

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 MAY 2011 AT COMMITTEE ROOMS A - B, MONKTON PARK, CHIPPENHAM.

Present:

Cllr Chuck Berry, Cllr Rosemary Brown, Cllr Nigel Carter (Vice Chairman), Cllr Peter Doyle, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Mollie Groom (Chairman), Cllr Alan Hill, Cllr Charles Howard (Substitute), Cllr Howard Marshall (Substitute), Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Stephen Oldrieve and Cllr Anthony Trotman (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Howard Greenman, Cllr Toby Sturgis and Cllr Dick Tonge

145. **Apologies and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Colmer, Cllr Chris Humphries and Cllr Leo Randall.

Cllr Howard Marshall, Cllr Charles Howard and Cllr Tony Trotman were the respective substitutes.

146. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 March 2011 were approved and signed as a correct record.

147. **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr Nigel Carter declared a personal interest in relation to Item 150 – Housing PFI as a non-executive member on the Sarsen Board.

148. **Chairman's Announcements**

Due to time commitments of the attending Cabinet member the Carbon Management Plan item would be considered immediately following the Housing PFI update.

The Chairman also confirmed that upon attending a Carbon Management Carbon event the Council was complimented in many areas for the work it had undertaken including carbon management.

149. **Public Participation and Councillors Questions**

There was no publication participation.

150. **Housing PFI Update**

Cllr Howard Greenman – portfolio holder for Housing and Mike Swabey – Strategic Project Manager were in attendance to present a report on the status of the Housing PFI Project to provide 350 new social rented homes.

Clarification was provided by the portfolio holder that there had been minimal change in progression of the project since the Committees previous update although commercial agreement had been reached between the Council and Silbury Housing Ltd in respect of the housing PFI deal.

However due to additional government approval processes it was likely that further negotiations would be reopened once consideration of central government's derogations response had taken place.

Members of the Committee noted that a new housing bonus, which it was understood would be payable to Councils allowing house builds on Council owned land, was likely to be written into the Localism Bill and questioned whether the project would be able to benefit from such a bonus. The Strategic Project Manager confirmed that this avenue would be further investigated but also provided clarity that the majority of the land in question was privately owned and as such would not be applicable.

Clarity was also provided that following value for money (VfM) assessments the Council had been advised that maintenance and operational insurance costs were considered high for the project. As such further discussions had taken place with Silbury and costs reduced accordingly. Contract management and monitoring costs had also been reduced internally with no effect to the project.

The specification of the properties had been reduced from a Level 4 to Level 3 which was the minimum build requirement for social housing. Although the initial aspirations of the Council was to provide Level 4 specification, Level 3 had been set by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and no further funding would be made available from the HCA for a higher specification.

In line with guidance received centrally projects across the County were expected to achieve in the region of 8-10% cost savings. The HCA had asked that Councils work with bidders to assess the private funder margins to achieve further cost savings where possible.

The set up costs of the project to date equated to £2.4m and there was therefore an incentive to see the project through to fruition. The bidding consortium led by Sarsen Housing had also invested heavily into the project. There was also a significant government grant attached to the build.

Before entering into the contract further information on the VfM element would be considered, via delegated decision, by Corporate Directors. The contract would also be required to pass through an internal VfM process set by Treasury.

The portfolio holder confirmed that the Committees concerns including the reduced specification of the build and costs already associated with the project would be noted.

Following motions received the Committee resolved to:

- 1) Welcome the Cabinet Member's decision to continue with the project; and**
- 2) Request that the officer research the difference in cost between a Level 3 and Level 4 specification and that this and the information on efficiencies would be taken into consideration by the Corporate Directors with delegated powers.**

151. **Carbon Management Plan**

The Committee at its previous meeting considered a report on the Council's carbon reduction commitment and resolved to receive an update on the Carbon Management Plan which would outline the Council's vision for achieving a 'low carbon' future.

Cllr Toby Sturgis - Cabinet member, Ariane Crampton – Head of Climate Change and Catherine Dixon – Senior Climate Change Officer were in attendance to present the update and answer questions arising.

Ensuing discussion included the extent to which contractors were signed up to the reduction of carbon emissions. Clarity was provided that new contracts, at tendering stage, would include specifications to address carbon emissions. The Defra framework was being used and was being embedded in the procurement process. Details would be provided to the Chairman and Vice Chairman by the Head of Climate Change following the meeting.

It was also noted that carbon emissions from schools, including academies, were not controllable by the Council. It was hoped that the league tables published would include a separate category to highlight those schools that were doing well in reducing carbon emissions and that this would, in turn, provide encouragement for other schools.

The Committee also noted that in relation to waste management there were currently two separate landfill sites operating within close proximity to each other in Compton Bassett near Calne. Although acknowledgement was given that these were private companies discussion took place as to whether there was a potential for the Council to promote collaborative working between the two parties to reduce carbon emissions.

The issue of 'green champions' within the workplace was further explored with confirmation provided that publicity to encourage the Council to lead by example had been circulated.

Further clarity was again provided in relation to the Tradable Allowance Scheme discussed at a previous meeting of the Committee. Members were reminded that a new levy had been implemented by the coalition government to replace the Tradable Allowance Scheme.

The Council remained committed to its plans to reduce emissions by 20% by 2013 and 50% by 2020. Although the criteria set by central government currently excluded transport sustainability remained a high priority within the Core Strategy.

A large proportion of the expected reductions would arise through efficient use of Council buildings all of which would be addressed through the Campus and Operational Development Programme.

In relation to aspirations set by the Council, the Cabinet Member confirmed that sign up to the declaration of carbon reduction had only commenced following Unitary in 2009. With this in mind the Council was progressing well.

Members felt the Plan should also include milestones and adequate risk rating.

The Head of Climate Change confirmed that the comments provided would be taken on board and clarified that an electronic document was published on-line which members could assess to monitor progress. Based on information available the Council was progressing well in achieving a 50% reduction by 2020. The energy management system was not currently included within the document as well as other areas yet to be quantified would also contribute towards the Council's ability to reach the desired target.

Members also questioned how the aspirations of the Council would feed into planning decisions. Clarification was provided that the Carbon Management Plan would also appear within Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy although it was noted that the outcome of the Localism Bill was likely to allow more flexibility at a local planning level which could potentially impact on the aspirations of the Council.

The Carbon Management Plan was the first of four Action Plans under the Council's Energy, Change and Opportunity (ECO) Strategy adopted in January 2011. These were:

- Carbon Management Plan
- Climate Change Adaptation Plan
- Low Carbon Transition Plan
- Renewable Energy Plan

The Climate Change Adaptation Plan was currently in draft form but was expected to be published in July 2011. The Low Carbon Transition Plan and Renewable Energy Plan were being worked on over the summer of 2011 with an aim to finalise the Renewable Energy Plan next year. These would be brought to the Committee for consideration and comment once at draft stage and would be fed into the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework as per the Carbon Management Plan.

As central government funding was available to encourage more solar energy use, the Housing Board would be encouraged to consider ways in which this could be accessed. A guidance document on energy efficiency funding was accessible to schools and consideration had been given to which properties within the Council's housing stock could be viable for solar energy.

The ECO Board was expected to meet again in September 2011. A carbon monitoring report would be submitted to the Carbon Management Team in August prior to consideration by the ECO Board. A copy of the report would be circulated to the Committee once available.

Resolved:

- 1) To recommend that the Carbon Management Plan includes suitable milestones and adequate risk rating;**
- 2) That the quarterly monitoring report for the Carbon Management Plan to be circulated to the Committee; and**
- 3) That the three other action plans sitting under the ECO Strategy to be scrutinised.**

152. Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment

Following a longstanding interest by the Committee an update on progress against the Flood Risk Management in Wiltshire was provided. The Committee was asked to consider the update and comment as appropriate.

Cllr Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member and Peter Binley Head of Service Highway Asset Management and Commissioning were in attendance to present the report and answer questions arising.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that flooding issues had been significant in the north of the County a few years ago but that due to collaborative working and cooperation between all relevant parties these had been minimised. The budget for 2011/12 had remained consistent with the previous year to help address further issues and flood awareness events held had been well attended and highlighted the work that residents were able to undertake themselves.

Defra had undertaken surface water modelling to ascertain the drainage of surface water which identified that approximately 20k properties within Wiltshire were of potential risk of flooding although there was a remote change in many instances. This was, in some cases, due to properties being built on flood plains.

Further work was to be undertaken to source information held by the former District Councils to ensure those records were also taken into consideration.

The Committee asked for the definition of a flood risk area under the current regulations. Clarification was provided that under European legislation member states were asked to carry out an assessment where a threshold of 30,000 people affected within a set grid pattern of 9 square kilometres was set. Based on this criteria Wiltshire was not considered a flood risk area and, as such, was not required to produce a flood risk management plan as part of the regulations. However, surface water plans had been carried out in the main towns (including Chippenham and Salisbury) to reduce the potential of future flooding damage.

Issues that were addressed by both Wessex Water and the Council included the adoption of roads on new estates where often inadequate or incorrect drainage existed. The Council also continued regular highways drain clearance with a cleansing cycle to target areas that required more frequent cleansing and, following CCTV surveys undertaken, invoices had been sent where relevant to those responsible for damaged drainage.

It was noted that Councillors could also address flooding concerns through the Operational Flood Working Group where there was expertise at a more local level.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee noted the progress made in improving flood risk management in Wiltshire and the effective work of the Operational Flood Working Group chaired by Cllrs Seed and Hewitt; and**
- 2) That the Committee approves the draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment provided.**

153. **Scrutiny of Procurement and Commissioning**

Overview and Scrutiny had been reviewing the way in which scrutiny of procurement and commissioning should be undertaken following the release of the Business Plan. The Liaison Board, recognising the authority's new approach to procurement and commissioning, resolved that future scrutiny would be dealt with by way of a dedicated Task Group that would report directly to the Organisation and Resources Select Committee and replace the existing Major Contract Task Groups.

To ensure consistency and to retain the knowledge gained by the individual Major Contracts Task Groups the Committee was asked to appoint a member from its Major Contracts Task Group.

Cllr Peter Doyle was duly nominated and voted in as the Committees representative.

Resolved:

- 1) **To agree to the disbandment of the Environment Select Committee's Major Contracts Task Group;**
- 2) **To approve the new Task Group arrangements to scrutinising procurement and commissioning with a watching brief for the decommissioning of the Council's facilities; and**
- 3) **That Cllr Peter Doyle be appointed the Committees representative on the new Procurement and Commissioning Task Group.**

154. **Project Board Update**

The Committee was asked to note the update provided with the agenda and to that, in relation to the Gypsy & Traveller Project Board, that Cllr Jose Green, the Committees representative, had been invited to attend the next meeting in May with the new Project Managers now in place.

Cllr Ian McLennan also confirmed that the emphasis of the Housing Project Board over the next year would allow for tenants of affordable housing to highlight the areas of required change for them.

155. **Business Plan**

Following the publication and endorsement of the Council's Business Plan the Liaison Board considered the most appropriate approach to scrutiny.

The report provided with the agenda outlined the themes identified by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Senior Scrutiny Officer that related to the Committee.

Upon consideration the Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note that Council on 22 February adopted the 4 year Business Plan on recommendation from Cabinet;**
- 2) Note the decision of the Liaison Board on 10 February that work be undertaken to identify relevant content from the Business Plan for the individual select committees;**
- 3) Agree the list of themes set out in the report but acknowledging that further refinement would be once further details emerge; and**
- 4) Recognise the budget implications and the demands on the leading scrutiny members in determining priorities and workload.**

156. Forward Work Programme

The Forward Work Programme was noted with the following additions:

Draft Wiltshire Core Strategy would be added to the Committee's Programme with a note that some area boards had received presentations.

Delegation of Services to include public conveniences would be added to the Programme for consideration of delegation of ownership to town and parish councils.

Carbon Reduction Plan would be added to the Programme for consideration in July 2011

Climate Change Adaptation Plan, Low Carbon Transition Plan and Renewable Energy Plan would also be added to the Programme for future consideration.

157. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration.

158. Date of next Meeting

To be advised.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.10 pm)

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