

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 February 2005

Present: Councillor Prince (Chairman), Councillors Bishop, Britter, Buckland, Chaplin Mrs Franklin, Mrs Hibbert and Mrs Fletcher as substitute for Mrs Ryder.
6.00 p.m. – 8.30 p.m.

1. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Holliday and Mrs Ryder.

The Chairman had indicated he would be late arriving for the meeting. The Vice-Chairman therefore took the Chair for agenda items 1-7 inclusive.

2. Declarations of Interest including any whipping arrangements

No such declarations were made.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January, 2005 were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. Public Questions

There were no public questions.

5. Matters referred to committee

(a) by Council

(b) by Cabinet

(c) by Area Committee

No items had been so referred.

6. Cabinet Deputies Update

(a) Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection)

Council had now approved the budget which included improved expenditure in areas within the remit of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As the Deputy he looked forward to the benefit of the improved recycling service that would be provided. He also confirmed there were no plans to take the collection of residual domestic waste to a 14 day collection period.

Reference was made to recent court cases in respect of anti-social behaviour and fly-posting where fines had exceeded £150 plus costs. A further case was pending.

The committee was informed that more use was likely to be made of on-the-spot fines for antisocial behaviour. It was thought that this could act as a positive deterrent.

(b) The Deputy Green Environment and Licensing

The committee was informed that the Friends of Hatherley Park had assisted in enabling maintenance to be undertaken which had improved the importance of this park to the local area. It was hoped that the success of this venture would encourage other groups such as Naunton Park and Pittville. It was also reported that the project officer for the regeneration of the Montpellier Gardens area was soon to be appointed.

Desilting of Pittville Lake

The committee was informed of meetings held with the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency had determined that the proposed land at the proposed site for depositing the removed silt did not require further improvement and therefore a new site would need to be found. Negotiations were continuing with contractors in respect of further negotiations with the Environment Agency to establish approved sites.

In response to questions from Councillor Mrs Hibbert, the Deputy Green Environment and Licensing indicated that the desilting was likely to start in September/October 2005. This timetable took account of the planning and waste exemption licence processes.

Regular meetings were being held with the Environment Agency in an endeavour to maintain progress.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Hibbert the Deputy acknowledged the request to discuss anti-vandalism measures at Pittville Park and Pittville Pump Room with additional CCTV and regretted that she had not discussed this issue with the Deputy Health Wellbeing and Economy.

The Vice-Chairman thanked the two Deputies for their briefings.

7. On-street illuminated equipment

The Assistant Director Environmental Maintenance reminded the committee that on 19 January 2004 it had requested a follow-up report to update repair and maintenance performance of on-street illuminated equipment. The committee was reminded that the council managed the provision and maintenance of street lighting as an agent for the highways authority which provided funding and set standards. The provision of underground power supply to street illuminated equipment was the responsibility of Central Networks. Although the council could not impose performance criteria on Central Network, a county-wide service level agreement was in place.

Mr Steve Owen, a representative of Central Network, updated the committee on the findings of the review of the distribution network in Cheltenham which had been completed in October 2004. The study had shown that to improve the distribution network would require £1.4M funding. A figure which was unlikely to be approved by the main board to Central Networks as it was not included within a five year development plan it was required to submit to the regulator. Improvements however would be made to the system, particularly where major problems occurred on a regular basis. It was intended over time to modify the network so that any light 'outages' would be limited rather than cover a wide area. The company was working with the local authority local lighting engineers to identify hot spots of regular problems and proposals would then be made to carry out improvements.

In responding to questions, Mr Owen indicated that although plans of the network were available, these were not that precise. Contractors were issued with network diagrams on request. In response to a question Mr Owen indicated that the survey had been to identify the various lighting control methods in place and to identify the appropriate points of control to assist with carrying out repairs. Central Networks were looking to prepare a five year plan to divide the network into small units. Areas with particular problems would see investment to improve performance.

Central Networks had recognised a need to give priority to public lighting and had therefore created a dedicated section to concentrate on street lighting. As a consequence performance in this area had improved. The Assistant Director stressed that all street light faults should be reported to the street lighting hot line and these would be dealt with as appropriate.

In response to a number of questions Mr Owen indicated that it was not the intention to undertake improvements to the distribution network to public lighting, but to look to reduce the number of light units that would be affected with any one fault. Councillor Buckland suggested that many faults could be attributed to the above average number of trench openings, mainly for the installation of cable television systems which were likely to increase incidents of damage.

Mr Owen acknowledged that this could be the case and that statutory undertakers should request plans from Central Network of the approximate positions of its network and equipment. He further explained in answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Fletcher, that although there were procedures in place to seek recompense from other utilities causing damage to the electricity network, often this was countered by claims against Central Network for damage caused to other utilities' services.

Councillor Mrs Hibbert suggested that compensation payments should be pursued so as to act as a deterrent to other utilities causing damage. She also enquired as to what monitoring of faults caused by damage was undertaken.

The Assistant Director indicated that highways inspectors examined trench openings and could impose fine on utilities that did not reinstate road openings properly.

The Vice-Chairman (Councillor Britter) thanked Mr Owen for attending the meeting. It was agreed that a further report be received by the committee in a years time.

The Vice-Chairman (Councillor Britter) vacated the chair in favour of the Chairman (Councillor Prince).

8. Access Working Group – draft terms of reference

The Assistant Director Integrated Transport had prepared draft terms of reference for the Access Working Group which was to examine the council's service for concessionary travel, shopmobility and support for community transport schemes and to make recommendations to the cabinet on any improvements which were appropriate and viable. It was anticipated that an interim report would be considered by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2005 and a final report would be presented in October 2005 prior to cabinet consideration later in the year.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the draft terms of reference as set out.

9. Review of the management of on-street, off-street and residents parking

The Assistant Director Integrated Transport presented a report of the Parking Solutions Working Group. He introduced Jason Benjamin the Parking Manager. The report updated the committee on the recommendations approved by Cabinet in November 2003.

The committee was informed that opportunity for efficiency and service improvements was available through greater use of technology. The parking manager and patrol officers had visited Swindon Borough Council and evaluated a system in operation there which would be invaluable under a decriminalised parking regime. The technology would also provide additional flexibility to patrol officers. As the council administers residents parking and on-street parking on behalf of the County Council, a substantial share of any costs would be met by the highway authority. The implementation of the system was subject to the borough council's ICT division identifying sufficient workload to implement the system.

In response to a question, it was hoped that the new system could be in place later in the year, but it was hoped it would be as soon as possible. In responding to a question the Parking Manager indicated that investment into new machines was taking place which would enable the monitoring of income collected in connection with the evening charge between 6pm and 8pm.

The committee was also updated with regard to a new agreement in respect of traffic warden services which it was hoped the Police would put in place for the new financial year to improve recruitment and retention of traffic wardens up until the decriminalisation of parking.

Councillor Bishop noted the priorities given to residents' parking policies and practices. She was informed that although organisations/business may be prepared to pay this was not beneficial as the main problem was of enforcement.

The Chairman expressed his concern that the timescale for likely implementation of decriminalised parking had been extended and could take up to four years. In response to a question it was indicated that the County Council was of the view that the introduction of decriminalisation needed to be strategically planned, otherwise any application to the department of transport would be rejected. A feasibility study had therefore been commissioned by the County Council, although progress had been slow in appointing consultants. The chairman was concerned that the implications of these

delays were a halt on new residents' parking schemes and a poor level of enforcement that would compound illegal parking.

He asked that the County Council be informed of this council's disappointment at the timetable being imposed by the County Council regarding decriminalisation which should be given greater priority. This view was supported by the committee.

Councillor Mrs Hibbert referred to the enhanced visitor parking scheme which was intended to improve parking availability for regular visitors to properties subject to residents' parking schemes. In view of the delay in implementing such a scheme pending introduction of new technology, it was requested that a temporary process be put in place, particularly in the Pittville area.

It was confirmed that a temporary process, as outlined, was being investigated.

The chairman, with reference to police recruitment of traffic wardens, hoped that the position would have improved in 12 months time.

The committee noted the update from the Parking Solutions Working Group

10. Gloucestershire County Council – Consultation – Local Transport (2006-2001)

The Deputy Built Environment and Democracy informed the committee that the County Council was consulting all districts and key transport and community stakeholders on its Local Transport Plan for Gloucestershire (LTP2). The borough council's comments were required by 11 March 2005 and as a consequence a report would be considered at cabinet on 8 March 2005. Any comments arising from Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be raised as a verbal update at the cabinet by the Deputy Built Environment and Democracy. The committee had been circulated an appendix that outlined suggested responses to the draft second local transport plan.

In framing the response to the County Council the Deputy wished to draw particular attention to three main areas:

- support for the early implementation of a park and ride site at Uckington on the Tewkesbury Road corridor and provision of extra capacity at the Arle Court site;
- concern at the absence of proposals for park and ride services on the A46 Shurdington Road corridor, particularly following completion of the A417/A419 and the anticipated new development at Brockworth.
- the urgent need to introduce decriminalised parking enforcement in Cheltenham without which policies to manage demand and implement the Traffic Management Act will be seriously compromised.

The Deputy shared the committee's concern with regard to the lack of action by the County Council in pursuing decriminalised parking. He had continued to persuade the County Council that decriminalised parking enforcement should be given higher priority.

The County Council officers had given a presentation on the LTP2 to the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership and a workshop had been held for Cheltenham Strategic Partnership stakeholders and members of the business partnership and sustainability panel. Comments made from these bodies had been incorporated into the responses to the County Council.

In discussing the response from the Deputy, issues regarding additional capacity at the park and ride at Arle Court and whether any steps were being taken to provide an alternative route for traffic coming onto the A40.

The deputy acknowledged the concern regarding expansion of park and ride site within green belt areas, but indicated that the office of the Deputy Prime Minister generally permitted park and ride facilities in green belt. With regard to the A417/419 it was unlikely this would affect Cheltenham, although HGV's would be diverted to the Brockworth bypass. It was also expressed that the proposals within the LTP2 should be linked into the Cheltenham Civic Pride proposals.

Reference was made to the proposed new railway station at Elmbridge Court and the impact this could have on Cheltenham. The Deputy clarified that the strategic rail authority was currently carrying out a feasibility study into a parkway between Cheltenham and Gloucester which would only be provided if the study identified a need for it and it could be funded.

Attention was drawn to the anticipated levels of congestion in the Severn Vale area, particularly in Cheltenham and Gloucester. As a consequence the County Council was proposing a public transport-led strategy of investment in integrated transport schemes and a major scheme bid, aimed at reducing congestion on the A40 north and east of Gloucester with new park and ride sites at Linton and Elmbridge Court. The Government Office had advised however that LTP2 targets should not be dependent upon the major scheme being approved and if it was approved funds would not be available until 2008.

It was a concern that the LTP draft proposals did not reflect a fallback decision should the major scheme bid be unsuccessful. In response to a question from the chairman, it was indicated that there was a duty to provide and project anticipated air quality in various parts of the town, and if air quality appeared to be falling below set levels a course of action to address the issue would be required. It was not thought however that such actions would be required in Cheltenham within the next few years.

Councillor Chaplin, noting the proposals, expressed his opinion that congestion was caused by over-management of traffic systems. Also that in the longer term a light rail route between Quedgeley and Bishops Cleeve should be pursued.

It was confirmed that such a proposal was reinforced within the proposals.

In response to a question it was indicated that problems with parking enforcement were with on-street parking as there was a full complement of parking patrol officers to enforce parking regulations at off-street parks.

The chairman, in summing up the discussion, asked that the council's response place greater emphasis on park and ride as it was an integral part of the council's policy and more capacity was needed. The alternative modes of transportation away from the motor vehicle could be assisted with a light rail link between the developed areas of the Severn Vale area.

The deputy reminded the committee that the council's integrated transport division continued funding was dependent upon implementing and achieving the aims and targets within the local transport plan.

The deputy was asked to include within the final response to the County Council a reference to the following:

- to support the technical studies regarding the potential of the Honeybourne Line as a high quality segregated public transport corridor;
- partnership working with the County Council to development and implement Civic Pride proposals and transport scheme.

14. Items for next meeting

- joint meeting of Environment and Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees regarding housing issues;
- maintenance of vegetation to public footpaths and walkways;

15. Date of next meeting

14 April 2005

**Councillor D Prince
Chairman**