

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
7 DECEMBER 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Tuesday, 7 December 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Cindy Hinds, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

APOLOGY: Councillor Andy Hughes

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors: Helen Brown, Veronica Gay, Richard Jones, Mike Peers and Arnold Woolley (initiators of the call in)

Councillors: Christine Jones (Deputy Leader - Partnerships - and Cabinet Member for Social Services), Haydn Bateman, Richard Lloyd and David Wisinger (observers)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection), Councillor Derek Butler (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Streetscene), Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) and Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation)

For minute number 45
Transport Strategy Officer

For minute number 47
Rachel Perry (HyNet Project Manager) and Amy Bodey (Head of Communications) of Progressive Energy Ltd

For minute numbers 48 and 49
Service Manager (Enterprise & Regeneration) and Strategic Executive Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Democratic Services, Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

43. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and David Evans.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

44. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme for consideration where the following changes were agreed:

- Report on the Climate Change Strategy to be added for February.
- Member briefing on Flintshire's Integrated Transport network to be rescheduled for early in 2022.
- Report on the Council's policy on the release of balloons and the environmental impact to be scheduled for a future meeting, as requested by Councillor David Evans.
- Councillor Dennis Hutchinson to discuss separately with the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) his requirements for a future report on the Standard landfill site.

Following discussion at the June meeting on enforcement of litter caused by alcohol consumption, the Facilitator read out advice from the Legal department clarifying that such legislative powers available to the Police under the Public Spaces Protection Order did not currently apply to Local Authorities.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Dave Evans and Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be noted;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

45. ACTIVE TRAVEL NETWORK MAP - OUTCOME OF THE FORMAL CONSULTATION

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) presented a report on the outcomes of both informal and statutory consultation exercises to enable required updates to the Council's Active Travel Network Map (ATNP) as required by the Active Travel Act (Wales) 2013.

In presenting the report, the Chief Officer paid tribute to the team for their work in assessing and investigating Active Travel routes. A new mapping tool called 'Commonplace' developed by Welsh Government (WG) had helped to increase public engagement during the pandemic and the link remained open to review maps.

The Chief Officer would liaise separately with Councillor Joe Johnson regarding a particular route in Holywell.

Councillor Glyn Banks added his thanks to the team for their work and encouraged Members to use the web link to review information prior to the final map submission to Welsh Government by 31 December.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Joe Johnson and David Evans.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work undertaken to complete both the informal and statutory consultation processes be supported; and
- (b) That the validity of the process utilised to produce the Council's updated ATNM, to be submitted to Welsh Government by 31 December 2021, be formally recognised.

46. COUNCIL PLAN 2021-22 MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Chief Officers presented the mid-year monitoring report to review progress against their respective priorities set out in the Council's Reporting Measures 2020/21 under the remit of the Committee. This exception-based report focussed on areas of under-performance against in-year targets.

For Planning, Environment & Economy, there were three indicators with a red status for current performance against target. The main contributing factors were recruitment challenges and changes in working practices due to ongoing uncertainty on the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic was also the main factor on the three red indicators within the Streetscene & Transportation portfolio. On recycling, performance had fallen short of the target, having been affected by an increase in residual waste.

Councillor Paul Shotton commended the Streetscene team for their work during the recent severe weather. He acknowledged the challenges in recruitment, particularly in social care, which were replicated nationwide.

On the last point, the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) said that work was underway across portfolios to identify areas experiencing difficulty recruiting to vacant positions.

On the recycling performance, Councillor Glyn Banks urged Members to encourage residents to play their part in helping to reach the 70% target.

Councillor Derek Butler commented on recent job fairs which had proved successful.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Sean Bibby and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the mid-year performance indicators for Recovery, Portfolio and Public Accountability Measures to monitor areas of under-performance be noted.

There was a brief adjournment prior to the next item.

47. A PRESENTATION ON THE HYNET HYDROGEN PRODUCTION AND CARBON STORAGE CROSS-BORDER PROJECT

The Committee welcomed Rachel Perry and Amy Bodey from Progressive Energy Ltd who were in attendance to give a presentation on the HyNet project, which covered:

- What is HyNet North West?
- Demand led Decarbonisation
- HyNet North West Infrastructure
- Hydrogen Production
- CO₂ Capture Plants
- Wider Benefits
- Momentum and Deliverability
- Positioning the UK as a world leader in clean energy

Councillor Paul Shotton commended progress with the project and its benefits for a lower carbon future for the region. In response to questions, Rachel Perry said that existing infrastructure was utilised where possible and she provided information on a similar project in the Humber and Tees region.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation on this innovative project. Following questions, she was advised that the business model, with Government support, was currently in development and would be supported by the Carbon Capture Fund whilst the building infrastructure would be funded by the individual organisations.

In response to concerns from Councillor Patrick Heesom about the Point of Ayr colliery site, Rachel Perry provided assurance on the offshore storage of CO₂

and robust assessment of existing pipelines on which there were no current concerns. As requested, the presentation slides would be circulated to Members.

Following questions from Councillor Owen Thomas, information was shared on the building of new infrastructure for Co₂ and hydrogen at Stanlow, and for hydrogen only at the Cheshire salt mines.

In welcoming the decarbonisation target, Councillor Chris Bithell asked about potential risks. Whilst the safety risks were low, economic growth was reliant on Government support as was the scale of the hydrogen rollout.

In praising the Council's involvement in the project and as local Member for Ffynnongroyw, Councillor Glyn Banks offered assistance with early public engagement to reassure residents in the vicinity of the Point of Ayr site. His comments were noted by the HyNet colleagues including his suggestion for an on-site public engagement session, with appropriate safety measures.

Councillor Derek Butler spoke about links with the Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) to access mutual benefits across the region. In response to comments, information was shared on the future role of hydrogen in domestic heating and plans for alternative storage of Co₂ for the Point of Ayr site, should additional capacity be required. Details were also given on future proofing of the hydrogen distribution network.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) confirmed that the North Wales Growth Deal project for a hydrogen hub in Deeside was based on green hydrogen as a long-term sustainable solution.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) said that HyNet was a key part of work of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board as well as the MDA.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Owen Thomas.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the presentation be noted.

There was a brief adjournment prior to the next item.

48. CONSIDERATION OF A MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE CALL IN ARRANGEMENTS

The Head of Democratic Services explained the procedure for the call in of a Cabinet decision as detailed in the supporting document. The Cabinet had considered a report on 'A Plan for Shotton' at its meeting on 16 November 2021. The decision (Record of Decision 3928) had been called in by Councillors Mike Allport, Helen Brown, Arnold Woolley, Veronica Gay, Richard Jones and

Mike Peers, the latter three of whom would be speaking on the item. Copies of the Cabinet report, the Record of Decision and Endorsement of Call in, which identified three reasons for the call in, were included in the agenda pack.

49. A PLAN FOR SHOTTON

Representations from call in signatories

Councillor Richard Jones was invited to address the Committee first. In recognising the challenges faced by all town centres and pressures on the Regeneration team, he said that investment of Council resources to support Shotton represented inequitable treatment of other towns across Flintshire. He questioned the key principles of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and environmental issues underpinning the decision by sharing comparison of ASB statistics across the whole of Flintshire and photographic evidence around Shotton town centre showing a good level of cleanliness and few shop closures. As such, he felt it was unclear why Shotton had been prioritised, particularly as it already benefitted from investment and good facilities in health provision, transport links, a range of banks and shops operating on the high street as well as plans for a green infrastructure project. He made the point that resources and investment should support all towns across Flintshire or that a plan for a specific town should be identified through assessing relevant criteria.

Councillor Veronica Gay's concerns were about the means of establishing Shotton as most in need of support when other towns were experiencing more anti-social behaviour issues and had fewer high street facilities, citing Saltney as one example.

Councillor Mike Peers said that the call in decision was not taken lightly and that there needed to be an assessment of need across Flintshire to fairly distribute resources. In pointing out that this was an 8-year evolving Plan, he drew attention to the high level of officer resources and working groups and the lack of detail on funding arrangements in the report. He said that the project should be used as a framework to develop a Plan for the whole of Flintshire with a shared vision to determine a hierarchy of need across all towns and divert resources appropriately.

Responses from the decision makers

As Leader of the Council, Councillor Ian Roberts said that the photographs reflected progress to date to address issues that were evident at the start of the project and he thanked the local Members for their role on that. He commended initiatives in various communities across Flintshire to regenerate town centres and acknowledged that work would be replicated in other areas. In response to the retention of banks on high streets, he said that such decisions were not under the control of the Council and he questioned the timing of the call in, given that progress had been reported to Cabinet at each stage.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) gave a presentation in response to the call in, which covered:

- Background and Basis for a Plan in Shotton
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Average income levels by town (North Wales)
- Aims of the Plan for Shotton
- Impact of suspending/ceasing work on the Plan
- Future and next steps

It was explained that the Shotton Master Plan had originated in 2020 in response to an increase in ASB and environmental complaints in the town, and it was clarified that no additional funding or resources had been released. Further development into a Plan for Shotton was aimed at improving community resilience, pooling resources and linking to other independent projects to add value and ensure the safety and vibrancy of Shotton. Criteria such as deprivation levels and average income levels demonstrated the need to prioritise Shotton. There were a number of risks if work was stopped at this stage, including loss of momentum from stakeholder engagement and achievements to date, the impact on partner organisations and lost opportunities to link to other independent projects. The Chief Officer explained that the project could form a blueprint for similar initiatives in other towns and that further engagement with communities could help to secure funding to support those changes and encourage community ownership.

As Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Councillor Derek Butler reminded Members that early successes from the initial Streetscene project to tackle significant issues in Shotton had evolved over time and that the approach was proving effective through its co-ordinated multi-agency response.

As Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection, Councillor Chris Bithell spoke about Master Plans developed for other towns and the serious issues publicised in Shotton at the time which warranted more urgent specific action. Resources needed to be managed and prioritised effectively and the report noted that additional capacity created in the Regeneration team would support the work in Shotton and towns elsewhere.

As Cabinet Member for Streetscene, Councillor Glyn Banks thanked officers for the detailed presentation. In referring to the unique location of Shotton, he said that the Plan was partly aspirational and was intended to be used as a basis for projects in other towns.

Questions from Committee Members

Councillor Joe Johnson praised the Council for working with local Members to improve facilities in other areas such as Holywell.

Speaking in support of the call in, Councillor Patrick Heesom questioned why the item had not been submitted to Overview & Scrutiny and the mechanism

for prioritising Shotton. He recommended Option 4 to refer the matter to full Council.

As one of the Local Members, Councillor David Evans recalled the serious issues in Shotton and their detrimental impact on the town centre at the start of the project. He welcomed the improvements achieved to date involving a number of agencies, volunteer groups and Council teams. In response to the points raised, he suggested that the timing of the photographs may have coincided with a recent clean-up by the Streetscene team and that comparison of ASB statistics should take into account the size and population of towns.

Speaking in support of the Cabinet decision, Councillor Paul Shotton proposed Option 1 that the Committee be satisfied with the explanation and allow the decision to be implemented.

Councillor George Hardcastle welcomed town centre regeneration but called for greater transparency to demonstrate that all towns were being given the same opportunity.

The Chief Executive said that whilst the blueprint was to develop a cohesive Plan focused on regeneration across towns, the project in Shotton was unique in tackling significant environmental and crime and disorder issues that were prominent in the town at that time. This in turn would help inform regeneration activities ongoing in other areas, to further engage with communities in order to create sustainable outcomes.

The Chair invited the initiators of the call in to sum up.

Councillor Richard Jones thanked everyone for their contributions. In responding to points raised, he said that the call in was in response to the recommendation in November for Cabinet to endorse further work. Whilst supporting the Shotton Plan, his concerns were about the Council's response which he felt did not demonstrate evidence to identify Shotton as a special case. He acknowledged the homelessness problem, but disagreed that environmental and ASB statistics were also key factors in the town. He added that the report should have been considered by Overview & Scrutiny to compare criteria across all town centres and ensure the appropriate allocation of resources and finances according to need. On that basis, he proposed Option 4 which called for the decision to be put to all Members at full Council.

In confirming the reasons for the call in, Councillor Mike Peers pointed out that the Cabinet report did not reference information shared at this meeting including the statistical chart. On the points raised, he referred to the wider benefits of facilities such as Marleyfield care home and the difference between the Shotton and Buckley Master Plans. He reiterated his view that the Plan for Shotton was at the expense of other areas and that the blueprint informing work on other towns should also benefit communities.

The Chair invited the decision makers to sum up.

Councillor Ian Roberts reminded Members that there were opportunities to seek a discussion on the matter at an earlier stage. In urging Members to support continued progress on the project, he commended the outcomes achieved to date by officers and partners, particularly in dealing with some sensitive issues.

Councillor David Evans seconded the proposal by Councillor Shotton, which then became the substantive Motion.

Councillor Heesom's proposal was subsequently seconded by Councillor Peers.

The Head of Democratic Services gave a reminder of the voting procedure and advised that having been moved and seconded, the substantive Motion would need to be put to the vote before an alternative option could be considered. He suggested that the vote be taken by roll call and the requisite number of Members indicated their support for a recorded vote.

On being put to the vote, the Motion for Option 1 was carried as follows:

For the proposal:

Councillors: Sean Bibby, David Evans, Cindy Hinds, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect and Paul Shotton

Against:

Councillors: Rosetta Dolphin, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Dennis Hutchinson and Owen Thomas

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the decision, the Committee is satisfied with the explanations received and therefore the decision may now be implemented.

50. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 9.30am and ended at 12.50pm)

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Chair