

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Function Room, Bridge Street Sports Centre, Leominster, HR6 8EA on Monday 7 June 2010 at 9.30 am

Present: Councillor RI Matthews (Chairman)

Councillors: WU Attfield, CM Bartrum, Bettington, DW Greenow, JW Hope MBE, TW Hunt, PM Morgan and A Seldon

In attendance: Councillors WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards, JG Jarvis (Cabinet Member - Environment & Strategic Housing) and DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors: DJ Benjamin; NL Vaughan; PJ Watts.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PL Bettington substituted for Councillor PJ Watts.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor PL Bettington declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Annual Report by Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing).

4. MINUTES

The Chairman reminded Members that for information only an update on actions arising from previous recommendations was contained at agenda item 8. Members noted that Amey Herefordshire used between 40 – 80 local contractors depending on the work and time of year. Payments to contractors should be within 21 days of invoice.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 19th April 2010, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Mr P McKay, Leominster, suggested that the expected report to the 13 July meeting concerning Public Rights of Way Service should include reference to the inspection of unsurfaced county roads as this matter didn't seem to be adequately inspected under the Council's Highway Maintenance Plan (see his question to Council 28 May 2010) He further suggested that as the meeting on 13 July would be receiving a presentation from the Local Access Forum, the question be put concerning whether there was adequate advertising for their meetings.

The Chairman thanked Mr McKay for his suggestions.

RESOLVED: That

- a. the Public Right of Way (PROW) report to the 13 July meeting also include information on the inspection of unsurfaced County Roads; and
- b. officers be requested to investigate the requirements for advertising meetings of the Local Access Forum and include in the report to the July meeting.

6. ANNUAL REPORT BY CABINET MEMBER HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

The Chairman invited Councillor DB Wilcox, (Cabinet Member - Highways and Transportation) to comment upon past performance; identify key issues and comment on future plans in relation to the Highways and Transportation portfolio.

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) provided an overview of the Highways and Transportation Services and highlighted progress in: Road Safety; Sustainable Transport; Winter Maintenance; Sustainable Travel; Supporting public & Community Transport; and future work on the Local Transport Plan 3 Review; Parking Strategy Review; the Hereford Relief Road; investment in maintenance; Edgar Street Grid – Yazor Brook Flood Alleviation; Widemarsh Street improvements, and Road Safety Improvements.

A full copy of the Cabinet Member presentation has been placed with the agenda papers in the Committee Minute book.

Arising from the presentation and questioning the following principal points were noted:

- It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the Council's and its partner's response to the winter weather which had included details of how the Highway Service had responded. Due to the additional costs involved in keeping the roads open (£936k) and subsequent increased maintenance (£3.5m in 2009/10) a number of planned schemes had been rescheduled. Costs would be involved in replenishing the salt barns and repaying the overspend. There were no plans to increase the normal salt/grit stock levels.
- In response to Members criticism of the rail companies for the lack of adequate accommodation on local trains, especially the overcrowding at peak times, and the lack of facilities at stations, particularly in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act the Cabinet Member informed the Committee that meetings were planned with the companies to again raise these issues. He undertook to report to Committee in due course. Depending on the outcome of the talks the Committee may consider inviting the companies to come before them to publically explain their position in these and other matters.
- While thankfully the number of killed and seriously injured (KSI) on county roads was falling (105) the Cabinet Member reported that any KSI were too many. Every incident was inspected and analysed. From profiling the highest number of incidents occurred to 16- 25 year olds and may relate to behaviour rather than road conditions. The Committee requested that the local member(s) be informed as soon as possible of any KSI in their ward.
- As the principal residential, business and retail centre for the County, access to the City was essential and the Committee requested information on the key points being used to lever increased funding from government to improve transport access to the City.
- The Committee were informed that a number of sustainable travel events had been arranged and details would be circulated.
- Since the report to the 26 March 2010 Committee a number of concerns had been raised by the public regarding the Connect 3 Greenway route which would

be addressed. A planning application was expected to be submitted in the autumn with construction due in 2011/13.

- 5 pairs of Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) were available for deployment through the Road Safety Team. The Cabinet Member urged parish councils to contact the team concerning the potential deployment of any SID as permissions needed to be obtained. The Cabinet Member reported that he would be discussing speed cameras and road safety issues with the Road Safety Partnership.
- On questioning how the National Review of Speed Limits was progressing and whether Councillors would be involved with the review the Committee accepted that it would be informed of progress by briefing note.
- The Cabinet Member urged members to keep themselves informed concerning the review underway of the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) and to respond to consultation.
- The Committee noted that a Pay-on-Exit pilot scheme would be undertaken at the Maylord Orchard car park and the Cabinet Member outlined how it would operate. Responding to whether the Pay-on Exit scheme would release resources for deployment elsewhere the Cabinet Member responded that it may necessitate increasing resources to staff the ticket validation desk and rectify any exit barrier malfunction. Changes would also occur to the car park closing times.
- Questions were asked regarding the recent closure by the owners of the Maylord Orchard car park of the pedestrian exits. The Head of Planning and Transportation reported that the necessary planning application to change the access arrangements had been approved as no adverse comment had been received from either the City Council or the ward member.
- Along side the ESG work a Parking Needs Analysis was being completed and would inform the review of the County Parking Strategy.
- Arising out of the public consultation on the Core Strategy, indications were that four fifths of the respondents supported a relief road for Hereford, however, opinion on whether it should be to the east or west was equally divided. A comment was made that the Council should show its commitment to the relief road by allocating finance to a reserve fund to support initial work.
- Questioned about progress of the Park and Ride schemes the Cabinet Member reported that discussions had been held with ward members concerning a proposed short term site (for 2 or 3 years) north of the Leisure Centre, Holmer Road, Hereford pending a longer term solution associated with the Hereford Relief Road. Members questioned the feasibility of a small site and criticised its location, as in accessing it traffic would already have joined the queue in Holmer Road. Comment was also made that in view of the difficulty in finding a site to the north then a site to the south, e.g. at Redhill, should be progressed.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation for his presentation and for answering the many questions.

RESOLVED: That

- a. the Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation is requested to take up in the strongest terms the matters concerning the lack of local train capacity and station facilities with the train companies and report to the November Committee meeting following which the Committee may wish to consider inviting the train companies to come before them to explain their position in these and other matters;**
- b. local Member(s) be informed when any serious incident or accident occur on roads in their ward;**

- c. **Members be informed by briefing note of the key points being used to lever increased funding from government to improve transport access to the City by the county population;**
- d. **information concerning the Sustainable travel events be circulated to all members;**
- e. **that current progress concerning the Review of Speed Limits be communicated to Members by briefing note; and**
- f. **that current progress concerning the bridge and road works being undertaken on the A438 (nr Rhydspence) be communicated to members by Briefing note.**

At this point the Committee adjourned for 5 minutes and resumed at 11.25am

7. ANNUAL REPORT BY CABINET MEMBER ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING.

The Chairman invited Councillor JG Jarvis, (Cabinet Member - Environment and Strategic Housing) to comment upon past performance; identify key issues and comment on future plans in relation to the Environment portfolio.

The Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing provided an overview based on the following themes of: Planning; Local Development Framework; Sustainability; Regulatory Services; Waste Management; Recycling, and Energy from Waste.

Arising from the presentation and questioning the following principal points were noted in relation to each of the themes:

Planning

- The Cabinet Member reported that following the reports by both the Audit Commission and Environment Scrutiny into planning, and consideration by the Constitutional Review Working Group the new constitution, which introduced the new planning committee arrangement in January 2010, were working well. The new arrangements provided for greater involvement by individual ward members into local issues and enhanced liaison between councillors and officers. Parish Councils and planning agents had also responded favourably.
- Responding to criticism concerning the lack of performance from the planning element of the new Civica ICT system the Head of Planning and Transportation shared in the disappointment, however, ICT were looking to rectify the problems. While there had been a 5 to 6 week backlog in processing the applications to the system during the September switch over this was now down to an average of 2 or 3 days. He acknowledged that plans were still being scanned externally and this caused a delay to their uploading. This element was still being looked at from a corporate point of view. Key staff had been consulted in the initial design of the system. Town and parish councils and the public would be consulted during the system improvement stages. The Sustainable Communities Director reminded members that the previous ICT system had ceased to be maintained by the manufacturers. The Committee were due to receive a report on planning at their July meeting and an update on the scanning element could be included.
- Concern was expressed regarding shortcomings in the enforcement of planning application conditions. The Cabinet Member responded that following a reorganisation of the planning teams a team had been set up to specifically address the enforcement issue and revise the enforcement standards.

- During discussion reference had been made to a 'planning tool kit' on which members requested further information and the Head of Planning and Transportation undertook to include this in a forthcoming work shop for members.

Local Development Framework (LDF)

- The Cabinet Member reported that the LDF replaced the Unitary Development Plan and would be key to future development in the County. Response to the Place Shaping Consultation during Jan to March 2010 had been very good with nearly 5000 people engaging in the process resulting in over 2400 detailed comments. This compared very favourably to experiences elsewhere. Results indicated support for both the proposed growth and proposed strategies. He outlined further opportunities for member involvement prior to consideration by Council, which he hoped would be in this administration.
- Responding to questions concerning any possible changes to the LDF process following the election of the new government, and in particular the housing allocation, the Cabinet Member reported that the LDF was being developed in accordance with current guidance. While government had recently announced it had dropped the housing allocation element, he commented that the county would still need housing and the location and number would be open to debate. The Head of Planning and Transportation commented that while the Regional Spatial Strategy had been dropped he was comfortable with how the draft LDF was progressing.
- Future development under the LDF required the utility companies to be in a position to provide the infrastructure and the Committee questioned what the latest position was, particularly with Welsh Water who, it was understood had not engaged in the discussions. In response the Sustainable Communities Director reported that Welsh Water were now in discussions. He acknowledged that there were areas of the County where major infrastructure improvements were needed and these would need to be prioritised.
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged the work done by Councillor PJ Edwards at regional level.

Sustainability

- The Cabinet Member reported that currently 95% of schools were registered in the Eco Schools programme with the County being in the top 3 for the number of registered schools with the prestigious Green Flag Award. Schools accounted for about 50% of the carbon emissions from council properties. Schools were encouraged to participate in the energy challenge to adopt good energy housekeeping approaches and appropriate energy saving behaviour. 99% of schools had Travel Plans and 36 schools had won a School Travel Achievement Award. 17 Schools had Green Flag status.
- He also reported that a Herefordshire Environment Partnership had been formed to work on carbon reduction related issues. The introduction of vehicle speed limits had helped with air quality issues at the Wilton roundabout and at Pencraig, Ross-on-Wye.

Regulatory Services

- The Cabinet Member reported that the good work of the Community Protection Team continued (reported in detail to the 26 March 2010 minute No 61). Achievements had been the implementation of the Civica single ICT system with Planning, Building Control, PS Housing, Land Charges and Waste Management. A challenge would be to continue improvements to the System. Other challenges would be the reorganisation of the directorate and associated accommodation issues, continue the work being undertaken on closed landfill sites and generally doing more for less.
- It was suggested that enforcement work by the Community Protection Team may be more effective if they worked out of usual hours. The Cabinet Member

responded that the team were willing to do so, however, human resources and contractual issues needed to be addressed.

- Questioned about a long standing issue concerning unadopted sewers the Assistant Director responded that meetings were ongoing with Welsh Water and a project group had been formed in an effort to progress the issue.

Waste Management

- The Cabinet Member reported that the 2009/10 recycling target of 35% had been met. The target had been set at 41% for this year and there was a continuing need to reduce the residual waste while increasing the recycled element. Currently 63,725 household properties had a recycling bin and 14,902 had a sack recycling service. This related to 97% of properties. The remainder were flats and discussions were being held with housing associations, managing agents and landlords about bringing these on board. The new refuse and recycling service had been introduced at a lower cost than the previous one whilst retaining a weekly refuse collection. Councillors would have a further opportunity to visit the new EnviroSort plant on 2nd July.

Recycling

- Schools waste is classified as household waste and the Council has introduced at 61 schools recycling using wheeled bins. The Council was looking at providing a service where a charge may be made for collecting household recycling from residential hostels, residential homes, hospitals nursing homes, self-catering holiday accommodation, holiday caravan and camp sites, charities and halls used for public meetings.
- The Committee noted that further delays had occurred to the development of a Greenwaste recycling site at Morton-on-Lugg.

Energy from Waste

- The Cabinet Member reported that the new energy from waste site would enable the recovery of energy from 200,000 tonnes of municipal waste per year (after recycling and composting) to reduce dependence on landfill. It would generate 15.5MW of electricity for the grid being enough to power around 20,000 homes with the renewable heat being used by nearby businesses. 40,000 tonnes of ash would be reprocessed to replace the use of aggregates. The site would provide up to 30 skilled jobs some of which it was hoped would be offered to applicants from Herefordshire. A Local education and visitor centre would be created. He further reported that a planning application had been sent to and validated by Worcestershire County Council as the planning authority. It was anticipated that the report to Worcester Planning & Regulatory Committee would take a number of months to prepare and no date had yet been set for its submission to the committee.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing for his presentation and for answering the many questions.

RESOLVED: That

- a. the report on planning applications and enforcement programmed for the July meeting also contain an update on the system for scanning planning application plans.**
- b. the Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing note the concern of the Committee that the enforcement of planning conditions was far from satisfactory and the Committee wished to see continued improvements in this area;**

- c. it be noted that the Head of Planning and Transportation intends to hold a work shop for all members on the theme of planning enforcement which would include reference to the 'planning tool kit;
- d. the Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing and key officers be requested to press Welsh Water and other bodies concerned to deal with the issue of unadopted sewers as soon as possible.

8. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED: That subject to reflecting earlier comment the work programme be agreed and recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

The meeting ended at 12.39 pm

CHAIRMAN