

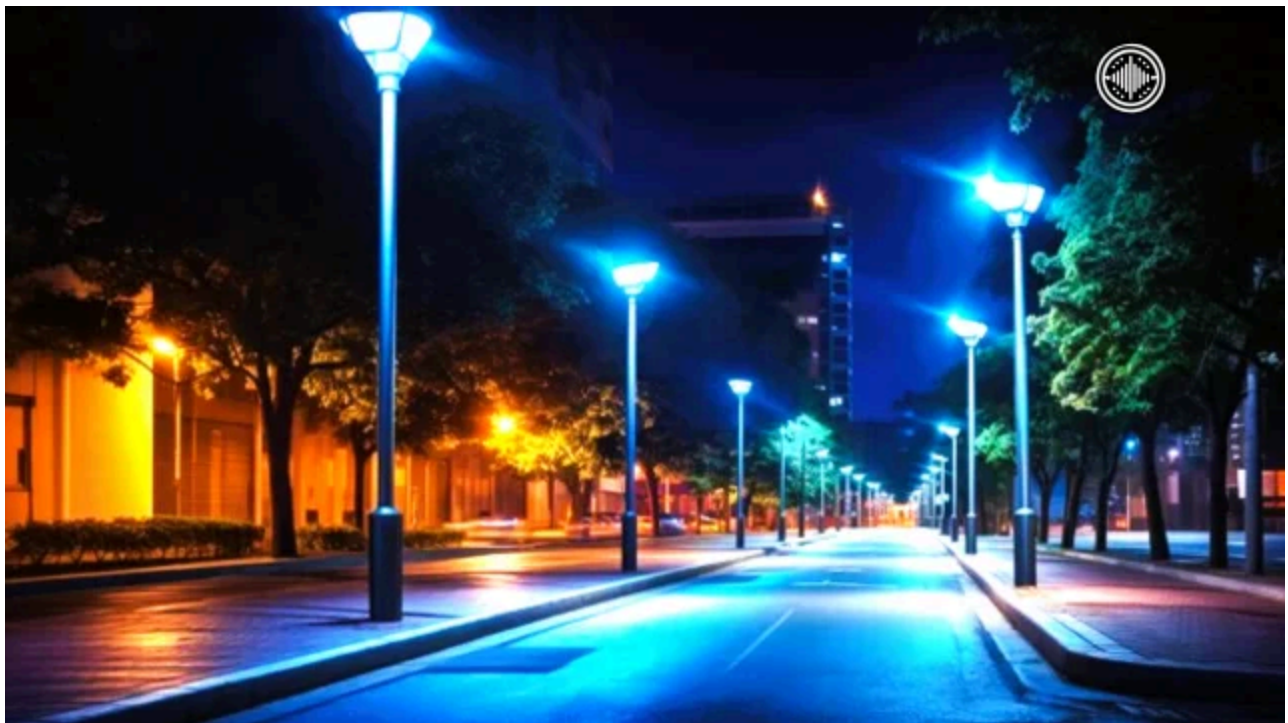
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Neath Port Talbot Council Reviews Street Lighting Trial Amid Rising Energy Costs and Community Concerns

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Neath Port Talbot, Wales. In response to escalating energy costs, Neath Port Talbot Council recently conducted a trial to switch off street lights between 1 am and 5 am in selected areas. The results, presented to the council's scrutiny committee on June 27, have sparked a detailed discussion balancing the imperative to reduce expenditure with residents' concerns over safety and community well-being.

The pilot involved the temporary deactivation of 144 streetlights across seven locations, impacting approximately 700 homes. This initiative forms part of a broader effort to address

a significant overspend in the council's lighting energy budget, which has risen sharply since the 2022-23 financial year. Despite prior measures such as upgrading to low-wattage LED lighting, dimming existing lights, and adjusting operational hours, the council anticipates an energy budget nearing £977,000 for 2025-26.

Feedback from residents during and following the trial was mixed. While some appreciated the environmental and financial benefits, others expressed concerns about personal safety and the potential for increased crime during unlit hours. Police representatives reported no incidents or concerns related to the trial period, with only seven low-risk complaints registered.

Councillor Tim Bowen voiced strong opposition to the switch-off, describing it as a regression to a "1940s-style blackout," emphasizing the importance of maintaining a safe and socially active environment despite financial pressures. Alternative proposals included turning off alternate streetlights to balance savings and visibility, or targeting lighting reductions in industrial estates rather than residential areas. However, officers noted that alternating lights could create safety hazards for drivers due to uneven lighting, while the potential for focusing on industrial areas remains under consideration.

The scrutiny committee will forward its findings and recommendations to the council cabinet, with the possibility of extending the trial to larger areas for further evaluation.

Neath Port Talbot's trial reflects a broader challenge facing local authorities: managing the competing priorities of fiscal responsibility, public safety, and community quality of life amid rising energy costs. As councils navigate these complex issues, the outcomes of such trials will be closely watched to inform future strategies.