

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held in the Conference Room, Ty Nant, Prestatyn on Thursday, 25th October, 2007 at 9.30 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillors E.R. Jones (Chair), B. Blakeley, P.C. Duffy, D.J. Thomas and C.H. Williams.
Councillors R.E. Barton and T.R. Hughes attended as Observers.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Environment, Head of Planning and Public Protection (G. Boase), Interim Head of Transport and Infrastructure (G. Dare), Head of Internal Audit (Ivan Butler), Senior Waste Management Officer (A. Roberts), Section Manager, Asset and Policy (W. Cook), Opus International Consultants (A. Wanstall), Scrutiny Support Officer (S. Price) and other officers including Administrative Officer (C.I. Williams).

APOLOGIES

Councillors P.W. Owen and S. Thomas.

433 URGENT MATTERS

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

434 MINUTES

The Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 27th September, 2007 were submitted.

Matters arising:-

6. Progress of the X2 Fortnightly Kerbside Waste Collection/Recycling Scheme - Councillor C.H. Williams referred to his concerns regarding the quality and size of bin bags supplied and provided examples of the bin bags in question.

***RESOLVED** – that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

435 INTRODUCTION TO THE HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

A copy of a report by the Section Manager, Asset and Policy, which provided an introduction and information in respect of the Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) and details of how its approach would benefit the management of the County Highway Network, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Mr Adrian Wanstall (Opus International Consultants) to the meeting.

With the aid of a power point presentation Mr Wanstall provided Members with a detailed summary of the HAMP. The report and presentation provided advice as to the necessity to produce a HAMP and the implications it would have on the way in which the Highways Network would be managed. It was explained that it was a Welsh Assembly Government requirement that all Welsh Authorities must have a HAMP and had been viewed as the way forward to optimise the management of the Highway Network. Key elements of infrastructure asset management had been included in the report and were highlighted in the body of the presentation.

Members were informed that the HAMP included all highway related assets, it considered the overall level of service required, the resources available and the most cost effective and efficient way to cover the projected life expectancy of the assets in question. It was confirmed that the advantages of introducing Infrastructure Asset Management Plans in order to ensure maximum benefit was achieved

from the limited budgets available to maintain generally ageing assets had previously been realised by governments worldwide.

In response to a question from Councillor R.E. Barton regarding personnel and budgetary issues and the Council's capacity to progress the Plan, Mr Wanstall confirmed that there would be a need to employ additional resources and that supplementary funding would also be required. He confirmed that Asset Management linked policies with financial planning, programming and performance monitoring and emphasized that Asset Management should be mission driven and customer focused with a clear link between decisions, budgeting, and performance monitoring.

In reply to questions from Members regarding the possibility of approaching Central Government for assistance with funding, Mr Wanstall confirmed that an approach had been made to the Welsh Assembly Government by the County Surveyors' Society for Wales in respect of funding issues but that a coherent plan was needed to evidence requests for funding.

The Corporate Director, Environment explained that as well as highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the current Highway Network and identifying areas where improvements could be made, the HAMP could assist in strengthening the authority's business case and increase pressure on the Welsh Assembly Government for the provision of additional funding.

During the ensuing discussion, Mr Wanstall responded to questions from Members and stressed that the HAMP would examine the most productive use of resources and finance available and would influence existing policies and procedures in respect of the management and maintenance of the Highway Network. It was agreed that the HAMP would be circulated electronically to councillors.

RESOLVED – *that the Environment Scrutiny Committee receive and note the Highway Asset Management Plan and endorse this approach to Highway Management.*

436 RECYCLING IN LLANGOLLEN

A copy of a report by the Senior Waste Management Officer, which reviewed the Council's recycling activities in Llangollen following the closure of the Civic Amenity Site due to road safety concerns.

A summary of the report, which outlined the impact of the closure of the site, was provided by the Senior Waste Management Officer. He explained that following concerns about road safety the Llangollen Civic Amenity Site had been closed on the 3rd August, 2007, the nearest alternative Civic Amenity Site being the facility at Carrog, Corwen. Details of the measures introduced to mitigate the closure of the Site had been included in the report and a search for a new Recycling Park/Public Amenity Site was currently being undertaken.

In reply to concerns raised by Councillor R.E. Barton regarding service provision for residents in rural areas not covered by the roll out of the x2 service, the Senior Waste Management Officer highlighted the need to provide recycling facilities for residents in rural areas to ensure that recycling targets were met. The Corporate Director, Environment explained that the present strategy had been based on meeting the 2009/2010 targets and confirmed that a revised strategy would need to be agreed to address future changes in circumstances after 2010. The Corporate Director explained that confirmation in respect of funding provision was being awaited from the Welsh Assembly Government.

Councillor T.R. Hughes referred to the figures produced in the report which provided confirmation that residents from Llangollen had not fully utilised the alternative Civic Amenity Site at Carrog.

It was confirmed that a formal request had been made to Wrexham County Borough Council for Llangollen residents to utilise the Civic Amenity Site at Plas Madoc. At the request of Members the Senior Waste Management Officer agreed to make further representations to Wrexham County Borough Council in respect of this matter.

In response to matters raised by Councillor T.R. Hughes, the Senior Waste Management Officer confirmed that the free bulky waste service would continue through the winter period, the containers at the recycling facilities at the Llangollen car park could be emptied every six days and the Saturday

morning garden waste collections from the Pavilion would continue, however, if usage of the service reduced then the respective Local Members would be consulted on the matter.

The Senior Waste Management officer informed Members that there had been a reduction in the tonnage of waste received and that recycling targets had been arrested. The Corporate Director confirmed that the ban on the tipping of illegal trade waste had assisted significantly in reducing the tonnage of waste received.

RESOLVED – that the Environment Scrutiny Committee supports the application to Wrexham County Borough Council for Llangollen residents to be allowed use of the Plas Madoc recycling park.

437 JOINT RISK ASSESSMENT

A copy of a report by the Head of Internal Audit Services, which provided an update on the latest high-level risks identified for the Environment Directorate and sought Members' views in respect of those and any other risks.

The Head of Internal Audit Services explained that the Council was required, on an annual basis, to develop the Joint Risk Assessment with its external regulators as part of the Wales Programme for Improvement. The risk assessments were used to inform the annual Joint Risk Assessment process with its external regulators to identify the key risks it faced. Details of the scoring mechanism utilised had been included in the report and the appendix to the report detailed the high-level risks identified for services within the Environment Directorate.

Members considered in detail Appendix 1 to the report and the following responses were provided to issues raised by Members:-

426 – The Corporate Director, Environment referred to the breach of control of contractors' procedure by some schools when carrying out maintenance and construction work. The importance of ensuring that Denbighshire complied with the requirements of health and safety legislation in respect of the control of contractors was emphasised by the Director. He explained that work was on-going and that the matter had been taken very seriously, he also assured Members that he was satisfied that the appropriate procedures were now in place.

The Head of Internal Audit Services informed the Committee that further reports and checks would be undertaken.

368 - The Head of Internal Audit Services confirmed that there was a statutory duty to provide free school meals for eligible pupils. Therefore, the Council would still need to provide free school meals even if the wider school meals service was withdrawn because the catering function was judged to be unviable.

The Scrutiny Support Officer explained that the School Meals Working Group had collated a significant amount of market research data and were consulting with Head teachers and governing bodies on a policy to retain pupils in years 7 to 11 on the school sites.

The Corporate Director, Environment explained that the issue of the provision of school meals was primarily a matter for consideration by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, he explained that the service in question was provided by the Environment Directorate and suggested that a report be submitted from the School Meals Working Group to the Environment Scrutiny Committee in respect of this matter.

429 – In response to concerns raised by the Chair, the Corporate Director, Environment confirmed that a number of experienced members of staff would be leaving the employment of the authority over the next five years particularly within the Transport and infrastructure and Environmental Services departments. He explained that difficulties were being experienced by local government in recruiting staff in some key skilled areas, due to a lack of funding or shortages of potential recruits.

256 - The Corporate Director, Environment confirmed that Denbighshire had held regular meetings with the Welsh Water Authority, Environment Agency and Network Rail to discuss the issue of

flooding and to share information. He explained that a process had been introduced to build up data in respect of this issue, and that home owners at risk of flooding would be written to highlighting the risk.

The Scrutiny Support Officer informed Members that it had been suggested by the Wales Audit Office that reports such as the risk assessment document could be utilised to inform the Committees' future work programme.

RESOLVED – that the Environment Scrutiny Committee receive the report, and the School Meals Working Group be invited to submit a report to the Environment Scrutiny Committee in respect of their findings.

438 ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES REPORT DURING 2006/07

A copy of a report by the Head of Planning and Public Protection, which provided details of the enforcement activities carried out by the Service during 2006/2007, had been, circulated with the papers for the meeting.

It was explained that the primary role of the Planning and Public Protection Service was to regulate legislation and take enforcement action where necessary to protect the environment, the health and wellbeing of individuals and to provide a safer community. The Head of Planning and Public Protection provided a detailed summary of the report which identified the various positive actions which had been undertaken by the Planning and Public Protection Service between April, 2006 and March, 2007.

In reply to concerns raised by Councillor C.H. Williams regarding figures produced in the press which related to the number of food hygiene inspection undertaken at food related premises by neighboring authorities, the Head of Planning and Public Protection referred to the increase in the percentage of inspections undertaken in Denbighshire. He also referred to the initiative of sharing good practice with neighboring authorities and confirmed that this would be continued.

Members considered in detail the report on enforcement activities during 2006/2007 and the following responses were provided to matters and issues raised by Members:-

Page 7. Good Practice – The Head of Planning and Public Protection provided details of the star rating system for the last food hygiene inspection at food related premises, and confirmation was provided that school canteens would also be included in the lists. In response to concerns expressed by Councillor TR. Hughes that it would be important to ensure that all food related premises were included in an up-to-date list to avoid legal action being taken against the authority, the Head of Planning and Public protection agreed that a robust system would be implemented

Members were informed that the Food Standards Agency would also be introducing a similar scheme on a nation basis.

Page 17. Case Study - In response to question from Councillor C.H. Williams, the Head of Planning and Public Protection explained that items seized, such as clothing, were destroyed, however, the possibility of donating them to charities for exportation could be considered.

Councillor D.J. Thomas asked that members of staff be congratulated on the successful work highlighted in the report.

RESOLVED – that the Environment Scrutiny Committee receive the report and note the Progress made to date.

439 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Support Officer, that reviewed the future work programme for the Environment Scrutiny Committee, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting. The Scrutiny Support Officer provided a summary of the report and Members agreed the following actions:-

- Community Capital Projects - At the request of the Principal Regeneration Manager, it was agreed that the report in respect of Community Capital Projects be received at the December, 2007 meeting of the Committee.
- Road Safety Presentation – Members agreed that the presentation by the North Wales Police on Road Safety issues be received by the Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting to be held on the 22nd November, 2007.
- Management of Highway Structures – Bridges – Members agreed that a report on the recently published Code of Practice (COP) for managing highway structures be included in the Committee's Forward Work Programme for November, 2007.
- Enforcement Policy – It was agreed that a report on the contents of a draft enforcement policy for Planning and Public Protection be submitted to the November, 2007 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- Disposal of Assets – The Scrutiny Support Officer confirmed that a report on the Disposal of Assets to generate capital receipts was scheduled to be submitted to the November, 2007 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – *that, subject to the above, the work program for the Environment Scrutiny Committee, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.*

Meeting ended at 12.25 p.m.
