

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 SEPTEMBER 2013

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, 18 September 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Matt Wright (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Ray Hughes, Colin Legg, Nancy Matthews, Ann Minshull and Paul Shotton

SUBSTITUTES:

Councillors Ian Dunbar (for Cindy Hinds) and Mike Reece (for Peter Curtis)

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Bernie Attridge (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment) and Carolyn Thomas

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling and Director of Environment

Head of Assets and Transportation and Energy Manager (for minute number 27)
Interim Environmental Protection Manager and Neighbourhood Policy & Strategy Manager (for minute number 28)
Performance Team Leader (for minute number 29)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Environment & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

26. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2013 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. ENERGY SWITCHING SCHEME - UPDATE AND REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS

The Head of Assets and Transportation introduced a report which outlined knowledge and recommendations from the National Energy Action, Consumer Focus and Welsh Government (WG) event which focussed on various models of collective energy switching.

There were many barriers to switching tariff, which included perceived hassle, trust or mistrust of the companies involved and lack of access to internet comparison sites. A Council-run scheme would give the residents trust in switching and a number of Local Authorities had been contacted during the development of the report that ran collective energy switching schemes.

The WG and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) are currently working on a pilot with Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Councils which was intended to form the basis for a Wales-wide collective energy switching programme. Further details on this were attached at Appendix 2 of the report.

In conclusion, the Head of Assets and Transportation said that officers would monitor the progress of the pilot very closely, including analysing the first auction, scheduled for November, 2013. In the event that this was deemed successful, the Council could consider a marketing campaign to prioritise the next auction run by Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils.

Councillor Paul Shotton said that he did not feel that it was appropriate at this time to pursue the setting up of a Council-run energy switching scheme which he said would not benefit residents who currently found themselves in fuel poverty. He asked if residents undertaking wall or loft insulation improvements to their home could see similar savings. Councillor Ian Dunbar asked whether information on how residents could reduce their energy bills could be made available at the Flintshire Connects Centres.

The Energy Manager agreed that setting up a Council-run scheme at this time would not benefit those residents in greatest need of support and there was a need to encourage those residents to switch energy suppliers in order to get the best tariff available to them. He said that encouraging residents to insulate their homes was a priority for the Council as this would provide a great saving to residents.

Councillor Chris Dolphin voiced his disappointment at the lack of progress to date and raised concerns over the costs outlined within the report which were much higher than other Local Authorities had spent on setting up an energy switching scheme. He asked whether an update on the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Councils pilot could be provided and said that he hoped the pilot would be successful to enable the Council to implement a similar scheme.

The Energy Manager provided an update on the pilot and reported that the Councils had appointed Energy Trust Wales to procure an energy switching agent. If the pilot was successful this would enable the Council to sign up to the scheme early in 2014. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling assured the Committee that a full overview of the scheme would be undertaken following the outcome of the pilot.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked whether the Council had considered submitting a bid to the WG for grant funding to enable an energy switching scheme pilot to be carried out in North Wales, which she said could benefit all residents across Flintshire.

The Director of Environment explained that Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Councils had been successful in receiving the grant as part of the Regional Collaboration Fund. The intention was that, if successful, this could be rolled out across Wales. The grant awarded to North Wales had been fully allocated, including undertaking a review of Public Protection services across the region.

Councillor Haydn Bateman asked if the introduction of smart meters could reduce energy costs. The Energy Manager explained that the introduction of smart meters was due to commence soon. He said that they may have a positive impact as the meters could provide information to suppliers on how residents use their energy.

In summing up, the Chairman said that the Committee were keen to introduce a scheme which would benefit all residents of Flintshire and there was a need for early analysis of the outcomes of the pilot in South Wales. He said that progress had been made but it was felt that this had been slow and that there was a need for officers to ensure that if a scheme was adopted that it was targeted first to those residents most in need of assistance to reduce their energy bills.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That in light of the Medium Term Financial Plan and the acute need for the Council to reduce costs now and into the future, it is not considered appropriate at this time to run such a project; and
- (c) That early analysis of the outcomes of the Pilot in South Wales be reported to the Committee as soon as possible.

28. ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Interim Environmental Protection Manager introduced a report to seek approval of the Environmental Enforcement Policy and statutory powers to deal with abandoned shopping trolleys, under Section 90 and Schedule 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as amended by the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act 2005.

During 2012 the Council's Internal Audit team carried out a review into cleanliness in the public realm and a key recommendation of this audit had been to set out a clear policy direction on enforcement within this area. The Environmental Enforcement Policy explains the Council's approach towards key environmental /Council enforcement issues faced by residents and staff on a daily basis. The Policy is intended to be a reference point to residents, Members and officers instead of having to make contact with several department or areas of the website to find out information.

Councillor David Evans thanked the Interim Environmental Protection Manager for the report but raised concerns regarding residents who continued to dispose of their waste in alleyways even though they had been contacted by officers on numerous occasions. He also raised concern on the length of time

taken to remove the waste and that no action was being taken against any individual. He commented on unsightly properties and asked how this could be tackled if it was not an environmental health issue, and asked what measures were in place to assist elderly residents or families on low income to remove bulky waste from their properties. He also felt that charges set out in the report for collecting, storing and disposing of abandoned trolleys should be increased.

The Interim Environmental Protection Manager acknowledged that taking action against individuals for fly-tipping was difficult to progress due to the need to evidence that the Council had done all it could to educate residents on when their bins are collected and ensuring that they had the most appropriate bin as well as giving them the opportunity to change their behaviour. Only when those steps had been taken could action be taken against an individual. One option currently being considered to tackle fly-tipping was the installation of CCTV, which would provide evidence of fly-tipping, funded through a Welsh Government (WG) grant. The Neighbourhood Policy & Strategy Manager reported that through the bulky waste collection system elderly residents or individuals in receipt of job seekers allowance could get their bulky items collected free of charge. The Director of Environment said that he would review the charges currently set for dealing with abandoned trolleys. If it was felt that this should be increased, the amended charge would be reflected in the Cabinet report.

The Chairman asked how many notices had been served under S215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The Interim Environmental Protection Manager reported that there had been 8 successful notices issued across Flintshire. The Chairman asked that further information on the criteria needed to issue such a notice be provided to the Committee by the Planning Department. Councillor Paul Shotton suggested that derelict/unsightly properties be added to the Committee's forward work programme for consideration at a future meeting.

Councillor Ian Dunbar commented on the age group of individuals who would be approached through the work and corrective action of the Policy and suggested that corrective action should be considered for individuals younger than the age of 16. He asked that information be made available to clarify what was meant by the term 'Alcohol Free Zone' and congratulated the Council on the recent fine issued by the Court for dog fouling.

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling agreed that there was some confusion around the term 'Alcohol Free Zone' and suggested that making information available could be carried out in conjunction with Town and Community Councils. The Interim Environmental Protection Manager explained that where offences were carried out by individuals under the age of 16 the Council would work closely with the Youth Justice Service to signpost the individuals to a range of other services available.

Councillor Mike Reece asked if consideration could be given to allowing the Coastal Rangers to issue tickets to individuals who breached the Policy and also whether Housing Officers could be asked to contact the Enforcement Team if they were aware of properties where refuse bags were being left in gardens of Council properties. The Interim Environmental Protection Manager explained that consideration was being given to providing appropriate training to Council staff who were out and about across Flintshire on a daily basis to issue tickets to

individuals breaching the Policy. He also said that he would liaise with the Head of Housing to ensure that there was an appropriate connection between Housing Officers and the Enforcement Team.

Councillor Ann Minshull raised concern over the number of residents who had not been issued with food waste bags following their request for them. She asked if litter pickers could be provided to the walking group in Shotton and whether the staff collecting litter in Shotton could be re-issued with the handcarts they had previously been using. The Director of Environment agreed to provide the walking group in Shotton with litter pickers and said that he would look into the matter on food waste bags. He reported that the use of handcarts had been piloted for a short time across Flintshire. He said that he would liaise with the Head of Streetscene and provide a response on the outcome of the pilot to the Committee at a future meeting.

Councillor Ray Hughes asked that Local Members be informed when Enforcement Officers would be visiting an area within their Ward. Councillor Colin Legg asked that penalties incurred for leaving mud on the roads could be dealt with sensitively. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling said that where mud had been left on the road the individuals would be approached and advised to clear it up, following this approach, penalties would be incurred if the mud was not cleared.

Councillor Veronica Gay raised concerns on the resources available to implement the Policy and suggested that the Dog-Watch scheme be re-launched following its earlier success. She also raised concern around commercial properties which were in need of repairs and asked how many businesses had accessed the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) scheme. She also asked if an officer from Streetscene could be invited to take part in future Environmental Visual Audits (EVA's) to encourage stronger links between Council departments.

The Interim Environmental Protection Manager commented on the success of the Dog-Watch scheme and consideration was currently being given to resource, deliver and develop the scheme in the future. He noted the suggestion for an officer to take part in future EVA's. The Director of Environment said that he would ask the Economic Development Manager to provide a response to the Committee on the number of businesses that had accessed the ERDF.

In summing up, the Chairman said that the Committee was pleased with the report but that further consultation needed to be carried out with the community to ensure that the Policy was being implemented effectively.

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling thanked Members for their positive comments and said that the Policy would enable the Enforcement Team to be more efficient.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the Environmental Enforcement Policy in Flintshire;

- (b) That the Committee support the statutory powers to deal with abandoned trolleys under Section 99 of Schedule 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and
- (c) That the Director of Environment reviews the proposed charges for the collection, storage and disposal of abandoned trolleys prior to submission of the report to Cabinet.

29. PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Performance Team Leader introduced a report which provided an update on the streamlined and corporate approach to performance reporting.

The Council adopted the Improvement Plan which focuses on the priorities which are going to have the most impact during 2013/14 on 25 June, 2013. The introduction of a new style Improvement Plan had presented the opportunity to review and streamline current reporting arrangements.

The Improvement Priorities were to be monitored by appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committees according to the Priority area of interest. Appendix 1 of the report provided the Committee with a mapping document which showed accountability and reporting lines. In addition to the Improvement Priorities report, twice annually (at quarters 2 and 4) performance highlights reports would be presented from the Heads of Service.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked if performance targets set by the Welsh Government (WG) and Europe would be included in the future performance reports. The Performance Team Leader reported that all statutory performance targets would continue to be included in performance reports.

In response to concerns raised on the format of future performance reports, the Director of Environment advised that the Committee would continue to receive quarterly performance reports with quarters 2 and 4 providing details of performance from each of the Heads of Service. He said that the new way of reporting performance would enable the Committee to challenge the way in which the Directorate were delivering on their Improvement Priorities.

The Chairman suggested that during consideration of the Quarter 1 performance report at the next meeting of the Committee, Members may want to comment on how the information was presented.

RESOLVED:

That the new approach to performance reporting be supported, subject to assessment of how the new style reports are presented at the next meeting of the Committee.

30. ENVIRONMENT FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

Following the Forward Work Programme Planning Workshop held on the 18 July, 2013, the Forward Work Programme had been populated with the items suggested by the Committee. The regular updates on the Deeside Enterprise Zone and Rural Development Plan would now be reported as part of the performance monitoring reports. If the Committee did not feel that this provided enough information then they could be placed back on the Forward Work Programme as separate update reports.

Following consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chair, the Facilitator suggested that a special meeting be held on the 9 October, 2013 to enable the Committee to consider the following reports prior to submission to Cabinet:-

- Improvement Plan Monitoring Report
- Policy for Unadopted Roads
- Policy for the Placement of Highway Street Furniture and other Temporary Obstructions on the Adopted Highway

The Facilitator reported that Mr. John Les Thomas would be attending the 13 November, 2013 to give a presentation on the Mold Food Festival. She suggested that the meeting scheduled for 10 December, 2013 be moved to follow the meeting of the Committee arranged for the morning of 16 December, 2013 to consider the budget proposals. She also advised that representatives of Natural Resources Wales felt that it would be more beneficial to attend a meeting of the Committee in mid 2014 to allow for the new arrangements to bed in.

In conclusion, the Facilitator referred to the 'Mini Scrutiny' session outlined in Appendix 1 of the report and said that in light of the discussions on the Environmental Enforcement Policy earlier in the meeting it appeared inappropriate to hold a session at this time.

Councillor Veronica Gay commented on proposals for an Airport relief road which would run from Queensferry through Sealand and Saltney and asked whether the Council has been consulted on these proposals. The Director of Environment said that he would provide further information on the proposal to the Committee.

Councillor Chris Dolphin commented on earlier discussions and asked when the Committee would receive an update on the pilot energy switching scheme. The Director of Environment hoped to bring an update report to the Committee in early 2014.

Councillor Haydn Bateman asked if a site visit had been arranged for Members of the Committee to visit the new bailer at Alltami. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste & Recycling suggested, that due to the large size of the bailer, it would be appropriate for Members to contact the Head of Streetscene to arrange a site visit individually.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approve the Forward Work Programme including the amendments listed.

31. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.03 pm)

.....
Chairman