

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 OCTOBER 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Tuesday, 13 October 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Cindy Hinds, Kevin Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Carol Ellis

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation); Chief Executive, Enterprise and Regeneration Manager, Regulatory Services Manager, Trading Standards Team Leader.

IN ATTENDANCE: Overview & Scrutiny Facilitators and Democratic Services Officer.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None were received.

11. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING (ENV)

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking for consideration and the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) gave brief updates on some of the items.

In response to requests from Councillors the Scrutiny Facilitator confirmed that reports on the Integrated Transport Strategy and Climate Change would be brought to the Committee when there was any further relevant information to present and confirmed that Planning Enforcement could be added. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) confirmed that a virtual meeting could be set up with the Management Team and Project Manager from Parc Adfer due to the site visit being deferred in the new year.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Owen Thomas the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) confirmed that there were plans for a cycle path from Rhydymwyn to Mold which had been put forward and the route was being looked into by Officers with an option to use the old disused rail land but unfortunately a lot of that land was not owned by the Council. It would need to be advertised as part of Network Map which would then fall into the bidding process for Welsh Government. He added that it would be some years away as there was a lot of work involved in procuring the land and getting the support for the route from Welsh Government.

Councillor Evans asked what the timescale was for the Mold to Broughton cycle path. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) advised that there was a full set of plans for the route now and that he had been in conversation with Welsh Government about potential funding which they were willing to fund for the Mold to Buckley and Sandycroft to Airbus sections rather than the full length and he would share the plans at a future meeting.

Councillor Hutchinson was interested to know if the original route of the Mold to Broughton and Chester cycle path was still intended to be along the Alyn Valley through Llong and Penyffordd. He felt this route would put cyclists off having to cycle up the Warren Hill or would it be following the railway line along the Alyn Valley which is more or less flat to Broughton and beyond to Saltney and Chester.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) advised that that would have been the preferred route but unfortunately the land is no longer in the ownership of the Council. Discussions were taking place with the land owner to utilise sections of the railway line as it comes out of Mold through Wylfa where we have got issues getting a dedicated cycle lane. He referred to an alternative route which utilises the verges passed Padeswood Cement through to Dobshell. This would be a dedicated cycle lane and not an on road cycle lane so it would be able to follow the railway for the full length. Details would be shared at a future meeting.

Councillor Bithell stated that there were a series of consultations due to take place in March but were aborted due to the emergency situation in relation to the Mold to Broughton cycle path. A portion of the old rail track along the Rhydymwyn to Mold cycle path was sold a number of years ago to a light railway group which was no longer in operation. He added there might be an opportunity to enter into negotiations with them to get land back into public ownership and have the cycle way along that route.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor David Evans.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approves/ amends as necessary;
- (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; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

12. 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.

13. REGENERATION OVERVIEW (VERBAL)

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) reminded the Committee that at the last meeting they discussed the change to the Terms of Reference by bringing in Enterprise and Regeneration which previously reported to Community and Enterprise.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager gave an overview of the Enterprise and Regeneration Service to familiarise the Committee with his aspect of work:-

- Service Functions
- Business Development
- Housing Regeneration
- Employability Programmes
- Social Value
- Digital Connectivity
- Regeneration
- Economic Governance

Councillor Heesom asked how Members could oversee and participate on the economic recovery process. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that scrutiny of the economic recovery process was an important function of this Committee. He said that he was open to suggestions from Members on how communication could be improved.

Councillor Shotton commented on how much pressure the Communities Work Team must be under and asked if Welsh Government were giving support as many jobs would be under threat. He added that retraining was the key to gaining employment and asked if that work was still going on giving the example of how much had been done with the Care Sector. The Enterprise and Regeneration agreed that it was a difficult time at the moment but this did not just fall on the Committees for Work Team it was a shared effort and numbers could not be predicted but an active dialog was kept to understand the current pressures and was fed back to Welsh Government. Some programmes were still taking place via virtually learning but people could not be sent into work places for work experience.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that Cllr Shotton's point about Digital Connectivity was correct in that some providers were investing particularly in the most built up areas but across North Wales it was very light as it was not naturally an attractive area to invest in. He emphasised the importance of the Growth deal programme to digital connectivity.

Councillor Hutchinson reported that the former Factory Shop in Buckley, which was previously up for let was now for sale and questioned what could be done to the shop to attract companies as it was becoming an eyesore. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager said that he was aware that it was for sale and that the sale price might attract interest as the lettings price had not. He advised that they were in touch with owner to give support and understand their longer term aims for the unit.

Councillor Hardcastle raised concern about the lack of consultation about the positioning of poles by BT Openreach. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager responded by saying that the Utility Companies have considerable powers and rights when it comes to installing their infrastructure. He advised they do talk to the Council, but the Council have very limited control over what they do and cannot insist that they consult. He advised that feedback will be given to Openreach, however there was a need for high quality infrastructure fit for purpose for the future which does sometimes mean disruption.

Councillor Owen Thomas was concerned that Town Centres were becoming just charity shops and cafes and there was a need to look at what comes in as they won't survive.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager stated that the future of Town Centres have not changed significantly since the 1970's therefore there was a need to support change. With the current crisis the world was changing which will cause organisations to think how they do business and people may be inclined to work locally and that potentially brings opportunity to town centres.

Councillor Kevin Hughes added that there was a need to base what we need to do on evidence as we cannot compete with shopping centres e.g. Broughton and Cheshire Oaks and there has to be a mix of retail, goods and services. He suggested looking at other towns and cities that have achieved real success like Altrincham and Rotherham.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager agreed that evidence base is really important and that there was a North Wales Project being undertaken to increase the range of evidence so that comparisons could be made. He agreed that it was important that we learn from other areas.

The Chair thanked the officers and for the detailed overview on this important area of work which was now part of the remit of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

Noted.

14. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE (PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY PORTFOLIO)

Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) gave a brief update on the two elements of the report:-

- The objectives for recovery for the portfolio

- The portfolio risk register and the risk mitigation actions both live and planned

Councillor Paul Shotton asked what plans were in place to move the enforcement process forward as he had a number of issues that needed to be resolved. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) advised that they had brought in consultants to assist with the backlog with 160 cases being passed to them. He advised that whilst the team only had 30% capacity earlier in the year which had a significant impact on their performance. The team were now back to full capacity and working through outstanding cases, whilst sticking to the priorities established within the Planning Enforcement Policy. The Chief Officer advised that 160 cases had been passed to them.

The Chair, Councillor Dolphin asked what results had come back from Contractors, and referred to two sites they had been out to with reports that they had driven passed without stopping. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) responded by saying that without knowing the individual cases that it was difficult to comment but to bear in mind that evidence could be captured without physically visiting a site as care is needed when going onto sites and the risk that Officers and Consultant would be exposed to. He added that the Council have received criticism for not visiting sites because of the risk of outbreak and recently one site was one of the hotspots in terms of Covid outbreak.

The recommendation in the report were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor David Evans.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the progress made to support the Recovery Strategy by the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio.

15. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE (STREETSCENE AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO)

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) gave a brief update on the two elements of the report

- The objectives for recovery for the portfolio
- The portfolio risk register and the risk mitigation actions both live and planned

Councillor Evans asked if the opening hours of Housing and Recycling Centres could be extended past 5.00 pm to accommodate people who work and also questioned if the staff were able to assist you as it states on the website. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) responded by saying that the opening times do change in the winter and the 5.00 pm closure was based upon footfall as the figures didn't justify being open longer. He added that he would be happy to do a local consultation with the visitors. Also support was not being offered to users at present but if support was needed it could be booked via the Contact Centre. The website would be updated once the arrangements had been reviewed.

In response to a questions raised by Councillor Owen Thomas the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) advised that when a refuse vehicle needed repair and this resulted in a reduction in the number of vehicles on a round, local Members could be informed in the future. He also agreed that the trees along the A541 would be assessed following the meeting.

Councillor Hardcastle questioned as to whether the cycle path between Ewloe and Aston was going ahead. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) advised that this was a trunk road proposal and that it was their responsibility to build it.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Hutchinson about identifying additional provision for burial sites the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) reported that the Hope site had been purchased by the Council and environmental studies were being undertaken before it could open possibly in the next 3 to 4 months. He added that Hawarden was a challenge due to problems with the land owner not wanting to sell although an alternative site has been identified which was local to the existing site with adequate space for a number of years. Buckley was more of a challenge but was committed to finding a solution. None were at a critical stage where there was no provision. .

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor David Evans and seconded by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee considers and supports the progress made to support Recovery Strategy by the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio.

16. RENEWAL OF PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS (PSPOS)

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) gave a brief introduction on the consultation that has been undertaken on the two Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) covering Dog Control and Alcohol Control and seeking view in advance of consideration at Cabinet on the 20th of October.

The Trading Standards Team Leader presented the report outlining the requirements as set out in the report. He explained that PSPO's were not permitted to have an effect for a period of more than 3 years, unless extended under Chapter 2 Section 60 of the Act.

The consultation ran between 3rd August and 4th September, 2020 and the results were as listed in the report which included comments that were received via email which could not be included when completing the electronic survey.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Ellis the Regulatory Services Manager advised that when the Order was originally introduced signage had originally been placed but unfortunately over time it had been removed. A full review of signage has already taken place and more robust signs will includes maps of the area showing exclusion zones. Areas that had been highlighted as a significant problem, such as Mill Lane Playing Field by Elfed High School,

Buckley would be first on the list and should this extension be approved it would be taken forward with immediate effect and would take 3 months to complete the full project. As for enforcement within exclusion zones the Team check signage at the location before they take any action firstly by speaking to people, as part of engage and educate, to make sure that they are fully aware of what restrictions are in that location. If they do not take that advice then a Fixed Penalty Notice would be issued.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas added that they were aware that Rosie Fishing Group at Wepre Park had requested a PSPO around the lake to exclude dogs from that area. Councillor Shotton added that the area was classified as a recreation area.

Councillor Hughes questioned as to why the number of fixed penalty notices was low as it was one of the biggest issues that he was contacted on within his ward. Along with Councillor Shotton he would like to see something specific in the order that targets dog owners that fail to dispose of waste in the bins provided. The Regulatory Services Manager said that success of the enforcement team was not gauged on how many fixed penalty notices were issued but that they looked at engagement and education. Following the departure of Kingdom more emphasis has been put on the team being visible and engaging and speaking to dog owners. Under the Environmental Act enforcement can be made under littering if the Team witnesses someone that does not dispose dog waste bags correctly.

As requested by members the Regulatory Services Manager confirmed that she was in a place to share the standard smaller signs that they have at present and could also provide Community Groups with them to display. Once the more robust signage was ready it would be shared with members and they would be made aware before signs were erected in their wards.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Patrick Heesom and seconded by Councillor David Evans

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee recommend to Cabinet for the extension of the existing Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for dog control be agreed;
- (b) That the Committee recommend to Cabinet for the extension of the existing public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for alcohol control; and
- (c) That the Committee recommends to Cabinet that a review is undertaken of all signage at all sites subject to the PSPO arrangements.

17. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.08 pm)

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Chair