

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 FEBRUARY 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, 6 February 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Matt Wright (Chairman)

Councillors Haydn Bateman, Derek Butler, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Joe Johnson, Colin Legg, Nancy Matthews, Paul Shotton and Carolyn Thomas

SUBSTITUTES:

Councillors: Ron Hampson (for Cindy Hinds), Mike Lowe (for Peter Curtis), Mike Peers (for Dennis Hutchinson) and Mike Reece (for Ann Minshull)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Patrick Heesom

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Peter Curtis

CONTRIBUTORS:

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Waste and Recycling, Director of Environment, Head of Streetscene, Head of Assets and Transportation, Transportation Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Lifelong Learning and Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor V. Gay declared an interest in bus transport – minute item 5.

58. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2013 had been circulated with the agenda.

Accuracy

Councillor D. I. Mackie had emailed two amendments to the minutes. On page 3, he had asked the Director to convey to the North East Wales Area Based Transport Study team the importance of strengthening connections to the Flintshire Bridge from the north of the county and the west of North Wales to ensure the advantages of the Deeside Enterprise Zone were experienced by people in those areas. On page 5, Councillor Mackie had asked that in view of the proximity of a national boundary to the proposed site had sufficient early consultations been conducted with our neighbours to comply with international treaty requirements.

Councillor P. J. Curtis had emailed an amendment to his comments on Civil Parking Enforcement. He wanted to add to his comments on Civil Parking Enforcement as follows: Councillor Curtis said that Holywell town had suffered with car parking charges for the last 20 years and that Holywell Town Council had never been in favour of car parking charges.

Councillor M. Peers asked that on page 10, paragraph 3, that the following be change be implemented:

Councillor M.J. Peers explained that the decision had been called in due to concerns about the inconsistency of car parking charges “under consideration for implementation at this stage “rather than car parking charges to be implemented”.

Councillor P. Shotton said that the comments attributed to him on page 13, paragraph 8 were incorrect and referred to Veronica Gay.

Councillor C. A. Thomas suggested that the minutes of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 9th of January be put forward as a good practice example of Overview & Scrutiny minutes for the review of minute taking that was being undertaken by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. The Chair & Members of the Committee agreed that they were an excellent example and concurred with the suggestion made by Councillor Thomas.

59. CHANGE IN AGENDA ORDER

The Chair proposed that the Recycling Income item be considered after the Review of Public Conveniences item in order that the Streetscene Manager could present two consecutive reports.

60. INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed members of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Peer Learning Exchange Team from Wrexham Borough Council to the meeting who attended as part of the WAO Scrutiny Improvement Study.

61. REVIEW OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

The Head of Streetscene introduced the report on the revised delivery arrangements for the Council’s Public Conveniences. He explained that it was not a statutory requirement for the council to provide public conveniences and that some stand alone facilities were no longer fit for purpose. The Council wished to look at a model based on the revision of existing council facilities and the use of private facilities. Morrisons Supermarkets in Saltney received £500 per year from the Welsh Government to allow the public to use their toilets. This development had enabled the Council to close the stand alone Council owned facility in the town that was no longer fit for purpose.

The Head of Streetscene said that the council would speak to Town and Community Councils to see if they would be prepared to take over the management of public conveniences. He added that a new signage scheme for public conveniences would be implemented so that the public would be aware of

any new arrangements. Details of the revised provision were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor P. Shotton thanked the Head of Streetscene for a clear report. He asked about the numbers of local businesses that had already come forward regarding the £500 grant. The Head of Streetscene said that there had been a number of enquires from businesses, although no grants had been allocated as yet.

Councillor N.M. Matthews said that she had visited all of the Council owned/subsidised facilities over the previous summer and found all but two to be in good order. She voiced concerns about the proposed closure of facilities at Cilcain and Caerwys and the effect on tourism and asked what alternatives would be put in place in those areas. The Head of Streetscene said that the Council would approach the Community Councils in those areas to offer support and to see if there were any private businesses willing to participate in the grant scheme.

Councillor D. Evans asked if income from car parking could be used to provide new public conveniences. The Cabinet Member for Environment said that the report had already been to Cabinet and that it was not the Council's intention to look at building new toilets. In the case of Shotton, Wetherspoons could offer its facilities to the public. Councillor Evans asked how visitors to the area would be made aware of facilities on the main coast road. The Cabinet Member for Environment said that new signage would be implemented.

Councillor C. A. Thomas asked if all the reviewed facilities had been checked for disabled access and baby change facilities and if local members had been consulted. The Cilcain Community Council had received a letter from the Council concerning the management of the public convenience but the figures quoted in the letter differed to those in the report. She voiced her concern at the potential loss of a facility at Cilcain which was a tourist hub in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Head of Streetscene in response said that the more modern public conveniences were DDA compliant, but all of the facilities needed to be checked. With regards to the letter sent to Cilcain Community Council, the figures quoted did not include water and energy charges. He confirmed that the Council would be speaking to community groups to see if they would be prepared to take on the management of such facilities. The local member for Cilcain had not been consulted at this stage of the review process. The Council had written to the Community Council and had now spoken to the County Councillor.

Councillor M.J. Peers said that despite the low utilisation quoted in the report, Cilcain was on the tourist route and had little or no alternative facilities. With reference to paragraph 3.04, Councillor Peers said that there was currently a lack of signage of public conveniences and asked if it could be looked at in conjunction with Area of Outstanding Natural beauty. He asked for details of the costs of a "Superloo" system that was deemed "prohibitive" in paragraph 3.09 of the report. Councillor Peers asked if current footfall from this recent study was consistent with previous studies as there were no footfall figures in the report. The current report stated low usage in Holywell town centre although previous studies showed higher footfall there than in Flint. The Head of Streetscene said

that figures could be supplied. He said that there were variances across Holywell and that footfall justified one unit. He explained that the amount of capital investment and running charges made “Superloos” an unviable option. He added that the Council would look at a local business to provide a facility in Cilcain in the longer term.

Councillor V. Gay said that it was right to remove the public convenience at Saltney as it had attracted anti-social behaviour. She asked why Mold Town Hall was not listed as a location. The Head of Streetscene said that the Council did not contribute towards its running costs. Councillor Gay asked why there was £9000 in the Saltney budget for the public convenience, when it had closed there. The Head of Streetscene said that the budget review would realign the budget to the correct area.

Councillor C. Legg said that it was important not to just look at footfall figures in the case of Cilcain, but to consider that the majority of users would be tourists and school parties and that there were no other alternative facilities. The Head of Streetscene said that footfall figures would be circulated with the minutes. These figures indicated that usage was low in Cilcain and Caerwys. The Council hoped the Community Council would take them over or a local business would seek the £500 grant.

The Cabinet Member for Environment said that the report had gone to Cabinet 2 months previously and they were aware, as were officers, of the urgent need to resolve the issue.

Councillor R. Hampson asked if a Flintshire Connects centre in Buckley could provide public conveniences. The Cabinet Member for Environment said that sites for future Flintshire Connects offices were being considered and the types of facilities to be offered would be discussed at the planning stage.

Councillor H. Bateman asked if the subsidy was withdrawn from the Daniel Owen Centre if they could then apply for the Welsh Government grant. The Cabinet Member for Environment said that this was not permissible under the grant scheme.

RESOLVED:

That Scrutiny note the future delivery option for each of the Public Convenience Facilities shown in Appendix 1 and that the following comments be recorded:

- That the possible impacts on tourism be taken into account, particularly in Caerwys and Cilcain.
- The need for clear signage.
- That facilities maintained by the Council are DDA compliant and have baby change facilities.
- That local members had not been consulted in the way that they would have liked during the course of this review and that proper consultation be undertaken in the future.
- That the Committee be informed of discussions between the Council and the local Members for Cilcain and Caerwys, including the Town & Community Councils.

62. RECYCLING INCOME

The Head of Streetscene introduced the report to update members of the Committee on the volumes of material collected and the level of income received from the sale of recyclates collected by the Council. He explained that the cost of collecting recycled material was higher than the value of income gained from the process and that values of recyclates were subject to market forces, so much so that 3 monthly contracts were put in place to ensure the best prices possible were secured for Flintshire. The shortfall in the cost of delivering the recycling service was recovered by a grant from the Welsh Government.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Public Protection and Recycling said that it had not yet been confirmed by the Welsh Government the levels of Sustainable Waste Management Grant (SWMG) for 2013/14.

Councillor J Johnson asked why the council were not already recycling textiles. The Head of Streetscene said that it was only recently that textiles had seen an increase in value.

Councillor G.H. Bateman asked if the contracts were fixed price contracts. He asked what would happen if all of the companies that purchased Flintshire recyclates decided that they did not want to purchase a certain commodity. Councillor Bateman asked how aluminium cans were separated from tin and asked if the Committee could view the recycling operations. The Head of Streetscene said that if contracts were long term they would offer better value, but it was difficult to secure longer term contracts at good rates. There was a pool of contractors who were engaged in an ongoing formal tendering process to bid for Flintshire recyclates. There was one long term contract in place which involved a paper recycling operation. The Head of Streetscene said that it was unlikely, at any given time, that all of the potential purchasers would refuse to purchase a certain commodity. Should this occur, the Council would have to pay to have the items removed. The selling on of recyclates was always cheaper than paying for it to go to landfill. Aluminium cans were separated by a magnet and baled separately.

The Chair agreed that it would be useful to visit the recycling facilities and asked the Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator to arrange this.

Councillor M. J. Peers said that it was good to see a £120,000 saving in land fill costs thanks to the success of the recycling operation. He said that he would have liked to have seen information around costs, so that he could compare costs since the launch.

The Chair said that good progress had been made with the recycling service and that scrutiny now needed to focus on costings.

Councillor D. Butler asked if the 1469 tonnes of recycled material referred to in paragraph 3.04 was an annual figure or a figure that represented the number of recyclates since the introduction of the programme. The Head of Streetscene said that this information would be provided in subsequent quarterly reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the level of income generated from sales of the material recycled by Flintshire residents and the positive progress made to date.

63. PROPOSALS FOR A REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES WITHIN FLINTSHIRE

The Head of Assets and Transportation introduced the report to advise members of how bus services were currently organised within Flintshire and to outline proposals for a review of the County's subsidised bus services and related services.

He explained that buses were provided by the private sector. The Council had no mandatory obligation to fund any public transport services, however it did have powers under the Transport Acts 1985, 2000 and the Local Transport Act 2008 to enter into agreements with public transport operators to provide subsidies for services that were not available commercially. Appendix 1 outlined the current provision in Flintshire of bus services.

The Head of Assets and Transportation outlined the challenges for the coming year:

- From 1 April 2013 the Welsh Government would make changes to the funding for bus services and community transport in Wales
- Across Wales there would be a reduction in grant from £33m to £25m for the next financial year.
- A new scheme called Regional Transport Services Grant (RTSG) would be in place from 1 April 2013.
- The Regional Transport Consortia would be responsible for the new grant in North Wales, this would be in the form of TAITH.

Work is currently being undertaken to understand how much of the £25m funding will be allocated to TAITH for 2013-14.

As a result of anticipated reduction in budgets of around £223,505, Flintshire County Council will be undertaking a review of its services during 2013/14 with completion scheduled in summer of 2013. The Council were now looking at criteria to build into a Policy to determine which services it should support.

Funding from Cadwyn Clwyd would secure a Rural Transport officer on a 12 month fixed term basis to understand the needs of the rural communities.

The Head of Assets and Transportation asked the Committee to look at the draft Policy in Appendix 2 and said that the review would come back to Scrutiny once Cabinet had approved the Policy and costings for routes and subsequent bandings had been determined.

The Chair said that member input into the proposed criteria and Policy in Appendix 2 was key.

Councillor P. Shotton asked if concessionary travel would be affected by the changes and asked for the widest possible public consultation on the matter. He also asked if commercial routes would be reviewed after the review of subsidised routes. The Director of Environment in response said that Concessionary Travel did not feature in the scope of the review and would not be affected by the changes. A potential reduction in commercial services would be taken into account in the review.

Councillor C.A. Thomas asked which agency would hold the funding for Concessionary Travel from 1 April 2013. The Transportation Manager said that currently Flintshire administered the scheme, but as of 1 April 2013, the funding would go through TAITH, and there were no indications that the current modifying factor of 0.70, which was applied to each company's representative concessionary fare, would change from this date. Councillor Thomas said that it was not fair that operators continued to raise fare prices when funding had not been cut. She said that it was important that rural bus routes into transport hubs were maintained to enable young people to get to work, to allow people access to hospitals and for shopping and social purposes. She asked that the Rural Transport Officer role be filled without any further delay, so that the views of rural communities were taken into account and asked if they had to be in post by April 2013. The Chair said that paragraph 4.02 of the draft Policy addressed access, connectivity and filling gaps in transport. The Director for Environment said that the Council exerted no control over commercial price increases, but did have some control over the prices charged on subsidised bus services. The Head of Assets and Transportation said that it was acknowledged that Flintshire had many rural communities and that the Policy development and the review would address their need for access to tourism, social and healthcare facilities. The Rural Transport Officer post would be recruited within the next 2-3 months, if not sooner, particularly if the post was filled internally.

Councillor D. Butler said that it was important to get bus routes to cover routes to workplaces at a reasonable cost to the customer. He asked that the Deeside Enterprise Zone and the transport needs of the potential work force there be considered. He asked that given the reduction in funding from £33 million to £25 million, would the requirement to spend 10% on community transport remain. The Director of Environment said that the council was still required to use 10% of the grant on community transport and that the Deeside Enterprise Zone would be taken into consideration in the review. He added that currently, no commercial bus routes served the Deeside Industrial Park.

Councillor N.M. Matthews asked if there was a national information service for bus transport. She also asked for more information about the criteria to be used to determine whether a service should continue to be supported and if it was similar to ones used by other councils. The Transportation Manager said that Travelline Cymru provided impartial travel information on public transport via a web site which included a journey planner. The Director of Environment said that it was clear that this service had not been well publicised and that improved marketing and publicity of the routes needed to be considered. He said that

residents' needs would be taken into account in the review and that they would liaise with neighbouring councils about working across boundaries.

The Chair said transport was a regionalisation issue and that this would raise questions as to how it would be scrutinised.

Councillor M. J. Peers asked for more information about the criteria for subsidy per passenger. He said that the needs of those in rural areas, sheltered accommodation and those travelling late at night needed to be taken into account. Councillor Peers asked for clarification in paragraph 8.01 of the draft Policy which stated that commercial fare levels would be analysed on a quarterly basis to ensure that subsidised fare levels on each service were closely aligned. He asked if it meant aligned to the costs of commercial routes. The Transportation Manager said that other authorities used a similar system, where low cost per passenger (green) would be £2 and under, amber would be £2.00-£5.00 and red would be £5.00 and above. Councillor Peers asked if this information should be in the policy. The Director of Environment agreed that it should be in the Policy. He added that if a service was reviewed as being in the red banding, it would not necessarily mean that the Council would not run it, as it could be a key service.

Councillor V. Gay said that Saltney Ferry did not have direct routes into centres of employment such as Sandycroft or the Chester Business Park. She said that the review should acknowledge where there were such gaps and to take into account the views of customers. The Transportation Manager said that a map could be produced that showed all the commercial and subsidised routes and key employment / residential areas. The Head of Assets and Transportation agreed to produce map and distribute to members of the committee.

Councillor N.M. Matthews asked if the criteria could be looked at again before it went back to Cabinet.

Councillor D. Butler asked if any innovative travel packages could be offered by TAITH, similar to the £4.80 Chester to Southport package which included train, bus and ferry services.

The Chair said that consultation was required and that members should consider who should be consulted.

The Director of Environment said that they would go out to consultation after the policy stage had been completed. Comments from the meeting would be taken on board and a revised Policy would be taken to Cabinet in March/April and then back to Overview and Scrutiny in June. The Director of Environment said that all subsidised services would be re-tendered after the review, including the "green banded" routes.

The Chair outlined the committee's comments on the draft Policy which were to be added to the report recommendations as follows:

- Improve the marketing of the bus services.
- Request clarity from HR as to when the new post would be appointed.

- Further information about the setting of subsidies – information needed on red, amber and green bandings.
- Details of Overview and Scrutiny arrangements for a regionalised service.
- A map of the main employment sites in the county/borders of county
- More innovative travel packages.
- Map of commercial and subsidised routes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That members note the changes to bus funding anticipated from 1 April 2013.
- (b) That members note the content of this report, subject to the above comments outlined in the preceding paragraph.

64. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

It was proposed that at the 23 July 2013 meeting there would be an update on the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project, an update on the Deeside Enterprise Zone and an update on Recycling.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approves the amendments listed above.

65. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting began at 10.00 am and ended at 11.55 am.

66. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were two members of the press present.

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Chairman