

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2019

Present: Cllrs Daryl Turner (Chairman), Cherry Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Robin Cook, Jean Dunseith, Simon Gibson, Ryan Hope, Val Potheary, Andrew Starr, Roland Tarr and David Taylor

Also present: Cllr Tony Alford, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Toni Coombs, Cllr Mike Dyer, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr David Shortell and Cllr David Tooke

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Paul Ackrill (Head of Commercial Waste and Strategy), Tony Bygrave (Senior Assurance Officer - Complaints), Lee Ellis (Scrutiny Officer), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), Jason Jones (Group Manager (Commissioning)), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), James Potten (Communication and Engagement Officer), Karyn Punchard (Corporate Director of Place Services), John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Kirstie Snow (Communication & Engagement) and Fiona King (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

3. **Terms of Reference**

The Terms of Reference for the Committee were noted.

Noted

4. **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted from Town and Parish Councils at this meeting.

There were no public statements and questions submitted for this meeting.

5. **Work Programme for the Place Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee considered its Work Programme.

The Chairman advised members that he would be attending a meeting shortly with other Scrutiny Chairs to prioritise a long list of items that had been suggested for scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that as items were added to the Cabinet Forward Plan they would feed through to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee work programme.

Resolved

That the work programme be updated accordingly following the meeting of Scrutiny Chairs.

6. Cabinet Decisions

Members noted recent decisions that had been taken by the Cabinet.

The Chairman advised that the aim of this standing item was to review decisions that had been made by the Cabinet in the period between Scrutiny Committee meetings and to further review Cabinet decisions a year in arrears to see the impact that had been made. He felt this would be something that developed as Cabinet moved forward.

Noted

7. Future use of Somerley Household Recycling Centre (HRC) by Dorset residents

Members considered a report that outlined the charges that Hampshire County Council proposed to introduce for non-residents at their Household Recycling Centre (HRC) from April 2020. This report would also be considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 30 July 2019. It was highlighted that 56% of the users of Hampshire County Council's Somerley HRC near Ringwood were Dorset residents.

The Head of Commercial Waste and Strategy highlighted a survey that had been conducted with the local residents who currently used the Somerley HRC.

He noted that whichever option was selected Dorset Council would incur further costs, either in terms of a direct payment to Hampshire County Council or in terms of consequential costs within Dorset. The recommendation to the Cabinet was that there would be no payment to Hampshire as there was no budget for it.

In response to a question from a member about the different items taken to the HRC rather than put in the kerbside bins and whether this had been considered, the Head of Commercial Waste and Strategy responded that this had been driven by Hampshire County Council and the advice to residents would be go to their own (Dorset) HRC to dispose of such items.

The Vice-Chairman made reference to the £225k income for non-household waste disposal and asked about expenditure for fly tipping across the County. The Head of Commercial Waste and Strategy advised that the costs of fly tipping would be considerable smaller and undertook to provide further information outside of the meeting. Members were reminded that income was gained from non-household waste and the responsibility of this was passed to the contractor.

Following a question about Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) at the HRC, officers advised that this was not operational at the moment but was planning to be introduced in January 2020. However, Hampshire would prefer not to use this system for Dorset residents.

One member made reference to the £60k that had been budgeted for Hampshire but to date had not been used and therefore felt there was budget provision for this service.

The Chairman invited the local members to speak:-

Toni Coombs, Councillor for Verwood advised members that she had been involved in this issue for 3 years. She had lived in Verwood since 1991 and had enjoyed free access to HRCs during this period. Cross border charging started in the London area and had a ripple effect, which continued to happen across the country. She felt one authority should not be subsidising another authority. Recently she had attended the Portfolio Holders decision day at Hampshire County Council, whilst the decision had not changed it had been agreed there would be more time for the decision to be made. A large consultation had been carried out with over 1500 responses. The HRC was 0.9 miles from the edge of Verwood and Cllr Coombs highlighted the other areas that would be affected. She felt there would be a cost to Dorset whatever happened. She accepted there was no budget but felt that residents would have to pay twice – via their council tax and again through this. She felt the post code system would be easiest to administer.

Mike Dyer, Councillor for West Moors and Three Legged Cross, commented there would be an immediate saving if Dorset Council paid for the Somerley HRC rather than diverting the waste into Dorset. He felt there should be several lots of £60k sitting somewhere that hadn't been paid to Hampshire. He suggested there was a case for paying Hampshire a sum, akin to a form of rental for using their facility as Dorset wouldn't be building one any time soon. He made reference to the 2 year transitional period and felt that in respect of climate change the economics and moral arguments needed to be looked at very carefully.

David Tooke, Councillor for Cranborne and Alderholt, reiterated the point about climate change with additional distances having to be travelled. If there was no money in the budget where would it come from? He felt there was money tucked away for residents to be able to use the HRC and urged the Cabinet to rethink the conclusion and to start negotiating with some real effort.

The Chairman reminded members that the Council had declared a climate emergency and felt this impacted on this decision.

The Vice-Chairman highlighted the need to do what was right for the residents of Dorset. There was an opportunity if the service was subsidised to work with the new Climate Change Group and felt if the Council invested a little it could perhaps save a bit.

One member wished to challenge the assumption that out of area use would include Shaftesbury HRC. She noted that a lot of Wiltshire residents used this facility and considered if there should be discussions with Wiltshire regarding some sort of trade off.

In respect of comments made about the Wimborne HRC one member agreed it was well run but access was very difficult and was over capacity already. He felt the Council needed to look at building another HRC and that there shouldn't be a double taxation imposed on some residents.

One member commented that Verwood was not a small rural part of the county but a significant population centre and we should not pass on the pressures to Wimborne. He felt the rental suggestion was a good point. It was important that the new Council found a way that all its services were universal. He suggested looking at the Woolsbridge Industrial Estate as a potential site. Asking residents to pay would give completely the wrong message and suggested the Council paid the money for the 2 years transitional period in order to give more time for a decision.

Cllr Anthony Alford advised members that part of his current portfolio included waste and that prior to that he was the Chairman of the Dorset Waste Partnership. The Council was now running on a very lean basis in respect of budgets. When the budget was set there was an expectation to deliver the service within budget. To suggest there was money available to meet the impact was unrealistic. There would have to be compensating savings elsewhere which could be reduced provision for HRCs elsewhere. In respect of Wimborne, he accepted that a replacement facility was needed but it would take some time.

Recommendation

1. That Cabinet do not follow the recommendation contained in the report but to have further discussions with Hampshire County Council in respect of Somerley HRC in order to give free access to residents for a 2 year period in order to find a long term solution.
2. That Cabinet investigate any potential for cross border income to the Shaftesbury HRC site to offset any future costs.

8. Dorset Council - Public Transport

Members considered a report on Public Transport which highlighted the various areas of transport that Dorset Council delivered to the residents of Dorset.

Following a question from the Vice-Chairman regarding contractors and sub-contractors and any possible areas of mitigation, the Corporate Director for Economic Growth and Infrastructure advised there was a compliance team within Dorset Travel who acted upon any issues raised by parents and members of the public. In respect of the business model ensuring that people were paid etc the Corporate Director undertook to brief the member outside of the meeting.

In response to a question about how new public transport was rolled out to members of the public, the Corporate Director advised that Dorset Council now had the opportunity to have a new discussion on transport which would include planning and infrastructure and would welcome ideas from members on how best to engage.

One member highlighted the issue in relation to the safety of cycling to school in particular areas which resulted in more parents driving their children to school. The Corporate Director advised that in future it would be helpful to have a discussion on sustainable transport but undertook to discuss this issue further with the member outside of the meeting.

The Chairman invited Bob Driscoll, Chairman of the Western Area Transport Action Group (WATAG) to speak, in order to give new members balance to the subject particularly in light of rural isolation and Post 16 transport difficulties.

Mr Driscoll advised that WATAG had now produced a booklet of travel information. WATAG was one of a number of Transport Action Groups (TAGs) set up in Dorset and were the eyes and the ears on the ground with a significant role to play and met every two months. Over the past few years they had seen major cuts to bus services in rural areas and had been advised that perhaps cuts that had been made were too deep. He felt the issue of concessions needed to be addressed at Government level. With climate change on the agenda a good and reliable public transport system was vital. Rural public transport would never pay in the conventional sense and would require funding, but more importantly investment. The integrated transport review held in February 2019 was excellent and he had received many complements, but sadly there had been no follow up afterwards or further chance for networking. He urged the Council to engage with other transport bodies.

The Chairman noted that the Post 16 transport policy had caused issues for young people in rural areas. Sundays and evening services in some rural areas were few and far between. Concessionary fares had been discussed with local MPs in the past couple of years. He felt it was important to encourage the Government to offer Dorset a pilot in charging say £1 per journey rather than losing the service. He proposed a steer to the Cabinet to ask them to approach the Government and ask them if Dorset could be a pilot citing reasons of the impact on climate change and the ever-increasing carbon footprint and improvement to service provision particularly in rural areas.

The Vice-Chairman proposed that a working group be set up to look into transport issues. One member suggested that car parking be included in the transport equation in order to help to influence the flows of traffic in some areas.

Resolved

The Committee agreed to set up a working group to look into transport issues further. Scoping and Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) would be created by the Working Group.

9. The potential of a "Local Area Forum / Board" and the involvement of Town & Parish Councils in the devolution of some Service Areas to them from Dorset Council

The Chairman advised members that he was keen to raise these issues because of the void that was created when the Shadow Council paused this particular workstream. He felt that the Committee should be gainfully employed rather than lose the next few months and he suggested creating a working group to investigate the wishes of Town & Parish Councils. Their ability to provide services at an improved level at reduced costs could be invaluable.

Members generally felt this would be a good way forward to try to rebuild relationships and trusts that might have been eroded in the past. One member highlighted some work with the Communications Team that was already taking place in his locality.

The Cabinet Member for Customer, Community and Regulatory Services highlighted some work that had been started as part of the community element of his portfolio. Town & Parish Councils wanted exposure to the leadership and the members of Dorset Council and his aim was to do more work on constructing this. His plan was to create an Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) to help continue with this work. With regards to the transfer of assets/services, this crossed into another member's portfolio and whilst the Cabinet were open to the conversation they were not considering any proposals at the current time. The EAP would be broadly based with political proportionality, along with lead officers, but could not guarantee the membership at this stage. The aim of the EAP would be to produce a Charter type document which would set out Town & Parish Councils' expectations of the Council and vice versa. The Cabinet Member added this might also set out the values, social, economic and environmental wellbeing but would also was to set out the role of the Ward Councillor to ensure they were able to carry out their role effectively.

One member felt it would be helpful to run a working group alongside the EAP for information gathering over the summer period.

Following a question about the inclusion of Town and Parish Council's in the working group, the Chairman agreed they would be involved.

Resolved

The Committee agreed to create a working group to establish a broad outlook for this workstream and to report back to members at their next meeting on 24 October 2019.

10. **Complaints**

The Senior Assurance Manager gave members a presentation on how complaints were dealt with corporately.

He highlighted that there were 646 complaint contacts at the end of the year 2018/19. There were 232 formal complaints and 10 out of 46 cases that were referred to Local Government Ombudsman were upheld these were mainly related to adult/children's social care. It was noted that there were just 81 lessons learned from 646 contacts. This information was from the closing report for Dorset County Council, but for Quarter 1 of the new Council there had been a significant increase in the number of complaints. Officers now felt there was a robust complaints policy in place.

The Chairman advised members that he had asked for Complaints to be a standing item on the agenda as it gave a good insight into what the public thought and was interesting to see if there were any trends happening that members should be aware of.

The Corporate Director for Economic Growth and Infrastructure highlighted the need for the update to not just be about complaints but compliments also. Customer interaction was the biggest focus area to learn within the Place Directorate but there was a need to gather evidence from the whole system.

The Corporate Director for Place Services advised members that when the Dorset Waste Partnership was a separate Partnership it did have its own complaints procedure separate from the host authority's procedure. With the emergence of the new Council we were all one council and all services would come under the one single complaints policy. This area of work was regularly on the Senior Management Team agenda.

In respect of statistics, the Vice-Chairman felt it would be more useful to start from a proper baseline so that figures were not skewed from previous sovereign councils. One member felt it would be more helpful and clearer to have the actual number of complaints as opposed to just percentages.

Recognising the impact of the digital age, one member felt it would be helpful to have a system in place where members were able to find out about complaints in their own areas.

Following discussion the Executive Director for Place highlighted that there were convergence issues which continued to need to be addressed regarding the data, and that his management team were reviewing this on a fortnightly basis. He added that in the Place Directorate all services were customer facing so complaints and compliments were very important.

Noted

11. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items of business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.10 pm

Chairman

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