

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
26 FEBRUARY 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 26 February 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Ray Hughes (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, Andy Dunbobbin, David Evans, Dave Hughes, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, and Paul Shotton

APOLOGIES: Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Kevin Hughes (for Veronica Gay)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside, Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection, Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Transport Manager, Integrated Transport Unit Manager – Streetscene and Transportation, and Regulatory Services Manager

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

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

50. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 December 2018 and 15 January 2019 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

51. FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE WELSH GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER 'IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSPORT'

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report on the Welsh Government (WG) Transport White Paper 'Improving Public Transport'. He reported that the WG had issued a consultation White Paper in December 2018, on plans to improve public transport in Wales. The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the WG legislative proposals for reforming the planning and delivery of local bus services in Wales, together with the licensing of taxis and other private hire vehicles. The closing date for responses to the consultation was 27 March 2019.

The Chief Officer advised that there were 10 proposals within the White Paper which were summarised within the report. He explained that proposals 1 to 6 related to public transport and invited the Integrated Transport Unit Manager, and the Regulatory Services Manager to report on each of the proposals and the general proposed responses. Proposals 7 to 10 referred directly to taxi licensing and the Council's response had been discussed by the Licensing Committee. The proposed response to the questions relating to these proposals were detailed in appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas expressed concerns regarding the lack of clarity in relation to proposal 1 in the report and the membership of the Joint Transport Authority and funding arrangements. She explained she had raised these issues with the WG and had been told that a more detailed paper could follow shortly. She also pointed out that the White Paper did not mention how Transport for Wales would fit in. She added that the Authority currently delivered WG funding on behalf of other North Wales authorities, e.g. bus passes and the bus support grant. Councillor Thomas also referred to the new livery that Flintshire would be putting on buses and the Chief Officer agreed to circulate information regarding this to the Committee.

Councillor Joe Johnson said he was opposed to the proposal to increase the eligibility age for the mandatory concessionary fares scheme to bring in line with a woman's pensionable age. He expressed the view that bus passes should remain available from the age of 60 and commented on the need to reduce the carbon footprint. He felt that the proposed changes could have a negative impact.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas emphasised that people under the age of 65 who already received a free bus pass would continue to be eligible to receive a free pass.

Councillor David Evans referred to the Authority's suggested responses to the WG white paper for transport which was appended to the report. Commenting on questions 18 and 19 which both had the answer 'Yes' he said that this did not answer the questions. Councillor Evans supported the view that the concessionary bus pass age should remain at 60. He felt that in many cases the concessionary fares could maintain the operation of bus services and suggested that changes could make routes unviable in the future. He also referred to the carbon footprint and said that by using a bus service people did not have to use their cars and also referred to the social benefits to be gained by meeting other people, going out and about, and gaining access to social activities, health and wellbeing services. He urged the Council to amend the Consultation Response with regarding to Concessionary bus passes to retaining the status quo.

Councillor David Evans commented on the number of bus passes which were issued but not used and referring to the reapplication process said there was a need to ensure that people who had their bus passes reissued actually used them.

Councillor Chris Dolphin said that bus passes were popular but cost a lot of money. He emphasised the importance of reliability and up to date timetables and said there was a need to ensure that bus services were scheduled so that users of the service had enough time to visit town centres and spend at least 2 hours there which would increase footfall and rejuvenate local businesses in the area.

Councillor Thomas recognized there was more work to be done in relation to bus timetables which was an ongoing challenge in terms of the resources needed to keep up to date with changes to service routes and service timetables etc.

In response to a question regarding the budget for local travel arrangements, Councillor Carolyn Thomas advised that the budget was approximately £500k for public transport in Flintshire. A total of £1m for the whole of the County including approximately £500 from WG.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin supported the need to maintain concessionary bus pass age at 60 and referred to people's health and wellbeing, citing the need to visit GP surgeries and hospitals as examples. He added that if the bus pass age was raised this could have a negative impact on social and healthcare budgets in the future.

Councillor Dunbobbin welcomed the suggestion that Councils could operate services and asked if this would join up with community transport schemes, school transport arrangements etc.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas recognized the need to maintain transport services and the importance of being able to access transport to maintain health and wellbeing needs.

Councillor Ray Hughes expressed concern regarding public transport in rural areas and said there was the potential for people to become isolated if bus services could not be accessed. He emphasised the importance of ensuring up to date information regarding timetables and the need to ensure they were synchronized citing the example of a recent change to a service which had resulted in a 45 minute wait for a connection to the next service.

Councillor Kevin Hughes thanked officers for their work. He reiterated the views expressed by Councillor David Evans that not all people who applied for a concessionary bus pass used it. He commented that bus passes should be allocated to those who needed them and suggested that a form of means testing could be introduced to ensure a more needs based system.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) referred to the current position on the WG proposals on the licensing of taxis and other private hire vehicles as detailed in the report. He said the Council's response had been discussed by the Licensing Committee and the proposed responses to the proposals were appended to the report.

Councillor Joe Johnson commented on the regulations in Flintshire whereby hackney carriage licenses could only be provided to black cabs, whereas in other North Wales authorities it was possible to obtain a license with saloon cars and standard mini buses. He said this was problematic as black cabs were extremely expensive to buy.

The Licensing Team Leader explained that the Authority was nominated as a first phase authority with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act to ensure all hackney carriages were accessible and adopted the black cab. She confirmed there were only 2 registered hackney carriage licenses in Flintshire.

Councillor Johnson added that this demonstrated that the current system was not working, with only 2 taxis available for the whole of Flintshire for people to be hailed down as private hire vehicles can only take pre-bookings. Cllr Johnson urged the Council to give this further consideration.

Councillor Kevin Hughes suggested that taxis be fitted with CCTV for the protection of driver and customers. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) advised that the use and standards for CCTV within vehicles, as detailed in Question 23, page 30, of the report, were supported.

Councillor Chris Bithell commented that the introduction of national standards was to be supported and were advantageous in terms of public protection. He said he was opposed to central organisation and spoke of the importance of local knowledge and the sharing of vital information in terms of public protection matters.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the WG Consultation be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee's comments regarding concessionary bus passes are incorporated into the Council's response.

52. FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S HAZARDOUS ROUTES

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report on the criteria for defining a school hazardous route and define the hazardous routes to school within the County. He provided background information and invited the Transport Manager to present the report.

The Transport Manager reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report, and advised that the Council had a legal duty to assess the travel needs of learners who walked to and from school. The Council's Transport Policy, which was appended to the report, dictated that free school transport would be provided to the nearest eligible site of education in the following circumstances:

- the child resides in excess of 2 miles (for primary school pupils) and 3 miles (for secondary school pupils) from their nearest appropriate school; or
- If the route is deemed to be 'hazardous'

The Transport Manager explained that in accordance with the Learner Travel Statutory Provision, a route can only be defined as 'acceptable' (i.e. non hazardous) if the criteria as detailed in section 1.02 of the report was met.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) emphasised that the hazardous routes policy would only apply to the nearest school. He explained that free transport would not be offered on the basis of transport not to the nearest school.

Councillor Haydn Batman asked whether condition of the road was taken into account. The Transport Manager confirmed that an assessment would take the condition of foot-ways and road surfaces into account.

Councillor Dave Hughes expressed disappointment that the route from Llanfynydd to Abermorddu was not listed.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin referred to a road in Northop Hall and it was suggested that specific matters regarding routes be raised with officers outside the meeting.

The Committee felt it would be more appropriate to delay advertising the routes on the Council's website until anomalies raised by members had been reviewed.

Councillor Marion Bateman referred to the list of hazardous routes and asked if there were plans to improve any of them and thereby removing them from the list in future. The Transport Manager explained that the routes were reviewed constantly and each year there was an opportunity to bid for funding for schemes which could result in improvement work being undertaken and some routes being de-classified as hazardous.

Councillor Bateman asked if the ranking of hazardous routes could be provided. She also asked if information could be provided to schools in terms of their position in relation to hazardous routes. The Transport Manager advised that a matrix was available and could be circulated to the Committee.

Councillor Chris Bithell emphasised that the policy only applied to the nearest school and it was necessary to apply the rules rigorously to avoid additional expense. He commented that there had been examples where parents did not want a route to be 'made safe' as this would remove the provision of free school transport.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's statutory duty to assess the travel needs of school pupils under the Learner Travel Guidance and the process used to define Hazardous Routes to School, be noted; and
- (b) That the current list of Hazardous Routes to School be noted.

53. QUARTER 3 COUNCIL PLAN 2018/1 MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced a report to present a summary of performance for the Quarter 3 (October to December 2018) position of 2018/19 for the Council Plan priority 'Green Council' relevant to the Committee.

The Chief Officer advised that the Quarter 3 monitoring report was a positive report and showed that 92% of activities were making good progress with 85% likely

to achieve their desired outcomes. 67% of the performance indicators had met or exceeded their targets. Risks were being managed with the majority being assessed as moderate (61%) and minor/insignificant 22%. The report was an exception based report and therefore focussed on the areas of under-performance.

The Chief Officer referred to the major risk identified for the Committee that 'funding will not be secured for priority flood alleviation schemes'. He advised that from 7 January 2019, the Council had a new statutory duty as a Sustainable Drainage Approving Body (SAB). He explained that this had placed significant resource demands on the small Flood and Coastal Risk Management Team to implement, resource and fund this new statutory role. He continued that in the short-term the impacts of developing this new service would lessen the ability of the Team to deliver non-statutory flood alleviation schemes.

Referring to the SAB regulations introduced on the 7 January, Councillor Chris Bithell reported that Flintshire had asked the WG to delay implementation because of the need to prepare, however, there had been no delay and a sum of £20,000 had been received to deal with the implementation.

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to page 68 of the report and the comment that for 2018/19 waste and flood allocations were to be removed from the Single Revenue Grant (SRG) and asked for an update.- He added that there needed to be more sites earmarked for renewable energy schemes across Flintshire. He referred to the hydro scheme at Wepre and asked if there was potential for any other schemes in Flintshire.

The Chief Officer advised that a SEG enabling nature grant had been submitted and a response was expected by the end of March. On the subject of renewable energy he commented that the Council was always looking at options and advised that the Council were looking at potential sites for solar farms within the County.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the Quarter 3 Council Plan Monitoring Report 2018/19.

54. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration. She advised that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 9 April 2019.

It was agreed that an item on traffic calming would be included on the Programme for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended; and

- (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.

55. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.50 pm)

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Chairman