

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 11 June 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Hilary Isherwood (Chair)

Councillors: Alex Aldridge, Haydn Bateman, Peter Curtis, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Colin Legg, Nancy Matthews, Ann Minshull and Paul Shotton

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillors: Andy Dunbobbin for Ian Dunbar and Vicky Perfect for Cindy Hinds

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Ray Hughes and Carolyn Thomas

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure, Chief Officer (Planning and Environment), Chief Officer (Organisational Change)

For agenda item 5 - Nick Thomas and Richard Weston from Natural Resources Wales and Regional Emergency Planning Manager

For agenda item 6 - Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) and Chief Regeneration Officer

For agenda item 7 – Performance Team Leader

IN ATTENDANCE:

Environment and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chair sought nominations for a Vice-Chairman for the Committee. Councillor Alex Aldridge nominated Councillor David Evans, which was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Evans be Vice-Chairman for the Committee.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 April 2014 and the joint meeting with Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 28 April, 2014 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Matters Arising

2 April 2014

Councillor Haydn Bateman referred to page 5 on Traffic Infrastructure and Services and sought clarity on the emphasis of funding available being changed from leisure use to supporting the local economy. The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) said that there had been a change of emphasis on the area of funding to those cycleways that now served the business economy.

Councillor Peter Curtis indicated that he had not received a response to his request at the previous meeting on parking permits for carers who needed to undertake regular visits as part of their work. The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) advised that he had replied but indicated that he would do so again. The Cabinet Member for Environment spoke of the specific issue raised by Councillor Curtis and said that once further details had been agreed on Civil Enforcement, updates would be provided to the Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Chris Dolphin about when a report on the criteria used in the survey to ascertain the condition of roads would be submitted to the Committee, the Environment and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator advised that it would be considered at the Committee meeting scheduled for 9 July 2014. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that Councillor Dolphin could have details of the criteria prior to the next meeting.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked when the update report on the Energy Switching pilot scheme would be available. The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) said that a report could be provided to the 9 July 2014 meeting of the Committee. In response to a query from Councillor Dolphin, he added that a review of C roads would be undertaken once the review of A and B roads had been implemented.

28 April 2014

Councillor Dolphin asked what progress had been made on Housing and Planning colleagues working together to work proactively with owners to bring empty houses back into use. In response, the Chief Officer (Planning and Environment) said that the project was 'work in progress' but that Housing and Planning colleagues were committed to identifying a solution. The Environment and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator advised that a workshop on empty homes had taken place recently and was attended by

both Planning and Housing colleagues. Councillor Peter Curtis referred to the issue of funding being provided for shop fronts to be brought back into use but suggested that a condition should be imposed that any flats above the shops should not be left vacant for several months as had been the case in the past. The Facilitator advised that these issues could be discussed at the Town Centres workshop for Members which was scheduled for 14 July 2014.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the Welsh Government Houses to Homes Scheme and asked when work would commence on a particular project in Connah's Quay. The Cabinet Member for Environment requested that Councillor Shotton put his request in writing to the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) to enable her to provide a response. The Environment and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator advised that the issue had been considered at a recent Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. PRESENTATION BY NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

The Chair introduced Nick Thomas and Richard Weston from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Phil Harrison, Regional Emergency Planning Manager to the Committee.

Nick Thomas and Richard Weston jointly provided a presentation to the Committee on NRW's Work in Flintshire. The main features of the presentation were:-

- Who we are
- Our purpose
- Landowner and Land Manager
- Outdoor Recreation
- Water Framework Directive
- River Alyn Water Framework Directive Project
- Fisheries Management
- Designating Authority
- Species Management
- Rights of Way
- Dee Estuary Regional Park
- Flintshire Coastal Tourism Potential Challenges
- Statutory Consultee on planning applications
- Environmental Regulation
- Compliance and Enforcement
- The River Dee
- Incident Management
- Flood Risk Management

The Regional Emergency Planning Manager provided a detailed background to the work of the Regional Emergency Planning Team which was due to commence on 1 July 2014. He explained that the six North Wales Local Authorities had signed up to provide a Regional Emergency Planning Team which consisted of ten employees with a Manager and a Deputy. The Team was based at two hubs, one for Flintshire, Denbighshire & Wrexham and the other for Ynys Mon, Gwynedd and Conwy and would work closely with NRW and would have close links with the Local Resilience Forum. The Team would introduce best practices across the region and part of the role would involve close working with Elected Members to provide them with information for their residents on issues of concern such as flooding.

Councillor Paul Shotton raised concern about the erosion at Wepre Gate and the sand dunes at Talacre. He also asked questions on licences for cockling; the Northern Gateway site; funding for flooding and dredging in rivers. In response, Mr. Weston said that erosion works were carried out where land defences were affected and requested that Councillor Shotton discuss Wepre Gate with him following the meeting. Work on the sand dunes had been undertaken but discussions were ongoing on future works. On the issue of funding for flooding, he indicated that there had been no change in the funding streams (one from revenue and the other from capital) since the formation of NRW but a restructure of the service was to be undertaken which could affect the funding streams. Mr. Thomas said that the issue of flooding was likely to worsen in the coming years but explained that significant sums of money had been spent on flood defences and identifying land management issues which could help to reduce flooding problems. He felt that dredging in certain places was appropriate but that widespread dredging of rivers was not suitable. Mr. Weston explained that outline planning permission had been granted on the Northern Gateway site and NRW were working with WG on flood defence works and WG were funding sheet piling works which would remove the issue of breaching the flood defences. Mr. Thomas advised that 50 licences had been issued for cockling and added that the restriction of cockling to those with a licence was a better arrangement than had previously been in place.

Councillor Alex Aldridge extended an invitation to Mr. Thomas and Mr. Weston to visit Flint to look at two issues which were causing concern which he provided full details on; one was the continuation of the cycleway and the other was land fronting Dee Cottages.

In response to a question from Councillor David Evans about how the areas of risk of flooding could be identified, Mr. Weston said that flood maps were available which showed the areas at risk and the level of risk associated with the area. These were available through a link on the NRW website. Councillor Evans also spoke of concerns about land being allowed to flood to alleviate flooding in residential areas. He referred to Balderton Brook and to the problems that flooding of land caused for farmers and asked whether there were any measures to mitigate the flooding. Mr. Weston said that a risk based programme of works was in place and spoke of the brook and added that maintenance of water courses was the responsibility of the land owner.

Following a further query from Councillor Evans about the SSSI site at Wepre, Mr. Weston said that flood defence works on the Northern Gateway site would not increase the risk of flooding on the other side of the river.

Councillor Veronica Gay also raised concern about Balderton Brook. Mr. Weston said that management of flood risk to property was a key priority for NRW and added that regular meetings took place. Councillor Gay extended an invitation to Mr. Weston and Mr. Thomas to visit Saltney Town Council to discuss local issues.

Councillor Colin Legg commented on an issue over the use of the car park at Ysgol Rhos Helyg and spoke of the Halkyn Ranger and asked to be kept informed of any resolution to the problem. He also raised concern about the destruction of cotoneaster plants on Halkyn Mountain as the site was now covered in nettles which he did not agree with. Mr. Thomas confirmed that he would contact Councillor Legg to discuss the issues.

In response to a question from Councillor Chris Dolphin on flooding at the Halfway House public house in Carmel, Mr. Weston said that this would be the responsibility of Flintshire County Council. The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) confirmed that he was aware of the issue and the Cabinet Member for Environment indicated that responsibility had come to the Council with no funding and therefore the issue would be considered during the programme of prioritising the order of works required in the County. Councillor Dolphin also spoke about flooding concerns in Greenfield.

The Regional Emergency Planning Manager spoke of community resilience and communities taking responsibility for their own defences. Councillor Dolphin commended Flintshire County Council for their work during the flooding earlier in the year and said that the sandbags had been welcomed by residents.

The Chair thanked Mr. Weston, Mr. Thomas and the Regional Emergency Planning Manager for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received.

5. MERSEY DEE ALLIANCE

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) and Chief Regeneration Officer introduced a report to advise Members of progress regarding the work of Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA).

The Chief Regeneration Officer detailed the background to the report and explained that the MDA was made up of nine partnerships which included Flintshire County Council, Welsh Government (WG) and Glyndwr University. He added that the area of North East Wales and North West Cheshire was

unique in the UK as a major economic area divided by a national boundary. The MDA had been formed in recognition of the shared interests of both sides of the national border and to develop a joint approach to key economic matters particularly about market planning, major transport infrastructure and lobbying on issues of shared concern.

The report provided information on the work which had been carried out which included the Dee Region Report by Dr. Elizabeth Haywood in 2013. The MDA Board had submitted a case to WG for City Region Status for the MDA and even though the bid had not been accepted, WG had accepted that the MDA was an area that needed further consideration.

Work on a Growth and Investment Prospectus had also been undertaken to inform, implement and secure appropriate recognition for MDA priorities in the strategic economic plans and European Structural funds bids being developed by the two Local Enterprise Partnerships and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. This would focus on the growth potential of the M56/A55 Innovation Corridor, raising the profile of the MDA among key stakeholders and key messages that would form the basis of an inward investment marketing proposition for the MDA area.

In welcoming the report, Councillor Nancy Matthews thanked officers for their work but said that she could not see any movement on the attitude of WG and she felt that they did not appreciate the unique position of the area and its geographical training corridor. She said that discussions had been undertaken in 2008 on the Halton Spur and the electrification of the railway line from Bidston to Wrexham, both of which she felt could make a significant difference to the area. Councillor Paul Shotton spoke of the economy of the area that was greater than Cardiff or Swansea and expressed his disappointment at the bid for City Region Status not being accepted. In response to a question from Councillor Shotton on the electrification of the Bidston line, the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) said that the issue had been discussed at a recent meeting of the MDA Strategy Group and work was still ongoing to decide what priorities should be taken up with WG. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development said that he would endeavour to make WG aware of the MDA. Councillor Colin Legg said that there were several instances in Europe where similar joint approaches were taken which worked well and he felt that the raising the profile of the MDA was important.

Councillor Veronica Gay referred to an issue about Broadband coverage in Saltney which she felt needed reviewing and in response, the Chief Officer (Planning and Environment) said that British Telecom had not completed their work in Flintshire yet; he added that he could provide her with a detailed response of the programme of work.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and

- (b) That an update report be submitted to the Committee in six months time.

6. IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2014/15

The Performance Team Leader introduced a report to consider the content of the draft Improvement Plan 2014/15 and the "How achievement will be measured" document prior to submission to Cabinet on 17 June 2014 and endorsement by County Council on 24 June 2014.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to page 36 on the Transport Infrastructure and Services sub-priority and said that people being able to access employment, local services and facilities was the most important part of the plan. The Chair concurred and raised concerns at the lack of bus services after 6pm in semi rural and rural areas.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the continuation of the Dragons Den initiative, the Young Entrepreneur Programme and the Shuttle Bus Service. He also commented on the Business Sector Growth and the securing of jobs in Flint and new job opportunities becoming available in Buckley.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

7. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Environment and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee.

The Facilitator provided details of the reports due for consideration at the 9 July 2014 meeting of the Committee which included receiving a report on progress made with speed limits for A, B and C roads in Flintshire. The Cabinet Member had earlier indicated that information could be provided to Members in advance of the meeting, which Councillor Alex Aldridge welcomed, but he requested that the information include details of what the funding stream had been, what it was now and what it would be in the future. The Facilitator added that it had also been requested that an update on the Energy Switching pilot scheme be provided and it was hoped that this could also be submitted to the 9 July 2014 meeting. She also advised the Committee that a Member workshop on Town Centres had been arranged for 14 July 2014 and that a Forward Work Planning workshop needed to be arranged to allow discussion on the items to be considered at future meetings of the Committee.

Councillor Alex Aldridge suggested that the Committee could undertake visits to look at the environment to see the work carried out at Talacre and to visit local employers such as Airbus and Toyota. Councillor Paul Shotton concurred and spoke of a recent visit to Tata Steel which he had found very

informative. The Facilitator advised that visits had been arranged in the past but had resulted in a very low turnout by Committee Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved subject to the inclusion of an update report on the Energy Switching pilot scheme being submitted to the 9 July 2014 meeting; and
- (b) That the Environment and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator consider arranging a visit for the Committee.

8. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.25 pm)

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Chairman