

**MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at the Shirehall, Hereford on Friday, 13th June, 2003 at 10.30 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor J. H. R. Goodwin (Chairman)  
Councillor W. L. S. Bowen (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors B. F. Ashton, Mrs A.E. Gray, K. G. Grumbley, B. Hunt, R. Mills,  
J. W. Newman

In Attendance: Councillors P. J. Edwards (Cabinet Member – Environment, Planning & Waste Management), R. M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation).

**1. CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

The Committee noted that Council had appointed Councillor J. H. R. Goodwin as Chairman and Councillor W. L. S. Bowen as Vice-Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting and gave a brief outline of his perception of the role of scrutiny. He expressed the hope that members would be engaged and enthusiastic and that the work of the Committee would be to the benefit of the County.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors G. W. Davis and T.W. Hunt.

**3. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor B. Hunt substituted for Councillor T.W. Hunt.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**5. MINUTES**

In relation to the minutes of 27th March, number 66 – Environment Revenue Budget Monitoring - the Head of Engineering and Transportation made a brief correction to the information reported concerning residents parking schemes. He reported that since July 2002 Local Authority Searches had included a set question relating to approved parking schemes. He further reported that schemes were required to be locally publicised.

**RESOLVED:** That subject to the above correction the Minutes of the meeting held on 19th March and 27th March, 2003, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**6. SCRUTINY – ROLE AND TECHNIQUES**

The Committee received a presentation on the role of scrutiny and the techniques that the Scrutiny Committees can use in their work.

The Policy Officer briefly described the background to scrutiny and outlined some of the key principles and risks to effective scrutiny. She advised in relation to questioning skills; the development of work programmes and highlighted the 10 steps to undertaking successful in-depth reviews. She further advised that some issues could be investigated by methods other than by formal Committee or Select Style Committee e.g. task and finish groups, presentations, briefings or by meeting in other venues. She summed up by directing members to a number of useful documents and websites.

The Chairman thanked the Policy Officer for the informative presentation.

**RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.**

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Committee received a report on sickness absence for the Environment Directorate.

The Personnel Manager (Well-being) reported upon the absence statistics for the Directorate which covered the period 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003. The appendix to the report indicated the number of people working in each division of the Directorate and the full time equivalent (FTE). The next column indicated the FTE days lost for each division followed by the average days lost per FTE. The appendix also indicated the number of FTE days lost for specific reasons and the number of jobs filled by people with disabilities.

The Committee discussed the statistics and noted that managers received more detailed reports to enable them to closely monitor their sections. It was noted that with a comparatively small number of staff in a section, one or two long-term sicknesses could greatly affect the overall statistics. The Committee further noted that the report to the November meeting would contain annualised figures and that these could be used for comparison with other authorities.

**RESOLVED: That the report on sickness absence in the Environment Directorate be noted.**

## **8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

Members were informed of the latest position with regard to the Environment Capital Programme for 2003/04.

The Director of Environment reported that the total amount available for the Capital Programme was expected to be £10,451,720. However this would be subject to adjustment as part of the 2002/2003 final accounts process. Sums available to fund the Capital Programme from Basic Credit Approval (BCA) would all have to be spent and the invoices paid on or before 31st March, 2004. The Programme would inevitably change during the year as the sums allocated for individual schemes were reviewed and revised.

In the course of scrutinising the programme the following principal points were noted:

- The Director reported that the Rotherwas Access Road scheme had obtained planning consent and that the Roman Road scheme was awaiting an environmental assessment. Both schemes were on target.

- Income shown from private developers normally related to income derived from Section 106 agreements.
- In response to questions regarding 'Quiet Lanes', the Head of Engineering and Transportation reported upon an evaluation of potential pilot schemes in Herefordshire for which consultants 'Halcrow' were undertaking a survey. He advised that the principal of the scheme was to establish a network of lanes attractive to pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders. Vehicular use would be discouraged but not prevented. Consequentially any scheme proposed was likely to involve an intensive consultation process and would probably cost more than the limited funding available.

**RESOLVED: That the report on the Environment Capital Programme 2003/04 be noted.**

## **9. ENVIRONMENT REVENUE BUDGET 2003/04**

The Committee were informed of the latest position with regard to the Environment Revenue Budget for 2003/2004 following the formal approval of the Council's budget.

The Director of Environment and the Assistant County Treasurer reported that the Council had approved a budget of £21,878,000 for the Environment Programme area which included allocations for Central Support Services. The budget for 2003/04 would be adjusted to take account of any carry forward from 2002/03. In addition to the effect of inflation a number of additions had been made to the budget and these were listed in the report. The Environment budgets for 2003/04 were attached to the report at appendix 1. While the out-turn for the 2002/3 budget was awaited, it was expected that the target budget would be met.

The Committee debated the 2003/4 budget and in response to questions regarding waste management; research into other methods of disposal and village collection schemes the Director acknowledged that waste management and disposal was a large and complicated subject. He announced that the first in a series of member briefings would be organised on 'Best Practical Environmental Option' (BPEB) on Waste. This would cover the issues of planning and land use. The Director briefly described the current position regarding the Waste Management contract and commented that the consideration of other methods of waste disposal was ongoing. He reported that the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had been unsupportive of the fall-back position of transporting waste to a new facility at Heathrow and consequently the fall-back position would be re-considered. He reported that while "bring sites" in villages were an important element of the collection process unfortunately due to the low volumes collected this could not be justified at the moment on cost grounds, particularly when compared to the cost of kerb-side collection in urban areas.

The Committee noted that Development Control fees were set nationally by government. The Chief Planning Services Officer reported that while the fees had recently risen by 14% and Herefordshire had benefited from an increase in planning applications, which had produced a reasonable income, this position could not be expected to continue.

The Director reported that Cabinet had endorsed a draft programme of improvement work in the planning area to be funded by the Planning Delivery Grant.

**RESOLVED: That the report confirming the Environment Revenue Budget 2003/04 be noted.**

**10. PAYMENT OF UNDISPUTED INVOICES WITHIN 30 DAYS**

The Committee considered the performance against this performance indicator during the financial year 2002/2003.

The Assistant County Treasurer (Accountancy & Exchequer Services) presented a report detailing the Directorate's performance in achieving the 100% government target. He reported that the annual percentage for Environment was 86.9% compared with 79.4% in 2001/02 but that the performance figures for the last 6 months of 2002/3 had each exceeded 92% with the exception of the Christmas period.

During debate on the level of performance against the target it was noted that payment of undisputed invoices had dropped during both Christmas and summer periods. This suggested that there was a personnel issue which needed investigation.

**RESOLVED: That subject to the comment above the report be noted.**

**11. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMERCIAL ENFORCEMENT – PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered progress in relation to the Commercial Enforcement Review and were invited to consider the member representation on the Challenge Panel for the review.

The Best Value Officer reported that the Stage 1 Report covering data collection had been approved in April 2002. Some progress had been made on collecting and analysing information from benchmarking and consultation activities. However, a delay had occurred in progressing the review. This had been due to a shift in priorities for officers on the review team who had been involved in the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and EFQM Assessments, and activities relating to the rolling out of the modernisation agenda and Customer Relations Management (CRM) initiative. He reported that the review timetable had been revised with the Option Appraisal stage being scheduled for completion in time to report to the Committee in September 2003. Representation by members was sought on the challenge panel of the review team.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and Councillor B.F. Ashton and Councillor R. Mills be appointed as the Committee representatives on the challenge panel of the review team.**

**12. BEST VALUE REVIEWS – IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

The Committee received a report on the exceptions to the programmed progress on the actions in the improvement plans resulting from the reviews of Development Control, Public Rights of Way, Highway Maintenance and Public Conveniences.

The Director of Environment reported that exceptions to the programmed actions had been listed in appendix 1 to the report.

During discussion of the exceptions report the following principal comments were made:

- In relation to Development Control the Chief Planning Services Officer reported that budget aspects identified in the review had been restructured.

However, staff time sheets were being processed to enable a more detailed breakdown of costs between functions.

- Issues concerning Public Conveniences were progressing. Current consultation with Town Councils so far indicated little enthusiasm in relation to changes in operational aspects. The Director reported that the Improvement Plan had been drawn up and acknowledged that a further report on progress was required.
- The Committee noted that due to the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease a number of targets in relation to Public Rights of Way had not been met. However, the Head of Engineering and Transportation was confident that many of the outstanding issues would be addressed in the next few months.
- In response to questions on Highway Maintenance the Head of Engineering and Transportation reported that a number of new contracts or partnership agreements were being looked at which would introduce innovative methods of working. Progress with IT systems, for both Highways and Environmental Health, was part of a corporate process which would include information from other Directorates. Proposals by Ofgem concerning electricity connections were still awaited. A draft Street Lighting policy based on national policy, but incorporating local issues where possible, was in an early stage of consideration.
- It was suggested that in addition to monitoring performance indicators the Committee should also focus on results monitoring.

**RESOLVED: That subject to the comments detailed above the report on the implementation and improvement plans be noted**

### **13. MONITORING OF 2002/2003 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – FULL YEAR APRIL 2002 TO MARCH 2003**

Members were updated on progress made by the Environment Directorate for the full year April 2002 to March 2003 towards achieving all of the performance indicators/targets which appeared in the Council's Performance Plan.

The report of exceptions to the targeted performance was attached to the report at appendix 1.

During the course of scrutinising the indicators/targets the Committee noted the following principal points:

- BV87 (and BV82a) On questioning whether this figure included Landfill Tax the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards reported that this was a difficult figure to compute due to other factors e.g. composting. However, the landfill tax was included in the Waste Contract PFI figures and would therefore be included in this indicator. The Director agreed that a way needed to be found to express the cost of waste collection to the public in a meaningful way e.g. cost per black bag.
- Local targets regarding Food and Health and Safety inspections – The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards reported that due to pressure from the Food Standards Agency resources had been focused on Food Standards Inspections, which, while inspections had been targeted, had resulted in a large volume of inspection work. This had had a detrimental

effect on Health and Safety inspections which also required an increased level of resourcing. He commented that the Service offered advice and training on these issues via the Herefordshire Business Partnership.

- BV109a – The Committee noted that due to the small number of applications, the target for determination of major industrial planning applications could be greatly affected by one application. Further improvements were expected following Cabinet's endorsement of the draft programme of improvement work to be funded by the Planning Delivery Grant.
- Responding to a comment on the percentage of planning applications invalid on receipt, the Chief Planning Services Officer reported that while covering a complicated subject, the information leaflet for applicants had been improved and she hoped that applicants would find the information clearer.
- BV 178 – The Head of Engineering and Transportation reported that the results were based on a sample survey which was considered to be representative of the 2,000 miles of Public Rights of Way in the County.
- BV 186a & BV 196b – the Assistant Treasurer reported that the out-turn expenditure figures were currently being compiled and, while not easy to calculate, the required figures would be known soon.

**RESOLVED: That the exceptions monitoring report in relation to the 2002/2003 local and national performance indicators be noted subject to the members comments summarised above.**

#### 14. GEM PERFORMANCE

The Committee considered issues concerning GEM (Good Environmental Management) Performance.

The Environmental Sustainability Officer presented a report on the background and current position in relation to GEM. The system focused on the direct effects the Council had on the environment which were within its own immediate control. She highlighted the Council's Environmental Policy which covered all the authority's services, attached at appendix C to the report. The Council had done well in the fourth West Midland Environmental Index – achieving a score 20% higher than the average for Councils. External auditors had undertaken a half-year surveillance visit to audit the Council's continued adherence to the standards required by ISO 14001 arising from which six Corrective Action Requests (CARs) and observations had been made. She also referred to progress on previous Scrutiny Committee recommendations. The Report referred to a summary of progress on GEM objectives and targets during 2002/3 (appendix A) and the performance on GEM targets due in 2002/3 (Appendix B).

The Committee discussed the report and in response to a question on baseline statistics for energy usage by the Council, the Environmental Sustainability Officer reported that this was a Best Value Indicator and since the employment of an Energy Monitoring Technician the baseline data was more robust.

In response to questions regarding contaminated land management (Appendix A section 4), the Committee noted that a considerable amount of maintenance and control of the Stretton Sugwas site was needed. Officers were exploring the possible use of the methane gas, which was currently flared off.

**RESOLVED: That the report on GEM Performance be noted.**

## **15. PARKING ENFORCEMENT IN HEREFORDSHIRE**

(The Chairman agreed to take this item as agenda item 14 - prior to the item on GEM Performance).

The Committee received a report on the first year of operation of the Decriminalised Parking Service.

The Head of Engineering and Transportation reported that income for the year 2002/03 was below levels anticipated in the original business plan but had been balanced by expenditure below forecast levels. It was likely that a small surplus - ring-fenced for transportation - may continue in 2003/4. However, with penalty charges being nationally prescribed, there was an increased risk of a deficit in future years, the possible management of which was described in the report.

The Director commented that since the Council had taken over the service there seemed to have been a reduced amount of disruption to traffic flow and less double parking. This improvement in traffic flow had also been noted in Ledbury.

Concern was expressed regarding possible public reaction to a deficit position for the service.

The Head of Engineering and Transportation reported upon the high levels of concern expressed in the Ross-on-Wye area which had been the subject of local meetings. Concern was now being raised in the Bromyard area which had possibly been aggravated by the recent loss of a local car park. He would be talking to local ward members about the situation in the near future.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

## **16. ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME 2003/2004**

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Director of Environment commented that while the work programme, detailed in the report, identified items requiring periodic monitoring and attention a number of substantial items had also been included. As discussed earlier in the meeting the subject of Waste Management would initially be covered by member briefings for all Councillors. Reports on other subjects would be presented as they became available. Depending on the subject these could be scrutinised by various methods as suggested earlier in the meeting (minute no 6 – Scrutiny Role and Techniques).

It was suggested that in addition to monitoring performance indicators the Committee should also focus on results monitoring. GEM issues were suggested as an item for possible further examination.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman be authorised to review the work programme with the Director of Environment.**

The meeting ended at 1.28 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**