

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Wednesday, 8th December, 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor J.H.R. Goodwin (Chairman)
Councillor *W.L.S. Bowen (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: P.J. Dauncey, Mrs. A.E. Gray, K.G. Grumbley,
J.G.S. Guthrie, J.W. Hope, J.W. Newman and Miss F. Short

In attendance: Councillor P.J. Edwards,(Cabinet Member - Environment)
Ms. G.A. Powell, J. Stone and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member –
Highways & Transportation))

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors W.L.S. Bowen, G.W. Davis, T.W. Hunt and R. Mills.

29. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor J.W. Hope substituted for Councillor T.W. Hunt and Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie substituted for Councillor R. Mills.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th September, 2004 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

32. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee were advised of progress with the 2004/05 Capital Programme for Environment Areas within the overall context of the Herefordshire Council Capital Programme.

The Director of Environment reported that, while there had been marginal changes to the Capital Programme due to increases or decreases in specific funding, the total for the Programme had increased from £12,009,519 notified to the previous meeting, to £12,044,105. Appendix 1 to the report set out the actual spend against each scheme to 30th September, 2004.

The Assistant County Treasurer reported that the total spent or committed to date was £6.249 million or 51.9% of the revised forecast. Due to the need to obtain a compulsory purchase order, spending on the Rotherwas Access Road would be significantly less than originally forecast and the spending forecast had been amended to reflect the change.

In relation to the level of prudential borrowing, Members were informed that

£395,000 had been included in the budget as a forecasted borrowing level to cover expected expenditure. In relation to the North West Herefordshire HGV Study concern was expressed over the accuracy of figures being used, and presented to Parish Councils in the Leominster area, by the consultants undertaking the study. On questioning the cost of installing a bus shelter, to Department of Transport standard, the Transportation Manager reported that in many instances the cost was split between Herefordshire Council and the relevant Parish Council.

RESOLVED: That the report on Capital Budget Monitoring be noted.

33. ENVIRONMENT REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee were advised of the budget monitoring position for the Environment Programme Area budgets for the period to 30th September 2004 including any variation against budget.

The Assistant County Treasurer reported that the total Environment budget for 2004/05 was £24,015,000. A net underspend of £1,030,000 was anticipated during 2004/05 from Environment General (£650,000), Regulatory (£30,000) and Planning (£350,000). With the exception of any underspend on the Waste Management PFI contract, any underspending would be carried forward into 2005/6. He expressed a degree of caution in relation to the building control and development fee income which was currently higher than expected and could not be relied upon to continue. The monitoring report was attached to the agenda report at appendix 1.

The Director of Environment reported that a number of staff vacancies in Planning Services had been filled and, in the circumstances, the Service was performing well.

Responding to questioning concerning changes to Part P of the Building Regulations, relating to legal requirements for safety upon electrical installation work in dwellings, the Head of Planning Services reported that this would generate additional work due to the registration of contractors.

RESOLVED: That the report on Environment Revenue Budget monitoring be noted.

34. A49 TRUNK ROAD - ROAD SAFETY ISSUES

The Committee discussed road safety issues concerning the A49 trunk road in Herefordshire.

The Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the Highways Agency had been invited to the meeting but were unable to attend. The Highways Agency had produced a statement entitled; "A49 Trunk Road: accidents at Ashton and A49 Route Management Strategy Between Ross-on-Wye and Shrewsbury". This was issued to Members at the meeting.

The statement outlined the position taken by the Agency following the accidents at Ashton in the North of the County. It stated that inspections at the site of the accidents had concluded that that particular section of the A49 did not have a high accident record. The statement also briefly outlined the undertaking of a Route Management Strategy Study (RMS) for the A49 between Ross-on-Wye and Shrewsbury. The Strategy also detailed safety schemes undertaken since April 2002 and further schemes valued at £650,000 for completion by April 2005.

The Chairman invited Councillor J. Stone (Upton ward) to speak as Local Member for the Ashton area. Councillor Stone reported upon the number of recent accidents,

both fatal and unreported, at Ashton. He highlighted not only the devastating effect accidents had upon the families and local community, but the consequential disruption caused to the local transport network due to the closure of the road; the effect upon villages due to resultant diversions and the damage caused to roads and verges by HGVs using the diversions.

Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie (Sutton Walls ward mainly adjoining the A49) raised a number of issues including: the reinstatement of the vehicle restraint barrier and provision of escape space at "Bungalow Bend" Dinmore Hill; the siting of speed restrictions at Burghope; siting of a speed camera on the south side of Dinmore Hill; the reinstatement of Deer warning signs at Queenswood; the reconsideration of the Dinmore Hill and Wellington Marsh avoidance route; the direction signage at Burghope Lane (U92623); the latest position concerning the provision of a roundabout at the northern end of Morton Park and the redesigning of the Morton Road, A49, the Morton Village Road and Ordnance Close.

Councillor J.W. Newman highlighted various problem areas including the speed of vehicles on the Callow and overgrown hedges which impeded pedestrians.

Councillor P.J. Edwards (Cabinet Member – Environment) commented that there were issues with other trunk roads and highlighted the need to extend the 30 mph speed limit near Tesco, Belmont.

Comment was also made regarding the difficulty in contacting the Highways Agency, both by telephone and by e-mail.

The Committee noted that the RMS, being a technique to provide a strategic framework for managing individual trunk roads over a ten-year period, was due to be published before Christmas.

In the absence of the Highways Agency from the meeting, the Committee requested that the Head of Highways and Transportation collate from all Members the various issues concerning the A49 and request the Highways Agency to attend a meeting of the Committee to answer the issues raised.

RESOLVED: That following consultation with all Members the Head of Highways and Transportation collate the various issues raised and request the Highways Agency to attend a future meeting.

35. GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (GEM) PERFORMANCE 2004/5 HALF YEAR

The Committee considered the Council's environmental management / ISO 14001 system at the half year to ensure that it continued to be suitable, adequate and effective and delivered improvement in environmental performance.

The Director of Environment reiterated that the Committee played an important role in providing top level scrutiny and feedback on the GEM system, which supported the Council's commitment to protect the environment. He also reported that the current Environmental Policy (June 2002) needed to be updated to reflect the major environmental commitments already made in Statutory Plans and other key documents. In addition an Environmental Strategy was being drafted which currently focused on the Environment Directorate. The document will link to next year's Good Environmental Management (GEM) programme.

The Environmental Sustainability Officer commented in relation to a number of issues raised in the report. These principally concerned: the GEM external audit

results, from which a number of corrective actions had resulted, detailed in Appendix 2 to the report; performance against targets, which had been detailed in Appendix 1 to the report and the tracking of legal compliance and the future development of GEM.

During discussion the following principal points were raised:

- Glass recycling – the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards reported that to undertake the collection of glass from households would, due to health and safety, involve major investment in collection containers and collection vehicles. Glass from trade establishments, restaurants and pubs, used to be undertaken, however, problems had arisen over the sorting of glass types, (brown, green and clear) which affected the ultimate value of the cullet. Glass was currently collected under the Trade Waste scheme.
- In the near future retailers of household type batteries should make provision for the collection and recycling of dead batteries in response to new legislation.
- Members requested that statistics concerning the take up of 'Car Sharing' be included in the next GEM report.
- The effectiveness of the ground source heat pump, installed at Marshfield Centre, Leominster, was being monitored.
- Investigations were underway into the feasibility of generating electricity from gas given off from the closed Stretton Sugwas landfill site.
- Salt Storage Barns – the Head of Highways and Transportation reported that planning permission had been received to locate a central salt storage barn at Rotherwas. When the central storage facility was operational the small storage units around the County would be closed. This would enable greater control over any environmental impact.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

36. SUPPORTING LOCAL BUS SERVICES

The Committee was advised of the Council's policy on the allocation of bus subsidies and informed of the level of passenger use of subsidised bus services.

The report described the current policy in relation to the determination of the subsidised network; the capital measures introduced through the Local Transport Plan programme to improve the attractiveness of bus travel in the County; the method of securing subsidised services, including the criteria for the award of contracts and indicated the numbers of people benefiting from the service. Appendix 1 to the report set out the cost and patronage levels on subsidised local bus services contracts.

During the course of debate the following principal points were noted:

- Subsidies to cross-boundary services were apportioned according to mileage and number of users
- The number referred to in Appendix 1 related to the contract number not the service route number. This was due to some contracts only covering part of a service route.
- In response to comments concerning the number of empty seats and the size of bus used, the Public Transport Manager reported that individual contracts specified the minimum number of seats required to be provided for the subsidy. The contractor then decided what size of vehicle he had available to fulfil the contract. He acknowledged that difficulties arose from a contractor's point of view in that during peak times e.g. fulfilling school transport contracts,

large vehicles were needed whereas during off-peak times smaller, more environmentally friendly vehicles could be considered.

- Any expansion of the Community Transport System, mainly provided by volunteers in the Leominster area, must recognise that the cost of provision per passenger was more expensive than many bus services.
- Questioned on the use of Bio-diesel the Public Transport Manager reported that contracts assumed the use of low sulphur diesel. The availability and use of Bio-diesel would be discussed with service operators.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

37. HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AMBITIONS - CONTRIBUTION MADE BY THE ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

The Committee considered the Environment Directorate's contribution to the work of the Environment Ambition Group and the Transport Wider Reference Group in relation to the Herefordshire Plan and Partnership.

The Conservation Manager reported that both Groups, supported by the Directorate, had had lengthy discussions with the Herefordshire Partnership Research Team about indicators in the State of Herefordshire report. The Environment Ambition Group had taken forward the Herefordshire Climate Change strategy. Work had also been undertaken on assessing alternative markets for apples in order to retain Herefordshire's orchards; reviewing the Herefordshire bio-diversity Plan (HBAP) and lobbying for changes to the Single Farm Payment Scheme. Work on the Transport Wider Reference Group had concentrated on the strategic issues of transportation. The Group had also considered the development of the next Local Transport Plan and had contributed to the County-wide Parking Strategy review.

In the course of debate the Committee noted that the Groups mainly comprised of voluntary representatives from a wide range of organisations and were very enthusiastic about the Environment Ambitions.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

38. HUMAN RESOURCES

The Committee received a report on sickness absence and other human resources matters for the Environment Directorate.

The Personnel Manager, Well-being, reported upon the absence statistics for the Directorate. The report provided a comparison for the year ending 31st March 2004 against the year ending 30th September 2004 by sickness type.

He highlighted that following action taken by management in relation to the current number of days lost (9.52 per FTE), it was expected that the overall figure would be close to the target of 7 FTE days lost per employee. The Council's target for employing people with disabilities was 1%. On the whole the Directorate was meeting this target with 1.5%. Indications were that the staff turnover figure had increased slightly to 10.8% due to the recent Directorate restructure and the decreasing overall numbers employed within the directorate.

The Committee scrutinised the statistics and noted that the recent high levels of staff vacancies, many of which had now been filled, and the increased number of planning applications had been a contributory factor to the higher levels of stress related sickness, particularly in Planning Services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

39. BEST VALUE REVIEWS - IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENT PLANS

The Committee received a report on the remaining actions and exceptions to the programmed progress in the improvement plans resulting from the reviews of Development Control, Public Conveniences, and Public Rights of Way.

The remaining programmed actions in the improvement plans were detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

RESOLVED: That the report on the implementation of the Best Value Review Improvement Plans be noted.

40. MONITORING OF 2004/2005 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - APRIL 2004 TO SEPTEMBER 2004

The Committee received a report on the exceptions to the targeted progress made by the Environment Directorate for the six months April to September 2004 towards achieving the performance indicators/targets which appear in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Exceptions to the targeted performance were attached to the report at Appendix 1.

In relation to BV82a – household waste arisings – Members requested that 'headline statistics' be provided on the cost of household waste. The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards undertook to provide statistical information for Members to use in constituency newsletters.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the 'headline statistics' on the cost of household waste be provided to Members for use in highlighting the issue in constituency newsletters.

41. UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S PARKING STRATEGY

The Committee received an update on the review of the Council's Parking Strategy.

The Chairman of the Review, Councillor J H.R. Goodwin, reported that the review was progressing. A number of meetings had been held, one of which had been to hear evidence from invited representatives and the public. He anticipated that one further meeting of the Review Group would be held to consider the draft report. It was intended that the report on the findings of the review would be presented to a special meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 24th January, 2005.

RESOLVED: That the position concerning the Review of the Council's Parking Strategy be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.05 p.m.

CHAIRMAN