

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 MARCH, 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council, held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 21 March, 2012

PRESENT: Councillor M.J. Peers (Chairman)

Councillors: E.G. Cooke, Q.R.H. Dodd, C.J. Dolphin, J.E. Falshaw, G. Hardcastle, C.M. Jones, N.M. Jones, S. Jones, C. Legg, D.I. Mackie, C.A. Thomas and D.E. Wisinger

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Eng. K. Armstrong-Braun, H. Brown and H.D. Hutchinson

APOLOGY: Councillor A. Minshull

CONTRIBUTORS: Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Environment, Executive Member for Regeneration & Tourism, Executive Member for Waste Management, Director of Environment, Head of Streetscene, Head of Assets & Transportation, Head of Regeneration, Team Leader (Technical, Finance & Admin), Highway Asset Management Plan Officer and Communities First Senior Co-ordinator

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

82. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 January and 22 February 2012 had been circulated with the agenda.

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Accuracy

On the Review of Flintshire Street Lighting Service, the Chairman asked that the minutes include his comments that following agreement by the Committee, the Street Lighting Task & Finish Group had met and would recommend that County owned highway lights were not to be switched off.

Matters Arising

On the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project, the Executive Member for Waste Management advised that anonymised submissions had been considered at the recent joint committee meeting where it had been agreed that waste would be transported by a combination of rail and road, to maximise use of the railway line across North Wales. The next step would be to reduce the three bidders down to two by June/July 2012 when more detail on the bids would be released to Members.

On Supermarket Price Offers, Councillor C.M Jones said that the Interim Public Protection Manager had been in contact and had asked for any evidence of

pricing discrepancies to be reported to himself or directly to Trading Standards. The Director of Environment added that work was being undertaken with Members and that the suggested video conference would be arranged at a later stage.

On Groundwork Wrexham and Flintshire, Councillor Q.R.H. Dodd sought an update on his comments relating to the Mostyn estate garden. The Director said that a response could be given by the Head of Regeneration who would be in attendance later in the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (including Whipping Declarations)

No declarations of interest were made.

84. THE COUNCIL'S HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Head of Streetscene, who was accompanied by Mark Middleton and Joanne Davies, two officers of the new Streetscene structure, introduced a report to advise of the content of the Council's Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP), the Council's bid to the Welsh Government (WG) for highway maintenance funding through their prudential borrowing initiative and to update Members on the current position in respect of pothole repairs on the highway network. The report also detailed progress made on the current year's works programme.

It was explained that the HAMP document could be viewed on the Council's website and in the Members' Library, and that individual copies could be provided to Members on request. A table showing recorded potholes over the past four years was included in the report following a request previously made by the Committee. The Head of Streetscene agreed to provide Members with a graph of the statistics together with a full works programme until June 2013 which was also available on the website. He went on to say that although permanent repairs were carried out on potholes where possible, it was sometimes necessary to carry out an immediate temporary repair during inclement weather conditions to seal the road and prevent risk to road users. On the availability of funding to enable prudential borrowing, due to the short notice given by WG on the initiative, a report had been submitted first to Executive and officers had succeeded in submitting the bid within the tight deadline.

Councillor D.E. Wisinger congratulated officers for their efforts in submitting the bid within the deadline and sought an update on the A494 which he felt needed to be addressed as a matter of safety, particularly in view of the sharp bend and the exit from the travellers' site. The Director of Environment explained that trunk roads such as this which spanned boundaries were the responsibility of the Trunk Roads Agency and agreed to pass on the Member's concerns.

Councillor Wisinger also referred to an area of resurfacing in Sandycroft which he felt was below previous standards and said that contractors should be told to use

quality tarmac. The Head of Streetscene confirmed that standard materials were used by contractors and work was subject to Council officers' inspection, however he agreed to meet Councillor Wisinger at the location to view the work done.

Councillor G. Hardcastle's concerns about the amount of litter discarded alongside the A494 were shared by the Head of Streetscene who said that although this was the Council's responsibility, consideration needed to be given to how the litter could be safely collected. Negotiations were needed to reach a compromise with the Trunk Roads Agency to consider a lane closure to collect the litter which would have traffic implications along the route.

Following a query by Councillor C.A. Thomas on community safety footways and funding for minor improvements, the Director explained that existing maintenance work was under the remit of Streetscene whereas funding for new work on Safer Routes in Communities and the Access Programme were under the Head of Assets & Transportation. He added that available budgets were oversubscribed and work needed to be prioritised, and would discuss a separate query on improvements to estate roads outside the meeting with Councillor Thomas. Members were informed that they could discuss any Streetscene issues within their wards with the Area Supervisors.

Councillor C.J. Dolphin thanked the team for improvements in Greenfield and Whitford but raised concerns about surface dressing work on estate roads. The Team Leader (Technical, Finance & Admin) explained that a micro asphalt material was used on adopted estate roads to prevent loose chippings and suggested that the area may need re-sweeping.

In response to a query by Councillor S. Jones, it was clarified that the funding available to Councils for highway maintenance would not need to be repaid to WG. Councillor Jones also referred to the works programme on the Council's website and the Head of Streetscene agreed to send Members a link to this document.

Councillor C. Legg asked that his thanks be passed to the highways manager and his team for the high standard of road surfaces in the County and raised concerns about deterioration of road edges due to the way that many vehicles were being driven. The Head of Streetscene suggested that examples of this should be reported to the Area Co-ordinator and mentioned that an annual independent survey of A and B roads had recorded Flintshire as the best in Wales.

Following a comment made by Councillor C.M. Jones on the condition of the blue bridge in Sealand and the subway footpath, it was confirmed that the bridge was in the ownership of the Council. The Head of Streetscene said that funding was available to assist in bringing the County's bridges up to the required standard and would make enquiries.

Councillor Q.R.H. Dodd noted the comment made by the Head of Streetscene that Members would be notified about work in their wards and welcomed this. He asked if the condition of roads on industrial estates could be looked at and requested details on the programme of road sweeping. The Director said that communication to Members and Town and Community Councils had improved. He advised that

industrial estates were included in the portfolio of assets under remit of the Head of Assets & Transportation but that most of the roads were unadopted. On road sweeping, it was explained that the Streetscene Task & Finish Group had set the standards of work and that any input by Members should be directed to Area Supervisors.

In relation to notification to Members, the Chairman commented on a statutory public notice in the local press which had referred to a local issue and suggested that Members should have been advised first.

Following a query on the allocation of winter maintenance savings, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Environment said that this had yet to be decided.

As the HAMP document and proposed resurfacing programme had not been included with the report, the contents could not be noted and Members therefore agreed to change resolutions 4.01 and 4.04 accordingly.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation relating to the Council's Highway Asset Management Plan which will form the mechanism for allocating future highway maintenance funding and method of delivering its statutory duty to maintain each individual asset within the highway infrastructure be noted;
- (b) That the outline bid for the first year of funding from Welsh Government under the prudential borrowing initiative as set out in paragraph 3.09 of the report be noted;
- (c) That the current position in respect of pothole repairs on the highway network be noted; and
- (d) That it be noted that the proposed resurfacing programme due to commence in March 2012 had been published and would be circulated to Members.

85. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Head of Assets & Transportation and Head of Regeneration introduced a report to request that the Committee consider the 2011/12 Quarter 3 service performance reports, note the update on the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC) contained within the performance reports and note progress made against the Improvement Target Action Plans contained within the performance reports.

Members were informed that any performance issues on Planning, Public Protection and Streetscene would be responded to separately.

Asset and Transportation

Councillor C.A. Thomas asked if renewable energy in Council buildings could include schools with no access to mains gas and similarly other forms of energy to

replace storage heaters in sheltered accommodation. She also referred to estate roads being brought up to adoptable standards and asked if the speed limit review could include all roads. The Head of Assets & Transportation confirmed that the results of the review were expected to be implemented in 2014 and would address all A and B roads in the County which included a significant amount of detail to be prioritised. In response to a query about legal notices, he said that the proposal submitted by Carl Sargeant AM on advertising revenue was still being considered.

On highway policy and strategy, the Chairman raised queries on the bus bays in Shotton and the cost to the Authority of empty voids properties. The Head of Assets & Transportation explained that the half width bus bays had been created to enable buses to pull out easier into traffic and that national non domestic rates (NNDR) applied to properties which were empty for longer than three months. The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Environment added that the traffic lights system in Deeside would be synchronised to help traffic flow.

In response to a question by Councillor C.J. Dolphin on the outcome of the speed limit review, it was explained that the review by consultants would provide a comprehensive database of A and B roads to help to inform speed limits and that any potential road safety issues identified could be looked at. The Chairman asked about consultation with Members to share local knowledge and the Director responded that the results of the review would be shared with Overview & Scrutiny in September/October 2012 to seek Members' views on the draft proposals.

Regeneration

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman congratulated the Head of Regeneration, Executive Member for Regeneration & Tourism and the Director of Environment for their achievements on the Enterprise Zone and on town centres.

Councillor S. Jones sought clarification on help provided to people seeking training and efforts to tackle the decline of town centres and improve quality of life in rural areas. The Head of Regeneration explained that officers were responsible for setting up and co-ordinating the delivery of the Town Action Plan Programme which included establishing partnerships and carrying out activities to deal with existing problems such as empty shops, with a range of quick-win and long-term projects. He gave examples of the contribution to the Mold Food Festival and the 'Shop Doctor' project which aimed to help traders become more successful, and referred to the development of the Masterplans to help develop towns and attract new investment. Councillor Jones suggested that the next performance report could include more detail on actions carried out and progress made.

The Executive Member for Regeneration & Tourism welcomed evidence that town and community councils were taking ownership of problems in their areas and commented that many of the recommendations from the Mary Portas review of town centres were already being implemented in Flintshire. He said that in comparison to other Authorities, occupying rates in Flintshire were mixed but good.

In response to comments by Councillor C.A. Thomas on Communities First initiatives, the Communities First Senior Co-ordinator said that the aim was to provide

job club activities such as helping people to complete CVs, provide access to IT facilities and help access to credit unions. Figures showed that a significant amount of people in smaller areas were using credit unions instead of higher rate loans. Councillor Thomas requested that the service be promoted to schools in outlying areas who may wish to participate.

Councillor D.E. Wisinger referred to the decline of small shops and suggested that nearby parking and reduced rates could help. The Executive Member for Regeneration & Tourism agreed but said that business rates were under the remit of the Welsh Government (WG) who already offered significant discounts. The issue of parking was already under consideration.

On town centre regeneration, Councillor C.J. Dolphin felt that funding was required to make improvements in Holywell. The Executive Member agreed that this was a concern but felt that the development of the first Flintshire Connects office in Holywell would help to attract more activity in the area.

The Chairman raised queries on railway integration on the Enterprise Zone and northern gateway and the change of red/amber/green (RAG) status on Improvement Plan monitoring. The Head of Regeneration explained that TAITH were looking at rail facilities in the area due to interest by businesses in using rail to reduce freight on the roads. He said that although good progress had been made on town centres, the difficulties faced by individual traders remained and this had been reflected in the level of confidence shown in the RAG status.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the 2011/12 Quarter 3 performance reports produced by the Heads of Service be noted; and
- (b) That the details of challenges be fed back to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of improvement targets.

86. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Due to time constraints, it was agreed that the item on the Communities First Bid would be considered prior to the Forward Work Programme.

87. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it is considered to contain exempt information by virtue of paragraph 15 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

88. COMMUNITIES FIRST BID

The Head of Regeneration introduced a report to advise Members on the implications of the statement by the Minister for Local Government & Communities of 13 December 2011, setting out further proposals for the Communities First (CF) Programme beyond 31 March, 2012, following the Wales wide consultation. The report also advised on the preferred options for improving the CF Programme in Flintshire based on principles agreed by Executive on 18 October 2011 and the CF Futures criteria set by the Welsh Government (WG).

The Communities First Senior Co-ordinator gave an overview of the new Cluster arrangements and the Executive Member for Regeneration & Tourism said that this reflected Members' wishes.

Councillor D.I. Mackie referred to the need for collaborative working between Environment and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committees on the issue of deprivation. Councillor S. Jones welcomed the report and urged officers to ensure that Members were fully involved.

On Appendix B relating to the proposed Clusters, the Chairman pointed out three areas which had been included as existing areas in the original Communities First programme, and asked that these be highlighted as such.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall governance structure agreed during consultation with partners, including Communities First Partnerships and the all-Member workshops held on 5 January 2012, be noted;
- (b) That the proposal for submission of a bid which includes Flintshire's most vulnerable areas, identified by Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) be noted; and
- (c) That the implications and opportunities for Flintshire in revising areas of interest and support structures in Communities First, including staffing, be noted.

89. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator introduced the report which gave Members the opportunity to consider and update the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

As this was the last meeting of the Committee prior to the Elections, it was agreed that the Programme would remain in draft for the new Committee to decide on their priorities. To assist with this, the Facilitator would arrange a workshop for new Committee and would include the results of the Speed Limit Review as one of the proposed items.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted on the basis outlined above.

90. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting began at 10.00am and ended at 12.45pm.

91. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There was one member of the press in attendance.

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Chairman

**SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT**

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	DATE: 21 MARCH 2012
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MEMBER	ITEM	MIN. NO. REFERS
NO DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST WERE MADE		