

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Held in the Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney at 2.00 pm on **Thursday, 3 February 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chairman), Andrew Coles (Vice-Chair), Mike Cahill, Maxine Crossland, Rupert Dent, Duncan Enright, Ted Fenton, Andy Goodwin, Liz Leffman, Alex Postan, Carl Rylett and Harry St John

Officers: Philip Measures (Service Leader), Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development) and Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica) Michelle Ouzman (Secretary), and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Democratic Services Manager).

35 Minutes of Previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, with the following amendment to the wording on page one of the minutes under item 31, paragraph five, last sentence insert the word waste: “ .. As for the recycle bins, these were not being issued anymore as they were not properly used, and were mixed **waste** contaminated.

36 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harry Eaglestone.

Councillor Maxine Crossland substituted for Councillor McBride, and Councillor Duncan Enright substituted for Councillor Owen Collins.

37 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

38 Participation of the Public

The following members of the public had registered to attend the meeting and address Members on Item 5. WPI and WP2 – Review Witney Flood Investigation Report:

- Mr Tony Stark – Witney resident
- Mr William Wareing – Witney Flood Mitigation Group
- Councillor Andrew Prosser – Ward Councillor by discretion of the Chair

Mr Stark addressed the Committee and a copy of his speech is attached to the original copy of these minutes. Mr Stark concluded that he was encouraged by the report and he wanted to work collaboratively with whomever took ownership to progress the recommendations.

Mr William Wareing addressed the Committee on behalf of the Witney Flood Mitigation Group and a copy of Mr Wareing's submission is attached to the original copy of these minutes.

Mr Wareing concluded that he looked forward to continued collaboration and expected to see substantial coordination amongst the groups involved, and he reminded Members that flood risk management and the delivery of appropriate mitigation action was in the Council's ability.

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Councillor Andrew Prosser addressed Members under the Committee Work Programme as agreed by the Chairman's discretion.

39 Committee Work Programme 2020/2021

The Chairman announced that he was going to bring forward the Work Programme 3 item (WP3), Presentation from Ubico, so that the guest presenters could have the opportunity to leave the meeting before the review of the Witney Flood Investigation Report, as this was likely to be a lengthy item. He explained that he would then return to Item 4 Participation of the Public and the Flood Report.

WP3 – Ubico 22/23 Business Plan.

The Chairman introduced Mr Chris Urwin, Ubico's Finance Director and Rob Heath, Ubico's Operations Director.

Mr Urwin and Mr Heath addressed the Committee and shared a presentation on Ubico's Business Plan for 2022/2023. The presentation focussed on the business Plan timeline and their five year vision.

The Chairman thanked both presenters and invited Councillors to comment or ask questions, remembering to focus on the Ubico Business Plan and not local issues.

Councillor Postan asked if Ubico took Gloucester City on board, what compensation West Oxfordshire would gain.

Mr Urwin explained that the Council had been consulted about Gloucester City joining Ubico, all parties would have an equal share and felt it would give a business benefit by strengthening the depth of the contract with the geography being more progressive. The Group Manager – Commercial Development, Bill Oddy clarified that the Ubico contract had started in 2012 with only Cotswold and Cheltenham District Council's being members, followed by West Oxfordshire. Each Council is costed separately. The data journey with collaborating, means no risk to one Council, but all Councils see the benefits. Councillor Postan suggested that a mechanical engineer on board would be a good asset on deciding the specification of vehicles to be used. Mr Heath confirmed that they had a Fleet Engineer who was an expert in this field.

Councillor Dent asked if there were any figures that determined the value of the contract. Mr Heath stated that 7million was a snapshot in time, with the most costly items being vehicles and staff. Mr Oddy clarified that this was the biggest contract the Council had and covered:

- Waste and recycling
- Grounds maintenance
- Street cleansing

Mr Oddy also confirmed that the breakdown in figures were now in the Council Budget and could be shared with the Councillors.

The Chairman asked why the contract had increased by so much.

Following a question from the Chairman, Mr Urwin explained that the costs had increased so much despite them trying to contain costs as much as possible and staff costs had seen a significant rise. He advised that Ubico linked their people costs to the governments pay

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structure, which was still being worked through at the moment, with at least a 1.8% increase plus a plan for a further 2% increase but it could potentially be more. Mr Urwin advised that driver retention was a priority, with Ubico utilising a pay increase, plus soft local staff benefits, as a way to retain drivers. It was noted that driver shortage was a national issue, as well as the increased in fuel costs. Mr Oddy also explained that supply chain issues were a global problem.

Following a question from Councillor Fenton relating to a branding review, Mr Urwin explained that this was about simplifying the branding so that residents from all the Council partners could recognise vehicles. The website was also being looked at with a view to simplifying the user experience.

Councillor Postan suggested adding personalisation to the trucks. Mr Urwin thought this could be good idea, would enhance community spirit and agreed to take the idea away and investigate further.

Councillor Goodwin advised that he would like to see figures, measures and outcomes for the end customers as well as the management of the land taking climate change into account, a reduction of waste and a focus on outcomes.

In response, Mr Urwin explained that there were contractual KPI's in place, and Ubico were embarking on the climate action journey. The 'In-cab' technology would help inform on outcomes.

Councillor Coles asked if Ubico had gathered customer thoughts and asked if they made the effort to engage with residents. Mr Urwin explained that they needed to be careful not to encroach on the Councils Communications Customer Service Teams, as Ubico were in partnership with the Council.

Mr Oddy explained that the Councils depot transferred to Ubico but the customer interface and engagement remained with the Council. He advised that the Council worked closely with Ubico, working together to resolve issues such as a missed collection. In addition, the Council was embarking on a trade and green waste review.

Councillor Crossland remarked that as she was the Councils Age Champion she thought that a large part of the local population were missing out if they were unable to use the current technology of services on line. Mr Oddy assured Councillor Crossland that the telephone contact line remained open for all queries and services.

The Chairman thanked Mr Urwin and Mr Heath for attending and answering the Committees questions. He also took the opportunity to thank Ubico for the 99% plus bin collection rate, especially during the challenging past two years, through lockdowns.

The Committee noted the presentation.

WPI and WP2 – Review Witney Flood Investigation Report

The Chairman confirmed that the report had been circulated and asked Mr Laurence the Shared Principle Engineer, to introduce it.

Mr Laurence felt that the report contained positive actions and comments and confirmed that within the next two weeks the first multi-agency meeting for more than two years was due to take place. The Multi-Agency group would include Thames Water, the District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the Environment Agency. This would be the first meeting of many meetings aimed at resolving issues and working in partnership to seek funding to enable future works and maintenance.

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The Chairman confirmed that the report centred on the Witney Floods and did not cover the whole District.

Councillor Enright commented on the emergency response on the night of the floods and hoped the report would address the response issues highlighted. He applauded the huge response from local residents on the night, and the blue light services. He wanted to know what role the Council and the Witney Flood Mitigation Group (WFMG) could take in the future to help make the recommendations happen. He also asked if Planners and Developers would be talking to Thames Water before planning applications were submitted.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 5.7 of the report regarding the Council's role, and asked Frank Wilson the Group Finance Director (Publica) to comment regarding planning.

Mr Wilson confirmed that the Planning Department always took note of flood plains and sought Thames Water advice when necessary.

Amy Bridgewater-Carnall the Democratic Services Manager advised that the Planners also use the Sustainability Checklist, and that new developers are also encouraged to use this tool.

Mr King confirmed that the Council's Emergency Plan and Emergency Response Plan were also being reviewed.

The Chairman invited Councillor Prosser the Ward Councillor for North Witney to address the meeting

Councillor Prosser welcomed the report, queried who was responsible for following up on the action plan and asked if the Emergency Plan was created by the Council with the Town Council's input. In addition, he welcomed more planning of housing but only if they were not in a flood risk area. Councillor Prosser went on to query why there were no timings against the actions and highlighted that the Environment Agency needed to update their modelling to enable residents and the town council to be more prepared.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Prosser for his comments.

Councillor Coles commented that since 2013 there had been no risk modelling completed, and queried the funding mentioned on page 3 of the report. He asked if the level of silt was part of the problem, as he believed that regular de silt work could be completed to stop this. Councillor Coles went on to advise that annual maintenance had been completed at Emma's Dyke and, having visited the area, the maintenance has not been completed. He was frustrated that there was no mention in the report that residents had been unable to get through on the 24 hour line. He noted that once he had got through to a senior member of staff, sand bags had been delivered immediately but unfortunately this was too late for some residents.. In conclusion, Councillor Coles queried the Outsourcing decision of the service and asked when this decision had been taken.

Councillor Postan thought that the report should be renamed Part 1 as there were two water courses. Whilst he noted that Mr King had been helpful, and he thought the report was excellent, there was no mention of the Shill Brook flooding that took place at the same time. Councillor Postan advised that in his ward people were prepared to contribute to help get these actions done. He felt that that had been administration of our water courses, and requested a part 2 of the report. Frank Wilson confirmed this this report was the most urgent and other reports would be produced, within the next few months. Councillor Leffman enquired if the Multi- Agency meeting would be discussing the River Windrush and the problems experienced in 2007 at Bourton-on-the-Water when flooding came down to Witney. Mr Laurence confirmed that all parties were already in dialogue about the effects of the Cotswolds on Witney. But he noted that the Council could not tell the Environmental Agency or Thames Water how to do their modelling. Mr King advised that the EA was

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producing new modelling for Witney and could include questions relating to whether the bridge was big enough for its current use.

Councillor Fenton asked why OCC/LLFA were noted in the table for action, queried the specific flood responsibility, and asked if the de-silting was going to happen.

Mr King informed the Committee that at the Multi-Agency meeting, comments and views from everyone should clarify the effects of de-silting, actions would be looked at however timescales would not be decided upon.

Councillor Fenton queried the existence of an engineering solution to stop the silt build up.

Councillor Postan reminded the Committee that Riparian owners had responsibility and a duty to maintain the banks and could be open to being taken to court if they did not do this. He queried if leaflets could be produced to advise on Riparian responsibilities..

Councillor StJohn asked who was going to take ownership of actions with the review of the early warning system being one of these actions. He also queried which fields were not acting as a flood plain and could these fields be referenced.

Mr King commented that following analysis on the effect of the alarm system, it was agreed that a dedicated person to answer the phone was required.

Councillor Dent asked if the EA could clarify if updated information or data of assets could be done at a moment's notice, and the timeframe of delivery of report actions.

The Chairman asked Mr Laurence if the Committee could be updated of the progress and thanked the Witney Flood Mitigation Group for their contribution.

The Chairman then called for a 10 minute comfort break at 15:52 and the meeting resumed at 16:02.

WP4 Service Performance Report 2021 Q2

Mr Bill Oddy the Group Manager - Commercial Development attended the Committee and said he was happy to receive questions from Councillors. He explained that the report was for period July – September of 2021, and that it was hoped in future that data collection would be quicker so that reports could be produced to reflect quarters just gone. He went on to explain that there was a point in time when all three of the narrow collection vehicles were out of service, resulting in missed collections. This was due to a supply issue of spare parts which were affecting global users at the time.

Councillor Dent hoped that lessons had been learned and that Ubico carried a stock of spares now. Mr Oddy was able to confirm that their Business continuity Plans were being reviewed.

Mr Oddy explained that the Council was actively trying to improve the abandoned call rate and calls not answered within 20 seconds. The call handlers were asking residents if they had tried to use the internet pages to resolve their query. Most calls could be resolved on line, leaving more time and quick call pickup for those residents that had an unusual requirement, or those residents that unable to use the on line services.

Councillor Enright referred to Page 98 of the report relating to Parking, the number of enforcements and the massive reduction during 2020/2021, Mr Oddy concurred that this was a typical Covid related statistic.

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Councillor Goodwin stated his thanks to the staff and enquired if there was a delay on getting replacement bins.

Mr Oddy was able to confirm that there had been a delay, however, this had been reduced to three weeks, with two staff working on replacement bins, and if staff had to isolate, these staff were drafted in to cover the refuse collection service. At present there were around 900 replacement requests per month with the number at Cotswold District Council being about the same.

Councillor Postan asked if a compact crusher could be used to compact the waste. Mr Oddy replied that they were encouraging re-use rather than throwing away.

The Chairman thanked Mr Oddy for his input and thanked the staff for their continued good work.

WP5 Air Quality Update.

The Chairman introduced Philip Measures, the Councils Service Leader for Environmental Regulatory Services.

Mr Measures gave a brief presentation on the current Air Quality Management Areas. Two areas had been monitored at the A44 at Chipping Norton and Bridge Street Witney and the current position was that WODC were failing the Annual Average Objective for Nitrogen, but were not failing on the hourly measurement. An action Plan in Chipping Norton required a full review With the Witney Action Plan still in draft. Mr Measures noted that resources were required to get these plans up to date and funding had been agreed to engage a consultant to review both plans.

The Chairman enquired what data was being measured and Mr Measures confirmed that data continued to be collected each month, with Defra displaying the latest data on their website. Following the presentation, Councillors had a discussion with Mr Measures about the equipment used to measure the air quality and the effects of the weather. Mr Measures concluded that the money requested was £25k which would be used on soft testing, modelling against existing data, but mostly on the consultancy to review and compose the Air Quality Plan.

The Chairman thanked Mr Measures for his input and it was agreed that he would return in six months with an update.

The Chairman then updated the Committee on the Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) and advised that the meeting held that morning was the last meeting of the Group. The initial meetings had revolved around setting up the Team and a brief of the work needed to be done, but lately this had morphed into briefings on what had been achieved since the last time the group had met. Now the Team had established itself, it was thought that the Climate Change Manager, Vanessa Scott could attend the Committee and give an update from now on. Most Councillors were sad to see the CAWG not continuing and asked if the decision had already been made. The Chairman confirmed that as there was only one more Committee sitting before the May elections, it was wise to raise the topic again after the elections. In the meantime, Vanessa Scott would be invited to the next Committee meeting. All Councillors agreed that a lot had been achieved since the group had been formed and wanted it noted that they were pleased with the current results of the Team and the future plans. Councillor Coles concurred and didn't want the pressure to fall on Climate Action, but reminded the Committee that they still had a Cabinet member, who's responsibility was Climate Action.

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It was agreed to circulate the CAWG latest update documentation to all Committee members.

40 Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2020-2021

Resolved that the Local Plan annual Monitoring Report 2020 - 2021 be noted.

41 Cabinet Work Programme

Resolved that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

42 Members' Questions

Councillor Coles announced the sad passing of former District Councillor Eve Coles and who had been a member of this Committee.

The Chairman wanted to pass on the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committees sincere condolences.

The Meeting closed at 5.08 pm

CHAIRMAN