

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 12 July 2018

PRESENT

Councillors: A D Harvey (Chairman) R J M Bishop (Vice-Chairman), J R Acock, A H Al-Yousuf, A S Coles, P J G Dorward, H B Eaglestone, E J Fenton, Miss G R Hill, Ms E P R Leffman, M D McBride and A H K Postan

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs L C Carter and Mrs E H N Fenton and the following resignation and temporary appointment was reported:-

J R Acock for C M Rylett

16 MINUTES

In relation to Minute No. 12, Mr Coles indicated that he had sought clarification of the quantity and types of material that were still sent to landfill.

16.1 Roadside Litter Clearance

Mr Coles reminded Members that, at the last meeting of the Committee, Mr Lightfoot had suggested that the Council should consider imposing strict conditions on any planning consent for the proposed drive through coffee shop at Eastnor House, Ducklington Lane, Witney. He advised that the planning application had been considered by the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee earlier in the week and expressed his disappointment that the Council's own Waste Officer had failed to comment on the application.

16.2 Proposed Meeting with Thames Water and the Environment Agency

Mr Harvey advised Members that, following discussion with representatives of Thames Water, the Environment Agency and the Council's Officers it had been concluded that the concerns raised by Members at the last meeting with regard to river pollution and future infrastructure provision were of too great a significance to be dealt with as an item at an ordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Given the importance of these issues and the wider public interest it was proposed to hold a full day meeting with representatives from Thames Water and the Environment Agency, together with other interested parties, to which all Members of the Council would be invited.

Following the recent television programme which highlighted concerns over pollution of the River Windrush, the Environment Agency had established a pollution team charged with exploring ways in which to clean up the watercourse. As it would not be in a position to make a report until early October, Mr Harvey suggested that the meeting be held at that time.

Representatives of Thames Water had confirmed that they would be happy to attend and representatives of the group Windrush against sewage pollution would also be invited to be present.

Mr Harvey suggested that the day be divided into three separate subject areas; a discussion with Thames Water and the Environment Agency on the question of pollution, issues relating to flooding and the provision of adequate infrastructure to accommodate the projected levels of growth within West Oxfordshire.

Mr Leffman suggested that the event should be opened to representatives of parish councils and Mr Harvey concurred.

Members welcomed the suggestion and expressed support for the event.

16.3 Implementation of Car Parking Strategy

Mr Fenton made reference to recent enforcement action taken against the drivers of vehicles parked in Bampton and questioned whether there been a change in the Council's 'light touch' approach to parking enforcement.

In response, the Group Manager Council Advisory Services assured Members that there had been no change to the Council's approach to parking enforcement and the 'light tough' approach was now enshrined in the Car Parking Strategy. She explained that the Council enforced on-street parking regulations on behalf of the County Council. Where traffic Regulation Orders were in existence, the Council's Officers were obliged to ensure that motorists adhered to them. She advised that arrangements had been made for the Parking Manager to meet with the Parish Clerk to discuss local concerns and clarify the Council's position.

In response to Mr Fenton's concerns over the adequacy of the bay markings, she advised that this was the responsibility of the County Council. West Oxfordshire drew attention to any perceived deficiencies but it fell to the County to address these. This could take some time as resources were limited.

Mr Fenton asked whether other districts in Oxfordshire enforced on-street parking on behalf of the County Council and the Group Manager undertook to investigate further.

Mr Postan considered that it was important that the Council enforced parking restrictions uniformly.

16.3 Fly Tipping

In response to a question raised at the previous meeting, the Group Manager advised that there had been a total of 514 fly tips reported in the District in 2017/2018. Instances of fly tipping appeared to be decreasing and the Group Manager advised that she was exploring the possibility of revising the existing performance indicator to provide more meaningful information to Members.

Ms Leffman suggested that it would be helpful to continue to monitor the number of fly tips reported as this information could be submitted to the County Council should it review its waste management strategy.

16.4 Unauthorised Encampments on Council Owned Land

The Group Manager advised Members that, since the last meeting, there had been a further incursion and unauthorised encampment on Council owned land at Deer Park, Witney.

Officers were looking at ways in which to prevent such unauthorised use and identify the best way in which to secure the site. However, the Group Manager cautioned that, as there were a number of other potential sites in the vicinity, securing one could simply result in the problem being displaced elsewhere.

Mr Eaglestone indicated that local residents were becoming increasingly incensed by these incursions and stressed that a solution needed to be found as a matter of urgency. Mr Coles noted that there was a footpath crossing the land that provided access to nearby employment sites and those using it had been submitted to threatening and anti-social

behaviour. In addition, those wishing to use the land for recreational purposes were unable to do so.

Mr Eaglestone considered that the Police should take a more robust stance in dealing with such matters.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Subsequently, whilst not disclosable interests, with regard to Item No. 9 of the Cabinet Work Programme Mr Dorward, Mr Eaglestone and Mr Harvey advised that they were Members of the Witney Town Council.

18 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

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

19 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018/2019

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services which gave an update on progress in relation to its Work Programme for 2018/2019.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee's Work Programme for 2018/2019 be noted.

20 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave Members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 19 June 2018.

It was noted that the report seeking authorisation for the purchase of new street sweepers at item 10 would not be required as the capital allocation for fleet replacement had already been made and the decision to award the contract did not constitute expenditure outside an existing budget.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Work Programme published on 19 June 2018 be noted.

21 VARIATION IN RECYCLING RATES ACROSS OXFORDSHIRE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Environmental Services Manager which provided information on the breakdown of waste recycled and composted by district in Oxfordshire and identified the tonnage of residual waste still going to Landfill.

Mr Fenton enquired whether Cherwell District Council made a charge for the combined collection of food and garden waste. The Group Manager advised that Cherwell made a charge to collect garden waste but provided a free food waste collection service. Cotswold District Council also operated in a similar fashion.

Dr Al-Yousuf noted that the percentage figures in table I were incomplete and could not be used to draw a comparison between each authority. The Group Manager confirmed that the information was not comparable as it related to the percentage of waste collected within each authority, not to the tonnage. Dr Al-Yousuf also suggested that this information could be misleading as different demographic factors across the County could

impact upon recycling rates. He questioned whether it would be possible to identify gaps in the waste stream that could be compared across the districts.

The Group Manager advised that the Council had conducted some waste composition analysis in the past and had used the results to target publicity. Whilst highly informative, such work was expensive. Some consideration had been given to undertaking work on a countywide basis and the Group Manager undertook to raise this with colleagues across Oxfordshire. Dr Al-Yousuf indicated that obtaining accurate data came at a cost.

Mr McBride advised that residents in Shilton Park were reluctant to recycle food waste as they believed that they had to use bio-degradable bags. It was important to communicate that this was not the case and that any bags could be used. The Group Manager thanked Mr McBride for this information and, although this had been made clear at the start of the new contract, acknowledged the need to reinforce this message. She advised that the Council had secured funding to support a door to door campaign. This was the most effective way of promoting recycling and it was anticipated that a temporary team would be in place by August to encourage and educate residents.

Mr Coles reiterated his belief that it had been an error for the Council to stop collecting flyaway plastics and enquired whether there had been any instances of penalties being issued for contaminated recycling. The Group Manager advised that, to date, no penalties had been issued and indicated that the Council had no wish to do so. The approach taken was based upon communication, education and promotion. However, the potential for enforcement was retained as a last resort.

The Group Manager explained that the Council had no option other than to cease the collection of flyaway plastics. The market was such that no one was prepared to process such material and had it continued to collect flyaway plastics, the Council would have had no option but to send it for energy recovery. The position would be kept under review and the Council could reconsider its position if circumstances were to change.

Mr Dorward noted that, whilst he had seen some collections rejected due to contamination at the early stages of the new contract, this was no longer evident.

Mr Harvey suggested that it would be helpful if Members were provided with a list of Councils recycling rates and the Group Manager advised that this information was available at <https://www.letsrecycle.com/councils/league-tables/>

In response to a question from Mr Fenton, the Group Manager advised that the full range of bin sizes was now available on request through Customer Services. There was no restriction on the volume of recycling that would be collected and smaller residual waste bins were available to those households that generated less waste.

Miss Hill indicated that some residents found it difficult to establish which types of foreign packaging could be recycled. She also expressed concern that receptacles were left untidily by some crews. The Group Manager advised that information on the types of material that could be recycled could be found on the Council's website and informed Members that crews were frequently reminded to leave bins and boxes in a tidy fashion.

RESOLVED: That the information provided be noted.

22 UPDATE ON THE LOW CARBON AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN

The Committee received the report of the Group Manager – Council Advisory Services, copies of which had been circulated, providing an update on the delivery of WODC's Low Carbon and Environmental Plan.

Dr Al-Yousuf thanked Officers for the report but questioned whether the information presented was evidence of cost effectiveness and efficiency. He questioned whether this represented value for money and whether efficiency could be improved.

It was explained that the staff referred to at paragraph 3.7 of the report were not Council employees but representatives of various organisations participating in the Better Housing Better Health Service. The Council administered the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Flexible Eligibility scheme which was funded through contributions from the energy suppliers and sought to identify those deemed to be vulnerable.

Dr Al-Yousuf asked whether the project was working well or if it could be improved. In response, The Energy and Resource Project Officer advised that the scheme was in its first year and had operated with limited funds and publicity. Additional funding was to be provided by the energy suppliers and steps were to be taken to raise the profile of the project. Officers were planning how to take this project forward.

Mr Harvey reminded Members that this was not a stand-alone project but followed from a line of previous initiatives. The Group Manager advised that the Council's role was as a facilitator and enabler. It part funded one shared post and sought to deliver as much as possible in areas where it could deliver a meaningful benefit, working with other agencies to promote schemes amongst hard to reach groups.

Mr McBride enquired as to progress towards reducing carbon emissions and the Group Manager advised that progress was reported on a year on year basis. She undertook to provide Members with information regarding progress towards the 2030 target.

Mr Coles considered that the Council's partnership with Wild Oxfordshire should be included in the Environmental Plan and enquired whether the Council still loaned out thermal imaging cameras to Community Groups. The Group Manager confirmed that this equipment was still available.

Mr Coles welcomed the proposed single use plastic audit and went on to propose that the Committee recommends the inclusion of a biodiversity audit as part of the Council's Low Carbon and Environmental Plan with a view to developing a Biodiversity Action Plan.

Mr Coles advised that DEFRA guidelines stipulated that Councils have a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making and should be able to demonstrate that they have identified ways of doing so.

He suggested that the Action Plan should incorporate the following three key objectives:-

- To act as a responsible landowner and manager for the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
- To undertake our duties as a regulator and policy maker to ensure the continued protection of biodiversity resources in accordance with legislation and to ensure that new policies are formulated to promote new development that allows biodiversity to flourish.
- To promote the benefits of conserving and enhancing our biodiversity resource to local communities in West Oxfordshire through our role as an advocate and facilitator.

The Group Manager advised that biodiversity was an integral element of the Council's planning function and it was **AGREED** that Officers from the Planning Service be requested to provide the Committee with an update.

Mr Dorward questioned whether the programme to replace existing lighting within the Council's buildings with LED lights was continuing and suggested that the Council should put pressure on the County Council to replace street lights with LED lighting. Mr Dorward also suggested that the Council push for this in new developments through the planning function.

The Group Manager advised that the installation of LED lighting was governed by Building Regulations and whilst there could be significant costs in updating old infrastructure, she undertook to raise the issue with the County Council.

Mr Acock suggested that the County should be encouraged to turn off street lights in the early hours, particularly in rural areas. Mr Coles advised that a similar initiative in North Leigh had resulted in a 10% saving in electricity. The Group Manager undertook to raise this with the County Council but cautioned that there could be highway safety implications.

RESOLVED: That the information provided be noted.

23 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Mr Fenton made reference to a recent email sent to Parish Clerks regarding requests for repairs to or replacement of street nameplates and enquired whether the Council was opting out of the 'Fix My Street' reporting system.

The Group Manager explained that the email was simply intended to provide parish councils with a single point of contact for such requests and was not connected to the 'Fix My Street' system which was operated by the County Council. Requests for repairs to or replacement of street nameplates were not accepted from individual residents and could only be made through parish councils to avoid errors or disputes. The Council was looking at ways in which to develop its customer relationship management system to improve the way in which it engaged with residents and reporting arrangements would be a major element of this work.

The meeting closed at 3.00pm

Chairman