

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 DECEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 10 December 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, Andy Dunbobbin, George Hardcastle, Cindy Hinds, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: Mike Peers (for Veronica Gay)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: David Evans and Ray Hughes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education attended as an observer together with the Chief Executive and Democratic Services Manager

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Glyn Banks, Cabinet Member for Finance; Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); and Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation)

Corporate Finance Manager - for minute number 46

Service Delivery Manager, Highways & Waste (Katie Wilby) and Regulatory Services Manager (Ruth Cartwright) - for minute numbers 47 & 48

Energy Conservation Engineer (Sadie Waterhouse) - for minute number 50

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

42. OPENING COMMENTS

The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator read out a statement on the restrictions over discussions at meetings during the Election period.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

44. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2019 were submitted.

Minute number 37: Councillor Shotton asked that the minutes include his question about electric vehicle charging points in Flintshire. He thanked officers

for the response and welcomed the additional charging points provided by Coleg Cambria.

Minute number 38: The Chairman asked if there was a register of unadopted roads in Flintshire. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that the Council was represented on a working group established by Welsh Government (WG) to compile a national list of unadopted roads across Wales. Councillor Carolyn Thomas advised that WG colleagues were considering policy changes in respect of unadopted roads at new developments.

Subject to the change, the minutes were moved for approval by Councillor Bibby and seconded by Councillor Shotton.

RESOLVED:

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

45. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme and an update on actions arising from previous meetings. On Environmental Enforcement, she advised that the policy would be forwarded to Town and Community Councils once it had been approved by Cabinet and that the Budget Statement was due to be circulated.

The Committee supported the suggestion for Climate Change to be the subject of an all-Member workshop in February 2020. The Chairman asked that any questions be submitted to him in advance.

Councillor Peers questioned whether the five 'test of significance' questions used to identify future agenda items applied to all committees and were embodied in the Constitution. He suggested that a sixth question be included on whether the issue was of public or Member concern. The Facilitator's suggestion that this be referred to the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee was supported.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved by Councillor Peers and seconded by Councillor Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved, including the Member workshop on Climate Change in February;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises;
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions; and

- (d) That the suggestion for a sixth 'test of significance' question in section 1.02 of the report be referred to the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee.

46. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY: COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21

The Corporate Finance Manager presented a report on the current financial forecast for 2020/21 together with efficiencies and cost pressures across portfolios. Specific proposals for the portfolio were highlighted for review. Since the report to Cabinet in April, the overall projected 'gap' in the Council's funding requirements for 2020/21 had increased by £2.854m to £16.174m.

The report also set out the national position and options available for the Council to achieve a balanced budget. Proposed efficiencies for all portfolios had been shared with Members at a workshop during the summer. Since that time, no further options had been put forward. The overall summary position to date showed a significant contribution of £8-8.5m towards the budget gap comprising of corporate and portfolio efficiencies and income (£1.784m), income derived from a provisional 5% increase in Council Tax (£4.38m) and the amount available to the Council from an Actuarial review which was nearing completion (£2m). The remaining options - dependent on the outcome of the Welsh Government (WG) budget - were a further review of the Pension Fund employer contributions, the sharing of cost pressures with schools and a Council Tax increase above the working assumption. The Provisional Settlement was due to be published on 16 December, with the Final Settlement confirmed for 25 February; possibly after the Council had set its final budget for 2020/21.

Councillor Peers asked whether a review of services was amongst the remaining solutions available to balance the budget. He noted that the provisional 5% increase in Council Tax required a much improved Settlement and said that alternative options were needed to avoid a similar position to that in the budget process for 2019/20. He also commented on the projected income from car parking where some areas had exceeded projected levels whereas others were consistently below targets. He added that garden waste charges should not be classed as an efficiency as charges were being passed to residents.

In response, the Corporate Finance Manager said that all service efficiencies had been included in portfolio business plans and that to implement anything new at this stage would be difficult. On the Council Tax increase, whilst a positive Settlement was expected from WG, the question remained whether it would be sufficient. More detail on the options available would be reported to Council later in the day. On the single person discount for Council Tax, a review that was underway was expected to generate additional income during 2019/20 and 2020/21. The Corporate Finance Manager acknowledged the need to differentiate between cost efficiencies and income generation.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas said that after the achievement of efficiencies, a decision had been taken not to cut any more services to avoid the impact on residents.

The Chairman sought clarification on contributions from Organisational Change and the efficiency on income from external works.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that recognising the difficulty of finding further efficiencies, beyond those already identified, had prompted a change in the way of working to generate income. More information would be shared at a later stage on exploring such opportunities within services through cultural changes or Alternative Delivery Models. On income from external works, the Chief Officer provided explanation on the benefits from the outsourced fleet provision through a single contractor, resulting in newer vehicles and reduced maintenance costs.

When asked by the Chairman, the Corporate Finance Manager said that the income generation approach would be applied across the whole of Council services.

Councillor Banks said that the aim was to protect core services and that no further suggested efficiencies had been put forward by Members. He gave a reminder that garden waste collection was not a mandatory service and that the charges offered value for money to residents.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Shotton and seconded by Councillor Dunbobbin.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Streetscene & Transportation and Planning, Environment & Economy efficiency proposals for 2020/21 be endorsed; and
- (b) That the Streetscene & Transportation and Planning, Environment & Economy cost pressures recommended for inclusion in the budget for 2020/21 be endorsed.

47. OUTCOME OF THE WASTE STRATEGY REVIEW CONSULTATION PROCESS

Councillor Carolyn Thomas introduced a report to seek a recommendation to Cabinet to approve changes to the recycling and waste collection service following public consultation. She thanked residents for working with the Council to maintain strong recycling performance currently ranked the third best in Wales.

The Regulatory Services Manager explained that the recommendations took account of over 8,000 consultation responses, reflected changes to the national strategy and sought further improvement on recycling performance to meet future targets. Whilst a change in black bin collection frequency was not currently supported, 32% of residents had indicated that they were unsure whether they could manage in the event of such a change. It was recommended that this option be reviewed again in 12 months' time to understand the impact of changes by Welsh Government (WG) to the national strategy. The proposal for increased enforcement had been widely supported, with some residents recognising the need for accountability.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that the proposals aimed to achieve a positive impact through changes in behaviour. In recognising concerns about increased enforcement, the three-stage approach allowed for informing and educating in the first instance with formal action taken for continued non-compliance. Current statistics demonstrated the effectiveness of the process in helping residents to understand and follow the system. Other proposed changes were a programme of education for residents, a trial of Absorbent Hygiene Product (AHP) collections funded by WG, a round review of the routing of waste collection rounds and the separation of cardboard and paper recycling to generate additional income.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas said that residents should be encouraged to recycle more food waste and that she was able to visit schools and communities to raise awareness of the proposed changes. She also advised of a national campaign to increase education on recycling.

Whilst in favour of increased enforcement for those consistently failing to recycle, Councillor Peers said that consideration must be given to any contributing factors, for example age or health issues. He asked if there was sufficient capacity within waste collection crews to maintain the monitoring list for recycling which should be evidence-based. The Regulatory Services Manager said that there should be no impact on the crews and that residents' names were removed from the monitoring list where enforcement was no longer required. Vulnerable residents experiencing problems with recycling were identified and a process was in place to target appropriate support. In response to further questions, it was clarified that AHP collections would mirror the current medical waste collections involving a separate bag. The separation of paper and cardboard was an operational change also reflected through consultation feedback and would be introduced in stages.

Councillor Hardcastle raised concerns that some older or vulnerable residents were uncertain about how to recycle and may worry about the prospect of enforcement. He spoke in support of the proposals but raised concerns about the potential for recycling to be mistakenly placed in a neighbour's black bin.

The Chief Officer reminded Members of the outcomes of discussion on the Waste Strategy at the October meeting. He said that Councillor Hardcastle's concerns would be taken back and gave examples where households in need of support had been identified and followed up by officers, as education was the priority rather than issuing fixed penalty notices. On resource implications, it was noted that the quoted figure of £70K included the cost of the vehicle and overheads for the two additional Enforcement officers.

During the debate, Members commended the extensive consultation exercise, the outcome on black bin collection frequency and the focus on education.

Councillor Dunbobbin paid tribute to members of the public who had responded to the survey. On the consultation process, it was confirmed that the views of Streetscene operatives had been included via workforce briefings.

The outcomes of the report were also welcomed by Councillor Bibby who shared an example where officers had provided support to a vulnerable resident in a caring and sensitive manner.

Councillor Dolphin spoke in support of the removal of Sunday collections and robust enforcement action. He referred to the impact of dropped litter outside properties and adequate provision for storing shredded paper ready for collection. Councillor Carolyn Thomas provided advice on the best way of storing recycling materials to maximise space in the bins.

In response to comments by Councillor Owen Thomas on reducing excessive packaging, Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to consultation by UK and Welsh Governments on manufacturer responsibility.

Councillor Hutchinson reiterated the need to support vulnerable people across all types of accommodation, and the need to educate people on the correct way of recycling. The Regulatory Services Manager said that leaflet distribution to all residents would form part of the education programme.

In thanking officers for the report, the Chairman encouraged Members who were also school governors to raise awareness of the proposals in schools.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Bibby and seconded by Councillor Shotton.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the responses to the public consultation exercise on the Council's Waste Strategy be noted; and
- (b) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the changes to the recycling and waste collection service detailed in the report.

48. PROPOSALS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AT STANDARD YARD WASTE TRANSFER STATION

Councillor Carolyn Thomas introduced a report containing proposals to upgrade the existing Waste Transfer Station (WTS) at Standard Industrial Estate in Buckley due to significant growth in processing demand. The WTS enabled the separation and sorting of recycling materials before being sent for onward processing. The report set out funding proposals and sought approval to Cabinet to progress with the project.

The Service Delivery Manager, Highways & Waste said that the proposals had been informed by the waste consultation exercise including operatives working at the site. The proposals would improve access and facilities and create an educational centre whilst also resolving logistical issues at the site. The aim at this stage was to gain political approval prior to progressing with the design of the development.

In response to questions from the Chairman, Councillor Carolyn Thomas said that there was no potential for sharing the WTS as neighbouring councils had their own facilities.

The two local Members, Councillors Hutchinson and Peers thanked the Service Delivery Manager for meeting with them and giving them the opportunity to provide feedback. Whilst both supported the need for investment on the site, Councillor Peers raised a number of concerns which had already been shared with officers. He questioned the viability of relocating the existing Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) to Greenfield and asked where the equipment breakdown issues had been reported. He considered the proposed new access road off Globe Way to be unnecessary and instead suggested utilising the existing road (marked with arrows on the plan) to avoid cutting off the building. Therefore he proposed that the first recommendation be changed to note the proposal "in principle" to improve the site.

In welcoming feedback, the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) expressed a willingness to discuss options for the development of the site to ensure its future viability. He said that the maintenance issues had increased over time as the equipment aged.

The Service Delivery Manager explained that the relocation of the MRF was only intended to provide resilience as a backup facility to increase capacity at Greenfield.

Councillor Shotton urged the Council to take advantage of funding opportunities from Welsh Government as and when they became available.

The recommendations, as amended, were moved by Councillor Peers and seconded by Councillor Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposals, in principle, for developing the Standard Yard Waste Transfer Station (WTS) be noted; and
- (b) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the proposed funding bids and investment required for Standard Yard WTS.

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

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

50. FLINT LANDFILL AND CRUMPS YARD SOLAR PV FINAL BUSINESS CASES

Councillor Bithell introduced a report on the final business cases for proposals to develop solar PV developments at two brownfield sites (Flint Landfill

and Crumps Yard) following the conclusion of intensive pre-development activities. Whilst planning permission had been obtained for the development at Flint Landfill, a decision on Crumps Yard was expected early in the New Year. Councillor Bithell outlined the main considerations from the report including a number of financial and environmental benefits from the scheme which would contribute towards local and national priorities.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) said that the report provided detailed technical and financial information on the scheme.

The Committee was introduced to the Energy Conservation Engineer (Sadie Waterhouse) who provided clarification on the financial implications, contractual requirements and community benefits. Following a request from the Chairman, she agreed to circulate site location plans to the Committee.

The Chairman said that more detail on the community benefits would be welcomed by Members. The Chief Officer spoke about a shift in the procurement strategy to achieve broader environmental benefits.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked officers for the report and welcomed its positive contribution towards climate change.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Shotton and seconded by Councillor Dunbobbin.

RESOLVED:

That the Project and Business Case be supported for the development of Crumps Yard, Connah's Quay and Flint Landfill for ground mounted solar photovoltaic uses.

51. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 9.30am and ended at 11.50am)

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Chairman