

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 MAY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 14 May 2015

PRESENT:

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Chris Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Cindy Hinds, Hilary Isherwood, Joe Johnson, Colin Legg, Brian Lloyd, Nancy Matthews and Paul Shotton

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillors: Mike Reece for Peter Curtis, Richard Lloyd for David Evans, Gareth Roberts for Veronica Gay and Carolyn Thomas for Ann Minshull

ALSO PRESENT:

Initiators of the Call-In

Councillors: Mike Peers, Arnold Woolley, Carol Ellis, Dennis Hutchinson, Neville Phillips

Councillor Richard Jones as Local Member

Councillor Clive Carver as an observer

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Ray Hughes

CONTRIBUTORS:

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Waste & Ancillary Services Manager, Parking & Enforcement Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Member Engagement Manager sought nominations for the appointment of Chair for this meeting. Councillor Carolyn Thomas nominated Councillor Hilary Isherwood and this was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Hilary Isherwood be appointed Chair for this meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Member Engagement Manager sought nominations for the appointment of Vice-Chair for the municipal year. Councillor Ian Dunbar nominated Councillor David Evans; the proposal was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Evans be appointment Vice-Chair for the Municipal year 2015/16.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Richard Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest but indicated that he had dispensation from the Standards Committee to be able to speak at this meeting.

4. 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.

5. FLINTSHIRE PARKING STRATEGIES

The Member Engagement Manager referred to the Call-in to the decision of the Cabinet from its meeting held on 21 April 2015 relating to Flintshire County Council's Car Parking Strategy. 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 21 April 2015
- (c) A copy of the Cabinet Record of Decision No. 3157
- (d) A copy of the Call-in notice signed by Councillors Mike Peers, Neville Phillips, Arnold Woolley, Carol Ellis and Dennis Hutchinson.

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 Mike Peers, as the first of the signatories, detailed the reasons for the Call-in. He explained that the decision had been called-in as the signatories felt that the Parking Strategy did not take into account the impact of parking charges on the vitality and viability of each town and community. They also felt that the impact of out of town shopping centres with free parking on existing town centres had not been considered. He said that a blanket approach had been taken in the introduction of parking charges which did not take account of the needs of the individual town centres. Civil Parking Enforcement had been introduced in Flintshire in October 2013 and this had included a residential parking scheme. Councillor Peers commented that scheme did not appear to be in place, except in Mold, and was therefore not generating the required income for the Council. He spoke of local parking hotspots and indicated that he had requested information about the number of tickets that had been issued and had been advised that this was one. He commented on the parking strategies for each individual town in

Flintshire and highlighted the section on the proposed improvements to the car parks; he did not feel that the erection of pay and display signage and motorbike designated spaces was an improvement. Councillor Peers felt that each town should have been considered individually to highlight issues of vitality and viability for the towns rather than applying a blanket approach across the County. He felt that introducing a period of free parking should be offered in all of the Council owned car parks.

In referring to comments from Mold Town Council and Denbighshire County Council on the issue of Broughton Retail Park, Councillor Peers said that there was evidence that out of town retail parks did have an impact on local towns, which was a concern. He referred to a document from the Federation of Small Businesses and asked if the Cabinet Member or Chief Officer were aware of it; they were not. Councillor Peers also spoke of a recent Welsh Government commissioned report and assessment on the impact of town centre footfall by out of town retail parks. He asked whether this had been taken into consideration. He highlighted an assessment referred to recently about the significant impact that Broughton Retail Park was having on town centres such as Queensferry and Buckley which he felt was clear evidence that viability in town centres in close proximity to retail parks was affected. In summing up, Councillor Peers raised the following issues and concerns:-

- Clear evidence of the effect of viability of town centres in close proximity to out of town retail parks
- No viability or vitality report in each of the individual town strategies
- The impact of out of town shopping parks had not been considered
- The parking strategy had taken a blanket approach across the county
- Free parking options had not been included
- There was discrepancy between public sector and private sector parking costs
- Ineffective Civil Parking Enforcement
- Residents Parking Scheme not yet introduced

He asked that the Committee choose option 3 to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration of the following issues:-

- Amend the Flintshire County Council Car Parking Strategy to include a period of free parking to help the viability and vitality of town centres
- Ask Cabinet to defer implementing car parking charges to allow town centres to engage with the Council about possible alternatives
- Review parking permit charges to allow parity for the public and private sector

Councillor Arnold Woolley echoed the comments of Councillor Peers and referred to parking strategies that had been put in place in other Councils in England and Wales. He concurred that each town should be considered individually and added that this was important for a transport plan to be effective. He commented that footfall in Buckley high street had reduced by 10% since the opening of the Health Centre because of its location and referred to the scrapping

of parking charges on the Park and Ride service in Cambridge because of a 25% reduction in footfall.

Councillor Carol Ellis said that Chester had introduced free parking after 3pm and commented that Buckley could not be compared to Mold when implementing parking charges. On the issue of the 10% reduction in footfall in Buckley high street, Councillor Ellis referred to a petition which had been signed by 1500 people. She asked that Cabinet defer the decision and look at Buckley as a stand-alone strategy to consider if there was an opportunity to identify a scheme which would be of benefit to the town. Councillor Ellis commented on apartments at Argoed Road which had been permitted on appeal even though there was insufficient car parking spaces at the development. The Inspector had indicated that residents could use the nearby car park and therefore car parking space standards did not need to be complied with. She raised concern that parking charges could result in car double parking on Mold Road which was a safety concern.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson agreed with the comments and the request to allow dialogue with Buckley Town Council. He commented on the main car park in Buckley and indicated that this car park was not used by individual people to park their vehicles for free to then car-share and travel in one vehicle to other destinations. He suggested that this could be evidenced by reviewing the CCTV footage. Councillor Neville Phillips referred to parents of children attending Westwood Primary School who would have to pay 20p each time they dropped off their child at school if the proposals were implemented. He explained that the car park in Bistre Avenue only had 35 places and sought clarification on whether the original document had indicated that charges would not be imposed on car parks with fewer than 50 spaces.

As a Local Member, Councillor Richard Jones, echoed and endorsed the comments made. He expressed surprise that the Chief Officer had not seen the report referred to earlier by Councillor Peers and also that Councillor Derek Butler was not in attendance as Cabinet Member for Economic Development. He commented on the 10% decrease in footfall in Buckley town centre and the additional reduction due to the opening of the Health Centre. He said that other car parking strategies had been implemented as a result of a town masterplan and a transport plan but this did not seem to have been the case. Councillor Jones raised concern that the starting point appeared to be the need to save £400,000 and said that this would have an impact on businesses, employees and residents. In referring to page 25, he highlighted the section on workforce permits and the zero charge for those Council staff on salaries at or below the nationally recognised living wage and for any modern apprentices employed by the Council. He raised concern at this because private sector employees would be expected to pay £200 which he did not feel was fair as it was a benefit to Council staff. He referred to a response that he had received to a question that he had submitted about parking in Buckley which he felt did not make sense. He felt that introducing parking charges would result in less shops and less choice for residents and therefore a stagnation of town centres. Councillor Jones referred to page 15 of the strategy which reported that the strategy 'would be adapted to suit the needs of all local communities at viable car parks, for example which offered a parking facility of 50 spaces or more'; he detailed a number of car parks that this would apply to.

In response to the comments from Councillor Jones about the question he had submitted, the Deputy Leader explained that a detailed response had been provided, which he read out. He added that Councillor Butler had not been invited to attend this meeting, as he had not been in attendance at any of the other Overview & Scrutiny meetings or workshops on the issue of car parking. He did not feel that 20pence was an excessive charge and he commented on the siting of Buckley Health Centre and the provision of a new superstore in Buckley. He gave a commitment that the strategy would be reviewed in 12 months time and any proposed changes would be referred back to this Committee.

On the siting of the Buckley Health Centre, Councillor Woolley indicated that the Council had been instructed to sell the land by the Minister to allow the health centre to be built. Councillor Ellis concurred that it was not in an ideal location and that she had initially expressed her concerns about the impact of the location on the town centre.

In response to the comments made, the Chief Officer explained that a dedicated team of officers enforced parking provision and that identified hotspots were reviewed regularly. He said that a different strategy was proposed for Buckley but at the workshops, Members had highlighted the importance of ensuring consistency across all car parks.

Councillor Paul Shotton did not feel that shoppers would travel to Broughton Retail Park to avoid paying 20 pence parking charges and commented on the original removal of car parking charges in Holywell which had since been requested to be re-introduced. He moved option 1 to accept the decision made by Cabinet. Councillor Joe Johnson agreed with Councillor Shotton and said that car parks in Holywell were extremely busy but the town centre shops were empty. He welcomed the re-introduction of car parking charges.

Councillor Nancy Matthews suggested that a half hour free parking in all car parks across the county which she felt would assist shoppers and town centre footfall. The Deputy Leader indicated that this had initially been suggested but had been turned down during discussions at the workshops and earlier meetings of this Committee to ensure consistency was applied. Councillor Matthews felt that this would provide consistency across the County rather than individual strategies for different towns.

Councillor Brian Lloyd did not feel that Broughton retail park was to blame for a reduction in footfall and suggested that Mold shops had lost trade because of the number of supermarkets in the town. He did not feel that the provision of a supermarket in Buckley would increase footfall to the High Street.

Councillor Gareth Roberts supported the request from the Buckley Councillors to re-look at the strategy for Buckley. He suggested that the short stay provision for car parks in Holywell be increased to three hours rather than the proposed two hours.

Councillor Ian Dunbar said that the comments about the impact on viability and vitality of town centres did not just apply to Buckley. He felt that the introduction of Aldi in Buckley would increase footfall and added that in the

workshops and earlier meetings of this Committee, Members had been in agreement that there should be a change to the charges in place prior to the introduction of this strategy. He spoke of the charges in Holywell which had been removed and were now to be reintroduced following consultation. He added that the Deputy Leader had assured Members that a review would be undertaken in 12 months, which was welcomed.

Councillor Chris Dolphin said that not charging for car parks in Holywell had not worked and added that three hours for short stay parking was better than the proposed two hours. He said that towns were individual and the strategies for each should also be individual to ensure that the proposals suited each town. He highlighted the WG document referred to earlier by Councillor Peers and asked whether it would have an impact on the request by the Buckley Councillors and sought clarification on the comment by Councillor Peers about the 40 pence per day charge for parents who were dropping their children off at school. The Deputy Leader said that if users parked in car parks near to school when they were dropping their children off, then they would need to pay the appropriate charge. He also said that he had not been aware of the WG document before today's meeting and expressed concern that it had not been mentioned previously.

Councillor Richard Lloyd felt that 20 pence was not a lot to pay and on the issue of paying to drop children off at school, Councillor Lloyd indicated that this could be looked at when the strategy was reviewed in 12 months time.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas queried whether users would still need to obtain a ticket if the proposal for a short period of free parking was agreed and implemented. She said that if the charges for parking were not imposed then the loss of income would need to be subsidised from other areas. She agreed that 20pence was a small amount to pay. In response, the Chief Officer said that parking charges would allow for the money to be reinvested elsewhere. He added that the proposal for free half hour parking would be difficult to manage.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Deputy Leader said that the prices in Mold were more expensive than other areas and three hours short stay parking was specific for Mold car parks.

Councillor Cindy Hinds felt that residents should not have to pay for car parks where they had no other option but to park in those car parks. The Deputy Leader said that the issue of resident's parking was in the strategy and if they relied on car parking, they would be entitled to a resident's permit.

On the issue of short stay parking being restricted to two hours except for Mold where it was three hours, the Deputy Leader indicated that this could form part of the review in 12 months time.

Councillor Hutchinson provided clarification on the siting of Buckley health centre and said that the site preferred by Buckley Members was closer to the town centre but this had been rejected by WG and the current site identified instead. He also referred to the protest through Buckley about the proposed charges.

Councillor Richard Jones said that that the health centre did have a negative effect on the town centre and commented on the protest that had taken place. He referred to his earlier comments about masterplans and transport plans and the requirement to save £400,000. He felt that the strategy should be amended now, not reviewed in 12 months. He commented on planning applications which had been passed by the Planning Inspector without the appropriate level of car parking due to near by car parks which were now to have charges applied. He said that different short stay times had been proposed for Mold and therefore this was not consistent with strategies for other towns. He agreed with the proposal for half hour free parking which would allow parents to drop off their children at school without having to pay a charge. His main concern was the discrepancy between private sector and public sector charges for those on or below the national minimum wage.

Councillor Woolley urged the Committee to choose option 3 to allow Cabinet to reconsider the decision.

Councillor Peers said that he was not asking for special consideration for Buckley but that Cabinet be asked to reconsider the viability and vitality of all towns be considered and that half hour free parking be included across the county but where this was not appropriate, towns could opt out. He hoped that option 3 would be chosen.

The Deputy Leader said that there had been a significant amount of engagement with members on the issue and that he had provided assurance that a review would be undertaken in 12 months. However, if he was advised of an urgent matter then this could be considered at that time and he would take a further report to Cabinet if required.

The Chair welcomed the involvement of town and community councils in the process.

The Member Engagement Manager indicated that Councillor Shotton had earlier proposed option 1; this was duly seconded.

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.

6. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 11.30 am and ended at 1.34 pm)

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Chair