

Environment Overview Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 19 June 2014.

Present:

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

Peter Finney, Cabinet Member for Environment, Spencer Flower, Leader of the Council and Rebecca Knox, Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families all attended under Standing Order 54(1).

David Harris, County Council Member for Westham, attended the meeting for minutes 116 to 118.

Trevor Jones, County Council Member for Dorchester, attended the meeting for minutes 116 to 118.

Officers attending:

Mike Harries (Director for Environment and the Economy), 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), Mike Hansford (Senior Engineer), Chris Hook (Workplace Travel Coordinator), Andrew Martin (Head of Dorset Highways Operations), Gordon Sneddon (Group Manager), Peter Speroni (Policy and Project Business Manager), Paul Willis (Group Manager) and Mike Winter (Head of Dorset Highways Management).

Acknowledgments

105. The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee took the opportunity to congratulate Mike Harries on his appointment as Director for Environment and the Economy and to welcome Hilary Cox as a member of the Committee. He also took the opportunity to thank Dave Ayre, Don Gobbett and Mike Winter for the valued contribution they had made to the work of the Committee and the County Council in the past. He wished them every success in the future, as the Committee was not due to meet again before they left the service of the County Council.

Apologies for Absence

106. Apologies for absence were received from Andy Canning, Peter Richardson and from Toni Coombs

Code of Conduct

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

Minutes

108.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising

Minute 65.6 - Public and Community Transport

108.2 Officers reported that there had been no progress in making amendments to the leaflets on Community Transport arrangements. This would form part of the holistic approach currently being investigated into how public and community transport provision should be delivered. Officers understood the importance of the public being given meaningful and understandable information so as to enable them to make informed choices and decisions.

Minutes 75-78 – Public and Community Transport

108.3 Officers reported that meetings had now taken place between officers and respective local members in an effort to find some solution to how public transport links from Wimborne and between Bridport and Yeovil respectively might be maintained and confirmed that discussion from these meetings would be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 2 July 2014.

Terms of Reference

109. The Terms of Reference of the Committee were noted.

Public Participation

Public Speaking

110.1 The Committee were informed that no requests for public speaking had been received.

110.2 The Committee were informed that no public statements or questions had been received.

Petitions

110.3 The Committee were informed that there had been no submissions of petitions.

Forward Together - The Way Ahead

111.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which provided an update and progress being made on workstreams for the Directorate's Transformation Programme, these being the Directorate's restructuring; Holistic Transport Services Review, and Highways Service Delivery Model.

111.2 Officers explained how the risk assessment process was applied and the reasoning for this. It was essential that any proposals were designed to reduce risk. In particular members wished to be assured that resilience would be maintained for emergency incidents, such as flooding. Officers confirmed that there was every intention that this would be the case, with how the process was managed being designed to ensure that response levels from front line services were maintained. However the way in which this would be delivered might well change so as to be more effective and efficient.

111.3 Members were informed that a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) was one of the proposed options and was seen as a mechanism to provide improved delivery of services in Dorset that might not otherwise be achievable. Charging for some services, or at least the recovery of costs, played an important part in how service delivery might be maintained in the future. A business case was currently being developed to evaluate the benefits of a LATC.

11.4 Some members expressed reservations as to how any LATC might operate and saw it as a means to privatise the delivery of services. They were similarly

concerned at how control over the quality of services provided might be guaranteed. The Director explained that outsourcing to a third party was certainly not the intention, this work was being done to help identify the means by which services could be delivered more efficiently in the future. Accordingly, a series of scenarios had been assessed to provide for the most efficient way of delivering services for Dorset in the future and this option, or an enhanced internal service with strategic business partners, was seen as providing the optimum benefit for Dorset's needs and would allow greater control over how services were delivered.

111.5 The Committee recognised the need to change the way the Directorate worked, both operationally and in how its resources were used, and remained confident that progress would be made to achieve this.

Noted

Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP)

112.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy in respect of the Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP) which was designed to provide a comprehensive and strategic overview of the Dorset road network, the assets associated with this and how the financial consequences of maintaining the network were being addressed. Members' attention was drawn to the inadequate capital funding of highway maintenance and the adverse impact this would have on carriageway condition in future years unless there was additional investment in the network.

112.2 Furthermore members were informed that revenue funding of highway maintenance was currently £1million short of that which was required to carry out a very limited programme of cyclical activities and anticipated reactive repair work. Following bids to central government for a share of the severe weather recovery fund, Dorset had been allocated an additional grant of £5.87 million for road maintenance against approximately £12 million that was needed.

112.3 Additionally a bid had been submitted for a share of the £168 million pothole repair fund made available by the Government, with allocations for this being announced imminently. The Committee were advised that initial indications were encouraging that Dorset would be reasonably successful in their bid given that their submission was seen to be well constructed and comprehensive. The Highways Asset Management Plan had played a significant part in providing the necessary evidence in support of this in identifying what was in need of repair. Members were pleased to hear that the submission looked to be promising.

112.4 The Director's report set out in detail what was contained in the two volumes of the Plan as well as the capital maintenances being spent on carriageways. The Committee were considering on this occasion Volume 1 of the HAMP, with the progress being made on Volume 2 being noted. The report provided for a series of five scenarios by way of an illustration for the way in which carriageway capital maintenance might be addressed, ranging from doing nothing to improving the network to a pristine condition, together with all the financial spending implications associated with these. Officers advocated that Scenario 4, which was designed to provide for more capital investment to improve the network to an acceptable condition over the ensuing ten years, was the optimum option and one which was considered to be realistic, deliverable and reasonable.

112.5 The Plan itself took into account the importance of well maintained highways; the highway asset management policy; what highway assets the Council had; what state those assets were in; what did the Council want the highways to be like; what was the worth

of the assets and their cost to maintain; what was able to be achieved and what needed to be done.

112.6 The Committee considered that members would benefit from an all member seminar on the subject following their October meeting and arrangements would be put in place for this.

112.7 The Portfolio Holder for Environment referred to the importance of structural maintenance prudential borrowing in being able to achieve all that the Directorate had managed and which had made a considerable difference to improving the condition of the roads as it had, particularly in how resurfacing works were managed when assessing the deterioration of the road's condition from potholes.

112.8 Members were advised that with regard to how emergency maintenance work was addressed, areas of known concern, particular those which were liable to flooding, were targeted for more frequent inspection and maintenance. In this regard, members considered that local knowledge of parish councils could play an instrumental part in assisting the management of this practice more effectively.

112.9 The Committee considered the Plan and its accompanying report to be an informative document which provided a comprehensive assessment of the highway assets the Highway Authority had and how these could be best managed. In agreeing that Volume 1 of the HAMP should be recommended for approval, the Committee asked that minor revisions should be approved by the Director for Environment and Economy, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and the Chairman of the Overview Committee.

Recommended

113. That the Cabinet be asked to approve Volume 1 of the Highway Asset Management Plan subject to further minor revisions approved by the Director for Environment and the Economy following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and the Chairman of the Overview Committee.

Resolved

114.1 That further work being carried out to prepare a business case for additional capital highway maintenance funding be approved.

114.2 That progress being made with Volume 2 of the HAMP be noted.

Reasons for Recommendation

115.1 A well maintained highway network is a key enabler to deliver economic activity and growth in line with the Corporate Plan.

115.2 To obtain approval of the revisions to Volume 1 of the HAMP to meet the requirements of new national guidance.

115.3 To highlight the likely future deterioration of the condition of the highway network at currently anticipated funding levels.

115.4 To seek support for the submission of a bid for additional corporate capital funding for highway maintenance.

Park and Ride - Weymouth and Dorchester

116.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on how the park and ride sites at Dorchester and Weymouth were operating. Members were informed that both sites operated with a subsidy and were under utilised.

116.2 The Committee were reminded that park and ride was acknowledged as a key element in the management of parking and congestion of the road network in Dorchester and Weymouth.

116.3 It was considered that better utilisation of park and ride could be achieved by enhanced collaboration with large employers such as Dorset County Hospital, West Dorset District Council and Magna Housing, all of whom would benefit from an improved park and ride option. Benefits could be realised for small and medium enterprises too by working with existing groups, such as Weymouth and Dorchester BID and the Weymouth and Dorchester Chamber of Commerce to further increase use of the service by workers and retail shoppers.

116.4 Further development of demand management measures in both towns would be essential to the success of both park and ride operations and would require close working with West Dorset District and Weymouth and Portland Borough Councils. The travel element of the County Council's Workstyles Project aimed to increase occupancy at County Hall without increasing the parking provision on campus and park and ride was an integral part of that strategy.

116.5 The report set out the current operational arrangements and statistical information in respect of each scheme, the scope and benefits of change, including the intended reduction in congestion and indiscriminate on street parking and the potential measures to increase patronage, including:-

- improved participation of other major employers,
- the review of parking arrangements for County Council employees, particularly at County Hall,
- the development of incentives for town employees to use the sites,
- investigation of the prospect of a new site for Dorchester to the south of the A35, and
- strengthening work with district and borough councils to align park and ride with town centre parking strategies.

116.6 The County Council Member for Westham was of the view that there should have been greater dialogue with Weymouth and Portland Borough Council prior to the proposals reaching this stage, as they would no doubt have had a valued contribution to make. This aside, in line with the Authority's corporate aims, he considered that there should be a promotion of the linkage with the comprehensive cycling network that now existed to encourage park and cycle as much as park and ride, and exuded the benefits of this. He also suggested that income could be generated from charging camper vans to use the Weymouth site. He considered that it was critical that the Borough Council was involved in the process and that local County Council members were engaged in the process too.

116.7 The County Council member for Littlemoor supported the view that engagement with local members was essential. He considered that the pricing structure should be assessed as he could see that there was little justification for different seasonal pricing variations as currently existed. He considered that there was a need for the facility to be made more attractive to visitors and residents alike, particularly with those residents from Dorchester, Littlemoor and Preston being targeted.

116.8 The County Council member for Dorchester (Trevor Jones) recognised that the Service, as it stood, was under utilised and there was a fundamental need for it to be rationalised. He considered that what was being proposed would unfortunately do little to improve the situation, with most of the proposals having been tried unsuccessfully before. Rather he considered that much could be learned from successful examples of schemes implemented elsewhere, in both how they operated, what obstacles they had faced and how these had been resolved. The efficient implementation of a park and ride scheme was essential to the effective management of town centre traffic, as currently neither long stay parking nor park and ride was being used at an optimum level, but rather that on street parking was taking place in inappropriate residential streets. He advocated, if necessary, the use of consultants in this instance, to help in any assessment process.

116.9 The other County Council Member for Dorchester (Richard Biggs) considered there to be no further need to explore the prospect of a new site for Dorchester given that the current one was under utilised and more effort should be afforded to maximising the effectiveness of that.

116.10 However the Committee were of the view that this was something that could be undertaken within the resources the County Council already had given the expertise available. The Committee recognised that for park and ride to work effectively there was a need for this to be complemented by a robust and comprehensive parking strategy which took into account traffic restraint by way of physical measures, pricing and enforcement.

116.11 Members were of the view that if the location of the site was not in the right place or the bus route did not suit those wishing to use it, it would not deliver the benefits for which it was designed, especially if commuters felt that this was impinging on their working day.

116.12 The Committee considered that any strategy for the improved use of the service should be made in collaboration with Weymouth and Portland Borough and Dorchester Town Councils and West Dorset District Council - as the authorities responsible for off street parking - to provide for an integrated package designed to decrease congestion in towns and reduce commuter travel mileage. Similarly, to work efficiently, any park and ride system should comprise the three key components of being affordable, reliable and regular.

116.13 From the Committee discussion, members regarded that this matter should be looked at with some urgency and that a further report should be considered at their meeting in October 2014. Further to the list of potential measures to increase patronage, as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the Director's report, the Committee generally considered that these provided a good basis for invigorating the interest shown in and improving the vitality of park and ride. Members agreed that there was a need to strengthen the collaborative working with District and Borough Councils in order to align the principles of park and ride with their respective town centre parking strategies. To improve the opportunities of this happening, there should be the inclusion of an additional potential measure providing for the investigation of other means of achieving an improved service at a lower cost and to benefit from lessons learnt elsewhere. Members also agreed that the respective local County Council members should play a part in contributing to the discussion.

Resolved

117.1 That the current position on how park and ride schemes in Dorchester and Weymouth were operating and the potential measures proposed to increase its patronage, be noted.

117.2 That the potential measures proposed to increase patronage and the courses of action proposed to be taken as contained in paragraph 5.1 of the Director's report, together with the points raised in paragraph 116.13 above, be agreed as a means of delivering valued and viable park and ride schemes in both Weymouth and Dorchester.

Reason for Decisions

118. Park and Ride was seen as part of the wider sustainable and healthy travel options which supported both corporate aims.

Superfast Broadband

119.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which provided an update of the progress in the delivery of the Superfast Dorset programme designed to provide and deliver the most appropriate superfast broadband solution for communities whilst maximising benefits in a cost effective manner across the business and domestic community.

119.2 Members noted the success in the delivery of the project to date and the progress that was being made and recognised the critical need to stimulate demand and encourage participation in the project. Members discussed how the service was being delivered and by whom and asked if there was the prospect for any other intervention by a smaller, local competitor. Officers explained the contractual arrangements for the delivery of the service and unfortunately, whilst recognising the County Council's obligation to support small businesses wherever possible, were bound by those contractual arrangements and that there was therefore little opportunity for that type of support in this instance.

119.3 The Committee were informed about alternative satellite solutions which were available and designed to serve hard to reach isolated communities or homesteads that were not necessarily commercially viable or attractive to BT, but this means of delivery would not attract the necessary government funding required to deliver a sustainable communication network, whereas the course of action that was being undertaken would.

Resolved

120. That the performance and progress to date in delivering fast and reliable broadband to residents and businesses across Dorset be noted.

Reason for Decision

121. To enable members to have an oversight of this important programme which contributed to the County Council's Corporate Plan focus on "Enabling Economic Growth".

Dorset Highways Performance 2013/14

122.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy which provided the performance results for a range of services in Dorset highways, focusing on customer experience, finance and service performance for the financial year 2013/14. It also noted how future performance reporting proposals would be considered by the Committee.

122.2 Key service headlines were drawn to the attention of the Committee and, whilst generally more complaints, comments and concerns had been received, customer satisfaction had been maintained or improved for most services, with the exception of road condition. Such complaints were undoubtedly compounded by the poor weather conditions experienced over the winter months and the damage this had caused to the carriageway. Officers reported that Government funding was soon expected to contribute towards the

repair of these and the improvement of the road condition in general.

122.3 From discussion, members highlighted the complaints which they had received about the condition of highway verges and how the vegetation was being managed. They hoped that the measures in place would soon rectify this. Furthermore, the delivery of the outstanding street lighting replacement programme was still of some concern to members but the Committee was advised that an assurance had been provided by the lighting contractors, Dorset Lighting Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Scottish and Southern Electric, that this programme was to be substantially completed in the near future.

122.4 Members' concerns had resulted from the way in which some particularly sensitive heritage sites had been managed, with little regard seemingly being paid to the environmental setting. It was acknowledged that with improved dialogue between the contractors and local public bodies about planning and timing of works, some of the issues which had arisen could have been avoided and would not have needed rectification, as was now the case.

122.5 However, the Committee were assured that the street lighting contract included provision for financial penalties for any slippage in the programme and consequently the contractors was obliged to rectify any mistakes made, at their own expense. Although this might well be the case, members remained concerned that such mistakes reflected poorly on the County Council as Highway Authority, even though liability and responsibility for the installation had been transferred to the contractors. Members took the opportunity to recognise how well the Principal Engineer, Rod Mainstone, had managed the contract in some difficult circumstances and were appreciative that it had still managed to achieve all that it had.

122.6 One member asked how complaints were being managed and considered that there should be an overarching policy for dealing with them. His particular focus was on public liability claims and the need to reduce these to a minimum. The Director considered that there was a need to take advice from the Risk Manager on how this might be addressed, but as a general rule, the robust defence and justification mechanisms which were in place for assessing liability claims had contributed significantly to a measured response being taken when responding to such claims. Similarly, the robust maintenance and inspection regimes which the Directorate had in place for assessing carriageway condition was the basis by which decisions to rebut liability were justified.

Resolved

123. That the Dorset Highways Performance 2013/14 report and progress made be noted.

Reasons for Decision

124.1 To ensure members were aware of the performance of Dorset Highways and to draw attention to any specific performance issues or highlights.

124.2 To provide evidence/data to assist members, and officers, in making evidence based decisions.

124.3 Feedback was sought to ensure that Dorset Highways continued to provide a simple, comprehensive and meaningful way of presenting service performance

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14 – Final Outturn

124.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Corporate Resources setting out budget monitoring information as at the end of the financial year 2013/14, which showed an overspend against all service budgets for the County Council of £1,110,000, which compared with the predicted overspend of £4,462,000 as at the end of January 2014.

124.2 For the Environment and the Economy Directorate, this represented an underspend of £351,000, or 1.10% of the budget for the year, with the details attributable to each cost centre being set out in the report.

124.3 Of particular note was the significant reduction in the predicted highways operations overspend, this being as a result of the emergency flooding works funding reclaimed under the Bellwin scheme. Similarly the relatively mild winter had resulted in the need for fewer gritting runs which also had contributed towards the underspend.

124.4 The Committee's attention was drawn to the proposal to carry forward the £300,000 underspend from Dorset Property arising as a result of the way in which the management of this Service was being addressed, generating a surplus of income over budget. Accordingly it was proposed that the carry forward would be used to contribute to further adaptations of the Council's accommodation in support of the Assets and Workstyle Programme within Forward Together.

124.5 Whilst the report recommended that the balance of the Directorate underspend of some £51,000 should be retained centrally by the Authority, Members were of the view that this should directly benefit the work of the Directorate. The Committee agreed that the Cabinet should be asked that this be retained by the Directorate to contribute towards how highway vegetation was managed. Whilst this appeared to be a reasonable request, the Group Finance Manager took the opportunity to remind members that the Cabinet had previously agreed to the bolstering of the Environment Directorate budget during 2013/14 with £800,000 contingency funding and would no doubt be mindful of this in their assessment of this particular request.

Recommended

125.1 That the Cabinet be asked to agree to the carry forward of £300,000 of the Dorset Property underspend to contribute towards further adaptations of the Council's accommodation in support of the Assets and Workstyle Programme.

125.2 That the Cabinet be asked to agree that the balance of the Directorate's underspend of £51,000 be retained by the Directorate to contribute towards additional highway vegetation management.

Reason for Recommendations

126. Close monitoring of the budget position was an essential requirement to ensure that money and resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Corporate Performance Monitoring Report: Fourth Quarter 2013-14 (1 January - 31 March 2014)

128.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Director for Environment and the Economy which presented the results of the monitoring of the County Council's Budget and Corporate Plan for the fourth quarter of 2013/14, 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. Members' attention was drawn to the work and budget of the Environment Directorate, which was largely encapsulated in Aim 4 of the plan.

128.2 Members were informed that at the end of the fourth quarter, the performance indicators in the Budget and Corporate Plan had an average "amber" rating. The percentage of indicators that were meeting or exceeding their targets was 60%. Furthermore, 68% of actions were on course or complete. At the end of Quarter 4, the forecasted year end underspend for the whole authority was £13,000, or 0.04% of the total budget.

128.3 Regarding performance indicators for the Directorate, Aim 4 had an average "amber" rating, with 57% of indicators on target, with 81% of actions on course or complete.

128.4 The Committee's attention was drawn to the national award received by the Directorate in recognition of the innovative engineering works associated with the repair and reconstruction of Beaminster Tunnel. Members were pleased to hear of this.

Noted

Schedule of Members' Seminars and Events 2014

129. The Committee's attention was drawn to the Schedule of Members' Seminars and Events for 2014. The Chairman drew attention to the proposed Highways Asset Management Plan seminar following the Committee's meeting on 9 October 2014.

Noted

Environment Overview Committee Work Programme

130. The Committee considered and agreed its work programme for the remainder of 2014.

Noted

Outside Bodies

131.1 The Committee received submissions from Margaret Phipps in respect of the Bournemouth International Airport Consultative Committee and Daryl Turner on the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre Trust providing a summary of the latest activities of both these bodies.

131.2 In addition, Hilary Cox provided updates on her involvement with the Dorset Local Nature Partnership Board, Jurassic Coast Trust, County Farms Liaison Panel and Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Minerals and Waste Policy Joint Advisory Committee. Mr Lovell gave an update on the Purbeck Rail Partnership and Paul Kimber, likewise, on the Portland Gas Trust.

Noted

Member Briefings

132. The Committee were provided with the opportunity to identify topics for future member briefings but decided that there was no need for any to be held at the present time.

Noted

Questions

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

Meeting duration: 10:00am – 12.40pm