

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 3 MARCH 2021 AT ONLINE MEETING.

Present:

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Derek Brown OBE, Cllr Peter Evans, Cllr Mike Hewitt, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Brian Mathew, Cllr Nick Murry, Cllr Steve Oldrieve, Cllr Tom Rounds and Cllr Tony Trotman

Also Present:

Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Graham Wright, Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cllr Richard Clewer and Cllr Philip Whitehead

15 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Bob Jones MBE.

16 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 January 2021 were approved.

17 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

18 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman reminded members about the timings set aside for each item on the agenda and the need to allow sufficient time to review the Committee's work between 2017-2021.

19 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

20 **COVID-19 update**

The Chairman introduced the report from the Council's Chief Executive which provided a summary of activity to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus in Wiltshire. The report was also considered by Cabinet on 2nd February 2021 and by Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee on 26th January 2021.

It was noted that all of the council's select committees would be receiving the COVID-19 update report and, to avoid duplication, members are invited to focus their questions and debate within this select committees' remit only.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Cabinet member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts & Tourism, Housing and Communities provided further in-depth detail on the Council activities undertaken and highlighted the activities of the Highways Team and Waste Team during the pandemic.

Cllr Clewer, Cllr Sturgis Cabinet member for Spatial Planning, Development Management and Property, along with his officer team responded to the following issues that were raised during the discussions:

- The impact of COVID-19 on the collection and use of Section 106 contributions from developers. Cllr Sturgis reported that the Council has good working relationships with developers and any instances where there are issues in connection with Section 106 contributions should be reported to the Director of Highways & Environment for further investigation.
- Pressure on the Discretionary Grant Scheme, the type of businesses applying for the Scheme and how the fund is coping with demand. The Director Economic Development & Planning explained that large businesses had not made a significant call on the fund, applications had mainly been received from smaller operations. Detailed information about the funds current position would be provided after the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Members and officers for attending the meeting and responding to comments and issues raised.

Resolved:

To note the update.

21 **Global Warming & Climate Emergency: Executive Response Part Two**

The Committee considered the report of Cllr Richard Clewer, Cabinet Member for Housing, Corporate Services, Arts, Heritage and Tourism and Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member for Spatial Planning, Development Management and Property responding to the findings and recommendations of the second Global Warming & Climate Emergency Task Group report which covered the Planning workstream.

The Committee were reminded that they endorsed the Task Groups report at their last meeting on 13 January 2021 and referred the findings and recommendations to the Cabinet members for comment.

Cllr Clewer and Cllr Sturgis spoke in detail about the responses provided in the report, in particular they commented on the development of key policies and strategies including the Local Plan Review, Local Transport Plan 4, the Climate Strategy, strategic approach towards the roll out of electric vehicle charging

points across the county and the development of a strategy to increase tree coverage across the county. Cllr Clewer confirmed that the Council would support carbon neutral development now rather than wait for the Local Plan to be adopted at the end of 2023.

The Committee commented on the importance of planting trees throughout the county and the willingness of community groups to be involved in this process.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting and responding to comments and issues raised.

Resolved:

- 1. To note the Executive response to the second Report of the Global Warming & Climate Emergency Task Group.**
- 2. That (as with the previous response considered on 13 January) the Executive response be referred back to the Global Warming & Climate Emergency Task Group for additional discussion and comment, with further consideration by this Committee at a future meeting.**

22 **Housing Aids and Adaptations: Final Report**

The Committee considered the final report of the Housing Aids and Adaptations Task Group which presented the findings and recommendations of the Task Group for endorsement by the Committee and referral onto the Cabinet member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts & Tourism, Housing and Communities.

The Committee noted that due to the streamlined Overview and Scrutiny (OS) arrangements operating since April 2020, the final report of the Task Group was being considered at this meeting of the Committee alongside the Executive Response.

Cllr King presented the report on behalf of the Task Group and referred to the Task Groups Terms of Reference, which highlighted the ways in which the Council could reduce the waiting time for residents with disabilities to access suitable housing. He thanked those involved in the Task Group and paid tribute to fellow Task group members for their time and work ethic during the course of the Task Group deliberations. Cllr King in reporting on the Task Group findings commented in particular on (i) the method of applying for a Disabilities Facilities Grant was overly bureaucratic, with inbuilt delays causing frustration to claimants and (ii) the questions raised by the Task group under the Adaptable and Affordable Housing Policies section of the report were not new issues, however they resulted in six recommendations at paragraph 39 of the report.

The Chair suggested that as the Executive Response would be considered as the Committee next item of business that questions should be held over until that item on the agenda.

Resolved:

- 1. To welcome the positive and proactive engagement from the Executive throughout this important review**
- 2. To consider a report in 12-18 months' time, outlining how these recommendations have been implemented by the Executive**

That the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts & Tourism, Housing and Communities considers implementing the following recommendations:

- 3. In order to ensure that a future adaptable affordable homes policy in Wiltshire is robust, efficient and delivers greater accessibility to affordable housing for disabled households, to work closely with the other local authorities, such as BANES and South Gloucestershire, who have already implemented adaptable and affordable housing policies by:**
 - a. Learning about the issues faced by these local authorities in reviewing their Local Plans**
 - b. Understanding how developers responded to the adaptable affordable housing policies put forward**
 - c. Understanding how these adaptable affordable housing policies are enforced**
 - d. Reviewing how council service areas, such as social care and revenues and benefits, have provided evidence to support a locality's need for adapted affordable housing**
- 4. In order to speed up the Disabled Facilities Grant process, from the initial Occupational Therapist's assessment through to the completion of work, to work with other local authorities to:**
 - a. Draft a document which outlines the average cost for the most commonly requested aids and adaptations – e.g. a stairlift or wet room**
- 5. In order to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care, to work closely with the Reablement team within Adult Social Care and publicise the Council's Aids and Adaptations policy, so that those seeking to return to their home are aware of the provision available**
- 6. In order to ensure that disabled households are not waiting longer than general needs households to access affordable housing, to consider operating a direct let process for Disabled applicants through the Councils Housing Allocations Policy, which would run in line with to the current banding structures. This will be developed through the Preferred Development Partnership to encourage all housing providers with stock in Wiltshire to accept direct lets of clients who have a high need for properties that are adapted or would be suitable for adaptation**

23 **Housing Aids and Adaptations: Executive Response**

The Committee considered the report of Cllr Richard Clewer, Cabinet Member for Housing, Corporate Services, Arts, Heritage and Tourism responding to the findings and recommendations of the Housing Aids and Adaptations Task Group report.

The Committee noted that due to the streamlined Overview and Scrutiny (OS) arrangements operating since April 2020, the final report of the Task Group was also considered by this Committee earlier in the meeting.

Cllr Clewer thanked those involved in the Task Group and explained that it was a good example of Scrutiny and Executive working together to formulate policy. He spoke in detail about the responses provided in the report. Cllr Gordon King, Task Group Member, thanked Cllr Clewer for his responses and the officer team who contributed towards the Task Group work.

Resolved:

- 1. To note the executive response to the Report of the Housing Aids and Adaptations Task Group**
- 2. That the Environment Select Committee consider a report in 12-18 months' time, outlining how the recommendations have been implemented by the Executive.**

24 **Environment Select Committee - legacy report (2017-2021)**

The Committee considered the report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer which highlighted the key aspects of the work undertaken by the Select Committee during the 2017-21 council and recommended topics as legacy items to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for possible inclusion in a new overview and scrutiny work programme after the elections in May 2021.

The report listed work undertaken by the Committee during the previous four years detailing its contribution towards decision making, policy development and good governance of the Council. In addition, the report detailed those topics that remained ongoing due to their significance or long-term nature of the topic.

It was proposed that (i) the Climate Change item should incorporate how the Council considers adapting to climate change and this area need to be more explicit; (ii) the impact of global warming and residential/industrial development on flooding issues in the County; and (iii) the planting of trees throughout the county.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve the Environment Select Committee's key activities and achievements 2017-21 and recommend to the Management Committee topics requiring further work, as detailed in paragraph 5**

of the report and including climate mitigation, trees and flooding in the new Council.

2. To note the next steps.

25 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

26 **Date of Next Meeting**

The Chairman thanked officers and members of the committee and those who took part in its task groups for their engagement and work over the previous years. He particularly thanked Cllr Bob Jones MBE, vice-chairman of the Select Committee.

The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting was due to take place on 15 June 2021.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 - 11.40 am)

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