

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 22 March 2010 at 9.30 am

Present: Councillor RI Matthews (Chairman)
Councillor PJ Watts (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: CM Bartrum, PJ Edwards, DW Greenow, JW Hope MBE, MAF Hubbard, TW Hunt, PM Morgan and A Seldon

In attendance: Councillors: JG Jarvis, SJ Robertson, J Stone, AM Toon and DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation)

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors: WLS Bowen and NL Vaughan.

41. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PJ Edwards substituted for Councillor WLS Bowen.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this point.

43. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 23 November 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Public Rights of Way – Documents on the Web Site

Mr P McKay suggested that when scrutiny look at Public Rights of Way issues at its July 2010 meeting it should include in its scrutiny the list of documents available via the web site as set out in his question to Council on 5 February 2010.

The Chairman thanked Mr McKay for his suggestion and instructed officers to include this aspect in the range of issues to be scrutinised in July.

Consultation and Working from Home – Agenda item 8

Mr G Simmonds questioned in relation to agenda item 8 – Environmental effect of staff and member travel to work arrangements - 1) the consultation undertaken when writing the report and 2) the Council's policy regarding working from home.

The Chairman thanked Mr Simmonds for his questions and instructed that the questions be dealt with under agenda item 8.

Speed Roundals

Mr M Wilson questioned whether any action had been taken in relation to Minute 32 Safer Roads Partnership – concerning resolution part B – taking up with Government the issue of speed limit repeater roundals. His attention was drawn to Appendix 2 to agenda item 16 which indicated that this had been included in the Highway Network Managers response to the Traffic Signs Regulations consultation, a copy of which would be made available to the Committee and Mr Wilson.

45. CARBON MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The Committee considered an overview of the carbon management performance and the Council's intended action to achieve its carbon reduction targets.

The agenda report set out the Council's target for the reduction of carbon emissions from its own operations and, together with appendix 1 to the report, outlined actions to achieve the target.

The Committee debated at some length various issues arising out of the report. It was appreciated that various initiatives and monitoring were being undertaken by sub-Groups of the Herefordshire Partnership, however, the Committee doubted whether the Plan, set out at appendix 1 to the report, was sufficient to achieve the target and highlighted that the Council was the lead partner in the Herefordshire Partnership and in the LAA and therefore should be setting an example to the County by driving improvement both to its own operations and in the County as a whole. It was recognised that costs were involved but in many cases reducing carbon emissions resulted in reduced energy costs.

While appreciating that many schools now had School Travel Plans the Committee questioned whether those plans were contributing to meeting the environmental targets and requested that a report be brought to a future meeting on this point.

RESOLVED:

- 1. the Committee were of the opinion that the Council's Planned Carbon reduction actions will not achieve the targets and requested that a further detailed report, on both the Council and Countywide intended actions, be submitted to the April 2010 Committee; and**
- 2. that a report on whether Schools Travel Plans were contributing to meeting environmental targets be considered at the April 2010 meeting**

46. SUSTAINABILITY AND PROPERTY PROCUREMENT

The Committee were updated on the procedures in place to ensure that the Council incorporated sustainability within building contracts and were advised of the Display Energy Certificate (DEC) performance of the Council's major operational buildings.

The report responded to previous committee recommendations or questions concerning the Council's energy/carbon footprint and the need for energy/carbon management within contracts. It also included information on Display Energy Certificates (DEC) performance.

While discussing the building contract tender conditions (Appendix A to the report) the Committee noted that a number of contractors had missed out on contracts due to not supplying the required information. The Head of Asset Management and Property Services reported that they were working with local contractors to ensure that they were clear about the range of information required. The Committee requested a briefing note setting out how this work was being undertaken.

Questioned why the facilities strategy with HALO only covered a 10 year period the Committee were informed that this linked into the length of the lease arrangements.

The Committee noted that during a period of high demand a number of specialist contracts had been let by AMEY to national companies rather than local companies. This had occurred as a result of local suppliers not meeting all the health and safety requirements, however, work was underway with local companies to address this issue.

Noting that a number of properties were DEC classified as G (see appendix B to the report) the Committee hoped that appropriate data would be forthcoming in the future.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a Member Briefing note be provided setting out how local contractors were being informed of the details needed when tendering for contracts.

47. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECT OF STAFF AND MEMBER TRAVEL TO WORK ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee considered an overview of the Herefordshire Council's Travel Plan; including an update on targets for travel mode shift, and looked into the future with the Plough Lane, Hereford, accommodation.

A Travel Plan aimed to reduce unnecessary travel, and promote sustainable travel, with an emphasis on reducing reliance on single occupancy car travel, to reduce the impact of travel and transport on the environment. The report set out the key objectives of the Herefordshire Council staff travel plan, future initiatives and opportunities particularly reflecting the accommodation plans for Plough Lane offices and the deeper partnership with the Primary Care Trust.

During consideration of the report the following principal points were noted:

- Answering the questions (see minute 44) concerning the consultation undertaken when writing the report and the Council's policy regarding working from home the Committee noted that a range of senior officers in a number of Directorates had been consulted. Report paragraph 10 indicated that a new Staff Travel Plan was being produced. The Committee requested a briefing note on the new plan when it had been compiled.
- In relation to home working the Committee noted that, while to a degree this already happened, with the move to the Plough Lane offices, home working would need to be further developed. Questions concerning the environmental balance between home working and office working were also raised.
- In view of the importance of the Plough Lane accommodation to meeting various environmental targets the Committee recommended that the Director of Resources make every effort to address the staff and Member travel to work issues set out in the report when considering the future development of the Plough Lane site.
- The Committee noted that while the Electric Smart Car had been well received, the trial period had ended due to battery problems. A member suggested a demonstration of an E-Motion electric powered bicycle.
- While noting this was a good return rate when compared nationally, members were disappointed that only 34% of staff had returned the Council's Travel Survey.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and:

1. **The Committee recommend that the Director of Resources make every effort to address staff and Member travel to work issues when considering the future development of the Plough Lane site; and**
2. **A demonstration of E-Motion electric bike be arranged for Members; and**
3. **Members be informed by Briefing Note when the Councils new Travel Plan is in place.**

48. WINTER DAMAGE TO THE COUNTY'S ROADS

The Committee were informed of the impact of the recent severe winter weather on the highway network and in outline the strategy that was being adopted to return the County's roads to an acceptable standard over the coming year.

The report set out the Council's response during the severe weather period, indicated the extent of the damage to the highway network and provided an outline of the proposed response to be delivered by a significantly expanded highway maintenance programme over the coming year.

The Chairman thanked the Council and AMEY staff for their hard work during the severe weather.

Arising from debate the following principal points were noted:

- Questioned on how maintenance was prioritised, the Committee were informed that AMEY carried out the Highway maintenance works in accordance with the Councils Maintenance Plan which set out the criteria and targets to be met. AMEY reported that potholes reported were investigated and those considered dangerous were filled within 24 hours, others were categorised for attention in accordance with the maintenance plan criteria. Extra resources had been allocated to this area of work and they were now catching up with the backlog.
- Responding to whether the Government had been approached for extra funding to meet the additional cost of repairs the Committee were informed that nationally The AA had put a case to government for extra funding to local authorities which had been rejected.
- Noting the benefit to rural communities of strategically placed salt bins and that current contact with Parish Councils over their placement seemed to be on an adhoc basis, the Committee recommended that the Council, through AMEY, increase its liaison with Parish Councils over the number and placement of salt bins.
- Members would be informed in due course of the programmed highway maintenance works in their area.
- The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) reported that while the Council only had a finite budget, Council had allocated £10.7 million to deliver a programme of capital highway maintenance during 2010/11. The programme would be delivered in accordance with the Council's Highway Maintenance policies, priorities for investment would be based on need and be focused on firstly addressing the maintenance of Principal and Non-Principal Classified roads. The AMEY representatives warned that while the increased budget would enable them to address the immediate and medium term issues it was unlikely to address the long term maintenance issues and another hard winter would affect the highway network condition.
- Members requested information on the length of highway maintenance works anticipated to be undertaken in 2010/11.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and

1. it be recommended that the Council, through AMEY, increase its liaison with Parish Councils over the number and placement of salt bins; and
2. a Member briefing note be produced informing of the approximate length of highway maintenance works anticipated to be undertaken in 2010/11.

49. PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICE

The Committee considered an update on progress on implementing the Scrutiny Review of the Planning Service.

On 14 September 2009 the Committee received a report setting out the Cabinet' response to both the Scrutiny Review and the parallel review carried out by the Audit Commission. Appendix 1 to the agenda report provided an update on progress to the recommendations identified through the Scrutiny Review.

On considering the progress the following principal points were noted:

- A major objective for the Service was to continue the work on the Local Development Framework (LDF). The ambitious target for responses to the consultation had been exceeded. External inspection of the process via a 'healthcheck' indicated that the soundness of the work was proceeding well. A further report on the LDF would be made to Cabinet and Council later in the year.
- Major advancements had been made in relation to the Section 106 processes with improvements to: the process; consistency, and the collection of monies where developer payments remained outstanding.
- It had been a bad year for planning fee income/application numbers, however, in the last 3 months there seemed to be an increase in confidence in the industry.
- The Committee expressed a range of views concerning the new Council Constitution and in particular the planning committee arrangements. Adverse comment centred around the reduced level of involvement non-committee members had concerning planning applications and the 'redirection' of applications. Noting that monitoring reports will be produced, Members requested that a report on the new planning committee arrangements be considered at a future meeting.
- In view of the increased development, primarily housing, expected in the County in the coming years it was suggested that to ensure that any potential consequential effects arising from a development were addressed at an early stage e.g. the need for any new or amended speed limits or road signs etc, a specific officer be nominated to co-ordinate such actions. The Committee noted that to a degree this already occurred in the transportation section, however, the Committee wished to ensure that a council-wide approach was taken.
- Issues were raised concerning the unavailability of certain planning application details via the Planning Website and the Committee noted that this may be due to the delay caused by scanning the documentation, which would improve when document scanning was brought in-house.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and:

1. **Progress in actioning the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Review be noted and the Committee considered that no further update report was necessary;**
2. **A monitoring report be considered at the September 2010 meeting setting out how the new constitutional and planning committee**

arrangements were working in so far as it falls within the remit of this Committee; and

- 3. the Committee recommend that as part of the directorate restructure consideration be given to nominating a specific officer to be responsible for co-ordinating any consequential actions arising from a planning development.**

50. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS RELATING TO THE HEREFORDSHIRE TRAVELLERS' POLICY

The Committee considered progress on the actions arising from the review of the Herefordshire Travellers' Policy.

On the 8 June 2009 the Committee received a report setting out the Cabinet's response, and action plan, following the review of the Herefordshire Travellers' Policy. The agenda report set out the further actions, progress and responsibility as at 2 March 2010.

On considering the report the Committee noted that: action listed against (iii) related to (iv); that the protocol with West Mercia Police was expected to be confirmed by 1 May 2010 and that the economic climate had affected the proposals at Linton, however, a recent planning application had clarified the neighbouring intentions and further proposals could now be worked on.

The Assistant Director (Environment and Culture) anticipated that a further review of the Travellers' Policy would be undertaken later in the year and suggested that elected members may wish to have an involvement in that Policy Review Group.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. Councillors: WLS Bowen; DW Greenow; TB Hunt and PJ Watts be appointed to the Policy Review Group that will meet before November 2010 to carry out a further review of the Policy with particular emphasis on its development with a report on its findings being made to the November 2010 meeting of the Committee; and**
- 2. A further report on progress against the actions arising from the Review together with an update on the findings of the Policy Review Group be reported to the November 2010 meeting.**

51. PARK & RIDE (NORTH) HEREFORD SCHEME

The Committee were provided with an update on work to date on the Park and Ride (North) Hereford scheme.

The report set out the background to the scheme, the work undertaken to identify potential sites, consideration of the in principal site at the Racecourse, Hereford, and the further work undertaken since consideration of the Business Case.

The Committee noted the longer term business sense in linking any permanent Park and Ride sites to the development of the Outer Distributor Road and on questioning the time scales involved, noted that to progress the ESG development, temporary sites would be investigated and work on this would start in 2010/11.

While appreciating the volume of traffic on the A49 it was suggested that a site be considered for the A465 (from Belmont) as this also had high traffic volumes. The point was made that traffic was unlikely to divert across from the A465 to a site at Grafton, and a site near Belmont could be linked to the existing cycleway.

A number of local ward members in attendance emphasised the importance that local members had early notice of any proposals.

In view of the intention to involve cycling and walking it was questioned whether the term Park and Ride should be changed.

The Committee noted that a separate pilot scheme was at an early stage whereby businesses on the outskirts of the City may be approached to make use of any spare parking capacity at their premises. Members would be informed further as the pilot progressed.

RESOLVED: That the position regarding the Park and Ride (North) Hereford scheme as now reported be noted.

52. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING

(Councillor DW Greenow declared a personal interest in relation to Rotherwas Access Road)

The Committee were advised of progress on the 2009/10 Environment Capital Programme within the overall context of the Council's Capital programme.

The Director of Resources representative presented the report and highlighted that the total of the Capital programme for environment had reduced to £15,764k from the figure of £16,717k previously reported. The reduction of £953k and the main variance were described in the report. Appendix 1 to the report set out in summary the capital budgets for 2009/10, on a scheme basis with funding arrangements indicated in overall terms.

On scrutinising the report the Committee requested that in future further background commentary be provided in Appendix 1. The Committee particularly noted the virements to support highway maintenance and that the Council had retained ownership of its winter gritting fleet to provide a degree of resilience to external forces.

RESOLVED That the Capital monitoring report be noted and future reports contain further background detail in Appendix 1.

53. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee were advised of the financial position for the Environment revenue budgets for the period to 31 January 2010. The report listed the variations against budget at this stage in the year and the projected outturn for the year.

The Director of Resources representative presented the report and highlighted a projected underspend of £95k. An underspend of £65k within the Environment and Culture Directorate and an underspend of £28k within the Regeneration Directorate. Further detail on the budgets was contained in the agenda report and its appendix.

The Committee noted that the full savings target under the Managing Agent Contract would not be achieved due to a delay in the start date for the contract and therefore savings would be pro-rata.

The Committee requested a report on the shortfall in income in the Parking budget, setting out the income/expenditure/staffing numbers – broken down by Market Towns.

Appreciating that some time ago a large retailer had vacated a number of stalls at the Hereford Butter Market, the Committee also requested a report on the shortfall in income in the 'Markets and Fairs' budget, including details of the stalls letting strategy.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and:

- 1. a report be considered at the April 2010 meeting concerning the Parking Budget (setting out the income/expenditure/staffing numbers – broken down by Market Town) ;and**
- 2. a report be considered at the April 2010 meeting concerning the Markets and Fairs budget (concentrating on the income, expenditure and letting of the Butter Market, and outlining the current letting strategy).**

**54. ENVIRONMENT & CULTURE AND REGENERATION DIRECTORATES:
PERFORMANCE FOR THE NINE-MONTH PERIOD TO DECEMBER 2009**

The Committee received an update on the progress towards the achievement of targets for 2009-10 relevant to the Environment Scrutiny Committee and contained within the Environment & Culture and Regeneration Directorates' Plans.

The Committee noted that government publication of data was still awaited in relation to NI185 – CO2 reduction from local authority operations. On further questioning it was noted that the targets related to the 2008/9 action plan and therefore progress had been rated as on target. Updated but unconfirmed data had been reported earlier in the meeting.

The Assistant Director (Environment and Culture) reported that in relation to NI182 actions had been put in place and he anticipated a better end of year position than indicated in the report.

RESOLVED: That the performance report be noted.

55. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED That subject to the inclusion of the items identified earlier in the meeting the work programme be noted and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

MR M HAINGE, DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

The Chairman announced that Mr Michael Hainge, Director of Environment and Culture, had left the Council on 19 March 2010. On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked Mr Hainge for the improvements in the services for which he had had responsibility and wished him well with his future plans.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm

CHAIRMAN