

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 14th September, 2011

6.00 - 8.05 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Penny Hall (Chair), Ian Bickerton, Nigel Britter, Jacky Fletcher, Diane Hibbert, Sandra Holliday, Helena McCloskey, Charles Stewart and Paul Wheeldon, Duncan Smith (Substitute for Rob Garnham)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

The Executive Director had given her apologies and the Director of Operations attended in her place.

Councillor Rob Garnham had given his apologies. Councillor Duncan Smith had been nominated as his substitute.

The Chair welcomed back Beverly Thomas, Democracy Officer, who had been on maternity leave.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

3. AGREEMENT OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THE 13 JULY 2011

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 13 July 2011 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters were referred to the committee.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Built Environment informed members of the following :

- the timescale for the North Place/Portland Street development had been brought forward with the report now going to Council on 10 October and then Cabinet on 18 October. This would enable the Council to have an input into the process and guide Cabinet in its decision.
- the report on the National Planning Policy Framework was due to go to Cabinet on 18 October. The consultation raised points of detail but the

big themes included sustainability and brownfield policy and any representations would be focused on these themes.

- 2 members were sought for the garden development SPD working group. These should not be existing planning committee members.
- members welcomed the opportunity for Council to have an input into the North Place/Portland Street development.

In response to a query on a proposed street racing event in the town centre in 2012 the Cabinet Member requested an email to be forwarded to him in order to investigate further as he was unaware of such an event.

The Cabinet Member Sustainability made the following points :

- the recycling rate for the first 3 months of the current financial year was just under 50 % compared to 35 % the same period last year which meant a corresponding decrease in tonnages sent to landfill.
- the waste and recycling working group was due to meet shortly before it reported to Environment O & S in November

Members were encouraged by the recycling rates but aired their concerns regarding the projections for the uptake of the green waste scheme not being fulfilled. The Cabinet Member Sustainability informed members that there had been a total of 11 000 sign ups to date against a target of 20 000 by the end of the financial year. CBC was actively looking at the situation and a marketing scheme would be undertaken in the coming months. The Director of Operations explained that from experience from other local authorities there was traditionally another spike in demand in the autumn and then again in the early spring. The marketing scheme involved roadshows at the recycling centre, garden centres and shopping centres where there was high footfall and in areas where there was low take-up, advertising on the side of vehicles and on receipts and in the Echo. Customers at Swindon Road would also be targeted.

Members raised the issue that many householders would like to take up the service but could not physically fit another wheeled bin on to their property or there were those who live in terraced housing and could not wheel a bin through their property. The Cabinet Member Sustainability told members that alternatives were being examined but it was unlikely they would be in a position to promote this during the forthcoming marketing campaign. Members remarked that an alternative may even be preferable to those residents who were using the brown bin. When asked about the cost of the campaign the Director of Operations explained that this was within existing budgets and mainly involved officer time. The overall target remained 20 000 households but the Director hoped for at least a take up of 15 000 following the marketing campaign. Members requested an analysis of take-up to date by area as local ward councillors could play a role in raising awareness in their area. The Director of Operations said that whilst the data fell under data protection rules he would try to provide this information as far as possible.

Members highlighted that some residents were under the impression that the green waste scheme was a one-off cost and it was asked how the collections would be differentiated when it came to the end of the period. In response the Director of Operations explained that the council held a database of existing customers and a reminder notice would be issued at the end of the period,

followed by a second reminder and finally contact would be made with the customer to say the service would be removed. In response to a question on the collection of brown cardboard in the future the Cabinet Member told members that the Council was currently working to capacity as the recycling scheme had proved so successful with residents but he acknowledged the issue which the Cabinet would wish to promote in future.

Members noted that a report was due to go to Cabinet on the review of the scheme in December and asked that information be brought to Environment O & S in advance of this meeting.

The issue of planting on roundabouts where there were advertising boards paid for by sponsors was raised by members. Some roundabouts had not been planted at all. In response the Cabinet Member Sustainability explained that roundabouts were planted with a mixture of flowers, bulbs, shrubs or trees. In response to a specific question relating to Westall Green roundabout the Cabinet Member explained that due to insufficient soil depth bedding plants were not suitable and therefore there would be flowering bulbs instead. The Director of Operations also told Members that as this was the first year of the scheme there had been a slight delay in securing sponsorship and thus in ordering plants in time for the season. Improvements should be visible next year. Members requested a briefing note on the funds raised through the sponsorship, how much had been spent thus far and what remained in the budget.

The Green Space Development Manager reassured Members that the work on Pittville Bridge was progressing well and was within budget despite rumours to the contrary. Members requested a briefing note from the officer detailing the original budget, what had been spent to date and what was anticipated to be spent.

In response to a question regarding flytipping by students in St Pauls the Director Operations reported that contact had been made with landlords who provided most of the student accommodation in the area. The letting agreement would now contain a clause stating that waste and recycling receptacles should remain at the property when the let terminated, if not money would be taken from the deposit.

A particular issue was raised with regard to a blanket licensing application by CBC Parks and Gardens Division for Sandford Park in July 2011 which had created significant public concern. The ward councillors for that area had not been given forewarning of the application and had thus found themselves wrong footed by the interest generated. This had done nothing to enhance the reputation for the council.

The Cabinet Member Sustainability explained that the rationale for the application was that a blanket licence was in place for Imperial Gardens. The application was in support of a food festival in 2012. However the application was withdrawn due to the public concern. Lessons had been learned from this and the festival organisers would apply for a temporary event licence for that event only and would consult properly with local residents. Members requested that the Green space strategy should be reviewed in terms of contacting local residents and park users on the way forward. In terms of the concerns raised on flooding issues the Green Space Development Manager explained that contact

had been made with the Environment Agency who gave in principle support provided a risk assessment was undertaken. The Council had also discussed the proposal with the hospital which was happy as long as access remained to the helipad and distances to the hospital were respected.

The Cabinet Member assured Members that in the future local members would be consulted first regarding the proposal of a major event in their area.

7. IMPERIAL AND MONTPELLIER GARDEN STRATEGY

The Green Space Development Manager updated members on progress with the redesign of Imperial Gardens since the Cabinet decision in July 2011. The results from the consultation had been positive and officers were now working up the design and quotations for works to be undertaken. The relevant applications for planning approval and listed building consent had been made. The final decision to go ahead with works in Imperial Gardens and Montpellier Gardens would be referred back to Cabinet for decision on 18 October in time for completion of works over the winter 2011/12. The Design Proposals and pictures of the current state of grass re-instatements in Imperial Gardens were on display at the meeting.

The Green Space Development Manager highlighted to Members that the cultivation of the whole site for the purposes of relaying the bedding area was likely to attract public attention and it was intended that temporary public information boards be used whilst this work was undertaken. Members highlighted the importance of the communication with the public and urged that local residents be directly informed and that a media release be issued to mitigate concerns.

The main issue arising from the consultation was that there should be good reinstatement after the events had taken place. The Green Space Development Manager informed members that prior to the Jazz and the Science Festivals the existing areas would be extensively drill seeded and that for the Literature Festival in Montpellier and Imperial Gardens there would be turf-oriented reinstatement.

Members raised the issue of the modifications to the eastern entrance to accommodate higher loadings and setting down area. The Green Space Development Manager confirmed that only a slight widening was required due to the gap between the two plinths but there were no highway implications.

In terms of whether officers had taken on board recommendations which had come out of the consultation the Green Space Manager said proposals with regard to seating repositioning and new seating and some suggestions with regard to plantings would be incorporated.

When asked if there was a fallback position the Cabinet Member Sustainability confirmed that preliminary costings in the proposals were on the conservative side and the Green Space Development Manager added that there were clauses in the land use agreements with the Festivals regarding rectifying any damage caused.

With regard to work to the Skillicorne Gardens shelter which had been deferred to a later phase assurance was given by the Green Space Development

Manager that this work would be fully scoped beforehand and there would be no damage to any first phase works.

In terms of funding for later works the introduction of heritage railings to the boundary of Imperial Gardens would be funded by the Friends. Cabinet was aware of the need to fund these works but had to prioritise.

8. FLOOD PROTECTION UPDATE

The Principal Engineer updated members on flood risk management progress since January 2010.

When asked why the town centre did not form part of the Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) process the Principal Engineer explained that this was protected by the Chelt Flood Alleviation Scheme as the SWMP did not look at fluvial flooding from main rivers or sewer flooding but flooding from ordinary watercourses and impermeable surfaces.

In response to a question on the Warden Hill Flood Relief Works 45 properties had been flooded in 2007 but the design and modelling undertaken for this project showed that the scheme would now improve the level of protection to a total of 130 properties.

Members noted that in terms of general watercourse maintenance and improvements there was an annual budget of £15k but this was being supplemented by the £90k enhanced maintenance budget for the 3 year period 09/10 to 11/12. Members were concerned whether there would be proper maintenance and improvements once these funds were exhausted bearing in mind that the Principal Engineer estimated that a total annual budget of £30k would be required to undertake the necessary works. Members were reminded that they would have the opportunity to put forward their proposals and ideas in the budget round.

When asked whether officers were still encouraging individual landlords to clear the watercourses which ran across their properties the Principal Engineer confirmed that officers did try to do this but the work undertaken, if any, was not monitored.

In response to a question on whether the Environment Agency (EA) intended to carry out the replacement of the butterfly valve at the Dowdeswell reservoir he confirmed that it was not the EA's intention to do this.

Supplementary information was requested on the Hearne brook catchment study. The Principal Engineer said that the cost of the scheme was identified as £250 k and if the scheme was successfully added to the EA's medium term plan it would provide protection to 15-20 homes.

Resolved

That the committee pay attention in the budget negotiations to the general watercourse maintenance and improvement budget.

9. NEW HOMES BONUS (INCLUDING ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMME)

The Cabinet Member Built Environment introduced the report and informed members that any scheme not included this year could potentially be included in subsequent years as the new homes bonus would continue to be allocated to the authority from central government.

Members remarked that they would have been better placed to comment on the proposed schemes had the criteria been included but understood that this was still being worked on. In response the Cabinet Member explained that rather than getting involved in elaborate scoring systems the proposed projects should be examined in terms of best value for money. The proposals had in the main been put forward internally by officers but some had come forward from community groups.

A discussion was held as to whether the proposed projects did actually fit the purpose of the funding which was to mitigate the strain on the increased population causes. The example of guttering on allotment sheds was given. The Cabinet Member Built Environment was confident that the projects proposed were small scale infrastructure projects and were consistent with the Government's intentions. Meanwhile some Members applauded the flexibility being used. The example of the project of Pittville Gates and Railings Restoration was given which in Cllr Hibbert's view would represent the perfect project for Cheltenham to mark the Queen's diamond jubilee.

Rather than each member comment on the project relating to their ward the Chair proposed that each member email directly to the Cabinet member their comments on the proposals.

When asked whether grass cutting could be included in order to enhance the appearance of the town, the Cabinet Member Sustainability replied that grass cutting was an ongoing revenue item and could not be allocated to the new homes bonus.

Members agreed that those projects proposed by community groups be given priority.

Resolved

- That Members forward to the Cabinet member their comments on the proposals.
- That the minutes of this item be forwarded to Cabinet

10. JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMISSIONING PROJECT

The Cabinet Member Sustainability referred to the Member seminar held the previous evening and outlined the background to the commissioning project. Significant management and operational savings were projected by setting up a Local Authority Company, a non-profit making body which would deliver waste and other environmental services including park management. A Cabinet working group comprising Cllrs Thornton, Fisher, Hall, Stewart and Whyborn, was due to meet that week to discuss the proposals and comments from the committee would be fed into this group.

Members requested that the presentation from the recent member seminar and all relevant paperwork relating to the project be circulated to all members. This

should include extracts of relevant information from the confidential reports which at the time were confidential due to the commercial sensitivity of the information. It was confirmed that the answers to the points raised at the seminar, including on value added tax and pension fund issues, would be circulated to all members.

In response to a question on the trade union view of the project the Director of Operations explained that the trade unions had been engaged at the start of the process and formal meetings were held with them on a regular basis. They were broadly supportive of the process and appreciated the difficult financial position the authority faced.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and reminded Members that the report would be considered by Cabinet at a special meeting on 13 October. She requested that the minutes of this meeting be forwarded to Cabinet for their information.

- 11. ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PLAN 2011-12**
The Chair referred members to the work plan as circulated with the agenda.
- 12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN DETERMINES TO BE URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION**
There were no urgent items for discussion.
- 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
The next meeting was scheduled for the 23 November 2011.

Penny Hall
Chairman