

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 SEPTEMBER 2016

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, 14 September 2016

PRESENT: **Councillor Ray Hughes (Chairman)**

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Chris Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Cindy Hinds,
Brian Lloyd, Ann Minshull and Paul Shotton

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Dave Mackie (for Colin Legg), Hilary McGuill (for Nancy Matthews) and Mike Peers (for Veronica Gay)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Councillor Kevin Jones, Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection & Leisure; and Councillor Richard Lloyd

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Carolyn Thomas

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment; Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation); and Highways Strategy Manager

Chief Officer (Planning & Environment) and the Access & Natural Environment Manager - for minute number 34

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

29. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2016 were submitted.

Minute number 22: Council Fund Revenue Budget 2017/18 - Councillor Hilary McGuill asked if all Members could be issued with the schedule of gully cleaning, following Councillor Chris Dolphin's request for data for his ward. Due to the length of the schedule, the Chief Officer agreed to provide the Facilitator with a summary of areas broken down by month, for circulation to all Members.

RESOLVED:

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

30. HIGHWAYS AND CAR PARK INSPECTION POLICY

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced the revised Highways and Car Park Inspection Policy following a review which incorporated the inspection regime for the Council's car parks and highway structures. The policy met legislative requirements in setting out what was inspected, frequency (based on risk) and intervention times for repairing defects. It was explained that walking inspections were carried out on footways whereas carriageways were generally inspected by the inspector travelling in a vehicle, accompanied by another officer driving. For bridges, the requirement was for an annual visual inspection together with a principal professional inspection every six years.

Councillor Paul Shotton thanked the Streetscene Area Supervisors for their work, in particular their prompt responses in dealing with issues raised. Responding to a query on filling potholes, the Chief Officer spoke about the use of various materials and the continued search for more creative options to identify a system which met all requirements.

The team was also praised by Councillor Ian Dunbar who welcomed the inclusion of car parking under the portfolio. He commented on the deterioration of car parks as a result of local businesses closing and raised safety concerns about a wall near Brookfield School in Connah's Quay. The Chief Officer would arrange for an inspection of the wall and gave explanation on the responsibilities of the Council as opposed to homeowners.

In response to queries from Councillor Hilary McGuill, the Chief Officer confirmed that Theatr Clwyd car park was subject to inspections. On the maintenance of cycle paths, a joint approach was taken with Countryside Services and there were no statutory requirements for surfacing, provided it was appropriate for cycle use. Councillor McGuill felt that the method for inspecting carriageways did not enable the inspector to identify road defects evident to a cyclist. Councillor Bernie Attridge noted concerns about potholes near the Tesco store in Mold which could not be safely avoided by cyclists. He reminded Members that an independent survey was undertaken each year and asked that any further issues be reported to the Streetscene Supervisors. The Chief Officer agreed to contact Denbighshire County Council to seek details of its system for logging issues reported by cyclists. On the inspection of carriageways, he said it was important to consider the safety of inspectors.

Following a query from Councillor Haydn Bateman, it was explained that the Council was not liable for third party claims arising from defects occurring between inspections, provided that the agreed frequency of inspections was documented and appropriate.

Councillor Mike Peers questioned the robustness of the policy in terms of defending potential claims and suggested that photographs could be taken during inspections. The Chief Officer spoke about the use of tablets to record inspection data and the move to newer systems which would speed up the process of work orders and record photographic evidence. He said that this could be demonstrated to the Committee.

Whilst noting the knowledge and understanding of issues by the Cabinet Member and officers, Councillor Chris Dolphin referred to problems in his ward. He questioned whether areas allocated to Supervisors were too challenging, particularly in rural locations where some of the footpaths appeared to be in a poor condition. He felt that walking inspections were necessary to properly identify issues with potholes. The Chief Officer urged Members to report issues with potholes on main roads. He said that a range of factors had determined the scope of areas, including the time needed for inspecting rural areas as opposed to densely populated locations. Councillor Attridge stated that there had been no cuts to the service budget and that the weedkilling schedule remained the same, with all work prioritised using the matrix system. He was disappointed that issues were being raised at this meeting when potholes being reported to the team were promptly repaired. The Chief Officer agreed to review the current provision and meet with Councillor Dolphin and the Co-ordinator to discuss the issues raised.

Councillor Brian Lloyd reported an ongoing problem with the deterioration of road surfacing at Ivy Crescent in his ward. The Chief Officer agreed to follow this up. He explained that patching work was often necessary as it was not feasible to repair every road surface, however principal roads with schools were amongst those given priority. Councillor Attridge commented on the potential to work with colleagues in Housing to access other sources of funding to resolve these issues.

Councillor Dave Mackie asked whether an Equalities Impact Assessment had been undertaken to help strengthen the Council's defence. The Chief Officer was aware that the original policy had been assessed but would check prior to the revised policy being considered by Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends Cabinet approval of the reviewed Highway and Car Park Inspection Policy which outlines the Council's approach to all safety inspections, intervention criteria and response times.

31. THE FINAL STAGE OF THE REVIEW OF EXISTING SPEED LIMIT ORDERS ON THE COUNCIL'S HIGHWAY NETWORK AND PROPOSED PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS FOR ANY FUTURE CHANGES TO SPEED LIMIT ORDERS

The Highways Strategy Manager introduced a report on the proposed approach for the final stage of the review of speed limits on the Council's classified highway network, which would address the historic anomalies within the existing speed limit orders on all other routes on the highway network.

It was reported that 36 of the 37 recommendations from Phase 1 of the review had been successfully delivered, with one Order due to be in place by the end of the month. Explanation was given on the range of complications which had contributed to the time taken on the review and the aim to put all speed limit Orders, both past and present, within a single consolidated Order identifying all speed limits across the county. Members were shown examples of the mapping information which would be uploaded to the website. A five year programme would be developed to review all existing speed limits for the remainder of the highway network and to prioritise routes using the matrix system. Further

proposals were detailed in the report to help improve the process and save on time. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that the proposed approach would help to address the frustrations raised by Members on previous occasions. He said that there was a high number of objectors in the county and that whilst the individuals had genuine concerns about flaws in the Orders, this impacted on the workload of the team.

Councillor Bernie Attridge spoke about the level of work undertaken and the need to allow time to review each speed limit Order.

In acknowledging the complexities of this work, Councillor Paul Shotton thanked the officers for the report and asked about funding for the mapping exercise for existing speed limits. It was explained that the internal technical team would undertake this work.

Councillor Ian Dunbar questioned the rationale for applying different speed limits along a straight stretch of road. The Manager said that this was dependant on the nature of the carriageway along with the legislative criteria.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked the review of high-risk routes involving varying speed limits where fatal accidents had occurred, for example on the Mold to Denbigh road. The Manager explained that each road would be risk assessed through the matrix, taking account of a number of factors such as the number of accidents, vulnerable users etc. In response to further questions, Town and Community Councils would be notified of the consolidated Order which would be subject to the statutory consultation process open to all UK residents. In respect of advisory speed limits outside schools, these were unlikely to be mapped but would be identified by colour. Councillor Attridge said that a bid for funding was being explored to increase the number of statutory speed limits outside schools in the county.

Following comments by Councillor Cindy Hinds, the Manager spoke about the Council's duty to consider any formal objections raised.

Councillor Mike Peers welcomed the work done by the Cabinet Member and raised a number of queries. In relation to inconsistent speed limits in Dobshill, the Manager advised that an advisory sign had been displayed as a temporary measure. He also confirmed that the Council worked in collaboration with the 'Go Safe' driving campaign and North Wales Police who were amongst the statutory consultees. He explained that the suggestion to display speed limit signs on speed cameras had been considered, however the criteria for use of repeat speed signs needed to be met. As an alternative, the suggestion to display a square sign would be passed to the 'Go Safe' team. Members were asked to forward any requests for reviewing speed limits to the Area Supervisor. Following comments about the need to consider local issues, explanation was given on the need to adhere to the strict guidelines of the Department for Transport with a reminder that maximum speed limits did not represent the intended speed limit. The Cabinet Member noted reports about the removal of covers from speed limit signs along the Dobshill to Hope road.

Councillor Chris Dolphin commented on the need for a 'Go Safe' presence on the A5026. The Manager asked that such requests be submitted by email for

him to pursue. In response to other points raised, he clarified that individuals who regularly objected to proposals were entitled to remain anonymous.

Councillor Dave Mackie raised concerns that the report made no mention of an Equalities Impact Assessment having been undertaken.

The Chairman referred to the ongoing problem of speeding traffic along the road in Pontblyddyn and suggested that signs raising awareness of this accident blackspot could help to deter speeders. The Cabinet Member agreed to look into whether this was feasible and shared concerns about this particular area, despite the instalment of a speed camera and traffic calming measures.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee recommends Cabinet approve of the revised process to deliver the final phase of the review of speed limit orders on all of the Council's highway network; and
- (b) That the Committee recommends Cabinet approve the proposed changes to the process which will be adopted for any future revisions of highway speed limit orders.

32. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Views were sought on the current Forward Work Programme and the following changes were agreed:

- The special meeting on 11 October to be changed to an all Member workshop, as proposed by the Chairman.
- The meeting on 2 November to be held at County Hall followed by a site visit to Brookhill to view the solar panels and waste transfer station in operation. The Chief Officer added that local Members would be invited to the formal opening.
- Following the earlier item, the Facilitator to liaise with Councillor Nancy Matthews to ascertain whether her suggested item on 'speed limits on C roads' was still required or alternatively if she wished to discuss separately with the Chief Officer.

In relation to the waste item, Councillor Paul Shotton asked that his thanks be passed to Gabrielle and Emma from the Streetscene team for their excellent work at the recent recycling event at Morrison's in Connah's Quay.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked if local Members could be provided with information about prosecutions for litter and dog fouling in their areas to help raise awareness. Councillor Bernie Attridge agreed to check the information given to Councillor David Evans following his request at the previous meeting. Councillor Mike Peers said that advertising details of the number of fines in public areas could help to deter others. The Facilitator advised that an item on Planning Enforcement would be scheduled at the end of the year.

Committee report format

The Facilitator sought feedback from the Committee on the report format which had been in use for a year. A suggestion was made by Councillor Dave Mackie that the template could indicate whether an Equalities Impact Assessment had been done.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended as necessary; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

33. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of paragraph 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

34. RIGHTS OF WAY SERVICE REVIEW

The Access & Natural Environment Manager presented an update on the ongoing Rights of Way Service review with recommendations to meet the required 30% reduction in core budget by maximising income and reducing expenditure, as part of the Authority's drive to address its financial position.

Information was shared on the approach taken to the review which involved exploring more creative ways of working, engaging with volunteer groups and benchmarking with other Authorities to develop a more robust charging mechanism. It was anticipated that the savings would be realised in 2017/18. The Chief Officer (Planning & Environment) explained that staff restructure was still under development.

Councillor Hilary McGuill spoke in support of Countryside Services and suggested working in partnership with various voluntary organisations as well as the Council-run initiative 'Walking for Health'. The Manager said that the aim was to explore different sector outdoor groups and that links with Sustrans provided a volunteer network to help maintain the cycle network. The team had also been able to access funding through Glyndŵr University. Councillor McGuill felt it was important that the savings from the re-tendering of the strimming contract should not compromise service delivery. The officers assured Members that the contractor was required to meet quality standards.

Councillor Mike Peers said it was important that a 30% efficiency should not reflect any reduction in service and questioned whether similar reductions in charges could be identified in other areas. Councillor Bernie Attridge said it was the intention to seek out other opportunities for value for money elsewhere and pointed out that Flintshire was amongst the lowest charging Authorities in Wales.

The Chief Officer gave examples where charges were being reviewed and reminded Members that the Rights of Way service was new to this portfolio.

The Manager responded to comments raised by Councillor Ian Dunbar on continuing work with the Groundworks Green Team and other outdoor groups for the benefit of the service. On the unauthorised use of byways, controls were in place to ensure that use was appropriate and any reported problems could be followed up via multi-agency links.

The Chairman permitted Councillor Carolyn Thomas, who was present in the public gallery, to speak on the item. She referred to the proposed staff restructure and hoped that the excellent service and knowledge of footpath officers were not affected by the changes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the increase in proposed charges be supported;
- (b) That the reduction in proposed expenditure be agreed; and
- (c) That the work being progressed to define a new staffing structure be noted.

35. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.45 pm)

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Chairman