

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
3 DECEMBER 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 3 December 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Hilary Isherwood (Chair) for Items 30-33
Councillor David Evans (Vice-Chair) chaired the remainder of the meeting

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Peter Curtis, Chris Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Cindy Hinds, Ray Hughes, Colin Legg, Nancy Matthews, Ann Minshull, Paul Shotton and Carolyn Thomas

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Mike Peers (for Veronica Gay)

APOLOGY: Cabinet Member for Economic Development

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Chris Bithell

CONTRIBUTORS: Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure, Planning Strategy Manager, Senior Planner, Economic Development Manager, Enterprise Manager and Project Manager

Chief Officers for Planning & Environment, Streetscene & Transportation and Community & Enterprise (for minute number 33)

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

30. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair indicated that there would be a slight change in the order of business to bring forward agenda items 6 and 7 to allow the Chief Officers to be present.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Carolyn Thomas declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 6 - Mid Year Chief Officer Performance Reports - due to her association with the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Action Committee, Bionet partnership and Cadwyn Clwyd.

32. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 October 2014 had been circulated with the agenda.

Matters Arising

Minute number 26: 12 Month Progress Report following the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement Measures - Councillor Peter Curtis referred to the information on penalty charges which had been previously circulated and asked for more detail to explain the reasons why the charges had occurred. He also pointed out that civil parking enforcement should take account of the fact that some parking spaces may not be able to accommodate wider vehicles. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) explained about contraventions to on-street parking as opposed to off-street parking which may involve parking across two bays or non-defined areas. He advised that the width of car parking spaces complied with the regulations and would provide a written response to the query raised by Councillor Curtis.

Minute number 27: Improvement Plan Monitoring - in response to a question from Councillor Curtis on food defence work to the riverbank, it was confirmed that diversion work had commenced on the footpaths and cycleways.

RESOLVED:

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

33. MID YEAR CHIEF OFFICER PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The Committee received a report to note and consider the 2014/15 mid year service performance reports produced at Chief Officer level for their respective portfolios covering the period April to September 2014. The Chief Officers each gave a short presentation on performance, outlining work which had been undertaken to improve performance and areas where improvement was needed, as outlined within the report.

Streetscene & Transportation

Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to an overspend of £149K reported at Month 5 due to additional overtime costs and use of agency workers as a result of vacancies within Waste Disposal & Collection Services. Having raised concerns at the recent Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, she felt that this should have been followed up by Cabinet and reported back to this Committee. She sought assurance that resources were not being diverted to Waste Disposal & Collection at the detriment of other Streetscene services, such as drainage and grass cutting, as this would present further problems. Councillor Thomas also commented on the potential for Town and Community Councils to be offered an opportunity to assume responsibility of grass cutting services in view of the current budgetary pressures.

The Chief Officer explained that following a realignment of the budget, teams within Streetscene were now generic, operating from a single depot and that despite some minor budget adjustments such as the example given, the services were being delivered as before. He pointed out that the £149K overspend was not significant given the overall budget and gave assurance that the adjustment was not at the expense of other Streetscene services but would be accounted for by the allocation of staffing and depot overhead costs across

the service. He asked if any particular concerns on areas of the service could be reported to him but went on to say that there were now more employees in the service than before and that the work was being undertaken in line with the standards set by Members of this Committee.

In response to other queries, the Chief Officer explained that work on 'The Nant' had been awaiting clearance of the river and that information would be emailed to all Members on the consultation exercise on local transport priorities, with a link to the Regional Transport Plan. A drop-in event would also be held on 15 December 2014 at Mold Town Hall to view the priorities for Flintshire. On Highways, it was clarified that Welsh Government (WG) funding had been available for prudential borrowing, however this funding ended this year, which represented a risk to the condition of the highway network. The centralising of Streetscene winter maintenance operations at the Alltami Depot would enable more effective control of services and there would be a future report to the Committee on new arrangements for the Council's Household Recycling Centres.

Due to Members' concerns around changes in Area Supervisors, the Chief Officer provided explanation on the need to balance service need and the expectations of individuals who had applied for voluntary redundancy. He gave assurance that this was being closely managed and that those Members whose wards were affected would be advised by email by the end of the week of the interim arrangements. The Chair suggested that the Chief Officer liaise with Councillor Thomas on her concerns around availability of teams.

Following concerns raised by Councillor Mike Peers around the lack of notification from WG on infraction charges, it was agreed that no action should be taken at present as the Chief Officer was due to meet with WG representatives. Clarification was given on the door-knocking exercise carried out in areas where low participation of food waste had been identified. Councillor Nancy Matthews said that Members had been told of an increase in food waste participation following this exercise.

In response to queries, the Chief Officer provided explanation on the final phase of the Fleet Review for the procurement of a single contract including a service level agreement for vehicles.

He advised that local Streetscene issues should continue to be reported to the contact number of the relevant Area Supervisor.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the success of the traffic light synchronisation in Deeside and thanked officers for the site visit to the food waste recycling facility at Rhuallt and for the provision of overspill car parking at Talacre. In relation to the 'van ban' at six of the recycling sites, this had been instigated to address the volume of trade waste at sites and had resulted in an increase in residents' waste recycling. It was noted that travel time through the Deeside corridor had substantially reduced following the synchronisation work.

Councillor Peter Curtis welcomed the introduction of improved street lighting which he felt covered a wider area. In response to comments on the installation process, the Chief Officer explained the necessity of this due to the involvement of other parties in replacing supply cables. Around 2,000 street

lights had been replaced in the programme to date, mainly funded by WG, however again there was uncertainty around future funding.

Following reports from Councillor Cindy Hinds about issues with street lighting and potholes, the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Environment asked that these be reported directly to the Area Supervisors or alternatively referred to himself or the Chief Officer to investigate.

In response to comments around the change in Area Supervisors and the voluntary redundancy policy, the Chief Officer referred to the financial pressures and the need to make alternative arrangements to meet the wishes of individuals who wished to leave the Council. Concerning further remarks, the Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure said that finalising the structure would avoid the need to revisit again in a year's time.

Following comments from the Deputy Leader, Councillor Matthews said it was her understanding that no area would be exempt from cuts and efficiencies. The Deputy Leader responded by saying that elements of statutory services such as Social Services and Education must be retained and therefore decisions had to be made on savings elsewhere.

Concerning comments from Councillor Chris Dolphin, the Chief Officer said that the footway resurfacing programme was available on the Council's website and would check that sufficient cover was in place at recycling centres over lunchtime periods.

Councillor Haydn Bateman queried the drop in risk score for fleet operations. The Chief Officer said that this represented a single example relating to an issue with vehicle markers and that the process would not allow a return to 'Green' status for two years. He went on to refer to a recent audit of the methods in place for recycling sales and the sharing of best practice with an all-Wales group. On the proposed changes at UPM Shotton, the Chief Officer said that the current contracts were not under threat.

Planning & Environment

In response to queries raised by Councillor Ian Dunbar, the Chief Officer (Planning & Environment) advised that the results of the Local Development Plan (LDP) candidate site process were due to be reported to the Planning Strategy Group and that the outcome of planning permission for the Deeside Solar Farm was awaiting the signing of a Unilateral Undertaking for the generation of energy to UPM Shotton.

On the areas of concern highlighted in the report, Councillor Mike Peers made reference to delayed responses to questions and concerns raised by Members. The Chief Officer gave assurances that he would be analysing the evidence currently being collated by the Democracy & Governance Manager to establish any trends. Councillor Peers drew attention to the slight downturn in the percentage of enforcement cases resolved within 12 weeks and following a recent incident, suggested that slow progress on follow-up action may be a contributory factor. The Chief Officer referred to the impact of an employee's long-term absence and said that detail on closed cases (where no follow-up

action was required) had previously been reported to the Committee. He said that the situation would be monitored and that officers were working on information for Members on active cases within their wards.

The Chief Officer also advised Members of changes to performance indicators proposed by WG as part of the emerging Planning Bill.

Councillor Thomas stressed the importance of providing cover for departments deploying agile working. In response to queries, the Chief Officer provided clarification on Wrexham Council's departure from the Minerals & Waste shared regional service and said that an update on the Flintshire Coastal Path would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

Concerning resources in Building Control, the Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure said that income streams were dependent on developments proceeding.

In response to a question from Councillor Bateman, information was given on the joint post of Ranger between the Council and the Amphibian Reptile Conservation Unit.

Councillor Curtis made reference to errors in the 'project closure report' which had been circulated to Members.

Community & Enterprise

Councillor Shotton welcomed the positive outcomes from the report such as the Council house building programme, and thanked the Green Team for work on enhancing areas of the county.

Information was sought by Councillor Thomas on a Flintshire Connects centre for Mold. The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) said that this was under the remit of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee and would discuss further outside the meeting.

The Chief Officer suggested that a report on the success of Flintshire Business Week 2014 could be brought to the meeting in February 2014.

In response to comments from Councillor Dunbar, the Economic Development Manager spoke of the country-wide challenges around high street regeneration. He said that opportunities were there for businesses to benefit from local industry and new housing developments and that the programme of work included early intervention steps such as helping to improve shop frontages, utilising empty space above shops and improving the physical appearance of areas for commercial investment. The Enterprise Manager gave an update on progress with the rollout of Superfast Broadband across Wales with the aim for Flintshire to be 97% enabled by Spring 2015.

Councillors Matthews and Thomas highlighted the importance of Broadband access in all areas of the county as opposed to a 'hit and miss' approach. The Enterprise Manager spoke of regular communication channels with BT and the identification of areas where Broadband support was most

needed. She agreed to discuss further with her contact at BT and would email this contact information to Councillor Dolphin as requested.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the Cabinet Member and officers be invited to take away the comments and provide responses; and
- (c) That the comments/observations of the Committee are fed back to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of performance.

34. QUARTER 2 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORTS

The Committee received a report to note and consider elements of the 2014/15 Improvement Plan Monitoring Report relevant to the Committee for the period July to September 2014.

The responsible officers each gave a short presentation on performance within each of the sub-priority areas, highlighting work which had been undertaken to improve performance and areas where improvement was needed, as outlined within each report.

Business Sector Growth in Deeside

The Chairman sought explanation for timetable slippage on work to the flood alleviation scheme for the Northern Gateway Masterplan. The Planning Strategy Manager explained that this was due to the slower technique used on piling.

Town and Rural Regeneration

No queries were raised.

Social Enterprise

As a further update, the Project Manager reported on the effectiveness of sub-group arrangements and activities of the social enterprise local network.

Councillor Shotton spoke positively about the social enterprise event held at Coleg Cambria and commented on the £30K of grant funding. The Project Manager advised that availability of this funding - which had recently been publicised through social media - had now been extended beyond March 2015.

Traffic and Road Management

Following comments made by Councillor Mike Peers on the implementation of 20 mph zones and yellow lines, the Deputy Leader said that the Council had written to all schools and that schools had been given a high priority on the list of highway improvements endorsed by Cabinet.

Councillor Curtis highlighted problems with parking at Ysgol Gwenffrwd and asked if this could be looked at. The Cabinet Member agreed to take this on board.

Transport Infrastructure and Services

No queries were raised.

Carbon Control and Reduction

In the absence of Chief Officers, the Deputy Leader asked that any queries be emailed to him.

RESOLVED:

That the comments/observations of the Committee are fed back to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of performance.

35. HERITAGE BUILDINGS

The Planning Strategy Manager introduced a report to raise awareness of the issues, options and approaches involved in the management and protection of heritage assets by the Council's Built Conservation team and to endorse the principle of the development of a Local Heritage Strategy.

As part of the background detail, information was provided on the different types of heritage assets and the classification of listed buildings/ structures. A survey utilising funding from Cadw had determined which listed buildings were at risk and to what extent. The last survey undertaken in 2011 had identified 133 buildings/structures in Flintshire to be at risk, some of which posed more significant concern than others, together with a further 136 which were deemed 'vulnerable'.

As reflected in the mid-year performance report, the Planning Strategy Manager referred to concerns around the implications of the Heritage Bill in respect of additional responsibilities for Local Authorities, with no clarity given on resources and funding. Despite the financial challenges, the report reflected positive elements in terms of resources and the proactive approach being taken by the Built Conservation team towards the protection and preservation of buildings at risk. The departure of one employee following acceptance of a voluntary redundancy request meant that two qualified conservation officers remained in the team: this level of expertise was considered sufficient in comparison to other North Wales Authorities. Within the aims of the service, the development of a Local Heritage Strategy would bring together components which were already in place.

The Senior Planner delivered a presentation showing photographs of the case study 'at risk' examples listed in the report and describing actions taken.

In referring to the challenges around funding, Councillor Mike Peers suggested alternative routes such as charging for services/expertise and seeking contributions from Town and Community Councils who may consider these local assets to be of importance. He added that the listed buildings/ structures could be categorised according to their importance within the county to target funding where it was most needed.

In recognition of the pressures on Local Authorities, the Planning Strategy Manager stated the intention was to look at charging options as well as continuing to pursue funding bids and identify innovative ways of exploring other sources of funding, eg Cadwyn Clwyd and building preservation trusts. He went on to say that a pragmatic approach would need to be taken to the possible de-listing of some buildings and that there was potential for discussions with Town and Community Councils on contributions or community working initiatives.

Councillor Peter Curtis felt it was important to allocate the limited funding on projects which were considered viable.

In response to queries raised by Councillor Haydn Bateman on the Bathhouse in Cilcain, the Planning Strategy Manager explained that there was no economical viable use for conversion and that Section 106 monies could not be utilised in this case. On a further query, he advised that different legislation covered the protection of ancient hedgerows.

The Chair said it was important to recognise the amount of heritage assets within Flintshire.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the report be noted and the Built Conservation service outcomes listed in paragraph 3.16 be endorsed; and
- (b) That the development of a Local Heritage Strategy for Flintshire be supported.

36. MERSEY DEE ALLIANCE

The Enterprise Manager provided an update on recent activity of the Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) since last reported in June 2014. She gave examples of the events supported by the MDA including for the Economic Ambition Board (EAB) and reported on the expansion of the MDA Board membership. The engagement of a company to produce a prospectus had resulted in a number of useful recommendations which were being taken forward. The report detailed the main areas of focus for the business plan including a number of operational priorities. It was also reported that Denbighshire County Council had declared plans to withdraw membership from the MDA with effect from April 2015.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the approach taken by MDA and noted the increased attendance at Flintshire Business Week 2014 which provided opportunity for networking. He asked about the allocation of spend on the MDA

budget and suggested that the Chair of the Deeside Enterprise Zone Board be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas pointed out that the Chair had already agreed to attend a joint meeting of the Lifelong Learning and Community Profile & Partnerships Committee in February 2014. The Facilitator advised that the former Chair of the Board had been unavailable to attend a previous meeting of the Committee but that an invitation could be extended to the current Chair.

In response to queries from Councillor Thomas, it was clarified that the EAB was now chaired by different members and involved more workstreams whereas the MDA had identified skills and transport as the key priority areas. It was suggested that future meetings involve representatives from EAB with the MDA to promote joined-up thinking.

Councillor Peter Curtis spoke of the need for Welsh Government to recognise the importance of the MDA.

Councillor Colin Legg suggested that the report be re-introduced at the next meeting of the Committee due to a number of Members having left the meeting early. It was pointed out that updates were scheduled on a six monthly basis and that progress on the MDA was also covered under performance reporting.

RESOLVED:

That the report and the value of the Mersey Dee Alliance to the successful development of the Flintshire economy be noted.

37. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Environment & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced a report to enable the Committee to consider the Forward Work Programme. The following changes were agreed:

- Update on the Flintshire Coastal Path to be reported to the next meeting on 14 January 2014 (as suggested earlier in the meeting).
- Report on breakdown of costs for Waste and Recycling Services to be included on the Forward Work Programme, following concerns raised at the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- Item on the success of Flintshire Business Week 2014 to be reported to the meeting on 11 February 2014 (as suggested earlier).
- The Facilitator to liaise with the Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) to request a briefing note to the Committee on the Blue Badge scheme.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be updated accordingly.

38. **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 12.55 pm)

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Chair