

## Environment Select Committee

---

### MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

#### Present:

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Derek Walters (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Stuart Wheeler, and Cllr Stewart Palmen (Substitute)

#### Also Present:

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Nick Botterill, Cllr Nick Holder, Cllr Dominic Muns, and Cllr Bill Parks

---

#### 54 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Mel Jacob, who was substituted by Councillor Stewart Palmen
- Councillor Dr Brian Mathew MP

#### 55 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes for the previous meeting held on 18 July 2024 were considered.

Mr Tony Blighe then presented a statement to the Committee under public participation with regard to Minute Item 48, Leisure Strategy and the Warminster Project.

Following which, it was:

#### Resolved:

**The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 July 2024 as a true and correct record.**

*Councillors Richard Budden and Tony Jackson requested that their votes against the motion be recorded.*

56 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Iain Wallis declared a non-disclosable interest by virtue of his employment by the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs and stated that he was speaking in a personal capacity and not as a civil servant.

57 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman noted that three statements had been received by officers for Members' information.

The first was a statement submitted by David Redfern, Director of Leisure, Culture, and Communities, with regard to the Leisure Strategy and the Warminster Project which was considered at the previous meeting of the Committee on 18 July 2024. The statement was read as follows:

*"Dear Environment Select Committee,*

*You will have received a number of emails about the presentation we made to yourselves in July, in response to a public question around the Warminster Project.*

*Please be assured that all rationale, process, and data supplied to the Committee was accurate.*

*Please also be assured that any emails that required a response are being dealt with."*

The second statement was submitted by Tamzin Earley, Arts and Funding Manager, which was in relation to the Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024-2030 which was also considered at the previous meeting of the Committee on 18 July 2024. The statement referenced Committee Resolutions 2 and 3, and Members were informed that further discussions had taken place with Councillor Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council, confirming that there would be no additional budget attached to the Cultural Strategy. Furthermore, it was confirmed that after discussions between officers, including Sarah Valdus, Director of Environment, it was felt that Environment remain as a key principle to underpin the principle of the strategy rather than being amended to a single theme, thus being better placed to help affect change.

The final statement was in relation to the Wiltshire Local Plan Review in which Members were informed that following the close of the Regulation 19 consultation, the next steps officers were taking would be to report to Cabinet and Full Council on the 8 October and 15 October 2024 respectively regarding the submission of the Plan to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination. It was highlighted that over 10,000 comments were received through the consultation which would help to inform the preparation of a consultation statement. Finally, a full Member Briefing would be drafted in line with the publication of the agenda for the 8 October 2024 meeting of Cabinet.

58 **Public Participation**

The Chairman announced that two statements had been submitted by Mr Andrew Nicolson, Chair of Wiltshire Climate Alliance, and Mr Jeremy Wire, Member of Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon, regarding Agenda Items 6 and 9, Household Waste Management Strategy Update, and Update on the Maintenance and Management of Public Rights of Way respectively. Both Mr Nicolson and Mr Wire were invited to present their statements to the Committee.

59 **Household Waste Management Strategy Update (2024/25)**

Councillor Dominic Muns, Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment, introduced the update on the Household Waste Management Strategy alongside Sarah Valdus, Director of Environment, Martin Litherland, Head of Service for Waste Management, and Charlotte Knowles-Lawson, Waste and Recycling Engagement Officer.

The purpose of the report as per Paragraph 1 was highlighted alongside Appendices 1 – 4, before officers briefly detailed a group of key achievements throughout the year such as the increase in the recycling rate, reduction in waste to landfill, and the successful recruitment of the new position of Waste and Recycling Engagement Officer.

The impacts of the Policy Review 2024-25 was detailed as per Paragraphs 5 to 8 of the report together with Appendix 1, with Members being informed of the key waste-related changes contained within the Environment Act 2021, such as the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), Extended Producer Responsibility for packing (EPR), and Simpler Recycling (previously known as Consistency in Recycling).

During the discussion, points included:

- Members welcomed the Reuse and Repair initiatives in tandem Household Recycling Centre (HRC) contractors and partners. Kennet Furniture Reuse (KFR) was then raised, and Members queried if officers were considering expanding the scheme across the County. Officers noted that the arrangement with KFR was progressing and as materials for reuse were being intercepted more systematically at HRCs instead of going to landfill, officers were continuing to review similar schemes in other LAs and to potentially extend to kerbside collections of bulky household waste.
- Malagby Biogas Digesters were raised, and it was queried if a pilot scheme on food waste collections in Wiltshire would involve the use of similar processes. Officers explained that there was sufficient empirical evidence from other Local Authorities (LAs) who already collected food waste that there would likely be limited direct benefits in trialling such processes and focus would therefore be directed on how to design and launch the service within the limited time frame before 2027. However,

as it was such vast project, officers did note that they would continue to review all options to ensure that the best methods were chosen.

- Members commended the reduction in the amount of kerbside recycling reject materials, and emphasised how vital education was in understanding the importance of separating recycling materials from general waste. Members further congratulated officers on recruiting to the role of the Waste and Recycling Engagement Officer who Members felt would be valuable in bringing the public's attention to the topic. Officers highlighted that the position was already having a positive impact on messaging through activities such social media engagement and workshops in local schools. Furthermore, officers noted that members of the public could sign up for email updates which contained regular information, hints, and tips to support residents through the different waste processes. The link to sign up to the Waste E-Newsletter can be found through this link: [Wiltshire News preference form \(mailchi.mp\)](#) (residents will need to select Waste as a topic of interest).
- The carbon emissions associated with large volumes of waste being burnt was then raised, with officers explaining that as there was not a standard formula recognised for the carbon emissions of all waste processes, it was difficult to quantify the results reliably. However, officers reassured Members that conversations between partners and the Waste Resource Action Programme were being regularly undertaken in order to understand carbon reporting processes and how they could be applied specifically to Wiltshire Council's different waste services.
- In response to a query, officers agreed to include in future reports the cost per kilo of sending waste to landfill and the amount of kilos of CO2 generated in the process.
- Officers confirmed that there were two overarching bodies that linked all LA waste departments together: one representing waste collection and disposal authorities, and one representing directors. Through these connections, officers had the ability to swap best practice ideas and were focussing on packaging materials and the recyclability of those materials, with these conversations then being taken to producers of packaging to support them in reducing their waste and carbon emissions.
- Other topics discussed included: supporting residents in composting food waste, accepting textiles at kerbside collections, and potential limited storage space for the separation of recyclables at residents' homes across the County.
- Finally, officers were commended for the report and thanked for their hard work and the results achieved over the past year.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

## **Resolved:**

### **The Committee:**

- a) **Noted the content of the report.**
- b) **Endorsed the 2024-25 Action Plan.**
- c) **Requested an addendum to the current report outlining the cost per kilogram per disposal activity before the end of the year.**
- d) **Requested a further update in 12 months' time to include additional information on waste carbon emissions and communication/education programmes.**

## 60 **Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance Contract Update**

Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, updated the Committee on the Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance contract, alongside Adrian Hampton, Head of Highways Operations.

Councillor Holder introduced the report and invited questions from Members.

During the discussion, points included:

- It was raised that some residents/Parish and Town Councils were continuing to cut the grass on verges in certain areas across the County which were thought to be the responsibility of the Street Scene Team. In response, it was explained that there had been a significant devolution of services to both Parish and Town Councils in conjunction with asset devolution and the development of a clear geomapping system which indicated which areas were devolved, which areas sat under the responsibility of the Street Scene Team, and the frequency of the cut for each area. As such, if residents/Parish and Town Councils wanted clarity on the frequencies or responsibility of grass cutting areas, they were encouraged to contact the Street Scene Team directly who would be able to advise further.
- It was noted that the baseline mapping area had been developed through consultations with all Parish and Town Councils around the frequency of cuts, local requirements, and biodiversity and environmental considerations.
- The move to a resource-based contract was detailed, with the delegation and transferral of services to other Parish and Town Councils allowing for resources to be deployed to deliver an area's individual needs and ultimately result in cost savings to Wiltshire Council.
- Members raised the maintenance of open spaces that formed part of development sites that had been given full planning permission but were being left to overgrow. Officers explained that they were focussing on

improving communications with residents and Members on the adoption process and stated that if further clarity was needed on the process, cutting regimes for sites, land ownership, and/or responsibilities for the management of said sites, the Street Scene Team could be contacted for further information.

- Members welcomed the required environment outcomes stated in Paragraph 24 of the report and requested that future reports included a graph setting out carbon emissions year-on-year against targets.
- Members sought further clarity on Paragraph 20 of the report, with officers acknowledging that the move to electrification would be the best option in terms of meeting the Council's carbon targets, but reassured Members that further work was being undertaken as part of the Depot Strategy Programme and that further updates would be given when able.
- Officers raised wildflowers, and Members were informed that a wildflower trial was being developed to start seeding and plugging the wildflower growth areas to help accelerate growth, encourage different species, and to support the Council's policy of continuing and extending wildflower conservation areas in order to help meet carbon reduction and environmental targets.
- It was explained that historically the Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance Contract was part of the larger highway contracts, but it was now a separate contract in order to focus more on best practice, trial and error on different methodologies, processes, and equipment in order to deliver a better service.
- The average annual contract objective scores were discussed alongside the customer service and quality scores and the differences between the two.
- Finally, officers were commended for the report and thanked for their hard work and the results achieved over the past year.

### **Resolved:**

#### **The Committee:**

- a) Noted the contents of the report and performance of the Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance contract in 2023-24.**
- b) Requested an update on service provision to the Committee in 12 months' time to include further information on annual carbon emissions and reductions, and service delegation savings.**

## **61 Milestone - Highways Term Maintenance Contract Year 1 Performance**

Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, updated the Committee on the Highways Term Maintenance Contract Year 1 performance, alongside Dave Thomas, Head of Highways Asset

Management and Commissioning, and Chris Clark, Head of Local Highways and Countryside Access.

It was explained that officers maintained regular meetings with senior Milestone staff through monthly Contract Monitoring Progress Meetings in which Milestone staff would report and evidence the performance of their services across a number of different aspects as part of the contract, including carbon reduction and social value. The Contract Performance Objectives were then highlighted as per Paragraph 16 of the report, and the calculation for the final Contractor's Annual Score was explained as per the information detailed in the appendices to the report, with the overall score for Year 1 being confirmed at 8.16 out of 10.

Further updates as per the report were briefly highlighted such as the substantive update of gully asset data, increased highway investment funding allowing for additional tankers for both planned and reactive gully activities, and increased resources for pothole repairs including further machinery and different repair methods.

During the discussion, points included:

- In response to a question regarding the differences between the different types of machinery used for pothole repair, it was noted that a number of videos had been published through the Communications Team which explained how each of the machines worked and what they were used for. Members were encouraged to contact the Communications Team if they had not seen the videos and were also encouraged to pass these on to residents or Parish/Town Councils where requested. It was further explained that the newer machinery increased capacity as there were now two different teams operating 3 machines, however it was highlighted that although the new technology provided more long lasting, durable, and effective repairs over a greater area, it did occasionally lead to longer network closures.
- Members queried the impact of the increased funding on Milestone's capacity and capability to deliver their services and meet performance objectives. Officers explained that not all of the additional funding made available was being invested into the Milestone contract and was instead being split across a number of different contracts such as machine surfacing and surface dressing. However, Members were reassured that officers had been working closely with Milestone to ensure that sufficient resources were in place to handle the additional expenditure. Furthermore, due to national recruitment issues for fully qualified staff, a portion of the investment was being absorbed through sub-contractors, thus allowing Milestone to react and deliver the additional investments more quickly. In response, Members requested a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to further understand the details and progress of each of the aforementioned contracts.
- Gully clearing was raised, and officers reassured Members that the additional investment into enhanced data recording and further tankers was making a significant impact on mitigating against future flooding concerns. Furthermore, officers were focussing on developing new

clearing schedules to prioritise higher risk areas, engaging with landowners, and identifying persistent gully failures to enter into Drainage Improvement Programmes. Officers then explained that the Discretionary Gully Emptying Service had experienced staff outages which impacted on the ability to deliver the service fully, however they were confident that the enhanced schedule alongside the additional investments would address those issues.

- When contemplating road closures, officers focussed on combining works where possible such as grass cutting, gully emptying, drainage works, and pothole repairs. Ahead of any potential road closures, Members were reassured that all relevant Councillors were contacted in order to relay any information to their residents, yet it was highlighted that utility companies had the statutory right to install and maintain their apparatus on public highways and as such, there could be times in which officers may be unaware of works being conducted at a certain time. However, the process by which this was undertaken was explained; namely, nationally agreed permit conditions and standards in terms of timescales, operational hours, reinstatement of carriageway, and temporary traffic management etc. Members were reassured that there was a level of accountability taken by the Council and repeated failures would lead to an escalation process that could result in the non-issuing of permits until officers were satisfied as to the resource management, capability, and performance of a utility company.
- In response to the increased number of potholes being reported, officers had made the decision to divert staff to help support repair work. Members commended officers, stating that they, and local residents, had seen a noticeable improvement.
- With regard to the additional investment received, it was reiterated that the Council were reliant on settlements from Central Government with no guarantee that funding levels would be replicated year-on-year. Furthermore, with price, material, and contract inflation, there was not a guarantee that as much work could be undertaken as had been possible with previous budgets.
- When assessing potholes, it was explained that inspections of the area as a whole was undertaken, but engineering decisions were made on the basis of the extent of works needed against budgeting considerations. Additionally, scanner surveys were being trialled to provide data relating to the condition of a carriageway, but these incurred challenges in respect of the volume of data gleaned. However, officers were continuing to pursue further trials and would update Members in future reports.
- Members raised the MyWilts app regarding pothole reporting and it was explained that updates to the app had taken longer than anticipated due to the complexities of updating both the functionality of the app alongside the integration into in-house Council highway systems. However, once an update was ready to be announced, information would be shared with Members and the public.
- The importance of communication between the Council, Members, and residents was emphasised, with officers encouraging Members to contact them with further feedback or questions.



- Officers were thanked for their presentation and hard work.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- a) Noted the contents of the report, and the progress and methodologies being used to assess performance, carbon reduction, and social value.**
- b) Requested a further update to the Committee on completion of the second year of the contract.**
- c) Requested a separate report regarding the future spend and impact of the increased funding for highways by Spring 2025.**

**62 Update on the Maintenance and Management of Public Rights of Way**

Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, updated the Committee on the maintenance and management of public Rights of Way alongside Chris Clark, Head of Local Highways and Countryside Access.

Councillor Holder introduced the report and invited questions from Members.

During the discussion, points included:

- The legal process pertaining to Definitive Map Modification Orders was explained, with officers highlighting that the backlog being experienced by the Council was a national issue and that many other Highway and Surveying Authorities were facing similar challenges. Members were reassured that officers were working with adjoining authorities in the Southwest Highways Alliance to consider best practice, lessons to be learned, and alternative processing methods.
- In response to Members highlighting the dependence of Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Groups (LHFIGs) being awarded grants through Area Boards, it was clarified that although there was a defined service budget, the level of resource this enabled was limited with only six Countryside Access Officers, thus leading to challenges in maintaining the vast network throughout Wiltshire particularly regarding boundaries between urban and semi-urban areas.
- The volunteer groups as referenced in Paragraphs 11, 12, and 14 of the report were raised, and Members queried how reliant the service was on these groups and sought further clarity on the insurance cover for volunteers when carrying out work on the network. Officers acknowledged and commended the vital work of volunteers within the service, but highlighted the risks associated with voluntary staff,

especially health and safety concerns. As such, it was explained that officers were looking to engage with Parish and Town Councils due to their ability to exercise Rights of Way maintenance semi-independently to the Countryside Access Officers for activities such as erecting location signs, installing gates and styles, and light hedge trimming etc. By using the Parish and Town Councils as a model to deliver such services, it would also address any insurance concerns as it would be undertaken through the Parish/Town Councils' own insurance policies. Officers noted that they were in the process of developing strategies to combat challenges arising from examples such as the use of specific equipment or vehicles provided by Countryside Access Officers and enforcement situations in order to best deliver the service via voluntary groups.

- Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report's Executive Summary were highlighted, and Members emphasised the importance of the impact that accessible Rights of Ways had on residents' health and wellbeing, and queried if additional investment could be sought to support this. In response, officers noted that they were seeking to develop a hierarchical approach to network connectivity akin to frameworks used within the Highways Service which would then allow officers to prioritise funding into areas that would reap the most benefits.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- a) **Noted the contents of the report and the progress that is being made in relation to the maintenance and management of public Rights of Way in Wiltshire.**
- b) **Requested a further update to the Committee on the maintenance and management of the public Rights of Way network before May 2025, including how the Council is learning from good practice at other Local Authorities, service budgets, work with volunteer groups, the enforcement activities of countryside officers, and the development of network use data.**

63 **Executive Response to the Final Report of the Speed Limit Assessments Task Group**

Councillor Nick Holder, Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding, introduced the report on the executive response to the final report of the Speed Limit Assessments Task Group.

There being no questions, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee noted the executive response to the final report of the Speed Limit Assessments Task Group.**

64 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme.**

65 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

66 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12 November 2024.

(Duration of meeting: 10.35 am - 2.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey - Democratic Services  
Officer of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718259, e-mail  
[ellen.ghey@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:ellen.ghey@wiltshire.gov.uk)

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line 01225 713114 or email  
[communications@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:communications@wiltshire.gov.uk)