

West Wiltshire District Council

Minutes

- Minutes of the:** Scrutiny Committee
- Held on:** Wednesday 16 April 2008
- Held at:** Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge
- Present:**
- Councillors:** Burden, Fuller, Hedley, Humphries, Jenkins, Mudge, J. Osborn (Chairman), Parks, Ridout, Walker
- Also in attendance:** Cllrs Carbin, Clark, Conley, H. Osborn, Phillips OBE, Repton
- Officers:** Policy Officer (DJ), Performance and Scrutiny Officer (ML), Grounds & Cleansing Manager (GB), Parking Project Manager (RS), Planning Policy & Conservation Services Manager (JS), Property & Estate Services Manager (JF), Member Support Officer (SS)

38. Apologies and Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Cllrs Blakemore, Carr, and Chivers.

Cllr H. Osborn substituted for Cllr Blakemore.

39. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

40. Announcements from the Chairman

New diary pages for 2008/09 are now being printed.

A CD containing an updated Staff Directory has been ruled out, but Members will be sent via email with the directory as an attachment every two months (with paper copies also available).

Attention was drawn to Members' Information Sheet (Issue 659) and the report on the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board contained therein.

The proposed closure of The Obelisk Post Office in Warminster is to be reviewed and delayed for three months after intervention by Postwatch. The

Chairman has volunteered to be on a Wiltshire County Council panel to look at the case for WCC support for Post Offices which would otherwise be closed.

British Telecom has published a list of pay phones scheduled for removal. The Chairman invited Members who could make a case for retaining any threatened pay phones in their areas to bring these to the attention of the next meeting.

Attention was drawn to plans to re-launch the 0845 police number, and making Neighbourhood Police Teams more readily contactable by the public.

There will be a report on the work of the Partnership Working Task & Finish Group for the September meeting of this Committee.

41. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19 March 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

42. Update on issues and challenges – Planning Policy & Conservation

The Planning Policy & Conservation Services Manager introduced his written report, and drew Members particular attention to three areas:

- the public examination into the Leisure and Recreation Development Plan;
- the public consultation exercise into the new Local Development Framework;
- and the transition to a unified core strategy across Wiltshire.

There had been two vacancies in the department, but these have both now been filled.

Cllr Phillips OBE, (Planning Portfolio Holder) reported on the preparations that the Interim Executive for the unitary authority are making with regards to development control and planning, and possible difficulties which may occur.

The Planning Policy & Conservation Services Manager answered a number of questions from Members, and made a number of points including the following:

- The conservation area appraisal for Bradford-on-Avon has been completed and he is confident that targets will be met for the other main towns;
- Development control and planning officers are working well together;
- Representations received from the public on the Local Development Framework are being processed, and a resume of points made will be circulated to Members to ask for their guidance.

The ending of the circulation of neighbour notices for planning applications was raised. Cllr Phillips OBE said that he was annoyed that neither he nor Cllr Ernie Clark (Chairman of the Planning Committee) were consulted. The public response to the ending of neighbour notices has been negative, with reports that site notices soon disappear. The feeling of the meeting was that neighbour notices should be reinstated.

It was agreed that the following recommendation would be put to Cabinet:

That the Scrutiny Committee recognises the unusual pressure that the Planning Policy and Conservation Service is under. It recommends that Cabinet gives its full support in terms of resources, to ensure that sufficient and suitable staff are recruited and retained to enable the service to fulfil its vital role.

It wishes the relationship between the Service and Development Control to be reviewed and improved.

Concern was expressed as to the loss of neighbour notification of planning applications and it wishes to recommend reversion to the previous policy.

43. Scrutiny Committee Annual Report

The Chairman introduced the proposed annual report of the Committee for the full Council, with the addition of an item on the removal of BT pay phones to be added to the 21 May 2008 forward work plan.

Resolved:

The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the annual report for 2007/08 and approved the annual work programme for 2008/09, to be submitted to full Council.

44. Review of policy on complaints about graffiti on private property.

Cllr Conley (Environment Portfolio Holder) introduced the Grounds & Cleansing Manager to the meeting, who then introduced his written report.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that it is the duty of the owners of private property to remove graffiti from their premises; that graffiti is a criminal offence, and that affected property owners should report this to the police. However, it is not the duty of the District Council to remove graffiti from private property.

A standard letter is being drafted to be sent to owners of private property affected by graffiti advising them that it is their responsibility to remove it.

It was agreed that the following recommendation would be put to Cabinet:

That in the three-month trial of sending letters to owners of property affected by graffiti, it should be emphasised that graffiti is a criminal offence that should be reported to the police, and that it is the duty of affected property owners to remove it themselves.

That officers should ascertain what are the Council's powers under the Town & Country Planning Act to enforce the removal by owners of graffiti from their property.

That officers should investigate ways of channelling graffiti 'artists' efforts elsewhere.

45. Civil Parking Enforcement

Cllr Conley introduced the Property & Estate Services Manager and also welcomed the new Parking Project Manager to the Council.

The officers reported on the plans for implementation of CPE, and how they had benefited from the experience of other local authorities in this regard. Arrangements are in place for the introduction of CPE in West Wiltshire from 16 June 2008.

Members raised a number of questions to which the officers responded:

- There are no plans to introduce parking meters, clamping, or towing-away;
- Residents' parking schemes may be considered once any changes in parking behaviour are perceived after CPE is introduced;
- Penalty charges will be £50 for less serious breaches, £70 for more serious breaches;
- CCTV will not be used for CPE penalties;
- Penalty notices will be fixed on the screen of vehicles, not sent through the post as first notification;
- Hitherto the police have not always enforced parking restrictions – CPE will not introduce new restrictions, but will be a method of enforcing existing restrictions, i.e. yellow lines;
- 'Blue Badge'/disability passes will be respected by enforcement officers, and attention will be paid to loading/unloading restrictions;
- The monitoring of CPE will be a matter for Wiltshire County Council;
- Any appeals against CPE notices will go to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal – an independent body - not to this Council.

The following was agreed:

**That the Scrutiny Committee welcomes the report;
encourages members to bring any particular local concerns to the attention of relevant officers;
and asks for an update of CPE after six months of operation.**

46. County health scrutiny update

Cllr Mudge gave a verbal reported on a number of health issues affecting the District, including the following:

- Wiltshire Primary Care Trust will end the 2007/08 financial year with balanced books;
- The PCT have expressed concerns about the service delivered by the Great Western Ambulance Trust, and is expecting an improved performance;
- 'Primary Care Centres' have been approved for Trowbridge, Warminster, and Westbury, however, there is no standard pattern for the services which should be provided by these centres;
- Concern has been expressed about the closure of the minor injuries unit at Melksham and the lack of nearby alternative provision;
- Concern has also been expressed by the delays in transferring patients from acute hospital care to convalescent care (so-called 'bed-blockers') and the cost of this to the PCT;
- There is an issue with the confinement of people who have learning difficulties and/or mental health issues in police cells, until suitable health service or other accommodation can be found.

47. Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition update

Cllr Humphries introduced the paper updating the Committee on the work of the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Transition Board which had first met on 28 March 2008. A paper has been prepared on the proposed political and management structure of the unitary authority, which can be viewed on the 'Towards One Council' section of the WCC website at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council/local-government-white-paper.htm>.

Members raised a number of issues including recycling and waste management, and the potential workload of members of the unitary authority.

Of particular concern was the provision of development control and planning services in the unitary authority, with the likely options being as follows:

- A single regulatory committee for the whole authority;
- Separation of the authority into four districts for these purposes;
- The creation of six population-based area committees;
- The devolution of these functions to the local Community Boards.

48. Cabinet Forward Work Plan

This was noted.

49. Date of next meeting

The next ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Wednesday **21 May 2008** in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge at **7pm**.

(7.00pm – 8.55pm)

These minutes were prepared by Sean Semple, Member Support Officer
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