

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2010 AT COMMITTEE ROOM III, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Cllr Chuck Berry, Cllr Rosemary Brown (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Brian Dalton, Cllr Peter Doyle, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Mollie Groom (Chairman), Cllr Alan Hill, Cllr Chris Humphries, Cllr Tom James MBE, Cllr Stephen Oldrieve and Cllr Leo Randall

Also Present:

Cllr John Brady, Cllr Peter Colmer, Cllr Linda Conley, Cllr Tony Deane, Cllr David Jenkins, Cllr Jeff Osborn, Cllr Toby Sturgis and Cllr Dick Tonge

49. Apologies and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Cllr Nigel Carter.

50. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 January 2010 were approved as a correct record.

51. Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interest were received.

52. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman reported that George Batten, Corporate Director Transport, Environment and Leisure would be leaving the authority this month. Following his departure an organisational restructure would take place. Transport, Environment and Leisure and Economic Development, Planning and Housing would be replaced by the department for Neighbourhood and Planning headed by Mark Boden. The Committee would be responsible for scrutinising this department.

53. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

54. **Making Best Use of Existing Housing - Empty Private Sector Home**

The Budget and Performance Task Group considered the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) at its last meeting and recommended that the Environment Select Committee considered the way in which the Council managed affordable housing across the County.

A report by the Head of Private Sector Housing was submitted which provided an overview of the measures being developed to bring vacant private sector housing back into use.

Cllr John Brady, Cabinet member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing; Graham Hogg, Service Director, Housing and James Hudson, Head of Private Sector Housing attended the meeting to answer any questions arising from the report.

Ensuing discussion included an acknowledgement of the need and challenge to recruit to the post of Empty Homes Officer. This included whether the Job Evaluation Questionnaire, part-time status of the post and salary provided a true reflection of the needs of the role. Options on ways to resolve the issue included the possibility of sharing the resource with neighbouring authorities and investigating whether the job description could be amended.

Further discussion included the rights of private landlords and the need for their cooperation to reduce empty homes numbers and ways in which private landlords could be incentivised to work with the Council to bring empty homes back in to use. It was also noted that empty homes information was currently generated from the four different Council Tax systems in place within the four hubs although an integrated system would be procured to address this.

The issue of vacant homes within the housing authorities' arena was also raised although this was understood to be an issue for discussion outside of the meeting.

Resolved:

- 1. To note the report.**
- 2. To receive an update on the key issues raised by Councillors at the May meeting of the Committee.**

55. **Climate Change Update**

A report was submitted by the Service Director Economy and Enterprise which provided an update on progress made against climate change objectives, the proposed work programme and resources available to deliver the objectives.

The report follows consideration of the item at the November 2009 meeting where a further update as outlined above was requested.

Cllr John Brady, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing, Alastair Cunningham, Service Director Economy and Enterprise and Ariane Crampton, Head of Climate Change attended the meeting to answer any questions arising from the report.

Ensuing discussion included clarification that the carbon management plan was on track to be delivered to Cabinet in April and that work was taking place with the Energy Saving Trust to produce an action plan to reduce the authority's carbon footprint. Note was also made that the installation of smart meters (to include the use and maintenance of meters in schools and other council buildings) would achieve an energy bill saving of 2% and that installation should be concluded by March 2011.

An acknowledgement was provided that in order to achieve climate change targets it would be necessary for all Officers to work together with the Climate Change team and a proposal was subsequently made that job specifications should therefore include responsibility to adhere to the authority's corporate climate change targets.

Further discussion included that collaborative working was already taking place with the Army (acknowledged to be the largest employer within Wiltshire at present) to find ways to encourage those living and working within Wiltshire to reduce the carbon footprint. Wiltshire Council had already taken part in a carbon trading simulation exercise and would continue with a more sophisticated exercise for the following year as a measure to meet the mandatory Carbon Reduction Commitment which would come into force on 1 April 2010.

Finally a request that the work programme should be recirculated to members of the committee based on time-frame rather than objective was received.

Resolved:

- 1) **That the Committee notes the information in the report on:**
 - a) **progress made against climate change objectives**
 - b) **the proposed work programme for 2010/11**

- c) **resources available to deliver against climate change objectives.**
- 2) **That a revised work programme will be circulated in time-frame order.**
- 3) **That a further update on the Climate Change Strategy will be submitted for consideration by the Committee in July.**
- 4) **To recommend to the Cabinet member for Staffing that job specifications should include responsibility to the authority's corporate climate change targets.**

56. **Flood Risk Management**

A report from the Corporate Director Transport Environment and Leisure was submitted which provided details of the current position regarding flood risk management and response arrangements within Wiltshire.

The report follows consideration of the item in September 2009 where a further update was requested for March 2010.

Cllr Dick Tonge, Cabinet Member for Highways and Maintenance, Tracy Carter, Service Director Waste Management Services and John Edwards, Deputy County Emergency Planning Officer attended the meeting to answer questions arising from the report.

Cllr Tonge clarified that following the amalgamation of the Transport, Environment and Leisure (TEL) and Economic Development, Planning and Housing (EDPH) departments, Parvis Khansari would take over responsibility of the Flood Risk Management Group. Clarification was also provided that the Pitt Review and Flooding and Water Management Bill would require a greater investment of resource amongst the team.

Ensuing discussion included the need for landowners to take responsibility of land maintenance with clarification that the legal services team were investigating how this could be achieved, that a list of schemes was currently being compiled to establish work concluded for release through Community Area Information Packs and that work was being done with water companies relating to flooding as a result of water run-off into sewers.

The flooding questionnaire (attached as Appendix 2 of the Report and circulated to all parish and town councils) was acknowledged as a good example of collaborative working to address flooding issues. The Committee also recognised the importance of the forthcoming Flood Fair mentioned within the report and requested further details on when and where this would take place.

It was hoped that the Flood Risk Management Plan would be available for consultation in August/September 2010.

Resolved:

- 1) **To note the report.**
- 2) **To receive an update on progress in December following the amalgamation of the TEL and EDPH Departments.**

57. **Gypsy & Traveller Strategy - Progress Report**

In September 2009 the Gypsy and Traveller Strategy Project Group was formed to create a strategy which would incorporate processes to deliver a coordinated and effective approach to service provision for and interaction with the gypsy and traveller communities.

Cllr Jose Green, as the appointed Select Committee representative, provided an overview of the work of the Project Group. A report by the Service Director for Housing (and Chair of the Gypsy and Traveller Corporate Project Team) and Head of Equality and Diversity was also presented which provided details of the progress, aims and objectives of the strategy.

Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet Member Waste, Property and Environment, Graham Hogg, Service Director Housing and Rachel Goff, Project Manager were in attendance to answer any questions arising for the report.

Ensuing discussion included a request for clarification on the report submitted to Cabinet on Gypsy and Traveller site allocation and the outcome of this meeting. Cllr Toby Sturgis clarified that Cabinet had agreed to the methodology behind site allocation within Wiltshire and not site location.

Further discussion included that those living on canal boats with a cruising license were included within the gypsy and traveller community category, that the existing cost of enforcement of unauthorised sites was likely to be significantly reduced following clarification of the methodology behind site allocation and that the training organised for 19 March was now to be reorganised.

The Committee also discussed their future involvement in the scrutiny of this subject and agreed to delegate continued responsibility to Cllr Jose Green as the Scrutiny representative on the Project Group.

Resolved:

1. **To note the progress, aims and objectives of the Gypsy and Traveller strategy project.**
2. **That the Committee recommends acceptance and adoption of the approach and commitment to the strategy to Cabinet in April.**
3. **That future updates on the work of the Gypsy and Traveller Strategy Project Group will be received by Cllr Jose Green as and when appropriate.**

58. **Waste Strategy**

The Committee was asked to note the response received from the Cabinet member on the recommendations received from the Environment Select Committee as outlined in the blue sheet papers.

Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet member for Waste, Property and Environment attended the meeting to answer any questions arising from the response.

Ensuing discussion concluded that waste collection and disposal would be reconsidered following the anticipated General Election.

Resolved:

- 1) **To note the response provided by the Cabinet member for Waste, Property and Environment.**
- 2) **To defer any scrutiny activity into waste collection until after the general election when future national policy would be determined.**

59. **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Plan.

60. **Date of next Meeting**

The Committee is asked to note that the date of the next meeting has been re-scheduled to 11 May 2010 and not 18 May 2010 as previously advised.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.00 pm)

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