

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT CAPITAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE BOURGES/VIERSSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL
ON 22 MARCH 2012**

Present: Councillors D Day (Chairman), N Arculus, J Peach, N North, B Rush,
JA Fox and N Sandford

Also Present: Councillor S Dalton, Cabinet Member for Environment Capital
Magda Steele, Youth Council

Officers Present: Paul Phillipson, Executive Director for Operations
John Harrison, Executive Director for Strategic Resources
Darren Sharpe, Natural and Historic Environment Manager
Peter Garham, Highway Maintenance Manger
Paulina Ford, Senior Governance Officer, Scrutiny
Dania Castagliuolo, Governance Officer
Israr Ahmed, Lawyer

1. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

Item 6 – Trees and Woodlands Strategy

Councillor Sandford declared a personal interest in that he was an employee of the Woodland Trust.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 January 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2012 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Call In of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

5. The Delivery of Renewable Energy

The aim of the report was to inform the Committee of the issues and challenges associated with delivering renewable energy across the council's assets.

Key points highlighted were:

Solar Energy

Funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) existed in the form of Feed in tariffs (Fit). From July 2011 the Feed in tariff unit rate had been reduced by 50% from 32.9p to 15.2. From July 2012 the rate would be reduced further and depending on how many buildings (25 or more) were affected it could drop as low as 5.6p.

Wind Power – This was still well supported by DECC.

Other technologies and incentives were being considered such as renewable heat incentive e.g. solar thermal and ground source heat pumps.

The benefit of the delivery of renewable energy supported directly the Councils Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) and provided the Council with the ability to generate money and contain future price increases.

Questions and observations were raised around the following areas:

- Has the cost of installing Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels gone down? *Members were informed that the cost of the actual panels was going down dependant on volume and where they were purchased from but the cost of labour to install them had not.*
- What level of wattage were the PV Panels that were being put onto schools and could they reserve the energy made in the summer months when the school was not being used. *Members were advised that the PV Panels placed on schools were typically up to 50kw and all the energy made was being consumed on site. If a 100kw PV Panels were to be used and surplus energy was produced during the summer months the energy could be transferred to another council property or sold to a third party through the Energy Services Company (ESCO) through a Power Purchase Agreement.*
- Can you up date the Committee on the Energy from Waste facility. *The decision on the choice and the recommendation would be made in June 2012.*
- Will there be any grants for funding to enable people to put PV Panels on their homes. *There was no direct Government funding for people to put PV Panels on their homes.*
- Members were concerned that PCC had not taken advantage of the introduction of the Solar Feed in tariff (Fit) which had been introduced in April 2010 soon enough thereby missing out on potential income prior to the reduction in the Fit in July 2011. The curtailment of the Freemans PV Panel project was an example of this. *Members were informed that once Cabinet approval had been received the Freemans PV Panel project had been accelerated however just before completion the Government changed the regulations which therefore affected the potential income from the project. The amount of work involved in fixing the PV Panels to the roof of the Freemans building had been more than expected which delayed the project. The Cabinet Member for Environment Capital acknowledged that some projects involving the Fit could have started sooner.*
- What plans has the Council made to take advantage of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). This was an incentive where the Government would pay people for producing renewable heat. *Members were advised that this was a low priority and other incentives like PV Panels, Wind Power and The Green Deal were more of a priority.*
- How many planning applications for onshore wind turbines have been approved by PCC? *Members were informed that only one application had been approved locally. One of the main issues in the Peterborough area had come from the Ministry of Defence who posed objections because of radar services. The Executive Director for Operations informed Members that there was an element in the Core Strategy (CS11) that identified the development proposals for dealing with renewable energy of which wind farms would be one of them. There was nothing in the planning polices that would prevent the development of wind farms but every application would be looked at on its own merit. There had only been one application presented to the Planning Committee.*
- Why has the council not put in place ground mounted PV Panels? *Members were informed that when the Fit was introduced very few Authorities looked at ground mounted schemes. There was an issue of how to get ground mounted electricity actually back into it rather than selling it on. Overtime this has developed and become more sophisticated. Some big developers had produced large scale ground mounted schemes.*
- Members had specific concerns around who would own the PV Panels if a school transferred to Academy Status and if they would then become the Fit generator and own the asset. *Members were advised that the School Governing Body would enter into a 25 year agreement to pay for the energy that came off the roof. In effect it would be like a 25 year energy contract and PCC would be able to guarantee what the payment terms were. The School would not own the Fit.*

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the report and requested that a progress report be brought back to the Committee in one year.

6. Trees and Woodlands Strategy

The purpose of the report was to present the updated Trees and Woodland Strategy to the Committee for consideration prior to referral to Cabinet.

The Committee considered whether the revised draft Strategy provided the objectives, policies and actions which would establish the Council's commitment and continued strategic direction for the protection, planting and maintenance of the trees and woodland within its authority. A key element of change within the Strategy was to move away from a reactive service to one that ensured that its resources go towards a pro-active defensible system for managing tree risk and ensuring high standards of asset management.

A total of 245 consultation responses had been received and comments and observations had been incorporated, where appropriate, within the revised Strategy including any new changes to legislation.

Questions and observations were raised around the following areas:

- Members were concerned about trees belts that were close to houses and had become overgrown. How would this be managed? *Members were informed that going forward the tree stock would be managed in different ways. Shelter belt management was different to specimen tree management. The shelter belts had limited intervention over the past 15 to 20 years and needed to be thinned whilst still providing a screen to residents. Each shelter belt would be assessed on its individual merits and there would be clear and precise specifications issued to contractors who would maintain the trees. Regeneration would be a valuable part of the process. Measures would also be put in place to monitor the quality of work of the contractors.*
- Members commented that the strategy did not advise people on biodiversity issues and which types of trees should be planted in specific locations across the city to accommodate those issues. *Members were informed that one of the main changes with the strategy was that the complete tree stock would be monitored and assessed to accurately record the various species across the city. Once an inventory had been established this would enable the formulation of new planting proposals and meet the biodiversity issues and address pest and disease issues. This would also help to guide developers when planting trees.*
- Members felt that the strategy provided a good balance in protecting the existing trees and woodland and seeking to expand the tree population but that the process for developing the Trees and Woodland Strategy had taken far too long over a period of six years. *The Cabinet Member for Environment Capital agreed that the strategy had taken too long and wanted to gain approval from Cabinet and Full Council as soon as possible.*
- Do you have statistics regarding how many trees had died within the new planting scheme in Peterborough and how many had survived? Members were concerned that new areas of planting had not been looked after. *The Officer advised that he did not have the information available at the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Environment Capital knew of the area mentioned and advised that it was a Trees for Cities and PECT initiative. Unfortunately the scheme had suffered from a hot summer and very dry winter causing the trees to die.*
- The Executive Director for Operations advised the Committee that there would be a fully qualified arboriculturist in place supporting the Natural and Historic Environment Manager and Enterprise who would be able to give specialist advice.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee:

- (i) Endorsed the Trees and Woodland Strategy;
- (ii) Supports the need for additional resources allocated within the Medium Term Financial Strategy to deliver the strategy; and
- (iii) Recommends the adoption of the Trees and Woodland Strategy to Cabinet prior to its consideration by Council as part of the major policy framework.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Committee requested that the Natural and Historic Environment Manager bring to the Committee at a future date:

- (i) the proposed Tree Risk Management Strategy
- (ii) annual progress reviews of the Trees and Woodlands Strategy

7. Highway Maintenance Plan

The report was presented to the Committee in order to seek approval to implement the Peterborough City Council Highway Maintenance Plan 2011 – 16 for use with immediate effect. The Highway Maintenance Plan (HMP) updates and replaced the previous Highway Network Management Plan 2004/05 and whilst not of the same name it was broadly based on the earlier document. The HMP was intended to provide a reference to Councillors, officers and all those with an interest in how Peterborough's highway network maintenance is managed and delivered.

Questions and observations were raised around the following areas:

- How do you decide what is a priority for work. *Members were advised that maintenance was done in three stages:*
 - *Reactive Maintenance*
 - *Routine Maintenance*
 - *Planned Maintenance*

In order to plan major schemes of maintenance we carry out surveys of the whole network. The classified road network is surveyed every year using a scanner which automatically picks up the defects. Unclassified roads are on a four year rolling programme. An engineer also inspects the roads. The results of the surveys are pulled together and prioritised.

- The report stated that driven inspections were undertaken for footway surveys. Members were concerned that the inspections were not conducted by walking on the footway. *Members were advised that if the footway was block paved or slabbed they would be walked; low level footways would have a driven inspection.*
- Members requested that when the smaller highways in housing areas were inspected the ward councillor receive a report so that when receiving a concern from residents regarding poor footpaths they would be able to respond.
- Members noted that the table for scheduled works within the report related to works done in 2011/2012. *The Officer advised that this would be replaced with the 2012/2013 schedule of works and a copy of this would be sent to Members.*

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee endorsed the Highway Maintenance Plan and recommended its use with immediate effect.

ACTIONS

The Highway Maintenance Manger to provide the Committee with a copy of the 2012/2013 Schedule of Works.

8. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The latest version of the Forward Plan, showing details of the key decisions that the Leader of the Council believed the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would be making over the next four months, was received.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

CHAIRMAN
7.00 - 8.55 pm

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