

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 FEBRUARY 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 11 February 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors: Paul Johnson (for Cindy Hinds), Mike Peers (for Veronica Gay) and David Wisinger (for Andy Dunbobbin)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Sean Bibby

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Marion Bateman and Haydn Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside and Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation)

Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Highway Strategy Manager and Senior Technical & Performance Manager for Agenda item 3 – Flintshire County Council’s Integrated Transport Strategy

Highway Network Manager for Agenda item 4 – Recovery of Costs following damage to the Highway Network

Service Delivery Manager for Agenda item 5 – Alltami Depot Stores

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Education and Community Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mike Peers declared a personal interest in Agenda item 3 - Flintshire County Council’s Integrated Transport Strategy, as Chair of Governors at Mountain Lane C.P. School.

Councillor Paul Shotton declared a personal interest in Agenda item 3 - Flintshire County Council’s Integrated Transport Strategy, as a School Governor at Ysgol Bryn Deva and Connah’s Quay High School.

63. FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) presented a report to update the Committee on the work being carried out to develop the Flintshire Integrated Transport Strategy, last presented to Cabinet in 2018.

The Chief Officer and Highway Strategy Manager gave a joint presentation, which covered the following areas:-

- Transport Hierarchy in Wales;
- Aims and Objectives
- A Fully Integrated Solution;
- Flintshire's Key Priorities; and
- The Key to Success

Councillor Paul Shotton thanked officers for their work in producing the Integrated Transport Strategy, a comment which was supported by a number of Members of the Committee. He detailed the initiatives introduced in Connah's Quay, including the installation of a pedestrian crossing on Mold Road and the improvements to the Deeside Shuttle Service, which were welcomed. He sought assurance around the frequency and security of the bus network going forward to enable people to continue to access employment at the Deeside Industrial Park.

In response to his question, Councillor Dave Wisinger welcomed the information provided by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member on the introduction of a cycle path from Mold to Airbus which would link to the Deeside Industrial Park and take in Queensferry and Sandycroft.

Councillor Chris Dolphin welcomed the work being carried out to provide bus services to rural areas. He raised concerns around Transport for Wales reducing rail times and the frequency of service in North Wales but welcomed the comments from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member that feedback and representations on these concerns had been made by the Council. He also welcomed the proposed safety measures for the Well Hill, Holywell. In response to his request on the updating of bus timetables at bus stations across Flintshire, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member gave an assurance that this was in the process of being updated.

Councillor David Evans asked for clarification on the exact location for people to access the Deeside Shuttle Service. The Chief Officer explained that work was progressing to enable the pick-up/drop off point for the Deeside Shuttle Service to be at the TATA Steel Road.

Councillor Owen Thomas said he would have liked to see reference to the electrification of the railway line included within the Strategy and also commented on the regular diversions put in place due to incidents along the A55 which he felt had an adverse impact on the County's network. The Chief

Officer reported that the Welsh Government were currently looking at pinch points following diversions from the A55 but assured Members that the Council did seek additional funding for improvement works as a result of additional use of the County's network.

Councillor George Hardcastle raised concerns around the proposals to introduce a cycle route along Aston Hill and the lack of consultation that had been carried out with Local Members. He had safety concerns if the cycle route did not include safety barriers. The Chief Officer agreed to pick this up with Councillor Hardcastle following the meeting.

Councillor Mike Peers commented on the aims and objectives of the Strategy but felt that the Council had not fulfilled these yet. He requested that a report on additional services along the borderline be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee following Councillor Dave Evans' previous concerns that additional services could result in a reduction in station stops. He welcomed the safety measures introduced at Mountain Lane C.P. School but raised concerns that they were not being enforced and asked whether the trial use of cameras at the location could be considered. He also questioned the £10 charge for the use of the Demand Responsive Transport Service and was concerned that this put residents in rural areas at a disadvantage. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member detailed the work being undertaken by officers to meet the aims and objectives of the Strategy, including partnership working with Wrexham County Borough Council to improve transport links to Wrexham Maelor Hospital. She also explained that during consultation residents had been agreeable with the £10 charge as the service was reliant on the availability of grant funding to make it viable to continue in the future. The Chief Officer said that it was hoped that by holding information on the residents using the Demand Responsive Transport Service, it would be possible in the future to contact them when events were organised in their area, to assist in providing them with transport to these events.

In response to comments made by Councillor Peers on the number of initiatives outlined within the report in Deeside, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development commented on the level of funding which had been removed from the service over the last 10 years. He advised that there was no bus route to Deeside Industrial Park but commented on the importance of ensuring that the 9,000 employed at the Park could access employment through public transport.

Councillor Ray Hughes raised concerns around the removal of a bus route within his own ward and asked what assistance could be given to the residents to access amenities. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member explained that the Demand Responsive Transport Service would assist residents and provided details of its launch earlier in the day. She agreed to circulate information on this Service to all Members following the meeting.

Councillor Paul Johnson whilst welcoming the report said that there was a need for regulated fares, commenting on the high cost of a train from Flint to London. The Chief Officer said that the fares for rail journeys was out of the Council's control but if the service was reliable then it was hoped more people would use the service and therefore there could be a reduction in fares in the future.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the hierarchy of transport strategy within Wales and the relationship between national and local policy which help identify the direct interventions needed to deliver key transport improvements be noted; and
- (b) That the Council's progress on the key interventions defined within the current North Wales Joint Local Transport Plan (NWJLTP) be noted.

64. RECOVERY OF COSTS FOLLOWING DAMAGE TO THE HIGHWAY NETWORK

The Highway Network Manager presented a report to inform the Committee of the process involved in reclaiming costs incurred by the Council and to provide assurance that agreed procedures were being followed. The Streetscene & Transportation service were regularly requested to attend traffic accidents and other incidents to clear debris or make repairs to the Carriageway when accidents and incidents occurred on the highway network. On these occasions, the highway network team looked to record costs, and identify those responsible for the incidents by working with North Wales Police and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), in an effort to recover costs from the individual or their insurers.

A recent internal audit of the processes in place had been requested by the service area as part of the scheduled internal audit programme. The audit took place in October 2019 and identified that the written procedures in place were acceptable and covered the process for recovering costs of rechargeable works. However, the internal audit identified that these were not being consistently followed and inaccuracies were apparent in the recorded information against claims held. Significant work had been undertaken by the service area since the audit report to refresh the process and respond to the areas identified for improvement, which were detailed within the report.

The Highway Network Manager advised that the service area do not currently follow up the recovery of costs for incidents that involve fatalities due to the sensitivities of such action. The cost of the incidents was often high and roads could remain closed for many hours to allow the Police to investigate the cause of the incident. He asked the Committee to consider whether it felt that the recovery of these costs should be considered in the future.

Councillor David Evans asked whether the Council were successful in recovering the full costs from insurance companies and also if the rates of pay from insurance companies aligned with neighbouring authorities. The Highway Network Manager explained that insurance companies often negotiated the costs to be awarded and also challenged the life of an asset which had been damaged. In some instances it was necessary to write off the debt and this had to be agreed with the Corporate Finance Manager as the Section 151 Officer. The Highway Agency in England trialled a fixed rate of pay across local authorities but this was abandoned due to lack of agreement on the fixed rates.

In response to questions from Councillors Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas around the inspections of the highway network and the difficulties in recovering costs from incidents where vehicles damaged hedgerows, the Highway Network Manager explained the process for inspection the highway network following work undertaken by utility companies. He also explained that it was not possible for the Council to share information received through the DVLA with anyone else, but he agreed to speak to Councillor Thomas following the meeting about an incident that had occurred within his own ward.

Councillor Chris Dolphin commented on the non-recovery of costs following a fatality and suggested that the recovery of future costs be considered on a case by case basis.

The recommendations outlined within the report, together with the following additional recommendation, was moved by Councillor Chris Dolphin and seconded by Councillor Joe Johnson:-

- That the recovery of costs for incidents that involve fatalities, be considered on a case by case basis.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee note and support the process of recovering costs for repairs following damage to the highway network; and
- (c) That the recovery of costs for incidents that involve fatalities, be considered on a case by case basis.

65. ALLTAMI DEPOT STORES

The Service Delivery Manager presented a report to provide assurances around controls in place within the stores in Alltami depot. The Alltami depot stores was responsible for the safe and secure storage of all stock items and materials used at the depot, and additionally, ensuring that all plant and machinery used by the service was operated, inspected and serviced in accordance with planned schedules and legal requirements.

Internal audits of the depot stores were undertaken in July 2016, with a follow-up audit conducted in May 2019. The overall findings from the audits were that the controls in operation at the time provided some assurance that key risks were managed and controlled effectively, but that more could be done. The Service Delivery Manager reported on the new stores system in place, as detailed within the report, explaining that a delivery project team would be established to monitor delivery of the system, which would be reported on a monthly basis to the Senior Management Team meetings.

In response to a request from the Chairman, the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that a copy of the audit report would be made available to Members of the Committee. He also advised that the service had been complemented on the level of information provided during a recent health and safety inspection.

Councillor Mike Peers thanked officers for the report. He commented on obsolete stock items and materials stored at the depot and asked whether the service received full cost recovery on the items sent to auction and whether the money made was returned to the service. He raised concerns around the lack of systems in place in order to return unused items of stock and asked why it had taken 3 years for there to be a follow-up audit. He asked what the cost to the service was for agency staff not returning appropriate clothing at the end of their employment and raised concern on the van ladders previously purchased by the Housing Department and stored at the depot and asked if there had been a duplication in cost if they had not been moved for a number of years.

The Service Delivery Manager responded that where obsolete stock items, such as, old lanterns and crash barriers could not be used elsewhere, they were auctioned and full cost of the items was recovered. This money was given back to the streetscene service. She wasn't aware of why the follow-up audit had taken 3 years but could pick this up with them following the meeting. In relation to the cost of non-returned clothing, the Service Delivery Manager explained that the cost had not been picked up as part of the audit.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Peers, the Chief Officer agreed to provide an update report to the Committee in six months' time in order to give assurance that the new working arrangements and processes were being followed correctly.

In response to a question from Councillor Chris Dolphin, the Service Delivery Manager advised that it was a statutory obligation to provide personal protective equipment and appropriate clothing to all employees.

Councillor Owen Thomas commented on the level of stock and goods on Council vehicles which he felt could be targeted. The Service Delivery Manager explained that Council vehicles remained at the depot overnight and that no stock or goods were left on the vehicles.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor David Evans.

RESOLVED:

That the working arrangements within the Streetscene & Transportation depot stores, and actions undertaken to control material and equipment held within the stores be supported.

61. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press and public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.29 pm)

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Chairman