

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon
at 2.00pm on **Thursday 6 February 2020**

PRESENT

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chairman), Martin McBride (Vice Chairman), Richard Bishop, Jill Bull, Mike Cahill, Andrew Coles, Owen Collins, Harry Eaglestone, Liz Leffman, Kieran Mullins, Elizabeth Poskitt and Alex Postan

Officers in attendance: Group Manager – Commissioning, Service Leader, Resident Services, Senior Officer, Resident Services.

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 December 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gill Hill and Ted Fenton.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in matters to be considered at the meeting.

45. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

No submissions were received from the public in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.

46. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

The Committee was provided with an update on its work programme for 2019/20.

46.1 Flood Prevention, Drainage and Sewerage Infrastructure Issues

Councillor MacRae, Cabinet Member for Environment, attended the meeting to discuss Water Day and other issues with the Committee. He explained that he had met with Matt Kirby, the Business Manager, Environmental Services and asked if the Committee had suggestions on what they would like presented when the event was next held.

Councillor Jill Bull commented that a bigger room was needed as people were standing at the last event. It was explained that the room in which Water Day was held in was the largest room available.

Councillor Leffman suggested that the organisations involved should be invited to hear residents' concerns.

Councillor MacRae indicated that an invitation was being sent to Thames Water. A letter had been sent to the Secretary of State explaining what the Council was doing to help the residents of the district, and he explained that the Council had no legislative powers, apart from those under the Public Health Acts. The Council could put pressure on organisations such as Thames Water and OFWAT, and although OFWAT had declined to be involved, they were looking to commission a report to investigate the situation. There was a lot of

work being done 'behind the scenes', and it was important that residents knew that the Council was doing its very best for the district.

Councillor Leffman felt that other rural areas in Oxfordshire might be in the same position. She appreciated that Philip Dunne MP had raised a Private Members Bill to stop sewerage being released into waterways.

Councillor Postan queried whether companies could be licensed in the way they operated, and Officers explained that licensing powers were limited.

Councillor Al-Yousuf observed that flood prevention was a critical issue, and that reports had been produced by the Audit Office about the relationship between flooding and planning, potentially earmarking sites which were prone to flooding, due to climate change, and he highlighted that the Council had declared a climate emergency.

Councillor MacRae explained that when planning applications were submitted, Thames Water was asked to comment. Laurence King, Shared Principal Engineer and his team worked hard to ensure that everything possible was done to alleviate the risk of flooding throughout the District, keeping ditches clear, although with climate change the frequency of flooding was changing. Councillor MacRae was meeting with RAF Brize Norton, who were creating bunds to protect the base.

It was suggested that an update from Laurence King could be given at the next meeting of Committee on 16 April 2020 and that it would be useful to formulate some specific questions prior to the update.

Councillor MacRae read an e-mail to Members which gave an overview of the work carried out in West Oxfordshire by the shared flood risk management team:

- All planning applications for one new dwelling, up to nine were sent to the team as an internal consultee.
- A small percentage of planned schemes involved the team scrutinising emergency flood plans for sites in flood prone areas.
- Planning work continued even whilst a flooding incident was taking place.
- The team investigated localised flooding from ordinary watercourses, main rivers or land and would make recommendations for other risk management authorities for work to be carried out, or produce designs for schemes which could be delivered or use delegated enforcement powers to persuade landowners to carry out work.
- Since the flooding of 2007, mainly external grants had been used to deliver forty local schemes and interventions to combat flooding in the District.
- A flood engineering resource had been retained by the Council when other local authorities had disbanded their teams.
- The Council was one of the few local authorities which delivered sandbags free of charge - when an Environment Agency flood alert was called the team was automatically made aware where sandbags would need to be delivered, which prompted either further investigation of the source of the flooding or recording of another incident at a known susceptible location. The information greatly assisted with bids for funding for local schemes. The recording of sewer flooding incidents also assisted with monitoring the performance of Thames Water in the area.

Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf thanked the team for their work on this issue.

Councillor Leffman queried the situation when rainfall was such that drains were unable to cope. Councillor MacRae explained that this could happen when there were cracks in the pipes where the water was entering the system.

Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf thanked Councillor MacRae for attending Committee and his input into the discussion.

46.2 Open Space Grass Cutting

This would be removed from the work programme. If items were identified which needed discussion, it could be brought back to Committee.

46.3 Implementation of Car Parking Strategy

The Group Manager explained that it was difficult to know how long the process would take. Once analysis of the consultation had been carried out, a meeting with the County Council would take place to put together proposals in order for them to be publicly available. The team was currently focused on re-procuring the Parking back-office ICT software system, which was time critical, but once that was in place the team could refocus on the project. Discussions should take place with the County Council towards the end of March 2020.

Councillor Leffman queried whether electric charging points could be put in local car parks. It was explained that this was included within the cabinet work programme.

46.4 Local Carbon and Environmental Plan – Biodiversity

This had been completed.

46.5 Environmental Regulations

There was a potential risk cause by Brexit and the absence of EU legislation or regulations, there would be elements of the air quality, flood and climate regulations which were no longer applicable. Officers would keep Committee informed of any revised regulations or government guidance.

Councillor Alaa Al-Yousuf questioned how the Committee could add value, perhaps by lobbying MPs.

Councillor Coles highlighted that at this point in time it was important to know about the environmental regulations in relation to air quality, and flood alleviation. Also being aware of the Agricultural Bill, he considered that these were areas where there would be changes and urged Members to be aware. Two Bills had been mentioned in terms of leaving the EU, although the situation would probably not become clearer until 2021.

46.6 Air quality

The monitoring of air quality would be added to the Committee's work programme.

46.7 Flooding

The Lead Shared Flood Risk Management Engineer, Laurence King, would be invited to attend the next meeting. Members were asked to consider any specific issues of concern.

Councillor Coles explained that he would be happy to work with officers to put some paragraphs together relating to Climate Change to present to the next meeting in order to forward to MP's.

46.8 Waste Collection Data

Members discussed the WODC Recycling Tonnages – By Material. The Group Manager – Commissioning explained that this was data which was routinely circulated for each meeting, and was purely for information.

Councillor Leffman queried figures in Q1 2017, as some figures were quite low. It was explained that there was no specific explanation for these figures, and that rates of recycling fluctuated throughout the year, and suppliers were making efforts to reduce the amount of packaging, reducing the amount of glass in bottles by 30%. Councillor Leffman also questioned the figures as the total sum in Q1 was incorrect.

RESOLVED: That progress on the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/2020 be noted and that the additional item referred to above be included within the Committee's Work Programme.

47. AIR QUALITY MONITORING

The Service Leader, Resident Services and Senior Officer, Resident Services had been asked to attend Committee to give an update and answer any questions. A presentation had previously been given to the Committee in June 2019. There had been air quality data collected and the officer requested questions from Members.

Councillor Postan questioned if there were any figures for air pollution in Bridge Street, Witney. Officers explained that when an air quality management area was declared, the calculations of pollution were apportioned to different vehicles through highways data which the county council could provide. The biggest vehicles for air pollution were HGVs, although the percentage of these vehicles on local roads was low. Vehicles were increasing in size and weight, leading to an increase in pollutants.

Councillor Leffman commented that depending on the outcome of the ban on Burford Bridge the air quality through Burford may be improved. She questioned the pollution levels in Chipping Norton as 80% of the vehicles passing through there were cars.

Councillor Al-Yousuf explained that he had received an e-mail question relating to monitoring in Burford and the levels of pollution being found there. The officer explained that the pollution levels were below the health limit with the quantity of nitrogen dioxide being monitored.

It was commented that, when discussion had taken place on the restrictions of HGVs in Burford, there had been concerns that it would lead to more traffic travelling through Woodstock, and it was necessary to be aware of such possible impacts.

Councillor Poskitt queried whether pollution from idling vehicles could be measured, and wondered whether the Council could discourage idling.

Officers explained that there was a legal responsibility to monitor air quality, although it was not required to measure nitrogen dioxide. In a DEFRA report the word 'average' was used, but officers were not sure what constituted an average, as the measuring could sometimes be from diffusion tubes on lampposts, which absorbed pollution and could then be analysed. Nitrogen dioxide levels in Chipping Norton were monitored.

Councillor Coles commented on euro six engines which the bus companies use and did officers feel that there is sufficient equipment for monitoring in Witney to gain accurate information as the outbound traffic could be stationary and inbound is moving. Equipment for monitoring on lampposts, if they were at a height would be giving a different reading to

whether the equipment was lower on the lamppost. He was considering children in push chairs and whether there was guidance which needed to be followed; should the monitors be at a typical person height. It was important to get the balance right as there was a risk to people's lives. Was there an automatic air quality monitoring system as having to wait to receive figures costs money, the monitors cost a lot of install and run, they have been turned off in Witney and Chipping Norton as they have done their job, although there should be continuous monitoring, which he commented was a political decision and some resources should be put into this.

Councillor Postan questioned the average pollutant, how many times and at what times of the day did the pollution go above a certain level. Officers explained that the level of pollution in Chipping Norton and Witney was not high and levels were looked at in order to consider whether or not to monitor against pollution.

Councillor Al-Yousuf thanked Officers for attending the meeting.

Councillor Eaglestone left the meeting at 2.47pm.

48. CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services, which gave members the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 January 2020.

48.1 Single Use Plastics

The action plan arising from the work of the Single Use Plastics Working Party was due to be considered later at this meeting, and the Committee noted that it would subsequently be referred to Cabinet and Council later in the month.

48.2 Consideration of tenders for the provision of Electric Charging Points and award of contract

The Group Manager – Commissioning explained that a framework had been procured for three different lots and there was good interest from suppliers. Lot 1 was the full costs paid by the Council, Lot 2 the Council would supply some funding and receive some subsidy, Lot 3, suppliers would bear the cost and would take the income. Suppliers had been awarded to this framework and decided which lot to use seeking to achieve some subsidy if possible. With the Framework procurement complete mini tenders were sought for site specific prices and a report was then planned for February Cabinet. Surprisingly no bids had been received. This had not happened before and suppliers had taken the time to bid on the framework and officers did not currently understand why there was no interest at the mini tender stage. The Group Manager highlighted that the Council was a victim of a growing demand in this market and that suppliers could pick and choose. Officers were currently in dialogue with the procurement team to look at a direct funding agreement to procure charging points for some sites, and a further update would be given to Cabinet on 12 February 2020.

Councillor Al-Yousuf suggested that members of the Committee attended Cabinet if at all possible.

Councillor Leffman queried whether the Council could combine with other Councils to carry out the procurement. The Group Manager explained that the Council and Cotswold District Council were already working together on this to try to obtain economies of scale

wherever possible. If the decision was to move to direct purchasing, charging points could be installed and phased throughout the district.

Councillor Postan commented that the original intention and recommendation was from Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny to trial the charging points, to be ahead of the game, not behind it and he believed the Council has lost the initiative and credibility due to circumstances. He has disappointed as a lot of work had been carried out to arrive at this point. He recommended that senior staff should consider this a first priority to carry out the work and the team be given more resources to do the job.

Councillor Cole shared Councillor Postan's frustration that it had taken a long time to arrive at this point and it was disappointing, this was no reflection on the officers but the Council should have acted sooner, it had now been taken over and left behind.

Councillor Leffman expressed disappointment and commented that she would be unable to plug an electric car into a charging point, as she had to park her car on the street, and putting a few charging points in car parks was not going to solve the problems. There needed to be consideration of the long term consequences. Councillor Leffman also queried the question of how to stop people parking and charging all day.

The Group Manager explained that if contracts were awarded for suppliers to install the charging points, the timescale for installation depended on locations and utility companies for the supply of electricity. The Manager also explained that restrictions could be put in place to stop people parking in the bays all day. Through a Parking Order, times could be controlled. The charging points being considered would take 40 minutes to fully charge, the parking spaces would be for electric vehicles only, but on street charging would currently be an issue. This was a key issue for the Government, which was putting investment into it.

It was suggested that the Council should look holistically at the provision of charging points with different combinations, driving change through planning policies, transport strategies and lobbying the government to influence what they did.

Councillor Postan repeated his view that this project was going to be a flagship project for the Council which had lost out and other organisations had overtaken and asked that this should go straight to procurement. He put a proposal forward to recommend to Cabinet the following:

“The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is disappointed with the long delay implementing the installation of electric charging points and request the Cabinet to prioritise this issue.”

This was seconded by Councillor Cahill, who commented that electric charging points should be put in at the Council offices, and that action was needed, not words.

Councillor Poskitt commented that Blenheim had been trying to carry out work on charging points, but needed efficient electricity support. She considered that this could be a future problem as not all sub-stations would be able to take the demand.

It was considered that the Climate Action Group should look at this issue of electrical infrastructure.

Councillors commented that the Government had revised its deadline to phase out fuel vehicles to 2035.

Arising from a question as to where the Council had gone wrong and what lessons could be learnt, the Group Manager explained that the correct process had been followed, this had never happened before, and if it was going to go wrong, she would have expected that to be at the framework stage and not the bidding stage. At the framework stage suppliers were interested enough to put forward tenders, she considered that the suppliers may have thought that there was no money to be made in the locations specified.

It was queried whether the Council should have gone through this process and was it possible to procure points locally. A question was asked whether the process of tendering and procurement needed to be audited, although this was not considered necessary. The Committee -

RESOLVED: That

- (a) That Cabinet be advised that this Committee was disappointed with the long delay in implementing the installation of electric vehicle charging points and be requested to prioritise this issue; and
- (b) That the content of the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 January 2020 be noted.

49. SINGLE USE PLASTICS (SUPS)

The Committee received and considered the report of the Climate Change Manager, which addressed the briefing note, statement of principles and action plan arising from the work of the Single Use Plastics Working Group, which was due to be reported through to Council, via Cabinet, later in the month.

The Committee congratulated the Chair who thanked Members and staff for their contributions to the action plan which Cabinet would now consider.

Councillor Coles expressed his disappointment that the Council buildings were still using plastic milk bottles for staff and visitors.

Councillor Poskitt queried whether the document would be produced in larger print.

A question was asked about printer cartridges. Councillor Al-Yousuf explained that this issue had been looked at, and there were procurement and technical issues in relation to refills. He would update the Committee at a future date.

Councillor Leffman queried the plastic bottles being used by the cleaning contractors. Officers would speak to the contractors relating to this issue.

Councillor Coles commented that he had visited the zero waste shop in Witney and commended it to Committee Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That Cabinet and Council be recommended to agree the proposed next steps as described by the SUPs Working Group in its meeting on 5 December 2019;
- (c) That Cabinet and Council be recommended to agree to the WODC Statement of Principles and Action Plan as presented; and
- (d) That the Single Use Plastics Working Group be dissolved.

50. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

A question was asked by Councillor Leffman regarding the amount of rubbish on the verges of the roads, commenting that whilst the leaves were off the trees it was easy to see the amount of rubbish scattered around the villages. She explained that Dorset had a scheme – bin it don't fling it – on road signs advising people to take their waste home with them, and wondered whether it was possible that a similar scheme could be introduced to highlight the issue, such as – we care about our District, please care on our behalf.

The Group Manager explained that it would be the Highway Authority who would be able to put signs on the highway. Ubcio would be able to do a clean-up. A request could be made to the County Council.

It was suggested that Councillor Leffman could put a motion to Council and the Committee was asked whether it would be willing to support such a motion.

Councillor Postan asked whether this was an initiative which could be a competition for schools, sponsored by companies which supplied the waste people were throwing on the verges. It was considered that this could be a cross party motion.

Councillor Poskitt highlighted that there were a lot of signs on the roads and the Area of Outstanding Beauty did not need to be cluttered with more signs.

Councillor Coles was frustrated that planning had been given for a drive through facility in Witney, which he considered could lead to more waste being thrown on to verges and queried whether conditions could be imposed to seek ensure this did not happen.

The Group Manager explained that when it came to planning there were specific criteria on which conditions could be imposed. Members asked that the team was made aware of issues such as this.

The Group Manager would give an update to Committee once information had been obtained from the highway authority.

The meeting closed at 4.02 pm

CHAIRMAN