

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6 JULY 2010 AT COMMITTEE ROOM III, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Cllr Trevor Carbin (Substitute), Cllr Nigel Carter, Cllr Peter Doyle, Cllr Jose Green, Cllr Mollie Groom, Cllr Alan Hill, Cllr Chris Humphries, Cllr Tom James MBE, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Stephen Oldrieve and Cllr Leo Randall

Also Present:

Cllr Tony Deane, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Richard Gamble, Cllr Keith Humphries, Cllr Jeff Osborn and Cllr Linda Conley

76. **Election of Chairman**

Cllr Mollie Groom was appointed Chairman of the Committee.

77. **Election of Vice-Chairman**

Cllr Nigel Carter was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

78. **Apologies and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Cllr Chuck Berry and Cllr Peter Colmer. Cllr Trevor Carbin substituted for Cllr Peter Colmer.

79. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 May 2010 were signed and approved as a correct record.

80. **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr Peter Doyle declared a personal interest in Item 8 – Housing PFI Scheme - as a non Executive director of Sarsen Housing Association.

Cllr Rosemary Brown declared a personal interest in Item 9 – Real Time Passenger Information - as an employee of BLB solicitors who represented Trapeze.

81. **Chairman's Announcements**

The recruitment of the Empty Homes Officer had moved forward with the job now regraded to a more attractive salary and the post advertised on the intranet.

The Council was consulting on the future waste collection service. A request for an update on the outcomes of the consultation exercise would be requested for the next meeting of the Committee.

82. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation at the meeting.

83. **Housing PFI Scheme**

At its previous meeting held May 2010 the Committee was informed that contractual negotiations with Silbury Housing Limited had been extended and were anticipated to be finalised in July 2010. The Committee duly requested an update on progress made towards finalising the PFI contract at its next meeting. The Housing PFI Project Manager, Chris Trowell, attended the meeting to provide the update and answer any questions.

Clarification was provided that negotiations had been completed, with Cabinet approval granted on 17 June 2010 to enter into the PFI.

Although the project had received Cabinet approval, the Project Manager had recently attended a meeting in London with Homes for Community Agency and CLG which indicated that value for money of the project would be coming under much heavier scrutiny by central government. As a result the PFI project could again be delayed although it was understood that there was a desire to drive the project through. The Project Manager would be seeking further clarity on funding deadlines within the next couple of days and welcomed any support the Committee could provide.

Cllr John Brady – Cabinet member for Housing, and Cllr Howard Greenman – Portfolio Holder for Housing, had confirmed their support in progressing the Scheme.

Resolved:

To ask the Leader and Cabinet Member to reaffirm their commitment to the PFI Project and to work with ministers in central government to ensure delivery.

84. **Real Time Passenger Information**

A report from the Corporate Director – Transport, Environment and Leisure, was received by the Committee at its meeting in November 2009 and provided an overview of the delivery of Real Time Passenger Information. The Committee resolved to request a further 6 month progress update. Accordingly a report was submitted to this Committee from the Corporate Director - Neighbourhood and Planning.

Cllr Richard Gamble, Ian White – Passenger Transport Co-Ordination Manager and Liz Douglas – Real Time Passenger Information Manager were in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

The RTPI Manager confirmed that the real time system was underperforming but that work continued with the supplier to resolve the issues; this included converting a key bus route to GPRS which was being monitored and was working effectively.

Information gathering was still taking place but initial indications showed a likely save of £125k over a 5 year period. Continued negotiating with the supplier was expected to reduce the price further, although an initial estimated capital investment of £42k would be required to further implement the GPRS system fully.

Wiltshire Council had a 15 year contract with Trapeze Group (UK) Ltd (who supplied and maintained the system), which would run until 2018.

Cllr Richard Gamble confirmed that original costs of the project were in the region of £2.5m, which included substantial grant funding from central government to encourage use of public transport. No contingency funding was currently in place, although the officers would continue to bid for any available funding.

[The meeting was temporarily adjourned for approximately 15 minutes due to a fire drill]

Ensuing discussion by members of the Committee on the ongoing effectiveness of the system included, concern over the length of time taken to rectify the system problems, and that further spend would be required by the Council to remedy the problems. Members also discussed the contract with Trapeze Group (UK) Ltd and were informed that a summary of the contract was available for consideration.

Members also requested clarification on why a target of 83% had been set on new GPRS routes and requested further clarification on the costs for converting the Warminster to Salisbury route to GPRS.

Resolved:

- 1) To note the progress made towards improving the performance of the RTPI.**
- 2) To request a further report to the September meeting of the committee outlining in more detail the financial analysis/context to enable councillors to decide if they support the proposal to switch to GPRS.**

85. Air Quality Strategy

The Committee was asked to consider the Air Quality Strategy ahead of its submission to Cabinet in September 2010. The Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing submitted a summary report providing an overview on progress to date.

Cllr Keith Humphries – Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing, Mandy Bradley – Service Director Public Protection and Gary Tomsett – Specialist Environmental Protection Manager attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

Clarification was provided that the Strategy was one of a series of harmonisations taking place which had proven difficult to pull together as the previous district councils each had different strategies in place pre Unitary. A Strategic Framework was now being developed for Wiltshire Council and was designed to be open and provide clear guidance on air quality.

The authority had a duty to monitor air quality as set by central government policy and the EU. The Air Quality team was working with the Climate Change team to investigate ways of working together in future to maximise resources available.

The Air Quality team currently consisted of 4 staff who were working to influence policies and procedures and tackling problems highlighted in known areas, such as Bradford on Avon and Salisbury.

The figures detailed within the report were provided by the Central Government Environment Select Committee, which were not specific to Wiltshire and therefore difficult to break down further.

Ensuing discussion included what work, if any, had taken place following historic recommendations made by former district councillors previously and the need for a greater emphasis on planning management, which was likely to be the only areas to which Wiltshire Council could assist in the reduction of pollutants. Sight of the deliverables, objectives and commitment to targets was also requested for inclusion within the report.

Resolved:

To note the report and request that the Cabinet member consider the comments made by the Committee when finalising the strategy.

86. **Climate Change Strategy**

The Committee considered a report at its meeting in March 2010. The report provided an update on the developments of the authority's Climate Change Strategy. The Committee resolved that a further update would be presented to the Committee's meeting in July.

A report by the Service Director, Economy and Enterprise, which was also submitted to Cabinet on 22 June 2010, was duly circulated to members for consideration.

Ariane Crampton – Head of Climate Change, attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions. The Senior Climate Change Officers, recently appointed, were also in attendance.

The Cabinet member for Environment was unable to attend the meeting.

The following points were raised:

- In advance of reporting to cabinet all reports were now screened for environmental implications and carbon footprint impact.
- Research had been undertaken on best practice nationally. The London Borough of Merton Climate Change Strategy was highlighted as a good example.
- A draft strategy was planned for consultation September/October with a planned adoption date of December.
- The Climate Change Strategy would include the framework strategy and full action plan and which would consider the carbon management plan (inc carbon trading strategy), adaptation plan, county carbon reduction plan and renewable energy action plan.
- The aim of the Strategy was to highlight, inform and articulate details of the environment policy frameworks, how the Council dealt with carbon change and how it could change carbon emission levels.
- The Climate Change Adaptation Plan was expected to be in place for February 2011 (in line with LAA target).

- The framework strategy and climate change plans would be submitted to the Committee in September prior to being submitted to the Climate Change Board.

Thanks were given to the Head of Climate Change and her team for the work undertaken although members of the Committee wished for the minutes to reflect their disappointment that the strategy had not been completed to date, whilst noting that the staffing structure had just been populated because of the delays in finalising the budget.

Ensuing discussion included the need for a strong message from Cabinet in support of and financial commitment to deliver the strategy on carbon change. Consideration should be given by the Portfolio Holder - Environment on where the environmental strategy and policy sat within the current structure.

The Committee also felt that the strategy should be a risk based strategy which should highlight the main areas to be addressed with a list of prioritisation rather than range of activities as currently provided. This should include details of the issues the Council could influence.

Further consideration should be given on ways to encourage climate change responsibility following the Committee's recommendation to Cabinet to include climate change responsibilities within job descriptions although acknowledgement was made that work was being undertaken to recruit 'green champions' as a way to encourage climate change awareness with staff across the organisation.

The increase in carbon emissions for 2010/11 was higher as estimated figures were included in 2009/10 and took into account the likely increase in transport emissions. A Green Fleet review was underway on ways in which to reduce transport emissions with a report expected at the end of October. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust were being considered to undertake this additional work, although it may be more cost effective for the work to be undertaken in-house.

Vantage Point software would be used to build a baseline of carbon emissions within the county as the current information was based on 2007 data. Vantage Point would enable the authority to consider property build, its impact and how the authority could achieve targets for Wiltshire in the future. This would benefit the Council in calculating and addressing its carbon emissions taking into consideration that it was understood that a carbon emissions levy would be charged at £12 per tonne with a potential rise to £25 per tonne.

Smart meters continued to be rolled out with a drive for old meters upgraded and replaced with smart meters.

Resolved:

- 1) **To ask the Cabinet member to confirm his supports towards the capital investment required to enable the fully staffed climate change team to achieve goals and to ensure the authority meets the minimum statutory requirements in respect of climate change.**
- 2) **That the Head of Climate Change and Cabinet Member would attend the next meeting of the Committee in September to present the draft strategy, plan and renewable energy study/Carbon Management Strategy.**

87. **Housing Commission**

Cllr Ian McLennan as an appointed member of the scrutiny committee on the Salisbury Housing Commission provided an update on the scrutiny work undertaken to date.

Two meetings had been held, the first of which Cllr McLennan was unable to attend due to his recent appointment as representative. The second meeting followed a visit to Salisbury to consider the housing stock and receive details on the processes undertaken from someone vacating a property to what needed to be done thereafter to make the property habitable.

The Board's main objective was to move into the top quartile of housing providers by 2012 and therefore the Service Director for Housing was now spending approximately 60% of his time in Salisbury in order to ensure this was achieved.

The Committee considered whether the results of the Audit Commission review on the Council's management of the Salisbury housing stock, would be affected due to the cessation of the Audit Committee and what work had been done with the management of housing stock to date.

Resolved:

That recognising the inspection regime that the Housing Commission was responding to was no longer in place; the Scrutiny Officer would investigate any repercussions.

88. **Forward Work Programme**

Resolved:

To note the updates provided.

89. **Date of next Meeting**

7 September 2010. Members requested a special meeting to allow the committee to consider the Climate Change Strategies in detail.

90. **Urgent Items**

Cllr Alan Hill raised a planning concern based on the directive from Minister Eric Pickles to delete the Regional Spatial Strategy and whether this could be used as planning legislation. There was concern that the chief inspector had directed his appeals inspectors that the RSS was enshrined in primary legislation and without new laws passed it could not be deleted from statute.

Resolved:

That the scrutiny officer would contact the Service Director - Development to provide clarity on legislation surrounding the Regional Spatial Strategy and update the Committee.

(Duration of meeting: 10:30am - 1:20pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Sharon Smith, of Democratic & Members' Services, direct line (01225) 718378, e-mail sharonl.smith@wiltshire.gov.uk

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