

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
3 DECEMBER 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Wepre Park Visitor Centre, Wepre Park, Wepre Drive, Connah's Quay, Flintshire on Thursday, 3 December 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Veronica Gay (Chair)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Ron Davies, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Brian Lloyd, Nancy Matthews, Ann Minshull and Paul Shotton

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Paul Cunningham (for Joe Johnson), Ian Dunbar (for Cindy Hinds), Mike Peers (for Colin Legg) and David Williams (for Ray Hughes)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Hilary Isherwood and Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Kevin Jones, Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure; Chief Officer, Planning & Environment; Chief Officer, Streetscene; Senior Rights of Way Officer and Rights of Way Officer

Mr. Nick Thomas, Operations Manager (North East Wales) and Anthony Randles, Team Leader, Natural Resource Management (Wrexham and Flintshire) of Natural Resources Wales

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

40. WEPRE PARK

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Committee received a presentation from Sarah Jeffery, the Heritage Lottery Fund Project Manager, on the history of Wepre Park and various projects undertaken.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

42. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2015 were submitted.

Accuracy

Minute number 37: Review of the consultation process for introducing traffic calming and other highway traffic and safety features on the highway -

Councillor Ron Davies clarified that his concerns about 'rat runs' related to Higher Shotton and not Connah's Quay.

Matters Arising

Minute number 35: Minutes of previous meeting - Councillor Paul Shotton reported that monthly meetings were being held of the Task Group set up to look at problems with fly tipping in the Golftyn ward and along the Deeside strip.

RESOLVED:

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

43. NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

The Chair introduced Nick Thomas and Anthony Randles of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and invited them to deliver a presentation on the work of NRW in Flintshire. The main features of the presentation were:

- Who we are
- Our purpose
- Landowner and Land Manager
- Outdoor Recreation
- Designating Authority
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Flintshire
- Flintshire Coastal Tourism Potential Challenges
- Potential for a Dee Estuary Regional Park
- Species Management / Alien Species Legislative Update
- Fisheries Management
- Partnership Work
- Water Framework Directive
- Environmental Regulation
- Incident Management
- Fly Tipping
- The River Dee
- Flood Risk Management
- Environmental Bill

Mr. Thomas spoke about the wide remit of NRW and described Flintshire as unique in terms of the urban areas and significant wildlife interest. During an overview of partnership work, he highlighted the role of the Halkyn Mountain Ranger and close links between NRW and the Countryside team on improvements to the Wales coastal path. He cited the potential for joint working on a possible Dee Estuary Regional Park which would not only be an opportunity to enhance recreation but could also help to benefit the environment (ie removal of eyesores) which in turn could improve employment opportunities

(eg tourism, light industry etc) and hence improve the prospects for the Estuary's communities. However, he raised concerns about the annual joint working partnership with the Countryside and Environment service in view of the intention by Welsh Government (WG) to allocate funding to local authorities through the Revenue Support Grant. He also advised that more funding would be required to support the Dee Invasive Project to tackle various invasive species and that officers were currently considering the implications of the European Directive.

Mr. Randles provided explanation on the setup of his team and gave an update on progress with the second cycle of the Water Framework Directive. He spoke about a range of improvements which had been carried out on the River Alyn, together with the various workstreams covered by Environmental Regulations.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the potential for more improvements at Wepre Park and the idea of a Dee Estuary Regional Park. He asked about the emphasis on more partnership working and the impact on NRW in relation to the Euro funding available for rural communities. Mr. Thomas spoke about eligible areas under the Rural Development Plan, the need to submit bids at an early stage and the commitment from NRW to work in partnership to deliver objectives. In response to a question on cockling, he said that the beds were opened between July and December, and explained the consequences from the difficult conditions this year which had resulted in low stocks and the potential impact on next year. On the Coastal Defence Survey, he shared concerns about the erosion of sand dunes at Talacre, but highlighted the challenges of resolving this satisfactorily, as evidenced previously. On the subject of fracking, explanation was given on the role of NRW in issuing licences which met the necessary criteria with consideration of the implications and impact on surrounding areas. On another matter, it was stated that funding had been allocated to support the control and management of invasive species in Flintshire including Bagillt.

In response to comments about the potential for flooding in Talacre, Mr. Randles agreed to pass these and any other similar issues to his colleagues responsible for flood management. The Facilitator explained that whilst flooding was within the Terms of Reference of the Committee, the Emergency Planning Manager had not been invited to the meeting as Emergency Planning and Civil Contingencies was under the remit of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This prompted comments from Councillor Kevin Jones who referred to the flood warning scheme and asked whether the funding allocated to flood management over the past ten years had achieved successful outcomes. Mr. Randles agreed to pursue a response for the Committee and also agreed to feedback comments from Councillor Ron Davies on the bad smell from the sewage plant in Queensferry.

Following a question on fly tipping, Mr. Randles explained that the protocol between NRW and North Wales local authorities provided clarity on responsibilities. He gave examples of larger issues on private or public land which would be dealt with by NRW, whereas smaller tips on Council owned or

private land would be under the remit of the local authority. The individual landowner would be responsible for the removal of the material and NRW had powers to serve notice and prosecute if necessary.

Councillor Brian Lloyd commented on the need to target invasive species more effectively to prevent regrowth. Mr. Thomas said that the aim was to focus on those species considered to be a more significant problem. He added that Canadian Pondweed tended to be more localised than Himalayan Balsam or Japanese Knotweed, and that a licence was required to use pesticides with the preferred option for volunteers to pull out the weeds. As stated during the presentation, major improvements had been made on the upper part of the River Alyn with work continuing downstream.

The Chair asked if a list of hotspot areas for invasive species could be circulated to all Members to generate assistance from local volunteer groups. Mr. Randles said that the presentation slide on invasive species included a link to access information on the Dee Invasive Project. A link to the presentation was available to all Members on the Council's website and a link to the report on alien invasive species would also be circulated by NRW.

Councillor Mike Peers asked about the likelihood of NRW achieving its objectives under the Environmental Bill in the absence of any additional funding. Mr. Thomas explained that the full implications were not yet known as the Bill was not due to be granted Royal Assent until Spring 2016. This was aligned to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and both pieces of legislation were significant in affecting all public bodies in terms of workload.

In response to a question from Councillor Jones, Mr. Thomas explained that funding from NRW to support the joint working partnership with the Countryside and Environment services (currently £37,900) was reducing year on year. It was understood that this element would in future be included within the Revenue Support Grant given to the Council. Mr. Thomas said that WG would need to clarify if any restrictions were to be attached to this element to avoid it being diverted to other services.

The Chair thanked the NRW representatives for their presentation and for responding to the questions raised.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

44. COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (CAMS)

The Senior Rights of Way Officer shared information on the Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) which had been used by the Council's Rights of Way team for almost 20 years to record rights of way issues reported by the public.

The Rights of Way Officer gave a demonstration of CAMS web, the internet-enabled module for reporting faults on public rights of way which was accessed via a link on the Council's website. New users were required to register their details to access the system and could then select specific areas from the digital map on which to input data on the issue they wished to raise, such as reporting obstructions, fly tipping etc. Since its launch in 2014, a number of improvements had been made to the system and a further update in the New Year would resolve some outstanding problems such as updating community areas and enabling progress to be automatically sent to the user who had reported the problem. In the meantime, users were able to track progress of their raised issues via the unique reference number generated by the system. Feedback from user sessions held with the Flintshire Local Access Forum and other relevant groups had been passed to the developers to improve the system, and the intention now was to raise awareness of the system with small groups of Members.

Councillor Chris Dolphin asked about the number of people who had used the system and raised concerns about the outstanding problems, including response times, which he felt would discourage users. He also took the opportunity to express his appreciation for the work done on footpaths by Jon Hill. The Senior Rights of Way Officer said that the forthcoming update would resolve these problems and that over 150 people had raised issues through various sources including the CAMS web.

During discussion on footpath numbers, it was confirmed that these could be viewed by selecting a particular footpath on the digital map. The Senior Rights of Way Officer also advised the Committee that the display of footpath numbers on public footpaths was currently being phased in.

In response to the comments made, the Chief Officer for Planning & Environment acknowledged that the system was not yet finished and was awaiting the update. He reiterated that the trial sessions with user groups had resulted in various changes to the system being implemented by the developer.

Following a request by Councillor Dolphin, officers agreed to provide the Committee with details of the cost of the system. Councillor Dolphin also asked for information on the system to enable him to share with others.

In response to the latter request, Councillor Nancy Matthews asked that this be circulated to all Members of the Committee. She went on to say that the service from the developer was not satisfactory and requested information on the procurement process. Councillor Ann Minshull commented that the system appeared to be too complex.

Councillor Mike Peers also raised concerns about the outstanding problems on the system and questioned why these had arisen. Whilst he felt it was useful for Members to be aware of the existence of the system, his view was that any briefing for Members should be delayed until the system was in full working order. The officers spoke about the aim to raise awareness of the system and for any feedback to be passed to the developer to make

improvements. The upgrade was currently being tested by the developer prior to its rollout early in the New Year, and it was the intention to publicise the system more fully at that point.

Councillor David Evans asked if the system was linked to other methods of recording rights of way issues, such as Streetscene, 'Fix My Street' or the Big Pathwatch initiative. Officers explained that people were able to report issues through various methods, all of which were filtered through to the Rights of Way team to log onto CAMS.

The Chair felt that more prominence should be given to the system on the Council's website to raise awareness and that it would be useful to create a mobile phone app to scan QR codes on footpath signs so that the footpath number could be easily identified.

The officers recognised that more could be done to publicise the CAMS web which was currently located under the 'Streets and Travel' section of the website. In addition, it could be easily accessed under 'Public Rights of Way' from the A-Z list. They agreed to take back the suggestion of an app for footpath identification, noting the cost implication of accessing CAMS on a tablet. In response to earlier comments, they explained that the company which had developed CAMS had worked with most other local authorities across Wales as there was no alternative provider. All feedback given to the developer was subject to consideration at regular group meetings and improvements had been made as a result of this.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report and demonstration of the CAMS web system be noted.

45. Q2 - MID YEAR IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Facilitator introduced the regular update report to consider progress towards the delivery of the impacts set out in the 2015/16 Improvement Plan, focussing on the areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee during the second quarter of 2015/16.

In response to a request from the Chair, the Chief Officer for Streetscene gave a brief update on the development of community transport arrangements, following the consultation workshops held in September 2015. Having taken the feedback on board, the approach was to formulate key routes such as Mold to Flint supported by community transport routes. Cabinet Members had asked that officers liaise with town and community councils early in the New Year to speak about joined-up proposals, following clarity on the budget settlement.

Councillor Kevin Jones explained that various transport options were included in years 2 and 3 of the plan but that the budget outcome needed to be resolved first.

The Chief Officer stated that plans for 2016/17 would allow some flexibility to introduce community transport arrangements across the county, with more detail to be shared at the Committee's budget consultation meeting the following week.

On Mold to Flint routes, Councillor Paul Cunningham commented on the recent withdrawal of a particular service and asked about plans for the remaining service and whether this was subsidised. The Chief Officer agreed to check and provide a separate response, adding that the Council had no jurisdiction on non-subsidised routes. He explained the need to get the right balance of core routes which would be brought to the Committee for consideration on completion of the consultation process.

The Chair commented on the need to encourage older drivers to participate in advanced driving sessions. Whilst the Chief Officer shared this view, he pointed out that Welsh Government restrictions did not permit use of the funding for other purposes or for advertising the sessions, which meant that the Council had to rely on its own communication channels. Councillor Nancy Matthews, who had taken part in the sessions, recommended them to others.

The Chair requested that more details on this particular initiative be circulated to enable Members to share with their older constituents.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

46. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator introduced the current Forward Work Programme for consideration by the Committee. She confirmed the two items scheduled for the meeting in January 2015, as set out in the appendix, adding that an update from the Dog DNA Task Group could also be received. She also confirmed that the Energy Manager had agreed to bring the item on Renewable Energy to the meeting in February 2015.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be updated accordingly.

47. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 12.10pm)

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Chair