

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil BA20 2HT, on Wednesday, 20 September 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair)
Cllr Adam Boyden (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Alan Bradford
Cllr Edric Hobbs
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Harry Munt
Cllr Alex Wiltshire

Cllr Bente Height
Cllr Henry Hobhouse
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Tom Power

In attendance:

Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Mike Rigby

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Michael Dunk
Cllr Helen Kay
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Gwil Wren

Cllr Matthew Martin
Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Mike Stanton
Cllr Richard Wilkins
Cllr Leigh Redman

20 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr S Ashton and Cllr M Martin who attended virtually.

21 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held on 19

July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

22 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

No additional declarations of interest were received.

23 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Although a statement had been submitted, Linda Ann and Peter Travis were unable to attend and Robbie Bentley speaking on behalf of Somerset Catch the Bus Campaign raised concerns over the proposed demolition of the Bus Depot in Yeovil, currently being used by First Bus. They believed that it was a noteworthy building, part of the town's long industrial heritage, and deserved to be a listed building.

In response they were advised that either a group or an individual could seek the listing of a building and if they required any support or advice to speak to the Conservation Officer within the Planning Service.

Tony Reese also addressed the Committee. He too believed that the building should be listed and that the Committee needed to be aware of how the bus services provided by First Bus had reduced and that they were no longer providing a proper transport service.

The Executive Member for Transport and Highways, Cllr Mike Rigby, responded by confirming that he'd had a number of conversations with the speaker and his fellow campaigners and that he agreed with much of what they had said. The Council's goal had been to try and stabilise the bus service in Somerset and that he was attending a meeting with First Bus today where he would raise the speakers' concerns.

24 Work Programme and Action Tracker - Agenda Item 5

The Scrutiny Officer presented the action tracker and explained that the work programme was currently being developed.

In response to questions it was confirmed that it would not be officer driven and that the Committee and individual members would have the opportunity to feed into it. Also, that the starting of the Highways Responsiveness Task & Finish Group had been delayed due to staff sickness..

25 Somerset Energy Plan - Task and Finish Group - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered the request to set up a Somerset Energy Plan task and finish group which would be taking a fairly high level approach to the subject.

Members agreed that the task and finish group should be set up and after discussing the optimum membership sought volunteers from the Committee.

Resolved

To set up the Somerset Energy Plan Task and Finish Group with the following membership:

- Cllr Ashton
- Cllr Boyden
- Cllr Bradford
- Cllr H Hobhouse
- Cllr M Kravis
- Cllr D Mansell
- Cllr H Munt
- Cllr T Power

26 Award of contracts for highways services - Agenda Item 7

A Mr Redgewell had requested to speak on this item but unfortunately, when called to speak, he was unable to do so virtually. Having provides no details of his statement or question he was requested to send them in and a written response would be given.

The Committee considered a report setting out the details for five highways related contracts.

Members praised the work of their Emergency Duty Teams and in response to questions it was explained that:

- If there were any changes to contact details, once the contracts had been awarded, members would be informed and the appropriate contact numbers advertised.
- Whilst the contract for maintenance would be outsourced as there was no guaranteed workload. They would be looking at their ability to deliver the services in-house e.g. grass cutting where appropriate in terms of service delivery and financial efficiency.
- A written response would be given regarding how long, under the contracts, a pot-hole repair would be guaranteed for.
- They would be starting a project to look at decarbonising maintenance of the highways. There was the potential to reduce carbon emissions, with an estimated 60% of carbon in highways maintenance being moving people,

equipment and materials around, by considering:

- Concentrating works in certain areas of the county.
- Having mobile recycling plants

This was a three year project and at the end of it they would report their findings back to the Committee.

- Regarding vehicles, they referred to 'alternative fuels' as it was up to the contractors to say how they were going to meet the targeted reduction of 50% in carbon emissions e.g. electric or hydrogen vehicles. But they would not be accepting the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil as a fuel, because this was usually transported around using diesel trucks.
- With five separate contracts there would be less outsourced decision making with the Council programming work over the network.
- With many hedges not under the ownership of the Council, overgrown signage was often the result of farmers not cutting them back. However, if they were reported to the Council, ideally online, they would arrange to get them cut.
- Maximizing income was an ambition and they would be working with contractors and look at obtaining revenue from the highways in a number of ways e.g. advertising on roundabouts.
- They were looking at improving the network management by:
 - Using a GIS system so that both officers and members could see the whole programme of works across the whole network listings dates and times etc.
 - Scheduling resurfacing work to tie in with developers work under S106 agreements.
- There was the potential to reduce carbon emissions, with an estimated 60% of carbon in highways maintenance being moving people, equipment and materials around, by considering:
 - Concentrating works in certain areas of the county.
 - Having mobile recycling plants
- The service levels within these contracts were similar to the previous ones and included incentives and penalties for the contractors.
- Grass verges were cut (not all of the verge) twice a year. The first between April and June and the second between August and September.
- Whilst not for general use, they still used glyphosphate weed killers, in a very limited and sparing way for noxious species such as Japanese knot weed.

The Committee then adjourned for a 5 minute break.

27 Budget Monitoring Update - Agenda Item 8

The Committee considered an update setting out the budget monitoring position up

until the end of July 2023. As part of the presentation and in response to questions it was highlighted that:

- Overall Budget - it was forecast that there would be a predicted overspend of £26.1 million, of which the majority related to the Adults and Childrens Services.
- Waste - there was a forecasted overspend of £800k. Some of which was due to an improved pay award, shared with Suez, that avoided strike action. A briefing note would be provided to members on some of the contractual elements and issues, in due course.
- Highways - there was a predicted overspend of £1.3 million mainly due to an increase in safety defects across the whole road network. There was also, included within this an amount of £200k, for dealing with the new highways' contracts, that had not been factored in because at the time the work started it had fallen under the budget of the Commissioning but now fell under Climate and Place.
- Economy & Planning - a predicted overspend of £400k due to the way Department for Work & Pensions funding could now be applied to the apprenticeship levy. Additionally, some of the issues with staff retention and agency costs would hopefully be addressed with the restructuring of the planning service.
- Some of the key risks and future issues were:
 - Contract inflation
 - Impact of the cost of living crisis
 - Staff vacancy levels
 - Climate change
- The recycling trial, involving the collection of cellophane and wrappers, taking place in Frome was part of a funded national trial and was unlikely to be rolled out across the county unless that too was funded.

28 Approach to Local Plan and Statement of Community Involvement - Agenda Item 9

Members received a presentation on the development of a Local Plan and the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) that was currently being developed which highlighted:

- That the SCI was a high- level document setting out how the Local Planning Authority would engage and consult with the community and stakeholders on planning matters.
- That it covered both engagement on planning policy and the determination of planning applications

- There was a need for a new SCI to replace the existing 5 District and County SCIs with a consistent approach on engaging with communities on planning matters.
- The consultation undertaken and the main changes made following that consultation.
- The Council's legal requirement to produce a Local Plan within 5 years of vesting day (by 1st April 2028).
- The Local Plan timetable and the factors that might affect it.
- That the Local Plan was produced as a separate work strand from the Minerals and Waste Plan reviews.
- The Local Plan was a key document that would help deliver the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy.
- A separate climate change Development Plan Document (DPD) had been considered but was not being recommended because:
 - It would divert resources away from the Local Plan significantly impacting the Local Plan timetable and the failure to deliver a plan on time could result in Government intervention.
 - Any delay would mean there would be a longer time without an up-to-date local plan resulting in an increase of 'planning by appeal'; reduced ability to deliver on other Council aspirations; and reduced chance of success in bidding for Government funding for projects'
 - Considering climate change policies strategically within a Local Plan would ensure they were deliverable together with affordable housing and infrastructure requirements
 - A DPD may not get policies in place any sooner as it would still have to follow the same production stages as a Local Plan.
 - The setting up of a Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee of the Executive was being proposed to oversee and monitor on behalf of the Council the review of the Development Plan.

In response to questions from the Committee it was explained that:

- Whilst the statutory requirement in relation to site notices and neighbour notifications for planning applications was usually either one or the other, in practice, quite often both methods were used. Written clarification on the statutory requirements would be provided to the relevant councillor.
- The current different inherited Community Infrastructure Levy charging systems would have to be reviewed, particularly in response to national reforms.
- The new Local Plan would have a lifetime of possibly 20 years.
- That under paragraph 19 (page 68 of the agenda pack) there was a typographical error in the penultimate sentence and that 'for' should be replaced with 'beyond' to read *Given the need to bring forward a Somerset-*

wide development plan, a wider exercise beyond the East area (e.g. more housing or review of strategic policies) is neither warranted or justified.

- That the Lead Member for the Environment and Climate Change would be a member of the Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee.
- The final report would clarify the rules under which the Sub-Committee would operate, the cross party engagement and how its decisions would be scrutinised.

The Committee felt that it was important to continue the current practice of serving both site notices and adjacent neighbour notifications and that 3.24 of the SCI be amended to clarify this.

Members believed that climate change policies should be a priority and that rather than waiting for 5 years for completion of the Local plan there was a need for a separate Climate Change DPD that could be come into effect before this.

Particularly as lessons could be learnt from work already done by other authorities such as Bath & North East Somerset, Cornwall and Warwick.

Resolved

To recommend to the Executive:

1. That under the Pre-Applicant stage, paragraph 3.10 of the Statement of Community Involvement should be amended to encourage applicants to consult with their neighbours.
2. That the Council should continue to serve both site notices and adjacent neighbour notifications and that the wording of 3.24 of the Statement of Community Involvement be amended to reflect this. The wording of the recommendation to the Executive to be delegated to the Executive Director – Climate & Place in consultation with the Chair and circulated to the Committee.
3. That a Climate Change Development Plan Document be created to advance the Council's climate emergency objectives, in particular zero carbon energy standards, new developments and renewable energy generation siting. To be separate from the Local Plan and to an earlier time scale to reflect the climate emergency declaration.

29 Water Quality in Somerset - NOW WITHDRAWN FROM THE AGENDA (to be considered at a separate meeting, to be arranged) - Agenda Item 10

(The meeting ended at 1.42 pm)

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CHAIR