

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 NOVEMBER 2021

Minutes of the remote attendance meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Tuesday, 9 November 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

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Streetscene), Councillor Derek Butler (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Councillor Christine Jones (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services); Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Highway Network Manager, Access & Natural Environment Manager

For minute no.38: Gwladys Harrison – Chair, Greenfield Valley Trust, and Brenda Harvey – Strategy Lead, Greenfield Valley Trust

IN ATTENDANCE: Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

36. 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 7 December 2021. She advised that a workshop on the Integrated Transport Strategy Workshop would be held on 14 December, and an invitation had been sent to Members.

Councillor Sean Bibby requested that an item on bulky waste collections be included on the Programme for future consideration by the Committee.

The Facilitator referred to the actions arising from previous meetings and explained that progress on long-term actions was ongoing would be monitored and information provided when concluded.

Councillor David Evans referred to the action arising due to Litter and Fly tipping which had been ongoing since June 2021 and asked that a deadline be agreed for a response. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) agreed to make enquiries regarding timelines and provide a response. She advised that the action on Toilet Strategy had been recently completed.

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

Councillor Patrick Heesom referred to the comments that he had made, during consideration of the item on Minutes at the previous meeting of the Committee, concerning his request for examination of the Planning process. He understood that work was in progress with Internal Audit and wished to clarify that his comments were not intended to convey any criticism of the performance of officers in Planning Services. Councillor Heesom also expressed his apologies to the Chair for his behaviour during the meeting and his failure to respect her position as Chair.

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.

37. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair proposed a change in the order of the agenda to enable the item on Greenfield Valley Strategy to be brought forward. This was moved and seconded by Councillors George Hardcastle and Joe Johnson.

38. GREENFIELD VALLEY STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced a report to update on progress on the work to establish a new strategy for Greenfield Valley Heritage Park and to inform of the findings from the public and partner consultations and seek the views of the Committee on the key elements of the strategy.

The Access and Natural Environment Manager advised that the Greenfield Valley Trust was responsible for the strategic management of the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park on behalf of Flintshire County Council under a management agreement. The Trust was currently preparing a new 10 year strategy to guide the future development of the site. The Access and Natural Environment Manager reported on the key considerations, as detailed in the report, and summarised the main vision and themes of the strategy and the findings from the consultation exercise.

Gwladys Harrison, Chair – Greenfield Valley Trust expressed her thanks to Brenda Harvey, Strategy Lead, and the Access and Natural Environment Manager and his team for their hard work. Brenda Harvey referred to the results from the public consultation on the Greenfield Valley Strategy 2021 which was appended to the report and advised that information was also available on the

Greenfield Valley website. She explained comments/responses on the website would be fed into the Strategy Working Group and submitted to the Board. She said it was anticipated that the final Strategy would be launched in the New Year.

Members spoke in support of the Strategy and Greenfield Valley Heritage Park and the work of Officers, staff and volunteers.

The Access and Natural Environment Manager agreed to speak to Councillor Dennis Hutchinson following the meeting on a matter he raised concerning common land in his Ward.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work undertaken so far to develop a new 10 year Strategy for Greenfield Valley Heritage Park and the findings from the public and partner engagement be noted; and
- (b) That the ongoing development of the Strategy be supported.

39. AUDIT WALES REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced a report to consider the key recommendations of the Audit Wales review of Town centre Regeneration and the Council's response. He provided background information and advised that the report set out the six recommendations; three of which local government was asked to respond to. The response to each recommendation was detailed in the report. Appended to the report was the Audit Wales self-evaluation tool and the Council's responses to the questions. The Chief Officer presented the report.

Councillor Owen Thomas commented on the detrimental impact of closed/unoccupied shops in town centres and asked if something could be done to improve the appearance of the abandoned buildings.

Councillor Sean Bibby spoke of the resilience of some local businesses which had coped with the challenges of the pandemic better than expected and had been well supported by the Council. He also said he was encouraged by the upsurge in demand for retail outlets in the high street in his own Ward and thanked the Chief Officer and his team for the financial support and assistance provided to local traders. He asked if data could be provided on the vacant unit rate for each town centre. The Chief Officer Bibby thanked Councillor Bibby for his positive comments and said the evidence of improvement on vacancy rates on units in town centres was due to recognition of the need to support local businesses and the attraction of shopping in local areas and people taking the opportunity to develop their entrepreneurial abilities. The Chief Officer said a report on the local economy would be submitted to the January meeting of the Recovery Committee and that he would request that information on vacancy rates be included.

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to section 1.05 in the report and commented that the training from the Welsh Government had been helpful and the assistance and advice provided would be taken on board to achieve best outcomes for town centres.

During discussion, the Chief Officer responded to the comments raised by Members around the importance of supporting town centre markets and the opportunities that can arise for local communities due to the success of small traders expanding their business in the future.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Owen Thomas and seconded by Councillor Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

That the Audit Wales recommendations be noted and the proposed response to Audit Wales be approved.

40. IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON PRIORITISING HIGHWAY SCHEMES, GULLEY EMPTYING, GRASS CUTTING, AND FLOODING

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) gave a presentation on the impact of the pandemic on prioritising highway schemes, gully emptying, grass cutting and flooding, which covered the following main points:

- Service impact of COVID-19: timeline
- prioritising highways schemes
- grass cutting and grounds maintenance
- gully emptying
- flooding
- key points

Councillor George Hardcastle thanked the Chief Officer and her team for their work. He expressed concerns around the control of weeds and use of weed spraying. He also commented on gully emptying and asked if this could be undertaken three times a year instead of twice. The Chief Officer explained that there were options around weed spraying which could be considered. In response to the need for more frequent gully emptying, she advised Members to report any specific problems in their Ward to their area coordinator who would report the issue to Streetscene & Transportation so that roadsweepers could be directed to clear that location. The Chief Officer advised that the Streetscene Standards were due for renewal next year which would present an opportunity to review the frequency of gully emptying if needed. The Highway Network Manager provided further information on the contractor arrangements for weed spraying and the process. The Chief Officer said there were options that could be considered around the tender process for the contract for weed spraying in the future.

Councillor Owen Thomas expressed some concerns around the grass cutting service and use of weed sprayers.

Councillor Patrick Heesom congratulated the Chief Officer and her team on their work and achievements during the pandemic and suggested that this could be acknowledged by the Leader of the Council.

Councillor Ian Roberts acknowledged the suggestion and also expressed his thanks to staff in all the Council's services for their hard work and the continuation of service delivery throughout the pandemic. The Chief Officer commented on the ongoing challenges in maintaining service delivery during the continued pandemic. Councillor Ian Roberts suggested that a message of thanks and appreciation be recorded on behalf of Members, on the payslips for all employees in recognition of their work and performance during the pandemic. This was agreed by the Committee. The Facilitator agreed to contact the Head of Organisational Change to action the request.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Patrick Heesom and Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work undertaken by the Streetscene & Transportation portfolio to maintain key services during the pandemic be supported; and
- (b) That a message of thanks and appreciation be recorded on behalf of Members, on the payslips for all employees in recognition of their work and performance during the pandemic.

41. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.38 am)

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Chair