

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT CAPITAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL ON 12 NOVEMBER 2009**

**Present:** Councillors C Burton (Chairman), D Day (Vice-Chairman), R Dobbs, J A Fox, S Goldspink, N North and J Wilkinson

**Also Present:** Councillor N Sandford – Representing the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group  
Councillor M Lee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment Capital and Culture  
Councillor D Seaton, Cabinet Member for Resources

**Officers Present:** Trevor Gibson, Director of Environment Capital  
John Harrison, Executive Director of Strategic Resources  
Steven Pilsworth, Head of Strategic Finance  
Karen Franklin, Head of Business Support – Operations  
Carrie Denness, Principal Solicitor  
Louise Tyers, Scrutiny Manager

**1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations**

Councillor Sandford declared the following personal interests:

- Item 6 – as a member of the Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT)
- Item 8 – as a Board Member of the Greater Peterborough Partnership (GPP).

**3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 September 2009**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2009 were approved as an accurate record, subject to Councillor North being added to apologies for absence.

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

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

**5. Response to Recommendations Made by the Committee**

The Committee considered the responses made by the Executive to our recommendations from the last meeting.

The recommendations related to:

- Review of Subsidised Bus Services
- Review of the Biodiversity Strategy

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Councillor Sandford reminded the Committee that at the last meeting City Services advised that they did not envisage any changes to their normal working practices following the introduction of the new Biodiversity Strategy, however in some areas of the city shrubs are now being completely removed rather than just pruned.

### **ACTION AGREED**

The Scrutiny Manager to write to City Services to clarify their policy in relation to shrub maintenance.

## **6. Progress on the Delivery of the Environment Capital Portfolio**

We welcomed Councillor Lee, Deputy Leader to the meeting.

The report focussed on the performance of the Environment Capital portfolio which formed part of the Deputy Leader's responsibilities. A lot of good work was in progress but it was acknowledged that there was still a long way to go in some areas. He was hopeful that we would be able to achieve our goal of being the UK's Environment Capital.

Key performance highlights included:-

- Significant, dedicated resource being committed to delivering the Environment Capital priority.
- The work of the "TravelChoice" initiative had facilitated a significant modal shift towards more sustainable travel modes with a corresponding reduction in car usage.
- The city continues to perform highly in waste recycling and Peterborough was designated as one of six Zero Waste Places in the UK by DEFRA in 2008.
- The city's strong environment goods and services sector (the "Enviro-Cluster") currently comprised 380 businesses of varying sizes.
- Targeted street cleansing activities, based on feedback from community consultation, were resulting in measurable improvements to cleansing standards.
- The majority of the city's extensive network of wildlife sites were under positive management regimes ensuring both quality and biodiversity in an accessible local environment.
- The Integrated Growth Study (IGS) published in 2008, provided a detailed benchmark describing the steps required for the city to grow substantially and sustainably alongside a wide range of parameters against which progress can be measured. Outcomes from the IGS include current detailed studies of the energy and water requirements of Peterborough as it grows including recommendations as to how these requirements will be met sustainably.
- A number of high profile community based projects continue to be actively supported, including the Eco-Arts Project, Green Backyard and Green Glington.
- The emerging Peterborough University would have a Sustainable Construction faculty as one of its initial academic offers.
- The Council has recently conducted a thermal imaging exercise of the urban areas of Peterborough to act as a basis for further work on energy efficiency in existing homes. The "Your Footprint Counts" campaign is raising awareness of individual responsibilities and behaviour change associated with climate change.
- Peterborough's Green Festival 2009 was the biggest and best yet with a range of accessible environmentally friendly events and activities taking place during the fortnight. This successful event is now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year.
- The Green Festival 2009 incorporated a stage of the Tour Series Cycle Race on 4 June. Peterborough was chosen as one of ten city centre venues for this national event and it attracted an estimated 8,000 visitors to the city and was watched by an

estimated 3m television viewers on ITV4. It is intended that the city will host a stage of this series in 2010.

- The city council has made significant efforts to reduce its own carbon footprint including the replacement of hundreds of individual printers, photocopiers and fax machines with a significantly smaller number of multi-function devices.
- The Council is also taking part in the shadow Carbon Trading Scheme administered by the Local Government Information Unit. Learning from this pilot will inform the statutory scheme which will be implemented nationally in 2010.
- A successful Masterclass involving, amongst others, Members of the Environment Capital Scrutiny Committee, was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> November 2009. Hosted by Jonathon Porritt, the outcomes from this important event will be fed into the city's further work on sustainability.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Who would declare us as Environment Capital and would there be an independent verification process to support that claim? *There is no one body who would declare us as Environment Capital and in part it would be for us to develop the criteria as none currently existed. We needed to set a standard that other people could challenge and our claim should be able to stand up to external audit.*
- Was any other city already claiming the title of Environment Capital? *No one is claiming it at the moment. We are looking to set the standard and would look to get our claim audited and we are up for being challenged.*
- At the recent Jonathon Porritt Masterclass, Forum for the Future had ranked us 10<sup>th</sup> out of 21 cities for sustainability. Was this a concern? *The Forum's report looked at the 20 largest cities in the country which were all significantly bigger than Peterborough. It showed that there were some areas in which we should be doing far better, for example health and education. Waste produced per household was high when compared to other cities. This has been a problem for some time and needed more work.*
- Why was Central Ward still having weekly black bin collections? *The three bin system has achieved a lot in the City but there is still a need to do a lot of work with a number of communities across the City, particularly around awareness and education. The Deputy Leader would clarify as to whether all of Central Ward had a weekly collection and would provide an update as to the work being done in that area.*
- It was important that dates were started to be added to some of this work, including dates we would have done more work, dates for reports on why Peterborough generates more waste and what work is being done in Central Ward and a possible date for declaring us the Environment Capital. *The Deputy Leader undertook to provide future dates in writing outside of this meeting.*
- There is already an Environment Manifesto and it is important that we implement the targets that we already had.
- Improvements to the housing stock are already being made by Cross Keys Homes but there are significant opportunities for improving the energy efficiency of privately owned and privately rented properties. This work also has a significant impact on the eradication of fuel poverty.
- How were the figures about Travelchoice arrived at? *This is an area that cannot be calculated easily other than for bus passenger journeys. For walking, cycling and car journey reduction a representative survey of residents' behaviour before and after Travelchoice was used and the figures are based on that survey data.*
- It is important that accurate statistics are used and when publicising that information it should be made clear that the figures are from a survey. *Counts can only be done on certain routes and then modelled. This is accepted practice and the data is used to try and encourage people to change their behaviours.*

- We need to get better at publicising the facts, both good and bad, and put it in a way that people can see what it means to them personally. *This view was fully supported and there had been an increase in communications over the last few months but we needed to encourage more people to make changes. More work was needed and the Deputy Leader would speak to the Communications Team.*
- Whilst the report is good at highlighting good practice it does not highlight the negatives. The Advisory Committee on Climate Change had indicated that 8,000 wind turbines needed to be constructed to provide sufficient renewable energy but 3/4 of turbine applications were being refused by planning authorities. What could we do to reverse this trend when applications were being considered by the Planning Committee? *It was not possible to control the Planning Committee but we would like to see proposals for more renewable energy in the area. The legal advisor stated that the Ministry of Defence had a number of issues with turbines as they could affect flying space. A Planning Inspector would be holding a public inquiry in November to look at objections and this should provide guidance on how to deal with future applications.*
- The Council should take a lead on using alternative power in its own buildings. Could ideas be brought forward in a future report? *This was an area that was being looked at. Often the up-front costs were high but some could be recouped back over time. There would be no point in doing work on buildings which we may not own in the future. Some work is being started with schools, particularly when new extensions were being built. Regulations had changed over recent years so that there was a need to take account of the environmental impact of buildings.*
- The report by the Forum for the Future would be a useful document showing comparable data with other cities. It may be useful to ask the Forum to carry out further research with cities of a similar size to us.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

- (i) That the Deputy Leader provides a further update at our meeting in March 2010.
- (ii) That a further report is provided on the progress of using alternative sources of energy within Council buildings.
- (iii) That communications with residents are improved to ensure that the consequences of peoples' actions are highlighted.
- (iv) That further information is provided on targets of further work including dates.
- (v) That education is improved in certain areas of the city on waste and recycling.
- (vi) That the Director of Environment Capital reports back with a list of cities we could be compared with and whether Forum for the Future could undertake further research for us.

## **7. Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/11 to 2014/15**

The Executive Director of Strategic Resources apologised for Councillor Seaton who had had to leave for another appointment. If any members had any questions directly for Councillor Seaton, he would respond in writing outside of the meeting.

The Cabinet had considered the Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/11 to 2014/15 at their meeting on 12 October 2009. As part of the Annual Budget Framework the Cabinet was required to consult with the Committee and other local stakeholders on the medium term financial plan.

The last Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007 provided a three year financial settlement for Councils which provided some certainty for the Revenue Support Grant and Dedicated Schools Grant. The final year of this settlement was 2010/11. The next three year settlement was highly likely to be less favourable nationally with the national budget in March effectively outlining a requirement to reduce overall spending in public services in future. This bleak financial picture will face whoever forms the Government after the General Election.

The 2009-10 budget had been set in the context of the continuing effects of the recession and in particular the reduced income streams expected, the impact of the Icelandic bank investments and the potential for increased pressure in demand led budgets. The Council had faced additional budget pressures during the year, including increased demand for children' social care, the ongoing impacts of the recession and the need to reprofile the Cross Keys Homes VAT shelter income over the next few years, rather than receiving it all in the current financial year. If left unmanaged, these pressures would total £8m.

The Council remained committed to its strategy in delivering service efficiencies and improvements using a proactive approach to managing council finances. A range of actions and measures had been implemented to manage these additional pressures, including:

- Use of balances to smooth impact;
- Delivery of departmental savings plans;
- Review of departmental reserves; and
- Target of external funding

Several budget scenarios on the impact of future funding levels had been modelled to assist with decision making in setting the budget for 2010/11 and provisional budgets for the following four years. The scenarios assumed the funding of no further cost pressures, and these would need to be absorbed within budget plans. The following impacts would arise from the scenarios indicated:

<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Impact by 2014-15</b>
1 - Original MTFS baseline (grant increase)	£1.3m deficit
2 – grant freeze every year	£8.1m deficit
3 – 5% grant reduction	£12.1m deficit
4 – 10% grant reduction	£16m deficit

The Council would need to tackle these possible deficits, whilst maintaining its commitment to meeting priorities and ensuring community needs were met longer term. To do so it would be necessary to undertake the following work streams to help deliver this:

- Review of service levels, fees and charges;
- Business Transformation expanded and accelerated;
- Review capital programme to release capacity;
- Asset disposal plans accelerated where practical;
- Review and ongoing challenge of projects;
- Review of the collection fund.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Council in February 2009 assumed Council Tax increases of 2.5% in each of the years up to and including 2011/12. It had been assumed that the tax increase would follow through in each year to 2014/15 and was used for modelling purposes only at this stage.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- What contribution had concessionary fares made to the position of the Operations budget? *An extra £242,000 had been put into the budget for concessionary fares and we had managed to save £80,000 after negotiations with suppliers. Demand had risen by 6% and there were a number of reasons for this increase, including Peterborough being a sustainable travel town which made it easier to travel on public transport.*
- What was the current expenditure on consultants? *This needed to be looked at in relation to the ratio of savings arising from their work. Consultants were usually*

*employed on an invest to save basis and the current ratio of savings to cost was around 3:1. Officers would pull together detailed figures.*

- *How much money was being proposed to be delegated down to the Neighbourhood Councils? No decisions had yet been made and it would depend on what each of the neighbourhoods needed. This was why it was important that Neighbourhood Plans were developed.*
- *Would some Neighbourhood Councils have larger budgets if they knew what was needed in their area? There was no simple answer. In areas such as grounds maintenance decisions would need to be made by the Council as to what it would accept as a minimum standard.*
- *Would the budget to Cabinet have details of the amounts to be delegated to Neighbourhood Councils? The amount of money would be the same and decisions on how it would be delegated would need to be made at the appropriate time.*
- *This consultation was not extensive and some authorities were consulting much earlier in the process. A more proactive process was needed. Officers were open to suggestions on how consultation could be improved but it was a two way process.*
- *A request for details of the Operations Action Plan was requested a number of weeks ago but had not been received. The report only gave broad headings with no detail of what savings had been put forward. Details of the action plan savings would be left with the Committee tonight and officers would be happy to meet with Members to go through them in detail.*
- *Were any departments undertaking zero based budgeting this year? Zero based budgeting was happening at various levels, for example concessionary fares and business support, but it was not being done on a Council wide basis.*
- *Was the Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance what you would expect it to be? It was close to what was expected for this time of the year but performance would be challenging, especially with business rates. This was a national problem.*
- *Would it be possible to have a breakdown of what the capacity bids were for 2010/11 and 2011/12? Officers would send the schedules to the Committee.*
- *Would it be possible to provide a list of discretionary spending areas, including why we provide the service and what the effect would be of not providing it? It would be difficult to define statutory levels but officers would look to providing details of the top 10 - 20 discretionary services with approximate values.*
- *Were officers concerned at the current position of the Capital Programme? There was a profile date for when we expected a receipt to be received and this was proactively reviewed each month.*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Cabinet provide details of the proposed budgets for the Neighbourhood Councils including how much will be delegated and when this will happen.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

- (i) That the draft questions which had been developed be forwarded to the Executive Director for him to provide a response.
- (ii) Officers to provide details of the top 10 – 20 discretionary services with approximate values.
- (iii) That the Chairman of the Committee works with officers in developing a simpler report for the future.
- (iv) Officers to provide details of the savings made against the cost of employing consultants.
- (v) Officers to provide a breakdown of the capacity bids for 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Councillor Goldspink left the meeting.

## 8. Progress on the Delivery of the Local Area Agreement Priority

The Committee received an update on the performance as at September 2009 of the Environment Capital outcomes contained within the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Peterborough's LAA contained four priorities: Creating Strong and Supportive Communities; Creating the UK's Environment Capital; Creating Opportunities, Tackling Inequalities; Substantial and Truly Sustainable Growth. Each of those priorities had four specific outcomes, beneath which sat a diverse range of actions and interventions to deliver lasting positive change for Peterborough.

The Environment Capital priority was measured by four specific outcomes: Overall Consumption of Natural Resources, Increasing the Use of Sustainable Transport, Growing our Environment Business Sector and Making Peterborough Cleaner and Greener. A Red/Amber/Green flagging system was used to indicate overall performance against each of the outcomes – red indicated that the outcome was significantly behind target, amber indicated that the outcome was experiencing difficulties, and green indicated that the outcome was on target or had achieved its objectives.

Overall the Environment Capital priority was reported at Amber for this period. The "Use of Natural Resources" outcome had stayed at Red during the last quarter although there were signs of improvement including a reduction in the overall level of contamination in the recycled waste collected. The "Cleaner and Greener" outcome had stayed at Amber as fly tipping reports and enforcement activity was still behind target.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Were there any examples of really good school travel plans which could be used as best practice with other schools? *Most schools are engaged and tried to use best practice to encourage those schools not yet involved.*
- The Voyager School were commended as good practice and they should be used as best practice. They have done a lot of work on sustainable methods of transport and the students monitor the plan themselves.
- Did we look for best practice in all of the target areas? *We could do more and are always learning. Systems are not as good as they should be and we do not always shout out about our successes.*
- Was there any way there could be some competition between schools, for example best sustainable travel rates?
- How were garden waste bins collected as there was a rumour that items in the brown bins were put in to the black bins as anything that did not compost down within three months was sent to landfill? *Officers would raise this with the Commercial Services Director and seek clarification.*

### **ACTION AGREED**

That officers would clarify with the Commercial Services Director what happened to the waste contained within the brown bins.

## 9. 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.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- A decision on approving the shortlist of bidders for the Energy from Waste Facility was due to be taken this month. In light of the decision of the Secretary of State to grant permission for the PREL facility, should the Council look again as to whether it should have its own facility? *It was agreed to discuss this issue at the next Group Representative's meeting.*

**ACTION AGREED**

To note the latest version of the Forward Plan.

**10. Work Programme**

We considered the Work Programme for 2009/10.

**ACTION AGREED**

To add an item on the Christmas Park and Ride service to the Work Programme for March 2010.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 14 January 2010 at 7pm.

CHAIRMAN  
7.00 - 8.55 pm