

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2010 AT COMMITTEE ROOM III, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Cllr Chuck Berry, Cllr Rosemary Brown, Cllr Trevor Carbin (Reserve), Cllr Peter Colmer, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Mollie Groom (Chairman), Cllr Alan Hill, Cllr Charles Howard (Reserve), Cllr Chris Humphries, Cllr Tom James MBE, Cllr Ian McLennan and Cllr Leo Randall

Also Present:

Cllr Howard Greenman, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr George Jeans and Cllr Dick Tonge

101. Apologies and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Doyle, Cllr Nigel Carter and Cllr Stephen Oldrieve.

Cllr Charles Howard substituted for Cllr Peter Doyle. Cllr Trevor Carbin substituted for Cllr Stephen Oldrieve.

102. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 September 2010 were signed and approved as a correct record with the following amendment:

- i) Cllr Tom James to be added as an attendee.
- ii) To note apologies were received from Cllr Jose Green.
- iii) The following additional wording to be included under Item 96 – Climate Change Strategy/Carbon Management Plan:

That the strategy should include a section on what help/advice/expectations the Council had on individual residents and the part that they can play.

That the purchasing strategy should include Wiltshire Council's expectations of partner strategies.

iv) That the last bullet point should be amended to read:

The importance of departmental action plans should be clearly stated within the Strategy and the plans should clearly indicate those whose responsibility it is to deliver the action required.

103. **Declarations of Interests**

No declarations of interest were received.

104. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Organisation & Resources Select Committee at its last meeting on 16 September 2010 disbanded the Budget and Performance Task Group. Responsibility for monitoring the Neighbourhood and Planning Budget would now fall within the remit of this Committee.

The Chairman's approach would be to continue to monitor the progress reports submitted to Cabinet and report by exception to the Committee.

105. **Public Participation**

Eric Mitchell, Chairman of Mere Parish Council, attended the meeting to express his concern over the proposed changes in parking charges and the impact this could have on the local community of Mere. This included the potential impact on trade within the Parish.

Cllr George Jeans, Wiltshire Councillor for the Mere Division, was also in attendance to express his concern over the proposed changes and provided clarification that residents of Mere had sent approximately half the consultation responses which voiced their concerns including the potential impact on trade with small communities.

106. **Future Direction of Neighbourhood and Planning**

The Corporate Director Neighbourhood and Planning attended the meeting to provide an outline of the priorities and challenges faced by the Department following the well publicised comprehensive spending review announced by central government.

Key issues arising included that the year ahead would prove challenging for both the Department and the Council as a whole, with budgetary cuts of 28% expected over the next 4 years although confirmed that the organisation was well placed to face the challenges in comparison to other public sector bodies.

Key projects under consideration for the forthcoming year included waste collection and leisure services where further comment was provided as follows:

- Waste

The waste collection service was being reviewed in order to ensure residents within Wiltshire received a better service. The review would allow Wiltshire to improve its waste management, including recycling, in a cost effective manner. Good communication would be a key element to ensure the public were kept informed of the new arrangements.

As the landfill tax was likely to increase the Council was looking to develop alternatives to waste disposal. The Council now had access to a waste disposal plant in Slough. Discussions were also taking place regarding the use of a mechanical biological treatment plant in Westbury which, if successful, would significantly reduce residual landfill.

The relatively small amount of waste within Wiltshire (Wiltshire generated approximately 25k tonnes, significantly lower than neighbouring authorities) would not justify the costs that would be incurred to build waste sites themselves. Collaborative partnerships with neighbouring authorities were considered a more cost effective approach and further work was being done in this area.

- Leisure

The Council inherited a portfolio of leisure centres following the amalgamation of the former District Councils within the Wiltshire county in April 2009. The service was currently being revised where usage, cost effectiveness and value for money would be considered.

Various proposals were being discussed following the end of the consultation period at the end of October. A report was expected to be presented to Cabinet in December where options on the appropriate direction of leisure services would be further considered.

As the Council was reviewing how it managed Council owned property through its Workplace Transformation Programme there was potential for further partnership working with 'campus' style facilities that could house several public services and which would result in cost savings.

Street Scene (who were responsible for amenities, ground and routine highways maintenance) would also be reviewed to ensure the most affective service was provided. The Street Scene Area Managers would be responsible for running the service and would provide a coordination role of works to be undertaken. The Area Managers would also attend local Area Board meetings to ensure the work of the Street Scene teams was widely communicated.

The current economic situation had affected housing in both the public and private sector with an increase in the number of people presenting themselves

as homeless. This had resulted in extra pressure on housing staff to find appropriate accommodation in light of the countrywide housing shortage. Although the Housing Departments had successfully reduced the use of B&B accommodation to 0% it was now likely that, due to the increased numbers, this may no longer be achievable. There was also an emphasis on improving the housing management service in the south of the County.

A lean review had taken place within the Planning department to address the need to amalgamate the 5 existing services across the County and the benefits that could be achieved. Work had already commenced in this area with the procurement of a single IT system to assist with the harmonisation of the service. Discussions were underway to ensure the transfer from Local Plans to a single Core Strategy would result in one clear set of policies that would enable all Planners to consider with any application received across the County.

National changes to the planning system had also taken place whilst the Core Strategy was being developed. This had resulted in a delay in progress whilst regional housing numbers were being set and the powers that local authorities would have announced.

The development of the forward planning policies had also been delayed until early 2011 following the release of further details within the Localism Bill expected in December 2010.

Following the details provided the following comments were provided:

- Parish Council involvement in waste collection should be explore.
- Recycling facilities should be given consideration as part of the waste review on waste transfer sites.
- As it was understood the average cost of the leisure services subsidy equated to approximately £150 per user, details of the cost per user per building would allow the Committee a better understanding of the cost of leisure facilities provided.
- The cost of maintenance may impact on the viability of facilities within rural locations.
- Consideration should be given to the potential of a 'change of use' in relation to some of the authorities existing buildings. The current housing shortage could perhaps be improved upon by exploring this area further.
- It was understood that a proposal had been made to the Secretary of State from the Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the results of which were yet to be confirmed. A bid submission by the Council continued to be developed in the meantime.

Resolved:

To thank the Corporate Director for Neighbourhood and Planning and note the update provided.

107. **Review of Local Transport Plan - Car Parking Strategy**

The Committee considered a report in January 2010 which set out the proposed methodology and timescale for reviewing the Local Transport Plan – Parking Plan. Upon consideration the Committee resolved to receive a further update prior to the Plan’s submission to Cabinet in December 2010.

The Cabinet Member for Parking and the Team Leader – Transport Planning were in attendance to provide an overview of the consultation process and provided details of the presentation made to all Area Boards.

Clarification was provided that an option to be considered was the ability of Town and Parish Councils to take over the responsibility of car parking management on a lease basis estimated to run for two year periods. The maintenance costs associated per individual car park currently equated to approximately £5k with details of the full operational costs would be made available to those Councils considering the option.

The review had been undertaken to develop a consistent approach to car parking throughout the County. The review took into consideration the new national, regional and local policies and would assist with the framework for developers to highlight the parking standards required. Neighbouring authority plans had also been considered as part of the review.

The consultation itself included the use of a web portal to allow encourage the public to provide comment throughout the process. Letters to Town and Parish Councils providing details of the options under consideration were also circulated. In addition, the Transport Plan was used to identify a further 8,000 contacts to encourage participation in the consultation process.

In terms of the feedback received, the general concept of banding Towns had been supported although there was some disagreement with the proposed banding itself, i.e. that a specific Town should not be included within a given band. A number of residents did not agree with any of the 3 options provided although the majority supported the idea of conventional charges.

A fundamental review on charges would be conducted in 5 years although annual reviews would be undertaken to ensure the Plan remained appropriate and in line with other authorities.

Although new housing developments adhered to the current policy position of a set number of parking spaces in relation to a set number of properties, the Committee supported a change to reflect the minimum parking standards.

The Committee noted that parking charges as a whole were lower in Wiltshire than many neighbouring authorities and that parking management needed to be the focus of any resulting plan. Accordingly, the review provided an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to manage parking themselves which would allow flexibility on the level of charges, if any, to impose.

Members of the Committee felt that the responses received via the Area Board consultations did not clearly reflect the 18 different sources of feedback received. Clarification was provided that the comments would be noted and that the resulting report for Cabinet approval would include Area Board feedback.

It was also proposed that the Area Boards would be the appropriate platforms to inform the public of the decisions made.

In relation to the consultation process itself, members questioned whether the process had contributed to the poor response.

A motion was received to recommend that the Cabinet Member 'embrace' the localism agenda and recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate. Each Town/Parish Council should negotiate with Wiltshire Council individually within a Council led accounting framework.

Upon vote the motion was not passed although it was noted that Councillors reserved the right to submit a minority report within the next 10 days of the decision made.

Following the meeting a minority report was received which is duly attached to these minutes as Appendix 1.

Resolved:

To congratulate the Cabinet member on the work undertaken and note the update provided and request that the comments made are taken into consideration by the Cabinet member prior to the final report's submission to Cabinet.

108. **Housing PFI**

Following a request made at the previous Committee meeting held in September, an update on the Housing PFI Project was presented by the Project Manager. The Portfolio Holder for Housing was also in attendance to answer any questions arising.

Clarification was provided that although sign off of the project was expected in December there was potential for a delay until January prior to the decision

being made by the National Audit Office where approximately 82 schemes were under consideration.

As Wiltshire had over 12,000 people on the housing register at present the additional 350 affordable homes resulting from the PFI would significantly benefit the County. Where other developments arose consideration would be given to identify affordable housing to further address the housing shortage within Wiltshire.

The Committee was informed that the cut in social housing funding from £8.4 billion to £4.5 billion across the Country was also likely to further impact on local authorities'.

The impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review was expected to be known by mid November where it was hoped that the decision to cease grant based funding for affordable rents would not impact on the existing PFI projects under consideration. Details arising out of the forthcoming Localism Bill were also hoped to provide further clarity in terms of affordable housing.

Resolved:

To note the update provided.

109. **Leisure Facility Review**

A report from the Corporate Director for Transport, Environment and Leisure was presented to the Committee in January 2010 and contained details of the work undertaken to develop the Leisure Facilities Strategy as approved by Cabinet on 24 November 2009.

Following consideration of the report by the Cabinet Member for Leisure the Committee subsequently resolved to receive a further update on progress made prior to approval by Cabinet and following the detailed public consultation exercise undertaken which had closed at the end of October.

The Head of Leisure Services and Cabinet Member for Leisure attended the meeting to provide the Committee with further details on the consultation process and details of the draft proposals expected to be considered by Cabinet in December 2010.

A generic copy of the presentation made to each of the Area Boards as part of the consultation process was circulated with the Agenda and the following additional information was provided.

There were approximately 2,300 responses to the questionnaires circulated and officers were considering all of the responses provided. The findings to date included that only 3% of respondents felt that Wiltshire Council should not continue to manage the facilities.

The consultation was widely advertised which included details provided in the Council's 'Wiltshire' magazine and roadshows undertaken to encourage participation. The roadshow held at Pewsey Car Park attracted more than 200 attendees alone, 83% of which had indicated that parking charges would deter users, although there was no evidence to suggest this was the case.

Although it was understood that some schools were obliged to allow the community use of their leisure facilities, it was noted that the hours made available in some situations did not reflect the best use of the facilities themselves. Members felt that this area may benefit from further scrutiny activity.

It was hoped that academies would also adhere to the protocol of allowing facilities to be used by the public.

The campus at Tidworth was highlighted as a good example of shared services, where both leisure facilities and library facilities were contained within one building.

The potential to transfer assets was being considered where local communities would be given the option to manage facilities locally. Members noted the importance of full details of operational costs being made available to those parties interested in taking over the facilities and clarification was provided that this would take place once any discussion had reached an appropriate stage. Declarations of interest only were being considered at this stage. The transfer of facilities would take place over the next 4 years where full operational details would be provided.

Resolved:

To note the update provided and request that the comments made by the Committee are taken into consideration by the Cabinet Member.

110. Task Group/Project Board Updates

An update on the work of the Task Groups and Project Boards with scrutiny representation was provided with the Agenda. The following additional information was provided:

Waste Task Group

A report by the Corporate Director Department of Neighbourhood and Planning to implement new, harmonised waste and recycling collection services across the County was considered by Cabinet on 19 October 2010.

The Committee noted that the recommendations made within the report were approved by Cabinet.

Housing Commission Board

The update provided was noted with the following amendment:

Key Progress Area – Item (e) should read ‘the Environment Select Committee to note’ and not ‘to endorse’ as written.

111. **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme provided.

The Programme would be amended to reflect today’s discussions.

In addition to the above, further discussion took place in relation to the Council’s consultation process. The Committee felt that the process may benefit from further scrutiny although acknowledged that the Environment Select Committee would not be the appropriate forum.

112. **Date of next Meeting**

11 January 2011.

113. **Urgent Items**

No urgent items were considered.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.00 pm)

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