

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 JANUARY 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Tuesday, 11 January 2022

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Joe Johnson, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

APOLOGIES: Councillor Andy Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson and Cindy Hinds,

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillor Kevin Rush (for Councillor Vicky Perfect)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Haydn Bateman (as an observer)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection), Councillor Derek Butler (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Streetscene), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) and Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation),

For minute number 54

Strategic Performance Advisor

For minute number 55 and 56

Enterprise and Regeneration Manager

For minute number 57

Highway Network Manager and Streetscene Service Manager

For minute number 58

Waste Strategy Manager

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

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

52. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and George Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

53. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme for consideration and highlighted the items being considered at the 8th February meeting. She then referred to the 5th July meeting confirming that the Standard Landfill Site item, as requested by Councillor Hutchinson, would be considered at that meeting. Moving to the Action Tracking report the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator provided an update on the completed actions and those which were still ongoing.

Councillor Owen Thomas asked for an update on the litter problems from food outlets. In response the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) confirmed that there was continued lobbying of Welsh Government (WG) for a change in the legislation. She confirmed that when the Area Coordinators were made aware of local issues they visited these local premises to speak to them.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene shared the concerns of Councillor Thomas and referred to a notice of motion submitted to WG a number of years ago. This highlighted the same issues with suggestions that the wrappings were tagged in some way to identify them. Unfortunately changes in the legislation had to be made by WG to enable enforcement to be carried out by the Council. The fast food outlets were aware of the issues but were not taking steps to mitigate the impacts of the litter. The Council was having to deal with that.

In response to a question from Councillor George Hardcastle on funding for dropped crossings, the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) confirmed that a report on this would be presented to committee in February. There was no allocated funding for this however requests were made to WG via the Active Travel fund, but resources were limited.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be noted;
- (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 progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

54. COUNCIL PLAN 2022-23

The Strategic Performance Advisor presented the Draft Council Plan for 2022-23 which highlighted the key priorities of the Council for the year. The themes and priorities remained the same but a review of all the actions and tasks has taken place following the Council's response to the Pandemic and Recovery.

The 2022/23 draft Council Plan has been agreed by Cabinet and was now being circulated for consultation to all Overview & Scrutiny Committees by early February. Following the Elections in May there would be opportunities for new members of the Council to view and contribute to the plan in June. The Strategic Performance Advisor would then consolidate all feedback prior to the final plan being presented to Cabinet and Council in July

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Owen Thomas and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That feedback be noted on the refreshed content of the themes for the Draft Council Plan 2022-23 prior to sharing with Cabinet in June 2022.

55. LEVELLING UP FUND – ROUND TWO

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the report which highlighted the Round Two Levelling Up for capital projects and the ongoing work involved prior to submission in the spring. This was being presented to Cabinet next week and comments from this committee would be fed into that report.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager provided background to the Capital Programme which was announced in 2021, running until 2024, and was part of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda. The Council was able to bid three times for strategic transport projects and regeneration programmes in the Alyn & Deeside and Delyn constituencies. All councils were able to bid with successful Councils required to provide a minimum of 10% match funding. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager reported on the unsuccessful bid last year, the priorities and concerns around the timescale for completion of the bids, which was unclear at the current time. He provided information on the bid strategies focusing on the coastal communities in Flintshire which included the legacy of former heavy industry, improving employment sites, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and safeguarding important heritage sites. It was hoped that these bids would help to retain employers, bring heritage assets back into use and encourage local people and visitors to visit the coastal area.

He then provided information on the 4 market failures addressed in the bids following:-

- Under investment in building stock with many at the end of the shelf life
- Heritage – many sites were in decline
- Connah's Quay docks
- Coastline – need to ensure it's valued with connection issues addressed

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager confirmed the proposals were at the development stage with more work required. Information was provided on the proposals for Delyn, Flint Castle Park and Greenfield Business Park, which

were using former heavy industry buildings. These were owned by the Council and the proposals could safeguard the jobs on these sites.

Moving onto Alyn & Deeside, the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager outlined the proposals for Connah's Quay docks, the business park and also tackling the issues of crime and anti-social behaviour. The proposals for the Clock Tower in Shotton and modernisation of the business units, utilising the business property grant scheme, were explained. Improved access to the whole area would be considered to encourage visitors. The timeline for the bids, how they would be assessed, shortlisted for submission whilst ensuring they were robust and deliverable, was also explained. The report would be presented to Cabinet next week with the Chief Officer and Cabinet Member moving this forward with delegated authority to amend the bid to meet UK Government requirements.

Councillor Paul Shotton said the Levelling up Fund was an opportunity to improve the heritage at Connah's Quay Docks and bring it back into use. The availability of business grants, improvements to the former steelworks and John Summers buildings would be beneficial for whole area. His concerns were around the short time frame to 2024.

Councillor Joe Johnson referred to Greenfield and asked if this provided new units or renovation of the old ones. He also asked if there was a waiting list for these units. In response the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager commented that assessment work was ongoing but that some were beyond repair. This was at an early stage with meetings being held with the tenants to discuss options and to support these businesses. If the funding was available some units would be demolished and rebuilt. There was a real demand and there would be no difficulties in letting them.

Councillor Sean Bibby commented that there was such fantastic potential for the whole coastline which was under-utilised. Referring to the anti-social behaviour and drug dealing problems, he paid tribute to the hard work the agencies and Police had undertaken to mitigate them. He fully supported all the areas covered in these bids.

Councillor Patrick Heesom asked to whom more detailed representations should be made. In response, the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) asked that all comments be submitted in writing to the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager prior to Cabinet next Tuesday.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development had concerns about the timescales and success rate saying all bids had to be watertight. He was optimistic and said linking constituencies with opportunities to promote coastal heritage would provide a tangible direction of travel towards 2024.

The Chair said that the business park at Greenfield was in need of investment as it was in one of the most deprived areas in Flintshire. She added that the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park (MF2) in the report was part of the plan for Holywell Town Council.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Sean Bibby

RESOLVED:

Members reviewed and discussed the proposed approach to developing proposals to be submitted to round two of the UK Government Levelling Up Fund.

56. FLINTSHIRE ECONOMY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the report which looked at the challenges faced following the Covid Pandemic and Brexit and was an evidence based assessment of the current position of the economy in Flintshire. The report set out the Council's position nationally and locally and the implications for businesses.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager explained the economy was in a state of transition following Brexit and the Pandemic with Flintshire at this point in time remaining strong and closer to the UK average in terms of competitiveness. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) data outlined the challenges faced by businesses with some closing or reducing their ability to trade with reduced turnover and confidence. The challenges around importing and exporting post Brexit continued.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager reported on the work of the Regional Skills Partnership and highlighted the key points. There had been fewer job loses than feared with unemployment rising last year but reducing this year. There seemed to be a mismatch between the aspirations of young people and the labour market and information was provided on the job opportunities which were not being filled. 81% of Businesses had faced recruitment challenges and further work was required by the Regional Skills Partnership and the Council to help to address that. Low business confidence had impacted investment and recovery with every sector struggling to recruit with care, construction, and tourism & hospitality finding it exceptionally difficult. Work was ongoing to assist these businesses to recruit. Another issue to highlight was that businesses were finding it difficult to find suitable available premises and work was ongoing to address that.

The Enterprise & Regeneration Manager referred to business rates and provided information on the vacancies across Flintshire which highlighted that some sectors were at higher risk than others. The Enterprise & Regeneration Manager reported on the responses regionally by WG and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to provide emergency funding for Town Centres and the hospitality industry. Information on the work of the Mersey Dee Alliance and the Council's Economic Recovery Group was also provided together with funding streams available for the Council. An update on the Town Centre entrepreneurs loan pilot was also given.

Councillor Owen Thomas felt that farmers were doing well saying there was a big demand for their produce, especially Welsh lamb. There had been too

much focus on Brexit and that it was time to move forward. He said that this year would be positive especially with the town centre shops starting to fill up.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development said the situation was positive and that there were positive signs in our town centres. Farmers were saying how awful Brexit had been with Fishermen unable to sell to the Continent because of the bureaucracy. The issues regarding skills, supplies and austerity were present prior to Covid. He was that proud Flintshire was in this position, but said the full impacts of Brexit would not be seen for a few years yet.

The Chair was confused with the figures stating unemployment was up but recruitment down and sought clarification. In response the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager said the picture was different sector by sector. Staff were leaving sectors and moving to other jobs, taking early retirement and there was less use of European labour.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Sean Bibby and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the contents and conclusions of the report were considered and supported.

57. REVIEW OF GRASS CUTTING

The report was presented by the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation). She introduced Neil Cox, the new Streetscene Service Manager to the committee.

It was good practice to review our practices and this service provision had been heavily impacted by the pandemic. The Policy had been reviewed regularly since 2012 with the latest version approved in January 2020. The report provided an overview of the performance throughout the 2021 season. Members were referred to sections 1.02 and 1.07 which provided information on the operations and yearly cuts. The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) then referred to sections 1.10 and 1.11 and appendix 2 which provided a summary for each team and cuts during the season. The impacts of the wet weather were also highlighted. An explanation of the changes to the tendering process for the Weed Spraying Contract to make it more resilient, was also provided. The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) finished by saying it was not proposed to make any changes to the policy.

The Chair asked if the flower planting programme had helped with grass cutting. In response the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) reported that there were processes to follow such as collection and replanting at the beginning and end of the season, which still required resources. The Highways Network Manager confirmed there were in excess 50 small sites across the county which required different responses, with dedicated machinery and management. The Council supported and promoted any areas which were put forward for wildflower with some areas replacing grass cutting and others which did not.

Councillor George Hardcastle referred to the impacts of climate change with the grass growing earlier in the season and asked if extra cuts would be required. In response the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) reported on plans to start the winter cut earlier and extend it but the season started earlier each year. She explained the same resources were used to grit the roads and that in March and October each year grass cutting and gritting the roads overlapped and took place at the same time. This was very difficult to manage but additional cuts were being planned for late January / early February to stay on top of this before the season started. The Highways Network Manager reported in January 2020 a full successful cut was made but this advantage was lost as the country went into lockdown due to the pandemic in March 2020. With the grass cutting season extending into the winter, the ground could become very wet and muddy, and the equipment churned up and damaged the ground which took longer to recover.

Councillor Owen Thomas raised the following questions:-

- He referred to the last sentence on page 73 which stated cutting was to maintain highway safety and visibility. He said in some well used rural lanes the high level of the grass was dangerous with a 50% loss of visibility. They required cutting more than once a year. The report stated there were 4 cuts a year in urban areas and one cut for rural areas.
- He referred to tenants' gardens and asked why the grass was not taken away after cutting or wondered if mulchers could be used.
- He then referred to amenity areas saying he had attended football matches where the grass was 4 inches long. Could this be looked at?
- He then referred to hedgerows saying last year had been the biggest growth ever seen, scratching the cars and blocking visibility. He understood that these were the responsibility of landowners but wondered if this could be addressed. The growth of hedgerows and verges was increasing and had to be factored into the plans for the service.

Responding to the comments raised, the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) agreed to speak to Councillor Thomas outside the meeting. There were different standards for rural lanes and urban roads regarding visibility splays. She took on board his concerns regarding the quality of work and confirmed she would investigate the issues Councillor Thomas has raised. She commented that the frequency of cuts was set in the policy but if Councillor Thomas was aware of problematic areas, whether for hedges or grass cutting, she asked that he contact his Area Co-ordinator in the first instance, as they had the discretion to address such issues. Referring to tenants' gardens she confirmed this was following the policy and provided by a contractor. Unfortunately there were insufficient resources to allow for mulching and collection of the grass cuttings.

In response to the amenity areas point the Highways Network Manager commented that there had been quite a few complaints regarding the football pitches. These were managed by schools or sports centres and the in-house team cut the municipal pitches. The schedule of performance for the municipal

pitches was included in Appendix 2 but because of weather conditions it had not be possible to cut the grass at certain times; however the full 12 cuts had been delivered. He asked Councillor Thomas to confirm the location of the pitches and he would investigate. Referring to the rural lanes he confirmed the policy stated one cut, but another cut was carried out in September/October in 2021. If the Area Co-ordinator was made aware of these issues they had the discretion to deal with this. He agreed to speak to Councillor Thomas directly.

Councillor Thomas confirmed that this had been raised with the Area Co-ordinator last year because of concerns over safety and accepted that last year's growth was exceptional.

The Highways Network Manager confirmed the majority of hedges were privately owned and that the Council would write to the landowner to give them the opportunity to carry out maintenance on these. There was a process to follow if they failed to act on our advice. Councillor Thomas added he would like to see the law changed so that the hedges were cut in the first month of the season.

Councillor Paul Shotton said the impacts of climate change were seen everywhere. He said the wildflower planting had been very well received in his area. He was pleased to hear the contract situation was being addressed for weed spraying and asked if the weed killer was a weaker solution. Replying to Councillor Shotton the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) explained the problem was not the solution used it was that the council had been let down by contractors and were struggling to fulfil the contracts.

The Chair asked what was being proposed with regard to the new contract. In response it was confirmed the areas would be lotted to ensure resilience. The Highways Network Manager confirmed that this was at the commissioning stage at the moment with lotting, size and areas being considered. The areas north, central and south being considered which would mirror the verge mowing contractor areas. With regard to verge mowing the same tenderer was being used for the north and south area but across three areas. He provided information on discussions with Denbighshire County Council and the Housing department and said there was no real opportunity to expand the contracts. The contracts would be lotted to ensure there was a fall-back position if needed.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene welcomed Neil Cox to the meeting and the streetscene service. He commented that the Councillors were the eyes and ears for the Area Co-ordinators in the first instance. If Members felt that specific issues needed raising he suggested that it should be included on the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor Ian Roberts understood the frustrations but said that these issues did not need to wait for committee meetings they could be raised through the streetscene Area Co-ordinators, Senior Officers and Group Leaders. During lockdown it was the Council's priority to focus on providing essential services and praised the way the staff had worked during the pandemic.

Councillor George Hardcastle agreed saying the streetscene and recycling staff did a fantastic job during the lockdown.

Neil Cox confirmed that members could contact him directly with any concerns.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors David Evans and Owen Thomas

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supported the work being undertaken and was satisfied that no changes were required to the policy.

58. VEHICLE PERMIT CRITERIA FOR HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING CENTRES

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) confirmed the review was requested by Cabinet following the two Member Workshops held in July 2021. A vehicle permitting scheme was the fairest way to ensure access whilst determining unlawful use by traders. Feedback from the workshops in July 2021 was that the existing policy was confusing and ambiguous, which had unintentionally resulted in traders being allowed to exploit the system and dispose of trade waste at these household recycling centres, which we were not permitted to accept. There had been issues at the sites with staff receiving verbal and physical abuse with the need for police involvement.

The purpose of the review was to make the policy clearer, less ambiguous and easier to understand. It also allowed some flexibility in terms of allowing traders to bring in their own household waste to the site (e.g. a plumber depositing garden waste) using one-off permits. Again, in response to the feedback from the member workshops, a booking system was proposed for asbestos and other hazardous materials and bulky mattress disposal. She referred Members to Appendix 1 which outlined the key changes and mentioned that all trailers, regardless of size, would require a permit. The online application process was now clearer and would limit the confrontation as this was previously carried out at the sites. Permits would be allocated to specific sites to negate the requirement for permit holders to travel to different sites to dispose of their waste. This would be introduced in April 2022 to enable communication with existing permit holders on the new requirements and wider publicity. Leaflets would be provided prior to the implementation date in April to allow for a period of grace. The current collection policy was highlighted at Appendix 2. Barriers would also be introduced at the sites which would assist staff. Information of the booking system was included at Appendix 3.

Councillor Owen Thomas sought clarification on the size of the trailers permitted to use the sites and where permits could be collected from. In response the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) confirmed that all trailers regardless of size now required a permit which was free of charge. There was an online application process provided at Alltami with visual checks and photographs provided online. This was working well and had been in use for a year now. Connects Offices still provided assistance for this and assessments were carried out by staff at Alltami. Councillor Thomas commented that the

Flintshire HRC sites were excellent and provided a great service for residents with very helpful staff.

The Chair asked if vehicles with a business sign were eligible to use the sites. In response the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) confirmed that provided it was their own household waste then they would be allowed to have one-off permits twice a year.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene was proud of the Policy which protected the workforce as regards disposal of hazardous waste such as asbestos. It also provided certainty for residents when they travelled to the sites to dispose of their mattresses.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee noted and supported the revised Vehicle Permit Policy for Household Recycling Centres.
- (b) That the Committee noted and supported the Household Recycling Centre booking system criteria.

59. THE NORTH WALES GROWTH DEAL QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) presented the six monthly progress report for the Economic Ambition Board which had been delayed from December. The report identified progress on outline business cases and Members were referred to point 1.05 which stated that the majority of projects were currently in an amber state. Information on the 7 projects currently shown in red was provided at point 1.08. Referring to Point 1.09 this highlighted the procurement and local procurement activities which were driven by the Economic Ambition Board. Information on the Climate Change Board and Biodiversity and steps being taken to mitigate the environmental impacts was also included. The appendix included more detailed information.

The Chief Officer (Planning Environment and Economy) confirmed it was hoped that David Matthews, the Land and Project Manager for the Land and Property Programme Board would be attending a future meeting.

Councillor Patrick Heesom asked if an update on the Holyhead Gateway and Mostyn Docks could be provided when available. In response the Chief Officer (Planning Environment and Economy) suggested if Councillor Heesom had any detailed questions then David Matthews would be able to provide answers at a future meeting. He agreed to circulate any updates which were received prior to the February meeting.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and George Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

That Members considered and noted the Quarter 2 Performance Report.

60. 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 12.00 pm)

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Chair