

**MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 25th February, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor RI Matthews (Chairman)

**Councillors:** WLS Bowen, JHR Goodwin, JW Hope MBE, MAF Hubbard, R Mills, PM Morgan, AT Oliver, A Seldon, RV Stockton and PJ Watts

**In attendance:** Councillors: H Bramer, PJ Edwards, JP French, JG Jarvis (Cabinet Member - Environment & Strategic Housing) and DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member – Highways & Transportation).

**49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors: C. M. Bartrum, KG Grumbley (Vice-Chairman) and T. W. Hunt.

**50. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor R Mills substituted for Councillor KG Grumbley (Vice-Chairman), Councillor A.T. Oliver for C.M .Bartrum and Councillor RV Stockton for Councillor T Hunt.

**51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**52. MINUTES**

The Clerk reported that the published minutes indicated the presence of the Chairman at both meetings when in fact he had submitted his apologies and the Vice-Chairman had taken the Chair.

**RESOLVED: That subject to the minutes being amended to indicate the absence of the Chairman, the Minutes of the meetings held 3rd December 2007 and 2nd January 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman.**

In response to a number of questions concerning progress at the Colwall Railway Bridge the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) briefly reported that while the Council had taken the lead on highway grounds to replace the railway bridge with a temporary bailey bridge, it was now most unlikely that that option would proceed. Network Rail, the owners of the bridge, had now agreed to bring forward the replacement of the bridge in their maintenance programme. Talks were therefore underway regarding the design and installation of a replacement bridge. While the programme of works was in the hands of Network Rail he anticipated that the Councils contribution to costs (due to increased highway weight capacity) was likely to come from the 2009/10 budget.

The Committee requested that: close attention be given to the Councils proportion of costs; that Committee members be kept informed of progress with Colwall bridge and that close attention be given to similar bridges in the County.

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

The Chairman referred to a letter dated 24 January 2008 from Leominster Town Council raising concerns about flooding and drainage issues, particularly in Silurian Close and Worcester Road, Leominster, which had come to light during the floods in July 2007 and minor incidents since.

The Director of Environment reported that the service had been working hard to undertake maintenance throughout the County as a result of the floods that could be claimed for under the Governments Belwin scheme.

The Acting Head of Highways and Transportation reported that in excess of £2 million of flood related works had been undertaken. While this had held up the normal programme of maintenance, efforts were being made to bring the programme back on schedule. In relation to Leominster he was aware of a number of issues. Property ownership investigations were being made and, where necessary, schemes would be developed to address the problem.

The Committee noted the position.

**54. GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (GEM) REVIEW**

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

The Sustainability Manager reported on the GEM / ISO14001 Management Review for the period October 2006 to September 2007, a copy of which was appended to the agenda report.

On scrutinising the report the following comments or principle points were noted:

- The Committee wished to continue to receive updates on the GEM performance and noted that the next report would include the outcome of the recent external inspection.
- Questioned on the recycling of trade waste the Cabinet Member (Environment) reported that while the Council had no statutory responsibility for trade waste the possibility of incorporating elements e.g. glass from pubs, into any revised collection contract was being investigated. The Committee also noted the principle that the producer should pay.
- The Committee appreciated the good educational work being undertaken in schools on environmental issues, particularly through the EcoSchool scheme. The Committee requested that information on the content of the scheme be provided to Members.
- Responding to whether GEM sought to preserve the County or allow for change, the Cabinet Member (Environment) reported that development in the County was governed by the Local Development Framework.
- That the Council's GEM Policy was disseminated to the wider County via partners under the Community Strategy.
- Overall in 2006/07 the Council would have saved £4.5k by buying all greenlist

rather than standard items from West Midlands Supplies. In response to concerns that approving additional cost of up to 20% for greenlisted items could, for some items, represent a significant sum the Cabinet Member (Corporate Customer Services and Human Resources) as a Council member on the WMS Board, undertook to raise the issue at the next WMS Board meeting.

- Since compiling the report, efforts had been made to close out the non conformances and observations, however, issues around the Carbon Management Action Plan were still outstanding. In relation to this the Director of Environment commented that the plan had a bearing on the Local Area Agreement and he was keen to ensure that the calculation methodology was correct. Questioned on whether the County was likely to reach its carbon management target, and what quantitative reductions could be achieved by setting more stringent requirements for house building, the Cabinet Member (Environment) reported that the house building issue was being looked at, however, there was a balance to be struck between the need for new housing and meeting the carbon reduction target. The Committee questioned whether set parameters were in place.
- Methane gas from landfill will be burnt more efficiently when the new flare is installed at Stretton Sugwas thus reducing the greenhouse gas emission. However, these mitigating measures would not be counted under new National Indicators 185/186 for emissions.
- Efforts were continuing to ensure confidence in the data sets relating to utility usage and billing. It was anticipated that National Indicator 185 will give clear guidance on what data the government expected to be collected. It was suggested that any new build premises should have easily accessible utility meters.
- The Committee supported the MY Energy initiative and encouraged all staff, including schools, to reduce costs, resource consumption and carbon emissions. The Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee suggested that office relocation under the accommodation strategy should produce further environmental improvements.
- Consultancy under the Energy Savings Trust programme was only available to the end of the current financial year and so would not be available to schools.
- Questioned on recommendation 11 – misuse of sewage treatment plant – the Committee noted that this was an historical problem relating to the sale of properties connected to the plant. In relation to recommendation 12 – single contract for maintenance of sewage works - the Committee requested that further information be provided.
- The new Hereford crematorium, which will have many environmentally beneficial features, was planned to open in November 2008.
- Noting the differing opinion expressed in the staff opinion survey responses between understanding their roles and feeling the Council was doing enough on environmental issues it was noted that a further staff survey was planned to establish greater detail and priority for action.
- Many of the main timber suppliers now stock timber that meets acceptable certification schemes and its use is now standard practice in Property Services and Amey Wye Valley Ltd.
- The Committee noted that only 4 out of 18 Directorate Service Plans had included specific environmental improvement targets in 2007/08. Revised Service Plans were being monitored for 2008/09.

The Committee appreciated the detail in the report and complemented the good work being done.

**RESOLVED:** that subject to the above points the report be noted.

**55. TRANSPORT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Committee received an update on the progress of developing a Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) to improve long term planning of investment in the transport network.

The Acting Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the Transport Asset Management was defined as a 'strategic approach which helped identify the optimal allocation of resources for the management, operation and enhancement of the highways infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of users.' He explained that the Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2006/7 to 2010/11 included a commitment to develop a Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) in recognition of the challenge and the need to continue improving delivery of the vital local service.

Development of the TAMP began in autumn 2007 and included an extensive public consultation exercise which would end 29th February 2008. A seminar for all Council Members had been held on 12th February when views on a number of key elements of the transport network were expressed.

The response to the consultation, Members views, including those of Parish Councils, would contribute to the development of 'levels of service' for transport assets. These will be clear statements of the performance of the asset in terms understandable to the customers. This work will lead to the development of 'lifecycle management plans', a key element of the TAMP the improvement plan. The improvement plan will bring together a number of actions for ongoing improvement and will identify the further work required to improve the quality of the TAMP and more importantly the long term planning of the service delivery. A first draft of the TAMP was due in April 2008 with a final document expected in May 2008.

The Committee debated the following themes:

The asset maintenance, – Responding to questions concerning street lighting the Committee noted that, in broad terms, the service were looking to upgrade the asset if possible. There was no specific budget for an improvement programme and therefore improvements would be sought through the planning process. The Committee noted the need to balance adequate light levels for safety without causing light pollution. Responding to a suggestion concerning reducing the level of highway maintenance to promote slower driving, it was noted that accident prevention, and therefore improved maintenance and signage, was a high priority for the Council and was included as a Local Area Agreement indicator. With regard to the overall service delivery, concern was raised that the Service Delivery Review, being the subject of a later agenda item, should not have an adverse effect on asset maintenance.

Highway drainage – Questioned on the clearance of culverts and bridges the Acting Head of Highways and Transportation reported that while there was no specific budget for this, bridge work was contained in the LTP and the Land Draining Engineer worked to address any problems. Complex issues arose concerning land owner responsibilities. Comment was made that despite recent Highway Agency works on the A49, drainage problems still occurred which the Acting Head of Highways and Transportation undertook to raise with the Highways Agency. The Service advised colleagues in Planning concerning highway and drainage issues arising from planning applications.

HGV Routes – Members commented that following recent highway diversions for

works on the A49 and the increased use of Satellite Navigation systems an increased number of HGVs were using narrow country lanes. Concern was expressed that adequate signage be provided indicating HGV routes. It was noted that the Council worked with the Freight Partnership to encourage the proper management of routes. An alternative option could be the imposition of lorry bans from certain roads.

Highway Signage – Comment was made concerning Streetscene and the urbanising of rural locations by inappropriate usage of signage. The Committee noted that a policy on illegal signs was being developed and the issues of 'A' board advertising signs would also be looked at.

Speed Restrictions – The Committee noted that the LTP set out the policy on speed restrictions, particularly in villages and at schools. The Cabinet Member (Highways & Transportation) informed the Committee that an innovative part-time 20 mph scheme was being piloted at Sutton St Nicholas School.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and;**

- a) **the Director of Environment convey the concern of this Committee to the Executive in relation to the Service Delivery Review efficiency proposals and any possible adverse effect on service delivery; and**
- b) **the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) consider a more environmentally friendly signage scheme for rural areas and in villages in particular.**

At this point the Committee adjourned for 5 minutes and reconvened at 12.15pm

## **56. SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW**

The Committee received a presentation on the Services Delivery Partnership Review of the Council's Service Delivery partnership with Amey that was currently underway.

The Director of Environment reported that the Directorate were responsible for a number of major contracts. In accordance with Council policy no up lift to budgets had been made to take account of inflation. Therefore there would be increasing pressure on budgets. Accordingly a review of the Service Delivery Partnership had been initiated and he reported that two key objectives had been set for the review namely: to review alternative forms of delivery with a view to securing annual savings to the Council of a minimum of £1 million and to improve current quality and level of service. He emphasised that any changes to the current arrangements arising from the review would be by agreement between Amey Wye Valley Ltd and the Council and would not require a re-procurement process.

The Acting Head of Highways and Transportation gave a presentation on the review outlining: the scope, aim and objectives; the comprehensive approach to providing opportunities for staff involvement; progress so far - the completion of stage one (identification of possible delivery models and their assessment against key criteria) and start of stage 2 (detailed evaluation). The next steps were identified as to complete the stage 2 assessment by April 2008; report the outcome and recommendations to Cabinet (April/May); undertake negotiations with Amey, and subject to successful negotiations, seek Cabinet approval to implement any changes.

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

- While other service delivery models were being looked at Herefordshire

would have its own model to reflect the local circumstances.

- The Scope of the review covered not only highways and transportation but included parks, countryside, public right of way (PROW) and property.
- Responding to questions on value for money (VFM) and the need to ensure flexibility in the remainder of the contract, the Committee were reminded that VFM and improvements to quality and level of service were key objectives for the review. The need to be aware of long term implications e.g. any transfer of property maintenance to a Community Partnership, would also need to be considered.
- Amey Wye Valley Ltd generally welcomed the opportunity to review the contract.
- VFM may also be tested by benchmarking services rather than by market testing.
- Questioned on the ability to respond to extraordinary events e.g. flooding, the Director of Environment reported that, when compared to the previous contractor, Amey Wye Valley Ltd had extensive resources and technical knowledge to call upon. Members suggested that flexibility and resource capacity be included in the contract.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Committee be kept informed of progress at each key stage.**

#### **57. ON-STREET PARKING**

The Committee were informed of the Council's current policy with regard to on-street parking controls and considered whether it was appropriate to undertake a scrutiny review to determine whether it would wish to recommend any improvements to the policy.

The Acting Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the Council's Countywide Car Parking Strategy formed part of the Council's Local Transport Plan that set out the overall transport strategy for the County. A copy of the Parking Strategy had been appended to the agenda report.

He reported that the current strategy identified that during the period of the current Local Transport Plan, consideration would be given to the introduction of on-street charges in central Hereford to contribute to managing demand and provide revenue funding to support Park and Ride or other sustainable transport improvements. The Council was currently developing proposals for park and ride facilities for Hereford and it hoped to bring forward a scheme to serve traffic entering the City from the North in 2009. In addition, the Council had over recent years continued with a programme of Residents Parking Schemes in residential areas close to the centre of Hereford, and in appropriate locations in the Market Towns, to deter commuter and shopper parking and help enable residents to park. Given the number of schemes that had now been introduced, he suggested it may be appropriate to review the extent to which they had been successful and whether there were any improvements that could be made to how the schemes were operated and enforced.

The Director of Environment suggested the Committee may wish to consider the approach they would wish to take to reviewing any improvements to the Council's policy in relation to the management of on-street parking.

The Committee agreed to undertake a review and noted a suggestion that the review group consider as part of the review the Oxford Park and Ride scheme.

**RESOLVED: that the report be noted and a scrutiny review of on-street parking**

be undertaken the membership of which to be Councillors: MAF Hubbard (to Chair the review); RI Matthews; PM Morgan; A Seldon and PJ Watts.

**58. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Cabinet Member (Environment) reported that various matters were ongoing in relation to waste and the waste disposal contract. He was conscious that all Members needed to be updated and reported that a Member seminar would be held on the subject in due course.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee work programme be approved and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.**

The meeting ended at 1.32 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**