

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon
at 2.00pm on Thursday 17 July 2014

PRESENT

Councillors: J F Mills (Chairman), H G Davies (Vice-Chairman), M A Barrett, R J M Bishop, M Brennan, Mrs E M Coles, C Cottrell-Dormer, P Emery, D S T Enright and Ms E P R Leffman

Also Present: A D Harvey

4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D A Cotterill, Mr H J Howard and Mr A H K Postan

The Chief Executive reported the following temporary appointment:

Mr D S T Enright attended for Mr A S Coles

5 MINUTES

Mrs Coles referred to her comments regarding the provision of a 'pink bin' recycling facility in Chipping Norton and that it should refer to the Albion Street car park and not New Street.

The committee agreed to an amendment being made to the minutes accordingly.

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 20 March, as amended, and 4 June 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in matters to be considered at the meeting.

7 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

8 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013/2014

The Committee received and considered the report of Ralph Young, Strategic Director, seeking approval of a work programme for 2014/2015.

The Strategic Director introduced the report and explained that some issues had been carried forward from the previous work programme and there were also a number of new work areas for consideration.

Waste Contract

Ms Leffman suggested that it would be beneficial to look at the impact of the closure of recycling facilities in the northern part of the district on aspects of the contract.

Open Space Grass Cutting

Mrs Coles expressed support for work to be undertaken on this matter as there appeared to be a lack of clarity about responsibility for maintenance and differing frequencies and standards of grass cutting. Mrs Coles highlighted the danger of highway verges being allowed to grow too tall thus impairing vision for motorists and pedestrians.

Mr Enright concurred and suggested that consideration could be given to the wider issue of geographically shared services within the environment remit. Mr Harvey advised that there were on-going discussions with various organisations and partner authorities. It was suggested and agreed that an update report be presented to a future meeting and members could decide how to take the matter forward.

Mr Enright suggested that it could be beneficial to amend the scrutiny toolkit/criteria to take account of matters delegated from Cabinet or other committees. The Chief Executive undertook to include an extra bullet point in the document.

RESOLVED: That, the Committee Work Programme for 2014/2015 be approved subject to the issues raised at the meeting.

9 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving the opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 17 June 2014 was received and considered.

It was noted that the item related to a shared Public Protection service had been deferred and would be considered as part of the wider project relating to Vision 2020.

RESOLVED: That, the Cabinet Work Programme published on 17 June 2014 be noted.

10 UPDATE ON FLOOD RESPONSE AND FUTURE ACTION

The report of the Head of Democratic Services advising Members of Thames Water's response to representations made following the last meeting was received and considered.

The Strategic Director outlined the Thames Water position regarding sewage infrastructure and their duties in this respect. It was highlighted that flood prevention was their key priority.

Mr Emery highlighted that a new Local Plan would be in place in the future and satisfactory infrastructure was needed to meet increased development. Mr Emery suggested that pressure needed to be maintained and Thames Water be encouraged to revisit their position on dealing with sewage.

Mr Cottrell-Dormer suggested that rainwater in the sewer system was a concern particularly in rural areas. Mr Cottrell-Dormer highlighted that problems could often be overcome with the provision of balancing ponds and other initiatives in new developments. The Committee expressed concern at the apparent lack of co-ordination between Thames Water and Environment Agency on these matters.

Ms Leffman concurred that pressure needed to be maintained on Thames Water to resolve problems. Ms Leffman suggested that investment needed to be made in better infrastructure and current priorities appeared to be London centric. Mr Harvey agreed that it was a concern that funding appeared to be focused on urban rather than rural areas.

Mr Harvey emphasised that funding was based on how many properties were affected and this tended to favour urban areas and thus rural areas tended to lose out as residents were more sparsely distributed.

Ms Leffman suggested that a further letter be sent to the local Member of Parliament to advise that the committee was not satisfied with the responses received to date. Members agreed that it was important not to let the issue drop and for the Chairman to send a further letter on behalf of the council. Mr Enright highlighted that Thames Water had a monopoly and needed to be reminded of their responsibilities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the information set out in the report be noted; and
- (b) That a further letter be sent to the local Member of Parliament advising of continued concerns regarding issues of infrastructure and responsibility for services.

11 START TIME OF MEETINGS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services regarding the start time for meetings of the Committee for the remainder of the 2014/2015 municipal year.

Mr Mills referred to the dates of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year and highlighted that if the committee was to respond to the Oxfordshire County Council flood consultation then it would be necessary to move the September meeting. It was agreed that the meeting be rescheduled to Thursday 11 September 2014 to allow comments to be passed to Cabinet for a formal response.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, meetings of the committee for the 2014/2015 municipal year be held at 2.00pm; and
- (b) That the meeting in September 2014 be rescheduled for 11 September 2014.

12 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – YEAR END 2013/2014

The report of the Shared Head of Business Information and Change providing information on the Council's performance for the Fourth Quarter of Year 2013/2014 was received.

Mrs Coles reiterated previous concerns regarding excess waste at recycling facilities and whether this was classed as fly-tipping or side waste. The Strategic Director clarified that there was a requirement to report figures to Defra on waste in a particular way. The committee was advised that excess waste at bring sites was dealt with as part of the waste contract and it was the responsibility of the contractor to clear up. If the waste was on the public highway or away from an identified bring site then the council had to pay for removal.

The Strategic Director acknowledged that responsibility for dealing with excess or dumped waste was not always clear but the key message was that it was anti-social behaviour and publicity needed to focus on that aspect.

Ms Leffman suggested that the closure of the facility in the northern part of the district could impact on the situation. Ms Leffman suggested that it would be opportune to look at whether there had been an increase in excess waste being put in to the household stream or tipped illegally. Ms Leffman asked if the business case for a new facility could be revisited. The Strategic Director, in response to a question, clarified that information regarding the amount of compostable waste was included in the report.

Mr Cottrell-Dormer highlighted the recycling of cardboard and asked if it was taken to local facilities. Mr Harvey clarified that recyclable material was owned by the contractor and they placed it on the open market to achieve the best possible price. Mr Davies referred to the red indicators for recycling and that this was a trend that was being experienced nationally and suggested it would be beneficial to look at other methodologies and for a report to be presented to a future meeting. Mr Davies indicated that once additional information had been received it may be necessary to review targets.

The Strategic Director reminded members that indicators were linked to the current contract but a review may be pertinent ahead of the procurement of a new contract. It was further highlighted that indicators had been set on a county wide basis by the now disbanded Oxfordshire Waste Partnership. Therefore individual councils now had greater flexibility to set their own targets.

Mr Harvey advised that at the launch of the contract there had been a lot of publicity regarding recycling and this had been well received and resulted in exceptional rates. However more recently the figures had dropped, as was the case elsewhere, and there may be a need to reinvigorate enthusiasm.

Mr Cottrell-Dormer suggested that a reminder to residents could be useful as there was a perception amongst some that not all suitable material was recycled as it was often placed in a single vehicle and not sorted. Mr Harvey acknowledged the concern and reminded members that material was recycled and where possible signs were placed on vehicles reminding residents that this was the case. A number of members spoke in support of more publicity and information being provided.

Mr Brennan asked if an alternative collection method such as co-mingled bins could help improve recycling. Mr Harvey reminded the committee that the H+ box system had been chosen as it cost less and level of contamination in material was reduced. Mr Harvey advised that the recycle market was constantly changing and the impact of the energy from waste facility at Ardley was not yet known. In response to Mr Cottrell-Dormer it was

confirmed that the Ardley facility was not a cost to the district council but acknowledged that it would be necessary to monitor whether more recyclable material was being put in the waste stream.

Mr Mills referred to the educational work done by WRAP and that public support for recycling was key. Mr Mills suggested that there would be significant work needed ahead of the letting of a new contract. The Strategic Director concurred and advised that the council would need to prioritise what it wanted to achieve from a new contract. Mr Bishop advised that the current system was well liked by residents and was working well so it was important to maintain that. Mr Enright agreed and highlighted the importance of incentives for the contractor so that maximum performance was achieved.

Mr Harvey advised that there had been some problems with regular changes in officers dealing with the contract at Kier. There was now a renewed commitment from Kier and it was hoped that this would help discussions. Mr Harvey indicated that a meeting was to be held with relevant officers from Kier in August and an update would be provided to the committee at the next meeting.

The Shared Head of Environmental Services reported that whilst the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership had disbanded officers were still meeting and education/awareness campaigns were an important part of that work.

Mr Cottrell-Dormer referred to indicator CS6 and highlighted the issue of private water supplies to a number of properties and the associated cost. The Strategic Director undertook to respond to Mr Cottrell-Dormer.

RESOLVED: That, the report be noted.

13 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Commercial Waste Minimisation

Mr Enright asked what work was being undertaken to reduce commercial packaging and waste minimisation for businesses.

Mr Harvey advised that work was on-going through the countywide Oxfordshire Environment Partnership. The Strategic Director clarified that a lot of the issues were primarily controlled through government directives and schemes. It was highlighted that the packaging industry had done a lot to reduce waste.

The Strategic Director indicated that in respect of waste minimisation Oxfordshire County Council had a lead role as they were responsible for waste going to landfill. The district council had a role in signposting businesses to where help and advice was available.

The meeting closed at 2.55pm