

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 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 Ian McLennan, Cllr Dr Nick Murry, Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Stuart Wheeler, and Cllr Stewart Palmen (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Derek Walters (Vice-Chairman) (Virtual), Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Andrew Davis, Cllr Nick Holder, Cllr Dominic Muns, Cllr Tamara Reay (Virtual), Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Jonathon Seed, and Cllr Graham Wright

42 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Dr Brian Mathew MP, who was substituted by Councillor Stewart Palmen
- Councillor Charles McGrath

It was further noted that Councillor Derek Walters would be joining the meeting remotely.

43 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 20 March and 4 June 2024 were considered. Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meetings held on 20 March and 4 June 2024 as a true and correct record.

44 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

45 **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.

46 **Public Participation**

The Chairman announced that a statement had been submitted by Mr Tony Blighe regarding Agenda Item 7, Leisure Strategy and the Warminster Project, and invited Mr Blighe to present his statement to the Committee.

47 **Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024-2030**

David Redfern, Director – Leisure, Culture, and Communities, delivered a presentation on the Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024 – 2030, alongside Tamzin Earley, Arts and Funding Manager, and Paul Pritchard, Service Manager – Development.

It was explained that Wiltshire Council had not previously developed a Council Cultural Strategy since its formation in 2009. As such, the Council had commissioned the development of a strategy with financial support from the Arts Council England. Officers were keen to develop a strategy that served the entire county and worked as an enabling tool that supported the delivery of arts and culture and yielded the wider benefits of related activities, such as enhancing the county's natural heritage and landscape, improving the mental health and wellbeing of residents, and creating resilient and vibrant communities.

A set of presentation slides were delivered which detailed the background to the strategy, why the strategy was necessary, the progress made to date, the strategy's visions, principles, and main themes, and next steps. Members were informed that officers had initially identified 5 key themes, however through stakeholder conversations and the engagement process, this had increased to 7 key themes which were: Identity; Health and Wellbeing; Community; Economy; Tourism; Communicate; and Connect.

Finally, it was noted that the next steps included corporate endorsement and continued conversations with designers to ensure that the strategy was delivered efficiently. Furthermore, the Cultural Partnership was highlighted as being the delivery mechanism for the strategy, therefore officers emphasised the importance of widening local partnerships and the development of the Council's Cultural Forum in which key officers from across the Council would work in tandem to help shape the strategy. Members were informed that officers

were looking to launch the strategy in Autumn 2024 at the first Cultural Assembly.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members queried what additional Council resources would be needed to deliver the strategy and where would they come from, to which officers acknowledged the limited capacity available which was why the mechanisms put in place as part of the strategy were focussed on bringing stakeholders together in order to share the delivery of the strategy.
- Members recognised the value in creating, supporting, and bringing together groups of people, however the limited financial means denoted to the strategy was highlighted. As such, Members raised concerns as to the strategy's success without adequate funding and sought further clarity on if future investments could be obtained or if additional officer provision could be deployed to support different stakeholders in administrative tasks or coordination of events. In response, officers again recognised the financial limitations, but noted that as part of the strategy's next steps, at least one more full-time equivalent role would be recruited to assist with delivery, and that officers had worked hard over the past couple of years in engaging with arts partners and identifying where the Council could help and support those partners. Furthermore, officers believed that raising the profile of the strategy would help in driving it forward, therefore Members were encouraged to promote the strategy within their local communities. Finally, it was highlighted that by having the strategy in place, if funding became available then officers would be better positioned to capture investment opportunities as oftentimes part of the process of writing a funding bid required Councils to demonstrate how the bid would contribute to a broader strategy, hence adding immediate value to any future applications.
- It was suggested that the environment and climate change be added as a key theme as it was felt that there were opportunities to show how arts and culture activities could enable the Council's climate change ambitions, influence culture in supporting and responding to the new and urgent challenges faced with regard to the rapidly changing climate, empower residents and businesses in understanding the impacts of climate change, and how to take positive actions within communities to prepare for the impacts of climate change. Officers echoed those sentiments and noted that they had attended events and workshops around the ability of the arts in raising the profile of the climate challenge.
- Members highlighted the need to promote and encourage existing cultures and appreciating what was already within their local communities by supporting and working each other.
- The importance of public engagement was raised, and it was noted that the cultural partnership would allow officers to understand good practice in organising arts and culture events and allow them to share these across the partnership.

- Finally, it was reiterated that the strategy was funded by both the Arts Council England and the Economy and Regeneration Team within the Council, therefore the strategy was also focussed on economic regeneration as well as arts, culture, health and wellbeing.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Councillors Dr Nick Murry, Stewart Palmen, and Mel Jacob proposed further recommendations in respect of including the environment and climate as a key theme and requesting the attachment of a budget to the strategy. Following a vote on the motion, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- 1) **Endorsed the Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024 – 2030.**
- 2) **Requested that there was a budget attached to the Strategy.**
- 3) **Requested the Climate and Environment was added as a Key Theme.**
- 4) **Acknowledged the Action Plan that was being proposed.**
- 5) **Requested a report on the delivery of the Strategy in 18 months' time.**

Councillors Tony Jackson and Stuart Wheeler requested that their votes against Resolution 3 be recorded.

48 **Leisure Strategy and the Warminster Project**

Councillor Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries, introduced the report alongside David Redfern, Director – Leisure, Culture, and Communities.

The background to the report was explained as per the Executive Summary and Paragraphs 2 to 7 of the report, and Members were reminded that the additional investments into the leisure service were intended as a means to modernise Wiltshire's leisure centres to maximise income and support public health objectives. It was noted that within the leisure service, Wiltshire were bucking the national trend with both its financial position and the maintenance of service delivery which officers noted could only be continued by making well informed decisions based on the Business Plan and sound evidence. As such, officers were continuing to strive for the right balance between sustainability gains, cost effectiveness, and benefits to wider public health.

Members were given an insight into the multi-levelled decision-making process that was followed in respect of pipeline projects and the subsequent framework that supported David Redfern as the Director for Leisure, Culture, and

Communities and decision-making authority. A series of slides were then presented which detailed the importance of fitness memberships through income, and the proportion of income related to squash specifically, the latent demand for the sites across Wiltshire, and which sites could benefit from further investment opportunities. Members were then shown the public squash court availability in comparison to a selection of other Local Authorities, public squash court usage in Wiltshire from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, and quotes from Sports England “Active Live Surveys” 2023 and 2024 in respect of squash.

Finally, Members were shown the assessment findings for investment options to improve sustainability and increase participation with regard to Warminster Sports Centre, and then the usage of the sports centre itself.

During the discussion, points included:

- The distance between Warminster and the next closest squash courts in Westbury, and the transport links between the two was raised when considering those members of the public who couldn’t drive. In response, it was noted that officers needed to focus on what was financially viable to the Council and what would have the biggest impact for the future.
- Members from Warminster Area Board attended the meeting and expressed their support for the decision and the subsequent improvements that were planned for the Warminster Sports Centre.
- Members thanked officers for their hard work, clear and thorough presentation, and the quick turnaround on the report.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- 1) Noted the Strategy for Leisure, alongside the framework for decision making.**
- 2) Noted the response from the Director of Leisure, Culture, and Communities on the public statement made at the 4 June 2024 meeting of the Committee around the specific project in Warminster.**
- 3) Thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their comprehensive report.**

49 **Speed Limit Assessments Task Group Final Report**

Councillor Jonathon Seed, Chairman of the Speed Limit Assessments Task Group, introduced the report alongside Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, and Dave Thomas, Head of Highways Asset Management and Commissioning.

Members were reminded of the aims and background to the creation of the Task Group as per Paragraphs 2 to 4 of the report. Members were then informed that the Task Group were proposing 7 recommendations, all which were unanimously supported by all Members that had attended the last 2 meetings of the Task Group, and which were intended to help explain the policy and process, standardise the process, capture and use all of the relevant evidence, publish the data with recommendations, and create an open, evidence-based appeals process for challenging speed assessment outcomes.

The different areas that the Task Group considered were briefly detailed as per the report such as speed data, road environment, and speed limit assessment reports, and it was emphasised that one of the main issues identified had been the disparity between how the Speed Data Guidance issued by the Department for Transport was being interpreted and applied by different Local Authorities across the Country.

Finally, the Members and officers who had supported the Task Group were thanked for their time, expertise, and hard work.

During the discussion, points included:

- Road safety concerns around Wiltshire in general, and how the National Speed Limit was not appropriate on a number of Wiltshire's more rural roads was raised. It was also suggested that the Task Group could have looked at alternative methodologies of setting speed limits, component elements of speed management, and more modern vehicle engineering and designs. In response, it was emphasised that the Task Group's Terms of Reference did not invite Members to consider a wider review of speed limits in Wiltshire or further examinations of road safety which were more within the remit of Central Government policy.
- It was noted that there were specific roads within the network that were the subject of recurring requests for speed limit assessments, and it was therefore queried whether the Council could create a map which showed over time those roads that had already been assessed and a record of those speed limit assessment outcomes.
- Finally, Members commended the report and the hard work undertaken by the Task Group.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- 1) Endorsed the report of the Task Group and referred it to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding for a response at the next meeting of the Committee on 3 September 2024.**

2) Requested an additional recommendation so that completed Speed Assessments were mapped/collated and published.

Councillor Richard Budden requested that his vote against the motion be recorded.

50 Updates from Task Groups and Representatives on Programme Boards

Councillor Dr Nick Murry, on behalf of Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group, presented an update on the Task Group since 4 June 2024.

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

- A meeting on 28 June 2024 in which the Task Group were briefed on the emerging Tree & Woodland Strategy. Members welcomed the strategy but encouraged the Council to implement it as soon as possible and queried how the strategy would be funded, how the entire tree, woodland, and hedgerow programme was being communicated more widely, and how the strategy fitted with the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, and the Council's use of its own estate.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee:

- 1) Noted the updated on the Task Group activity provided.**
- 2) Noted the Climate Emergency Task Group's draft Forward Work Plan in Appendix 1.**

51 Forward Work Programme

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme.

52 Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

53 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 3 September 2024.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 3.40 pm)

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