

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 OCTOBER 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 16 October 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Ray Hughes (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, Andy Dunbobbin, David Evans, Cindy Hinds, Dave Hughes, Joe Johnson, Colin Legg, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor: Mike Peers (for Veronica Gay)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside, Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection, Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Highway Strategy Manager, Finance Manager, and Access and Natural Environment Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Service Officer

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None were received.

21. BUDGET 2019/20 STAGE 2 PROPOSALS

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report on the stage 2 budget proposals for Streetscene and Transportation Portfolio and part of the Planning, Environment & Economy Portfolio for 2019/20. He provided background information and referred to the workshop held on 11 October, which had provided Members with the opportunity to understand portfolio budgets in more detail and the risks and resilience levels of service areas. The Chief Officer reported on the portfolio pressures and investments and Portfolio business planning efficiencies as detailed in the report concerning Streetscene and Transportation.

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to the reduction in income from waste recycling. The Chief Officer explained that the income from recycling waste, and cited plastic, card and paper as an example, had dropped significantly due to the loss of international markets and referred to the initiatives which were taking place to sustain the market.

In response to a question from Cllr Paul Shotton regarding the potential to use plastic as a replacement for Bitumen to repair road surfaces and potholes, the Chief Officer Streetscene and Transportation advised that discussion was taking place with a local company regarding this and it was intended that a sample batch of material would be provided for trial in the near future. Members

would be invited to visit the company to look at the product and when further information was available a report would be submitted to scrutiny on the findings.

Councillor Mike Peers raised a number of queries. He referred to the income from external works (Fleet Workshop) which was recorded as £0.010m in the report, and said on page 3 of the resilience statement it was stated as £10.00. He also asked for clarification as to whether 3 weekly waste collections were part of the proposals at the current time. Councillor Peers referred to the saving for 2015/16 of £30k on the closure of the information centre at Mold bus station, and said that it appeared the money was being spent processing the grant funding. The Chief Officer confirmed that the bus station grant was from the Welsh Government and that the £30k referred to was a revenue saving from closure of the small Information centre at Mold Bus Station.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas advised that a decision had not been made yet regarding a 3 weekly waste collection service but commented that due to the latest budget settlement and further reductions in funding it was not possible to rule out as a potential budget saving at the present time. She added that changing to a 3 weekly waste collection service could realise a saving of £800k.

In response to a question from Councillor Owen Thomas regarding side waste, the Chief Officer referred to the procedures used to address the problem of side waste which was left for collection. He advised that 1,400 warning letters had been issued to residents and businesses and said that only 30-40 cases had progressed to the second stage to warn of a notice being issued. The Chief Officer reported that no Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued and said that the aim was to engage with and encourage people to improve their recycling of waste products. He commented on the cost and low resale value of recycled waste and the need to find an alternative sustainable use for the benefit of the environment.

In response to a question from Councillor Mike Peers regarding access costs which had been raised at the budget workshop, the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), confirmed that the figures referred to 20 full time posts. Councillor Carolyn Thomas added that some of the work was mandatory. The Chief Officer advised that a report would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee with further detail on the mandatory services provided.

Councillor David Evans requested a report on the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a 3 or 4 weekly waste collection service with information included regarding the experiences of authorities who had introduced 3 or 4 weekly collections.

Councillor Cindy Hinds asked if plastic waste was sorted at recycling centres. The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) explained that mixed plastic was collected and then sold as mixed plastic. Separated plastic had a slightly higher value but a cost was incurred in separating the plastic. He reported that work was being undertaken to look at the business case for separation of plastic, however he felt it was important not to make recycling more complicated for residents which may effect recycling rates. The Chief Officer advised that the Authority was consistent with other local authorities in Wales in selling mixed plastic. Councillor Carolyn Thomas explained that the Authority currently accepted everything except black plastic and film.

Councillor Owen Thomas said that the volume of waste materials to be collected was increasing and asked if the Authority held records to show data on waste collected over the last five years. He referred to the waste materials produced by supermarkets and other retail and fast food outlets and said that although the Authority was working to achieve savings the amount of waste to be collected was increasing.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas explained that she was lobbying the WG and the UK to reduce the amount of plastic and waste produced and said that the WG was keen to work with supermarkets to encourage responsibility and reduce use of plastic material. In response to a further question from Councillor Owen Thomas, the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), advised that waste was one of the most regulated industries and advised that data/statistics on waste and recycling collection was available and was regularly reported on recycling and residual waste. He added that the WG were reviewing their targets with a view to increasing recycling targets from 70% to 80%.

Chair commented on the issue of litter discarded around fast food outlets and the 'blight' it caused on surrounding areas and asked if the Authority had raised the problem with local businesses. The Chief Officer confirmed that he had written to fast-food outlets in Flintshire to outline the Committee's concerns and had received a response which he would circulate to the Committee. Councillor Carolyn Thomas agreed to raise the matter during her meeting with the Minister for Environment the following day.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee endorsed the portfolio pressures and investments; and
- (b) That the Committee endorsed the portfolio efficiency options.

22. REVIEW OF HIGHWAY AND CAR PARK SAFETY INSPECTIONS AND INTERVENTION LEVELS AND RESPONSE TO POLICY.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report to review the above Policy in line with the revised national guidelines following the implementation of the new code of practice in October 2018. He provided background information and commented on the recognition in the recent budget announcement of the importance of the highway network in the delivery of economic and sustainable growth and said it was envisaged that 3 year funding would be made available for the resurfacing of roads. The Chief Officer invited the Highways Network Manager to give an overview of the main considerations, as detailed in the report.

Councillor Mike Peers commented on the Council's statutory duty as a 'Highway Authority' to maintain all adopted highways including highway structures within the County and the potential for claims arising against the County from highway users for personal injury or loss arising from incidents or accidents in the event of a breach of that duty. He commented that the priority must be public safety not 'class' of potholes. He asked if the Authority referred to

its inspection reports when dealing with claims arising from incidents or accidents which had occurred on the adopted highway network and were they available for Members to view.

Councillor Peers referred to the proposed policy for highway and car park safety inspections, interventions criteria and response times which was appended to the report. He commented on the defect identification criteria and expressed concerns that the category a defect would fall into was in the main down to interpretation. He said more detail needed to be provided on the red category.

Councillor Peers expressed concerns around the response times and feedback to issues raised by Members and residents concerning defects and cited an example of a defect which had been reported regarding a pothole in his Ward. He drew attention to the response time stated in the proposed policy. The Highway Network Manager responded to the queries raised by Councillor Peers and explained that risk assessments were undertaken by the Streetscene Area Co-ordinator in line with code of practice. He agreed to provide records on a case by case basis to Councillor Peers. Councillor Peers asked that regular updates be provided by the Streetscene Area Coordinator to Members on the condition of the roads, footways and car parks in their Wards.

Councillor Paul Shotton asked if consideration could be given to the use of drones to aid the Streetscene Area Co-ordinators to carry out their safety inspections or mend potholes. The Chief Officer confirmed that electronic equipment was already used to assist in safety inspections and agreed to look into the possible use of drones.

Referring to the inspection of structures and retaining walls, Councillor David Evans commented on the problem of damaged railings and asked if this was included in the inspections. He also said there were no timescales detailed in the proposed policy for the repair or replacement of any defects identified during the inspection of structures and walls.

Councillor Evans referred to the defect identification criteria on page 21 of the report and expressed the view that cycleways should be moved into the same category as footways.

The Highways Network Manager acknowledged the points raised around signage, structures, walls, railings, repair times, and cycleways, and said he would consider the suggestions in the final draft to Cabinet.

Councillor Owen Thomas commented on the timescale for potholes to be repaired and said in his Ward there was evidence that potholes had been waiting months for repairs to be carried out. He also referred to the poor condition of some pavements which were unsafe for pedestrians to use due to surface moss and overhanging trees and hedges. Councillor Thomas expressed concerns around public safety and said residents should be held responsible for maintaining overhanging branches and foliage onto public footways.

In response to the matters raised the Highways Network Manager explained that the issue of overgrown hedges and defects on pavements was addressed by the Environmental Enforcement Policy and where appropriate

residents were advised of their responsibility to maintain their boundaries in terms of overhanging growth.

Referring to the repair of potholes the Chief Officer explained that there was a matrix for resurfacing works but not for repairs to potholes and said the Streetscene Area Co-ordinator was the initial point of contact for identifying and prioritising defects. In response to a question from Councillor Andy Dunbobbin the Chief Officer agreed to circulate the link to the reporting app for potholes on the Flintshire website

Councillor Christopher Dolphin commended the policy and sought further information on the process to ensure a repair was done when a pothole was reported. Commenting on a road with more than 100 potholes, he felt there was a need to let Members know where a repair was on the list and whether action was going to be taken or not. The Chief Officer reiterated that Members need to liaise with their Streetscene Area Co-ordinators who would update on progress. In response to a further question from Councillor Dolphin, the Chief Officer advised that the patching programme was ongoing and driven by the Area Co-ordinators. The Chief Officer and Councillor Carolyn Thomas, agreed to undertake an inspection of the problem areas with Councillor Dolphin in his Ward.

Councillor Derek Butler commented that the volume of traffic in addition to the length of Flintshire roads should be given consideration by Welsh Government when allocating resources.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends Cabinet approves the revised Highway and Car Park Inspection Policy (as in Appendix 1) which outlines the Council's approach to all safety inspections, defect identification criteria, and response times.

23. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

The Facilitator sought the views of the Committee on holding an additional meeting in December due to the number of items which were to be considered at the meeting to be held on 27 November. Members agreed that an additional meeting be held on 11 December to start at 9.00 a.m.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended; 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.

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

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following item by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

25. GREENFIELD VALLEY – 6 MONTH REPORT

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced a report to provide an update on the current position of Greenfield Valley Heritage Park. He provided background information and referred to the key considerations, as detailed in the report, and progress on the Flintshire Internal Audit recommendations as detailed in the appendix to the report. He invited the Access and Natural Environment Manager to give an update on site operations.

The Access and Natural Environment Manager reported on the educational activities undertaken by 12 schools during the Summer term said more than 100 events had been delivered this season. He commented on the increase in visitor numbers and social media interest and explained that the improvement of general presentation and maintenance standards had resulted in Greenfield Valley maintaining the Greenflag Award and securing the gold standard visitor award from Visit Wales.

The Access and Natural Environment Manager referred to the improvement and repair works, and new signage which had been undertaken on walkways, woodland trails, priority paths, and steps. He advised that a user survey of Play offer within the site was completed during the Summer and the results would be analysed during Autumn. Meetings had also been held with the Active Travel Team to discuss the potential of a multi-user path through the Valley. Sustrans were also currently undertaking a feasibility study of potential routes.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

26. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.55 am)

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Chairman