

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14 MARCH 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 Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Dr Nick Murry,
Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Tony Trotman and Cllr Iain Wallis

Also Present:

Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Nick Botterill, and Cllr Caroline Thomas

13 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Charlies McGrath, Derek Walters, and Mel Jacob.

14 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 January 2023 were presented for consideration. As per Agenda Item 5, an update to the minutes was agreed, upon which a note would be included directing members of the public to the statement made by Cllr Nabil Najjar. After which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 January 2023 as a true and correct record.

15 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

16 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman thanked Cllrs Bill Parks and Rich Rogers for their work on the Committee and wished them the best in their new roles. Cllrs Tony Trotman and Tom Rounds were then welcomed as new Members to the Committee. The Chairman further welcomed Ellen Ghey as the new Democratic Services Officer supporting the Committee.

Details were provided of meetings and briefings he had attended since the last meeting, including Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Financial Planning Task Group meetings and addressing recycling contamination.

Members were informed that the scheduled Agenda Item 8, Wiltshire Design Guide – Draft for Public Consultation, would be moved to the end of the meeting as the relevant Cabinet Member had other work commitments that could not be missed at that time.

17 **Public Participation**

The Chairman announced that two written questions had been submitted and had received written responses as circulated within Agenda Supplement 1. Following the previous meeting held on 4 January 2023, Cllr Nabil Najjar asked the Chairman to read out a statement (below) clarifying comments made by officers in the meeting regarding the Malmesbury Heritage Trail app.

“A statement was made that:

‘The [Explore Malmesbury] web app was developed by the University of Winchester.’

There was confusion over who was responsible for the web-app, and we wish to confirm that the app belongs to Malmesbury Town Team CiC. Explore Malmesbury has been created and is operated as the result of a large voluntary community effort led by Malmesbury Town Team linking many local groups including the Town Council, Athelstan Museum, Civic Trust, Warden and Freeman and a large number of volunteers.

Officers had thought from their conversations with Malmesbury that Sprechen Limited, also Winchester based, were closely tied to the University of Winchester. We wish to confirm that this is not the case. The app was developed and is technically supported by a commercial business, Sprechen Limited. Students at the University of Winchester produced some augmented reality content for the app as part of their course work.

A statement was made that:

‘The cost of the Explore Malmesbury web app for each town would be a minimum of £10,000 per town.’ And [Explore Malmesbury] is ‘vastly more expensive’ [than Calvium].

We also wish to clarify that the £10,000 discussed cost was for an optional TV and video development within the app. We can confirm that Malmesbury Town Team has not been invited to quote for the development or supply of the Wiltshire Heritage Trails App against any requirement specification. We therefore cannot provide any comparison of cost between developing the original Calvium supplied Salisbury App or the Explore Malmesbury Web App and we had no basis to report to the Committee that ‘The cost of the Explore

Malmesbury web app for each town would be a minimum of £10,000 per town” or that Explore Malmesbury is ‘vastly more expensive’.

Nevertheless, officers reviewed the functionality of a number of solutions at length and concluded that a native app provides substantial advantages over a web-based model, not least, in our view, the ability to make use of mobile functionality, store content on the app, and not require constant mobile connectivity due to GPS, which is an advantage across our more rural communities. This therefore excluded Explore Malmesbury from our further supply consideration.

A statement was made that:

‘The content [on Explore Malmesbury] is delivered by Winchester and has no flexibility.’ and ‘What you see is what you get.’ and ‘Although material can be added it isn’t very straight forward’.

The officers involved in the trail apps programme have a high regard for the Malmesbury web-app, and the work and outreach undertaken around it. We recognise that the content is adaptable, and material can be added by local teams. This is one of several apps reviewed by officers along with the Corsham trails which were highlighted to illustrate the variation in approaches. We recognise that content can be added flexibly.”

Mr Ritchie attended the meeting and presented a further statement in response to the answers given where he gave further context to the parties involved in the creation, development and running of the Malmesbury Town Team’s ‘Explore Malmesbury’ app. He expressed disappointment in the comments made in both the meeting and the subsequent statement and responses to his questions and emphasised his wish to amend the minutes of the previous meeting as per Question 23-01.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the Committee could amend the minutes if they were so minded but suggested that a note could be attached to the previous minutes referring to Cllr Najjar’s statement. Mr Ritchie agreed to the action suggested.

18 **Highways Annual Review of Service 2022**

Councillor Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene and Flooding, introduced the report to the Committee alongside Dave Thomas, Head of Highways Asset Management & Commissioning, and Samantha Howells, Director – Highways & Transport.

It was explained that the report reviewed the performance of the highways service across the year 2022, and also provided an update on the status of contractors and suppliers involved in service delivery. The report was also noted as demonstrating the application of good practice and asset management principles which appraises future Department for Transport (DFT) funding. Members were informed that the Ringway maintenance contract had been

extended to April 2023 and that the Council was in the process of demobilising from Ringway while concurrently undertaking a mobilisation phase with the new contractor, Milestone Infrastructure Ltd, which had impacted on recent activity but allowed for continuity between services.

Contextual details were provided to explain some of the results from the review, such as volatile weather conditions impacting road conditions and the impact of the rise of inflation. Further details were given as to the introduction of the LHFIGs (Local Highway and Footway Improvement Groups) in April 2022, and Cllr Thomas stated that they had experienced difficulties in recruiting officers to support that work but further reviews on the matter would be undertaken. The Performance Management Framework was detailed with regard to the decline in skid resistance across the network, and the proportion of reactive maintenance against planned maintenance which was explained as partly being due to adverse weather conditions. It was confirmed that the framework would be reviewed and updated in time for the 2023 review to match the DFT Incentive Funding Scheme.

The national resourcing issues regarding qualified engineering staff was raised and officers noted that their recruitment method had been amended in response. Furthermore, long term investments had been made into their apprenticeship programme which was fully affiliated with the Institute of Civil Engineers and had already produced two professionally qualified engineers. Further challenges faced with regard to material availability, inflation rises, and overall workload as a result of the change from CATGs to LHFIGs were detailed. The move from Ringway to Milestone Infrastructure Ltd was further discussed, and Members were reassured that the majority of the existing Ringway and Parish Stewards operatives across the network were given the opportunity to transfer to the new provider, and had done so, under the new Milestone contract.

During the discussion, points included:

- Thanking officers and Ringway on their hard work throughout the year(s).
- Reassurance as to the retention of existing operatives, in particular the Parish Stewards. It was noted that they would be receiving different branded vehicles to those operatives working for Milestone Infrastructure Ltd. The importance of the Parish Stewards was emphasised due to their valued status in communities and their ability to gather intelligence and distribute information.
- The impact of climate change and adverse/volatile weather conditions on roads, and how these would affect Wiltshire Council's ability to meet the commitment to be carbon net zero by 2030 as set out in the Climate Strategy. It was explained that officers had altered the new maintenance contract with Milestone to include a scoring matrix, specific requirements/criteria to meet, and an explicit section on achieving net zero. Examples were given of moving fleets to electric vehicles, better utilisation and planning of reactive events, and reducing mileage. Benchmarks would be set up and regularly reviewed and any lessons

learnt within this new contract with Milestone would be rolled out to other contracts. Officers were comfortable that they were on the right track to meet the net zero commitment but noted the steep learning curve being experienced, and the anticipation of further advances and improvements in technology to aid this.

- The limited budget available to invest in network resistance and road maintenance.
- Standing water on carriageways was noted as being one of the biggest issues regarding worsening road conditions, thus officers were ensuring that drainage infrastructures were as efficient as possible.
- The incoming introduction of LCWHIPs (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans) which would seek to identify locations suitable for active travel schemes ready to seek funding to allow delivery. Schemes were being developed and introduced in Trowbridge, Salisbury and Chippenham thus far.
- Engagement with other departments across the Council such as Leisure Services and Public Health to encourage a mind shift among residents to undertake active travel such as walking and cycling where possible. Officers were in the process of a bid with the DFT for active travel funding, the result of which would be confirmed at the end of March 2023. Furthermore, Active Travel England would become a statutory consultee in planning from June 2023.
- LHFIGs were explained as being monitored and controlled on a local level, rather than on a strategic level, where the prioritisation and order of projects would be decided. Ongoing challenges were experienced within the LHFIGs due to insufficient resources to meet demand, such as recruitment issues, officer workloads and budgetary restraints.
- Ensuring that new developments were connected through cycle paths to bring cohesion to future active travel schemes.
- The potential to liaise and collaboratively work and coordinate projects with neighbouring Local Authorities in active travel schemes.
- The monitoring of the usage of the new active travel schemes and analysis of any data gleaned. Officers confirmed that this was something that could be undertaken and encouraged interested Members to contact them outside of the meeting for further information.
- The Street Lighting Project initially proposed a reduction from 13m kilowatt hours to 5.262m kilowatt hours and Members asked if the target remained feasible. Officers confirmed that the conversion to LED lights was almost finished and that within the new Milestone contract, further LED works would be undertaken alongside potential future rollouts for projects such as increasing the number of road sign lights. It was noted that although substantial financial savings had been made and electricity usage was decreasing, as more developments were finished, further street lights were erected and as such, the electricity bill would naturally increase and be exacerbated by the price increase per unit.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Cllr Bob Jones MBE proposed to move the recommendations which was seconded by Cllr Dr Brian Mathew. After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) The Committee endorsed the Highways Annual Review of Service and confirmed that the performance of the Council's highways contractors has been 'good' during 2022.**
- b) The Committee welcomed the results summarised in the Highways Performance Management Framework.**
- c) The Committee asked for an interim report on the Milestone contract in 6 months.**
- d) The Committee requested a report on the highways service and the Performance Management Framework in a year's time.**

19 **Housing - Allocation Review 2023**

Nicole Smith, Head of Housing, and Emma Legg, Director – Adult Social Care, presented the report on the Housing Allocation Review 2023 to the Committee.

It was explained that the Allocations Policy guided the allocation of social housing across Wiltshire. A full review was last undertaken in 2018 but minor amendments had been made since, the most recent being in January 2023. Officers wanted to make the Policy more transparent and easier to understand alongside ensuring housing those in greatest need, providing realistic expectations of being housed to those joining the Housing Register, and making the best use of Wiltshire Council's social housing stock.

Some of the details of the report were highlighted such as a 38% increase in people joining the Housing Register, particularly within the highest priority bands (Band 1 and 2) over the past three years. This was explained as being due to increases in homelessness and relief duties, and job security and house sharing concerns during Covid-19. As a result, practices had been amended to counteract the increase such as the introduction of a system whereby those seeking to join the register or experiencing housing issues liaising with a Housing Case Worker to set out alternative options and to help officers target their limited resource towards those most in need.

Homelessness was then discussed with officers noting the addition of the Tenancy Support Team focussing on preventative work such as aiding residents in increasing their income and backdating any eligible benefits. The demand for temporary accommodation had surged in recent months resulting in

the use of B&Bs for the first time in 10 years, however Members were reassured that this option was only for single residents and not families with children. Further reasons for increased temporary accommodation demand were detailed, such as a reduction in lettings from social housing providers partly due to an increase in void properties and difficulties recruiting contractors and surveyors. Additionally, larger properties were the most needed and the hardest to come by, resulting in longer waits for families to be housed, exacerbating the predicament.

During the discussion, points included:

- Unused and vacant Ministry of Defence (MoD) properties across Wiltshire and the potential to utilise these for temporary accommodation. Officers explained that after previous discussions with the MoD, it was not possible to utilise the properties in such a way, however, the MoD used a specific letting agency that officers could refer clients to for privately rented properties. Furthermore, the MoD had been lobbied by the Government to employ a portion of the vacant stock to support the housing pressures for Ukraine refugees.
- The number of void properties included in both Wiltshire Council and other social housing providers stock and what could be done to bring them back into use. Officers reiterated the national challenges experienced regarding recruitment issues and difficulties in catching up on the backlog of properties needing assessments.
- Disjoints between local homeless/rough sleeper charities and Wiltshire Council policies with regard to the provision of immediate aid such as tents, and the cyclical pattern of homelessness that some people become subject to. Officers reiterated the work that Tenancy Sustainment Officers undertook in supporting people to maximise their ability to increase their income. Furthermore, Wiltshire Council officers did not encourage the issuing of tents and instead focused on alternative options through Government initiatives and funding, homeless hostels and the 'Sit Up Service'. However, officers noted that they worked collaboratively with charities to understand where rough sleepers were situated so they could deploy officers to undertake assessments working on longer term needs and wider housing options.
- The relationship between housing providers and Wiltshire Council was explored and officers explained that housing associations were not obliged to provide the Council with information respecting the properties they were intending on selling or the number of properties being used at any one time. However, housing associations were required to submit an annual return, the data of which would be publicly available via their individual or Government webpages. Additionally, a Local Authority has the statutory responsibility for rough sleepers so although all relevant organisations work together on preventing homelessness, the ultimate responsibility lies with the Local Authority.

- Any available properties for let were explained as being advertised on the system, Homes for Wiltshire, where prospective tenants could then submit bids, following which the housing providers would then have access to limited information on those clients in order to provide tenancy.
- A task and finish group was proposed, and any interested Members were advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer for further information.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Cllr Bob Jones MBE proposed to move the recommendations which was seconded by Cllr Iain Wallis. After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) The Committee agreed to be involved in the review and development of a new Allocation Policy.**
- b) The Committee set up a task and finish group to work with Housing in the development of a revised Allocation Policy.**
- c) The Committee noted the most recent statistics for the allocation system.**

20 **Wiltshire Design Guide - Draft for Public Consultation**

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning, presented the report on the Wiltshire Design Guide Draft alongside Lynn Trigwell, Head of Natural & Historical Environment, and Sarah Valdus, Director – Environment.

It was explained that the draft Wiltshire Design Guide (WDG) was being shared with the Committee ahead of statutory public consultation with the intention of being adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The WDG was organised by the 10 characteristics of design as set out in National Guidance and was produced, as advised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), to support the delivery of consistently high-quality design standards in new developments and to set down clear expectations for development managers to refer to when at the very early stages of planning future developments. However, it was emphasised that specific aspects would vary per community and as such, Neighbourhood Plans would allow for more prescriptive designs. A second document was also noted as being produced to support the Neighbourhood Plan process in considering good design at the outset. The WDG was explained as being a cross-cutting document, developed in collaboration with multiple departments across the Council and in alignment with the objectives in the Business Plan, other key existing or new strategies such as the Climate and Core Strategies, and any other existing or new SPDs such as waste and storage.

It was noted that if a developer made the decision to stray from the WDG, they would need to provide clear explanations as to why, and if adopted as an SPD, it would carry weight in the planning process. The proposed timescale was then detailed, and Members were informed that it would be brought to the May 2023 Cabinet meeting before the four-week consultation period opened in Summer 2023. Once the comments received were considered and evaluated, and necessary amendments made, it would be brought to the October 2023 meetings of Cabinet and Full Council.

During the discussion, points included:

- Consulting with Planning Committee Chairs, Parish and Town Councils, and developers for comment.
- Officers also highlighted that the proposed timescales were dependant on the level and number of alterations gleaned from the comments gathered through the consultation.
- How the WDG would work with the Local Plan, and frustrations with continued delays to its finalisation. Cllr Botterill explained that due to continual changes impacting on its delivery, it was not feasible to put out the plan in line with previously stated timescales and instead officers had taken the time to increase its robustness, with the new intention of a draft published for Summer 2023.
- How the WDG would include links with renewable energy concerns, and meeting specifications included in the Equality Act 2010. Officers then emphasised that the WDG was concerned with built environments in alignment with the 10 design characteristics and as such, does not go into specific details on topics such as wind/solar farms, the inclusion of charging ports, or storage facilities, and Members should instead include these aspects within Neighbourhood Plans.
- The importance of transport linkages across developments such as cycling connections and the potential to enforce developers to include such networks to aid in the establishment of the LCWHIPs. Officers further emphasised that developers would be required to ensure that provisions were put in place to link with existing or emerging routes. However, if there were no routes planned then such enforcement could not be undertaken as it could run the risk of developers designing their own routes which would then go against the purpose of the WDG.
- Further concerns were raised as to the potential conflicts that could arise when planning routes that crossed through land owned by multiple people.
- Suggestion of installing utilities such as water pipes to the side of roads to minimise road closures and traffic congestions.
- If the WDG was adopted as an SPD, it would fit into the existing Wiltshire Council hierarchies and would carry considerable weight in planning matters.

- The ability for Wiltshire Council to regain some of the control lost as a result of the lack of a five-year land supply and putting the Council in a stronger, more defensible position.
- Members commended officers and Cabinet Members on their hard work in developing the WDG and welcomed its introduction wholeheartedly and noted that it was a shame that it hadn't been drafted years ago, as it would have mitigated many of the issues being faced now. However, some Members expressed hesitance as to how it would work in reality, and how it would be received by developers.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Cllr Tony Jackson proposed to move the recommendations which was seconded by Cllr Dr Nick Murry. After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) The Committee endorsed the draft Wiltshire Design Guide ahead of public consultation in early summer and:**
- b) The Committee noted the timeline for public consultation and the process by which the comments will be considered ahead of the Design Guide being formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.**
- c) The Committee requested that the Design Guide is also sent to the council's Planning Committees and parish and town councils for comment as part of the consultation process.**

21 **Leisure Services Insourcing**

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, FM, and Operational Assets, presented the report on the leisure services in-sourcing alongside David Redfern, Director – Leisure, Culture and Communities, and other officers.

The Chairman suggested that both this Agenda Item and the following, Item 10 – Libraries Development, be presented together, with all questions concerning both taken at the end of the joint presentation.

It was noted that the paper focussed on the improvement and integration of other Wiltshire Council services into leisure centres and libraries. Wider context was given to Members to provide an understanding of the scope, direction and ambition of both the library and leisure services. A substantial restructuring of the management team under David Redfern had been undertaken alongside continued Covid-19 recovery, thusly impacting on the start times of various projects. During this process, the service as a whole was reviewed in line with the Business Plan, and 5 main themes for decision making were established:

financial sustainability, contribution to public health, helping communities develop, local economy considerations, and environmental considerations. Under each of the headings, metrics were being developed to assess their performance.

Internal investments and improvements were being made as a result of the additional £11.5m allocated in the previous financial year's budget, such as the opening of the Melksham campus, and ensuring all swimming pools have modern disability access. Breakdowns of the financial data across 6 months of the project regarding leisure centres was shown alongside leisure membership information. Furthermore, it was confirmed that the leisure team were scoping opportunities for a pilot scheme to open certain leisure centres on Public Holidays.

The core statistics for library services before and during Covid-19 recovery were shown, alongside service priorities. As listed in the Agenda Pack, details for several projects and offers that align with Wiltshire Council priorities and objectives were given. It was highlighted that the Libraries Team worked with external and internal partners but there was always scope for further collaborative work. Officers expressed that by employing this new outlook and straying away from such a rigid budgetary focus and instead on delivering high-quality, integrated services that also meet financial obligations, they felt they made a difference to Wiltshire residents' lives.

During the discussion, points included:

- Congratulations were given to officers in the library team on delivering such vital and diverse services to communities.
- It was noted that officers did not have data as to the amount of warm and safe packs that had been distributed across the County, but it had been reported that more than 50 had been provided through Salisbury libraries alone and the anecdotal stories relayed to officers indicated a great level of success.
- Officers explained that unfortunately, most leisure centre data before 1 October 2021, when the in-sourcing began, was not provided by the previous supplier and therefore, long term historical analysis could not be undertaken. However, it was confirmed that the report submitted next year to the Committee would contain more individual and specific data to provide a more thorough review.
- It was explained that the metrics under the environmental considerations would look at the impact of carbon footprints more generally, not just that of the building itself but also people travelling to/accessing the sites etc.
- Officers were in the process of liaising with the Transformation Board with regard to a future facilities review, to understand the capacity needed to assess the data of existing sites and to undertake a thorough consultation with stakeholders before any decisions were made.
- Mobile library services were confirmed to be ongoing.

- Regarding the quality and pricing structures of Wiltshire Council owned leisure centres, officers stated that they felt they delivered an unbeatable service for residents in comparison to privately owned centres. This would be reinforced with the consistency and strong branding across all sites as a result of the in-sourcing.
- Officers worked in conjunction with the Communication and Marketing Teams to promote the services available to residents, particularly those most vulnerable. However, it was highlighted that marketing leisure and library services was slightly different in order to continue the development of a more sustainable model. Yet, there was always scope for improvements and Members were encouraged to contact officers if they had any suggestions.
- The importance for local leisure centre managers to become more autonomous and less reliant on direction from officers on specific aspects.
- The importance of the two services mutually benefiting each other and capitalising on existing relationships.
- The difficulties in combining leisure centre and library membership cards due to the complexity and differences between the two systems at the present time.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Cllr Tony Jackson proposed to move the recommendations which was seconded by Cllr Dr Brian Mathew. After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) **The Committee noted the Leisure Services Insourcing update and the increasing membership numbers and improving net financial position.**
- b) **The Committee noted the Library Service update, the recovery since the pandemic, and its priorities and the range of its activities.**
- c) **The Committee requested that they receive updates in 12 months' time to include further trend data, the outcome of the public holiday pilot and further information on the transformation review.**

22 **Libraries Development**

Details for this Agenda Item can be found under the previous Item 9, Leisure Services In-Sourcing.

23 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration. Cllr Tony Jackson requested an update on the Towns Programme app development which officers agreed to bring to the next meeting. Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme.

The Committee requested that an update be provided on the Wiltshire Towns Programme App Development.

24 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

25 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 6 June 2023.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 5.20 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey of Democratic Services,
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