

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 12 February 2015

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, C Cottrell-Dormer, P J G Dorward, P Emery, Ms E P R Leffman, and A H K Postan

Also Present: A D Harvey

33 CHAIRMANS OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed Claire Locke, Head of Environment and Commercial Services, to the meeting following her maternity leave and thanked Monica Stephens for her work in supporting the committee during that period.

Mr Mills also welcomed Louise Croot, Energy and Resources Project Officer and Bob Lightfoot, Environmental Operations Manager, to the meeting together with Ms Brigitte Hickman who would be speaking under public participation.

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence or temporary appointments.

35 MINUTES

Mrs Coles sought an update regarding the issuing of maps to parish councils showing responsibility for grass cutting in their areas. The Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that work was continuing and it was hoped to identify a couple of areas to trial the initiative.

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

37 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

In accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure Ms Brigitte Hickman, the Chair of Sustainable Witney, had given notice of her wish to address the meeting regarding the implications of the County Council's proposals to withdraw funding from the Oxfordshire Community Action Group Project.

A copy of her submission is appended to the original copy of these minutes.

Mr Coles thanked Ms Hickman for her input and highlighted that the Community Action Groups (CAG's) undertook important work that reflected the objectives of the council and it was important to try and retain a partnership. In response to Mr Emery it was confirmed that the figures relating to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) showed the proposed reduction in funding in the coming years.

Ms Leffman expressed support for the work of the CAG's particularly as there were a number of challenging issues. Ms Leffman expressed the hope that support could be given to help work continue on issues such as reducing the amount of waste going to landfill.

Mr Mills thanked Ms Hickman for her submission and indicated that it was not in the remit of the committee to make any financial commitment but that it would be possible for officers to advise on grant aid and opportunities for accessing funding elsewhere.

38 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015

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

Waste Contract

The Strategic Director advised that Kier were unable to attend the meeting as had been planned. It was explained that key staff were not available to give a presentation regarding recycling but this together with an update regarding other aspects of the contract would be given at the next meeting. The committee expressed disappointment that Kier had not been able to meet the request to attend this meeting.

Thames Water – Infrastructure Issues

Mr Harvey reported that at a recent Oxfordshire Environment Partnership (OEP) meeting there had been a presentation by OCC regarding flood risk. Mr Harvey highlighted that he and representatives from other district councils had raised concern that Thames Water were not performing well in rural areas in respect of addressing flood issues.

Mr Davies advised that work had now been undertaken by OCC and Thames Water in Finstock and this would hopefully rectify the sewage problems the village had been experiencing. Mr Davies suggested that it was important to keep pressure on responsible authorities to meet their duties.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee Work Programme for 2014/2015 be noted.

39 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving the opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 20 January 2015 was received and considered.

RESOLVED: That, the Cabinet Work Programme published on 20 January 2015 be noted.

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services proposing changes to a number of existing performance indicators currently used to measure the performance of the waste service contract.

The Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services outlined the background to the report, links to the waste contract and options for future reporting of performance indicators. It was clarified that three indicators were being recommended to be changed.

Ms Leffman in acknowledging that residual waste increase could be linked to an improved economy suggested that this should also mean increased recycling. Ms Leffman referred to higher performing authorities and that the collection methods could also impact on recycling figures. Ms Leffman asked if performance data could be filtered for different parts of the district. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that more detailed data could be provided but it would be by round which did not necessarily accord with parish boundaries.

Mr Davies referred to previous discussions about identifying areas of low recycling and having targeted campaigns in those parts of the district. The Environmental Operations Manager advised that this information had been identified and was available for members. As a result discussions had been held with the contractor and promotional work and awareness campaigns undertaken. The Environmental Operations Manager highlighted that the Christmas food campaign had been very successful in increasing the amount of food waste collected. It was acknowledged that there was further work to be done.

Mr Harvey thanked officers for the report and suggested that careful consideration needed to be given as to whether it was right to change the indicators at this time. Mr Harvey suggested it may give out the wrong message by increasing the targets and tolerances and so not be as challenging for the contractor. Mr Harvey reminded the committee that work on the new contract would commence in the coming year and it may be preferable to look at revised indicators as part of the negotiation process rather than at the current time.

Mr Mills acknowledged the concern but suggested that benchmarking against the leading recycling councils was not an unreasonable approach. Mr Mills highlighted different collection systems and the importance of community engagement in improving recycling figures. Finally Mr Mills emphasised issues around missed collections. Mr Davies reminded members that the indicators were not directly linked to the requirements of the contract with Kier but were set by the council.

Mr Postan asked about recording of missed collections and it was confirmed that these were logged on the system. Mrs Coles reiterated previous concerns about public perception when kerbside sort vehicles were not available and recycling was placed together in a single vehicle. A number of members concurred with Mrs Coles and it was agreed that an awareness campaign would be beneficial.

Mr Emery sought further details regarding penalties in the contract and why indicators were different. The Strategic Director highlighted paragraph 3.4 of the report which set out that missed collections were subject to a method statement of how misses would be

reported. The Environmental Operations Manager explained that the current indicators were based on previous local indicators and were extremely low and therefore challenging with the targets rarely being achieved. It was emphasised that a penalty system was in place so the contractor did not get away with poor performance.

Mr Emery asked if there was any data that indicated 'hotspots' for missed collections. In response it was advised that this was not the case but if any trends were identified then officers investigated to try and resolve the situation. Mr Cottrell-Dormer expressed concern that often people just put bins out late which was not really a missed collection. The Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that further information was ascertained when a missed collection was reported to establish whether it was a genuine miss.

Ms Leffman emphasised the importance of continued recycling campaigns and that increasing the tolerance on the indicators was acceptable. Mr Coles, in supporting the proposed changes, suggested that it was important to communicate the reasons why it was being done and that there was not a perception that they were being changed just to achieve targets.

Mr Mills highlighted particular issues around flats/apartments where there was a different collection system for recycling. The Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services acknowledged the concern and advised that an action plan was being developed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet be recommended that the following revisions to the existing Performance Indicators (PIs) are adopted for the 2015/16 financial year:
 - SS2 – 93kg per quarter with a tolerance of 10kg
 - SS6 – 40 misses per 100,000
 - SS7 - 40 misses per 100,000
- (b) That Cabinet be recommended that the new PI's are reviewed at the end of quarter 2 to ensure that they are appropriate and that they reflect the needs of the service. Adjustments can then be tested and proposed for 2016/17 if required; and

41 LOW CARBON AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN – ANNUAL UPDATE

The report of the Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services providing an update on the delivery of WODC's Low Carbon and Environmental Plan was received.

The Energy and Resources Project Officer presented the report and outlined the work that had been undertaken within the council and with external partners. It was reported that a new plan for 2015/2016 was being developed and would be reported to the next Climate Change Board for approval.

Ms Leffman referred to the Green Deal initiative and asked whether there was a target for the number of households helped as part of the scheme. The Energy and Resources Project Officer advised that 26 households had been referred in the district and there was a target of 36 for each district. It was noted that promotion of the scheme would continue to encourage more participation.

Mr Dorward referred to the provision of solar PV and asked if consideration had been given to using car parks. In response it was advised that it had not been looked at in detail and there were concerns around vandalism and safety. It was explained that panels on buildings gave a better return.

Mr Davies referred to recent discussions at the Finance & Management O&S Committee where it was agreed to recommend that the council bought in to the Peterborough City Council framework with a view to developing solar PV on council buildings.

Mr Brennan asked if officers undertook research on new technologies that were becoming available. The Energy and Resources Project Officer advised that discussions had been held with the contractor working with Peterborough City Council to look at new initiatives.

RESOLVED: That the update report be noted.

42 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Bin Stickers

Mr Postan referred to "speed limit" stickers that had been available some time ago and asked if they were still available for placing on bins. The Environmental Operations Manager undertook to look at the matter further to see if any were still in stock.

Litter on Verges

Mr Cottrell-Dormer expressed his thanks to officers for their work in clearing litter from the highway verges but expressed disappointment that OCC had recently cut the verges which had exacerbated the problem in some areas.

Archimedes Screws on Waterways

Mr Cottrell-Dormer asked if the district council was involved in the implementation of any schemes to use Archimedes screw technology on any waterways. Mr Harvey advised that schemes were already in place at Minster Lovell and Blenheim Palace and companies were actively looking for suitable sites elsewhere.

Bring Sites Survey

Mr Leffman referred to a recent survey that had been undertaken in respect of bring sites and asked when the results would be available. The Interim Shared Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that officer were reviewing the data and looking at actions arising from the results. It was agreed that the matter could be discussed at the April meeting.

Abandoned Shopping Trolleys

Mr Dorward asked about responsibility for removing abandoned shopping trolleys. The Environmental Operations Manager advised that the relevant supermarket was informed when an abandoned trolley was reported and they collected it. If the trolley was not removed within a certain time then the council took responsibility and the supermarket was charged for storage.

It was emphasised that officers took a collaborative approach with supermarkets to try and reduce the number of abandoned trolleys. Mr Mills advised that trolleys abandoned in waterways were the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

Air Quality

Mrs Coles referred to recent press reports that indicated particulates from diesel vehicles were more harmful than previously thought and asked whether this was being taken in to account in respect of air quality issues in the district. Mr Harvey acknowledged that there was a difference in emissions and particulates between petrol and diesel engines and it was anticipated that new guidance would be forthcoming regarding Air Quality Management Areas.

The meeting closed at 3.10pm

Chairman