

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 4th December, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Councillors: Mrs. W.U. Attfield, P.J. Dauncey, D.J. Fleet, K.G. Grumbley, J.G.S. Guthrie, T.W. Hunt, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, Ms. G.A. Powell and J.B. Williams

In attendance: Councillors P.J. Edwards, Cabinet Member - Environment)
D.B. Wilcox (Cabinet Member - Highways and Transportation) and
R.M. Wilson

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor JW Newman and Miss F Short.

27. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor DJ Fleet substituted for Councillor JW Newman and Councillor Mrs MD Lloyd-Hayes substituted for Miss F Short.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ms GA Powell declared a personal interest in Item 9 Environment Capital Budget Monitoring in relation to 'Accessible Bus Network' funding.

29. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

A member of the public suggested the Committee should investigate the reduced staffing levels in the trade waste team. The Chairman undertook to discuss this with the Director of Environment and if appropriate place an item on a future agenda.

30. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held 25th September, 2006 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

31. GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (GEM) REVIEW

The Committee reviewed the Council's environmental management/ISO 14001 system to ensure that it continued to be suitable, adequate and effective, and delivered improvement in environmental performance and full compliance with all relevant legal and other requirements.

The Director of Environment drew the Committee's attention to the highlights detailed in the appendix to the report and reported that the Corporate Management

Board had considered the report on 21st November and their response was also set out in the appendix. The Committee's attention was drawn to points 10 'recycled fibre content of paper for external printing' and 11 'all wood used by the Council to be from certified sources'. The Director also highlighted that a number of bids for works that were now becoming pressing had been made for inclusion in the capital programme.

The Sustainability Manager reported further in relation to the Council's commitment to the Carbon Management Action Plan and the need to lead by example; the waste targets which had not been achieved in 2005/6 and the Procurement Strategy.

On scrutinising the report the Committee debated issues relating to the collection and cost associated with the disposal of household batteries; the current problems experienced with the provision of an interceptor at Broad Street car park, Leominster and breaches in compliance at Hillcreast Housing sewage treatment works.

Arising from discussion concerning waste the Director reported that negotiations under the waste contract were difficult and commercially sensitive. He anticipated that any variation to the waste contract would be reported to Cabinet following which Members would be updated on the position.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

32. POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE USE OF THE RIVERS WYE AND LUGG

The Committee considered the draft policy statement for the use of the rivers Wye and Lugg as the basis for public consultation.

The Conservation Manager reported that Herefordshire's rivers, in particular the Wye and Lugg, were important culturally, environmentally and economically to the County's future yet by their nature the rivers had constraints that must be acknowledged if the qualities that made them so attractive were to be maintained. While Herefordshire Council was able to influence some aspects of the rivers' use the Environment Agency (EA) had prime responsibility for their management and he reported in relation to the Water Framework Directive whereby the EA must produce River Basin Management Plans, and the Wye Waterway Plan, which incorporated the Wye Navigation Plan. It was therefore considered timely for the Council to develop a policy for the use of the two rivers and present this in a formal statement. The draft statement, appended to the report, set out the strategic background to the issue, general policies setting out the Council's approach to the use of the two rivers and the operational policies covering those aspects over which the Council had some powers and responsibilities. The method of initial consultation and an indication of further consultation was indicated in the report.

During debate on the draft policy statement the Committee noted that the document attempted to address broad issues rather than individual user or access rights. Possible use of the river for energy generation would be dealt with under the planning mechanism. In relation to Policy Statement 8: 'Public Rights of Way' (PROW), the Committee thought proposals should be considered with a degree of urgency rather than 'earliest opportunity' in view of the impending 'freezing' of the PROW map.

RESOLVED: That the draft Policy Statement for the use of the Rivers Wye and Lugg be recommended to the Cabinet Member as the basis for consultation with the relevant organisations and public.

33. ENVIRONMENT REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee was advised of the financial position for the Environment Programme area budgets for the period to 30th September, 2006.

The Director of Environment and the Director of Resources' representative reported that the total Environment Budget for 2006/07 had increased to £26,714,460 mainly due to the allocation of additional budget to mitigate costs arising from Job Evaluation. In overall terms the budgets were expected to come in within budget. Detailed reports on budget monitoring were set out in the report and appendix 1.

During the course of scrutinising the monitoring report the Committee noted the following points in response to questions raised:

- In response to a comment that the concessionary travel budget would be overspent the Committee was informed that the budget had been increased at the beginning of the year to take account of changes to the concession. The scheme had been successful and therefore a slight overspend was now forecast.
- Underspends identified in the Conservation Grants budget related to specific ring-fenced budgets for particular projects and therefore a request for any unused grant to be carried forward would need to be made in order to complete specific projects.
- On debating Waste Management the Director reported that the work practices of the Waste Management Services had evolved over the years. In response to questions and concerns regarding trade waste a report, which would include any implications arising from the Government's recent review of the Waste Strategy, would be brought to Committee in March 2007.

RESOLVED: That the Environment Revenue Budget monitoring report be noted and a report on trade waste be included in the Committee work programme for March 2007.

34. ENVIRONMENT CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee was informed of the latest position with regard to the Environment Capital Programme for 2006/07.

The Director of Environment and the Director of Resources' representative reported that the total of the Capital programme had been increased to £13,387,000 a net increase of £171,000. A brief overview of the forecast was set out in the report together with, at Appendix 1, the capital budgets for the programme areas.

While scrutinising the Capital Programme monitoring report the Committee noted the following points in response to questions raised:

- Anticipated expenditure under 'Rural Rail Improvements' budget to provide disabled access for platforms at Ledbury station may be delayed due to impending re-letting of the rail franchise for services on this line, which is making it difficult to ensure the support of the rail industry for investment at the present time.
- The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) reported that negotiations were ongoing to secure a suitable car park site for the Park and Ride scheme in Hereford.
- Funding under the 'Accessible Bus Network' budget would be used to

improve accessibility at bus stops e.g. raised kerbs. The Director of Environment reported that while discussions were ongoing with vehicle operators concerning the introduction of disabled accessible busses or the use of alternative fuels, unfortunately since bus deregulation the Council had little power to influence commercial operators.

- 60% of schools have a school travel plan and further schools would be included during the year. Questioning whether 'in-distance' children could be expected to walk down narrow country lanes or be expected to afford the cost of bus travel the Committee were informed that there was no funding for 'in-distance' travel and Children's Services, who arranged school travel, did assess the safe routes to school.

RESOLVED: That the Capital Budget monitoring report be noted.

35. MONITORING OF 2006/07 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2006

The Committee received an update on the exceptions to the targeted progress made by the Environment Directorate for the six months April to September 2006 towards achieving:

- the targets that appear in the Council's Corporate and Annual Operating Plans and which were reported monthly to respective Cabinet Members and, by exception, bi-monthly to Cabinet
- the targets that appear in the Directorate Plan which were reported monthly to the respective Cabinet Members and, by exception, bi-monthly to Cabinet.

The Director of Environment was pleased to report that for the six month period to September 2006 none of the indicators for which the Environment Directorate and the Cabinet Members for Environment and Highways and Transportation had responsibility had been identified in the Integrated Performance Report to be of concern e.g. receiving a 'red traffic light'. For Members information the list of indicators contained in the Integrated Performance Report was set out at appendix 1 to the report. He informed the Committee that performance against all other indicators was within 10% of target. In addition performance, where ascertainable, against those indicators where data was not available either monthly or quarterly also appeared to be on target.

On scrutinising the report the Committee noted: that the indicator relating to 'deposits of litter and detritus that fall below an acceptable level' (target 18) the performance of 23 only related to the first three-month analysis. The Service expected to be at or below a score of 18 by the full year. The perceived underperformance in customer satisfaction with trading standards (target 80 performance 65) may correlate to the change in the way customer enquiries were handled namely via the Consumer Direct service. The kerbside collection of waste would be further extended as viable areas/villages were identified.

RESOLVED: That the performance indicators – April to September 2006 monitoring report be noted.

36. DRAFT TRAVELLERS POLICY

The Committee considered the recommendation of the Environment Scrutiny Committee Review Group established to review the Draft Travellers' Policy.

At its meeting in September 2006 the Committee established a Scrutiny Review Group to give preliminary consideration to a revised Travellers Policy. The

Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor WLS Bowen, reported that the Group had considered the policy and had made some minor alterations to the draft policy but in the main were content with the policies proposed. The Group proposed that wider consultation be undertaken, for example with the Herefordshire Travellers' Support Group, in advance of the draft being submitted to Committee for consideration and forwarded to the Cabinet Member for final decision.

RESOLVED That

- a) the report be noted and the draft policy be circulated for comment to interested organisations including the Herefordshire Travellers' Support Group; and
- b) the Review Group consider any comments made and the resultant draft Policy be considered by this Committee prior to being forwarded to the Cabinet Member for a final decision.

37. UPDATE ON THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Chairman of the Household Waste Recycling Review Group, Councillor KG Grumbley, updated the Committee on progress with the review. He reported that various interviews had been held and that a site visit to South Shropshire District Council, being a high performing authority, was planned. A final report on the findings of the review would be made in due course.

38. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Chairman and the Democratic Services Officer reported upon the Committee work programme, a copy of which was set out at appendix 1 to the report.

RESOLVED That the Committee work programme as set out at Appendix 1 be approved and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

The meeting adjourned between 10.40 am and 10.47 am and ended at 11.57 a.m.

CHAIRMAN