

## Environment Select Committee

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**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4 JUNE 2024 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.**

**Present:**

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Mel Jacob, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Iain Wallis, and Cllr Derek Walters (Vice-Chairman)

**Also Present:**

Cllr Ian McLennan (Virtual), Cllr Nick Botterill, Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Tamara Reay, Cllr Jonathon Seed (Virtual), and Cllr Graham Wright (Virtual)

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**28 Election of the Chairman 2024/25**

Nominations were sought for a Chairman for the forthcoming year. On the nomination of Councillor Iain Wallis, seconded by Councillor Derek Walters, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee elected Councillor Jerry Kunkler as Chairman of the Environment Select Committee for the forthcoming year 2024-25.**

**29 Election of the Vice-Chairman 2024/25**

Nominations were sought for a Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year. On the nomination of Councillor Richard Budden, seconded by Councillor Iain Wallis, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee elected Councillor Derek Walters as Vice-Chairman of the Environment Select Committee for the forthcoming year 2024-25.**

**30 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Charles McGrath

- Councillor Stuart Wheeler

It was further noted that Councillor Ian McLennan would be joining the meeting remotely.

31 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Chairman explained that the minutes from the previous meeting held on 20 March 2024 would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee alongside the minutes of this meeting held on 4 June 2024.

32 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

33 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman drew attention to the document attached to the Agenda Pack titled "Procedural Document" which listed a number of standard scrutiny questions that could be applied to almost any topic that a Scrutiny Committee may encounter. As such, the Chairman encouraged Members to make use of the document and explained that it would be included for Members' reference in all future Environment Select Committee agendas.

Furthermore, the Chairman noted that the order of the agenda would be amended to accommodate conflicting work commitments; therefore, Agenda Item 11, Updates from Task Groups and Representatives on Programme Boards, would be brought forward and considered before Agenda Item 8, Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL).

34 **Public Participation**

The Chairman announced that a statement had been submitted by Mr Tony Blighe regarding Warminster Sports Centre and invited Mr Blighe to present his statement to the Committee.

Members highlighted that they felt the statement had raised issues that needed further scrutiny and suggested that the matter be included within the Forward Work Programme for the next meeting as a matter of urgency considering the timescales detailed.

## 35 **Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL)**

Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, presented a verbal update to the Committee alongside Parvis Khansari, Director – Place, and Nic Thomas, Director – Planning.

It was explained that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL) had originally been introduced with the intention to replace Section 106 agreements to provide a more robust and transparent way of yielding development contributions. As a result of the recent Corporate Peer Challenge, it was highlighted that it was crucial that the Council aligned all processes in order to utilise the different investments and resources provided for maximum strategic gain and to have rigorous thought into how the CiL was used.

Officers were undertaking reviews into how investments were allocated; do the procedures meet strategic objectives and are they fit for purpose. The current decision-making process had been identified as impractical due to the irregularity of CiL requests, therefore a more dynamic process was necessary in order to respond to demand. Furthermore, it had been found that there had been instances in which allocations of CiL to schemes had not been fully delivered for a significant amount of time, therefore officers were looking to better monitor CiL and other planning incomes to ensure that timely allocation information was available for Members and officers.

Finally, it was highlighted that officers were reviewing the different rate of funding devolution processes in which part of the CiL income was allocated to Town and Parish Councils depending on the progress of their Neighbourhood Plans. Upon review, it had been noted that it was not clear how or if the funding had been spent, therefore officers were seeking to better understand how best to devolve the funding to Town and Parish Councils equally and fairly, and to improve communications between Wiltshire Council and Town and Parish Councils in respect of CiL allocations to enable more informative and effective discussions and plans.

Finally, officers noted that an internal audit for Section 106 processes was undertaken in 2023 which had led to a number of recommendations that officers were in the process of implementing; one of which being how the Council negotiate and secure funding for contributions from developers. As such, officers were looking to continue reviewing the topic in parallel to the CiL review for a better aligned strategic direction.

During the discussion, points included:

- It was explained that the legislation in relation to allocations of CiL to Town and Parish Councils was laid down by Central Government, therefore the Council was limited in which it could control. However, it was noted that the Government had consulted on significant changes

and reform in the area, therefore if there were any specific concerns and/or suggestions, these could be inputted into any consultations.

- Town and Parish Councils had a less restrictive framework in respect of how or when they spent CiL and Members highlighted the importance of maintaining funding at that level and encouraging Town and Parish Councils to spend CiL on what their communities needed and what they felt was most appropriate. However, it was acknowledged that visibility and transparency of funds at that level was an issue and Members noted that encouraging Town and Parish Councils to be more visible could encourage more effective implementation and value for money. Officers echoed this and recognised that the Council needed to support Town and Parish Councils throughout the process.
- It was further explained that Section 106 agreements were specific to developments and CiL was more targeted at the cumulative effect of developments which developers could not influence; as such, CiL was a strategic investment that could be used in a number of different ways. Previous budget reports showed that CiL had been historically allocated to Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Groups, however it was highlighted that this was at the discretion of Cabinet.
- Officers were congratulated on their approach and thanked for the update.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- 1) **Noted the update.**
- 2) **Requested the Community Infrastructure Levy Review Report by the end of 2024.**

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

Councillor Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Military-Civilian Integration, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, and Tourism, introduced the report alongside Victoria Moloney, Head of Economy and Regeneration.

A brief overview of the nine workstreams was detailed as per Paragraphs 12 – 24 of the report, with particular reference to the Explore Wiltshire Trails App, the Explore Wiltshire Events Progressive Web App, and the Vibrant Wiltshire Scheme.

During the discussion, points included:

- It was explained that officers were undertaking a lot of footfall analysis to understand public behaviours and it was noted that the majority of towns were returning to pre-pandemic levels of footfall. It was acknowledged that although the high streets were active, there would be continued shifts over time, therefore it was important that officers understood which towns would maintain footfall and which towns may need alternative strategies. Furthermore, it was noted that a lot of the smaller high streets were still in the recovery stage rather than the newer market patterns of a post-covid landscape. As such, these transition towns would require structural change which was recognised within the programme with officers identifying which towns needed additional support to address those challenges. However, it was highlighted that the most progress was being made with Town and Parish Councils that actively engaged with the programme.
- It was noted that the initial footfall data gleaned provided a snapshot in time, but allowed for a benchmark for those towns who had the biggest retail sectors. As such, monthly reports were developed for each town and officers had trained Town and Parish Councils on how to understand and best use those reports.
- Visit Wiltshire was raised, and it was confirmed that regular meetings were continuing to be undertaken to discuss how all partners and organisations could collectively support the tourism economy. Officers were additionally looking at legacy agreements, structures, and partnership to ensure that best marketing practice was embedded in Town and Parish Councils.
- The importance of events as a powerful driver was highlighted and officers explained that due to the volume of events across Wiltshire, there was not enough resources to include them all within the Explore Wiltshire Events app upon launch. As such, the larger events with links to town centres were currently being prioritised, however it was emphasised that work would continue with Town and Parish Councils and trusted partners to start including smaller events in the future.
- The barriers associated with encouraging the public to use the two apps and visit different areas across Wiltshire were observed, and it was explained that the Explore Wiltshire Events platform would operate as both a mobile app and a website so that the public could also access the site through a browser. Additionally, officers were making use of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and were working with the Highways and Transport Department by investing in Demand Responsive Transport to expand the network and enhance accessibility to towns, services, and employment.
- It was explained that under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund officers were in the process of designing and launching a programme called 'Rural Hubs' which centred on support for rural enterprises to ensure that they

had the ability to access a different kind of support to that of a commercial town centre business.

- Due to the complexity of the landscape, it was acknowledged that bespoke support was needed for those Town and Parish Councils who were less familiar with the different practices' officers were advising and that it would take time to embed these alongside providing the appropriate infrastructure necessary.
- Members commended officers on their hard work and the progress being made, and Members were encouraged to contact officers if they had any further suggestions or feedback.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- 1) Noted the update.**
- 2) Requested a further update in 12 months' time.**
- 3) Requested that information on footfall data be brought to a future meeting as a Part II item.**

**37 Update on Broadband Provision in Wiltshire**

Victoria Moloney, Head of Economy and Regeneration, updated the Committee on the progress being made in supporting the delivery of broadband provision across Wiltshire.

The background to the programme was briefly detailed as per Paragraphs 2 – 8 of the report, and Members were informed of the £18.8m contract awarded to Wessex Internet to provide approximately 14,500 hard-to-reach premises in South Wiltshire with access to gigabit-capable broadband. Furthermore, the North Wiltshire project remained in the procurement cycle with Building Digital UK in which work was progressing on cross regional connectivity solutions to assess which providers would have the ability to undertake the build. As such, further announcements were expected by the end of the year.

It was highlighted that as Wiltshire had two Project Gigabit contracts for the North and South of Wiltshire respectively, there was the possibility that a few Wiltshire properties would be eligible for a Project Gigabit voucher. Finally, it was explained that conversations were progressing in respect of the Shared Rural Network “not spots” surrounding mobile connectivity by which the main four mobile infrastructure providers share rural infrastructure to ensure

maximum coverage. It was noted that some areas had already been identified and further updates would be reported in the coming months.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members were informed that the decommissioning of the copper network had been postponed until approximately 2027 because the build had not been completed to the level anticipated. However, Members were encouraged to approach officers with specific postcodes they were interested in as officers would be able to identify if they were classified as being eligible for public subsidy or if there was a private build being planned.
- Officers were working with Building Digital UK (BDUK) to confirm which properties would be connected by the private sector and to establish accurate information in order to identify which properties may need to be considered within the public provision if necessary.
- It was explained that once the North Wiltshire contract was confirmed, officers would be able to understand the scale of how many properties would not be covered under the two contracts. Furthermore, the operational plan for South Wiltshire was due to be submitted and approved by September 2024, therefore officers would have a better sense of the gap in provision at that time and could then address accordingly.
- It was noted that there had been related projects in Wiltshire that had taken a non-standard approach to broadband infrastructure, yet it was highlighted that only once the scope of the shortfall had been identified could other technologies be considered. It was further emphasised that the Government looked to suppliers to decide on the most appropriate technologies, with fibre being the current endorsed method.
- Officers noted that powers to enforce were a consistent policy discussion with regard to situations where residents were not eligible for provision through no fault of their own, but further information on this topic could be discussed outside of the meeting.
- Members were encouraged to pass any enquiries to [broadband@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:broadband@wiltshire.gov.uk).
- Officers were thanked for their continued work and commitment to supporting residents throughout the delivery of the project.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- 1) **Noted the update.**
- 2) **Noted the future delivery plans across Wiltshire.**

### 3) Requested an update in 12 months' time.

## 38 Updates from Task Groups and Representatives on Programme Boards

Councillor Jonathon Seed, Chairman of the Speed Limit Assessments Task Group, presented an update on the Task Group since 20 March 2024.

The recent activities of the Task Group were detailed, namely:

- A meeting on 26 March 2024 in which the Task Group looked at the recently revised Department for Transport guidance 'Setting Local Speed Limits' (March 2024). A small number of recent speed limit assessment reports were also reviewed alongside a list of speed limit assessments over the last 18 months provided by the Highways and Transport Department.
- A meeting with AtkinsRealis and Highways Officers on 20 May 2024 to look at the role of external consultants and the compiling of evidence for the development of speed assessments. Particular focus was given to the use of community information, the interpretation of the Department for Transport guidance, the use of collision data, and the consideration of vulnerable road users.
- A meeting on 23 May 2024 with several Chairmen from Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Groups who had requested speed limit assessments in the past 18 months in order to understand their experience of undertaking the assessments.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the Task Group looked at both accident hotspot data and Wiltshire Council's approach to speed limit assessments in comparison to other Local Authorities in a broader sense rather than particular specifics. Furthermore, it was explained that the Task Group were focussing on the perceived lack of transparency in the investigation and assessment of applications and appeals, particularly in those cases where the results don't meet the expectations of those who apply for them.

Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group, then presented an update on the Task Group since 20 March 2024.

The recent activities of the Task Group were detailed, namely:

- A meeting on 15 March 2024 in which the Task Group reviewed the consultation process and responses for the Air Quality Action Plan 2024-29. The Task Group welcomed the increase in monitoring and that air quality was improving, but raised other air quality concerns, not created by vehicles such as wood burning stoves and fire pits.



- The Wessex Community Energy Network Event on 16 May 2024 which was attended by the Chairman and explored opportunities to engage with local communities in creating, saving, and sharing energy.

In response to questions regarding further understanding of the issues being explored and relevant schemes such as the Tree and Woodland Programme, Members were encouraged to attend any meetings of the Task Group and provide feedback and suggestions to be considered in the Task Group's Forward Work Plan.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- 1) **Noted the update on the Task Group activity provided above.**
- 2) **Re-appointed the Climate Emergency Task Group and the Membership listed in the report, with the commencement of the 2024-25 Council year.**
- 3) **Noted the activity of the Climate Emergency Task Group (June 2023 – June 2024) in Appendix 1.**
- 4) **Noted the Climate Emergency Task Group's draft Forward Work Plan in Appendix 2.**

39 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

As per the discussions under Agenda Item 7, Members requested that the Warminster Sports Centre be included within the Forward Work Programme.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme, with the inclusion of a report regarding the Warminster Sports Centre.**

40 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

41 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 18 July 2024.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.30 pm)

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