

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4 JANUARY 2023 AT KENNET ROOM - 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 Brian Mathew, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Bill Parks, Cllr Iain Wallis and Cllr Derek Walters

Also Present:

Cllr Tony Trotman, Cllr Nabil Najjar, Cllr Ashley O'Neill and Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling

1 **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Charles McGrath.

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman provided details of meetings and briefings he had attended since the last meeting, including on the Future Chippenham project and on Local Highways and Footway Improvement Group speed surveys.

5 **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

6 **Update on the Towns Programme App Development**

Councillor Nabil Najjar, Portfolio Holder for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, provided an update on the Towns Programme App development, with support from Victoria Moloney, Head of Economy and Regeneration, and Terry Bracher, Heritage Services Manager. Councillor Najjar explained the need for town centres to engage in a different way in order to progress, including through the use of digital solutions and experience.

Background was provided on initial development of a Salisbury focused app promoting heritage trails, and research on different approaches and costs for similar schemes in Malmesbury, Corsham and other areas, to identify the most engaging and effective content, working with local councils and groups to tell local stories, audio visual content, and avoiding duplicating provision. A development model was prepared, and an initial 10 towns had been identified for the first rollout of the app in Spring 2023.

Details were also provided of the development of the What's On App. Existing provision such as VisitWiltshire was targeted at external visitors to Wiltshire, or on a single area within the county, mostly marketed on social media and often difficult to search. The What's On in Wiltshire App would seek to list events across Wiltshire in a consistent way, with search engine optimisation, and for local groups to upload in a simple way.

The Committee discussed the update and raised queries. A Member expressed concern at the cost of the development of the app and what the expected returns would be, and whether VisitWiltshire and other approaches were being duplicated when funds could be utilised on other matters.

In response it was stated that the app would be a marketing tool which many stakeholders had responded to positively. It was noted that if current provision met all needs there would not be a need for councils and others to have their own pages for events, but many did, and that Wiltshire residents might be less likely to review tourism focused sites when looking for events in the county, as these were externally focused.

The Committee continued to discuss the update. Several Members welcomed the development of the apps and were encouraged at providing a distinct new offer for events listing and identification. Details were sought on how the heritage trails app and What's On app would function, who would be able to upload material and content policies that would be in place, use of audio and visual content, the hosting of data and contingencies in the event the app developer was not able to continue support, linkage of areas near to the towns themselves, marketing research on different groups to target for local events, listing of regular and one off events, ongoing support from the council and other issues. It was confirmed the council worked closely with VisitWiltshire, which it helped fund, but it was stated that model was membership based which the app would not be.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

- 1) To note the update.**
- 2) To receive a further update by the end of 2023.**
- 3) That update to include an outline of costs and expenditure, launch timescales, promotion activity and an initial assessment of impact.**

7 **Update on Broadband Provision in Wiltshire**

Councillor Ashley O'Neill, Cabinet Member for Governance, IT, Broadband, Digital, Licensing, Staffing, Communities and Area Boards, presented an update on the provision of Broadband in Wiltshire, with support from Victoria Moloney, Head of Economy and Regeneration.

It was explained that a previous government programme to rollout superfast broadband to areas considered commercially non-viable had been running since 2013 and had come to an end, with over 97,000 properties upgraded. 20,000 properties in Salisbury had also been upgraded to full fibre broadband to support its economic recovery.

Project Gigabit was a programme aimed to achieve 85% gigabit level internet capability by 2025. In Wiltshire the level was currently around 57%. Councillor O'Neill explained that procurement and contracts were starting this year, with the council working in partnership with providers and Building Digital UK, an executive agency of government. The importance of digital connectivity in a rural county like Wiltshire was emphasised. Details were provided of the contract lots, which included Swindon.

The Committee discussed the update and sought additional details, including the technical difference between the superfast and gigabit upgrades, identification where possible of alternative provision for hard to reach areas, and how much competition and choice there would be for consumers. The project as with the previous one was focused on areas determined to be commercially non-viable, and it was acknowledged this could lead to some confusion to local residents as to why certain areas were included or not included.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

- 1) **To note the update.**
- 2) **To receive a further update by the end of 2023.**

8 **Wiltshire Council's Housing Board Annual Report**

A report was received from Councillor Phil Alford, Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets, and Asset Transfer, on the Wiltshire Council Housing Board Annual Report. The Housing Board is made up of residents, independent members and councillors, to make recommendation on how to manage the Housing Revenue Account, which manages council tenancies and leaseholders. Councillor Ashley O'Neill was in attendance on behalf of the Cabinet.

Simon Hendey, Director, Assets and Commercial Development, presented the report, which provided details on activities on the Board between October 2021 and November 2022, and provided other updates. This included recruitment of

new resident members, work of the tenancy sustainment team to secure additional benefits and grants for residents, work undertaken to improve the energy efficiency of council properties, and planning permission obtained for some zero carbon homes.

It was stated that some of the performance indicators in the report were disappointing, including around repairs and bringing empty properties into use. The council was seeking to recruit to its property services team, but due to the way data was recorded it was anticipated that the indicators would decline further before they improved.

The Committee discussed the report and presentation, seeking details on the number of residents in council tenancies, adjustments made to communication methods with residents, and assistance provided on obtaining benefits or setting up of fuel hardship funds for customers. It was also confirmed that policies relating to mould and damp had been reviewed, with a significant increase in communications from residents about the issue following recent national press coverage.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was then,

Resolved:

- 1) **To note the Wiltshire Council Housing Board Annual Report 2021/22.**
- 2) **To receive the Annual Report 2022/23 at a future meeting.**

Councillor Tony Jackson left the meeting at 1215.

9 **Climate Emergency Task Group**

Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Global Warming and Climate Change Emergency Task Group presented an update on the work of the Task Group since November 2022.

In response to a request from the council's Climate Team, the Task Group had reviewed the Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, which was last revised in 2016. The Task Group had recommended a rewriting of the plan, and provided details of principles to consider when undertaking that work. The Task Group would also be looking at work relating to zero carbon housing, the Local Development Plan, and Local Transport Plan.

The Committee discussed the update, seeking details of the impact of use of solar panels on council buildings.

It was then,

Resolved:

- 1) **To note the update on the Task Group activity provided.**
- 2) **To note the Task Group's draft forward work plan at Appendix 1.**

10 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve the Forward Work Programme.

11 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 14 March 2023.

12 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.30 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Kieran Elliott of Democratic Services,
direct line 01225 718504, e-mail kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line 01225 713114 or email
communications@wiltshire.gov.uk

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