

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 FEBRUARY 2021

Minutes of the remote meeting of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Tuesday, 9 February 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Cindy Hinds, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Veronica Gay, Christine Jones, Richard Lloyd, and Mr Rob Dewey, Independent Member of the Standards Committee (as observers)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Transport Manager, Development Manager, and Strategic Performance Advisor

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

37. MINUTES

(i) The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020 were submitted.

The minutes were moved by Councillor Joe Johnson and seconded by Councillor Owen Thomas.

(ii) The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 were submitted.

The minutes were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That both sets of minutes be approved as an accurate record.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

39. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme. She reported on the items scheduled for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 9 March. She advised that updates on the Integrated Transport Plan and Climate Change would be added to the FWP as appropriate and a virtual site visit to Parc Adfer was also to be arranged. She invited Members to put forward any further items they wished to be included on the Programme. Councillor Chris Dolphin suggested that an item on Public Footpaths/Rights of Way be scheduled for future consideration and this was agreed by the Committee.

Referring to the item on borderland train services Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked if there was any progress on the electrification of the Wrexham to Bidston line. The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) provided a brief update and advised that a number of options were being considered including battery operated trains.

The Chief Officer suggested that a report on the Winter Maintenance Policy be brought to a meeting of the Committee in September.

Councillor Joe Johnson asked that an update on litter and fly tipping be added to the FWP.

The Facilitator reported on progress on the actions arising from previous meetings. Some actions were completed and progress ongoing on the remaining.

Councillor Owen Thomas referred to work on Ash Dieback and expressed concerns around the closure of the A541. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) said he would arrange for an update on the Ash Dieback programme to be provided to Councillor Thomas following the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor David Evans on the trial pot-hole programme the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) explained that he would provide a report on the results of the trial to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to a Welsh Government consultation - A Litter and Fly-tipping Free Wales which was currently open until April.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked if the Authority could provide assistance to local town/community councils who had suffered flooding and asked that an item on this be scheduled on the FWP. In his response the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said he would circulate a copy of the Authority's policy on sandbags to the Committee for information.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman 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.

40. COUNCIL PLAN 2021/22

The Chair introduced a report on the proposed Council Plan for 2020/21 with specific focus on the Committee's respective portfolios. She invited the Strategic Performance Advisor to present the Plan.

The Strategic Performance Advisor provided background information and reported that the Plan had a refreshed structure of six themes and supporting priorities, as detailed in the report, which set ambition with measured realism. He explained that the work on the priorities had progressed well and the draft Plan (Part 1) was appended to the report. He advised that Cabinet had agreed to the content and all Scrutiny Committees were to be consulted over the next cycle. Following this consultation the Plan would be presented to Cabinet in the second stage prior to adoption by County Council in April/May.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) reported on the main areas where Streetscene and Transportation supported the Council Plan. He referred to the Green Society and Environment, Active and Sustainable travel growth, development of the County's electric vehicle charging points, achieving safety targets, developing waste transfer stations as standard, composting facility at Greenfield, supporting the Re-use and Repair Café under construction and supporting the Authority's need to abolish some of its plastic use. He also reported on work to develop a transport infrastructure to sustain economic growth.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Economy & Environment) reported on Town Centre Regeneration, Business support, Local Development Plan targets, reducing worklessness, and spending money for the benefit of Flintshire.

The Chair referred to the priority Child Poverty and commented that there was a need to raise awareness on parental entitlement to claim free school meals. She also referred to Housing Needs and asked if residents in rent arrears were prevented from swapping to a smaller property to meet their needs. The

Strategic Performance Advisor agreed to pursue the matters raised and respond to Councillor Dolphin following the meeting.

The Strategic Performance Advisor explained the process for reviewing progress of the Plan once adopted and said a performance report on the whole Plan would be presented to each Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the relevant areas highlighted for consideration.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Chris Bithell and seconded by Councillor Owen Thomas.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the further developed themes of the Council Plan 2021/22 prior to sharing with Cabinet in March 2021.

41. FLEET ELECTRIFICATION

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced a report to consider the proposals for fleet electrification. He provided background information and advised that the report sets out the ambition of the service and identified the various projects being progressed to introduce low emission vehicles within the fleet and the development of infrastructure to support that uptake.

Referring to the development of electric vehicle (EV) charging points across the County the Chief Officer reported that the Council was working closely with the Welsh Government to explore the benefits of adopting a regional and national approach to ensure consistency for users of the EV charging network in Wales. He advised that an initial 17 sites for installation of fast charging points had been identified across the County which could be used by the general public.

Councillors Owen Thomas and Dennis Hutchinson asked questions around how electric vehicles would be charged, the arrangements for charging electric vehicles if kept at an employee's home address, and off-street parking restrictions. The Chief Officer explained that it was intended that charging points would be available in depots and said when employees were on duty out-of-hours charging points would be provided around the County. He advised that discussions would be held with Trade Union representatives regarding how to facilitate charging points at an employee's home address. The Chief Officer invited the Transport Manager to present the report.

The Transport Manager reported that the domestic and commercial demand for EV was increasing and commented on the significant developments in technology. The opportunities for front-line services was being explored and cited buses, refuse collection vehicles, and road sweepers, as examples and the infrastructure to support this was being investigated. He reported that the Council had also engaged with its Fleet contractor to review the usage and journeys of its own vehicle fleet to identify optimum locations for 'charging hubs'

to support service delivery. The contractor was reviewing the tracking data to identify vehicles and journeys that are best suited to electric vehicles and the charging infrastructure required to support vehicle movements in daily use by individual services. He also commented on the need to consider the capacity of the local grid to support such growth (specifically at certain times of the day).

The Transport Manager advised that the Council was in discussion with its current Fleet supplier concerning the expiry of the existing contract in 2023. The aspirations of the Council and the supplier were being discussed to ensure that every aspect of new technologies was considered and built into an extension to the contract to meet the change in procurement that a move to an EV fleet would entail.

The Transport Manager reported that following a successful bid WG funding had been secured to introduce a limited number of EV charging points at the Standard Yard site, Buckley. He explained that future expansion of the site would offer an opportunity for the Council to develop a 'Sustainable Transport Hub' on site which would support the move to an all-electric fleet powered by a 'home grown' source of renewable energy. The Transport Manager reported on developments around operating electric buses on the County bus network, the suitability of electrical powered waste vehicles, and opportunities to work with the Council's existing forecourt fuel provider to look at innovative new costing models.

The Chief Officer reported on progress on the Council's Hydrogen Fuel aspirations and explained that with Welsh Government support the Council had commissioned consultants to develop a Strategic Outline Business Case for a potential Hydrogen Hub on Deeside Industrial Park. The commission would consider hydrogen production and storage at the facility with capacity to provide fuel to both the Council, Deeside Industrial Park, other North Wales Councils, private vehicles and LGVs using the North Wales coast road. He suggested that this may be an item that the Committee would wish to add to the FWP

Councillor Chris Dolphin read out a message of support from Councillor Tudor Jones for the Council's ambitions regarding hydrogen which were detailed in the report.

Councillor Vicky Perfect asked if consideration had been given to providing charging points for EV for people who wished to visit Flint Castle and the coastal path. The Chief Officer responded that the areas referred to by Councillor Perfect would be included in the next phase for introducing charging points in the County.

Councillor Owen Thomas expressed concerns around how charging points would be monitored to prevent people parking vehicles for longer than necessary. The Chief Officer explained that one of the options to be considered was to make the spaces dedicated to charging vehicles short-stay spaces (2 hours maximum).

Councillor Carolyn Thomas spoke in support of the initiatives and schemes being progressed as detailed in the report and thanked the Chief Officer and his team for their work and commitment.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Sean Bibby and seconded by Councillor Chris Dolphin.

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the content of the report and supports the ambition of the Council to introduce low emission vehicles across the Council's operational vehicle fleet.

42. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced the report. He provided background information and explained that the report sets out the structure of the Planning Enforcement team and where it sits within the Development Management service and the Planning, Environment and Economy portfolio. The adopted Planning Enforcement Policy was appended to the report and advised how it had been implemented and the Council's performance against the Welsh Government Planning Enforcement indicators.

The Chief Officer commented on recent priorities for service delivery within the Planning, Environment and Economy portfolio in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. He also referred to the need to progress the Local Development Plan to meet the Delivery Agreement deadlines and advised that Development Management, which included the Planning Enforcement service, was not identified as a Council priority nor was it referenced within the Council Plan. The report outlined the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on service delivery, the mitigating actions taken and further actions proposed.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the need for better communication in response to the queries raised by Members. In acknowledging the need for some improvement, the Chief Officer said action had been taken to address this and the need for Cabinet Members and Group Leaders to escalate matters on Members' behalf if a response had not been received within the timescales in place. The Development Manager referred to the mitigation measures and future service improvements during 2021 as detailed in the report.

Councillor Chris Dolphin asked if the Planning Enforcement team was fully staffed. He also expressed concern around the number of cases lodged with Legal Services awaiting prosecution and asked for an explanation of the backlog of work. The Development Manager explained that the Development Management Team has 14 permanent officers split into two teams, one managing the North and the other the South of the County and reported on workload arrangements for the service. Referring to the cases awaiting

prosecution with Legal Services, the Chief Officer explained that Legal Services worked in conjunction with other Services provided either within the Council, other local authorities, or external statutory bodies which impacted on progress of prosecutions. He also commented on the greater demand on Legal Services due to more active enforcement which has subsequently produced more work for Legal Services.

Councillor Derek Butler drew attention to section 1.21 of the report and commented on the time spent addressing unnecessary enquiries and complaints when no planning breach had been committed.

Councillor Chris Bithell commented on the additional pressures on services as a result of the pandemic and emphasised that, unlike some other local authorities, service delivery had continued despite the impact of reduced staffing due to illness or bereavement. Councillor Bithell referred to a new back-office system to be provided in the near future which would enable Members and residents to be better informed of enforcement matters and the actions taken to address them. Councillor Bithell commented on the time and resources required to investigate enforcement breaches. He paid tribute to the Chief Officer and his team for maintaining a high level of services in very difficult circumstances.

The Chair referred to the employment of Eden Consultants to progress outstanding enforcement cases. The Development Manager explained that 40 cases had been initially transferred to Eden Consultants on a trial basis and robust systems and engagement was in place around each case. She advised that the system was working successfully and a further number of cases had been transferred to Eden Consultants. The Chief Officer commented that the Council had been successful in making claims to the WG for excessive costs and some of that funding would be used to pay for Eden Consultants.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Chris Dolphin

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the report and supports the further mitigating actions which are proposed; and
- (b) That a further update report be brought to the Committee in nine months

43. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.31 am)

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Chair