

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon
at 2.00pm on Thursday 1 December 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, H J Howard, Ms E P R Leffman and H E J St John

Also Present: Mr T J Morris

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence but, as Mr Postan had to leave the meeting to fulfil a personal commitment, Mr H E J St John attended in his place following his departure.

37 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

39 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

40 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.

31.1 Waste Collection Contract

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services provided an update on the waste transfer projects and arrangements for the introduction of the chargeable garden waste service. She advised that, at its meeting held on 16 November, the Cabinet had agreed that the provision of the garden waste collection service be transferred to Ubico Limited with effect from March 2017. The transfer would allow a good service to be maintained and also release fleet resources to Kier as spare vehicles for use on the refuse collection contract.

In response to questions from the Chairman, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the reliability of the current refuse collection contract suffered as there were no spare vehicles to replace any that became inoperable. Releasing those used for the collection of garden waste would assist in this respect. Initially, additional vehicles would be leased by Ubico from April pending the acquisition of the new fleet necessary to deliver the full waste collection and recycling service from October 2017. However, the cost of vehicle leasing had been incorporated into the business case.

In response to a question from Mr St John, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the current contract with Kier was to terminate on 8 October 2017.

The chargeable garden waste service would be introduced with effect from 1 April on the basis previously agreed. A further report seeking adoption of the garden waste policy was to be considered by the Cabinet in December and the policy had been developed to follow the approach previously discussed.

A publicity campaign would commence in January to advise residents of the new arrangements. In addition to wheeled bins, a sack collection would be offered to serve properties unable to accommodate bins. Letters would be sent to all households and information disseminated through the press, local publications and social media. It would be easy to subscribe to the service which would operate through the use of licence stickers.

Mr Fenton enquired whether the sacks provided would be re-useable or single use and Mr Howard questioned whether sacks would be printed or stickered. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that this had yet to be determined. In response to a question from Mr Emery, she confirmed that publicity would be sent to town and parish councils.

Ms Leffman enquired whether residents would be able to choose between bin and sack collections. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that, as collection costs were greater, sacks would only be provided to those properties unable to accommodate wheeled bins.

(Mr Postan left the meeting at this juncture)

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that, with effect from 1 April 2017, no bins without a licence sticker would be collected.

Mr St John suggested that residents should be reminded about home composting and the Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that this would be promoted as part of the publicity campaign.

Mr Coles enquired as to the likely uptake. In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that the new service had been modelled on the expectation that about one third of the 35,000 households currently using the free service would not sign up to the chargeable service giving a figure of some 20,000 to 22,000 users. External factors such as the availability of waste recycling centres would also have an impact upon the final outcome.

Mr Emery questioned whether facilities existed to convert garden waste to energy as gas. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that no such facility was available locally and the initial cost of setting up such a plant was significant.

Mr Dorward asked what would be done with redundant garden waste bins. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that residents would be encouraged to find a use for them at home but that they would be collected on request. Any collected would be cleaned for re-use or, if damaged, recycled. Mr Dorward questioned whether the licence stickers would be sufficiently robust. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the system had been used successfully by Cotswold District Council. In response to a further question, she advised that a small charge would be made for replacing lost licence stickers.

Ms Leffman enquired whether any sanctions would be applied against those residents putting green waste in with their general refuse. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services suggested that a lack of physical capacity would restrict this but, if it was identified as a problem, residents would be contacted and discouraged from doing so.

Mr Howard suggested that redundant garden waste bins could be used for recycling but the Head of Environment and Commercial Services indicated that, whilst the cost of cleaning them to avoid contamination of recyclable materials may prevent this, it was being considered.

31.2 Thames Water Flood Prevention and Infrastructure Issues

The Committee noted that Thames Water had advised that the company had planned the winter sewer network flow surveys and pre-installation surveys would commence in November and December. Initial surveys and costings relating to additional monitoring of pumping station rising mains had been completed and the company continued to review historical river level trends and available data sets to determine patterns between ground water and river levels and flooding events.

The CCTV survey would commence when the weather was set to get wetter as it would be easier to identify and fix any points of significant infiltration under such conditions.

The Witney (Brize Norton), Carterton and Standlake flooding questionnaire surveys had all been completed.

Members were reminded that, at the last meeting, Mr Fenton questioned whether there had been any progress towards connecting the settlement of Black Bourton to mains drainage. Thames Water had advised that there were no plans for main line connection in the current plan to 2015.

Mr Fenton invited the Committee to submit a formal request to Thames Water to include the provision of a mains connection for Black Bourton during the next plan period. It was **AGREED** to his request.

Mr Howard noted that there were still on-going problems in relation to new development Carterton and reminded Members that, at the last meeting, Members had agreed that representatives of Thames Water be invited to meet with the Committee. Members suggested that representatives of both the strategic and operational management at Thames Water could be invited to attend the March meeting to discuss these issues.

31.3 Car Parking Strategy

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised Members that a report on the response to the public consultation on the car parking strategy was to be submitted to the Cabinet in December. Response to the consultation had been limited and no significant changes were proposed to the strategy as drafted. The Strategy identified two key themes; on-street parking in various locations and the impact of out-dated traffic Regulation Orders and capacity issues in certain locations.

Although it acknowledged that there was a need to meet the additional demand generated through growth during the period of the emerging Local Plan, the identification of particular issues was no guarantee that they would or could be addressed as land availability and funding remained an issue. Even where existing facilities could be decked, the cost was estimated at between £10,000 and £12,000 per space.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the Council was not under a statutory duty to provide parking but wished to do what it could to facilitate appropriate provision. Facilities could be provided by third parties such as developers or local councils. The provision of funding for specific schemes would be considered on a case by case basis in the future but, for now, the strategy simply set out a framework for future provision.

Mr Fenton questioned whether the consultation period had been sufficient. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that the most recent exercise had been the second phase of a more comprehensive programme of consultation and that there was no requirement to consult at this stage. She explained that the strategy was an evolving document that would respond to changing circumstances and new developments. Mr Fenton noted that the strategy appeared to concentrate on the main towns when there were also issues in the villages. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that the issues in more rural areas were also acknowledged and that the Council would seek to address them. She reiterated that it was the County Council, not the District, which had power to make and revise traffic regulation orders but assured Members that Officers would support the processes necessary to make changes to TRO's

Finally, Mr Fenton indicated that there was a perception amongst a section of the community that the Council used penalty notices to generate income. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services emphasised that this was not the case, penalty notices being used as a tool to address traffic management and highway safety issues.

Ms Leffman made reference to the lack of parking provision for users of the railway stations at Long Hanborough and Charlbury and asked if the Council was seeking to address this issue. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that discussions were taking place but that the Council had no power to require Railtrack to provide additional parking. She also advised that, without further investigation, it could not be proven that indiscriminate parking in the vicinity was entirely related to station users. Ms Leffman also suggested that, to allow for more effective use of existing facilities, the Council could consider the introduction of charging for long term parking.

Mr Coles agreed that the introduction of charges could present a solution to the difficulties experienced in Witney and went on to express concern at suggestions that the temporary car park in Woodford Way could be lost. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that any decision to close that car park would consider where the displaced capacity could be accommodated.

Mr Howard suggested that the introduction of charging carried a reputational risk and advised that Bicester was looking at the possibility of introducing free parking.

Mr St John made reference to difficulties that had arisen in Eynsham where the Chairman of the Parish Council wished to see more pro-active enforcement. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that the Council carried out targeted enforcement to address specific highway safety and traffic management problems but also sought to educate residents. Mr St John queried whether the Council could make bylaws to address particular issues but it was explained that it was the role of the County Council through TRO's.

Mr Harvey advised that problems of obstruction were a police matter and Mr Emery indicated that Police Community Support Officers in Eynsham had been active in this respect.

31.4 Environmental Regulations

Mr Coles noted that the decision to monitor the aftermath of Brexit and the dismantling of the Department for Energy and Climate Change had still not been added to the Committee Work Programme as agreed. Officers apologised for this continued omission and undertook to remedy the oversight.

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

41 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Chief Executive giving an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the Work Programme published on 15 November 2016 was received.

41.1 Procurement of Vehicles for the Waste and Recycling Service

In response to a question from Mr Howard, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services confirmed that work on the procurement of vehicles for the waste and recycling service was underway and that the tendering process would be completed by July or August 2017. The new vehicles would not be required to be in place until October that year.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 15 November 2016 be noted.

42 BUDGET 2017/2018

The Committee received and considered the report of Frank Wilson, Strategic Director and Head of Paid Service, setting out the initial draft base budgets for 2017/18, draft fees and charges for 2017/18 and the latest Capital Programme for 2016/17 revised and future years.

The Go Shared Service Head of Finance introduced the report and drew attention to the levels of external funding summarised at Appendix A. He advised that the Council was to remain in the Business Rates Pool and explained that a re-valuation of business rates on solar farms would result in a £50,000 reduction in income for the Authority. Business rates appeals could account for a further £900,000 giving rise to an estimated deficit of some £375,000 for this Council. However, provision had been made to address this through previous surpluses and this sum had not been incorporated within the budget. Revenue Support Grant had been reduced from £1,000,000 to £636,000 but, as the Council had agreed to a four year settlement, this reduction had been anticipated and built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

New Homes Bonus had been reduced from £1,800,000 to £1,300,000 but Officers were still awaiting information on its distribution and this figure remained an estimate. Overall, the Council could expect a reduction of some £800,000 in external funding.

The Budget outlined operational expenditure of some £11,000,000. Growth had been built into the budget funded through income derived from the purchase of Des Roches square and the introduction of charges for collection and disposal of green waste

The Council had little control over items such as Business Rates, fees for school swimming from the County Council, the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and the cost of the new waste collection contract.

The existing grants budget would be maintained with requests from the Cotswolds Conservation Board and the Citizens Advice Housing Project going forward for consideration as part of the budget process.

Investment income had fallen from £657,000 to £607,000 and the Council would need to borrow to fund any future capital investment. However, interest rates remained low for short term borrowing. In conclusion, the Go Shared Service Head of Finance advised that the use of General Fund balances for 2017/18 was estimated at some £290,000.

In response to a question from Mr Emery, the Go Shared Service Head of Finance confirmed that a report on the Review of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy was to be considered by the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following week.

Mr Coles indicated that he would wish to see the Council utilising capital funding to provide affordable Housing. Mr Emery advised that the Cabinet had already agreed to allocate some £500,000 to support a Local Authority Partnership Purchase Broker Scheme on the recommendation of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that Committee had also considered two further schemes which it hoped to bring forward to the Cabinet in due course.

In response to a question from Mr St John, the Go Shared Service Head of Finance advised that certain elements of the narrative supporting the budget would not be completed until closer to the conclusion of the process so as to ensure that the information provided was up to date.

The Chairman thanked the Go Shared Service Head of Finance for his presentation and expressed his appreciation to all those involved in the budget process.

RESOLVED: That the current budget proposals be endorsed.

43 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTER 2 2016/2017

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Leisure and Communities providing information on the Council's performance at the end of the second quarter of year 2016/2017.

Mr Fenton made reference to difficulties encountered as a result of fly tipping around the Council's 'bring sites' and enquired whether CCTV could be introduced in an effort to restrict this. In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that, whilst there was no legal impediment to establishing overt CCTV surveillance, there were practical issues that needed to be addressed. Officers had been looking at the possibility of using CCTV at the Asda site in Carterton but this had stalled with the change of ownership. This could be explored further and, if successful, rolled out elsewhere.

Clearly, monitoring the installation would have financial implications. It was possible that targeted action could be directed towards particular problem areas but widespread coverage would have significant staffing implications. Mr Fenton suggested that Town and Parish Councils may well be willing to help. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services indicated that she would raise the issue with the Environmental and Regulatory Services team.

Mrs Fenton noted that commercial waste accounted for a large volume of fly tipping and recalled that mobile CCTV cameras had been used successfully in the past. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that Officers followed up cases of fly tipping wherever possible.

Mr Coles enquired whether the relevant performance indicator could be revised to provide information on the number of cases reported. In response, the Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that the indicator was intended to measure the Council's performance but confirmed that more detailed information could be provided. Ms Leffman requested that this should include details of the location of incidents. Mr Emery suggested the use of dummy cameras. However the Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised these had been installed by a third party at Carterton but had not appeared to have any deterrent effect. Mr Dorward noted that posters featuring eyes had been found to be particularly effective.

Mr Coles noted that there had been a fall in recycling rates and questioned whether the introduction of a chargeable green waste service would exacerbate this. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that this was a national trend and that food waste in the refuse stream was a major issue. She acknowledged the concerns expressed over the introduction of charges but indicated that it was thought the introduction of a co-mingled recycling service would boost performance in that area and balance any decrease in recycling of green waste.

The Council sought to promote food waste recycling and further efforts would be made later in the New Year once the new garden waste arrangements had bedded in. It was thought to be preferable to concentrate on promoting the garden waste service in the first instance and not to dilute that message with by running a parallel campaign on food waste.

RESOLVED: That the information provided be noted.

44 PRESENTATION BY THE COUNCIL'S BIODIVERSITY OFFICER

The Committee received a presentation from Melanie Dodd, the Council's Biodiversity Officer. A copy of the presentation is attached to the original copy of these minutes.

Given recent decisions from the Planning Inspectorate that had enabled development upon sites which the Council had considered inappropriate, Mr Eaglestone questioned the extent to which reliance could be placed upon issues of biodiversity in the planning sphere. Mr Coles indicated that the recent appeal decisions had been due to the fact that the Council had not put a Local Plan in place. Mr Howard noted that development proposals in the Shill Valley had been rejected by planning.

Mr Brennan questioned who would manage biodiversity projects. In response, the Biodiversity Officer advised that Wild Oxfordshire managed a number of projects but that there were no resources available to develop projects to a stage where they were costed and ready to go.

Mr St John expressed his appreciation of the financial support the Council had provided to the Wychwood Project for work on North Leigh Common and hoped that this would continue. He noted that a proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy could be applied to such projects and suggested that the land in and around Langel Common in Witney could benefit from a co-ordinated approach between the various landowners to improve the management regime.

Mr Coles suggested that the Committee could look at such issues and made reference to the Deer Park Wood project run by local volunteers. The suggestions put forward in the presentation represented the start of a process and Mr Coles expressed his support for a Biodiversity Audit.

Mr Dorward drew Members' attention to BS 42020:2013, the Biodiversity Code of practice for planning and development and Mr St John made reference to the report prepared some years previously on the condition of North Leigh Common, suggesting that the report needed updating and resources allocated for maintenance work.

The Biodiversity Officer advised that she was involved in the review and re-design of the landscaping around the Council's premises at Woodgreen and Elmfield with colleagues to incorporate biodiversity enhancements.

The Biodiversity Officer also outlined the importance of managing other Council owned land for biodiversity. Whilst contributions at the Council's offices could demonstrate what can be achieved for biodiversity in urban areas, a much more significant contribution towards the biodiversity duty could be achieved by managing sites such as North Leigh Common, Langel Common and Standlake Common for wildlife.

The Biodiversity Officer advised that ongoing management and maintenance to enhance these sites and others like them was an important consideration for the Council. She suggested that a review of management plans could be carried out to help build upon the work already carried out by local volunteer groups.

The Chairman thanked Ms Dodd for her presentation.

45 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no questions from Members relating to the work of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm

Chairman