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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 7 June 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	J Hale (Chair)	
	Councillors	P Hackett P Johnson (In place of D McCubbin) C Jones A Sykes J Walsh	S Whittingham R Wilkins KJ Williams S Williams
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	P Johnson (In place of D McCubbin)	
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors		
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors		

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. No such declarations were made.

2 MINUTES

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2010.

Resolved – That the minutes be received.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Committee was requested to appoint a Vice-Chair.

On a motion by the Chair seconded by Councillor Johnston it was:

Resolved – That Councillor McCubbin be appointed Vice-Chair of this Committee for the current municipal year.

4 **REVIEW OF WINTER WEATHER RESILIENCE**

The Interim Director of Technical Services presented a report in response to the request of Cabinet (Minute 286, 13 January 2011) seeking further improvement in the Council's winter weather resilience and a report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The severe winter weather during December 2010 and January 2011 and prolonged freezing conditions had brought with it a number of consequences including;

- Interruption of domestic refuse collection;
- Concerns over school closures;
- Concerns over the communication to residents, community groups and employers about the weather situation and service delivery;
- Concerns regarding the service provision to the most vulnerable in our communities; and
- Shortage of rock salt and grit especially for pedestrian and major shopping areas.

The Director covered each of the above issues in turn and highlighted the many improvements that had been, or were to be adopted which would add to the resilience of the council.

The Director responded to questions from members concerning:

- the grit/salt stock and the operation of the National Salt Reserve;
- the supply grit/salt to schools;
- maintenance of the Primary Road Network and major bus routes
- the use and security of community grit bins

Resolved – That this Committee:

- (1) Note the lessons learnt from the latest period of severe winter weather.**
- (2) Note the Council's performance to date in delivering the highways winter maintenance service in 2010/11.**
- (3) Note that further work continues to be undertaken to ensure a better awareness and understanding of the impact and consequences of severe winter weather.**

5 **REVIEW OF WINTER WORKING RESILIENCE ARRANGEMENTS - ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES CONTRACT WITH BIFFA**

The Interim Director of Technical Services presented a report that had been prepared as part of an ongoing Workstream and in response to a request by the Council, to undertake a review of the arrangements for providing refuse collection services during periods of severe winter weather.

The report outlined the current severe weather working arrangements and included details of what lessons have been learnt as a result of the disruptions to services during previous winter periods and specifically during the latest conditions experienced during November 2010 to January 2011. As part of the review, the Council's Environmental Services contractor, Biffa, had been requested to explore a number of options for minimising any disruption to collection schedules during any future periods of severe winter weather. This work has taken into account experience in other authorities, along with Biffa's direct experience from collection contracts that they have elsewhere.

Biffa had recommended the introduction of two key initiatives aimed at reducing the risks arising from vehicles losing control on snowy and icy roads and reducing the corresponding risks to refuse operatives collecting bins on icy pavements and roads:

- (i) the use of overshoe 'crampon' type footwear for refuse collection staff, and;
- (ii) a trial of winter tyres on a selection of the refuse collection fleet with a view to evaluating their effectiveness and assessing the full implications of expanding their use to the full fleet of vehicles.

Mr Mark Hodkinson, Regional Manager Biffa, gave a full presentation of the background to the work, the options explored and their conclusions/recommendations. The options considered were:

- Tyre Chains
- Snow Socks
- Winter Tyres
- Additional PPE for crew – snow shoes
- Additional Gritting of affected areas via new areas

Key facts considered as part of review included the size of the operation (40 plus rounds), 200,000 collections weekly on AWC, and the need to balance operational improvement with service/cost to all parties.

The Director and Mr Hodkinson responded to questions from members regarding the options.

Resolved – That this Committee:

(1) Note the results of the 'Lessons Learnt' exercise as detailed within section 5.0 of this report, along with the actions taken by officers to provide further improvements to the Council's severe weather plan for Environmental Services.

(2) Note the outcome of the Biffa Partnering Workstream in this area, as outlined within Section 6.0 of this report and endorse the recommendations arising from the review, as contained within sections 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 of the report.

6 **PRESENTATION - EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT - COUNCIL PROGRESS TOWARDS EXCELLENCE STATUS**

Further to minute 56 (Scrutiny Programme Board – 2/3/2011) Jacqui Cross, Corporate Equality and Cohesion Manager, gave a presentation on the Equality Duty 2010 to ensure that Members were fully equipped to provide effective scrutiny in the areas identified as being necessary for Excellent accreditation by the summer of 2012.

Jacqui Cross gave an overview of: the new Equality Duty and the general and specific duties contained within it; the Fairness Agenda contained within the Government's Equality Strategy 2010; and the role of scrutiny to demonstrate that the Council had met its general and specific duties and was able to demonstrate improvements and outcomes as a result of its equality objectives. She highlighted three key questions for the committee to consider:

- Is the Council meeting the equality general duty (Equality Act 2010)?
- Is the Council meeting the equality specific duties (Equality Act 2010)?
- Can the Council demonstrate improvements and outcomes as a result of its equality objectives

and gave examples of some theme based objectives which would be included in any future Equality Watch Scheme and Plan.

Jacqui Cross discussed with members some of the key issues relating to inequalities awareness, ways of advancing equality of opportunity, and the impact on the community and voluntary sector.

Resolved – That Jacqui Cross be thanked for her presentation on progress made to date with regard to the Equality Framework for Local Government and Equality Duty 2010.

7 **LIBRARY SERVICE INTRODUCTION OF E - BOOKS**

The Director of Finance presented a report outlining the proposed programme for the introduction of an e-books facility into the Library Service to allow access to books that could be read via a variety of IT media selected either at a Library or via the web. The report detailed the timescales involved and the likely savings and efficiencies that would be realised by these changes.

The Director responded to questions from members regarding monitoring the use of the e-books service and the potential for further development e.g. supply of ebookreaders (as costs reduce), and access to historical and localised reference material.

Resolved - That the Committee note that, as there is only one viable supplier, the Library Service will deliver the e-books service via the OverDrive solution, as negotiated via the North West Libraries Consortium.

8 HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATIONS PANEL

The Committee was requested to undertake a review of the Highways Representation Panel and to appoint members to serve on that panel if it was to be retained in 2011-2012.

Resolved – That the Committee:

(1) confirm that the Highways Representation Panel be re-appointed for 2011-2012 with the terms of reference identified.

(2) appoint the following members to serve on the Highways Representation Panel in 2011-2012, including the appointment of the Chair and named deputies:

Members

Deputies

J Hale (Chair)

D McCubbin
S Williams
A Sykes
P Johnson
K Wood
P Hayes
G Ellis

R Wilkins

A Bridson
A Brighthouse
P Gilchrist
T Harney
M Johnston
S Kelly
D Mitchell
P Williams

J Williams

P Hackett
C Jones
J Walsh
S Whittingham

9 2010/11 YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Interim Director of Technical Services presented a report providing an overview of progress made at year-end against the performance indicators for 2010/2011 and key projects which were relevant to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved – That the Committee note the contents of this report.

10 **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The terms of reference were submitted for Members' information.

Resolved – That the terms of reference be noted.

11 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2011-12**

The views of the Committee were requested concerning topics to be included in this year's scrutiny work programme.

A paper listing the reports from chief officers on key issues during the year had been circulated separately as a supplemental agenda item.

The Forward Plan for the period June to September 2011 had been published on the Council's website and Members were invited to review the Plan and indicate whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan.

Resolved - That the paper listing the reports from chief officers on key issues during the year, as now amended, form the basis of the committee's work programme for the current municipal year.

12 **DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS - TENDER ACCEPTANCE**

The Interim Director of Technical Services reported that he had used his delegated authority to approve the appointment of the following contractors:

(i) Project Title: Collection, Storage and Disposal of Vehicles Abandoned or Voluntarily Surrendered (3 year contract with 1 year option to extend)

Contractor: Car Transplants Limited

This contract related to the provision of services to allow the Council to fulfil its duty with respect to abandoned vehicles.

(ii) Project Title: Wirral Coastal Strategy

Contractor: AECOM

This contract related to the production of a Wirral Coastal Strategy, which would provide the business case for the future management of Wirral's coastal defences in accordance with the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) policies.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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