

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2017 AT KENNET COMMITTEE ROOM.

Present:

Cllr Bridget Wayman (Chairman), Cllr Rosemary Brown, Cllr Dennis Drewett, Cllr Peter Evans, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Mike Hewitt, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Magnus Macdonald, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr James Sheppard, Cllr Tony Trotman and Cllr Trevor Carbin (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Jonathan Seed, Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cllr Jonathon Seed, Cllr Richard Clewer and Cllr Philip Whitehead

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Edge who was substituted by Cllr Trevor Carbin. Apologies, were also received from Cllr Brian Dalton.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

To approve the minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 13 December 2017.

RESOLVED:

To sign the minutes as a true and accurate record.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced to the Members, that this would be the last Environmental Select Committee meeting, until after the Local Government Elections in May 2017.

5 Public Participation

There were no public speakers.

6 Annual Housing Board Report

Cllr Jonathon Seed gave a brief introduction to the report. Members were asked to consider and comment on the draft version of the Annual Housing Board Report. Cllr Seed introduced Cllr Richard Clewer, as the lead in Housing Board item.

Cllr Richard Clewer, gave a broad overview of the details of the report and its context. He spoke of impact of the Housing Bill and the difficulty in providing concrete answers to some of the issues identified in the reports.

Attention was drawn towards the financial impact of the Housing Bill but also whether the work of the Housing Board would continue in its current form, after the Local Government elections in May, and with the impending legislative changes brought about by the Housing Bill. It was highlighted that the table on page 25 of the agenda was out of date as much of the data in the table had already been finalised.

Members were invited to ask questions and express views on the report.

A question was raised regarding page 21 of the agenda, asking what was meant by “The need for a wider social housing register”. It was confirmed that there was a need to look at affordable housing for those who were not eligible for social housing but still needed support.

Councillors discussed practical service delivery issues, with some reference to customer complaints of substandard, or incomplete works carried out on residences. It was confirmed that there had been some cases of service shortcomings, but that the number were relatively few given the portfolio of nearly 6000 properties and large-scale programme of refurbishment being undertaken.

A question was asked as to what the future solutions were going to be for providing more social houses. The difficulties surrounding the Right to Buy Scheme, were discussed and the need for the Council to protect their investment in properties. In response it was noted that under the new proposals, 10% of affordable housing was going to be for First Time Buyer properties.

Other options for social housing and affordable housing were discussed, including shared ownership, and Members expressed approval and current plans and proposals. Approval was also given to the quality of some of the new houses being built in the county.

After further technical questions and points were raised, it was;

RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the report.

To receive the report in 12-months provided it is reported under the same format.

7 Housing Repairs Contract Procurement

Cllr Jonathan Seed introduced the report, explaining that the purpose of the report was a review of Housing Repairs services and presenting proposals on how to procure, monitor and deliver these services.

Janet O' Brien, Head of Housing Strategy and Assets, delivered a presentation which gave an overview of the report and looked broadly at all contract services and explained the overall cost summaries and figures. The different options considered for future procurement of services were highlighted and the Steering Group's proposals were put forward. The proposal was to develop the Council's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO), to take on all Responsive Repairs and Void Works from 1st April 2018, and either to Either develop management expertise in house or procure externally. In regards to the Planned Works and Adaptations the proposal was to extend the current contract to April 2020, and for the DLO to take it on from April 2020.

Members were then invited to ask questions and comment on the report.

The debate focused on the issue of management, and whether this should be sourced internally or externally. Members expressed views that it would be better to have internal management so that the Council have control and can adapt to changing demands. Members supported the DLO approach.

The potential benefits of expanding the DLO in recruitment of young people and apprenticeships was also noted by Members.

Carlton Brand, Corporate Director, spoke regarding the proposals. He expressed his support for expanding the DLO. On the question of Management, he said that sourcing externally came with risks, clarifying that you can train for skills but not necessarily the attitude required for Local Government. In this respect, he highlighted the need to be able and willing to adapt to changing needs and priorities, referencing the upcoming legislative changes under the Housing Bill. He urged Members to consider the issue, as part of a wider corporate solution, rather than solely a housing solution.

In regards to the specific proposal to expand the DLO and to phase out other contractors members expressed support to transition as quickly as possible.

RESOLVED:

To note the draft report on Housing Repairs Contract Procurement and support Option 1 as described in the report, so long as there is a suitable manager available/dependent on volume of business.

8 Update report from Leisure Services

A brief introduction was given by Councillor Jonathon Seed emphasising that Public Health and Leisure Activity were intertwined. He said that the health of the population was very important to Wiltshire Council and there was a real drive towards promoting physical activity.

A presentation was delivered by John Goodall, Consultant in Public Health, Health Improvement, and Physical Activity. He gave an overview of the aims of Leisure Service in improving the health of Wiltshire's population. He gave statistics and figures, highlighting some of the health issues faced by the County, such as obesity, and compared it to national figures. Attention was also drawn towards the service improvements and expansions, including reference to new Leisure centres that had been built or improved across the County. The financial indicators were also shown, with a graph showing budget savings. Although, it was noted that there was still a £100,000 deficit for the service area.

In the debate that followed, much discussion was held on the benefits of Leisure Activity in the prevention of ill-health, and the dependence on social and health care services. It was highlighted that, whilst there are clear savings, it is difficult to quantify exact figures as the savings may be made by other bodies, such as the NHS. It was explained as more of a cost preventing exercise, rather than a cost saving one.

A final point was considered, noting that the increased costs of improving Leisure facilities had to be balance against potential increased profits. It was stated that with enhanced sites there was a wider potential to increase income by proving additional or alterative services, such as hiring out venues.

RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the report.

9 Calne Library Model

Councillor Jonathan Seed introduced the report explaining that the Calne Library Model had been a success. He stated that the Library was now being used for lots of different uses and the Community Hub was receiving regular bookings. The Hub was now not limited by staff, allowing it to be open for longer. He said that the "Open Plus" system benefited working people and allowed the library to be used at times convenient to the wider public.

A question was asked regarding potential security issues and abuse of the facilities. It was explained that there was card access and CCTV. Furthermore, there had been no reported instances of misuse or anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the report.

10 **Gypsy and Traveller Plan (G&T Plan)**

Cllr Toby Sturgis introduced the report, explaining that the term Gypsy Travellers now also referred to canal boaters. He spoke of the existing problem of a lack of suitable pitches for Gypsy Travellers and issues with finding suitable land where the essential services can be provided.

Councillors discussed the need to accommodate Gypsy Travellers in the area, particularly to the benefit of the children from these communities, and their education. The situation with canal boaters in Bradford on Avon was also noted.

Some Councillors asked whether it should be the Council's responsibility to provide suitable sites and services. Cllr Sturgis stated that the Council was working with all partners to achieve the aims.

RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the report.

11 **Housing Service Support Contracts Rapid Scrutiny Final Report**

A brief overview was given of the Rapid Scrutiny report. The deliberations of the Group were outlined and the proposal for Option 3 to be carried forward was discussed.

The Committee discussed the need for scrutiny in this area to reflect the up to date needs of the customer group.

RESOLVED:

To note the report and to set up another Rapid Scrutiny Exercise to investigate the form in which the recommissioning of housing support service contracts under Option 3 will take.

12 **Review of the Work of the Environment Select Committee**

The Chairman asked Members to note the on-going work of the Committee, detailed on page 96 of the agenda.

Members were also asked what topics to take forward as recommended legacy topics. A number of areas were identified including:

- Maintenance of Pavements,
- Maintenance of Footpaths and Byways,
- Parking spaces for residential accommodation,
- Allocation of funding for Local Highways to Area Boards
- A review of speed limits, traffic calming measures and vehicle emissions.

RESOLVED:

To note the report and list of legacy topics to be sent to the Management Committee for consideration.

13 **Forward Work Programme**

RESOLVED:

To note the Forward Work Plan.

14 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

15 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was set as Tuesday 20 June 2017.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.50 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Edmund Blick of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718504, e-mail Edmund.blick@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115