

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 MARCH 2022 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Bob Jones MBE (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Mel Jacob, Cllr Dr Nick Murry, Cllr Bill Parks, Cllr Rich Rogers, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Derek Walters, Cllr James Sheppard and Cllr Stewart Palmen (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cllr Kevin Daley, Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cllr Tamara Reay and Cllr Graham Wright

82 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Charles McGrath and Cllr Dr Brian Mathew.

Cllr Stewart Palmen substituted for Cllr Dr Brian Mathew.

83 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

The minutes of the Environment Select Committee meeting held on 12th January 2022 were approved and signed.

84 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

85 **Chairman's Announcements**

Recent meetings

The Chairman commented on meetings he had attended since the last Environment Select Committee meeting in January 2022. The Chairman had attended Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee on 25 January & 8 February 2022. The Chairman and the Vice Chairman received a briefing on 1 March on an impending Cabinet Member decision for approval to form an Enhanced Partnership and Scheme with local bus operators as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

86 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

87 **Recycling**

The report was introduced by Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member Transport Waste Street Scene and Flooding. He firstly expressed his disappointment with the bin strike and how it had overshadowed good news about the new collection rounds resulting in savings and improved recycling rate leading to more income from recycled materials.

Martin Litherland, Head of Waste Management, summarised the key parts of the report. This included the new mixed dry recycling scheme introduced in 2020 and the strong performance of the waste and recycling services during the pandemic, despite increased pressure on the service. Future plans for the service included proposed battery recycling scheme and collection of small electrical items as a response to an increase in the number of waste fires. In response to the Environment Act 2021 there are plans for a deposit return scheme, weekly food waste collection and free of charge garden waste collection.

Questions and comments on the report followed which included the following points:

- Contamination of recycling materials and how to reduce it. Contamination is measured by the service and a video of the recycling plants and how they work is being considered to improve the understanding of how to correctly recycle. Councillors also noted the importance of education in schools and suggested signage on bin lids to improve recycling habits.
- That plant performance is monitored, and recirculation of material would be commencing soon with the aim to improve performance. As well as this the separation discs would be replaced to reduce gaps and catch more small items to improve efficiency.
- Waste miles and how best to measure them was looked at closely and factored in when looking at contracts.
- Food waste and the changes needed in Wiltshire due to the Environment Act 2021. Officers clarified that most food waste currently goes to produce energy at the Westbury plant. As a result, there would be a need to assess the impact on removing food waste from the waste stream and consider the optimum time for food waste collection to be added.
- The role of waste vehicles in lowering Wiltshire Council's carbon emission. Officers explained that they were considering the most appropriate time to decarbonise the waste fleet, bearing in mind the importance of efficiency and reliability. A hybrid approach could be taken with EV for local collections and different options for longer distances. It was highlighted that the service had managed to reduce the number of waste vehicles from 149 to 121.

- Cllr Tony Jackson paid tribute to the outstanding work of the waste team. He also drew attention to the Warminster biogas facility and questioned whether it could be used in a pilot scheme for food waste collection. Officers were unsure of a trial as such but would keep discussion open.
- The implications for Wiltshire Council of introducing free garden waste collections. Figures on what is currently spent and what is currently earned from garden waste were requested.
- Whether the improved recycling income was sustainable or likely to drop back to pre-2020 levels. Officers predicted that it would not return to pre-pandemic levels and that the Environment Act 2021 should maintain good prices, though forecasts take account of some degradation.

Resolved:

That the Committee,

- a) Note the findings of the report, particularly in relation to the impacts of the Covid pandemic on waste service performance since the implementation of a new kerbside recycling scheme.
- b) Note the actions planned to help reduce the contamination of kerbside collected Mixed Dry Recycling.
- c) Note the future developments that may arise under the Environment Act 2021.
- d) In upcoming updates receive information on communication strategies; the emerging future waste collection plans and their impacts including costs and the overall carbon emissions of recycling.
- e) At a future convenient time visit the Materials Recycling Facility (MFR) at Calne.

88 **Grass Cutting Policy 2022/23**

The report was introduced by Cllr Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member Transport Waste Street Scene and Flooding. He emphasized the need for balance between areas requiring a lot of trimming and areas to facilitate growth and wildflowers.

Adrian Hampton, Head of Highway Operations, outlined the key points covered in the report. This included that the main highways cut would be in August but that reviews would take place throughout. He gave examples of Local Councils such as Pewsey, Devizes and Salisbury that now run their own grass cutting arrangements as part of Wiltshire Council's drive to enable local communities to set their own priorities. He explained that to maintain wildflower verges the cut and collect process that is needed produces a bit more carbon, so there is sometimes a compromise between biodiversity and carbon reduction. The main focus of the report was to manage the right land in the right way.

Officers responded to a number of questions and comments from the Select Committee which included the following areas:

- The junction at Knook joining the A36 from B390 was raised as an area that had been reported multiple times as needing reactive cutting to improve visibility. It was clarified by Officers that this area was maintained by National Highways and the reports were passed on to them to action.
- Cllr Parks thanked officers for the report but raised concerns about rural verges on narrow country roads and what the financial implications were for highways service plan to manage them. It was explained that there would be financial implications but tracking the exact change in cost was not possible right now due to the change in contractor and change in traffic management costs.
- The possibility for Parish Councils to buy highways services through CATG's to cut verges more on the rural roads. The Head of Highway Operations advised caution over top up services due to a need to understand the implications of extra work on carbon emissions.
- The frequency of hedge cutting if fast growth causes issues. It was clarified that hedges are cut more than once a year if highways flag it as a safety issue. In terms of footpaths, rights of way are a reactive service and respond to reports through the app.
- Details of how the service delegation works with Town Council's taking on responsibility for the grass cutting service on their land, not including highway land.
- Calls for improved engagement with Parish Councils, specifically in rural areas where the cutting of verges can have an impact on safety for pedestrians.
- Whether there was a way to prevent double paying for maintenance of green spaces as some end up paying precept and costs for a management company. Officers clarified that this related more to planning but that they would pass on those comments.

Resolved:

That the committee:

- a) Note the grass cutting arrangements for 2022 and the background to the provision.
- b) When receiving future updates that they include information on engagement with local communities, rural parish roadside grass cutting and the overall carbon impacts and costs.

89 **Climate Emergency Task Group**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Task Group, who provided an update on the work of the Climate Emergency Task Group since January 2022. The Task Group welcomes the Climate Strategy and urged

that it should be a green thread that runs through all council decision making. It was also stated that the Task Group await further detail on the delivery of the strategy and that they have raised the issue about county farms.

An update was requested on the bulk buy solar panels scheme to make it cheaper for individuals to fit solar panels on their homes. It was explained that the programme had been approved but was progressing slower than expected due to mixed feedback from other councils that adopted it. These issues have been raised with the provider and it is expected that a few thousand households would engage with the scheme. Cllr Dr Nick Murry suggested the council work to try to help public engage with reliable installers.

There was a query over the lack of provision in the budget to replace trees removed due to ash dieback. This was suggested as something for the Cabinet Member for Climate Change to explore.

It was stated that onshore wind was the cheapest source of electricity and that there was no mention of how Wiltshire would promote implementation of it in the Green/Blue Strategy. In response to this query it was clarified that it had not yet been possible to commission a report on wind power in Wiltshire for a contractor to be appointed due to high demand. However, the intention was for this to be done as soon as possible.

Resolved:

That the committee,

- a) Note the update on the Task Group activity provided.
- b) Note the Task Group's draft forward work plan.

90 **Forward Work Programme**

Resolved:

- a) To approve the Forward Work Programme, subject to any additional items agreed by Committee at today's meeting

91 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

92 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Environment Select Committee will take place at 10.30am on 14 June 2022.

(Duration of meeting: 10.35 am - 12.16 pm)

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