

## 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 21 July 2016

### PRESENT

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

Also Present: R A Langridge

#### 17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from and Mr H J Howard

#### 18 MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

#### 20 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

#### 21 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2016/2017

The Committee received and considered the report of the Strategic Director which gave an update on progress in relation to its Work Programme for 2016/2017.

##### 21.1 Waste Collection Contract

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that negotiations were taking place with the Council's existing contractors regarding service delivery to the end of the contract period. There had been some issues over missed collections and discussions were in hand to address this as the objective was to ensure a seamless transition between existing and new contracts.

Arrangements for the transfer of the contract to UBICO in October 2017 had commenced and the current contractor had given permission for the Managing Director of the Company to address existing staff who would be TUPE transferred to the new service provider.

As the existing contractor operated a materials processing facility, there were advantages in their maintaining a strong working relationship with the Council as the new contractor would have need of such a facility. Discussions on the way forward would commence over the next few weeks.

Negotiations with Ubico regarding TUPE transfers, the provision of depot services, the vehicle fleet and ICT provision were also underway.

In response to a question from Mr Emery, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that details of the impending transfer of service providers had already been made public.

#### 21.2 Thames Water Flood Prevention and Infrastructure Issues

The Committee noted that Thames Water had advised that the company was continuing to plan their Autumn / winter sewer flow surveys, planning on sinking boreholes in Standlake to monitor ground water levels to seek to identify links between ground water infiltration and flooding, reviewing historical river level trends and planning on undertaking a phase of CCTV surveys of the sewers to see if we can spot defects that could allow ground water ingress. These should be undertaken in August 2016

In relation to the flooding questionnaire surveys the Witney survey was anticipated to commence in mid-August, the Carterton survey was 50% complete and the Standlake survey was mostly completed.

Members requested that Officers continue to monitor progress.

#### 21.3 Open Space Grass Cutting

In response to a question from Mr Coles, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services undertook to provide Members with further information regarding the Witney Town Council's decision not to enter into an agreement with West Oxfordshire to carry out grass cutting on their behalf.

#### 21.4 Environmental Regulations

Mr Coles suggested that the Committee should add an item to its Work Programme to monitor the aftermath of Brexit and the dismantling of the Department for Energy and Climate Change. He considered it important that the Council monitored the changes in relation to environmental laws and regulations and, in particular, two issues with a direct bearing on West Oxfordshire; air quality and flood alleviation measures.

Mr Cotterill acknowledged the importance of keeping abreast of these issues but suggested that it would be some considerable time before the full implications became clear.

The Committee **AGREED** to add this item to the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:** That, subject to the above amendment, progress with regard to the Committee's Work Programme for 2015/2016 be noted.

#### 22 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted that there were no items in the Cabinet Work Programme published on 24 June 2016 that fell within the remit of the Committee.

#### 23 ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY SERVICES GROUP

The Committee received a presentation from Bill Oddy, the Group Manager of Environmental and Regulatory Services regarding the structure, role and responsibilities of the new service. A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Group Manager advised that he would be repeating his presentation for all Members after the Cabinet meeting the following week and would emphasise the new contact arrangements for the service.

In relation to air quality, Mr Cotterill enquired whether the fact that the new service was operating across county boundaries would enable it to bring greater pressure to bear on county councils to enforce HGV routing restrictions. In response, the Group Manager advised that, whilst it would not increase the partner councils' influence, the new service would have access to greater levels of expertise.

Mr Cotterill also enquired whether staff who had left the service were likely to be called back on a consultancy basis. The Group Manager advised that, whilst the new service had only just commenced operation and staffing requirements could change, it was unlikely that former staff would be returning as a significant level of expertise had been retained across the partner authorities.

In response to a question from Mr Emery, the Group Manager advised that West Oxfordshire was not supporting the partner authorities financially and that the apparent disparity in income was due to the increased revenue accrued by the Building Control Service as a result of the more extensive levels of development in West Oxfordshire.

Ms Leffman sought an assurance that the closer relationship between Members and Officers in relation to large scale events would continue. The Group Manager advised that these relationships would be maintained and the same degree of emphasis would be placed upon large scale events as had been in the past.

In response to questions from Mrs Reynolds, the Group Manager indicated that the employment costs shown in his presentation were budgeted figures and that savings resulting from a reduction in staffing levels would be shown in the budget as and when they were realised. He advised that the Duty Officer arrangements were to operate during office hours only although other provisions were in place to respond to significant incidents in an emergency.

With regard to new partner authorities joining the service, the Group Manager advised that there could be some initial capital costs, primarily related to ICT compatibility and redundancies. He went on to explain that, whilst it had cost some £1 Million to establish the service, the annual savings of £890,000 secured gave a very short payback period on that investment.

In response to a question from Mr Coles, the Group Manager advised that Ubico now operated the pest control service.

Mr Langridge considered that it was important to publicise the new service and was pleased to note that the ethos of the new organisation was to work with businesses to prevent problems arising, rather than to address them after the event. He noted that this was the first public facing service to go live as part of the 2020 vision project.

Ms Leffman enquired whether there was any significant difference in instances of fly tipping between the three districts. The Group Manager advised that levels were broadly comparable throughout the operational area but undertook to provide Ms Leffman with more detailed information.

In response to a question from Mr Postan, the Group Manager advised that Officers responding to enquiries from a particular area were told to identify themselves as

representing the relevant council. However, he acknowledged that the new method of working would take a little time to bed in.

Members thanked Mr Oddy for his presentation and his work in establishing the new service.

## 24 LOW CARBON AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN – ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Environment and Commercial Services which provided an update on the Council's Low Carbon and Environmental Plan.

Mr Coles acknowledged the work on energy conservation and efficiency carried out to date and went on to enquire whether the Council could consider making its buildings and premises more wildlife friendly by the provision of nest boxes for vulnerable species, hedgehog friendly areas or a wildflower area.

The Chairman reminded Members that the Council provided support to a number of groups and organisations working in this area and the Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that such a project fell outside the scope of the Low Carbon and Environmental Plan.

The Strategic Director advised that there was a degree of expertise within the Council's Local Plan team and undertook to make enquiries as to what bio-diversity and nature conservation initiatives the Authority might implement. Mr Postan noted that such measures were often required as conditions of planning consents.

With regard to the thermal imaging surveys, Ms Leffman enquired whether the Council had any processes in place to support the reduction in energy consumption when particular issues were identified. In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that, as individual cases varied considerably, the Council signposted individuals to the various advice groups and organisations established to offer specialist advice in this field. There was a variety of potential grant schemes available but these often depended on an individual's circumstances rather than the specifics of their property. Utility companies were also under an obligation to provide advice and assistance under certain circumstances.

In response to a request from Ms Leffman, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services agreed to provide information regarding community groups that had carried out thermal imaging surveys

**RESOLVED:** That the information set out in the report be noted.

## 25 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LOCAL PLAN AND CAR PARKING STRATEGY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Environment and Commercial Services which outlined the relationship between the Council's Parking Strategy and the Local Plan 2031.

Mrs Reynolds expressed concern that the Parking Strategy could be subsumed in the Local Plan and stressed that it should be retained as an independent entity. In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that the Parking Strategy and Local Plan would remain as separate documents but emphasised the necessity of the two being aligned.

Mr Emery expressed his support for the retention of free car parking and suggested that, given the need for additional parking provision, the Council ought to start to make financial provision now. Whilst recognising the need for the Parking Strategy to reflect the Local Plan, he did not wish to see it delayed.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services reiterated that the Parking Strategy needed to reflect the housing numbers within the Local Plan and advised Members that, although the Local Plan would not be finalised for some time, a report was due to be considered by the Cabinet in October and public consultation on the draft Parking Strategy would also commence that month.

The Public consultation would run for a period of three weeks and it was not envisaged that this would result in any significant changes but would offer the public the opportunity to confirm that all relevant issues had been included.

Mr Langridge acknowledged that the Parking Strategy had taken some time to develop but stressed that it was a complex piece of work.

Mr Coles questioned whether third parties such as private developers or local councils would be likely to provide increased parking provision and Mr Postan questioned the desirability of commercial third party involvement. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the Council did not have a monopoly on parking provision and noted that, in addition to the initial capital required, there were on-going revenue costs. It was possible that private developers would wish to invest and the Council's Parking Strategy would identify where there was demand. .

Mrs Fenton expressed her support for the retention of free car parking. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that the Strategy would not recommend the introduction of parking charges but advised Members that, without a revenue stream from charging, there may be limited resources to invest in additional provision.

The Strategic Director reiterated that the development of the Parking Strategy was a complex process intended to identify the District's future needs and develop a business case by which to address them. She acknowledged Members' concerns and the wish to avoid delay but echoed the importance of ensuring that the Strategy reflected the projected level of future development.

**RESOLVED:** That the information set out in the report be noted.

## 26 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Mr Fenton made reference to a number of complaints that had arisen with regard to the issue of fixed penalty notices in Bampton.

In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services outlined the measures being taken to address historic parking difficulties in various locations throughout the District

Miss Hill expressed concern over parking difficulties experienced in the vicinity of the Leafield Primary School. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that concerns over potentially dangerous parking should be referred to the County Council which could impose appropriate parking restrictions.

The meeting closed at 3.15pm

Chairman