

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 27 November 2014

PRESENT

Councillors: J F Mills (Chairman), H G Davies (Vice-Chairman), M A Barrett, R J M Bishop, M Brennan, A S Coles, Mrs E M Coles, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C Cottrell-Dormer, P Emery, H J Howard and A H K Postan

Also Present: A D Harvey

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

The Chief Executive reported the following temporary appointment:

Mr J C Cooper attended for Ms E P R Leffman

24 MINUTES

Mr Mills advised that Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had undertaken flood alleviation works in Bridge Street which was positive. However issues regarding responsibility for works in other areas were yet to be resolved.

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 September 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

26 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

27 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013/2014

The Committee received and considered the report of Ralph Young, Strategic Director, providing an update on the work programme for 2014/2015.

Waste Contract

Mr Mills suggested, and it was agreed, that it would be beneficial to receive an update from representatives of the contractors at the next meeting. Mrs Coles and Mr Howard referred to problems of excess material, including commercial waste, at bring sites and sought clarification on responsibility for clearing up sites. The Strategic Director advised that whilst the council had overall responsibility clearance at the bring sites was included in the waste contract and undertaken by the contractor.

The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services indicated it was an issue that officers were aware of and were undertaking work to resolve problems. It was suggested that there were communication/promotional matters that needed to be addressed.

Mr Harvey reported that a targeted campaign had been undertaken in Chipping Norton in an attempt to raise awareness of what could be deposited at the sites. In addition evidence had been gained about potential fly tipping and prosecutions were being considered. Mr Harvey acknowledged it was a district wide issue and it was important to make residents aware.

Mr Emery suggested that it was difficult for people without their own transport to access the larger waste recycling centres and it would be positive to advise residents of other options. Mr Coles referred to the use of CCTV and asked if the council worked with shops where sites were located to identify fly tipping. Mr Harvey confirmed this happened where there was CCTV coverage.

Mr Howard suggested that the bulky household waste collections could be better promoted and the cost of the service looked at to see if it was a barrier to people using it. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services reminded the committee that some charitable organisations also collected items.

Oxfordshire Flood Risk Management Strategy

Mr Mills advised that Cabinet had supported the recommendations of the committee for inclusion in a response to OCC on the strategy. Mr Harvey thanked members for their input to the formulation of a response.

It was noted that OCC would be considering responses to the consultation at a Cabinet meeting on 16 December 2014.

Thames Water – Flooding and Sewerage Issues

Mr Mills indicated that a response had been received from the local MP and a copy had been circulated to members. Mr Mills asked if members supported further correspondence being sent to the Consumer Council for Water, as was suggested in the letter, as a way of progressing matters.

The committee agreed that this would be positive and that it would also be useful if examples of incidents in the district and the responses from Thames Water could be forwarded. Members also considered it would be beneficial to get clarification of the role of the consumer council.

Car Park Strategy

Mr Mills referred to the recent Cabinet decision to undertake an initial study in respect of off street parking and requested that the committee be kept advised of progress.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee Work Programme for 2014/2015 be noted subject to the issues raised at the meeting.

28 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving the opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 11 November 2014 was received and considered.

RESOLVED: That, the Cabinet Work Programme published on 11 November 2014 be noted.

29 BUDGET 2015/2016

Consideration was given to the report of the Strategic Director seeking consideration of the initial draft base budgets for 2015/16, draft fees and charges for 2015/16 and the latest Capital Programme for 2014/15 revised and future years. The committee was reminded that the Cabinet was required to consult overview and scrutiny committees on its budget proposals in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

The GO Shared Services Head of Finance advised that the budget was based on no growth. It was clarified that the pay award had now been agreed and the budget would be adjusted to reflect the reduced rise. The committee was advised that there was some unavoidable growth to meet costs arising from OCC financial cuts. In addition proposed efficiency savings and additional income streams were outlined.

The GO Shared Services Head of Finance confirmed that the grants budget would be maintained at the current level and it was emphasised that the whole budget would be reassessed in light of the government grant settlements that would be announced soon. The attention of the committee was drawn to the specific pages relating to environment budgets.

Mr Emery expressed support for the retention of the grants budget as it provided support to many organisations and asked if any additional funding may be available through money going back in to funds. In response it was clarified that this was not in accordance with the approach adopted by Cabinet and in fact there was an extant decision to reduce grants which Cabinet had chosen not to implement at this time.

Mr Emery referred to the loss of funding for swimming and increased tipping charges for trade waste and sought further information. Clarification was given that increased charges for waste would be reflected in contract costs to the council. The Strategic Director advised that OCC would stop subsidising the dual use leisure facilities and so costs for swimming arrangements would need to be covered.

Mr Cooper asked for clarification of the final pay settlement and suggested that budgets could be adjusted to target areas that were not meeting performance indicators. The Strategic Director confirmed that the settlement was 2.2% over two years rather than the 3% budgeted for so there would be a benefit of about £60k. The committee was advised that there were still a number of unknowns that could impact on the budget and these would be reflected in future versions.

Mr Coles supported Mr Emery in respect of increasing the grants budget. The Strategic Director reiterated the position including the implications of one off funding and that it was not in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Mr Harvey advised that as well as grant funding loans were also available to parishes to help with community projects.

Mr Howard suggested that the charge for bulky household waste collections could be reduced as it could mean less fly tipping and reduce costs elsewhere in the budget. The Strategic Director advised that an increase in charges was proposed which would bring it in line with other authorities and it was a costly service to run. Mr Davies suggested that a reduction was unlikely to change the mindset of some residents and they would fly tip anyway. Mrs Coles indicated that a reduced cost would be an incentive. The Strategic Director outlined the increased collection and landfill costs and the need to be aware of this when considering charges. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services reiterated that some charities could also collect goods free of charge and this could potentially be promoted more. Mr Emery suggested that a sliding scale, dependent on the type of bulky waste being collected, could be considered.

Mr Mills highlighted that bulky waste collections were difficult in apartments and flats and this could lead to fly tipping in communal areas. The Strategic Director acknowledged the concern and clarified that the Management Company or housing association had responsibility for clearing such areas. It was advised that it was not a significant problem in the district.

Mr Cottrell-Dormer referred to the new facility at Ardley and sought clarification of the cost of putting waste through the site. The Strategic Director confirmed that it was energy from waste facility and initially costs to the council would be higher than landfill.

Mr Mills sought clarification of the increased third party payments in respect of waste collection and recycling. In response it was advised that this related to the waste contractor and was linked to the contract.

The Strategic Director concluded by outlining the timetable for the budget and that members would have an opportunity to express views at Cabinet and Council.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be advised that the committee notes the present position in respect of the 2015/2016 budget.

30 OPEN SPACE GRASS CUTTING – UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received the report of the Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services providing an update on the work carried out to date focussing largely on the dialogue the Council is having with OCC and the potential implications budget cuts could have on service provision.

The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services advised that in addition to discussions with OCC options for shared working were being discussed with town and parish councils in respect of grass cutting. Mr Mills expressed support for the work with local councils and asked if the issue of footpaths, which was a particular problem, was being resolved. In response it was advised that until the financial position was clarified this could not be considered in detail.

Mr Davies suggested it was a two stage process and the council was waiting on OCC to clarify their position before other decisions could be made and asked when a decision was likely from OCC. In response it was acknowledged that it was needed as soon as possible as cutting usually commenced in April and it was emphasised that the potential funding cut was reflected in the draft budget proposals.

Mr Cotterill asked how shared services could operate with towns and parishes. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services suggested it could be shared resources so that only one contractor was doing the work. It was further clarified that the amount of work needed to be established in each parish and any existing contractual arrangements assessed.

Mr Howard suggested that road safety needed to be a prime consideration and a reduction in the number of cuts could be detrimental to that. The Strategic Director confirmed that this concern had been raised with OCC and that it was their decision on the standards. Mr Harvey advised that discussions were on-going with OCC at a high level and it had been made clear that liability would rest with OCC.

The committee expressed support for the position that had been taken in respect of discussions with OCC.

Mr Emery suggested there could be merit in looking at leaving some areas of land uncut and develop them as a natural meadow habitat Mr Postan asked if a map could be provided to parishes identifying land and responsibilities for maintenance in that area.

Mr Coles asked if the shared working concept could be extended to include housing associations. Mr Harvey advised that the contract for Cottsway was with a private contractor but was something that could be explored further. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services suggested that once initial partnerships had been agreed it could provide a model for future arrangements.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

31 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTER 2 2014/2015

The report of the Shared Head of Business Information and Change providing information on the Council's performance at the end of the second quarter of year 2014/2015 was considered.

Mr Davies referred to Indicators SS6 and SS7 asked if penalties were included in the contract if Kier did not meet performance targets. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services advised that default payments were in place. The Strategic Director clarified that not all missed collections would be defaults as there was tolerance within the contract which allowed Kier to make the collection within a specified timescale. In respect of defaults it was explained that these were notional figures as there were financial claims against the council by the contractor as well.

Mr Davies sought clarification as to whether the reported indicators were the same as those used in the contract. The Strategic Director advised that the performance indicators reported to the committee were based on previous national indicators which had to be reported to Defra. It was acknowledged that criteria in the contract were different. Discussion ensued on the relevance of the indicators and it was suggested and agreed that they should be reviewed so that they were more relevant to the contract requirements. It was noted that a report could be presented to the next meeting.

Mr Howard highlighted indicator SS2 relating to residual waste and suggested that a lot of residents had lost faith in the system and there was a need to reinvigorate publicity regarding recycling. Mr Harvey acknowledged the concern and agreed that enthusiasm for recycling had been good when the contract commenced, but as elsewhere in the country, this tended to decline. Discussions were ongoing on how to improve recycling through promotion within existing budgets.

Mr Davies referred to previous discussions regarding low recycling areas in the district and focusing campaigns in those areas. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services advised that community recycling events were being undertaken and food waste campaigns in conjunction with OCC were being explored.

Mr Cotterill referred to residual household waste and sought clarification of how much waste would be going to the new energy from waste facility and whether this would be reflected in the indicators. The Strategic Director advised that only residual waste would be sent there and there would be no impact on figures as they reflected collection only. The Interim Shared Head of Environment & Commercial Services reported that commissioning tests were being undertaken at the facility so it was hoped that waste would be sent there soon.

The Strategic Director clarified that whilst initial costs of using the Ardley facility would be higher there would be benefits in the longer term due to increasing landfill tax and landfill disposal costs.

Mr Postan highlighted concerns that sometimes different vehicles were used to collect and residents thought that the material was going to landfill. Mr Postan suggested that there was a reputational risk to the council as a result. Mr Mills acknowledged this was a recurring problem and it was right to question how often Kier used alternative vehicles. Mr Harvey gave an assurance that all material collected was recycled and some was taken to a materials recycling facility (MRF) where it was sorted.

Mr Howard concurred that it was important that residents knew where their waste material was going. In respect of residual waste Mr Howard drew attention to the fact that if there was excess waste and the lid was open they were not being collected and asked what should be done with excess material. The Strategic Director confirmed that it was not collected for health and safety reasons and additional residual waste should not be collected. It was agreed that this may need to be made clearer for residents.

Mr Coles returned to the issue of publicity and that there were no longer any national media campaigns to increase recycling. Mr Coles suggested that a working party could be established to look at the issue further. Mr Mills questioned what outcomes could be achieved. Mr Coles advised that members could look at causes of apathy and how recycling

could be increased. In response to Mr Coles it was confirmed that the council undertook work with local schools and any work needed to be done within existing limited budgets. Mr Harvey suggested and it was agreed that a report be presented to members outlining work already being undertaken and then the committee could decide what further work may be necessary.

The Strategic Director acknowledged the concerns that had been raised regarding recycling. Members were reminded that the council was in the top ten nationally for recycling performance which was positive. The Strategic Director suggested that improvement in performance could be limited.

Mr Cooper suggested that it would be good for the committee to receive additional information regarding the MRF. The Committee expressed an interest in receiving a presentation regarding Pure Recycling's Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at Ettington, Stratford Upon Avon, Warwickshire, which was owned by the Kier Group. Consequently it was agreed that Kier be invited to present to the Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

32 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no member's questions.

The meeting closed at 3.45pm

Chairman