

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney at 2.00 pm on Thursday 7 December 2017

PRESENT

Councillors: D A Cotterill (Chairman); A H K Postan (Vice-Chairman); R J M Bishop, A S Coles, J C Cooper, P J G Dorward, H B Eaglestone, P Emery, E J Fenton, Miss G R Hill, H J Howard and Ms E P R Leffman.

Also in attendance: Mrs C E Reynolds

36 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 October 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs E H N Fenton, and the following temporary appointment was reported:

J C Cooper attended for A M Graham.

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

There were no submissions from the public under the Council's Rules of Procedure.

40 WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING CONTRACT

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services, together with Gareth Edmundson, Managing Director of Ubico, gave an update on the introduction of the new waste and recycling contract, and the Committee was advised that the slides used in the presentation would be circulated to all members of the Council.

The Committee was reminded of the background to the changes and the key features introduced when the new contract commenced on 2 October, and the slides included information as to the number of missed collections, which showed a sharp decline from 23 October. Nonetheless, it was confirmed that although the number of misses was now at a similar level as under the previous contractor, further and significant improvement was being sought.

Mr Edmundson spoke at length and outlined: (i) the important service issues which had arisen since the commencement of the contract; (ii) the nature of the project for changing and testing the changes to rounds which had been introduced; (iii) the frustration at misses and repeat misses to collections, an issue exacerbated by unresolved misses from the previous contractor, combined with outstanding container deliveries; and (iv) the steps being taken to address the performance issues and to drive continuous improvement.

The latter included:

- Improved management and supervision
- Better briefings and de-briefings for the operatives

- Daily inspections of known “hot-spots”
- Visits to customers and properties where there had been repeated missed collections
- Improvements in reporting back to the Council on problems and issues
- The delivery of outstanding containers to households by the Station Lane operatives
- The creation of “operation STORM” (Station Lane Team on Repeat Misses) to provide swift responses
- Work with the Downs Road depot to achieve consistency in service improvement
- An increased senior management presence in West Oxfordshire
- Improved liaison with West Oxfordshire customer services

During general discussion:

- The Chairman queried the lack of in-cab technology, and Mr Emery felt that satellite navigation should have been provided as it was inexpensive. In response, it was confirmed that it was hoped that there would be future capacity to look into more sophisticated in-cab technology
- Mr Edmundson confirmed, in response to Mr Emery, that the fitting of waste vehicles to be able to collect small electrical appliances was now complete
- Again in response to Mr Emery, it was explained that anticipated TUPE costs were necessarily based on assumptions which had to be revised once information from the previous contractor was made available. There had always been a risk that the amounts would be higher than anticipated, and that had proved to be the case. Mr Edmundson also mentioned the national issue with a shortage of HGV drivers, and the higher than average rates of pay in Oxfordshire
- The Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that the contractual changes had never been anticipated to save money but had arisen because the previous contract was coming to an end and was, in any event, known not to be profitable. The option of awarding the contract to UBICO had been preferred, because the lack of a profit element meant that the increases in costs were not as large as they would otherwise have been
- In response to a query from Ms Leffman, it was stated that it had always been anticipated that there would be some initial one-off costs during the initial period of the contract
- Mr Cooper asked whether additional costs fell to UBICO or to the Council, and it was explained that because UBICO was a teckal company it did not have its own resources, and if anything cost more than anticipated that cost would fall to the Council. This was also the reason that penalties for any failings in service would not be appropriate
- Mr Howard asked about the delivery of 360 litre bins to households which had requested them, and was advised that they should be delivered by the end of January
- Mr Howard also referred to a perception of some carelessness from crews in the treatment of bins and in returning them to the position where they had been left for collection. Mr Edmundson was aware of that concern and confirmed that it would continue to feature in briefings and training for operatives
- Mr Postan hoped that welfare facilities could be provided very quickly at Downs Road, and was advised that the intended portacabin could not be placed on site until landlord’s consent had been granted, and that consent was still awaited
- Mr Coles expressed disappointment at the problems, given the time which had been available to prepare for the new service/contract, and (i) hoped that there had not been an associated increase in recyclables being placed in household waste containers;

(ii) considered that a radio system for communications would be preferable to mobile phones; (iii) felt that the impact of the service issues on customer services staff should be acknowledged. In response, it was stated that initial data suggested a decrease in household waste; and it was confirmed that the invaluable assistance of customer services during a difficult period had been acknowledged and thanks had been passed to them

- Mr Fenton wished to place on record his thanks to the Head of Environment and Commercial Services, the Waste Manager, and the Cabinet Member for the Environment for their prompt and helpful responses to queries and concerns.

The Committee was appreciative of the information and responses given, and the Chairman advised members of his intention to invite Mr Edmundson to a future meeting to provide a further update.

41 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/2018

The Committee received the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave an update on progress in relation to its Work Programme for 2017/2018. The Chairman briefly went through the items covered in the report, and drew attention to the facts that (i) the consideration of the review of member structures and democratic costs had been completed at the Council meeting held 25 October; and (ii) a report on the release of balloons and sky lanterns was included elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

RESOLVED: That progress with regard to the Committee's Work Programme for 2017/2018 be noted.

42 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave it the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 November 2017.

The Chairman advised that the report on exploring the feasibility of additional car parking capacity in Witney was likely to be considered by the Cabinet in January

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 November 2017 be noted.

43 A 361 HIGH STREET (BURFORD) PROPOSED 7.5 TONNE WEIGHT RESTRICTION: CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which reminded it of the consideration of this matter at the meetings of this Committee and Cabinet on 12 and 18 October respectively, and advised of the subsequent call-in request from Councillors Cotterill, Emery, Howard and Langridge and the reasons for that request. Accordingly, the Committee was now asked to consider whether it wished to support that request, and seek further consideration of the matter by Cabinet.

In speaking to the matter, the Chairman referred to information that he had obtained from local businesses, relating to the impact of heavy vehicles on those businesses and their premises. He also referred to the "pavement culture" in Burford, stating that traffic noise and disturbance was a concern, which should also be emphasised to Cabinet.

Mr Howard referred to the Council's obligations in terms of protecting the environment, and was of the opinion that, as a minimum, the Cabinet should have agreed to express an opinion to the County Council. Mr Cooper referred to the desirability of seeking to

improve the Cotswold line by dualling the single track length, to offer an alternative to road haulage. Mr Coles and Ms Leffman each referred to the relevance of this matter to support for tourism, and also mentioned the need to consider alternatives to road transport. It was -

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet be requested to reconsider its response to this matter, in light of (i) the Committee's previous request; (ii) the information obtained by the Chairman from local businesses; and (iii) the points made at this meeting.

44 BUDGET 2018/2019

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager Go Shared Services, copies of which had been circulated, setting out the initial draft base budgets for 2018/19, draft fees and charges for 2018/19 and the latest Capital Programme for 2017/18 revised and future years. In her introduction, she outlined the financial pressures facing the Council, and noted that it was proposed to recommend a £5.00 increase in Council Tax at Band D and to use £154,000 from General Funds to support the budget. In response to questions, she:

- Explained the position in relation to UBICO and the fact that additional UBICO costs particular to West Oxfordshire would be charged to this Council, together with apportionments of other costs
- Stated that clarification of the situation in relation to the New Homes Bonus was awaited. The budget assumption of £1.6m was likely to be reduced, and the budget papers would be adjusted when more was known
- Commented that the collection fund surplus would be clear in January

The Committee -

RESOLVED: That the current budget proposals be endorsed.

45 RELEASE OF HELIUM BALLOONS AND SKY LANTERNS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Group Manager, Environment and Regulatory Services, which reported on the findings regarding the impact of helium balloons and sky lanterns on the natural environment, public safety and animals in the District.

Mr Coles welcomed the report, drawing attention to the concerns he had previously raised, and stating that it was important for the Council to make a symbolic statement for the benefit of farmers and the protection of the environment. He proposed that Cabinet should be requested to take the steps outlined in recommendations (b) and (c) in the report. It was -

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the information in the report be noted;
- (b) That, arising from the evidence outlined in the report, Cabinet be recommended to introduce a policy to prohibit the release of helium balloons or sky lanterns on land in the ownership of the Council, or under its control; and
- (c) That Cabinet be recommended to ask officers to contact all Town and Parish Councils in the District to make them aware of the risks to the environment, public, and animals from helium balloons and sky lanterns, and to ask them to consider

taking steps to prohibit the release of balloons or sky lanterns on land in their ownership or under their control.

46 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: QUARTER TWO

The Committee received and considered the previously circulated report of the Head of Leisure and Communities, which provided information on the Council's performance at the end of quarter two of the current financial year.

The Chairman and the Head of Environment and Commercial Services each made reference to the fact that the figures were already out of date, and explained that more useful and up to date information would be included when the next performance report was presented.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

47 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Ms Leffman requested information on the recycling of cartons, and was advised that there was a lack of contractors who would process them, partly because of the expense of doing so, but also related to the lack of a market for the recycled product. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services also confirmed that the matter would continue to be kept under review, and members would be advised of any change in the situation.

Mr Fenton asked for an explanation of "fly-away" plastic, and it was stated that the term applied to any plastic film or bag which was not rigid.

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm

CHAIRMAN