

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 24 November 2008 at 9.30 a.m.

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

Councillors: CM Bartrum, WLS Bowen, JW Hope MBE, MAF Hubbard,
TW Hunt, PM Morgan, A Seldon, NL Vaughan and PJ Watts

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

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

25. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest were made.

27. MINUTES

The Chairman commented that the information requested at Minutes 23 had been received or incorporated into agenda reports for this meeting. The Committee requested that it be supplied with the list of premises energy officers referred to at minute No 21 (d).

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 15 September 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

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

Four representatives of Pixley Parish Council attended and highlighted concerns of their parishioners about the speed of traffic in their parishes but principally on the A438 and A417/2 and presented a supporting statement. They requested that the Council give serious consideration to their proposal that Herefordshire Council adopt a blanket 50pmh speed limit on all presently 'un-restricted' roads.

The Member for Frome Ward (Councillor P Morgan) spoke in support of the request and highlighted that there had been 4 deaths on the local roads in the last year and while the Local Transport Plan (LTP) included reference to reducing traffic speeds in villages, she suggested the rural areas also needed similar consideration.

RESOLVED: That a report on Speed Limit Proposals for the Rural Areas be added to the Committee work programme for consideration at a future meeting.

29. CARBON MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

The Committee received an update on information requested at the September meeting. This included:

- Progress on carbon management and in particular progress in reducing emissions to meet the Council's Nottingham Declaration target of a 20% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020 (1.25% per year);
- Current position in relation to fleet management of Council owned vehicles;
- Responsibilities for reading meters in council buildings; and
- information in relation to the Local Area Agreement target (NI186) to reduce per capita carbon emissions by 4.9% (13.1% including national measures) by 2010

The Sustainability Manager presented her report setting out: the financial implications and highlighting the strong link between ongoing costs and carbon emissions; the 'risk' to the Council and the increasing public interest in the Council managing its own emissions and performance against targets. Her report also set out: progress on carbon management, including the action plan to reduce Council carbon emissions for the current year (Appendix 1 to the report); the Council's Carbon Emissions Inventory (Appendix 3 to the report); work around landfill emission reductions; the current position in relation to fleet management (Appendix 2 to the report); officer responsibility for reading Utility metres in Council buildings and initial information in relation to the Local Area Agreement target (NI186) on County per capita carbon reduction.

On scrutinising the report the following principal points were noted:

- Noting the strong upward pressure in fuel prices, which put pressure on budgets across the Council and schools, the Committee appreciated that strategic consideration needed to be given to better use of energy efficiency measures. It was also questioned whether fuel price increases appeared on the Council's risk register.
- Following on from the energy theme above the Committee questioned progress on the Council's Accommodation Strategy as the Council's properties probably have a major bearing on its carbon emissions. In response the Director of Environment and Culture reported that the Council's Property Section were the main driver for the Accommodation Strategy. The Committee requested a report on how the Accommodation Strategy could assist with meeting the Council's carbon management targets. Concerns were voiced that, to show that the Council could lead by example, any new head quarters must be energy efficient and well designed.
- Director of Environment and Culture also reported that developments in ICT should enable more flexible and energy efficient ways of working e.g. home working or laptop use while on site.
- Responding to whether greater energy efficiency could be imposed through building regulation the Head of Planning and Transportation responded that local policy and Local Plans were ahead of the national legislation. Efforts were made through the planning policy, or by local negotiation with developers, to raise building energy efficiency levels. Greater success had been achieved with small local builders than with national companies. The

Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) commented that while current development applications reached efficiency level 3 he expressed a wish to see level 4 being reached. He also commented that, while the initial capital outlay may be more expensive, he wished to see greater energy efficiency measures incorporated into affordable housing.

- The Committee noted that work on reducing emissions from homes, businesses and transport (target NI186) had been temporarily affected by the resignation of the Climate Change Officer. The Director of Environment and Culture reported that due to budget pressures the vacancy would be re-evaluated in the New Year.
- Questioned whether any penalties were imposed on contractors by their inefficient use of fuel the Director of Environment and Culture reported that it was in contractors own financial interests to ensure the efficient use of plant and materials. Fleet fuel efficiency will specifically be addressed in new contracts.
- Responding to questions on the figures in section '8.2 landfill emissions' Director of Environment and Culture reported that these were best estimates. The new flare at Stretton Sugwas was providing data and work was underway to see if energy generation was feasible.
- In relation to the waste contract the Committee noted that while enhanced collection rounds, through greater collection of recyclables, would increase the carbon footprint it was hoped that this would be offset by a more varied use of the vehicles.
- Questioned on the integrated use of Council generated transport e.g. education, social services etc, the Director of Environment and Culture reported that the management of the Council fleet was due to be reported to the Council's Joint Management Team.
- Comment was made that the level of 'school run traffic' increased the carbon emissions and radical thinking was needed to address this with questions being posed 'why do schools start at the same time' and 'can better use be made of school busses'? The Committee noted that this was a complex issue and the requirement of education was different from that of Social Services. However, where possible the various teams liaised before any contracts were let so that where possible services were co-ordinated. The Committee requested a report on how transport contracts for school/health/ social care/ public transport, including small fleet operators in the voluntary sector, were co-ordinated.
- The Interim Transportation Manager referred to statistics from the annual School Travel Survey which outlined changing patterns in travel to schools. The Committee requested that the statistics be forwarded to them.
- Questioned why the opportunity had not been taken to use a carbon neutral fuel for the new Minster College, Leominster, and no heat recovery system had been fitted to the new crematorium, Hereford, the Director of Environment and Culture reported that the Council's Property Section had considered the relevant specifications and the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) reported that this issues had been debated at Cabinet. The Committee registered its concern that long term energy efficiency / carbon reduction measures needed to be given high consideration when new building projects were planned.
- The Committee requested background information on why a proposal to set up an 'Invest to Save' mechanism that would enable investment in energy efficiency works, in partnership with West Midlands Supplies (WMS) had not been progressed by the WMS Board.
- Noting the position outlined in the report (paragraph 8) concerning the Council's fleet management and the work underway by the Energy Savings Trust the Committee requested that a more detailed report be made to a future meeting. Noting that the Council managed 28 mopeds on behalf of the

'Wheels to Work' scheme the Committee requested further background information on the scheme.

RESOLVED: That:

1. **Property Services be requested to report to the March meeting on how the Accommodation Strategy can assist with meeting the Councils carbon management targets and based on current information, the Committee are currently minded not to support the new Accommodation Strategy unless it is in line with the Council's 1.25% carbon reduction target.**
2. **a report on how transport contracts for school/health/ social care/ public transport, including small fleet operators in the voluntary sector were co-ordinated be added to the committee work programme for consideration at a future meeting.**
3. **when new building projects are planned that Property Services ensure that long term energy efficiency / carbon management issues are addressed.**
4. **the Committee be informed of the reasoning behind why WMS had not progressed the Invest to Save Mechanism proposal.**
5. **A more detailed report on the management of the Council's vehicle fleet and possible appointment of Fleet Manager be added to the Committee work programme for consideration at a future meeting.**
6. **further background information be provided on the 'Wheels to Work' scheme.**

The Committee adjourned for 5 minutes and resumed at 11.03am

30. REDUCING ENERGY CONSUMPTION - STREET LIGHTING

The Committee were informed of options for reducing the energy consumed and carbon dioxide generated through street lighting.

The Highway Network Manager presented his agenda report and highlighted: the current volatility in the energy market; the energy used for street lighting; that a number of initiatives or pilot schemes to reduce lighting levels were being trailed by other local authorities and described a range of possible options with an initial view of potential advantages/disadvantages to Herefordshire together with an indication of how quickly any benefits could be realised.

The Committee appreciated the informative report and requested that a further report, on reducing energy consumption by street lighting, including any indicative costings/savings for Herefordshire, be considered by the Committee when the results of street lighting reduction trials currently carried out by other authorities are known.

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) emphasised that any reduction in street lighting needed to be considered in the round as there may be consequential effects, for example on road safety and crime levels.

RESOLVED: That a further report on reducing energy consumption by street lighting, including potential costings/savings, be included for consideration in the Committee work programme.

31. SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW - UPDATE

The Committee were informed of progress with the Service Delivery Review.

The Director of Environment and Culture reported that negotiations were progressing with Amey concerning improving the performance and value for money under the service delivery agreement. He anticipated that a full progress report would be made to Cabinet on 18th December 2008.

The Committee discussed: levels of worker supervision while on site, which was the responsibility of Amey; the possible imposition of stringent penalty clauses should targets not be met and the potential to lose valuable local knowledge through any loss of staff.

The Director of Environment and Culture emphasised that the focus would be on getting value for money based on outcomes rather than on rigid task specifications.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

32. ON-STREET PARKING SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE

The Chairman of the On-Street Parking Review Councillor MAF Hubbard, briefly informed the Committee of progress with the review.

He reported that the Review Group had been investigating the range of issues set out in the terms of reference and he commented upon the complex and interlinked range of issues involved. He thanked all who had taken part in supplying information to the review and specifically thanked Alison Cook, Income and Recovery Manager, for providing a range of statistical information.

In view of the close relationship between the aspiration for on-street parking and the current uncertainties around the proposed Park and Ride scheme he was doubtful whether the Group would reach any significant recommendations concerning on-street parking charging. However, the Group were likely to make recommendations on Residential parking and parking in general. He anticipated that the Group would report to the March 2009 meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

33. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee were advised of progress of the 2008/09 Capital Programme for Environment within the overall context of the Herefordshire Council's Capital Programme.

The Committee were advised that the total of the Capital Programme had increased to £21,951,000 from the figure of £19,949,000 reported to the previous meeting. Brief details of the budget changes were set out in the agenda report together with a headline indication at Appendix 1 to the report.

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

- The net increase of £3,284,000 on the Ross Flood Alleviation Scheme related to additional costs associated with tunnelling and shaft sinking works. The scheme was being funded by the Environment Agency and officers were actively pursuing the refund of these additional costs.
- Noting that minor changes had been made to the Local Transport Plan (LTP) budget schemes a view was expressed that the re-allocation of budget had not been made in accordance with the sustainable intentions of the LTP in that cycling and pedestrian schemes had not been progressed in favour of

car related schemes. The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) highlighted that re-allocation had only happened where schemes were unable to proceed and that public rights of way; speed limits and the outer distributor road feasibility study had benefited from the re-allocation.

- The Interim Head of Highways reported that 60% of the LTP had been committed at September. Problems arose where for example support for the Rural Rail Scheme had still not been obtained from the rail operator. While this particular funding was for one year the scheme could be reprogrammed in the overall LTP.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

34. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee were advised of the financial position of the budgets covered by Environment and Regeneration Programme Area budgets for the period 30 September 2008.

The Director of Resources representative reported that the total budget for 2008/09 had increased to £25,347,000 from the amount previously reported. The increase of £296,000 was due to additional budget relating to job evaluation costs for staff transferred to Amey Wye Valley Ltd in September and £34,000 addition to Planning as part of the realignment following restructuring.

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

- Questioned where the £429,000 from the government Restoration Fund (following the Floods in 2007) would be allocated, the Director of Environment and Culture reported that the income would be used to support the Directorate budget.
- Following on the theme of flooding, Director of Environment and Culture reported that, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration, they were investigating small scale schemes that may address local flooding problems. Little response had been received to letters sent to Town and Parish Councils requesting their input to local flood 'hotspots'. It was suggested that all Councillors on Herefordshire Council be requested to provide such information.
- The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) reported that, together with key officers, he would be meeting with the Environment Agency to discuss a number of matters one of which would be small scale flood alleviation schemes.
- Reference was also made to a report by Herefordshire Voluntary Action concerning the effects of the flooding which the Committee requested sight of.
- On discussing the budget position for the Planning Section the Head of Planning and Transportation highlighted a number of budgetary pressures effecting the Service, particularly in relation to the use of the Planning and Housing Delivery Grant, and work needed on the Local Development Framework. The Committee referred to the overspend on legal and consultant costs of £63k and noted that this had primarily occurred due to defending planning appeals. The Committee requested an analysis of the costs for both pre and post May 2007 and by sub-committee.
- The Committee noted that the £125k grant for de-trunking the A465 represented a part year payment in accordance with the Department for Transport formula.

RESOLVED: That

- a) The report be noted and the Director widen the request for information on local flood hotspots to include Councillors on Herefordshire Council;
- b) The Herefordshire Voluntary Action publication on the effects of the flooding be circulated to Members;
- c) A report analysing the cost of planning appeals broken down by Sub-Committee pre and post May 2007 be presented to a future meeting;

**35. ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE AND REGENERATION DIRECTORATES:
PERFORMANCE FOR THE SIX MONTH PERIOD TO SEPTEMBER 2008**

The Committee received an update on progress towards the achievement of targets for 2008-09 relevant to the Environment Scrutiny Committee and contained within the Environment & Culture and Regeneration Directorates Plans.

The Improvement Manager reported that while a number of targets still lacked base line data, in general terms, there had been an improvement since the last report. There had also been an overall improvement in the direction of travel.

The Improvement Manager also reported that some of the services in both Directorates had had the benefit of regular monthly customer satisfaction surveys. Coverage had gradually increased in the Environment and Culture Directorate but only covered the Planning and Transportation Division in the Regeneration Directorate. The Directorates acted upon the comments made in the surveys, however, a clearer picture would be available when a full year of results was available.

In relation to obtaining a wider view of the Service from the public, the Committee noted that data from the 2nd year of the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) would be available and requested that the results of the PLASC survey be circulated.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and the committee be circulated with information from the PLASC report.

36. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

Referring back to minutes No 28 (suggestions from members of the public on issues for scrutiny) the Member for Central Ward (Councillor MAF Hubbard) questioned why the County shouldn't take a new approach to curtailing vehicle speeds and suggested that consideration be given to a County-wide 50mph limit being imposed with 20pmh in very urban areas.

The Member for Frome Ward (Councillor PM Morgan) expressed concerns about the level of flooding both to roads and properties. While aware that some maintenance works had taken place she questioned what was being done to solve the problem. She suggested that a report be made to Committee outlining the situation throughout the County focusing on:

- the number of houses and roads that flood; the cost to business and the difference between rural and urban areas where substantial investment had been made in flood alleviation schemes;
- the long term prognosis with regards increased heavy rain fall and questioning whether the current drainage systems could cope or if the situation was likely to get worse;
- the financial and resource implications of improving the situation;

- whether the Council has the finance and resources to improve the situation and whether the Council had a plan to address these implications;
- what are the implications for the Council from The Pit Review: Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods;
- the Council is not solely responsible for solving the flooding – what is the situation with regards other responsible parties and what could be done to improve working with the other responsible parties.

It was also commented that much of the damage to roads was a result of flooding caused by the lack of ditch/drain maintenance. It was suggested that the report should also tackle the question whether the current network of minor roads was sustainable in the long term or whether the Council should be ruthless and consider extinguishing those which were little used.

The Cabinet Member (Environment & Strategic Housing) informed the Committee that due to the tight time schedule a small Working Group had been formed to consider policy issues that would drive the Local Development Framework and he invited the Committee to put forward up to 4 members to assist on the Group.

The Cabinet Member (Environment & Strategic Housing) also informed the Committee that significant work was underway concerning the waste disposal contract. The process was at confidential negotiations stage but he hoped to make a report to the March 2009 meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **subject to the inclusion of those issues identified earlier in the meeting and the above issues of County-wide speed restrictions and flooding the work programme be noted and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee;**
- b) **the Chairman and Vice-Chairman consider the nomination of members to serve on the LDF Working Group.**

The meeting ended at 12.46 p.m.

CHAIRMAN