

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 JULY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Friday, 10 July 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Veronica Gay (Chair)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Ron Davies, Glenys Diskin, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Cindy Hinds, Ray Hughes, Hilary Isherwood, Brian Lloyd, Nancy Matthews and Paul Shotton

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillors: Andy Dunbobbin for Joe Johnson, Mike Peers for Colin Legg and Ian Dunbar for Ann Minshull

ALSO PRESENT:

Initiators of the Call-In

Councillors: Dave Healey and Tim Newhouse (not already Members of the Committee)

Councillors: Clive Carver and David Wisinger as observers

CONTRIBUTORS:

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure, Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) and Waste & Ancillary Services Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager, Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

16. CONSIDERATION OF A MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE CALL IN ARRANGEMENTS

The Member Engagement Manager explained the procedure for the Call-in of a Cabinet decision.

17. HOPE HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING CENTRE

The Member Engagement Manager referred to the Call-in to the decision of the Cabinet from its meeting held on 23 June 2015 relating to Hope Household Recycling Centre. The Call-In notice had been signed by five Members of the Council. To assist Members, the following documents had been circulated with the agenda:-

- (a) A copy of the procedure for dealing with a called-in item.

- (b) A copy of the report considered by Cabinet on 23 June 2015
- (c) A copy of the Cabinet Record of Decision No. 3204
- (d) A copy of the Call-in notice signed by Councillors Hilary Isherwood, Tim Newhouse, Cindy Hinds, David Williams and Dave Healey.

The Member Engagement Manager explained the procedure for a Call-in meeting and detailed the four options available to the Committee.

The Chair invited the Call-in signatories to address the Committee. Councillor Hilary Isherwood, as the first of the signatories, queried whether the Committee Members had received the correspondence submitted by protesters Jacqueline Hurst and Dr. Rachel Parsonage. Copies were obtained and circulated to the Committee Members and the decision makers, who were represented by the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Environment and the Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure.

Councillor Isherwood detailed the reasons for the Call-in which were that the signatories felt that the data was flawed, that an unrealistic timeline had been set and that answers on certain issues such as rubble, had not been provided. It was suggested that information on data analysis had been requested but had not been forthcoming despite a Freedom of Information Act request. Councillor Isherwood also indicated that the correspondence from the protesters reported that they had been advised by the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) and Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure that the only option to retain the site was for the community to take it over. However, a cost benefit analysis had not been received but details of footfall and running costs of the site had been provided by the Waste & Ancillary Services Manager. Councillor Isherwood felt that the footfall figures were incorrect and that the number of visitors was nearer to 24,000 rather than the figure provided.

Councillor David Williams, who was one of the signatories but had been unable to attend this meeting, had requested a breakdown of the reported £200,000 savings per annum; it was suggested that this information had also been requested by the Clerk of Penyffordd Community Council but this had not been provided. Councillor Isherwood also referred to £3m funding from Welsh Government for recycling for the whole of Wales and said that details had not been provided on why rubble could not be collected at Hope Recycling Centre.

It was reported that meetings had been held with the Cabinet Member, Chief Officer and local County Council members but Councillor Isherwood disagreed that all those present had been in agreement about the suggested proposals for the sustainability of the site. She felt that the Community had been left with no choice but to consider a Community Asset Transfer.

Councillor Isherwood referred to the consultation exercise undertaken from August 2014 and a meeting of Llanfynydd Community Council in February 2015 where the Chief Officer had been asked if the Hope Recycling Centre was to be closed, and had responded that it was not to close. She indicated that the Clerk of Llanfynydd Community Council had submitted a complaint as it had been felt that details of the possible closure had been known by the Chief Officer at the time of the meeting in February 2015. Councillor Isherwood also felt that the timelines detailed in paragraph 3.04 were inadequate as information requested by the Community Council had not been forthcoming. The Community Councils had already set their precept for 2015/16 and it would therefore not be possible to consider taking over the site from January 2016, as suggested, as there was insufficient information to prepare a business case.

Councillor Tim Newhouse suggested that there were three possible options for the site:-

1. Flintshire County Council continue to run the site
2. A Community Asset Transfer takes place
3. The Recycling Centre closes

On Community Asset Transfer, Councillor Newhouse confirmed that a meeting had taken place with the Cabinet Member, Chief Officer and Community Council representatives. Following that meeting, an email had been sent requesting six months of figures for weekend only opening of the site to allow the Community Council to consider whether the proposal was feasible. If it was, the proposals could be discussed and the precept could be set accordingly for 2016/17 and the site could be taken over from April 2016. He felt that the suggestion from Cabinet that community groups submit an Expression of Interest based on 14 days figures was inadequate and reiterated his earlier comment that it would be more appropriate for six months of figures up to the end of January 2016 be provided. However, if it was felt that the transfer was not sustainable, then the site could be closed. He added that the figures provided when the site operated seven days a week would not be the same as the details required when the site would be for weekend/recycling only and closed for the remainder of the week.

Councillor Cindy Hinds felt that Hope recycling centre had been unfairly compared with other sites because it was not able to collect soil and rubble like the other sites. However, it was reported that estimated recycling levels were similar at Hope, Connah's Quay, Flint and Buckley. She felt that a rural impact assessment should be undertaken and referred to the information commented on earlier by Councillor Isherwood from Doctor Rachel Parsonage that the details that had been provided by the Council were inaccurate. Councillor Hinds said that the previous Administration had earmarked the Hope Recycling Centre for closure but queried whether this was still required because of the £3m funding provided to Councils by Welsh Government (WG) for recycling. She hoped that Flintshire County Council could keep the site open for six to 12 months to allow any interested parties to establish whether it was a viable option and to consider drawing up a business plan. Councillor

Hinds added that if the site did close, the employees that worked there would be made redundant.

In echoing the comments made by the other signatories of the Call-in, Councillor Dave Healey drew attention to the issue of rubble which was collected at Connah's Quay and Flint but not at Hope. He felt that this meant that the figures for Hope were not comparable with the other sites and suggested that this could make a difference of 27% in the efficiency figures provided and that a reconsideration of the proposals was therefore justified. He commented on the impact of the austerity measures imposed by Westminster and spoke of the cumulative effect on rural communities of the cuts for Flintshire of £52.8m. He suggested that closing the recycling centre would result in underdevelopment in rural communities. Councillor Healey felt that a complete overview of the impact of individual communities as a result of the cuts should be known and suggested that the imposed cuts could result in residents moving away from rural areas and the closure of local services such as shops and schools. He suggested an alternative recommendation that this Committee recommend to Cabinet that a Task and Finish Group be established by the Organisational Change Overview & Scrutiny Committee to monitor the impact on individual Flintshire wards that were most at risk as a result of the austerity measures.

In response to the comment made by Councillor Isherwood that the Chief Officer had stated in a meeting in February 2015 that the Hope Recycling Centre was not to close, the Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure indicated that at that stage a decision to close sites had not been made as the budget process had not been concluded. Workshops had been held in March 2015 where Members had been advised of the specific details regarding the closure of Hope Recycling Centre. He reminded the Committee that the site had been earmarked for closure under the previous Administration but added that at that stage, the Council was not facing the current financial pressures that it now faced. He commented on the distances that residents would be required to travel to alternative sites if Hope Recycling Centre did close and said that residents in Gronant and Trelawnyd areas faced greater travelling distances than those to the alternative sites to Hope. Councillor Jones referred to the meeting held with Higher Kinnerton Community Council where the proposal for weekend opening only was accepted but that they were not in a position to take over the management of the site but could provide personnel at the site. This proposal was considered to be acceptable but would not make the initial savings identified. Weekend/recycling only at Hope was to take place until September 2015 but the Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure advised that this could be extended to January 2016 to allow discussions to take place.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) said that the decision to close Hope Recycling Centre had not been taken lightly and had been as a result of a number of contributing factors to undertake a review of the Household Recycling Centres. He said that he would not have indicated that closure of the site was not being considered if he had known that it was

included in the proposals. The Chief Officer said that community groups who may be interested in considering putting forward an expression of interest had been invited to attend a meeting where the requested details had been given. A Technical Team had been in attendance to assess the footfall on the site but on four out of 56 days, the data for the last four hours had not been counted. To take account of this, data from the busiest days had been added which resulted in a total footfall of 24,000 which was half the amount at Flint Recycling Centre. The Chief Officer explained that there was no room at the site in Hope for a skip for rubble but based on a similar size site, if a figure for rubble was included, this would increase the figure for recycling levels from 50% to 57%. He added that to include a rubble skip would require the redesigning of the site and the removal of some of the other skips which would result in an overall reduction in recycling levels.

On the issue of the £3m from WG, Flintshire County Council had been successful in a bid for funding and had received £519k for different types of vehicles for rural locations. This was not money available to protect elements of the existing service. The site was on the fringe of a landfill site and would be costly to extend and a business case would not be viable. The Chief Officer spoke of the lengthy meetings which had been held with six Community Councils. He reminded Members that the site was currently still open for seven days a week and that figures had been provided based on a 12 month period for collection and value of the materials to allow interested parties to decide if they wanted to take the proposals forward; they had also been advised that there would be a need to increase recycling rates. He added that the staff at Hope Recycling Centre would not be made redundant as they would be redeployed to posts that were currently being filled by agency staff.

Councillor Nancy Matthews indicated that the proposals to close the site during the previous administration were taken at the same time as the kerbside recycling service was improved. She felt that the site at Hope was too small to be able to offer the up to date service provided by the Greenfield centre. Councillor Paul Shotton recognised that the proposals raised were emotive but reminded Members of the unprecedented cuts imposed on the authority. The number of sites was higher in Flintshire than any other county in Wales. He queried whether the residents that used Hope Recycling Centre could visit the site at Brymbo and commented on the increase in house building in the area which he felt would not result in the necessary increase in footfall to the site. Councillor Shotton asked if there had been any expressions of interest for a Community Asset Transfer. In response, the Chief Officer said that Wrexham County Borough Council had been formally notified of the proposal to close Hope Recycling Centre but it be signposted for residents to use the sites at Mold or Buckley rather than the facility at Brymbo. Councillor Isherwood explained that she had always been vehemently opposed to the closure of the site at Hope and her opinion had not changed.

In referring to the table on page 15 which detailed the recycling performance for all of the sites in Flintshire, Councillor Peers said that the

Hope site had been compared with sites in urban areas. He concurred that figures were needed to allow interested parties to consider whether a Community Asset Transfer was a viable option. He referred to the value of the recycling products received at the site being passed onto the new operating organisations and queried whether the value should have been used to offset the cost of £200k as this did not appear to be the case. He felt that closing the site completely would not encourage recycling and suggested that collaboration by the six Community Councils to operate the site should be considered and that the site should continue to operate until this suggestion had been explored.

Councillor Chris Dolphin felt that Community Asset Transfer was the way forward for this site and added that the recommendation put forward by Councillor Healey should be considered by County Council. He spoke of underdevelopment of rural communities and of the village hall that was run by residents of Whitford. He suggested that the proposals to close this site could have an impact on the future of the sites at Connah's Quay and Flint which had similar recycling levels to Hope. Councillor Dolphin felt that the opportunity should be given to community groups to keep the site open at no cost to Flintshire County Council.

The Chair allowed a member of the public, Mr. B. McManus, to address the Committee. He said that he was not directly affected by the closure of the site but that he had a background in recycling. He raised concern at the erosion of public services and suggested that adequate time to gather all of the information was needed. He offered to work on putting a proposal together if required.

Councillor Ron Davies said that the cuts were being imposed on the Council and suggested that closure of the site would not have been considered by AD Waste. Councillor Haydn Bateman queried whether there was sufficient capacity at Mold Recycling Centre to take the extra waste currently received at Hope. The Waste & Ancillary Services Manager confirmed that there was capacity at Mold and Buckley sites.

Councillor Tim Newhouse said that the figures that were required for six months were for the running of the site as a weekend/recycling only centre and therefore were not yet available as the site was currently open for seven days per week. He suggested that opening for recycling/weekends only should commence as soon as possible to allow figures to be obtained so that Community Councils could consider their options. Councillor Dolphin proposed option 3 to refer the decision back to the decision maker, which was duly seconded. The Chief Officer responded that figures had been provided but the figures for recycling/weekend only were not yet available as the site was currently open for seven days per week. He also confirmed that the value of materials had been taken account of when calculating the operational savings figure of £200k.

Councillor Glenys Diskin sought clarification on the cost of operating the site for recycling at weekends only and asked whether this proposal would

include Flintshire County Council meeting the remaining costs. The Cabinet Member commented on the proposal by Higher Kinnerton Community Council that they would provide volunteers to be at the site at weekends with all other costs being met by the Council. On the point raised by Councillor Peers, the Cabinet Member explained that all six Community Councils had been approached to take over the site but only one had replied positively to the proposals. He also confirmed that Flint and Connah's Quay could also be at risk of closure in the future based on the reported recycling rates and added that Welsh Government had indicated for some time that there were too many recycling centres in Flintshire.

In response to a question from Councillor Matthews, the Chief Officer advised that the cost for staff for seven days per week was £90k per annum.

The Chair raised concern that footfall at a rural site was being compared to urban sites and asked whether it was possible to provide the six month figures that were being requested. She also sought clarification on whether a joint meeting had been set up between the six Community Councils affected by the closure of Hope Recycling Centre. In response, the Cabinet Member said that the invitation had been extended but had not been taken up.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin raised concern about the recommendation being put forward by Councillor Healey. In response, Councillor Healey said that he felt it was important to consider the combined impact of the austerity measures on individual communities as currently matters were considered as separate agenda items at separate meetings. Councillor Shotton said that Members represented their respective areas but decisions were made for the benefit of the whole of Flintshire. Councillor Peers suggested that the recommendation by Councillor Healey should be submitted as a Notice of Motion to Full Council and debated accordingly.

Councillor Isherwood suggested that seven months figures be provided as Community Councils did not meet in August. In referring to the comments of Mr. McManus, she said that she had not been aware that community groups other than Community Councils could put forward proposals to take over the site. Councillor Newhouse reiterated his earlier request for six months figures for weekend/recycling only which would then allow Town & Community Councils to consider the issue in January 2016 and set the precept accordingly if they felt that the proposal could be taken forward from April 2016.

In response to the comments made, the Cabinet Member said that the process to consider the proposals had commenced in March 2015 and that the request for a longer timeline had been taken on board. He confirmed that no Expressions of Interest had been received and added that a large amount of information had been provided to Community Councils. He said that if figures for six months were only provided once the site became weekend/recycling only then this would result in the site being open for longer than currently proposed and would mean savings would need to be found

from other budgets to retain the opening of the site in Hope whilst the figures were considered by Community Councils or groups.

Councillor Shotton proposed option 1 which was duly seconded. He was advised by the Member Engagement Manager that option 3 had already been proposed and seconded and that would have to be voted on before another option could be considered.

In response to a query from Councillor Davies about whether it would cost an additional £100k if the site remained open for another six months, the Chief Officer advised that this would be based on the current arrangements and that the saving would be more if the site was only open at weekends.

Councillor Newhouse suggested the following recommendation:-

‘That Cabinet approves the closure of the site on 28 February 2016 should no expressions of interest be received or at a date between 1 March and 27 March 2016, if there is no evidence during the period that the expression of interest received is likely to progress.’

On being put to the vote, option 3 was lost. On being put to the vote, the proposal to accept option 1 was carried; the decision could therefore be implemented.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the decision, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the explanation that it had received and therefore the decision could be implemented.

18. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were three members of the public and two members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 11.34 am)

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Chair