

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 SEPTEMBER 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Monday, 21 September 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chairman)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Patrick Heesom, Cindy Hinds, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

APOLOGY: Councillor George Hardcastle

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation); Chief Executive and Head of Democratic Services

IN ATTENDANCE: Team Leader – Democratic Services, Overview & Scrutiny Facilitators and Democratic Services Officer.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Facilitator advised that it had been confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the County Council that the Chair of the Committee should come from the Independent Alliance Group. The Committee was advised that Councillor Rosetta Dolphin had been appointed to this role for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Councillor Rosetta Dolphin as Chair of the Committee be noted.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Joe Johnson nominated Councillor David Evans as Vice-Chair of the Committee and this was seconded by Councillor Paul Shotton. There were no further nominations. On being put to the vote, this was carried.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Evans be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2020 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Sean Bibby and Chris Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

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

5. EMERGENCY SITUATION BRIEFING (VERBAL)

The Chief Executive explained that the current situation was fluid. He and his Chief Officer colleagues would be ensuring that Members received short up to date verbal briefings at the start of meetings. He also commented that it may yet be necessary to reinstate the situational briefings which had been delivered to members during the first six months of the emergency.

RESOLVED:

Noted.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report on the Terms of Reference of the Committee advising that all of the Committees have been changed as a result of the review. The following Regeneration Services have been transferred to this Committee from the former Community & Enterprise Committee:-

- Communities First
- Economic Development and Tourism
- Enterprise
- Regeneration Partnership
- Rural Development Plan
- Visit Wales

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

RESOLVED:

That the terms of reference, as agreed by Council and appended to the report, be noted.

7. RECOVERY STRATEGY (PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY PORTFOLIO)

The Chief Executive presented a report to provide the Committee with oversight of recovery planning for its portfolio areas as part of the strategy for the resumption of full democratic governance. Feedback from each of the Overview & Scrutiny committees on the risk registers, recovery priorities and revised performance indicator targets for their respective areas would be reported to Cabinet prior to publication of a full Recovery Strategy.

A presentation showing the handover from response to recovery covered the following points:

- Recommendations from Cabinet
- Objectives of the Recovery Strategy
- Response Objectives
- Examples of local achievements in Response
- Recovery - handover arrangements
- Regional and Local Recovery Structures
- Recovery Objectives - Services
- Recovery Activities
- Community Recovery
- Council Plan and Performance
- Democratic Governance of Recovery

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) went through the Community Recovery section of the report, which had been split into two sub-groups Economy and Vulnerability and Poverty. He gave further background to the Sub-Regional Community Recovery group, which is a joint Public Service Board initiative between Flintshire and Wrexham. Four recovery themes had been identified for action and he advised that this was Joint Lead for the Environment and Carbon Reduction workstreams. He gave two examples of what they proposed to do to help the Environment; Green Spaces which was to improve the quality, provision usage, accessibility to promote green spaces and secondly Carbon Reduction to address the challenges of climate change at a local level.

The Chief Executive referred to the Council Plan that was refreshed on an annual basis but due to the emergency disruption, which kicked in mid-March, was not presented in April. He explained that Cabinet had extracted from it and updated the key things that were essential to recovery between now and next Spring when the Council and its Services would hopefully be re-stabilised due to the massive disruption and produced a draft Council Plan attached to the report

Also attached was an updated version of the Key Performance Indicators relating to the two portfolios indicating where changes had to be made to ambition and targeting in year due to the interruption by the emergency or by some of the data that no longer applied.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) explained the format of the report which was purely based on the Recovery of Planning, Environment and Economy together with 4 appendices attached. He made reference to the 14 recovery objectives that were listed which were set in July 2020 some of which had already been addressed.

He reported that the bulk of the portfolio were not identified as critical services, although still working, with the exception of Trading Standards, Licensing, Environmental Health Functions and Food Safety Functions as well as Health and Safety who were assisting the establishment of PPE model which all had to continue.

He pointed out the risks:-

- 20 open risks spilt over Portfolio Management, Workforce, External Regulations, ICT & Systems; Portfolio Service and Performance
- Specific Recovery risks shown as *
- Number of red risks reduced by 20% since June
- 40% of risks now decreasing, compared to 25% in June

and focused on 3 of them:-

Workforce - PE07 - Impact on service delivery due to the resilience of staff and succession planning was going down due to the redeployment of staff, external recruitment and engagement of consultants explaining that September was a month for recovery in that area.

External Regulation - PE13 - Another example of a risk reducing was Welsh Government had accepted the revised delivery agreement for the Local Development Plan.

PE-14 - Previously going down but now stabilised at amber due to the recruitment of two temporary Environmental Health Officers to assist with the planned and reactionary programmes of inspections whilst also enforcing national and local Covid 19 restrictions, regulatory activity and TTP work.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Owen Thomas the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) reported that they were in a better position than a year ago to know what the impact of Ash Dieback was. During lockdown, with the roads being quiet, they had managed to go out doing survey work and early reports show that it hadn't progressed as quickly this year as they first thought but initial survey work showed extensive areas of Ash Dieback growing close to some major roads e.g. A5104 leading to Corwen had extensive Ash Trees showing signs of the disease. The complication was that only 5% were within Flintshire's land ownership and they would need to track who owned the land to make them aware of the fact that they had these diseased Ash trees on their land. Now that the survey work has been done they have a much better idea of where the trees were, and what status they were at to inform future planning.

Councillor Chris Dolphin wanted clarification about future lockdowns querying if Officers would be going out on their own to view sites and not necessarily speak to anyone. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) clarified that before undertaking any site visit Officers needed to do a thorough risk assessment, which remains a requirement. The first question asked was it essential to go on visit or can the information be gained in some other way. If the answer was no then the Officer wouldn't undertake the site visit. Throughout lockdown there were two members of staff within the Development Management Service who were identified as critical staff and if any really important cases were flagged up then site visits were undertaken safely and also followed through on enforcement on a number of cases. Throughout lockdown, the first two quarters of this year, Flintshire served more enforcement notices than last year due to triage visits. On one particular case drone footage was commissioned which in normal circumstances wouldn't have been used he also added that Building Control visits had been carried out via video conference.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Chris Dolphin and seconded by Cllr Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the full set of immediate strategic priorities for recovery of the portfolio as set out in the report be agreed, together with the risk analysis and mitigating actions both live and planned; and
- (b) That a forward work programme for the Committee be rebuilt for the remainder of the 2020/21 Council year with recovery planning at its core.

8. RECOVERY STRATEGY (STREETSCENE AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO)

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) gave a presentation which provided background on risks had been identified. Together with his Senior Management Team they had identified 47 different risks across Finance, Workforce, Property Assets, Governance/Legal, External Regulation, ICT & Systems, Service Delivery, Highway Policy, Fleet, Waste Strategy and Parking and Enforcement of which 2 had been closed but were reviewed weekly. Moving into winter months new risks were emerging and would continue to be monitored.

He provided further information on the following specific areas:-

Finance

ST09 – Market for resale of recycled material extremely volatile. Reporting that there are huge swings in the prices they receive for plastic, paper and glass etc. and unfortunately most of them are slipping creating a substantial pressure for business but also creating issues for staff in finding ready markets for the material.

ST10a – Overall waste arising up by between 10 – 20% due in part to the number of people working from home, spending more time at home and not going on holidays resulting in waste not being taken elsewhere. Tonnage is up which is causing pressure in terms of additional gate fee but also more work for the staff when collecting waste on the side of the road.

Workforce

ST12 – Reduced numbers of frontline workers and contractors to deliver services safely due to increased sickness levels.

ST17a – Increased risk of ill health due to mental health and well-being, personal and/or family issues.

Councillor Paul Shotton thanked Streetscene for returning to a more normal situation particularly on grass cutting in his area. He advised that the Interim Supervisor had been in touch with Connah's Quay Members to put forward their areas which were in need of a serious clean up similar to the one that happened in Shotton.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas advised of a Recycling Campaign that Welsh Government were launching, working in partnership with Local Authorities called 'Be Mighty Recycle Campaign'. She added there would be a lot of publicity about it to encourage people to recycle and get the rates back up again which would hopefully stop littering as well.

The Chair asked a question about the second recommendation. She questioned what would happen to everything else that would have been part of the Forward Work Programme. The Head of Democratic Services advised that a member of his team had been identifying items which were in the Forward Work Programme of both the former Environment and Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committees with regard to ongoing items which would be fed into the forward work programme for the Committee. There would be an emphasis on recovery items but the forward work programme would also recognise that regular items do still need to come to Committee and also issues dealing with regulatory functions.

The Chief Executive added that thought was needed to be given about risks that the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) and the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) had highlighted as they also figured in the immediate Forward Work Programme perhaps in a way they wouldn't have done so before. Also looking at current risks business continuity needed looking at for the winter as there could be a very challenging winter ahead. Some services might have to take a step backwards to a partial delivery.

He advised that Special meetings were being set up for November specifically to deal with the budget.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Chris Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

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9. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.24 am)

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Chairman