

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 24 March 2016

PRESENT

Councillors: D A Cotterill (Chairman), R J M Bishop, M Brennan, A S Coles,
P J G Dorward, H B Eaglestone, Mrs E H N Fenton, E J Fenton, Miss G R Hill, H J Howard,
Ms E P R Leffman, A H K Postan and Mrs C E Reynolds

Also Present: T N Owen

51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Emery and Mr A D Harvey

The Chief Executive reported the following temporary appointment:

Mrs E H N Fenton attended for Mr M A Barrett

52 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

54 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

55 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENT

Agenda Order

Mr Cotterill advised that he would be taking Agenda Item No. 7 – Thames Water Drainage Strategies before Agenda Item No. 5.

56 THAMES WATER – DRAINAGE STRATEGIES

The committee received a presentation from Mr Huw Thomas, Thames Water, and Mr James Playfair, eight₂O, in respect of a number of drainage strategies in the district. A copy of the presentation is appended to the original copy of these minutes.

Mr Cotterill asked if levels of future development, particularly in the Brize Norton and Carterton area, had been taken in to account and what flow measurements would be undertaken. Mr Thomas advised that meetings had been held and growth issues for the area carefully considered as part of the strategy development. It was emphasised that the West Oxfordshire Strategies were at a more advanced stage than others in the region and it was anticipated that they would be progressed together once all data was in place.

Mr Playfair confirmed that flow monitors would be installed fairly shortly so that data regarding pressure on the sewage network would be available for consideration. Mr Cotterill highlighted the importance of the strategies linking to proposed development and

that timescales were met. Mr Thomas confirmed that the proposed end dates for the strategies were as previously reported and there had been no slippage.

Mr Howard, whilst acknowledging that the development of strategies was positive, emphasised the need to resolve some of the immediate issues. Mr Howard reiterated the likely levels of development in the future, including MOD housing, and the need to update the pumping stations as a priority to reduce use of tankers. Mr Thomas acknowledged the concern and reiterated the need to properly assess the infrastructure to fully understand what works may be required. Mr Thomas agreed that the use of tankers was not sustainable and longer term costed options needed to be considered.

Mr Keith Glazier, representing Brize Norton Parish Council, highlighted flooding issues in Brize Norton and the sewage system backing up in some areas. Mr Glazier emphasised the pressure on the pumping station and whilst the installation of new pumps had been beneficial there were still matters to be resolved and suggested that a new rising main to Witney had previously been mooted as a solution. Mr Thomas advised that the flow monitoring would clarify issues around the effectiveness of the infrastructure and identify where there were problems. It was indicated that the existing station had the right capacity but there could be misconnections or illegal connections that exacerbated the situation.

In response to Mr Glazier it was clarified that the data would be carefully considered and it was highlighted that the strategy was looking wider than individual assets and whilst local solutions had been undertaken it was hoped to have a more integrated approach.

Mr Glazier referred to potential development in Minster Lovell and the impact this could have on the infrastructure in the area. It was highlighted that ingress of water and sewage overflow was the main concern. Mr Playfair reiterated that there could be defects in the sewers or direct inundation of manholes. It was advised that the assessment of flows would identify problems and the data would be used to inform whether immediate repairs were necessary.

Mr Cotterill asked about the process for undertaking the work. Mr Playfair advised that he would be co-ordinating the project and be responsible for the appointment of contractors. The committee was advised that the work would be beginning in the coming weeks and the council would be kept advised of the timetable.

Mrs Fenton welcomed the ambition to reduce reliance on tankers and it would have a positive impact in her ward. Mrs Fenton expressed concern regarding new developments and the associated pressure on existing infrastructure. Mr Thomas clarified that if it was considered that new development would exceed the capacity of existing drainage then Grampian planning conditions could be imposed and it was important that current residents were not detrimentally impacted.

Mrs Fenton highlighted issues around changes in planning that would allow the conversion of some commercial buildings to residential without the need for permission, which could significantly increase the number of toilets. Mr Thomas concurred that this could be an issue if increased pressure on drainage resulted but explained that without a planning application process on these buildings Thames Water probably wouldn't be aware of these changes. Mr Cotterill reminded the committee that the council had some control through the use of Article 4 directions through which the right to develop without permission was removed.

Mr Thomas reiterated that new developments needed to be assessed to see if the current sewage provision was capable of taking extra houses and if it wasn't then the developer

would need to make provision. In respect of surface water flooding it was clarified that new developments had to contain any water within the site so should not impact.

Discussion ensued regarding the need to identify gaps in the current infrastructure and then balance immediate works that may be required and the longer term strategies. Mr Playfair indicated that details of developments would be factored in to the modelling process to test the resilience of plans against likely future demands.

Mr Fenton highlighted specific issues relating to the lack of mains sewerage in Black Bourton. Mr Postan suggested that updated facilities were needed to meet the needs of Bradwell Grove as waste was currently being pumped some distance. In response to issues raised Mr Thomas confirmed that Thames Water was keen to be involved in the development of local and neighbourhood plans.

Ms Leffman, in noting that the strategies were positive, highlighted that there were issues elsewhere in the district that needed addressing. Ms Leffman referred to problems in Charlbury particularly with old pipes and suggested a wider approach was needed. Mr Thomas advised that he was in regular contact with the council's Flood engineering team to identify problem areas and undertake works as required.

Mr Brennan advised that there had been significant development at RAF Brize Norton including concreting of large areas and asked if Thames Water had contact with the base. Mr Thomas advised that there were no regular meetings but acknowledged that such development could have an impact on flooding and drainage. The Strategic Director reported that there was a regular liaison meeting between the council and the RAF and suggested it would be beneficial if Thames Water attended the next meeting, to which Mr Thomas agreed.

Mr Howard highlighted the emerging local plan and delays as a result of the suspension of the inquiry. Mr Howard suggested that the final housing figure could be significantly higher than previously proposed and together with the district maybe having to take some of Oxford's unmet need the strategy needed to be robust. Mr Howard also referred to the impact of climate change.

Mr Playfair acknowledged that all these factors needed to be part of the modelling process and reiterated that developers would need to include appropriate measures in new housing schemes. The need to ensure that there was no detrimental impact on existing communities was emphasised. Mr Playfair highlighted the importance of feedback from local councils and communities to help shape the strategies.

Mrs Smith, Standlake Parish Council, advised that some surveys had already been undertaken in the area as part of the strategy preparation.

Mr Cotterill thanked Mr Playfair and Mr Thomas for their attendance at the meeting and asked that the committee be kept advised of progress.

(Mr Owen left the meeting at this juncture)

57 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2015/2016

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director providing an update on progress with the committee work programme for 2015/2016.

Waste Contract

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that there had been a slight delay in preparing the report on service redesign options, to allow further analysis of data

as well as obtaining further information regarding legal implications and recycling rates. It was reported that an independent person from the Somerset Waste Partnership was looking in detail at the information and challenging the costed options to ensure that all aspects were correct.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services indicated that two separate reports would be presented to Cabinet in June, one to agree the specification and the other to agree the procurement process. This would mean that the reports could be considered by this committee at the scheduled meeting in June. The committee was advised that the report would contain a series of costed options and comparisons with other high performing authorities.

Mr Howard asked if there was an option for a short term extension with the current contractor. In response it was explained that the current contract ended in autumn 2017 and it was anticipated that the new contract would be let from that date.

Mr Fenton sought further information regarding possible collection regimes. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that this could include kerbside sorting of recycling, co-mingled collections and the frequency of collections. It was reiterated that these would be fully assessed and cost implications included for consideration by members. The committee was reminded that if a co-mingled approach was chosen the council would need to demonstrate an economic and environmental benefit. The issue of gate fees and selling of recyclate was highlighted as having an impact on the overall cost of each option.

Mr Coles referred to residual waste collections and asked whether there would be options for this included. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services indicated that a fortnightly collection was likely to be retained and that feedback during public consultation indicated that most people were happy with this service.

Mr Postan emphasised the importance of gaining value for money and that it was imperative for members to have as much information as possible. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services gave an assurance that there would be detailed data and figures with the report likely to be considered in exempt session due to commercial sensitivity.

Grass Cutting

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services reported that officers had been informally advised that Witney Town Council did not want to pursue the land swap as previously discussed. The committee was advised that officers were keen to pursue this initiative and would talk to other local councils to establish interest.

Mr Coles suggested that a formal response was required from Witney Town Council. Mr Eaglestone and Mr Dorward, members of the town council, indicated they would make some inquiries to establish the current position. Mr Brennan suggested that Carterton Town Council may be keen to participate.

Car Park Strategy

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services reported that the public questionnaire had generated just under 2700 responses. The responses were now being analysed and in particular comments made by respondents were being looked at in detail. The committee was advised that all the feedback would be summarised in a report for consideration by members.

Mr Eaglestone highlighted the issue of the location of long term parking in Witney particularly for those working in the town. The concern was acknowledged and it was clarified that the data would be considered in conjunction with the parking sites available so that the distribution of parking could be assessed. It was hoped that a report would be presented at the next meeting.

Mr Coles suggested that changes in subsidy and possible withdrawal of bus services would also need consideration. Mr Fenton indicated that the siting of designated spaces such as disabled and parent parking should also be looked at to ensure that they were in the most appropriate locations.

Mr Howard asked if consideration had been given to providing subsidised bus passes so that workers were encouraged to use public transport rather than their cars. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services reminded the committee that this could be discussed with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) along with other matters such as on street parking as this was their responsibility. Mr Coles indicated that subsidised passes tended to be provided by employers rather than local councils.

Mr Postan referred to the design of car parks in that the size of the spaces could be looked at and the possibility of introducing charging points for electric or hybrid vehicles considered. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that charging points had been trialled by Cotswold District Council and was an initiative that would be looked at. Mr Dorward indicated that there had been previous discussion about building a multi-storey car park on Woodford Way.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that once all the data had been analysed and issues identified the next stage would be to look at how best to provide parking facilities throughout the district.

Household Waste Recycling Centres

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services reported that OCC was undertaking a review of the recycling centres starting with the Redbridge site in Oxford. The committee would be kept advised of progress with the reviews.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services referred to the presentation at the last meeting in respect of officers visiting residents to encourage recycling. It was reported that comparative figures for January showed an increase of 29 tonnes on dry recycling and 25 tonnes on food recycling on the previous year. There had also been a consequent reduction in residual waste.

Mr Coles suggested the figures were very positive and the council should be promoting the matter. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services indicated that this would be done and thanked residents for achieving improved recycling. In particular it was positive that residual waste had reduced which was not always the case. Mr Howard suggested that this could save the council money.

RESOLVED: That progress with the Committee Work Programme for 2015/2016 be noted subject to the issues raised at the meeting.

58 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Executive giving the committee the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 11 March 2016.

The committee noted that both the items were scheduled to be considered by them prior to being presented to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme be noted

59 TOILET TWINNING

Mr Cotterill drew attention to an initiative called Toilet Twinning that provided people in the poorest communities in the world with a decent toilet, clean water and all the information they needed to stay healthy. This was done by twinning a toilet in this country with a latrine in a developing country. The donation was used by Tearfund to provide clean water, basic sanitation, and hygiene education. Further details could be found at: <http://www.toilettwinning.org/>

Mr Cotterill suggested that whilst the council was unable to financially support the project it could promote the initiative and encourage people to participate. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that she would speak with the Communications Team to see if some publicity could be undertaken.

Mr Coles expressed his support for the project and suggested that some towns may already have links with developing countries that could be strengthened further through this. Discussion ensued on the possibility of local town/parish councils also being involved and promoting the project to residents.

60 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Mr Coles referred to new legislation regarding the compulsory microchipping of dogs which would fall on the council to enforce. Mr Coles asked, considering that the council no longer had a dog warden, whose remit the new duties would fall. It was understood that duties were currently split between the Environmental Enforcement team and Ubico. Mr Coles expressed concern that the two full time enforcement officers were already dealing with fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, waste dumping, dog fouling and HMO's in the district.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that responsibilities would still be split. Ubico would collect stray dogs and all those collected would be scanned to see if they were microchipped.

The enforcement responsibilities would be retained by the council and it was important there was liaison to ensure that all requirements were met. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the matter would be raised with the relevant service heads to ensure that the new legislation was being complied with.

The importance of communicating the changes to residents and the role of vets in reporting unchipped dogs were highlighted. Mrs Fenton advised that a lot of parish newsletters had already highlighted the new rules so residents were becoming aware of the changes.

The meeting closed at 3.55pm

Chairman