

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25 JULY 2023 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Bob Jones MBE (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cllr Matthew Dean (Substitute), and Cllr Stewart Palmen (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Carole King, Cllr Bill Parks, Cllr Jonathon Seed (Virtual), and Cllr Graham Wright (Virtual)

38 Apologies

Apologies for absence for Members of the Committee were received from:

- Councillor Charles McGrath
- Councillor Derek Walters
- Councillor Tony Trotman
- Councillor Dr Nick Murry, who was substituted by Councillor Matthew Dean
- Councillor Mel Jacob, who was substituted by Councillor Stewart Palmen

Additional apologies for absence were also noted from Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

39 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes for the previous meeting held on 6 June 2023 were considered. Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 June 2023 as a true and correct record.

40 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

41 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman announced that two items on the Forward Work Plan scheduled to be considered at the meeting, relating to Active Travel and Public Transport Review & Passenger Transport Service Update, had been deferred to a later date. As such, it was noted that they would remain on the Forward Work Plan until such time.

42 **Public Participation**

The Chairman informed Members that a number of statements had been received the previous evening via email relating to Agenda Item 6: Household Waste Management Strategy Update. It was confirmed that those statements had been passed onto the relevant officers for note, and that they would also be circulated to Committee Members after the meeting.

A further two members of the public were in attendance and also made statements in relation to Agenda Item 6, focussing on alternative methods of domestic waste management, utilising previous disposal sites such as bottle banks, and potentially combining collection services.

43 **Household Waste Management Strategy Update (2023/24)**

Councillor Bill Parks, Portfolio Holder for Waste, alongside Sarah Valdus, Director for Environment, and Martin Litherland, Head of Waste Management, updated the Committee on the Household Waste Management Strategy 2023-24.

It was explained that when looking at the whole life cycle of waste materials, officers were aiming towards a circular economy whereby waste was reduced and reused while ensuring there was due consideration and interlinkage to Wiltshire Council's Climate Strategy and Delivery Plan. Members were informed that a national carbon calculator had recently been launched which allowed officers to assess the carbon impact of the services provided. The significant changes in UK waste policy under the Environment Act 2021 were briefly noted but it was highlighted that key details of these changes were yet to be announced. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had released an Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) which introduced national targets. Officers were in the process of assessing the implications of these to waste management as well as other Council services.

Aspects of the National Policy Review were then detailed. Namely, the:

- Plastic Packaging Tax launched in April 2022.
- Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme.
- Deposit Return Scheme launching in October 2025.
- Further consistency in collections; potential for weekly food waste collections from approximately 2025.

- Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs); the incineration of all waste upholstered domestic seating from 1 January 2023 due to the presence of flame-retardant chemicals.

The impacts on Wiltshire's waste services for each of the above was explained, such as potential losses in income and/or further costs and emission implications if additional collections were confirmed as required.

A performance update for 2022/23 was then given with officers providing figures for the number of tonnes of municipal waste managed, Wiltshire's recycling rate, and how much waste was sent for waste treatment or landfill. It was noted that the vast majority of these figures had reduced since the previous year 2021/22, which officers suggested could be attributed to the more stringent measures put in place as a result of the Environment Act 2021 and/or emerging public concerns arising from the climate crisis. Members were then updated on the 2022/23 action plan's activities, including the launch of the reusing paint and 'Recycling – Let's Sort It!' campaigns, successful trial of a pop-up reuse shop in Devizes, and new recycling collections for household batteries.

Highlights from the 2023/24 action plan were given and it was noted that the number of activities for the upcoming year's plan had been reduced to support officers' ability to deliver targets against other competing priorities, such as coordinating the response to the emerging Environment Act 21 requirements and the procurement of new services and contracts post 2026. As approximately 16% of the contents of general waste bins collected at the kerbside contained materials that were recyclable, officers were focussing on concerted public engagement through the continued use of the 'Recycling – Let's Sort It!' campaign to communicate further advice, guidance, and education in relation to reusing, recycling, and reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. Furthermore, recruitment for a Waste and Recycling Engagement Officer was underway to supply additional capacity for the Waste Management Team to provide more targeted communications.

During the discussion, points included:

- The impacts of the previous year's industrial action on service provision.
- The type of technology utilised by the incineration plants contracted in Germany and Slough that the Council exported some of Wiltshire's waste to.
- The carbon impacts of incinerating waste in comparison to alternative methods of disposal. To this, officers confirmed that the new national carbon calculator released by central Government would become part of the assessment and procurement process for new and existing contractors/third parties moving forward.
- As the incineration contracts did not expire until 2033, Members queried the level of involvement that they and members of the public could have in the future procurement process. Officers confirmed that there would be

further engagement with the Committee and wider Cabinet closer to the time.

- It was confirmed that officers within the Waste Management Team would measure and monitor performance data for the requirements set out as part of the Environment Act 2021.
- It was noted that the POPs requirements did not extend to other soft furnishings such as mattresses and curtains, but that there was a further consultation exercise by the Environmental Agency happening which was looking at the potential to broaden the scope of materials accepted for incineration.
- Additional funding/reimbursements for supplementary resources needing to be deployed as a result of further requirements under the Environment Act 2021, such as free food and/or garden waste collections. Officers noted that there was the potential to receive funding and appropriate receptacles, however details of such were yet to be published and as such, officers were still in the process of understanding the implications on tonnage variations and current contracts.
- Ensuring that when contractors extend the reach of their enterprises pertaining to reusable materials, their processes are as sustainable as possible.
- It was clarified that the national target of 287kgs of waste per capita per year referred to the total residual waste generated by one person, excluding any materials that can be recycled, reused, or composted.
- It was explained that the Mechanical Biological Treatment Facility in Westbury had reported a reduced input for 2022/23 as a result of restrictions being voluntarily put in place by Hills due to odour concerns raised by the public.
- It was explained that alternative arrangements were procured in relation to disposing of large-scale flame-retardant materials as it was not deemed appropriate to use the waste energy facility contracted in Slough due to atmosphere concerns and the need for suitable abatement controls. Furthermore, officers were awaiting further innovations within the industry to allow for an affordable and sustainable way to separate individual materials present in these larger scale items, such as metal springs within a mattress.
- Officers highlighted that the new guidance was published in mid-November 2022 and some of the requirements were enforceable from the beginning of January 2023, therefore Local Authorities had faced particular challenges with the short time frame given to respond to the revised guidance.
- Officers confirmed that certain landfills in Wiltshire, such as the Lower Compton site in Calne, utilised gas engines that extracted methane to generate energy.
- The potential to consider methane fuelled collection vehicles if the need to provide a separate food waste collection arose. Officers stated that it would definitely be considered, however highlighted that it may not be

achievable in the near future as it may require the infrastructure to support a new fleet and the technology needed to utilise that method of propelling vehicles wholesale may not be available at the time.

- Officers confirmed that they were having ongoing conversations with Hills to discuss future changes and implications of the Environment Act 2021 whereby they would raise the possibility of ducting the heat and CO2 produced by incineration facilities into reusable energy to support nearby greenhouse installations.
- As part of the 'Recycling – Let's Sort It!' campaign, officers noted that there would be communications relating to pre-sorting waste ahead of arriving at Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) to minimise queues and contaminated materials. Further training would also be given to HRC staff to empower them to advise members of the public when using HRCs.
- Officers explained that as the requirements being published were relatively fast-changing, it did not seem appropriate to produce resources for waste receptacles such as stickers or bin hangers listing out what could be sorted into which bin as they would soon become outdated. However, once officers had further clarity on key details and timelines, it would be something they would consider for future service changes.
- It was clarified that all waste facilities required an environmental permit in order to operate, and if found in breach of this, the Environmental Agency would impose consequences. Therefore, the chemicals and contaminants being produced as a result of incineration were filtered and captured before emission through the chimneys and any residue was disposed of at a containment or hazardous waste landfill site. As such, the best available techniques were being applied and Members were reassured that the appropriate control measures were in place to protect the public.
- Public feeling and safety concerns were highlighted, especially in respect to the incinerator due to be built in Westbury.
- Members thanked officers for their report and presentation and commended their hard work when considering the tight time constraints placed upon them by central Government.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Councillor Bob Jones MBE proposed to move the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Iain Wallis. After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) The Committee noted the Household Waste Management Strategy update 2023/24.**
- b) The Committee agreed to receive a further update in 12 months' time.**

Councillor Jonathon Seed, Chairman of the Housing Allocations Policy Task Group, presented an update on the work of the Task Group since its inception.

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

- A scoping meeting held on 19 June 2023 with Nicole Smith, Head of Housing.
- A meeting with local social housing providers held on 12 July 2023 to understand and get feedback on how the current Housing Allocations Policy worked in practice.
- A meeting between the Chairman, relevant Cabinet Member and Head of Housing to understand the aims of the policy.

Furthermore, Members were informed that the Task Group were intending to hold two more meetings to discuss and conclude on different areas of the policy ahead of developing a report and a set of recommendations before being brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

During the discussion, members queried Paragraph 9 of the report and asked for further clarification on what was meant by “inconsistencies with applying the policy”. In response, it was noted that some cases were found to be dealt with quicker and more concisely, however it was acknowledged that further discussions were needed to find out more details. Other points raised included defining what was meant by affordable housing.

Cllr Seed concluded by commending the experience of the Task Group’s Membership and the hard work undertaken up to the date of the meeting.

Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group, then presented an update on the work of the Task Group since 6 June 2023.

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

- Receiving a briefing on 29 June 2023 from Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, Georgina Clampitt-Dix, Head of Spatial Planning, and Geoff Winslow, Spatial Planning Manager, concerning the draft Local Plan and the policies that would address the climate emergency.

Members were informed that the Task Group were pleased that the draft Local Plan recognised and was working towards tackling many of the issues previously raised in discussions with officers and Cabinet Members, such as promoting renewable energy and accelerating the construction of low carbon homes. As such, it was highlighted that the Task Group would continue to monitor the delivery of the Council’s Climate Strategy as well as focussing on local transport.

Members requested that the Task Group consider exploring the Council's Waste Disposal Policies in relation to the amount of carbon emissions generated by the disposal of municipal waste, as discussed during the previous Agenda Item. Furthermore, Members highlighted that officers would be undertaking conversations with Hills to further explore the issue and requested that officers from the Climate Team be involved in those discussions at the appropriate time.

After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) **The Committee noted the update on the Task Group activity provided.**
- b) **The Committee noted the changes to the Housing Allocations Policy Task Group Terms of Reference and the timing of its final report.**
- c) **The Committee noted the Climate Emergency Task Group's draft Forward Work Plan as per Appendix 1.**

45 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Councillor Stuart Wheeler highlighted the implementation and performance of the Milestone contract to date and suggested that further scrutiny was needed in relation to the effective operation of the Parish Stewards Scheme and other difficulties raised by members of the public such as the accessibility of work and costs. Parvis Khansari, Director of Place, confirmed that a report could be brought to a future meeting of the Committee to provide reassurance and further clarity for Members.

Members also raised Leisure Services and if any Terms of Reference were available for any scrutiny activities in the area, and if the commitment circulated to Members regarding the continued use of Salisbury City Hall as a live music venue underlined any review that was being undertaken. Officers confirmed that these two points would be reviewed and confirmed outside of the meeting.

Furthermore, Members noted that they had been contacted by a member of the public who was a qualified Rights of Way officer and had raised concerns as to the accuracy of Wiltshire Council's definitive maps and the backlogs experienced by these officers in reviewing Rights of Way within Wiltshire. Members then suggested that further reviews into these issues be undertaken.

After which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme with the inclusion of items suggested by Members regarding Rights of Way and the Council's Milestone contract.

46 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

47 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 19 September 2023.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.45 pm)

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