

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 4th July 2019

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection and Safer Communities.

Report Author: Head of Planning and Public Protection

Title: Seagull Management Update Report

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 Seagulls are both a part of everyday life within our towns and also represent something of a nuisance to some residents and visitors of the County. There are limitations on what actions the Council can take to control/manage the seagull population. The Council agreed to explore some proportionate and affordable actions that could help to control/manage the nuisance. An action plan was approved and the report details the progress made by the Council against the agreed seagull management action plan and what further actions are proposed.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To update Members on the progress made against the action plan, specific actions that have taken place in Rhyl and to advise Members of future actions to be taken.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 Members to consider and comment on the content of the report and support the actions taken to date.

4. Report details

- 4.1 Gulls (of which there are many types) are highly intelligent and adaptable birds. Many have become part of urban living and have gradually moved away from the sea. Gulls are protected under the Countryside & Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.
- 4.2 A detailed report was previously presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee on the 22nd of March 2018 (Appendix 1), detailing the 'problems' associated with 'seagulls'. An action plan (Appendix 2) was agreed by the Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and supported by Members. The action plan is a cross Council plan, detailing actions that could be explored and undertaken by various Council services. DCC services have undertaken work over the past 12 months which we believe would have a positive impact on addressing some of the 'problems' associated with seagulls. As agreed at the Scrutiny Committee in March 2018, letters were sent to Welsh Government, WLGA and Natural Resources Wales to ask for support and assistance in dealing with this national and regional challenge, but no response was received from any of those organisations.

4.3 **Complaints**

4.4 A total of 45 complaints from members of the public were received by DCC in relation to seagulls since the 1st of March 2018. These complaints mainly relate to residents complaining about neighbours feeding seagulls. Some relate to swooping seagulls on Rhyl High Street mainly. Following receipt of such complaints about feeding at residential properties, officers from Planning and Public Protection send a warning letter to the resident advising them not to feed seagulls and that it is causing nuisance to others. Please see Appendix 3 for an example of such letters. If the issues persist then it is possible to serve a legal notice requiring the person to stop feeding the seagulls. To date, there has been no need to serve a legal notice to deal with any specific problems at residential properties. No complaints were received about feeding of seagulls in public spaces/high street etc.

4.5 **Communications/Media**

4.6 Work was undertaken on publicising the seagulls issue to engage with residents and businesses and get their support to address the problem. This included:

- News stories asking people not to feed the seagulls.
- Articles on the corporate website
- A programme of social media messages about the seagulls.
- Articles in three editions of County Voice.
- Video with Head of Planning and Public Protection for social media.
- Video with the former Mayor of Rhyl, welcoming news that the Council was launching a campaign.

4.7 Due to reduced capacity within the DCC Communications Team/Press Office they are unable to support the project to the same level for the future.

4.8 The Planning and Public Protection Service has funded the design and printing of posters to be placed in the shop windows of businesses in Rhyl advising members of the public not to feed the seagulls. These have been distributed and should further help to raise awareness with residents and visitors in particular. The posters can be found at Appendix 4.

4.9 **Waste/Streetscene Activities**

4.10 Highways and Environmental Services have introduced a common specification and replaced all bins within Rhyl town centre and promenade areas which has effectively doubled the capacity and the birds are now unable to gain access. The Service has received positive feedback since this change and the cleanliness of these areas has been much improved.

4.11 An improved cleansing and sweeping regime has been introduced, which comprises of more frequent emptying of bins, more sweeping and regular jet washing of street furniture, (particularly during the summer months), which again has improved the perception and satisfaction of the public realm and town centre areas.

4.12 All new lighting columns are now routinely assessed to establish whether bird deterrents can be fitted but this is not always possible although the majority do carry some form of anti-perching measure within the coastal areas.

- 4.13 Highways and Environmental Services are exploring the cost of installing and maintaining netting in Rhyl Town Centre, but it is not currently clear where the funding to install it would be found, given there is already a significant pressure on the Streetscene revenue budget. Installing netting would also require us to obtain the necessary permissions from private landlords. The Rhyl Business Improvement District (BID) has stated that it intends to invest £400,000 over 5 years in cleansing & maintenance (the primary focus of the BID for the first two years), and has specifically committed to tackling seagull related issues. This may therefore be something that the BID could look at if netting is considered to be one of the most effective ways to tackle seagull related issues.
- 4.14 Waste and Recycling Services are continuing to design out disposable sacks in the area, moving all suitable properties to a wheeled bin system. Dumped black bags, and black bags placed out at collection points on waste collection day are a main source of food for the seagulls.
- 4.15 The “on-street” communal bin containers that have attracted black sack dumping have also been removed, and residents have successfully been transferred to individual bins and re-issued with food waste caddies.
- 4.16 Approximately 15 properties are trialling large gull proof sacks. The residents present their disposable sacks inside the gull proof sack, providing effective containment of the waste. Feedback from the residents using the sacks has been very positive and the seagulls have not attempted to penetrate them. An application for funding has been submitted to Welsh Government through a collaborative nationwide bid being led by Keep Wales Tidy and the outcome of the application is expected in February. Funding has been requested to provide enough gull proof sacks to supply all households that have to remain on a sack collection service due to storage constraints. The funding also covers the implementation of appropriate technology to closely monitor participation in the service and compliance with the Council’s recycling service. Contingency budget have been allocated for this project in the New Waste Operating Model, should the funding application be unsuccessful. Design of the sacks will be tweaked as a result of feedback from waste operatives and residents.
- 4.17 The Council is also taking part in recycling enforcement trials operating across the North Wales region. Welsh Government have funded the trials and WRAP are developing the supporting communications campaign. Whilst this will be delivered across the entire County, West Rhyl is one of several areas been selected as a focus area, where additional resources will be targeted to increase participation in recycling. This will help drive food waste out of disposable sacks and into lockable secure food waste caddies, cutting off a significant source of food for the seagulls. Pre-trial monitoring will take place in February to ascertain important baseline data that will help thoroughly evaluate the campaign approach.
- 4.18 **DCC Property Services**
- 4.19 The Council’s Property Services continue to provide assurances that where ‘practically’ and ‘financially’ possible, they implement measures to protect our existing and new properties from seagulls. They implement appropriate measures to either improve or contain the issues. All the new recent waterfront developments have been designed and improved to reduce the impact of seagulls. We will never totally eradicate

the problem. We will always apply best endeavours when we are investing in our properties. Seagull deterrent measures are now automatically part of the project briefs.

4.20 Rhyl Business Improvement District

4.21 The Rhyl Business Improvement District (BID) has identified seagull control as a priority for them. They are currently developing their final business plan and therefore the BID might consider funding seagull control within the town.

4.22 Although the Council is under significant financial pressure and budgets are reducing, DCC services have clearly undertaken a significant amount of work over the past 12 months that will help to address the problems posed by seagulls in the town centre balanced against the fact that gulls are a part of coastal life.

4.23 Further work may be possible over the next 12 months, particularly in collaboration with the business community in Rhyl.

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

5.1 The work contributes to the Corporate Priority of providing an attractive and protected environment

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

6.1 All actions will need to be funded within existing service budgets.

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

7.1 This is an update report and therefore there is no need to undertake a Well-Being Impact Assessment. An assessment was previously undertaken for the March 2017 report to Members.

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

8.1 Consultation with various DCC Services, Communities Scrutiny Committee and Rhyl Business Improvement District.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 The actions highlighted should be contained within existing resources.

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

10.1 Risk to the Council's reputation amongst residents if no action is taken to address some of the concerns. There is also a risk that the actions taken have negligible impact and also that measuring the impact is also difficult.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 The report is providing an update and there is no decision required.

11.2 Section 7.4.2(b) of the Council's Constitution states that scrutiny committees may "review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas".

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