

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 6th June, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Councillors: P.J. Dauncey, G.W. Davis, K.G. Grumbley, J.G.S. Guthrie, J.W. Hope MBE, J.W. Newman, Ms. G.A. Powell and Miss F. Short

In attendance: Councillors Mrs. P.A. Andrews, J.W. Edwards, T.M. James, R. Mills, R.J. Phillips and D.B. Wilcox (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs A.E. Gray and T.W Hunt. Apologies were also received from Councillor P.J. Edwards (Cabinet Member – Environment).

The Committee noted that Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie had replaced Councillor R. Mills as a member of the Committee.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor Ms G.A. Powell substituted for Councillor Mrs A.E. Gray and Councillor J. Hope substituted for Councillor TW. Hunt.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ms G.A. Powell declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Herefordshire provisional Local Transport Plan 2006/7 to 2010/11, due to her involvement in “WyeS Moves” Community Transport initiative.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 30th March, 2005 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

5. HEREFORDSHIRE PROVISIONAL LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2006/7 TO 2010/11

The Committee considered the draft Herefordshire Provisional Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2006/7 – 2010/11.

The Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the provisional Local Transport Plan had to be submitted to Government by 29 July 2005 and the quality of the Plan contributed to the overall future capital funding allocated by Government for Highways and Transportation in the County. This would be Herefordshire’s second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) and would constitute the Council’s transportation policies and strategies for the five year period 2006/7 to 2010/11.

He further reported that the Plan would include a costed programme of transport improvement schemes for the period which had been developed with the aim of delivering key outcomes including: improved accessibility; safer roads; reduced congestion and a safeguarded environment. An Executive Summary of the draft Local Transport Plan 2006/7 to 2010/11 was provided at Appendix 1 to the report. Progress in working towards the previously identified objectives was summarised in the report. The development of the strategy had been informed by a number of studies that had been carried out to develop key areas of policy. The provisional LTP2 also needed to take into account developing areas of national transport policy.

After submission of the Plan in July, 2005, Government would undertake a detailed assessment, which would be published late in 2005 at which time the financial settlement would also be announced

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation), the Head of Highways and Transportation and the Team Leader (Transportation Planning) were questioned by the Committee. The following is an outline of the principal questions asked by the Committee and responses given by officers:

- How does the Herefordshire LTP compare with LTPs of other authorities? Is there any method of comparing how well we do?

The Council is rated by government on its Annual LTP progress reports. Last year the Council's performance had been rated as above average and in the previous year as Well Above Average, resulting in a supplementary 'Performance Grant' which was utilised to support the Roman Road improvement scheme. Highway maintenance had also received a good rating but caution was needed, as this element of funding was formula based.

- How does the LTP2 compare with national approaches – e.g. congestion charging? What degree of Government constraint is there?

The LTP process was becoming more restrictive. The process had a number of mandatory indicators/requirements, however, three related to local conditions. While congestion charging did not apply to Herefordshire, LTP2 contained proposals to set a local target concerning congestion in the City in the hope that additional funding would be forthcoming to help meet the target. Local need would be emphasised wherever possible. The LTP scheme dealt with predominantly highway maintenance and capital projects whereas local issues were usually met from revenue funding.

- The agenda covering report and the Executive Summary indicated that Herefordshire did not achieve all that was set out in LTP1. Why was this and have lessons been learned and translated into the LTP2?

The first LTP contained a list of schemes to the value of approximately £20m. The government in its funding round had allocated approximately £10m to Herefordshire and consequently the schemes had had to be prioritised. LTP2 would seek to progress those schemes that had been postponed and move forward a number of new schemes. 86% of the first LTP was on track for completion as indicated in the latest LTP Annual Report. The funding mechanism since the first LTP had changed in that for Herefordshire a base line allocation of £11m was already known. This base line would, however, change according to the quality and various elements within the LTP2 bid.

- LTP2 builds on the success of first LTP. How sure are we of the data / information used in compiling LTP2. How robust is it bearing in mind LTP2 takes us to 2011?

Data used for the first LTP is already in place. Through monitoring or undertaking further studies, additional, or updated data, would be added to the database and therefore there was a reasonable level of confidence in its robustness. Costed elements to be included in LTP2 were difficult to predict but national indicators for the type of schemes included were used to give a reasonable indication of the likely cost. Cost management procedures would be put in place when schemes progressed.

- Have the targets in the first LTP been met and were they sensible targets/achievable. How have these outcomes been translated to the targets for LTP2?

The LTP Annual progress report indicates that 86% of the achievable schemes have been met or are on track to be completed within the LTP period. The Directorate believe that, while challenging, the LTP2 targets should be achievable.

- The increased use of sustainable transport is a key outcome that will contribute to all four Government/Local Government shared priorities. However, given its high profile it's not clear what aspect of sustainable transport usage will increase. The Corporate Plan target for 2007-8 only shows an increase in bus usage of 2,000 journeys over the 2003-4 figure. This equates to only 38 extra journeys per week. Where will the increase in usage be and what will be the cost of this increased usage?

2004/5 saw a decrease in bus usage, which had been outside the control of the Council. Proposals were being considered to change the concessionary bus fare from 50% to free. Park and Ride and the Intelligent Transport System would contribute to the change in bus usage patterns. A study undertaken following the reduction in bus availability in the City had indicated no appreciable subsequent increase in car usage. It was speculated that people who would have used the bus were now walking or cycling.

- In the absence of any significant increase in bus usage how will traffic congestion in the medium term be reduced?

In the City, increased partnership working with the Highways Agency will be needed. The introduction of an Intelligent Transport System will optimise traffic signals; speed up bus movements and improve traffic flow. Structuring the introduction of such a system will necessitate discussions with, for instance, bus operators to ensure that the computerised equipment is installed in buses. In the short term, depending on revenue finance, upgrading works will be undertaken to the existing SCOOT traffic system. It was hoped that year on year improvements could be made to improve congestion problems.

- Without disclosing contractual issues, what is the pace of progress on Park and Ride? Two priorities to be addressed for Hereford in LTP 2 are - improving and extending the cycle network and permanent park and ride. Will the park and ride sites provide safe and accessible cycle provision to the main areas for employment, shopping and leisure? When developing these sites will the Council be using "joined up thinking" to encourage maximum use?

A progress report on park and ride is shortly to be submitted to the Cabinet Member – (Highways and Transportation), for consideration. Detailed work on bus routing from/to the proposed site is still to be completed. The Edgar Street Grid development may provide the opportunity to create a circular route. Links to the Hospital and railway station will be looked into. The use of the park and ride car parks by cyclists had not so far been considered but access and security will be looked at.

- There's an assertion that permanent park and ride sites will reduce traffic congestion in the central area, does this mean that car parking spaces in the central area will be reduced by a similar number to those being provided for by park and ride? If there is a reduction in city centre parking what impact will this have on income? If there is no reduction in city centre parking how will congestion be reduced?

There will be a net cost to the Council in operating a Park and Ride scheme, however, as a Unitary Authority the Council was better placed to balance the overall parking provision. On the introduction of park and ride a management system will be put in place to ensure the best use of all the parking facilities.

- The Council doesn't operate any buses. Will we have to rely on existing operators?

The Executive was aware of the limited number of bus operators in the area, which would provide limited competition for the provision of the services. A major capital investment would be necessary should the Council wish to operate bus services.

- What is the position regarding the Air Quality Strategy particularly at the A49 corridor in Hereford and Bargates in Leominster.

The Hereford Transport Strategy includes health monitoring. Data collected is used to model the impact assessment to be included in the LTP2. Any improvements at the A49 would need to be implemented with the co-operation of the Highways Agency. Any improvements at Bargates would be subject to funding availability.

- Reference is made to improving the health of the County through increased cycling, walking and air quality etc. Does the LPT2 pick-up and reflect all the health benefits. Has this been cross-checked with the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

Key service providers, including the PCT, have provided input and this will be further developed over the course of the LTP2 period.

- Accessibility – can you give examples of schemes implemented in the first LTP? How successful have they been and how does the LTP2 continue this work.

Examples of schemes implemented are the introduction of low floor buses and the up grading of the Hereford and Leominster bus stations. This work will be continued by improvements to: rural footways; pedestrian signal crossings and the introduction of Internet accessible bus timetables. Area Highway Teams are investigating the possible provision in rural areas of a number of bus passenger waiting areas, rather than the more costly provision of bus shelters.

- A Hereford Intelligent Transport System would provide traffic control; bus priority; traffic and traveller information. Assuming the "exceptional scheme" funding bid was successful what would the likely timescale be for its

implementation and what happens if we don't get the funding?

A case would be built up for the system over the next two years. If the funding bid were insufficient to implement all the schemes proposed in the LTP2 then schemes would have to be prioritised. In the meantime other sources of funding would be explored.

- The summary emphasises the importance of behavioural change contributing to the achievement of the Strategy's objectives and refers to school and work travel plans. How will the impact of these on modes of travel and congestion be measured? Is there evidence from other parts of the country that the proposed method has worked?

Mandatory targets are set by government, however, these don't link directly to traffic congestion. At the moment it is difficult to show what contribution any improvements might make. Data will be collected from Hereford and the market towns to inform the indicators rather than the targets.

- The rail travel sections in the LTP2 refer to the various rail franchises. What incentives are there for the rail companies to work with the Council to deliver better services? What are the chances of adding further proposals for stations with car parks e.g. at Woofferton.

While the LTP2 looks at improving rail services in the County there are no firm proposals for improvements to local stations. There are no proposals for new stations. It is thought that the redevelopment of New Street Station, Birmingham, is likely to divert finance away from rural schemes.

- Reference is made in the Executive Summary to rail services to London, does the full LTP2 mention that there are bus services to London?

Bus services to London are mentioned and encouraged in the LTP2.

- It is proposed that a comprehensive review of the supported bus network be undertaken. What is the likely timescale for this review? Will the review be wide ranging to explore for instance changing from big buses to smaller dial-a-ride services?

It is proposed that new computer software be obtained that will enable a desktop modelling exercise to be undertaken. This will enable a variety of bus use scenarios to be explored. Economy of scale often meant that bus operators operated large buses to cater for the peak time requirement.

- In relation to the road network, the Executive Summary referred to "the efficient movement of goods and services to help sustain the local economy". Will the LTP2 also highlight the importance of the Herefordshire network in the regional and national network? Had the Secretary of State responded to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) letter concerning safety and maintenance of the A49?

No specific bid had been made for additional de-trunking of highways in Herefordshire. The A40 (Gloucestershire boundary to Ross) is likely to be de-trunked in the near future, subject to negotiations currently in progress between the Highways Agency and Gloucestershire County Council. The A465 from the Welsh border to Hereford was designated for de-trunking but negotiations with Herefordshire Council had stopped pending clarification of the future status of this

route in Wales. The previous Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) had written to the Secretary of State for Transport suggesting that consideration should be given to a more innovative form of management for the A49 in Herefordshire and Shropshire. On the day of the meeting a response had been received from the Highways Agency but no comment had been made about the future management arrangements. No response had been made directly by the Secretary of State.

Members were reminded that the provisional LTP would be considered by Cabinet and then by Full Council as part of the Council's Policy Framework.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and any further comments by Members be forwarded directly to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transport).

6. CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY & REVISED POLICY

The Committee considered: 1) the consultation draft of the Corporate Environment Strategy, summarising the policy aims, objectives and action plans the Council have adopted and 2) the proposed revision of the Council's current environmental policy.

The Environmental Sustainability Officer reported that the Corporate Environment Strategy provided partners and managers across the Council with an overview of major environmental commitments that had already been made by the Council. Some were mandatory while others were led by the need to control costs. All were linked through the agreed ambitions of the Herefordshire Plan and the Corporate Plan (2005/08), which states that one of the Council's top eight priorities for the period of the Plan is, "to protect the environment, including recycling much more waste and significantly reducing carbon emissions".

She further reported that the revision of the policy took account of: the certification to ISO 14001; of the numerous Council services and functions and changes to the initial focus and revisions to the ISO 14001 standard. Copies of the consultation draft "Corporate Environment Strategy", together with the "draft Strategy Action Plan" were appended to the report.

The Director of Environment commented that the policy brought together the various environmental policies, updates and action plans into one document.

The Committee were complementary about the format and content of the policy document but thought reference should be included to convey a positive attitude towards the receipt of feedback to the commitments detailed in the policy.

The Committee debated whether local standards could be imposed in relation to increasing the specification for building insulation. While legally this would be extremely difficult to impose, the Director of Environment suggested this could be kept in mind when negotiating development contracts.

On questioning the inclusion in the policy of the "development of appropriate sources of renewable energy" (4th bullet point on agenda page 23) the Environmental Sustainability Officer confirmed that the Council would look at various energy options for the County, and this would include wind farms.

In response to comments regarding schools being encouraged to recycle, and yet being charged trade waste fees to dispose of the waste, the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards reported that he was investigating the issue but, as yet, there seemed to be no easy solution.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Environment Strategy and Revised Policy be noted.

7. BIODIVERSITY

The Committee considered the actions taken in relation to biodiversity conservation and proposals for the development of a related strategic framework to direct the future work of the Council upon this activity.

The Conservation Manager reported that one of the key Council objectives was to enhance the quality of life and conserving biodiversity made a considerable contribution to this. The report highlighted a number of important factors that needed to be taken into account which influenced the Council's activities in relation to biodiversity conservation and a number of recent achievements in this area.

He further reported that the Council had a number of roles and responsibilities in relation to biodiversity conservation and that these now needed to be brought together in the form of a strategic framework. The strategic objectives to be used as a basis for developing such a framework were set out in the report at paragraph 7.

The Committee agreed that it would be wise to have a strategic framework and noted the intention to report on further developments to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That

- a) the report be noted and a further report be presented to a future meeting and;**
- b) the proposed objectives for a strategic framework, as set out in paragraph 7 of the report, be noted.**

8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2005/06

The Committee was advised of the latest position with regard to the Environment Capital Programme for 2005/06.

The Assistant County Treasurer reported that the programme was largely based on the capital allocations in the 2004/05 Local Transport Plan. The Capital Programme for 2005/06 was set out in appendix 1 to the report and detailed the individual schemes. This indicated that the total amount available for the Capital Programme was £13,460,610.

RESOLVED: That the report confirming the Environment 2005/6 Capital Budget be noted.

9. ENVIRONMENT REVENUE BUDGET 2005/06 AND OUTTURN 2004/05

The Committee was advised of the latest position with regard to the Environment Revenue Budget for 2005/06 following the formal approval of the Council's budget.

The Assistant County Treasurer reported that in addition to the effects of inflation, Council had also approved a number of adjustments to the budget for 2005/06. This had resulted in a 2005/06 budget of £32,892,000 for the Environment Programme area. This would be adjusted to take account of any carry forward when the 2004/05 budget closing position was confirmed.

The Director of Environment confirmed that a further revenue budget report would be presented in the autumn.

RESOLVED: That the report confirming the Environment Revenue Budget 2005/06 be noted and a further report be presented in autumn 2005.

10. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMERCIAL ENFORCEMENT - STAGE 3 REPORT

The Chairman had invited Councillor R. Mills to attend for this item in his role as a member of the Best Value Review Team.

The Committee considered the Stage 3 report of the Best Value Review of Commercial Enforcement.

The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards reported that a summary of the conclusions from the review were detailed in the agenda report. He highlighted various aspects of the review, particularly that meaningful statistics and benchmarking data had been difficult to obtain and that developments arising from the "Hampton Review" would still need to be taken into account. The review team, having considered the information gathered and the options available, detailed in Options Appraisal at section 7 of the Stage 3 report, had concluded that Environmental Health (Commercial Enforcement) Trading Standards and Licensing should be re-engineered to deliver a more efficient service.

On questioning various aspects of the review the Committee noted that consideration had been given to: current trends in the service; staffing and pay levels; the need for further integration of sections within the service; the potential for externalising the service or the opportunities to take on work from other authorities (expand the service). Improvements to IT, both within the service and available to the public 'on-line' would improve the level of service and help to maximise its capacity. However, the IT improvements must meet the 'corporate' and proposed 'contact centre' requirements.

RESOLVED: That the Stage 3 report be noted and the recommended preferred option contained at Section 8 in the report namely: that the Environmental Health (Commercial Enforcement), Trading Standards and Licensing be re-engineered to deliver more efficient services, be supported and recommended to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

11. GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (GEM) REPORT FOR 2004/05

The Committee considered the Council's environmental management/ISO 14001 system for 2004/05 to ensure that it continued to be suitable, adequate and effective and delivered improvement in environmental performance.

The Environmental Sustainability Officer reported that a summary of information on the Council's performance against its nine environmental objectives was set out in the appendix to the agenda report. The report also set out progress with the ISO 14001 certification, developments during the year and plans for 2005/06. Also attached to the report at Appendix IV were the proposed Good Environmental Management (GEM) objectives and targets for 2005/06. Other appendices to the report set out more detailed information on performance against each target for 2004/05 and corrective actions raised internally and externally during the year.

The Committee appreciated the work undertaken in compiling the report, particularly the establishment of baseline data. This data now needed to be used to show reduced usages or financial savings being made. The increase in recycled paper

usage was noted together with the shift from desktop printers to networked photocopiers.

The Committee also appreciated that more work needed to be done concerning energy usage following the Council's formal adoption of the Carbon Management Action Plan (CMAP).

RESOLVED: That the Good Environmental Management (GEM) 2004/05 report, including the objectives for 2005/6, be noted.

12. BEST VALUE REVIEWS - IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENT PLANS

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

The remaining programmed actions in the improvement plans were detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

RESOLVED: That the report on Best Value Reviews – Implementation of Improvement Plans be noted.

13. MONITORING OF 2004/2005 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - APRIL 2004 TO MARCH 2005

The Committee was updated on the exceptions to the targeted progress made by the Environment Directorate for the full year April 2004 to March 2005 towards achieving the performance indicators / targets which appear in the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Committee noted a number of additional figures namely that on agenda page 121, BV86 "Target 2004/5" was £42.59 and that BV87 "Actual 2004/5" was £58.51. Agenda page 124 relating to 'Network Sustainability' the "Actual 2004/5" was 18%.

RESOLVED: That the exceptions to the targeted progress, indicated in the report, as amended by the inclusion of the above figures, be noted.

14. TRUNK ROADS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee considered the written response from the Highways Agency to the issues raised at the Committee meeting held on 28th February 2005.

The Head of Highways and Transportation reported that replies to the questions and issues raised by Members, both prior to and raised at the meeting held 28th February 2005, had been received from the Highways Agency and these were reproduced in appendix 1.

While a minority of Members expressed a degree of satisfaction with the progress on improvement schemes in their area, other Members were dissatisfied with the responses. The Committee agreed that outstanding issues be referred through the Head of Highways and Transportation for discussion at officer meetings with the Highway Agency. The Committee agreed to keep the position under review and, if necessary, extend a further invitation for the Agency to appear before the Committee.

The Director of Environment reported that following personnel changes in the Highways Agency both he and the Cabinet Member – (Highways and

Transportation), would ensure that future discussions with the Agency would be held at senior management level.

RESOLVED:

That

- a) **the Trunk Roads in Herefordshire report be noted and Members refer outstanding issues to the Head of Highways and Transportation for further discussion at officer meetings with the Highways Agency; and**
- b) **a further meeting between the Committee and the Highways Agency be held in abeyance.**

The meeting ended at 12.57 p.m.

CHAIRMAN