

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
held via video conferencing at **2 p.m. on Thursday 11 February 2021**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chairman), Martin McBride (Vice Chairman), Joy Aitman, Richard Bishop, Jill Bull, Andrew Coles, Owen Collins, Harry Eaglestone, Ted Fenton, Gill Hill, Liz Leffman, Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Postan.

Also in attendance: Councillors Norman MacRae and Harry St John.

Officers in attendance: Jan Britton (Managing Director of Publica); Andy Barge (Group Manager – Strategic Support); Bill Oddy (Group Manager – Commercial Development), Laurence King (Lead Shared Flood Risk Management Engineer); Ness Scott (Climate Change Manager); and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer).

Visitors attending: Beth Boughton, Managing Director, Ubico, and Robert Heath, Operations Director, Ubico.

26. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 December 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Woodruff and Councillor Joy Aitman substituted for Councillor Mike Cahill.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

29. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

Mr William Wareing addressed Members on Agenda Item 7, Christmas Floods in West Oxfordshire.

A copy of Mr Wareing's submission is attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

30. DRAFT UBICO BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN

The Committee received a presentation from the Managing Director of Ubico, Beth Boughton and the Operations Director, Robert Heath.

The presentation covered Ubico's draft Budget and Business Plan and provided an overview of financing, operational matters and plans for the future of the business including carbon reduction.

Following the presentation, Ms Boughton and Mr Heath answered a range of questions from Members which are summarised as follows:

- The potential to extend the life of refuse vehicles, cannibalising existing vehicles and working with other shareholders to stretch the life of the fleet;

- A breakdown of the £7.5 million budget was managed and monitored by officers;
- The number of employees on the waste team was available and could be forwarded to Members;
- The options available should a move to electric vehicles prove expensive and the best way of investigating alternative fuel sources;
- References to 'teckal' company in the report may need clarifying for members of the public.

In response to a question from Councillor Ted Fenton, Councillor MacRae advised that the signwriting on the sides of refuse vehicles had been investigated and work would begin on transforming this at the end of the month weather permitting.

All Members thanked Ms Boughton and Mr Heath for attending and for providing a comprehensive overview of the service. In addition, they passed their thanks to all of the staff at Ubico for continuing to deliver an excellent and efficient service to residents of West Oxfordshire.

RESOLVED: That the presentation and discussion be noted.

31. FLOOD PREVENTION, DRAINAGE AND SEWERAGE INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES & CHRISTMAS FLOODS IN WEST OXFORDSHIRE

Due to the overlapping nature of the two agenda items, the Chairman agreed to merge the discussions, enabling officers to answer queries on all of the cross cutting themes.

The Committee received a presentation from the Group Manager – Strategic Support on the work completed and data compiled so far following the floods experienced in December 2020.

The slides provided information considering the flooding that took place over Christmas 2020, the learning points taken from the event, along with the predictability and preparedness on the data available at the time. An overview was also given on the work undertaken to date, in particular the change in responsibilities following the floods in 2007 and plans to enhance the Out of Hours Service, improve Community Emergency Plans, review sand bunker locations and consider the provision of flood wardens.

The Lead Shared Flood Risk Management Engineer, Laurence King, addressed Members and provided an overview of the varying roles and responsibilities of the District Council and external partners. He advised that the Lead Local Flood Authority, Oxfordshire County Council, was the responsible body.

Councillor Leffman acknowledged that flooding had been a long standing issue and queried how the Council could get landowners to manage their ditches. She highlighted the instances of sewage coming up from Thames Water sewers and flooding properties and Members discussed how landowners could be engaged to act.

Mr King explained that the Thames Water situation had been on the Council's radar for a long time and one option available to councillors was better and more consistent lobbying. He recognised that officers were very active in making Thames Water take notice of local issues but reminded that the Council did not have any statutory powers over them, nor did the Local Lead Flood Authority. He did not feel that there was a lot that could be done until legislation changed.

With regard to the issue of ditches, Mr King advised that an agency agreement was in place with the County Council to enable WODC to take enforcement action if necessary. Officers did take action when locations were brought to their attention but highlighted that it could sometimes be difficult to prove ownership. He reminded Members to report any instances of blocked ditches to the Council.

Councillor Ted Fenton addressed Members and noted that Bampton had an Emergency Plan and hoped that Witney Town Council would be encouraged to create their own. Officers also provided clarification on the days that the Council was closed over the Christmas period and the out of hours standby arrangements.

Councillor Coles thanked all those involved on the night of the floods including the Fire Service, Ubico, Officers, and members of the public. He felt that lessons could be learned to enable a better, more coordinated response and asked for clarification on the temporary accommodation that had been made available during the incident.

Officers explained that evacuations were not carried out in the dark under clear advice and conversations with any households that flooded regularly or were at risk from flooding, would continue to take place. The meeting was also advised that a recent announcement from DEFRA had confirmed that grant aid would not be activated in this instance, as they did not feel that sufficient numbers of people had been affected. However, the Council continued to visit properties, where possible and offer help and advice on suitable products and quotes obtained.

Councillor Postan felt that community action was key to encourage preventative and remedial works to water-courses where surges or lack of flow could be encountered. He suggested that parish councils should be engaged and could be used as forums of information regarding landowners and problem areas.

With regard to riparian ownership, Mr King advised that all parish councils had been contacted previously but this channel of communication could be re-opened.

The Group Manager, Commercial Development, Mr Oddy, advised that he had been on site at Bridge Street on the evening in question, along with Mr Wilson and the Deputy Leader of the Council and echoed the thanks given to residents for assisting. He also reiterated the importance of the role that Parish and District Councillors had to play as community leaders.

Members discussed instances of flooding in their own wards and noted that this often appeared to be due to blocked drains. It was agreed that developing a plan at parish level would be helpful along with a reminder of sandbag storage location points. The issues with sluices along the River Windrush were discussed, the location of gauges and the cleaning of road gulleys.

Members recognised that new housing developments could lead to the displacement of water and officers should be conscious of surface water adding to flooding problems.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor MacRae addressed the meeting and thanked everyone who had turned out to assist with the incident on 24 December. He noted the disappointment regarding the announcement on funding from DEFRA and agreed to speak to the Cabinet Member for Resources and officers about ways that the Council could assist with grant advice. He also looked forward to receiving the reports from the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority.

The Chairman invited Mr Wareing to provide any closing comments and thanked him for attending and providing his viewpoint to the committee.

RESOLVED: That the presentation and discussion be noted.

32. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

The Committee was provided with an update on its work programme for 2020/21.

As detailed in the report and circulated to Members prior to the meeting, and update on the Bulk Waste Charges, advising that the issue had been subsequently considered by Cabinet in November. It was approved that the bulky waste collection standard number of items be increased from three to four as soon as practicable, with the fee remaining at £27.68 in the 2021-22 financial year. The fees would be considered by Council as part of the budget process on the 24 February 2021.

The Group Manager, Commercial Development addressed Members and outlined the upcoming Environmental Services Improvement Programme which aimed to deliver efficiencies and service improvements in the future. Members agreed that the officers leading on the project, Bill Oddy and Scott Williams, be invited to provide an overview at the next meeting.

In response to a query from Councillor Poskitt, Councillor MacRae advised that he would look into the potential of funding from the government for help in planning against future flooding and would look to advertise this through the Council's news page and social media channels. It was hoped this could help Councils to plan for better water management within their own area.

It was noted that a progress report on Air Quality was an annual item for the committee and would be factored in to a future work programme. With regards to the closure of recycling centres, this would be addressed in the Service Improvement Programme and the Electric Vehicle Charging Points report would be picked up by another committee.

In response to a query from Councillor Al-Yousuf, officers advised that a representative from the Local Lead Flood Authority could be invited to attend a future meeting and provide an overview of their role.

Councillor Leffman asked if an update on recycling data could be provided which was agreed.

The Climate Change Manager, Ness Scott addressed Members and provided an update on the Carbon Action Plan. Members noted that work had commenced on Leisure Centre improvements, starting with Witney ATP, Carterton Pavilion and ATP and Carterton Leisure Centre.

Having heard from officers, the Committee agreed that the Work Programme be updated as below.

RESOLVED: That the following items be added to the work programme for future meetings:

- a) Environmental Services Improvement Programme – add to April 2021
- b) Live Waste Data – add to April 2021
- c) Attendance by LLFA representative – invitation to be extended to April 2021 meeting

33. 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 January 2021.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

34. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were none received.

The meeting closed at 4.28 pm

CHAIRMAN