

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 15 September 2008 at 9.30 a.m.

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

Councillors: WLS Bowen, MAF Hubbard, TW Hunt, PM Morgan,
AT Oliver, A Seldon, NL Vaughan and PJ Watts

In attendance: Councillors PJ Edwards, JG Jarvis (Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing), J Stone and DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation)

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor CM Bartrum.

The Chairman announced that Councillor JHR Goodwin had stepped down from the Committee and had been replaced by Councillor NL Vaughan. The Committee recorded its thanks to Councillor Goodwin for his service to the Committee.

16. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor AT Oliver substituted for Councillor CM Bartrum.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor P J Edwards declared a personal interest as a former Cabinet Member.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 9 June 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions were received from members of the public.

20. ENVIRONMENT: PERFORMANCE FOR THE FOUR-MONTH PERIOD TO JULY 2008

The Committee considered the progress towards the achievement of targets for 2008-09 relevant to the Environment Scrutiny Committee and contained within the Environment and Culture Directorate and the Regeneration Directorate.

The Improvement Manager reported that a significant number of the performance indicators were new (from the National Indicator set) and therefore a different format had been chosen, for this report only, to enable a more detailed description of each indicator to be provided.

Overall performance by the Environment and Culture Directorate was considered to be on track for all Local Area Agreement, Community Strategy and Corporate Plan indicators on which the Environment and Culture Directorate took the lead or towards which it is making a significant contribution. There was a similar picture for other indicators, including those from the National Indicator set. In general there were fewer indicators in the Council's Corporate Plan with a number of those being reported annually or by external agencies.

On scrutinising the performance indicators the following principal points were noted:

- In relation to customer satisfaction (paragraph 9 bullet points 4 and 5) the Committee congratulated the staff, and acknowledged the good management, in achieving the good levels of customer satisfaction.
- Continuing the above point the Committee expressed an interest in comparing the satisfaction levels with similar authorities also affected by flooding and requested details from comparable authorities.
- Questioned on the collection of data for principal roads the Committee noted that data was collected by a specialist contractor on behalf of a number of authorities in the region. However, efficiencies may be made in that this survey work could be included in the revised Service Delivery Contract with Amey. The Cabinet Member, Highways and Transportation (H&T) commented that he had to balance highway maintenance expenditure between the various categories of road. A number of initiatives were underway e.g. the Watchman Scheme with the Parish Councils. Following the recent floods in various parts of the County, unplanned works, and therefore unbudgeted, had been necessary. While a claim would be made under the Belwin Scheme the Council would still need to fund the initial expenditure up to the Belwin threshold.
- Questioning the 'Amber' rating for the indicator 'people slightly injured in road traffic accidents' (agenda page 38) the Committee were informed that, while current performance had not met last year's profile, it was expected that the target would be met.
- It was requested that the appropriate date be included in the report where data was collected annually.
- Responding to comments on the indicator for litter/detritus/flyposting/ graffiti the Director of Environment and Culture (E&C) acknowledged that there was always room for improvement. However, he highlighted that due to the increase in fuel costs the street cleaning contract was likely to cost an additional £90,000 for the same level of service, a cost that would have to be supported from other budgets.
- Questioned on the level of flytipping the Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing (E&SH) acknowledged that more needed to be done. However, whenever possible, cases were taken to court.
- Responding to a claim that the Council was not following the national guidance for cleaning 'dirty streets' the Director E&C agreed that if there was national guidance then it should be followed. In response to comments regarding streets not being cleaned due to inclement weather or machine breakdown the Director E&C reported that cleaning should be in accordance with the contract, however, greater flexibility over the use of resources would be sought under a revised contract to ensure that, for example, grass cutting

was only carried out when and where necessary.

- The Cabinet Member H&T commented that responding to previous criticism the number of days taken to repair 'a street light under the control of the authority' was now 2.45 compared to the target of 6.61. In view of earlier comment concerning under resourcing in street cleaning the Committee questioned whether resources could be reallocated to the service from street lighting. In view of light pollution, rising electricity costs and the need to meet carbon emissions targets (NI185) it was asked whether street lights could be turned off e.g. after midnight, light levels reduced or low energy light bulbs used. The Director E&C reported that a number of authorities did turn off street lights and this option could be investigated. The Head of Highways reported that street lighting was only installed as part of a developer scheme. However, the Council had a street light upgrade programme using more environmentally friendly equipment. The Committee acknowledged that the suggestion would have to be balanced against other social expectations e.g. personal security and crime levels. The Committee requested a report to the next meeting.
- Questioned why a proposal to introduce a 20mph speed limit on East Street (East), Hereford, had been delayed, the Head of Highways reported that there were stringent criteria governing such an introduction. The scheme may require physical adaptations and would therefore be considered against other priorities. In relation to road safety the Cabinet Member H&T commented that various schemes were underway e.g. Young Driver training and Back on your Bike training, including the continuation of the safer routes to schools and school travel plans.
- Under the indicator 'level of air quality' (agenda page 43) the Committee questioned why the Council didn't already have a full inventory of vehicles in its fleet. The Director E&C reported that no central inventory was held because there was no central fleet manager and each Directorate was responsible for its own vehicles. The Committee expressed concern over the economic and environmental implications of this and requested that a report, together with the inventory, be submitted to a future meeting.
- Also in relation to air quality it was suggested that in view of the traffic volumes on the A465 Belmont Road, Hereford, that this road should be included in the air quality monitoring surveys.
- The Sustainability Manager reported that once the data had been collected on the impact that past extreme weather events had had on the delivery of Council services, a report would be made to the various service managers. Any actions identified would be included in directorate action plans which were due to be revised in April 2009. The Committee requested a report on any actions to be undertaken.
- The Committee noted that every 1% change in household waste collected affected the contract by £300,000. In relation to the 'performance to date' it was noted that the collection performance (197.6kg to June) was not linear and it was anticipated that the performance would be close to target. Responding to questions on the possibility of introducing household food waste collection, similar to that in South Shropshire, the Committee were informed that the scheme at Ludlow had to be supplemented by food waste from supermarkets.
- It was suggested that trade waste accounted for between 80 – 90 % of waste sent to landfill. The collection of trade recycling by the Council was limited by government constraints and private sector competition and could prove costly to set up as there were private sector businesses already in operation in this area. It was thought greater incentives to recycle trade waste would come about following the increase in landfill tax.
- The Cabinet Member E&SH reported that progress under the current waste

PFI was holding up well and discussions were moving ahead. He commented the review of the waste collection contract was already taking a broad view of waste reduction and collection. In relation to trade waste, discussions were ongoing with the Blue Box scheme at Ross-on-Wye concerning their future involvement, particularly in trade waste recycling, and he hoped they could run a pilot scheme in the near future.

- In relation to inspecting food establishments the Committee noted that over 47,000 hits had been recorded on the Herefordshire 'Scores on the Doors' web site. The Scores on the Doors scheme rates all food manufacturing businesses on their standards of hygiene, five stars being excellent and no stars being very poor. A decision was awaited from the Food Standards Agency concerning what level was considered an acceptable rating.

RESOLVED: that

- a) the position as set out in the performance report for the four month period to July 2008 and further described above be noted;**
- b) the Committee be informed of customer satisfaction levels with other comparable authorities as described above;**
- c) where data is collected annually then the collection date be indicated in the report;**
- d) the Director of Environment and Culture confirm that national guidance is being followed concerning cleaning dirty streets.**
- e) a report setting out the options concerning the possible reduction of energy/environmental impact of street lighting be presented to the next meeting.**
- f) A report on the Council's vehicle fleet, including an inventory of vehicles, be presented to a future meeting.**
- g) A report on the impact past extreme weather events had had on the delivery of Council services, together with any actions identified for inclusion in Directorate Plans, as they relate to the remit of this Committee, be presented to a future meeting.**

At this point the Committee adjourned for 5 minutes and reconvened at 11.04 am.

21. ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY AND CARBON MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

The Committee reviewed the Council's performance against the corporate Environmental Strategy targets and received an update on the Council's targets in relation to climate change and carbon management, with particular reference to the Council's own carbon emissions.

The Sustainability Manager reported that the Environmental Strategy report for 2007/08, (Appendix 1 to the agenda report), showed strong performance overall on the targets, particularly in the areas of waste management, air pollution control, biodiversity, supporting environmental management within the Council and local businesses, provision of planning services, and EcoSchools. Areas where objectives were not met included the number of reported cycle trips and use of buses by the public and dealing with abandoned vehicles. She further reported that the Council's ISO 14001 triennial renewal visit in July went well and the Council had retained corporate certification for all unitary council functions to the international management standard. Options for rolling ISO 14001 out to the PCT were being explored. However the Council's external certifiers had raised one non-conformity. For the second visit in a row this related to the Council's approach to reducing its own carbon emissions.

The agenda report set out the background to the Council's carbon management

including commentary on recent increases in utility prices, initiatives to increase carbon awareness and to reduce carbon emissions.

On scrutinising the report the following principal points were noted:

- The Council's current carbon emissions inventory for its own operations (Appendix 2 to the report) showed a small reduction in emissions (1.25%) from March 2005 to March 2008. However this was below the target set in 2005 and included in the Corporate Plan 2007-10. There were considerable fluctuations from year to year in the extensive data set which underpinned this calculation and further work was being undertaken to clarify the position.
- While Herefordshire's Local Area Agreement had set 3 year targets for reducing carbon emissions, the Committee were concerned to hear that resources had yet to be allocated to achieve the targets. The Director of Environment and Culture responded that by the time of the next Committee meeting a report would have been made to the Joint Management Team setting out the current position and a way forward.
- A key element in the Council's carbon reduction target related to the Council's property and the Committee requested a report setting out where the Council currently was with its Accommodation Strategy. It was also questioned whether the Council should have photovoltaic units on its properties to generate power. The Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee reported that his committee was due to receive a report on the Strategy in October.
- While works had been undertaken at Stretton Sugwas landfill site to reduce methane emissions further investigations would be undertaken into the greenhouse gas reduction this was achieving and possible use of the flare for electricity generation.
- In relation to the County's energy usage, questions were asked whether more could be done to promote energy efficient housing development through the planning system. Energy efficiency in social housing was also questioned. The Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing commented that efforts were being made in relation to housing, however, a pragmatic approach was needed.
- Questioned whether officers in each Council building were still appointed as premises energy officers the Director of Environment and Culture undertook to provide the Committee with a list of such officers.
- Questioning whether there was an action plan to achieve the 200 tonne carbon reduction required to meet the Council's own target the Committee were informed that a Council-wide Carbon Action Group had been formed to compile and analyse data by directorate and formulate plans on how each directorate would respond. The Committee requested to see the resultant action plan.
- The Committee acknowledged that the Council was the custodian of a number of historic buildings and while these may not be carbon efficient these would need to be maintained.
- On debating waste objectives (agenda page 18) the Committee noted from earlier debate that further waste reduction work was on-going.
- Asked whether video conferencing could be used in an effort to reduce the number of business miles incurred, the Director of Environment and Culture responded that this could be possible, however, it would probably necessitate modifications or upgrades to the IT systems.
- The Committee acknowledged that possible actions to achieve carbon management targets could have adverse consequences for other areas of service.

RESOLVED: that:

- a) the position as set out in the report be noted;
- b) the outcome of the report on the allocation of resources to meet the Local Area Agreement carbon reduction targets be reported to the next meeting.
- c) a report setting out the current position with the Council's Accommodation Strategy be presented to a future meeting;
- d) The Director of Environment and Culture provide the Committee with a list of Premises Energy Officers; and
- e) the resultant carbon reduction action plan by the Council-wide Carbon Action Group be reported to Committee.

22. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES - UPDATE

The Committee considered a request from the Chairman of the Planning Services Scrutiny Review Group for an extension of time to report their findings from the Review.

RESOLVED: That the findings of the Review be reported to the meeting scheduled for 23 March 2009.

23. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the work programme.

The Committee noted that Local Transport Plan issues would normally be highlighted via the capital budget monitoring report.

A Member questioned the control of injurious weeds, namely ragwort, which is toxic to animals. The Director of Environment and Culture reported that responsibility for injurious weeds was under the control of the Secretary of State through DEFRA. If it was found in highway verges it was dealt with either by the Highways Agency or by the Council under the verge cutting programme.

The following information, previously identified during the meeting, be provided to the Committee in the form of a briefing note:

- Minute 20 b) - customer satisfaction levels compared to other authorities;
- Minute 20 d) - confirmation that national guidance is being followed concerning cleaning dirty streets;
- Minute 21 d) - list of premises energy officers.

The following issues identified during the meeting to be added to the Committee work programme:

- Minute 20 e) - report setting out the options concerning the possible reduction of energy/environmental impact from street lighting;
- Minute 20 f) - report on the Council's vehicle fleet including an inventory;
- Minute 20 g) - a report on extreme weather events and resultant actions identified for inclusion in Directorate Action Plans within the remit of this Committee.
- Minute 21 b) - report on the allocation of resources to meet the LAA carbon reduction targets be reported.
- Minutes 21 c) - the Current position with the Council's Accommodation Strategy be reported
- Minute 21 e) - the resultant carbon reduction action plan by the Council-wide

Carbon Action Group be reported

- Minute 22 – The findings of the Scrutiny Review of the Planning Service be reported to the 23 March 2009 meeting.

RESOLVED: that subject to the inclusion of the previously identified issues the work programme be noted. And reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee

The meeting ended at 12.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN