

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 OCTOBER 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Wednesday, 17 October 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Matt Wright (Chairman)

Councillors Haydn Bateman, Derek Butler, Peter Curtis, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Cindy Hinds, Dennis Hutchinson, Nancy Matthews, Paul Shotton and Carolyn Thomas

SUBSTITUTE: Councillors Ian Dunbar for Ann Minshull

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor G. Hardcastle, Acting Waste Manager, Acting Waste Strategy and Recycling Team Leader.

APOLOGIES: Councillor J. Johnson, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Leisure, Chief Regeneration Officer.

CONTRIBUTORS: Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste and Recycling, Director of Environment, Head of Streetscene, Economic Development Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Interim Environment Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor C.A. Thomas declared a personal interest in agenda item 6, due to her involvement with the Flintshire Rural Partnership and Cadwyn Clwyd, not as a representative of County Council.

29. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September, 2012 had been circulated with the agenda.

Accuracy

Councillor C.A. Thomas said that on item 26, page 6, her question about vacant posts in Environment did not include her question about the possible employment of apprentices to train as Environmental Health Officers.

Matters arising

The Chair advised members that there would be a North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project Workshop on 28 November.

The Scrutiny Facilitator advised members that the Executive Director of Public Health Wales had provided the report regarding particulate matter standards and that she could email the report to members and also provide a hard copy in the members' library.

Councillor D. Evans said that he had not yet received a copy of the Green Infrastructure action plan for the Lower River Dee. The Director for Environment was not aware of this and said he would arrange for a copy to be forwarded. Councillor C. A. Thomas asked if she could also receive a copy.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendment noted above.

30. STREETSCENE REVIEW

The Head of Streetscene introduced the report to update Members on the outcome of the review of the Streetscene service six months after its launch in March 2012.

In order to assess the progress made by the service so far, feedback and comments on the service were requested from Council Members through the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, members of the public through satisfaction surveys, all Streetscene Staff, Trade Unions and Town and Community Councils. The Head of Street Scene reported that 23 replies had been received from councillors with a total of 89 comments, 17 were complimentary and 29 suggested improvements to be made. A total of 6 replies were received from staff and two replies from two trade unions. In relation to the Customer survey, 50% of customers were aware of Streetscene and a third knew the phone number. Two thirds of respondents had noticed an improvement. The comments related to four main areas which fed into the following four action plans:

1. Staffing structure
2. Operational
3. Office and Depot and a series of Action Plans implemented.
4. Contact Centre

The Head of Street Scene said that the action plans would be built into future service plans. The Director of Environment then provided an update on the four main objectives of the project as follows:

Improving Customer Access to the Service

Streetscene now had one telephone number to cover the whole service. It was recognised that initially there were not sufficient contact centre staff to deal with the high volume of calls. The Director of Environment commented that changes were being made to the contact centre as the service evolved.

Raising Public Awareness of the Project

There had been a big media campaign around the launch date and lots of people now recognised Streetscene and the single number as a result of this.

Operational Changes

Operational changes had led to a more joined up service. Generic job roles had improved flexibility and enabled priorities to be met.

Office and Depot rationalisation

Previously there were five depots; there was now one operational depot at Alltami.

The Director of the Environment said that there had been enormous changes to the service in the last six months and suggested that an update be submitted at some stage in the 2013/14 Forward Work Programme.

Councillor C. A Thomas asked how the surveys had been carried out. The Director of Environment in response said that customer surveys had been undertaken at roadshows and fetes during the summer. Councillor Thomas asked about street lighting and the Director of Environment advised that the Committee's FWP had timetabled a street lighting workshop in November. She raised concern on the changes to grass cutting in rural areas which were not reflected in the Grass Cutting Policy and said that she expected the grass cutting policy to have been changed as a result of the grass cutting Task and Finish group in scrutiny. The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment said that it was not within the remit of scrutiny to make policy. He explained that policies went to Cabinet for authorisation and that at the time it was not allowed to go to Cabinet. He agreed to go back to Cabinet to discuss this. Councillor Thomas said that she was impressed by the work of the Streetscene supervisor in her area and the pride in my patch initiative.

Councillor P. Shotton said that it was a good report and that if all actions were undertaken it would lead to a much improved service. With reference to 68% of residents not being aware of the existence of Streetscene, he asked if letters could be sent out to publicise it and if the Contact Centre would be moved to Alltami. The Director of Environment said that a letter had been circulated with Council Tax bills in May, but that we would look at further ways of informing the public and that the Contact Centre would be moved to Alltami.

Councillor N.M. Matthews asked if future action plans could include details of the RAG status, a timescale and officer responsible. She added that she was very happy with the work of her local Streetscene Supervisor. The Director of Environment said that all future action plans would contain RAG status, dates and Officers responsible columns.

Councillor H.D. Hutchinson said that the local supervisor in his area worked well. He voiced his concern that when grass was cut at sheltered accommodation schemes, the cuttings were not removed. The Deputy Leader of the Council said that Housing were responsible for grass cutting at council owned sheltered accommodation and that the Head of Housing had previously researched the cost of removing grass cuttings and found the cost prohibitive.

He added that the Cabinet Member for Housing was looking at a budget pressure bid for grass cutting and that it was an item on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny agenda. The Chair welcomed the news that the issue would be pursued by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor I. Dunbar asked about the future use of the now vacant Queensferry Depot. The Director of Environment said that the Queensferry Depot had become the salt store for regional resilience stocks for the A55 and trunk roads on behalf of the Welsh Government. He added that the intention was to ultimately dispose of the depot and to have discussions with the Welsh Government to see if the site was needed as part of any road widening plans. Councillor I. Dunbar asked about which department had responsibility for litter picking on playing fields before the grass was due to be cut. The Deputy Leader said that currently, responsibility lay with various departments and that he wanted to integrate all litter picking into Streetscene.

Councillor P.J. Curtis said it was a good report and acknowledged that surveys could only give limited feedback. He asked for information about out of hour's council contacts and procedures for emergency situations such as localised flooding. A recent flooding incident in Bagillt had exposed a lack of awareness about who could coordinate assistance. The Director of Environment said that there was an out of hours service called Care Connect with supervisors on 24 hour standby. On the day of the flooding in Bagillt, there had been a problem with contacting the Care Connect Service and this was under investigation. Councillor Curtis reported that parking penalty signs had been removed from council car parks in the Holywell area. The Director of Environment asked that Councillor Curtis forward details to him about the incidents. Councillor Curtis referred to a letter received by the Town Council which stated that damaged salt bins in the area would be removed, but did not state if they would be repaired or replaced by the council. The Head of Streetscene asked Councillor Curtis to forward to him the correspondence and confirmed that damaged council owned salt bins would be replaced with new ones. He added that Town and Community Councils had the option to purchase further bins.

Councillor D. Butler said that he welcomed the changes to the service and praised the work of his local supervisor. He said that grass cutting removal should be prioritised for elderly residents in council accommodation.

Councillor D. Evans said that performance in the contact centre had improved 100% since its introduction and that staff were very helpful. He asked if Councillors could be issued with the council mobile phone number of the area supervisors. The Director of the Environment said that he would re-issue the information to Councillors.

Councillor V. Gay said that she wanted to see more detail in the Call Centre performance graphs. She asked if an Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out for the project. The Head of Streetscene said that an Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out initially and was being updated.

Councillor G.H. Bateman suggested that artificial grass could be used in sheltered accommodation schemes. He also said that he had been disappointed

by the service provided by some Call Centre staff and that when he visited the Depot, he noticed there were no rooms available for private conversations. The Chair advised that if Members had any staff concerns, that the matter be raised outside of Overview and Scrutiny with the relevant officer and managers.

Councillor C. Hinds acknowledged the work of the local supervisors. She asked if emails to the contact centre were dealt with as quickly as telephone calls. The Head of Streetscene confirmed that response times were the same for emails as well as telephone calls.

Councillor C.A. Thomas proposed that point 4.03 of the proposed resolution concerning the adoption of the new Grass Cutting Policy be removed. This was seconded and approved by a show of hands.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members of the Committee note the comments received on the service and the progress made during the first six months since its launch and advise that further public awareness of the telephone numbers be developed;
- (b) That Members note the content of the Action Plans for the service and that deadlines and persons responsible be incorporated into the Action Plans;
- (c) That point 4.03 of the report, concerning the Grass Cutting Policy be removed from the recommendation;
- (d) That a further report be presented to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2013-14; and
- (e) That the Director of Environment convey the thanks of the Committee to the Streetscene supervisors for their work.

31. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S WASTE STRATEGY

The Chair advised the Committee that the following item referred to the Review of the Council's Waste Collection Service and not the Review of the Council's Waste Strategy as stated in the agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste and Recycling introduced the report to update Members on the progress made within the waste collection service, six months after the service review.

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste and Recycling said that there had been initial problems after roll out in November 2011 and that service levels had improved on a month to month basis. The issue of missed collections was the main concern of residents and this equated to 20-30 missed collections per 100,000 collections. It was hoped that performance would be further improved with the introduction of an electronic notification service to confirm that waste collections had been made. This would be rolled out in January after an initial pilot with assisted collection rounds. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling said that in Quarter 1, Flintshire had achieved a

recycling rate of just under 60% which was the second highest rate of recycling for a Welsh Local Authority during the period.

The Head of Streetscene said that of the 30 recommendations highlighted in the Action Plan, all but three were on target. There was an ongoing review into the use of sticker notifications on bins, the side waste issue was ongoing and negotiations were ongoing with the software supplier of a queue notification service on the telephone contact centre. New weighted blue and white bags for recyclables were now available and had received good feedback.

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste and Recycling reported that a new service had been introduced for flats which involved a smaller "scatter" vehicle. Saturday collections have been piloted and would be expanded following consultation and subject to availability of vehicles and funding. Side waste continued to be an issue and officers would visit and advise residents who persistently left side waste. The managed weekly collection service was anticipated to deliver a further £245,000 of efficiencies in 2012-13. The existing Household Recycling Centres are to remain

Councillor H. D. Hutchinson thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their report. He asked if there had been any new refuse crews in the Buckley area as he had received reports that the service levels had dropped. Councillor Hutchinson voiced concern at the crew's practice of leaving food bin lids open after they had been emptied. The Head of Streetscene said that operatives would be reminded about the need to leave bins tidily with the lids shut. He said that he was not aware of a new team in the Buckley area and added that new members would be introduced one at a time into established rounds. He advised members to contact him or Harvey Mitchell if they became aware of any issues.

Councillor C.A. Thomas said that collections could be missed in rural areas if the operatives were given house names only. She said that hand held consoles sometimes lost their charge and that the contact centre should provide addresses for the rounds. Reports had been received of bins replaced in the middle of driveways and the practice of large numbers of bins being gathered in one spot in a road for ease of collection by the vehicle. Councillor Thomas said that this had resulted in the wrong bins being returned. She asked if the budget could support the Saturday rounds and new vehicles. The Cabinet Member in response said that operatives were told to replace containers and bins as they had been found and that they had sufficient time to complete their rounds, so they did not have to cut corners with their work. The Director of Environment said that the budget monitoring report which went to Cabinet recently showed that the delayed introduction of Single Status had been compensated by income from extra recyclates.

Councillor P.J. Curtis said that supervisors must monitor time taken to complete rounds if they cannot be completed in the allocated time. He said that the Action Plan points were good, but will take time to complete.

Councillor N.M. Matthews thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their report. She asked if operatives who worked on Saturdays and Bank Holidays received premium payments. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste said that time and a half payments are made for Bank Holidays

and Saturdays because Part 3 negotiations had not been completed. Councillor Matthews asked if a target be considered to eradicate the use of bin bags inside bins as they took a long time to decompose in land fill. The Cabinet Member Public Protection, Waste and Recycling said that bin bags keep the insides of the bin clean. The Director of Environment said that residents were free to purchase and use bin bags inside the bin if they wished. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste and Recycling and the Director for Environment agreed to give the suggestion further consideration.

Councillor D. Evans expressed concern that the use of missed collection technology could result in arguments between the council and residents. He asked if further types of plastic containers could be recycled. The Head of Streetscene said that items would not be recycled if there was not a market for them. Councillor Evans commented that there were not consistent service standards at the various Household Recycling Centres. The Head of Streetscene said that operatives at each Household Recycling Centre should meet and greet customers inside the Centre and ask customers if they needed assistance. Councillor Evans reported problems with bins left out in the street by residents in terraced housing in Shotton. The Head of Streetscene said that scatter vehicles could be used to empty bins from the rear of properties in alleyways.

Councillor D. Butler asked if anything could be done to dissuade groups of scrap merchants who targeted refuse set out for waste collection. He said that some residents leave bulky items outside their homes for the merchants to collect. The Director of Environment asked Councillor Butler to provide details to him regarding the locations.

Councillor C. Hinds asked if blue bags could be sealable, to prevent water accumulation. She asked if more replacement food bags could be carried onboard the vehicles. The Head of Streetscene said that new blue bags with Velcro seals were available on demand and that vehicles were being modified to carry more replacement bags.

Councillor G.H. Bateman asked if vehicles could be sent back on the same day to pick up missed collections. He also asked if the Council had plans to promote a bin cleaning service. The Head of Streetscene said that complaints often came in too late in the day to take remedial action that day. He said that it was not practicable to send operatives back the next day, as it would impact on the collection service for that day. The Deputy Leader said that the Council had been contacted by a Social Enterprise company that offered bin cleaning and sought assistance with promotion. He said that he would forward the email to members. The Head of Street Scene said that he could give the company details of the rounds.

Councillor C.A. Thomas said that a resident who wanted to dispose of computer discs was told by an operative at the Household Recycling Centre to dispose of them in the general waste stream. The Head of Streetscene explained that he would investigate this.

Councillor C.J. Dolphin said that some crews had been seen to be rush around to complete rounds. He reported that food bags were still stacked up in the street and was concerned about stray plastic bottles littering streets. The

Head of Streetscene said that operatives knew not to stack up waste and action would be taken against anyone doing this. He said that stray waste would be collected by litter teams in exceptional weather who would follow refuse vehicles on their rounds. Councillor Dolphin asked for clarification about the operative's working day and asked how savings could be made to the service when pay premiums were issued for Saturday shifts. The Head of Streetscene said that operatives had sufficient time to complete rounds and must sign in and out at every shift. Staff may clock out up to half an hour earlier than their scheduled end time, should they have completed their duties for the day. On some days they will be expected to go beyond their scheduled end time to complete a task, up to 30 minutes of which will be unpaid. The Head of Streetscene assured Members that operatives were not asked to achieve unrealistic targets. The Director of the Environment said that he would forward financial information regarding the savings mentioned in the report to Councillor Dolphin.

Councillor V. Gay said that residents were not aware of the Clinical Waste Service. The Head of Streetscene said residents would need to ring up to access the service which is partly funded by the NHS. He said that district nurses and pharmacies promoted the service and that Harvey Mitchell could follow this up with her.

RESOLVED:

- a) That Members of the Committee note the report and the progress made within the service since the service review in March 2012;
- b) That the Committee be supplied with financial information for the service outlining savings; and
- c) That the Committee notes the positive achievement of a near 60% recycling rate.

32. RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL FUNDS

The Economic Development Manager presented a report to update Members on progress made in implementing the Rural Development Plan for Wales (RDP) 2007-2013 in Flintshire and to provide briefing material on the current and future position with European Structural Fund Programmes.

The Economic Development Manager informed members that the RDP programme was coming to an end. The Welsh Government had offered extensions for projects, new projects or extended activities. The European Structural Funds were due to finish in 2013, with project spend, including Flintshire projects running until 2015, subject to extension being approved. The Flintshire Projects run under European Structural Funds were the Town Centre Regeneration Project, Strategic Business Parks, which involved Deeside Industrial Park, and the Genesis 2 Project to help economically inactive people overcome barriers to work.

Councillor P.J. Curtis said that the Holywell Streetscape and Access Improvements on page 61 made reference to approval by the Town Partnership, but not the Town Council. He asked if it was intended that the High Street be

opened up to traffic. The Economic Development Manager said that the Town Partnership referred to the funding side of the project and that any consultations about the scope of the project would be undertaken in conjunction with the Town Council and County Council. He said that the area would see improvements for both pedestrians and traffic. The High Street would continue to be closed to traffic as now. Councillor Curtis said that he would expect full consultation for future plans.

The Chair asked if all funding for the projects would be drawn down before the end of the Programme. The Economic Development Manager reassured Members that projects would be completed, with the Talacre/Gronant project at the detailed design stage in negotiation with BHP, CCW and the land owner and the Mold and Holywell projects were at the scoping stage, and would move into design stage after Christmas.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the progress in implementing the Rural Development Plan in Flintshire and the briefing material on European Structural Funds.

33. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Environment Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced a report to enable the Committee to consider the Forward Work Programme.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project be removed from the Committee Meeting on 21 November and considered at a later date, following the workshop on 28 November at 10am. The Committee also agreed that Civil Parking Enforcement be discussed at the 9 January meeting and that Contracted Bus Services be moved to the 6 February Committee meeting.

The Facilitator advised the Committee that there had been a request from the Corporate Resources Committee that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee submit a report into Recycling Income. The Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also invited the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to a future Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting, to discuss Assets and Estates in January or February 2013.

The Chair asked Members to note dates of the forthcoming budget rounds in their diary.

RESOLVED:

That the amendments to the Forward Work Programme listed above be noted.

34. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting began at 10.00 a.m. and ended at 12.25 p.m.

35. **ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no members of the public present and two members of the press present.

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Chairman