

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2011 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, MONKTON PARK, CHIPPENHAM.

Present:

Cllr Chuck Berry, Cllr Rosemary Brown, Cllr Trevor Carbin (Substitute), Cllr Nigel Carter (Chairman), Cllr Peter Doyle, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Alan Hill (Vice Chairman), Cllr Howard Marshall, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Leo Randall and Cllr Anthony Trotman (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr David Jenkins, Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cllr John Thomson and Cllr Dick Tonge

174. **Apologies and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Cllr Chris Humphries, Cllr Stephen Oldrieve and Cllr Tom James.

Cllr Tony Trotman substituted for Cllr Chris Humphries and Cllr Trevor Carbin substituted for Cllr Stephen Oldrieve.

175. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2011 were approved and signed as a correct record.

Regarding item no.165 – Cllr Leo Randall wished to put on record that unitary, town and parish councillors in the Southern Wiltshire community area had not been made aware that the consultation undertaken as part of the Southern Wiltshire Core Strategy would be amalgamated into the wider Wiltshire Core Strategy following consultation.

176. **Declarations of Interests**

The Chairman, Cllr Nigel Carter declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item no.7 – Housing PFI Contract, as he was a non-executive Director on the board of the Sarsen Housing Association. He would not vote or otherwise comment on this item.

Cllr Tony Trotman declared a personal interest in Item no.6 – Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme, as he was a board member of the Calne Leisure Centre.

177. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman confirmed it was his original intention to bring the Air Quality Strategy and a report on the award of the Highways Works Contract to the meeting, however both items have been delayed on the Cabinet work programme and as such would be considered at the November meeting if possible, or a subsequent meeting. Both items remained a high priority.

178. **Public Participation and Councillors Questions**

None.

179. **Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme.**

The Chairman invited the Head of Climate Change and the Cabinet member for Waste, Property, Environment and Development Control Services to update the committee on the Council's first submission under the Carbon Reduction Commitments (CRC) scheme.

The Head of Climate Change highlighted the following points:

- November's publication of results would mark the first time council had been asked to submit its carbon footprint reduction efforts in this way.
- Officers estimated Wiltshire would place at the top of the bottom quartile of all organisations, based on an initial analysis undertaken by the Local Government Improvement Unit (LGIU).
- Only emissions from static sources were taken into account by the scheme.
- Schools accounted for 48% of the Council's CRC emissions in 2010/11 (approximately 48,000 tonnes CO₂, rising to a projected 60% the following year).
- The Council planned a net investment of £3.5 million over the next 5 years for energy efficiency.
- The first year's league tables were based on two proxy measures of success – namely the proportion of emissions covered by smart meters and the Carbon Trust Standard (an accreditation scheme).

The Cabinet member then highlighted the importance of the redevelopment of the Council's County Hall site, which would deliver approximately 40% energy efficiency savings compared with the current building, and facilitate the disposal of various other council buildings.

In relation to schools' emissions, the emissions of Wiltshire's Academy schools did form part of the council's measured carbon output, although the council's direct control over these schools was limited. Discussions were also being held

with all schools across the county regarding the actual level of out-of-hours lighting needed to ensure security.

It was also confirmed by the Cabinet member that the Council was launching a programme to educate children in Wiltshire's schools and an officer was in place to deliver this. Improvements to improve insulation in schools and investigations into the possible use of biomass-powered combined heat and power plants in Schools and leisure sites are ongoing.

Although Street Lighting was not considered under the CRC scheme, it was the subject of a separate invest-to-save programme.

The committee recommended that, if it did not already, Wiltshire's statement to be submitted to the CRC portal should emphasise the large, sometimes rural nature of the Council, and the extant measures taken to address emissions.

Campaigns to drive behavioural change had begun across the Council staff and members, in particular the 'Green Champions' programme amongst staff and efforts to synchronise and compress meetings of the Cabinet and ELT to avoid unnecessary travel where necessary.

The Cabinet member was mindful of the need to balance the carbon reduction benefits of selling property with his duty to obtain best value for the council. The committee was assured that the Council was flexible and responded to market conditions when choosing whether to sell, let, lease or retain property.

The committee expressed an interest in the payback times of the investments to be made over the next five years. It was explained that for most projects under consideration this was 4-5 years, however larger scale renewable energy generation schemes generally had longer pay-back periods and the efficacy of various schemes was considered by the officer transformation board.

Resolved:

- 1) To thank the Cabinet member and officer for their attendance and for the update provided.**
- 2) To request that reports from the ECO board be circulated to the committee.**
- 3) To invite an update to return to the Committee in early 2012, which would detail the effects of behavioural change efforts on Carbon Reduction; include details of the renewable energy projects currently active / planned by the Council; and to give precise figures of the expected benefits of the ongoing Transformation programmes (including the County Hall re-fit).**

180. **Housing PFI Contract**

The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Communities and Housing was in attendance to present a written update on the Housing PFI contract following the successful outcome a value for money (VfM) review of the project and subsequent ministerial approval.

A concern for some members of the committee was the 'high' risk rating of the project, given that officers and councillors were soon to enter into the PFI contract and planned financial close was estimated to occur in November.

In response the Cabinet member clarified that the project must still achieve approval from the Homes & Communities Agency, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Treasury. The need for these external approvals rather than any issues with the project itself or with local partners gives rise to a higher risk than would otherwise be the case. Once the necessary approvals have been obtained from external agencies, the risk level is likely to drop substantially.

Subsequent questions from councillors centred around which level of the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) that the homes would be built to (Level 3), and the possible benefits and drawbacks to building the houses to CSH Level 4.

The Cabinet member confirmed that the other funding streams for improvements such as Photo-voltaic (PV) roof panels were possible, and drew the committee's attention to continued uncertainty regarding the future level of feed-in tariff payments for householders and business which generate their own renewable energy. It was confirmed that the monetary gains from any PV panels installed by householders on a self-financing basis, would pass directly to the household.

Further questions from committee members concerned the value for money of the PFI contract and the details of the process by which nomination rights were transferred. It was explained that 'Homes 4 Wiltshire', (the partnership of the Council and the Registered Social Landlords), will be used by the PFI contractors to source tenants. Even after the contract period of 20 years has passed, it was felt highly likely that the houses would remain available for allocation by Homes for Wiltshire.

Should the project not advance partner funding in the region of £5-6 million would be lost in addition to the Council's total predicted set up costs of £2.5 million outlined in the accompanying report.

The committee commended officers and councillors for their work over the last few years.

Resolved:

- 1) To welcome the work of the Cabinet member and officers towards successful delivery of the project, and at this stage not to raise any**

specific issues for the Cabinet member to take into account when making the necessary decisions to formally enter into the PFI contract.

- 2) To welcome the invitation from officers to supply an update on the progress of the project, to return to committee once work on the ground has begun.**
- 3) That officers be tasked to investigate the 'New Homes Bonus', and whether or not Wiltshire Council qualified for the funding available, with a written response to be circulated to members of the committee.**

181. Car Parking Charges

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Howard Marshall put forward the reasons why he wished the new county-wide Car Parking Charges (as adopted at the Cabinet meeting on 14 December 2010 and Full Council meeting on 22 February 2011 and amended thereafter) to be scrutinised by the committee. His principal concern was the effects that a potential shortfall in the budget of the Department of Neighbourhood and Planning would have upon services such as rural buses which were at least partly funded by parking revenues.

Cllr Marshall proposed that a task group be set up to consider the issue. Cllr Brown seconded the motion.

The Head of Finance, Andy Brown, confirmed that the expected shortfall was £540,000 over the financial year, and that officers were looking at areas across the entire department of Neighbourhood and Planning, to find ways to reduce this shortfall. A report would be presented at the 18 October meeting of Cabinet.

The shortfall was county-wide, with some variation from town to town the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explained. More accurate year-end figures were awaited to provide data with which to evaluate the policy. Regarding Salisbury changes to the Park and Ride schemes had saved £300,000 and the Vision plan necessitates that the present central car park be redesigned.

The Cabinet member referred committee members to his recent delegated decision HT-032-11 regarding proposals for changes to Bus Services. He explained that of the circa £30 million budget of the Council's Passenger Transport Unit, very little was discretionary spending. The two areas where the council did spend were to provide post-16 educational transport and to subsidise bus routes. Wherever possible measures had been taken to save in areas other than the important and sensitive area of bus services – for example through reducing the operational cost of the county's park and ride services and renegotiating PTU contracts where possible.

Following these efforts, a package of measures to save £600,000 from bus services had been agreed which sought to achieve the necessary savings. The

need for savings in bus service spending was minimised by the decision to increase car parking charges specifically to raise income for this purpose.

The committee then debated whether or not to establish a task group to investigate the subject. The motion was defeated.

Discussion focused on the necessity for full and reliable data on the effects of the car parking charges to be made available to the committee and the timescale for this to be done. The Cabinet member highlighted the point that more accurate figures regarding car park revenue were expected by the end of September.

The Committee noted that Car Parking charges were subject to a review which would report to the meeting of Council on 08 November.

Resolved:

That the Committee consider Car Parking Charges as a full item on the agenda of the next meeting, with the understanding that a suitable report will be circulated in advance of the meeting, to provide details on the following:

- **Full details of the estimated shortfall in parking revenue, with a countywide total and an area-by-area breakdown, and showing a comparison with the revenues prior to the changes to the car parking charges.**
- **The wider economic context, using data from statistical neighbours if possible.**
- **Effects on Traders to be made clear, and differentiated from the effects of the recession.**
- **Detail on the nature and extent of the link between revenue from car parking and the provision of bus services / subsidies.**

182. Forward Work Programme

The Forward work programme was noted and amended to reflect the rescheduling of the Air Quality and Highway Works Contract items to subsequent meetings, in addition to the inclusion of updates on the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) scheme and the housing PFI Contract - to be received at the January Meeting.

A full report on the Car Parking Charges across the county, including the economic context and impact of differing revenue streams will be brought to the 1 November meeting.

183. Date of next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 01 November 2011, at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge, from 10:30am.

184. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.30 pm)

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