

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12 MAY 2021

Minutes of the remote meeting of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Wednesday, 12 May 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

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

APOLOGIES: Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, and Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Bob Connah for Councillor George Hardcastle

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Haydn Bateman and Veronica Gay (as observers)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Transport Manager, Enterprise and Regeneration Manager, Access and Natural Environment Manager, Highway Network Manager, and Team Leader – Access

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chair expressed congratulations to Councillor Carolyn Thomas on her election to the Senedd and requested that a letter be sent to Councillor Thomas congratulating her on behalf of the Committee.

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

54. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme.

She advised that an update on the Integrated Transport Plan and Climate Change would be scheduled on the agenda when appropriate and drew attention to the further items which were listed for consideration at future meetings. The Facilitator asked Members to forward to her any suggestions for further items they wished to be included on the Programme.

Councillor Chris Dolphin requested that an item on Town Centre Markets be included on the FWP. He also requested that the item on Planning and Enforcement which was scheduled for consideration by the Committee at a meeting to be held in November 2021 be brought forward as a matter of urgency. It was agreed that the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) would discuss the scope and purpose of the item with Councillor Dolphin and any concerns following the meeting.

The Facilitator referred to the actions from previous meetings which had been completed and asked the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) to provide an update on weekend missed collections. The Chief Officer said an email would be sent to update all Members on the contact details.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson commended the Chief Officer and his team on service provision which he said overall had been excellent.

Councillor Chris Bithell asked for an update on the Aggregates Levy Fund. The Facilitator advised that no response had been received yet to the letter sent to the Welsh Government on behalf of the Committee to seek reinstatement of the Fund.

RESOLVED:

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

55. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) provided background information and introduced a report to update Members on the current challenges facing town centres and the regional and local responses being put into place.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager presented the report and outlined the strategic context, the Flintshire town centre regeneration strategic approach and the funding currently available to support it, and the programmes of work underway in Flintshire. He explained that the report also proposed an increased emphasis on intervention to create more sustainable use of properties within town centres.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the issue of unused and unsightly properties in towns and on the resource implications for investment in Flintshire towns. Whilst welcoming the funding made available by the Welsh Government he commented that it either required repayment or match funding and asked if this would be a problem for the Council going forward. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that the enforcement programme would begin in

June this year to set out a realistic and robust programme of work around empty properties. Regarding the concerns around funding expressed by Councillor Shotton the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager confirmed that where grant funding was available it required a minimum of 30% funding from another source and loan funding would need to be paid back. If match funding could not be found then the Council could not participate in projects.

Councillor Owen Thomas expressed concerns that the availability of shopping in town centres might not exist in the future.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson referred to the availability of funding for investment in Flintshire towns and asked if funding was available for Buckley Town Centre, citing the restoration of Buckley Public Baths as a project in need of urgent funding. The Chief Officer Planning Environment & Economy referred to the development of action plans for each town centre to show funders how the package of property (and other) interventions fitted together into a whole. He advised that in the first instance, suggestions were needed from the local community to determine the projects to come forward. The Chief Officer and Enterprise and Regeneration Manager also responded to Councillor Hutchinson on his specific request for assistance with funding to restore Buckley Public Baths.

Councillor Chris Bithell expressed a number of concerns around the funding available for capital investment and asked if the funding would remain available for some time to allow assessments to be fully made for applications for the future.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress in delivering the priorities for town centre regeneration as agreed at the March 2020 Cabinet meeting be noted;
- (b) That the resource implications of delivering the programme and consideration for their inclusion in the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme be noted; and
- (c) That the Committee supports giving delegated authority to the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to bid for external funding as it becomes available to support the approaches to town centre regeneration set out in this report.

56. ACCESS TEAM PERFORMANCE 2019/20 AND 2020/21

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the report to inform the Committee of the progress of the Access Team over the last two years and highlight its performance in managing and maintaining the network and developing access opportunities for health, wellbeing and outdoor recreation.

The Access and Natural Environment Manager provided background information. He presented the report which detailed the measures of performance over 2019/20 and 2020/21, in particular looking at how the Access Team had responded during the Covid 19 pandemic and adapted to network needs during the lockdowns.

Councillor David Evans referred to the closure of public footpaths, as outlined in section 1.05 of the report, and asked for an update on the current situation. The Team Leader - Access advised that all the footpaths had reopened. Officers also responded to the further questions raised by Councillor Evans concerning footpaths, bridleways, and inspection of footpaths. Councillor Evans suggested that Members be trained to voluntarily inspect footpaths in their Wards to assist the Service. The Access and Natural Environment Manager welcomed the suggestion that Members and volunteers highlight any issues with footpaths in their areas to enable problems to be resolved by the Access Team as they arise.

Councillor Chris Dolphin commended the Access and Natural Environment Manager and his team on their hard work and achievements.

Councillor Paul Shotton commended the work of the rangers on the coastal path and referred to the increase in public use of the coastal path due to the pandemic. He commented on the voluntary work of the Deeside litter picking group which he said had done sterling work in clearing the coastal path area. Councillor Vicky Perfect also spoke in praise of the voluntary work of the Flint litter picking group.

Councillor Owen Thomas expressed concerns around the cost of maintaining footpaths which were not used at the expense of those in regular use and therefore required frequent maintenance. He asked if town and community councils were involved in the upkeep and decision-making around footpaths/rights of way.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson referred to matters relating to footpaths and landfill sites in the Buckley area and specifically the Standard landfill site. The Access and Natural Environment Manager responded to the concerns raised by Councillor Hutchinson and explained that work was in hand on the specific footpaths/rights of way he had referred to, in order to bring up to the required standard.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) drew attention to a quotation in section 3.01 of the report from the Ramblers Association Flintshire which he said reflected the very positive relationship between Flintshire Ramblers Association and the County Council Rights of Way team, and expressed thanks and congratulations to the Access and Natural Environment Manager, Team Leader – Access, and their staff on their hard work and achievements.

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

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee support the good work of the Access Team in managing, maintaining and developing Flintshire's Right of Way network.

57. ASH DIEBACK SURVEYS UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the report to provide an update on the work to mitigate the risks associated with the disease following the survey and inspection of affected trees adjacent to highways over the Summer 2020.

The Access and Natural Environment Manager presented the report which detailed how Flintshire County Council had confronted ash dieback in 2020/21 in line with the 2019 Ash Dieback Action Plan. He provided background information and advised that to moderate and manage the risk associated to ash dieback a series of surveys had been undertaken to assess the distribution and disease classification of roadside ash trees for priority and secondary roads. A programme of tree removal had begun on Flintshire owned trees and landowners with infected trees had been contacted to highlight the presence of ash dieback with an expectation that they would manage their own trees to mitigate the risks. In conclusion the Access and Natural Environment Manager outlined the next steps as detailed in the report.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked if there had been any issues regarding landowners refusing to take responsibility for ash dieback on the trees situated on boundary hedgerows with highways and asked how ownership of the land and tree was confirmed. The Access and Natural Environment Manager explained that enquiries were made with the landowner, Land Registry, and locally to determine ownership. In some cases where there was a shared responsibility, or unregistered land regarding boundary trees, the level of risk would take priority in terms of managing a diseased tree.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Joe Johnson and seconded by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee support the officers in their ongoing work associated with Ash Dieback.

58. HIGHWAYS ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN (HAMP)

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced the report to provide an update on the development of the Council's HAMP and provide an explanation of how the Council utilises the principles of the HAMP to guide the strategy for managing and maintaining the highway infrastructure. The report

also provided an update on the trial use of recycled material in highway resurfacing material.

The Highway Network Manager provided background information and presented the key considerations as detailed in the report. He also reported on the Council Policy on Highway Safety Inspections, intervention levels and response times which was appended to the report.

Councillor Paul Shotton said he was pleased and encouraged to read in the report that the use of plastic waste had been successfully trialled and was being considered for use in resurfacing material for roadworks. In response to a question from Councillor Shotton, the Chief Officer explained that some concerns had been expressed around the environmental impact of using recycled plastic in road surfacing material and the supplier had been asked to undertake research to conclude if the scheme was beneficial as a long-term sustainable and economic solution for the use of plastic products.

The Chief Officer responded to the specific concerns raised by Councillor Bob Connah regarding the control/monitoring of the work schedules of the contractors which were used by the Council.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Owen Thomas on the maintenance of cross-boundary road networks, the Chief Officer explained that each local authority had a duty to inspect and maintain its own roads. He agreed to take up the specific concerns raised by Councillor Thomas with the relevant Council on his behalf. The Highway Network Manager advised that the Council worked jointly with neighbouring local authorities when necessary. In response to a further question by Councillor Shotton regarding comparison with other local authorities, the Highway Network Manager referred to the data which had been provided by the Welsh Government in 2018/19 which showed that the Council was first in A and B roads and sixth in C roads. He said that the Council's own latest information provided by Welsh Government was that the Council had the least amount of poor condition roads in Wales.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson regarding temporary repairs to road pot-holes, the Highway Network Manager explained that there may be no immediate intention to replace a repaired pot-hole, however there was an awareness that the temporary measure may need further action going forward and explained the criteria to determine how a permanent repair was applied to the road network programme.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Joe Johnson and seconded by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the current arrangements and actions of the portfolio to maintain the highway network in accordance with the statutory requirement be noted;
and

- (c) That the Committee recommend approval of the revised policy for Highway and Car Park Safety Inspections, Intervention Criteria and Response Times to include a revised approach to Highway Structures inspections.

59. FORTHCOMING ACTIVE TRAVEL CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Highway Strategy Manager presented the report to inform the Committee of the forthcoming 12 week statutory consultation on both the Council's Active Travel Existing Route Map (ERM) and Integrated Network Map (INM) which was scheduled to commence in August 2021. Members were asked to comment or make suggestions on the proposed consultation process. He provided background information and reported on the main considerations as detailed in the report.

The Chief Officer emphasised the importance of schemes being included on the INM to form the basis of the Council's grant submissions to the Welsh Government for the future. He encouraged Members to add their suggestions for local schemes to the INM to support future bids.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Chris Dolphin and seconded by Councillor Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the timescales associated with the forthcoming consultation exercise for the Council's ERM and INM be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee requests a further report detailing the outcome of the formal consultation on the Council's INM, prior to submission in December 2021.

60. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.22 pm)

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Chair