

Environment Overview Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 21 June 2013.

Present:

Robin Cook (Chairman)
Margaret Phipps (Vice-Chairman)
Richard Biggs, Andy Canning, Ronald Coatsworth, Paul Kimber, Mike Lovell, Peter
Richardson, Mark Tewkesbury and John Wilson.

Andrew Cattaway, Toni Coombs and Hilary Cox attended under Standing Order 54(1).

Officers attending:

Miles Butler (Director for Environment), Mike Harries (Head of Dorset Property, Deputy Director), Steve Hedges (Group Finance Manager) and David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

For certain items, as appropriate:

Dave Ayre (Head of Countryside and Business Development), Don Gobbett (Head of Planning), Andrew Martin (Head of Dorset Highways Operations), Mike Winter (Head of Dorset Highways Management), David Coates (Group Manager), Becky Forrester (Dorset Council's Working Together Policy Officer), Dugald Lockhart (Policy Lead, Superfast Dorset), Mike Petitmange (Principal Engineer – Sustainable Property), Gordon Sneddon (Group Manager) and Anne Gray (Principal Consultation and Research Officer).

Public speaker

Attending for minutes 84-86

Brian Shears, local resident

Apologies for Absence

80. Apologies for absence were received from Peter Hall and Mervyn Jeffery.

Code of Conduct

81. There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

82.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2013 were confirmed and signed.

82.2 The Head of Dorset Highways Management reported that despite delays experienced with regard to repairs to the Beaminster Tunnel, progress was now well advanced and the works were on course to be completed by the end of July 2013. Members welcomed this news.

Terms of Reference

83. Members noted the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

Procedure for Petitions - Petition entitled "Help save our bus service in Winterborne Kingston"

84.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment on the receipt of a petition for the retention of a regular bus service to Poole and Dorchester from Winterbourne Kingston.

84.2 Officers reported that from evidence gathered there was no justification for the retention of this bus service given the number of passengers using it.

84.3 Officers considered that as the Passenger Transport Service was amid an exercise to review all of the subsidised public bus services throughout Dorset, with a view to these being rationalised, consideration of the retention of individual services was inappropriate at this time and accordingly, this request should be considered within the parameters of the review.

84.4 Brian Shears, a local resident and the petition organiser, stated that despite the evidence gathered, the Service was well used and provided the only option for those with no transport of their own to gain access to either Poole or Dorchester. He asserted that the figures were not necessarily an accurate reflection of the usage of the Service. Whilst he appreciated that there was an ongoing review, he asked for the case that had been made for the retention of this particular service to be taken into consideration.

84.5 The County Council Member for Winterborne recognised the concerns raised by the petitioners but acknowledged that a number of subsidised rural bus services in her particular electoral division were not well used and that the ongoing review was designed to determine where the County Council's limited resources should be best targeted and that this service would be part of that review. She considered that the emphasis on the establishment of community led transport should also play a part in rural transport needs.

84.6 Officers confirmed that the evidence gathered had been from their own sources and was designed to provide for a comprehensive reflection of usage, which could be analysed as part of the review, which included readings taken on both Saturdays and Wednesdays, the latter being Dorchester market day.

84.7 One member considered that it would have been helpful for members to have been provided with an indication of associated costs for such services. Whilst the Director acknowledged this point, he reminded members of the briefing session/seminar on subsidised public bus services, which was to follow the Committee meeting, which would set out such costings in more detail.

84.8 The report provided members with a series of options for their consideration as to how they wished the petition to be dealt with. Accordingly members considered that the petitioner's request should be incorporated within the existing review and that the petition organiser should be informed in writing of the Committee's views and how it would be dealt with.

Resolved

85. That the petition be noted and the petitioners be notified that their request be considered in light of the ongoing review of the subsidised bus services in Dorset.

Reason for Decision

86. In order to comply with the County Council's published scheme for responding to petitions and so as to enable local people to connect with local elected decision makers.

Sustainable Construction Strategy 2011 -14 Action Plan – Performance Report

87.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment which provided a mid-term update on progress on a revised, three year, Sustainable Construction Strategy, with the aim of ensuring that sustainability was built into the whole construction

process, together with an action plan covering the 5 action identified areas and 16 key priority tasks. Members were informed that one area was on target, relating to embedding sustainability principles into management processes and procedures, but that the other four required mitigation actions, which had been identified, to be implemented.

87.2 Accordingly, particular focus was now being placed on the impact of two significant programmes; the Baseline Design work and the Asset Reduction programme, along with the use of the environmental assessment tools, Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) and a sustainability matrix developed by Max Fordham and how these were seen to deliver what was required.

87.3 Members noted that in the Sustainable Construction Strategy, the BREEAM Assessment tool was highlighted as one of the main tools being used to assess the sustainability of construction projects. This fitted with the county council focus of reducing carbon emissions and energy costs and increase opportunities for energy efficiencies. The way in which the Service was considering to make use of their reusable highways surfacing was also noted.

87.4 Of particular note however was that whilst BREEM was a comprehensive tool for building regulation assessment, it was not necessarily appropriate when being applied to more minor projects as it was an expensive option and an involved, time consuming process which required considerable resources and commitment to execute effectively. Nevertheless, it was still considered important to have a measure of sustainable construction so as to be possible to monitor and assess improvement.

87.5 Officers reported that during the development of the Sustainable Construction Strategy a Sustainability Matrix for schools, developed by Max Fordham, was considered as a quick, more rudimentary, alternative assessment of sustainability more suited to less comprehensive projects and more readily able to be applied. This model listed a series of sustainability criteria and specified target levels for differing standards of construction, including Minimum Standard; Best Practice; Innovative; and Pioneering.

87.6 These matrices are currently being explored as useful tools to be used either alongside, or instead of, BREEAM assessments to provide a 'Dorset' assessment to meet local circumstances on their particular merits.

87.7 Members considered that whilst there was need to bear in mind the value for money considerations, and on face value, the Max Fordham model met that criteria and could provide a basis for how sustainable building was assessed, good quality and standards should not be compromised as a consequence. Accordingly, members considered that the Max Fordham option delivered all that was fundamentally necessary and as such should be used wherever appropriate, with each projects being considered objectively and on its own merit, and certainly for the assessment of minor projects.

87.8 However members considered that wherever possible, flexibility within the processes should allow for this model to be used when assessing major projects too, but that standards and quality should not be compromised and that any minimum standards should be on the basis of the best practice category. Members were mindful that whatever option was adopted should make allowance for any particular prevailing circumstances, such as the needs pertaining to coastal environmental conditions.

87.9 Members considered that on the basis of the Max Fordham option being adopted as to the means by which future assessments should be made, this should be monitored to determine that it achieved all that was necessary and was doing what it was designed to do. Accordingly a balance needed to be maintained between providing value for money to a basic, rudimentary standard and how this would impact on the long term maintenance needs of a development.

87.10 Accordingly, members were supportive of the Max Fordham alternative option as a basis by which future sustainable construction assessments might be made.

Resolved

88. That the progress to date as set out in the action plan (Appendix 1 to the Director's report), the key issues in respect of Baseline design and BREEAM and the approach being taken within Dorset Highways all be noted.

Recommended

89. That Cabinet be asked to take into consideration the support of the Committee of adopting a more flexible tool to assess sustainability, such as the Max Fordham Matrices, in place of the currently used BREEAM.

Reason for Decision/Recommendation

90. The corporate Sustainable Construction Strategy is one key element in how the County Council is seeking to fulfil its corporate responsibilities, deliver the County Council's carbon reduction target, compliance with the CRC and the environmental aims of the Corporate Plan. Progress against agreed actions is reported periodically.

Dorset Highways Performance - 1 October 2012 – 31 March 2013

91.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment which presented the performance results for a range of highway services and focused on customer experience, finance and service performance for Quarters 3 and 4 of 2012/13. The report also comprised a summary of Dorset Highways Performance and templates for a range of key highway services.

91.2 Members were informed that significant pressures continued to affect the service, such as budget reductions, structural reorganisation and extreme weather, to name but three.

91.3 Following a service review, Grounds Services had recently moved from Dorset Highways to Countryside and Business Development. Whilst this service was no longer delivered by Dorset Highways, it would continue to work closely with the new 'Dorset Countryside' group and its performance monitored in undertaking work on the highway network.

91.4 Officers reported that Dorset Highways had recently procured a new Highways Management system called 'Confirm'. The 'Confirm' enterprise system would replace the existing EXOR Highways system, plus a number of interim solutions across Dorset Highways. 'Confirm' would help Dorset Highways work smarter, more efficiently and help make a number of significant financial savings. The key benefits of the system were mobile working, asset management, integrated mapping, process automation and operational and performance reporting/dashboards.

91.5 Whilst recognising that there were certain areas which did not reflect particularly well in terms of performance for customer, performance or finance, the Chairman clarified that the data which had been presented was historic and did not necessarily reflect the direction in which the Service was now travelling. Arrangements had now been put in place to address these issues as far as possible but it was acknowledged that some of the particular difficulties were beyond the Service's control, such as government funding or extreme weather, which had undoubtedly contributed towards those disappointing results.

91.6 In response to the costs associated with the new "Confirm" system, officers

explained that whilst the initial cost of the system was undoubtedly significant, the benefits of the flexibility of its use and the ability to customise it more readily, together with the ability to gather more meaningful information on highway maintenance and asset management, meant that, through its implementation, it would realise further savings and would provide value for money. The system was considered to be an important investment particularly as replacement costs for the existing system had begun to escalate and was becoming increasingly inefficient. Officers confirmed that savings of £50,000 would be realised in due course. The Director confirmed that the Directorate's Open Day on 1 October would have this system on display.

91.7 Officers also confirmed that with regard to how cyclical maintenance was being managed, as reactive incidents had increased, resources used in dealing with this had understandably resulted in programmed maintenance work being neglected to a certain extent.

91.8 Clarification was provided as to how the works relating to verge cutting were programmed. Officers explained that who assumed responsibility for this varied considerably throughout the county, and in some cases, this was carried out by either the district council or by their sub contractors.

91.9 Members expressed their concern that the programme of works appeared to not being adhered to in some instances particularly when town and parish councils had every reason to believe that this would be the case. Members asked what might be done to rectify the matter. Officers responded by reminding members that since the number of annual cuts had been reduced to six, any unexpected issues encountered meant that there was difficulty in resuming how the programme was managed, leading to delays in cuts.

91.10 Furthermore, given the growth rate of grasses during the spring, the equipment being used proved to be inadequate and consequently it had been necessary to purchase more resilient machinery in order to achieve what was necessary. However, competing requests from other local authorities experiencing similar problems had meant that the Service were still awaiting delivery but members were assured that everything possible was being done to rectify this matter as soon as was practicable.

91.11 Regardless of this situation, however, members were informed that the Service was to review the way in which it managed its verges in an acknowledgement of the benefits and value of the flora and fauna it accommodated.

91.12 The Chairman confirmed that there would be regular bi-annual updates on the performance of the Service by way of the Director's report and it was hoped that more positive results would be achieved in the coming months as services were more effectively and efficiently delivered and he hoped that funding towards this could be identified.

Noted

Corporate Performance Monitoring Report : Fourth Quarter 2012-13

92.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Director for Environment which presented the results of the monitoring of the County Council's Budget and Corporate Plan for the fourth quarter of 2012/13, with a specific focus on those elements of the plan which were managed by the Environment Directorate. The report also contained analysis of the Council's progress against all five of its corporate aims and presented the Corporate Balanced Scorecard.

92.2 The Dorset Council's Working Together Policy Officer drew members' attention to the work and budget of the Environment Directorate, which was largely encapsulated in Aim 4 of the plan.

92.3 Members were informed that at the end of the fourth quarter the performance indicators in the Budget and Corporate Plan had an average "amber" (0% - 5% off target) rating. The percentage of indicators that were meeting their targets had risen from 56% in quarter 3 to 59% in the fourth quarter. Furthermore, 76% of actions were on course. The year end projected overspend for the whole authority had not materialised as anticipated, with there being an underspend of £5.2 million as at the end of March 2013.

92.4 Regarding performance indicators for the Directorate, Aim 4 had an average "amber" rating at the year end, with 85% of actions being on course or completed. Environment Budgets were underspent by £24,000, mainly due to pressures from the effects of flooding and the heavy snowfall in January 2013, these being offset by savings elsewhere. The Dorset Waste Partnership budget had an overspend of £480,000 for 2012-13.

92.5 The Dorset Council's Working Together Policy Officer explained the detail behind the reasons for red performance indicators and answered a series of questions raised by members on specific elements of the report.

92.6 One member considered that in respect of EN5 - "Provide an efficient and safe road network", it was more efficient to manage the road network by surface dressing where practicable rather than by patching pot holes, which could leave an uneven road surface and which was invariably susceptible to erosion.

92.7 In response to members' questions regarding why the Dorset Waste Partnership was still showing as a red indicator, officers explained that the figures being considered were still somewhat lagging behind what was actually taking place and that, with the continual roll out of the unified collection service and how positively this was being received in Christchurch, the figures would be seen to be improving in the coming months.

92.8 The Cabinet Member for Environment also explained that street sweepings could no longer be categorised as recyclables, which had consequently resulted in a financial loss, coupled with the fact that the value of recyclates had fallen globally. With regard to EN9 – "Reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill and work in partnership with others to reduce the overall costs of waste management in the county", the way in which the public were receiving acknowledgment to emails etc was to be commended and members were informed that such improvements would be included future reports.

92.9 Similarly, in respect of EN2 - "Address climate change and other sustainability issues", the overspend was a reflection of a relatively small budget, contorted by the figures and which could be attributed to a staff resourcing issue.

Noted

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2012-13, including MFC Update

93.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer which showed budget monitoring information as at the end of the financial year 2012/13, showing an overspend against all service budgets for the County Council of £767,300, compared with the predicted overspend of £4,392,000 as at the end of January 2013.

93.2 For the Environment Directorate this represented an underspend of £24,200, or 0.1% of the budget for the year this being attributable to:-

- Countryside and Business Development - £241,900 over spent
- Dorset Highways - £47,300 over spent
- Planning - £235,000 under spent, and
- Dorset Property - £78,400 under spent.

93.3 The Committee were asked to consider one proposal for the carry forward of £40,000 within the Planning Service due to the Purbeck Business Centre Service and Maintenance Costs, which had been due in 2012/13 but had slipped into 2013/14.

93.4 In response to members' questions, officers explained the detail behind the figures, how these were applied and being managed, and particularly how contingency was being used.

Recommended

94. That the Cabinet be asked to agree to carry forward proposal outlined in Section 3 of the Director's report

Reason for Recommendation

95. Close monitoring of the budget position is essential to ensure that money and resources are used effectively.

Rural Community Broadband Fund

96.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment on progress with how the Rural Community Broadband Fund was being managed and how this was being applied to Dorset in order that technologically inaccessible parts of Dorset were able to be served by Broadband.

96.2 Members were informed that by working with communities in those defined areas there was an opportunity to obtain extra funding to complement the Superfast Dorset Programme from Defra's Rural Community Broadband Fund.

96.3 Officers explained that it was intended that two Expressions of Interest should be submitted to Defra for the Rural Community Broadband Fund (DCMS). These being in respect of:-

- Upper Marshwood Vale and Char Valley Broadband
- Dorset Farms and Country Estates Framework

and if the expressions of interest were subsequently recommended by Defra to proceed to full business plan and application, then the approval of the Cabinet would be required at that stage.

96.4 Officers explained that the Cabinet were to make a decision at their meeting on 26 June 2013 on the contract arrangements for the Superfast Dorset Programme, this being sponsored by DCMS and part funded by Dorset local authorities. It was acknowledged that, to date, there had been misgivings at how the two programmes inter related nationally. However, every available opportunity to attract additional funding was being pursued.

96.5 Whilst local authority sponsored schemes were preferable, community schemes also played their part in meeting the needs of communities to ensure that those

more inaccessible areas benefited from inclusive broadband coverage. The Committee were informed that it was critical that applications for funding continued to be submitted as this was the only way in which the necessary funding might be secured.

96.6 In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman of the County Council as to why the scheme for the Blackmore Vale was not being sponsored by the County Council, officers confirmed that this particular scheme was community led, was being launched as such, and this approach had received the support of both North Dorset District Council and the County Council.

Recommended

97. That the Cabinet be asked to support the submission of two Expressions of Interest to Defra for the RCBF in respect of:-

- i) Upper Marshwood Vale and Char Valley
Broadband
- ii) Dorset Farms and Country Estates
Framework

Reason for Recommendation

98. Effective delivery of the Superfast Dorset Programme, together with additional resources from Defra through the rural Community Broadband Fund will support the County Council's aims to:

- help build strong communities for all
- safeguard and enhance Dorset's unique environment and support our local economy.
- provide innovative value for money services

Citizens Panel 29

99.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment on the findings of the Citizen's Panel Survey 29, which received 3,043 online and posted responses, which represented a response rate of 60%.

99.2 Members noted that on this occasion, the evidence gathered covered the following areas of County Council and NHS activity:

- Local Decision Making
- Consumer Issues
- Transportation in Dorset
- Recreational Activity in Poole Harbour
- Dorset Libraries and ebooks
- Crime and disorder in Weymouth town centre (Weymouth and Portland panellists only)
- Urgent care services (NHS questions)

99.3 Members were interested to learn that Citizens' Panel 30 would cover questions on:

- Superfast Broadband
- Flooding
- Beach Cleanliness
- Waste
- Community

- NHS questions

with the majority of the subject matter being within the Directorate's remit.

99.4 In response to a member's question as to why other local authorities within Dorset were not also engaged in this process, officers explained that there had been an opportunity for them to contribute but they had not taken up the offer.

99.5 Members reported that their constituents often expressed confusion over what each tier of council was responsible for and, even within individual councils, which directorate or department was responsible for what particular service. Members asked officers to consider how the current situation might be improved.

99.6 The Cabinet Member for Education and Communications stated that the County Council should be striving for the delivery of a seamless service regardless of what this might be, with arrangements being put in place to ensure service users could access what they needed directly. Both Dorset Direct and the dorsetforyou website contributed significantly towards achieving this.

Noted

Policy Development Panels

Policy Development Panel on Community Led Highway Initiatives

100.1 The Committee considered a progress report by the Director for Environment on a policy development panel established to examine how communities could engage in the delivery of local highway improvements and safety measures. The main issues concerned the type of work which could be safely undertaken, how best to insure those working on the highway, supervision and volunteer training.

100.2 A guidance document on how communities could undertake work safely on the highway was produced and agreed that it would be trialled to see if it required amendment prior to widescale implementation. Members of the Committee would be provided with a copy of the guidance for their information.

100.3 Officers reported that it was intended that a number of small-scale initiatives should be progressed as a way of determining whether the guidance worked as intended.

100.4 Progress to date had been limited given the County Council elections but the County Council Member for Beaminster had identified a number of small-scale pilot projects that local communities in her division had indicated they would be prepared to undertake, including gully clearance, traditional finger post refurbishment/renewal, verge clearance and painting highway railings.

100.5. However, before work could commence issues relating to insurance and training needed to be resolved.

100.6 The Head of Highways Management confirmed that the details of this innovative scheme had been sent to the Department for Transport in the hope that it could be used as a basis for some countrywide guidance.

Noted

Policy Development Panel on Roundabout and Other Asset Sponsorship

101.1 The Committee considered a report on the work of the policy development panel established to consider sponsorship opportunities on assets within the purview and control of the Council.

101.2 The Panel had met on two occasions, with membership being drawn from every overview committee as this was seen as a cross-cutting, whole authority initiative.

101.3 Much of the business of the first two meetings focused on updates and learning from the Roundabout Sponsorship Scheme. The Panel had agreed to extend an invitation to commercial organisations to identify ways in which further income could be generated through advertising and sponsorship. Assets to be considered for income generation were:-

- Lighting columns
- Boundary and welcome signs into or within the county
- Bus shelters
- Verges or County Farm sites
- The County Council's own fleet of buses
- Other vehicles e.g. those of the Dorset Waste Partnership, Highways, Countryside and mobile libraries
- Car parks and on-street parking machines
- Advertising on the dorsetforyou website or other separately hosted websites
- Sponsorship of County Council uniforms
- Country Parks and other Countryside sites

101.4 Members considered this to be a beneficial exercise. The Cabinet member for Education and Communications asked that any advertising or sponsorship being considered should accord with the County Council's own branding and not be incongruous to this.

101.5 The Committee reaffirmed the membership of the Panel, subject to Rebecca Knox being replaced by Mike Lovell.

Noted

Establishment of future Policy Development Panels

102. The Committee considered possible topics for future work of policy development panels. They agreed that at an appropriate time a policy development panel be established to review subsidised rural bus services, including community led transport schemes.

Member Briefings

103.1 The Committee were provided with the opportunity to identify topics for future member briefings.

103.2 Members asked that the October 2013 meeting should be followed by a briefing on the financial context of how the Directorate operated and on the County Farms Estate, and that the January 2014 meeting be followed by a briefing on Gypsies and Travellers. Members also identified economic generation as a additional topic of interest..

Noted

Schedule of Members' Seminars and Events 2013

104. The Committee's attention was drawn to the Schedule of Members' Seminars and Events for 2013. The Director drew attention to the Directorate Open Day to be held following the next Committee meeting, on Tuesday 1 October 2013.

Noted

Environment Overview Committee Work Programme

105. The Committee considered and agreed its work programme for the remainder of 2013.

Noted

Questions

106. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting duration: 11.15 am – 1.20 pm

