

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 SEPTEMBER 2021

Minutes of the remote attendance meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Tuesday, 14 September 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

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

APOLOGIES: Councillors Andy Hughes and Christine Jones. Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Streetscene), Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Development Manager (Planning), Highway Network Manager, Service Manager Streetscene Delivery, Waste Strategy Manager, and Project Lead – Planning Services

For minute number 23

Andrew Fraser (Chief Executive), and Jamie Edwards (Operations Manager), Agile Applications

IN ATTENDANCE: Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 were submitted. The minutes were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Owen Thomas and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

20. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme. She drew attention to the items scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 12 October, and advised there would be an additional item on the agenda to consider the Budget 2022/23 – Stage 2.

In response to a question by Councillor Joe Johnson on progress on the incinerators at Parc Adfer, the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) advised that a virtual tour of Parc Adfer was scheduled for the next meeting. The Chair reminded Members to contact the Facilitator if they had any suggestions for further items to include on the Forward Work Programme.

The Facilitator referred to the actions arising from previous meetings. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) provided an update on progress on the actions arising from the meeting held on 8 June. She explained that the waste bin location criteria would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Owen Thomas expressed concerns around discarded litter on streets, roads, and in the countryside. The Highway Network Manager advised Members to raise concerns relating to specific premises with their area co-ordinator who would bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate business manager. Councillor Glyn Banks advised that the Welsh Government (WG) would be introducing measures to ensure that businesses which created waste packaging would be held responsible for removal of discarded waste/litter near their premises. Officers advised that information would be circulated on the WG initiative as soon as received.

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

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.

21. TARGET 70 – A REVIEW OF FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL’S WASTE STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced Neil Cox, Streetscene Service Manager, to the meeting. She presented the report which provided feedback from the two all-member workshops/seminars which had been held to give an update on the current recycling performance, the impact of the COVID pandemic on services and changes that the Council could implement to achieve the national recycling target of 70%. She advised that the report provided feedback from the seminars and recommendations on future recycling and waste service provisions. The Chief Officer drew attention to page 26 of the report which listed the recommendations which had been made by Members from the workshops/seminars. She reported on the key considerations as detailed in the report.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor George Hardcastle regarding waste recycling and the information and support available for elderly

and vulnerable people, the Chief Officer explained that work was being undertaken in conjunction with the Housing Service to raise awareness and further information was being developed and shared for people who did not have access to the internet.

Councillor Dave Evans spoke in support of the electronic tag system for brown bin collection (RFID radio frequency identification). He queried the data provided on the success rate of the pilot scheme. The Chief Officer responded to the points raised and confirmed that the pilot scheme had been successful and commented on the benefits achieved. She explained that it was intended to roll out the programme across the County, potentially on a phased approach, in the future.

Councillor Paul Shotton asked if information could be provided on the number of residents receiving assisted collections, and on the vehicle permit system. The Chief Officer agreed to circulate information on the number of assisted collections to the Committee following the meeting. Members were informed that literature for assisted collections could also be provided. The Chief Officer advised that an update on the vehicle permit system could be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair asked if a check was undertaken to ensure that the assisted collection scheme was still required by individuals. The Chief Officer agreed that a review would be undertaken to ensure that eligibility/requirement for the service was updated.

Councillor Sean Bibby commented on the need to raise public awareness on recycling in terms of clarity around what could and could not be recycled. He cited examples of collections which were not taken by the streetscene crews because they contained non-recyclable items. Councillor Bibby also commented on the side waste containers and bags and said litter problems were sometimes caused by split and open bags/containers. He welcomed the return of side-waste enforcement. The Chief Officer acknowledged the points made and said a review could be undertaken in the future.

Councillor Bibby raised a number of further questions concerning the availability of information on waste recycling in different languages, if there was a charge for the AHP collection service, and the issue of vehicles obstructing streets and preventing access by services (including emergency service vehicles). The Chief Officer responded in detail to the matters raised by Councillor Bibby and confirmed that the AHP collection service was free of charge.

In response to a question from the Chair around non collection of waste recycling the Chief Officer explained that the Streetscene service crew had stickers which could be put on the bag/container to explain why it was not collected.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson referred to two complaints he had received from residents in his ward concerning non-collection of the assisted service for the brown bin garden waste, and renewal of a blue badge. The Chief Officer

agreed to discuss the issue of the non-collection of the garden waste with Councillor Hutchinson following the meeting.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Owen Thomas.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee welcomes the feedback from the member seminars and supports the work undertaken to date to increase recycling rates; and
- (b) That the recommendations on future recycling and waste service provisions be approved.

22. WINTER MAINTENANCE POLICY REVIEW 2021-2023

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report to seek comment on the review of the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy. She provided background information and advised that the report outlined the current Policy (as appended), the legislative requirements of providing such a service, and the actions taken by the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio to support the winter maintenance service operations. In addition, the report outlined the County's response to other adverse weather events such as flooding and high winds.

The Highway Network Manager presented the key considerations as detailed in the report. In response to a query from the Chair, he explained the need to 'top-up' the reserve fund by £150k to prevent the Service from reaching an overspend position on the planned budget and reserve balance.

Councillors Owen Thomas, Dennis Hutchinson and George Hardcastle expressed concerns around the problem of blocked gulleys. The Chief Officer acknowledged the points made and explained that a review was being undertaken around the frequency and timeliness of maintenance of gulleys and further information would be included in a report to the Committee at a meeting on 9 November. Officers explained that the Streetscene Standards were to be reviewed next year and the frequency of gulley emptying was part of the standards. In response to the further concerns expressed by Members, Officers explained that the gulley emptying service was operational throughout the year and a number of projects were ongoing and additional resources applied to improve service following the impact of a storm last January.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Joe Johnson and seconded by Councillor George Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the outcome of the review of the Winter Maintenance Policy 2021-2023 (Appendix 1) and procedures for delivering the winter maintenance service operations, along with the County's response to other adverse weather events, be approved; and

- (b) That the need to maintain the budget at present levels, 'top up' the reserve by £150k and carry forward an MTFS revenue pressure for 2023/24 onwards be supported.

23. PLANNING AND ENFORCEMENT

The Development Manager (Planning Services) introduced a report to provide an update on the performance of the planning enforcement service with particular focus on response times and communication standards, site visits, use of planning consultancy, backlogs, achievements, and mitigation actions. She reported on the key considerations as detailed in the report.

The Development Manager introduced Andrew Fraser (Chief Executive) and Jamie Edwards (Operations Manager) Agile Applications, and Lynne Fensome, Project Lead – Planning Services. She explained that Andrew and Jamie would introduce and demonstrate the new software system procured by the Planning, Environment & Economy Service to provide a better infrastructure to deliver a range of services within the portfolio.

The Chair expressed concerns around the lack of response from Planning officers to the enquiries from Members on planning and enforcement matters and commented on the 10 day response deadline which she felt was too long. She acknowledged that some delays were due to wait times for a response from Legal Services which was beyond the control of Planning Services. The Development Manager explained that the 10 day response timescale was a corporate deadline across all services in the Council. She advised that the new software procured by the Planning, Environment & Economy Service would maximise the information available on planning applications directly to Members and the general public and therefore reduce the need for a direct response from officers to most enquiries and requests for additional information.

In response to the comments and concerns expressed by Members the Development Manager drew attention to the performance statistics provided in the report on the number of enforcement cases investigated, including those where positive enforcement action had been taken within each year and quarter 1 2021/22. She also advised that the issue of backlogs was addressed within the report and it had been agreed that a business case be prepared for an additional full-time permanent Planning Enforcement officer to be employed. The Development Manager explained that she was not able to comment on the specific cases raised by Members but would respond directly following the meeting.

Councillor Chris Bithell commented on the impact of Covid-19 on the Planning Service in terms of increased enquiries and applications concerning home improvements. He also said there was raised public awareness of building development in local areas due to people having been restricted to their local area and working from home. Councillor Bithell referred to the statistics provided in the report and reiterated that the total number of cases investigated and the number of cases investigated in 84 days or less, had risen significantly since 2018/19. He commented on the challenges of the pandemic and referred to the measures taken within the Planning service to maintain continuity of service delivery and performance. He welcomed the introduction of the new software

system (Agile Applications) which was much needed and would improve access to planning and enforcement information for Members, the general public, and applicants. He advised that a workshop would be arranged to inform Members how to access and use the system.

Andrew Fraser and Jamie Edwards gave a joint presentation on Agile Applications which covered the following:

- Company/product overview
- Project x 160 plus major tasks
- Citizen portals
 - Enforcements
 - Planning

The Chair suggested that a report be provided to the Committee in six months' time to give an update on progress of the new software. Following a suggestion from the Chair, it was agreed that Officers would design a training programme on the new system to include staff, clients, and Members.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the actions taken be supported;
- (b) That a progress report be provided to the Committee in March 2022; and
- (c) That Officers design a training programme on the new system to include staff, clients, and Members.

24. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.27 am)

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Chair