

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15 September 2010

(18.00 –20:00)

PRESENT: Councillors Ian Bickerton, Nigel Britter, Jackie Fletcher, Rob Garnham, Penny Hall (Chair), Diane Hibbert, Sandra Holliday, Helena McCloskey and Paul Wheeldon.

Also Attended: Roger Whyborn (Cabinet Member Sustainability)
John Rawson (Cabinet Member Built Environment)

Prior to the commencement of the meeting Members and Officers stood in silence as a token of their respect for Councillor John Morris who had recently passed away.

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rob Garnham declared a personal interest in Item 9 - Review of Allotment Strategy because Bloor Homes was mentioned in the report.

3. MINUTES

The Chairman referred to Minute 6 on Page 4, paragraph 4 relating to the proposed LTP3 Working Group and asked for the minutes to be amended to make it clear that the report from the Working Group should be considered by this committee and that it would form the basis of the Council's comments to the County Council.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2010, as amended, be approved and signed as a true record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions on this occasion.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

A. By Council

None referred.

B. By Cabinet

None referred.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Sustainability informed members that he had no further comments to make other than those issues that were detailed on the agenda and to be discussed later in the meeting. A question was raised by a Member relating to road sweeping and the Cabinet Member for Sustainability was asked if this work was undertaken in accordance with an agreed action plan. The Assistant Director Operations confirmed that currently each street and residential area had a fortnightly litter collection but road gulleys and footpaths were only cleaned on request. An initiative had been introduced several years

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To be approved at the next meeting of the Environment O&S Committee on 24 November 2010.

ago where local residents had been invited to ensure that when gulley cleaning had been requested they would ensure that all parked cars were removed which made the sweeping far easier. This initiative had proved to be very successful.

In response a member agreed that the streets now appeared to be much cleaner than some years ago when it had been necessary to appoint a Working Group to look into the situation but she drew attention to the large number of weeds in the gulleys and on footpaths. She also asked if satisfaction surveys were still carried out. In reply the Assistant Director Operations accepted that there was a problem with weeds and this was in the main due to the climatic conditions. He confirmed that weeds were sprayed twice per year in early Spring and Autumn and the Autumn spraying had already begun. He asked that if any Member was aware of a particularly bad problem they should contact him. Satisfaction surveys were no longer done as this was being considered on a corporate basis. He acknowledged that the last survey carried out had shown a drop in the level of satisfaction and since then he had been responding to requests for cleaning and monitoring any complaints.

The Member thanked the Assistant Director for this information and suggested that in view of the drop in the level of satisfaction the previous Working Group should be reconvened and an item should be added to a future agenda to consider this if satisfaction levels continued to drop.

A Member referred to the problems associated with fly tipping and was concerned that this might increase as result of the fortnightly collections. He asked if any proposal were in hand to deal with this situation. The Assistant Director Operations indicated that all evidence showed that there was no sustained increase in the level of fly tipping but he had a team of Street Scene Enforcement Officers available to deal with any problems that may be experienced. Swindon Road Recycling Centre was also available for residents to deposit unwanted items.

The Cabinet Member Built Environment informed Members about the Bloor Homes consultation exercise with regard to the Midwinter Improvement Scheme that was taking place at the Prince of Wales Stadium. He understood that an application for planning permission for this development was soon to be submitted. He considered this to be an important development which would be extremely beneficial to Cheltenham and to the Council

He referred to the revised Development Brief for the Portland Street Car Park that was currently out for consultation. He appreciated that there were difficult issues associated with this development but he considered the current proposals durable and it should now move forward so that the sites can be developed.

7. Budget Scrutiny Working Group

The Chairman upon request agreed that this item be taken before item 7 - Waste Recycling Collection Systems.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report that informed Members of the challenging financial position facing the Council and he drew attention to the budget deficit estimated to be £2.4m for 2010/11 and £4.7m over the period of the Medium Financial Term Financial Strategy. In view of this it was important

to ensure that a proper budget scrutiny process was in place and he suggested that a group of Members be drawn together from the various scrutiny committees to develop as budget champions to support the process. All Members agreed with this view and one Member suggested that the Group should come under the remit of Cabinet as this would give it 'more teeth'. Following discussion about the likely commitment required from the representatives it was

Resolved that Councillors Hibbert and Britter be appointed as the Environment O & S Committee representatives on the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the suggestion that the Group fall within the remit of the Cabinet be approved.

8. Waste and Recycling Collection Systems

Councillor Fletcher had requested that Environment O & S Committee review this topic because she felt that there had been little or no consultation with Parish Councils or residents about the revised proposals. At the Environment Committee there had been no opportunity for further scrutiny to be planned and therefore no action could be taken to monitor the scheme as it was rolled out. She considered that a progress report should be made to the Environment Committee when the new scheme had been in operation for six months. In addition the Cabinet minutes indicated that the Environment O & S Committee had examined the proposals and this was incorrect. It was also felt that there had been no prior communication with households about the closed bin policy and most residents learned of this decision from the Echo. She then quoted from a letter she had received from a local resident expressing concern because she lived in a small property with little room for additional bins and that the area would become an eyesore with additional bins everywhere. This was just one example of a great number of comments she had received about these proposals.

In response, the Cabinet Member Sustainability referred to the papers circulated with the agenda and to a further paper circulated at the meeting giving an extract from the Joint Waste Management Strategy approved by Cabinet on 30 October 2007. He reminded members that all relevant information had been contained within the PowerPoint presentation that was made at the last meeting and that he and Officers had welcomed questions.

He referred in particular to the closed bin policy that had been implemented as a starting point for the scheme. He stressed that at this time the Council was not actively enforcing this policy but would over time once adequate notification had been made to residents. He suggested that this part of the scheme had been brought forward in response to the fatality in the Cotswold area that might have been attributable to an overfull bin. He commented that in any shared service scheme the Local Authorities involved would retain political control over any service provided and would not defer the implementation of a scheme to await a joint service agreement.

The Cabinet Member for Sustainability pointed out that the Joint Waste Strategy was already in being and the decisions taken only reflected the policy that had already been agreed.

The Assistant Director Operations informed Members that when the presentation had been made he had emphasised that the proposals had been

officer recommendations but based on the Joint Waste Strategy. The Council as part of the Gloucestershire Waste Partnership had spent time consulting with the public and local businesses with regard to the waste strategy. He apologised for not reminding members that a commitment had been made by the Cabinet when they agreed the Joint Municipal Waste Strategy on 30 October 2007 that within three years they would strive to deliver exactly what was now being proposed.

During the discussion the following points were then made by Members:

- There had been a complete lack of paperwork made available to members when considering this issue and without all relevant information it would be difficult to have reached an informed decision.
- There was full support for the need to increase recycling but concern was expressed about the process and the fact that the Cabinet Member for Sustainability appeared to have allowed the officer to answer all the questions when this matter had been considered. Doubt was expressed that there had been any mention of the proposed charges during the discussion.
- Generally members felt that there had been a complete lack of consultation and many items contained within the strategy had not been consulted upon at all.
- It was suggested that the Waste Working Group be reconvened to consider this issue and that it be made up of a member from each party plus an external representative and the Cabinet Member for Sustainability.
- Reference was made to the discussions about difficult to reach properties and information was requested about how the scheme would operate in this situation. In this respect the Assistant Director Operations accepted that further consideration was required to decide what areas in the town would be unsuitable for fortnightly collections.
- In answer to a question about the suggested terms of reference of the Waste Working Group the Cabinet Member for Sustainability suggested that it should consider among other things the closed bin and side waste policy, the consideration of the criteria for special cases, the congested areas where additional bins would cause a problem and perhaps other associated matters such as fly tipping and bonfires. A Member suggested that the discussions should only be about the new scheme and not other long standing problems.
- The Cabinet Member for Sustainability stressed that the general principles of the Strategy would be difficult to change at this stage in view of the major procurement implications. A Member stated that in these circumstances there was little point in discussing issues that could not be changed and it was therefore essential for the Waste Working Group to be fully aware of their terms of reference.
- A Member asked for details of the cost of the scheme. The Assistant

Director Operations did not have this information to hand but pointed out that the costs were within the existing budget and in fact there was likely to be a cost saving.

- Reference was made to the sorting of recycled waste at the kerbside and whether this was cost effective. The Cabinet Member for Sustainability stated that a close watch was being kept on the situation in Tewkesbury Borough where the Council sorted the recycling after collection. The Assistant Director Operations pointed out that the markets for recycled waste had picked up over the last six months and the price currently being paid for waste paper was the highest he had ever seen.

The Strategic Director then suggested that the terms of reference of the Waste Working Group which could be pre and post implementation, would need to be agreed and signed off by the Environment O & S Committee. Progress should also be reported back to the Environment O&S Committee by one of the committee's representatives on the Working Group. She suggested that this could be by way one of the Committee's representatives on the Working Group who were Councillors Jacky Fletcher and Nigel Britter and an item be added to the Committees Work Plan to receive a report at each meeting. All Members supported this view and it was suggested that as it was essential for the general public to be informed as soon as possible the terms of reference of the Group could be agreed by the Chair.

Resolved that the terms of reference of the Waste Working Group be agreed in the quickest way possible to enable an early meeting of the Group to be convened.

9. Review of Allotment Strategy

The Green Space Development Manager introduced the discussion paper on the review of the allotment strategy. He reminded Members that the original strategy had been approved in 2005 and the documents circulated with the agenda gave details of a review undertaken after the first five years. He stated that the first five years had been taken up with undertaking various necessary improvements to allotments and at that time the demand for allotments had been low. Since then, demand had increased substantially and was now outstripping supply. The next five years of the strategy would therefore focus on ways in which the number of allotments available could be increased in order to satisfy the current and future demand.

He then referred to issues discussed by the Working Group including fees and charges, the community management of the allotment sites, as well as the legal responsibility of the Council and Parish Councils to provide allotments. Work would be undertaken to address the situation within Parishes, to identify numbers and to examine ways in which the Parish Councils could satisfy demand.

The Chair considered that this paper reinforced what she had felt about allotments which were at the heart of the community but which entailed the Council in a considerable amount of work. She had enjoyed being part of the Working Group that had looked at this issue.

The Cabinet Member for Sustainability referred to the discussions within the Group which had raised many issues including fees and charges, the need to explore self management, the possibility of using Section 106 to provide allotment land and the Parish Council involvement. He also drew attention to the enquiries received from voluntary groups who were looking to grow vegetables on an allotment for sale to the public and this must be part of any strategy. A Member advised a note of caution in this respect as there could be an effect on other businesses selling these goods.

In conclusion the Chair referred to the fact that the Allotment Forum did not include all stakeholders and at some time in the future she felt it necessary to look at how the Forum was managed.

A Member then suggested that in view of the work to be carried out in the next five years of the Strategy the Working Group should remain in being so that progress reports could be made. Members felt that officers should be thanked for this excellent report.

10. Environment Overview & Scrutiny Work Plan 2010-11

The Chair referred to the importance of the LTP3 item that had been added to the workplan for the next meeting so that the Committees' observations could be sent to the County Council the following day.

Reference was made to the Budget Scrutiny item to be considered in January 2011 and it was suggested by the Strategic Director that this should be a single item meeting. This would result in the items on the Review of Cheltenham Car Parking Strategy & Related Enforcement and Street Scene Enforcing Review to be deferred until the March meeting. Other items to be included in the workplan were

- Street Cleansing Update six monthly report
- Cabinet Waste Working Group regular reports
- Update following implementation of the new waste scheme

A member referred to a suggestion by the RSPCA that dog licensing should be reintroduced and he felt that the Committee should look at this possibility. It was suggested that as the Street Enforcing Review was now to be considered at the March meeting this could be discussed at that time.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 24 November 2010

Penny Hall
Chair