seek Member views on the conclusions of SLT in an attempt to introduce some limited control/management of the “seagull” population and their behaviour.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- That:
- 3.1 the Committee confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment as part of its consideration (**Appendix 1**); and
- 3.2 Members support the corporate actions agreed at SLT as contained in the Table at **Appendix 2**.

4. Report details

- 4.1 There is no such bird as a “seagull”. This is a collective name for different breeds of “gulls” such as Herring Gull (most prevalent in DCC), Lesser Black Backed Gull, and Greater Black Backed Gull etc. These are highly intelligent and adaptable birds, many of which have become “urban”, living in towns and cities and no longer nest, breed, hunt or feed at sea. They are large birds, and for many they are intimidating.
- 4.2 All wild birds, their eggs and nests are “protected” under the provisions of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. Many “seagulls” are also afforded additional protection as their populations are falling in the wild.

4.3 The following “problems” are associated with “seagulls”;

- H&S;** Gull droppings contain micro-organisms which can transmit disease.
- Public Safety;** Gulls can become aggressive during the nesting season.
- Noise;** Gulls create a noise nuisance, particularly early morning
- Damage;** Nesting gulls can cause damage to buildings
- Littering;** Fouling can cause public realm “untidy” issues, and gulls scatter rubbish as a result of feeding, ripping open bin bags etc.
- Pestering people;** Gulls associate any food they see as theirs. They have learned our habits. Gulls “pester” people who are eating food outdoors, and will actually take food out of someone’s hand

4.4 It also has to be recognised that many people like “seagulls”, they are a traditional part of our seaside environment, and in their own right are impressive birds.

4.5 The Council does receive complaints about the “seagull” population, directly from local residents and from elected Members, MPs, AMs etc. These complaints are traditionally passed onto the Planning & Public Protection department as historically we had a “pest control” service. As a result of previous savings the Council decided to “stop” our pest control service and a saving of approx. £80k was secured. The Service now has no resources, manpower, budget or otherwise to respond to complaints about “seagulls”.

4.6 The reality is that as a Service we did very little previously and what we did do had no or very little impact. What we do now is direct any complainant to the Council website, which in turn provides a link to an RSPB web site about “seagulls”.

4.7 In any case the issues often require an approach beyond the scope of the Planning & Public Protection department, a point made clear in **Appendix 2**.

4.8 The “seagull” issue is not unique to Denbighshire. Officers have carried out research on what others are doing. There are no simple answers. To assist Members to further understand the issues and the lack of simple answers to the problem the following appendices are attach to this report;

4.9 **Appendix 3;** Detailed report presented to Cardiff Council Environment Scrutiny Committee in May 2013.

4.10 **Appendix 4;** A letter of June 2016 from WLGA to Dr James Davies MP

4.11 **Appendix 5;** A letter of September 2016 from RSPB to Conwy County Borough Council

- 4.12 **Appendix 6**; Bird Advice Sheet provided by Animal Aid
- 4.13 **Appendix 7**; “Alternatives to Culling; Gulls” report by Animal Aid
- 4.14 If Members read the attached material it will be evident that there are no easy solutions, indeed any actions taken by just Denbighshire may have no impact given “seagulls” do not recognise County borders and the issues are common place throughout the UK.
- 4.15 What the attached literature does do is provide a number of suggestions for action, to **try** and mitigate against **some** of the issues.
- 4.16 The Council does not have the resources to spend potential large amounts of money that at best may address some issues in some areas, but in all likelihood will have a very limited affect and will only move the problems to another area.
- 4.17 Yet doing nothing does not appear to be a reasonable response either. So **Appendix 2** summarises the intended, albeit limited, approach as considered by SLT

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 Seeking to limit some of the negative impacts caused by “seagulls” will help support the Corporate Priorities of Clean and Tidy Streets and Supporting Vulnerable People.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 The table of proposed actions as contained in **Appendix 2** affect a wide range of Services across the Council. Those actions will need to be funded within existing Service budgets.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1 The Well-being Impact Assessment is attached as **Appendix 1**. The overall conclusions on the proposed actions in **Appendix 2** are positive. This is the first Assessment completed for this topic. Further Assessments may be required as each Service takes responsibility for the individual actions.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1 The table of proposed actions at **Appendix 2** has been considered and agreed at SLT.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 A statement has not been sought as the proposed actions in **Appendix 2** have been agreed by SLT. It was accepted that no “new” money would be found to implement these actions i.e. they would need to be funded by Services using existing budgets as part of “business as usual activities.”

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1 There is a risk to the Council's reputation amongst the citizens of the County if no actions are taken to at least try and address some of the negative impacts created by the "seagull" population, hence the actions contained in **Appendix 2**.
- 10.2 The Council cannot address or solve all the negative issues associated with the County's "seagull" population. There is a risk by proposing some actions there will be an increased expectation among sections of our community that the Council will commit additional resources, which is not being proposed. There needs to be a clear communication strategy regarding the Council's overall approach.
- 10.3 There is a risk that the proposed actions will have very little impact, but the actions are in part about the Council seeking to do what it can and in part about educating the general public.

11. Power to make the Decision

- 11.1 This report is seeking Members views, and as such no "decision" is necessary. Nevertheless, Scrutiny does have powers in relation to policy development and review, as outlined in Section 7.4.1 of the Council's Constitution.
- 11.2 There are numerous potential actions contained in **Appendix 2**, and it will be the responsibility of each Head of Service to ensure they act upon the appropriate/relevant statutory powers where necessary.

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