

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2016 AT KENNET ROOM- COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JQ..

Present:

Cllr Peter Edge (Vice Chairman in the Chair), Cllr Trevor Carbin (Substitute), Cllr Brian Dalton, Cllr Dennis Drewett, Cllr Peter Evans, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Magnus Macdonald, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr James Sheppard, Cllr Tony Trotman and Cllr Philip Whalley (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Cllr Alan MacRae and Cllr Philip Whitehead

65 Apologies

Apologies were received from Chairman Cllr Bridget Wayman who was substituted by Cllr Philip Whalley.

Apologies were also received from Cllr Rosemary Brown who was substituted by Cllr Trevor Carbin.

Further apologies were also received from Cllr Mike Hewitt and Cllr Jacqui Lay.

66 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the last meeting of Tuesday 25th October 2016 were presented to the committee for consideration and they were agreed as a true and accurate account.

Resolved

Minutes were signed by the Vice Chairman Cllr Peter Edge.

67 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

68 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman informed the committee of the adoption of the Supplementary Planning Document 'Waste storage and collection: guidance for developers' was considered at the 15th November Cabinet meeting. Further questions on the document were asked to be directed towards the relevant officers.

69 **Public Participation**

There were no public speakers.

70 **Progress on Social Housing Developments**

The Committee was provided with a progress report on the council house building programme.

In September 2015, the Cabinet Capital Assets Committee approved a programme of new council house building funded with a combination of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reserves and borrowing with other sources of capital including Right to Buy (RTB) receipts, commuted sum funding from planning gain and grant funding secured by bidding to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

The delivery of new affordable council homes across Wiltshire, including homes for older people and adapted homes, aims to meet a number of the council's priorities, objectives and outcomes outlined in the council's business plan.

The Committee was asked to note the update report.

Cllr Richard Clewer gave a verbal update on the programme. It was stated that it was proceeding on track, despite the usual setbacks expected in planning. It was also mentioned that the new Housing and Planning Act 2016 was close to being enacted and, whilst they would proceed with current strategy, they had to be open to the changes, to be brought about by the new legislation.

The Chairman invited technical questions on the report.

During questioning, it was clarified by that the strategy sought to respond to need where possible and gave the example of the ongoing development of social housing bungalows in Devises. It was also clarified that all major Housing Associations would be taking part in the Right to Buy Schemes.

A question was asked about pledges to cut social housing rental costs of 1% for 3 years. It was confirmed that this was still the policy for Wiltshire Council but that the new Housing Bill could change that.

Councillors then discussed the application of shared equity to social housing. It was noted that it has become increasingly popular and could become almost 30% of all social housing.

Resolved

To note the progress report on social housing developments.

71 **Housing Strategy – Final Draft**

The Committee was provided with a copy of the final Housing Strategy in preparation for it going to formal consultation.

The strategy has been developed in partnership with key stakeholders including Housing Associations, landlords, developers and tenants, as well as elected members, and has been approved by Cabinet Liaison to commence formal consultation.

The strategy sets out a joint vision for Wiltshire whereby everyone in Wiltshire should be able to live in a decent and safe home they can afford.

The Committee was asked to review and comment upon the 5 year Housing Strategy that sets the priorities and strategic direction for Housing for the next 5 years.

The report was introduced by Cllr Richard Clewer. He explained that it was a Housing Partnership Strategy and that it had 4 main aims of facilitating housing need, making best use of existing house stock, meeting accommodation needs and taking a lead in housing provision. He then referred to committee to the details of the report.

The Chairman invited technical questions about the strategy.

It was asked what was being done to address homelessness. Cllr Clewer explained that work was being done under the housing strategy along with other bodies to offer support. The committee discussed some of the issues regarding homelessness and barriers in offering them support.

Plans to introduce increased charges for those families in social housing owning over £31,000 were queried. Cllr Clewer said the exact details of the plan were not known at this time and that members would have to wait for the final draft of the Housing Bill for answers.

Technical questions were also asked about some of the definitions and percentages listed in the report. Cllr Clewer pointed out that the strategy was going to public consultation and that more of the details would become known at that time.

A further question was raised as to the numbers of empty homes versus those on the waiting list for affordable housing. The Housing Officer explained that Wiltshire Council did all they could to promote effective use of properties and that compared to the rest of the country, the percentages of empty homes was comparatively low.

Finally, there was some criticism of the selling off of Council owned housing, as after questioning Cllr Clewer revealed that “not enough” is made in selling a council home to build another one.

Resolved

To note the final draft of the Wiltshire Council Housing Strategy 2017-2022 along with comments from the committee raised during discussion.

To investigate the establishment of a Re-Commissioning of Housing Service Support Contracts rapid scrutiny exercise to look at the approach to procuring new services.

72 **Parking Services Update**

The Committee received a report updating members on the actions taken since the Car Parking Strategy Review in March 2015. This included details on the full implementation of charges that were approved, updates on the types of asset transfers that have occurred to local communities, the introduction of new technologies, and the predicted income shortfall following the proposed charges.

The Committee was asked to note and comment on the actions to date following the Parking Review and make any comments on the proposed approach.

Cllr Philip Whitehead introduced the report and explained that the Parking Review had reduced charges across the county. He observed that this meant that Wiltshire had gone 6-7 years without increased charges, in contrast to the rest of the country.

Cllr Whitehead spoke of identified parking issues and strategies in Chippenham. He informed the committee that there was a shortage of parking in Chippenham and that this was creating issues for the shopping centres. He explained that he had been asked to reduce charges but determined that would further exacerbate the problem, with workers taking up spaces rather than shoppers. He spoke of some initiatives being looked into such as Free parking days and other incentives. He praised the "Free after 3 pm" policy in Salisbury, stating that it had benefited the shops, and said that it was being considered for other areas.

Cllr Whitehead then sought to inform members on the plans for the introductions of new technologies. He said that he was in re-negotiations for cashless payments, via mobile phones, after explaining that excessive charges had been incurred by customers. He said that he was looking for an arrangement whereby there were no such charges on "mobile" payments. He addressed concerns that some members of the community, such as those who were vulnerable, disabled or elderly, may not be able or willing to use the cashless system. He said that they would seek to trial cashless payments in smaller car parks near to larger car parks, still operating a cash payment system, in case they are unable to pay via phone. He said that it was part of a long term strategy with the ultimate aim of making savings and efficiency.

Cllr Whitehead also informed members that the cash machines in car parks were going to need updating due to the pound coin being changed in 2017. This, he said, was to reduce fraud but it would be at a considerable cost to the Parking budget in the short term.

The chairman invited technical questions on the Parking Review.

Questions were asked regarding the application of paperless tickets to residential permits. Cllr Whitehead explained that it was similar to paperless tax disks and presented no issue being electronically managed.

A question was asked about maintenance of car parks and whether regular works would be done by Wiltshire Council. Cllr Whitehead replied by saying “there is only one budget” and that with a reduced budget they were limited on what they could do. He did, however, say that when it came to matters of safety, Wiltshire Council would be responsible for maintenance.

A member asked whether asset transfers of car parks were being considered, particularly to local Town and Parish Councils, whereby funds could still be made to Wiltshire Council. Whilst they were aware of this as an option, it was not seen as an immediate solution, or as part of the current strategy.

Finally, it was asked how much money was collected parking fines and the figure was given, by the Parking Services Officers, as between £800,000 and £1,000,000. Although, it was clarified that this was revenue and not profit, as you have to factor in running costs.

Resolved

To note the reported actions to date following the Parking Review.

73 Playing Pitch Strategy Update

A Wiltshire Council Playing Pitch Strategy is currently being developed to support the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the need for a single Wiltshire-wide open spaces standard.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler presented to the draft Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy to the committee and invited them to comment and give its endorsement to the draft.

Questions were asked as to why certain, less well known sports, such as touch rugby and walking football had not been included in the strategy. The Strategy Officers explained that no-contact sports, such as those listed, were included in the strategy but did not feature in the formal statistics because they are generally non-competitive sports.

It was also noted by committee members that some playing pitches and clubs had been missed out, specifically, Wilton Playing Pitch. The Officers noted these points and said that they would look at including Wilton Playing Pitch and any others brought to their attention.

A technical question was asked on the application of the strategy to when Councils are looking at applications for other leisure schemes and use of open spaces, for example development or Performing Art Centres. The Officers explained that the strategy gives guidance for applications of that nature and it gives a baseline for looking at the needs of a particular community. The Officers assured members that there was a steering group, with dedicated staff, looking

into community leisure needs and they could be contacted with any specific issues or questions.

After further questions, it was made clear that Wiltshire Council were willing to do all that they could to support sport and would work with any club that was willing and able to build their resources.

Resolved

To endorse the draft Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy with comments made.

For the Environment Select Committee to receive annual updates on the development of the Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy.

74 **Task Group Update**

Councillors from the task group were in attendance and stated that there was no formal update from the group, as it was still under consideration and work was being done to progress the priorities of the group.

Resolved

To note the task group update.

75 **Forward Work Programme**

Members noted the Forward Working Plan in the reports but there were no updates forthcoming.

Resolved

To note the forward work programme.

76 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Wednesday 22nd February 2016.

77 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 3.50 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Edmund Blick of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718504059, e-mail Edmund.blick@wiltshire.gov.uk

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