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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 15TH APRIL 2021

HELD VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING

Present: Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf, Chairman
Councillors Richard Bishop, Jill Bull, Andrew Coles, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Ted Fenton, Liz Leffman, Martin McBride (Vice-Chair), Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Postan

Also in Attendance: Councillor Norman MacRae, Cabinet Member for Environment

Officers: Scott Williams, (Business Manager – Contracts); Kenton Vigus (Waste Contracts Specialist); Adrienne Frazer (Strategic Support Officer) and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer).

Apologies: Councillor Owen Collins

35 **Minutes of Previous meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 3 February 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

36 **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Owen Collins.

37 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

38 **Participation of the Public**

There were no requests received.

39 **Committee Work Programme 2020/2021**

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

The Chairman advised that an invitation had been extended to Oxfordshire County Council as Local Lead Flood Authority, following a request made at the last meeting. However, due to staff changes OCC had advised they would be unable to attend until the June 2021 meeting. Officers confirmed this would be added to the work programme for June.

Councillor Coles queried if further information could be given on the nature of the staffing changes and was advised that there had been a change of officers with a new person in post.

It was also proposed that the final line of the appendix be amended to remove reference to the Cabinet Advisory Group for Environment. Councillor Al-Yousuf advised that the Climate Action Working Group had met earlier that day and had a successful and information meeting.

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

a) Update from OCC as Local Lead Flood Authority be added to June 2021;

40 Cabinet Work Programme

The Committee considered the report from Democratic Services which gave Members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 23 March 2021.

Councillor Bull queried if the report relating to the Upgrade to West Oxfordshire's Public Open Space CCTV would be submitted in May as detailed. In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment advised that he was unable to advise any further as this area of work did not fall within his remit.

In response to a query from Councillor Enright, Councillor MacRae advised that an update on the Christmas Floods was due to be provided by the Leader in May.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

41 Environmental Services Innovation Programme - Presentation

Members received a verbal presentation on the Environmental Services Innovation Programme from the Business Manager – Contracts which outlined the work planned for the future of the service.

Councillor Leffman asked for clarity on the replacement vehicles timeline and was advised that the service at West Oxfordshire was different to that being delivered at Cotswold District Council who were due to review their contract after two years. Mr Williams explained that it was still possible to deliver savings and efficiencies working with our partner Councils because there were commonalities in the service. It was noted though that one of the challenges was that the service covered two different waste disposal authorities – Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Councillor Poskitt highlighted that there appeared to be slightly different waste being collected, via differing methods. Mr Williams advised that in general, the waste was similar but it was the way that it was collected for example the separation of some dry recycling contents. However, the food waste was collected in the same manner so efficiencies could be found there.

Councillor Coles asked if there was the potential to introduce more digital reporting, with prompts or promotions for customers. Officers explained that one of the projects being worked on was a self-serve facility for Councillors to access but it was highlighted that not all residents were comfortable with a move to digital.

Councillor McBride raised the issue of moving to electric or hybrid vehicles as the intel coming back appeared to be positive. He was assured that all options were being considered as well as hydrogen, rail, air and sea for the movement of heavy fleet.

Having received the report and heard from the officers present, the Committee noted the presentation.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

42 Environmental Services In-Cab Technology System

Members received a presentation from the Business Manager - Contracts, outlining the business case on the costs, benefits and risks of procuring an Environmental Services In-Cab Technology system. The presentation and supporting report offered the Committee the opportunity to comment to Cabinet on the seeking of approval to proceed in procuring the system using the capital budget of up to £140,000, which was set aside in the 2021-22 capital programme.

Mr Williams explained how the equipment worked within the vehicles and the benefits this afforded the crew including up to date route information, health and safety data and access requirements for their route. He also explained that the device was able to store information about any incidents relating to damage to bins or other vehicles and could alleviate issues around potential insurance claims.

Members noted that Ubico were using the technology at Cotswold District Council and had already recorded a fall in the number of missed bins during the two weeks of use. Officers felt the technology would also provide a fuel saving and help with carbon reduction. Page 23 of the report detailed more of the customer benefits.

Mr Williams answered queries from Members including the robustness of the devices and the ability to use the app on a smartphone if the tablet failed.

Councillor Poskitt noted that some crews did not place bins back where they found them, causing residents to search for their own. Officers assured her that crews would be held to account if the service was not delivered appropriately.

Having read the report and having heard from the officer present, the Committee supported the recommendations and asked the Cabinet Member to pass their comments to Cabinet for information.

RESOLVED that the recommendations in the report be supported.

43 Members' Questions

Councillor Leffman asked for an update on the Bring Sites from the Cabinet Member present. She noted that Parish Councils had not yet been contacted by officers to discuss the future of the sites in their areas. In response, the Business Manager - Contracts, advised that due to the gradual reopening of businesses and recycling sites since lockdown, the Council had decided to pause further action and pick the issue up in May. He explained that the closure or removal of any site would be a gradual process.

Councillor Leffman queried if something could be done to encourage drivers from dropping litter from the vehicles onto the roadside. Officers advised that Ubico had a rota in place to carry out roadside cleansing and asked Councillors to email them with any areas affected by littering.

Councillor Coles raised the issue of non-essential tree maintenance still be carried out, despite officers advising that the work would be complete by March. His concern related to the disruption this caused to nesting birds. He asked if the Tree Maintenance Policy could be looked at as the last review was carried out in April 2019.

In response, the Chairman reminded the meeting that the Council had recently appointed a new Biodiversity and Land Management Officer who would be likely to look at issues such as this. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that the engineers did check the trees prior to carrying out any work.

Councillor Postan asked if positive action could be taken to tackle the dumping of waste, dry wipes and wet wipes into the sewerage system, causing ongoing problems with the water courses and rivers. He referenced a recent Panorama programme which had highlighted this problem.

Councillor MacRae reminded Members of the work the Council had already undertaken including writing to the Secretary of State for the Environment, the relevant private members bill but reiterated that the Council had no statutory powers over the water authorities. He again asked Members to continue to let himself and officers know of issues being encountered.

Councillor Postan hoped that officers could look at further action that could be taken with regards to Planning and Land Management control.

As this was the last meeting of the municipal year, Councillor Enright thanked the Chairman for steering the Committee over the past year and all officers for their work. This was supported by Councillor Eaglestone and wished everyone standing for re-election good luck in May.

Duration of the meeting: 2.00 - 3.17 pm

Chairman on
Thursday, 15 April 2021