

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 9th November, 2007 at 9.30 a.m.

Present: Councillor RI Matthews (Chairman)
Councillor KG Grumbley (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: GFM Dawe, JHR Goodwin, JW Hope MBE, TW Hunt, MD Lloyd-Hayes, PM Morgan, AT Oliver, A Seldon and PJ Watts

In attendance: Councillors PA Andrews, WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards and DB Wilcox
(Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation)

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor MAF Hubbard.

23. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor GFM Dawe substituted for Councillor MAF Hubbard.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During discussion on agenda item 11 Review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire – Councillor PJ Edwards declared a personal interest as the former Cabinet Member (Environment).

25. MINUTES

Prior to the meeting Councillor GFM Dawe had submitted a number of suggested amendments to the minutes, copies of which were available prior to the meeting. Councillor GFM Dawe and Councillor M Lloyd-Hayes expressed concerns that the minutes should contain a fuller record of the meeting in that the minutes didn't mention there being no specific budget for scrutiny or the estimated cost of undertaking a scoping report. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reminded Members that minutes were not a verbatim record but a summary of proceedings that included only the essence of the discussion and the decision. While in most cases the suggested amendments added to the understanding of the meeting the Committee agreed that the printed Minutes represented an accurate record.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2007 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

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

A Member of the public made general comments in relation to road safety which were noted.

27. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER (HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION)

The Committee received a presentation by Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) on key issues in his portfolio area. A copy of his presentation has been appended to the agenda in the minute book.

The Cabinet Member reported on four main areas namely: an overview of the Highways and Transport service; achievement in 2006/07; funding, and work underway and for the future.

An overview of the Highways and Transport service. He highlighted the wide range of important services provided; the Council's strategy towards implementing the Local Transport Plan (LTP) and that the Service had been awarded the Centre of Excellence award following its successes in road safety and providing public transport services. Information packs had also been provided to other highway authorities setting out best practice in 11 areas of operation.

Achievement during 2006/07. He then commented on the areas of: Key Performance including helping pedestrians by the restoration of the Victoria Footbridge; promoting sustainable transport including school travel plans, work place travel plans, cycle parking and new cycle routes. Supporting Public Transport including increased patronage, free travel for people over 60 and travel corridor enhancement. Further achievements included the excellent response by the service to the July flooding and in maintaining the massive network of highways, which included bridges and street lighting.

Funding. He highlighted that capital funding under the LTP including the LPSA2G/SRSG totalled £10,889,000. Following completion of a good submission a Government bonus of 5% had been expected, however, the Government had reduced the bonus scheme to 3%. The LTP covered the period 2001/2 to 2010/11 and while the level of annual funding during the early years had been increasing he warned that levels of funding were now decreasing. There were also issues concerning supporting the revenue funding from LTP funding. On general revenue funding he reported that this stood at £9,266,000 being approximately 5% of the Council Tax.

Work underway and the future. He highlighted a number of schemes or developments including: tackling flooding in Hereford and Ross-on-Wye; the cost of the Streetscene service; the Rotherwas Access Road which was due for completion in Spring 2008 and the Holme Lacy Road improvements which were on track for completion. He encouraged Members to vote in the bid for Sustrans Connect 2 – Rotherwas River Wye Crossing Big Lottery funding. Due to ongoing negotiations he was unable to confirm the site of the Northern Park and Ride site. Negotiations were also underway for a site on the South side of the City. The Service was working with the ESG Co (Edgar Street Grid) to help clarify transport benefits and ensure impacts were properly mitigated. Work was underway on road safety improvements and speed indicating devices. Various initiatives to improve public transport, including rail, were being developed or underway.

On questioning the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) the Committee noted the following points:

- A number of parish councils received payment under the 'Lengthsman' scheme to undertake a range of predefined works, however, should further works be required then these would be considered.
- Regular meetings were held with bus operators to discuss provision, subsidies and timetabling, which included representatives of Children's

Services Directorate to represent school bus provision. The monitoring, including spot checks, of subsidised services was undertaken. A suggestion was made whether school busses returning to their depots could be utilised as services busses. Also during debate an issue was raised whether operators allowed bicycles and dogs onto busses.

- Talks continued with the Highways Agency concerning road safety on trunk roads in the County.
- While £1.2m was received from the government towards concessionary fares the Council still provided a subsidy.
- If the County failed to win Big Lottery funding for the Sustrans Rotherwas cycle/walkway then the Council would need to look at where it placed this project in its transport priorities.
- A view was expressed that the Council could do more to improve rail travel through membership of rail partnerships. Also that the Council could consider employing a rail officer.
- Responding to a claim that an Outer Distributor Road was contra to the intentions of the Carbon Reduction Plan the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) replied that moving traffic created less emissions than standing traffic and that the emissions from moving traffic were more dispersed.
- The term Outer Distributor road more accurately described the function of the road. i.e. it will distribute traffic around the city rather than simply allow long distance "through traffic" to bypass the city.

The Chairman thanked Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) for his presentation and answering the Committee questions.

28. REPORT BY CABINET MEMBER (ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING)

Director of Environment gave an oral overview of key elements of the Environment programme area on behalf of the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing).

The Director of Environment and the Head of Planning Services highlighted the following issues:

- elements of the waste subject would be mentioned during a later agenda item however, it was noted that the joint waste contract with Worcestershire was complex and crucial and that major penalties could be incurred in the future if the contract was wrong. The current collection contract was being reviewed, the correct infrastructure needed to be in place to deal with the resultant waste and significant investment would be needed.
- the service was consulting on implementing the National initiative 'score on the door' scheme. Following a food hygiene inspection of the premises the score would be publicly displayed on the premises door there by providing a competitive advantage to premises with good hygiene standards. The Committee also noted that under a new inspection regime wherever possible inspections would be combined to reduce the number of visits and disruption to premises.
- Discussions were ongoing concerning increasing the level of service provided during out of hours towards antisocial behaviour (noise) issues. As part of this discussion meetings were being held with the police to co-ordinate actions and pool data.
- Good progress was being made with the Local Development Framework, which would replace the UDP and provide the core strategy to 2026. Officer and member involvement was needed to consider the infrastructure implications in meeting the regional planning targets.

- Edgar Street Grid (ESG) development would provide a key focus to new housing in the City. A Supplementary planning documents had been completed. ESG are working with three shortlisted developers to discuss pre planning application issues. A planning application for the site was expected in 2008.
- Work was ongoing concerning the Biodiversity Action Plan on which a report would be made to the December meeting of the Committee. The Plan facilitated the drawing down of government funding and considered issues concerning new or existing conservation areas.
- Planning application numbers and fees were holding up well. The Service were looking to upgrade the IT system in 2008 to enable planning applications and correspondence to be electronically scanned and made readily available.

Questioned on the provision of new housing the Committee noted that the UDP would continue for a further 3 years. There would need to be broader thinking around the type of housing provided and infrastructure provision to enable the 16,500 new homes to be encompassed in the UDP.

Responding to questions on whether the Council could impose higher building standards to require developers to provide eco-style housing the Head of Planning Services reported that the Council could only invite developers to comply. He remarked that the larger developers may be willing to work to higher standards, however, economic issues seemed to prevail concerning the development of small plots by local developers. He hoped that the national regulations would be revised to reflect eco-policies.

The Committee further noted that issues concerning procedure and guidance on 'planning obligations' would be the subject of a report to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

29. ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE RESTRUCTURE

The Committee received an oral update from the Director of Environment on the restructure of the Environment Directorate.

The Director reported that he had inherited the 2007/08 budget for the Directorate. He had therefore had to consider the future financial position based on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. In line with this the Directorate's budgets would not receive any uplift for non-salary inflation, which would be further affected by recent increases in fuel charges. Added to this he needed to address the cost of improving the IT systems in the directorate and make further moves to co-locate staff to improve efficiency, and to improve staff development and training.

Due to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review and levels of inflation, he anticipated needing to make £1.8m of savings. He was therefore looking at a number of options including a maximum reduction of 60 personnel posts in the Directorate. He currently estimated that this would involve approximately 40 posts resulting in 20 to 25 redundancies. A project board had been set up involving Members, staff and unions, to oversee the review. He had also set up a project team to look at maximising the budget and a review of the contract with Amey Wye Valley Ltd had been initiated with a remit to save £1m without reducing the service.

He anticipated that the review would be completed by the end of January 2008 with

the aim of implementing changes by the end of April 2008, however, he emphasised that the Council needed to get it right so the timetable may vary.

Questioned on cuts to services he categorically assured the Committee there would be no reductions to services provided investment was made in IT services and staff were co-located.

The Committee briefly discussed the issues concerning the availability of a suitable building to co-locate staff and the Councils ability to vary the Amey Wye Valley Ltd contract.

A number of Members expressed concern regarding when they had been informed of the proposals.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

30. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING

Members were advised of progress of the 2007/08 Capital Programme for Environment within the overall context of the Herefordshire Capital Programme.

The Director of Resources representative reported that the total of the Capital Programme had increased to £28,931,000, as set out in appendix 1 to the agenda report, from £27,004,000 notified to the 19 June 2007 meeting. This was a net increase of £1,927,000 and details of these budget changes were set out in the agenda report.

On scrutinising the report the Committee noted that:

- Finance for improvements or developments to the cycle network were spread over a number of budget headings. It was also noted that while the cycle network wasn't extensive in the market towns this issues was being looked at.
- Responding to whether the current unspent budget for traffic calming could be spent in villages the Committee noted that any underspend would be reallocated to other parts of the LTP programme.
- The Director of Environment confirmed that funding was being sought to undertake archaeological investigations on either side of the Rotherwas Ribbon site.
- Questioned on the repayment period under prudential borrowing the Committee noted that this was dependant on the type of scheme and the life of the asset, which could be over 10 to 20 years.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

31. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee were advised of the financial position for the Environment Programme area budgets for the period to 30th September 2007.

The Director of Resources representative reported that it was expected that the Environment Revenue budget for 2007/08 will be underspent by a net amount of £357,000. He reported that the Environment revenue budget for 2007/08 had reduced from the amount reported in June 2007 (£25,021,000) to £24,741,000. The

reduction of £280,000 was set out in the agenda report.

While scrutinising the Revenue report the Committee noted the following points in response to questions raised:

- Clarification was given concerning the transfer of staff, and resultant transfer of staffing budgets, to the 'info by phone' team.
- Following the ending by the City Council of the service level agreement for various services the highways and transportation budget had been allocated an additional income budget in relation to Christmas Lights.
- Questioned on the levels of fee income and staffing costs the committee noted that the report and appendix was a top-level report to indicate expenditure at budget head levels. While a more detailed report could be provided the Director of Environment reported that his services managers were currently undertaking a performance cost comparison against other authorities.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

32. REVIEW OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee considered the further findings of the scrutiny review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire.

The Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor KG Grumbley, reported that the review Group had submitted its findings in March 2007 (appendix 1 to the agenda report) however, it was agreed that the report be held over pending the then awaited results of the Governments review of the National Waste Strategy. The Committee in June 2007 agreed that Councillor Grumbley, together with Councillor PJ Edwards, review the scrutiny findings in light of the governments review and resubmit the scrutiny report.

Councillor KG Grumbley reported the review had been carried out in accordance with the scoping statement (appendix 1 to the report) and provided a detailed commentary on the original report. He then commented on the implications for Herefordshire arising from the Government's Review of the National Waste Strategy and highlighted that as anticipated the Government had set higher targets for recycling and composting of household waste and would be increasing the standard rate of landfill tax, as indicated in the supplementary report.

He further reported that since compiling the report and supplemental report he had learned that the new waste collection contract for Herefordshire was unlikely to come into operation until Summer 2009 when a new recycling plant should be operational near Worcester. Based on this assumption he recommended that the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) consider further extending the current coloured bag collection system to areas of the County not currently covered. He further commented that the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) had indicated to him that he was currently minded to introduce weekly black bin (residual waste) collection with recycled materials being collected fortnightly.

The Chairman suggested that in view of concerns over alternate weekly collections and the change to wheelie bins that a seminar on waste collection and disposal options be held for all members and that at the same time all town and parish councils be consulted over this sensitive issue.

Questioned on the recycling of commercial waste the Committee noted that this comprised a sizable element of the waste stream and a number of members

suggested that the Council should encourage the Government to take on the issue of reducing this element of waste.

Responding to a number of questions the Director of Environment commented that: the judicial review appeal for the planning application at Madley (proposed autoclave facility) was that morning being heard in the High Court. The issues of wheelie bin use at terrace premises would need serious consideration. Black bags left in the street constituted fly tipping and could, as a first resort, be tackled by fixed penalty notices.

The Committee questioned the capital cost of changing to wheelie bins compared with the cost of black bags. In response the Waste Services Manager reported that from a study undertaken by WRAP, bag collection for refuse and recycling was the most expensive form of collection. If Herefordshire changed to wheelie bins then the cost of the bins and the change to the collection fleet could be factored into the cost of the collection contract.

In view of the range of issues concerning waste collection and disposal three Members suggested deferring consideration of the report until after the previously suggested seminar.

The Committee considered whether it wished to approve the report including supplementary recommendations or defer consideration until the after a seminar on waste collection and disposal. The Committee decided to agree the report and supplementary recommendations.

RESOLVED: that

- a) **subject to part b below the Committee agree the findings of the original Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire review and the supplementary recommendations identified in the agenda report for submission to the Cabinet Member (Environment & Strategic Housing);**
- b) **The Committee strongly recommends that before any further consideration is given to the suggestion of alternate weekly collections and the change-over to "wheelie bins", that a seminar on Waste Collection and Disposal Options be held for all members, and that at the same time, all Town and Parish Councils be consulted over this very sensitive issue;**
- c) **The Executives response to the Review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive has approved its response; and**
- d) **A further report on progress in response to the Review then be made after six months with consideration being given to the need for any further reports to be made.**

33. REVIEW OF TRAVELLERS POLICY - UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the progress of the scrutiny review of the Council's Travellers' Policy.

The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards representative reported that in December 2006 an initial draft policy had been produced and considered for consultation, however, subsequent work at sub-regional level in the area of Travellers' Housing Needs had necessitated further work on the policy being temporarily put on hold. While the outcome of the sub-regional Travellers' Housing Needs work was still awaited, other work on the policy had progressed to a point

where it was considered appropriate to hold further meetings of the review group. It was anticipated that the findings of the review group would be reported to Committee in March 2008.

RESOLVED: That the current position regarding the review of the Travellers' Policy be noted and the findings of the review be reported for consideration to the March 2008 meeting of the Committee.

34. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme as set out at appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee decided that the Waste Strategy issue, referred from Strategic Monitoring Committee, be considered following the seminar on waste collection and disposal, referred to earlier in minute No. 32.

In relation to the two parking issues raised by Councillor MAF Hubbard the Committee agreed that Members inform the Head of Highways and Transportation of issues and that a report be presented to the March 2008 meeting.

RESOLVED: that subject to the above the Committee work programme be approved.

The meeting ended at 12.55 p.m.

CHAIRMAN