

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 15th March, 2021 as a Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT

Councillor JP Findlow (Chairman)
Councillor Q Abel (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors L Braithwaite, S Brookfield, J Buckley, T Dean, A Farrall, P Groves, M Hunter, D Jefferay, C Leach and K Parkinson

VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor David Brown
Councillor Sally Holland
Councillor Rob Moreton
Councillor Denis Murphy

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Frank Jordan- Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Place
Paul Bayley- Director for Environment and Neighbourhood Services
Peter Skates- Director of Growth and Enterprise
Ralph Kemp- Head of Environmental Services

59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

60 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the meeting 12 February 2021 be accepted as a correct and accurate record.

61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

62 WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no declarations of the Party Whip.

63 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Five registered speakers attended the meeting and gave a statement on the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Congleton.

- 1) Congleton Town Councillor, Paul Duffy spoke against the proposed closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) in Congleton. He queried the stated £4million costs to build a new site and suggested that these were more in the region of £100k per annum. The Council could find £100k funding through the Capital Programme. With the addition of new homes to the area a generated income had been proposed of £8.5million, this could be invested back as a HWRC. He recommended that the Cabinet decision in April be delayed to enable proper scrutiny of other plans.
- 2) Brereton Parish Councillor, Andy Lindsay spoke in favour of a new HWRC in Congleton, and drew attention to the fact that there had been an increase in housing in the Brereton area with 3,000 new homes being built around Congleton.
Councillor Lindsay advised the Committee that the Council should rethink as there was an opportunity to build a new HWRC in Congleton with good road access to the new Congleton Link Road.
- 3) Congleton Town Councillor, Robert Douglas spoke against the proposed closure of the Congleton HWRC. He advised the Committee that over the past three months, residents had been challenging the £4million anticipated build costs. In Norfolk and Nottingham, Local Authorities had built new sites for less than this. Councillor Douglas challenged the statement in the report that stated residents would only add 1 or 2 items to their domestic waste bin. He advised the Committee that in his opinion queues to alternative HWRCs would get worse, that would put lives at risk and this had not been highlighted anywhere in the report. Finally he requested that this Committee consider a working group to look into alternative options for Congleton and then to report its findings back in 6 months.
- 4) Congleton Town Councillor, Kay Wesley spoke against the proposed closure of Congleton HWRC. She advised the Committee that she was the Chair of the Community and Environment Committee at Congleton Town Council. She noted that Cheshire East Council had ambitious goals to reduce waste and improve air quality but she suggested the closure of Congleton HWRC would contribute to working against those targets. She felt there was a significant risk of fly tipping. She also noted the Equality Impact Assessment included as part of the agenda report had a passing reference to disabled residents having to be driven to the tip. Councillor Wesley challenged the statement there was no gender impact in that a disproportionate number were women, who were vulnerable, older or single parent without a car. She advised the Committee that it should consider recommending that a Cabinet decision on 13th April would be premature and that it would be more prudent to establish a Task and Finish Group to explore avenues before reaching a decision.
- 5) Congleton Town Councillor, Suzy Firkin spoke against the proposed closure of the Congleton HWRC and encouraged this Committee to be part of the solution by challenging the Portfolio Holder and Leader of the Council to do better in the way other councils and countries are finding creative solutions. Councillor Firkin challenged the consultation data and suggested it was highly contested. Councillor Firkin suggested the closure of the site at Congleton would be an easy and flawed decision and that Climate and Budget need to be taken seriously. Councillor Firkin

agreed with her colleagues on the Town Council by advising that the Committee should consider recommending that a Cabinet decision on 13th April would be premature and that it would be more prudent to establish a Task and Finish Group to explore avenues before reaching a decision.

As a point of clarity the Chairman advised that this Committee could advise but not instruct Cabinet.

RESOLVED

That the speakers be thanked for their attendance and statements and were invited to stay in the meeting where the main points of concern could be addressed later in the agenda.

64 HOUSEHOLD WASTE & RECYCLING CENTRE- CONSULTATION RESULTS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the large number of public speakers, visiting Member presence and general public interest in this item, the Committee agreed to bring this item forward.

Councillor Laura Crane, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Waste, introduced this item and addressed some of the points made by public speakers. Firstly the Committee were advised that the draft Cabinet report had been provided with the in light of the feedback from the previous meeting that Members considered there was not enough information to make an informed decision to scrutinise properly. The recommendation to Cabinet was a replacement Household Waste Recycling Centre would not be provided in Congleton when the lease on the current Congleton Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) expired in September 2021. Councillor Crane agreed that a Task and Finish Group could be a good idea to move forward with new ideas. Finally Councillor Crane noted that rural communities within the borough had never had any HWRC within a drivable distance.

Councillor Crane then handed over to Frank Jordan, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for Place to give an overview of the report contained within the agenda. Frank reminded the Committee that the proposal was at a draft stage but it was important for this Committee to consider the options.

There were two that were key:

- 1) Environmental. The recommendation would support the Councils Environment and Waste strategies, in particular the strategic objective to reduce waste.
- 2) Finance and Value for Money. Current provision was favourable to the published guidance, as 96% of the borough would be able to reach a HWRC within 20 mins.

The current HWRC contract would end in March 2023. The current market was volatile, and there was a significant risk that the costs would be higher and the key issue with Congleton, was the site was not in the Council's ownership. The £4 million within the report to provide a new centre for Congleton was based on a specification, scope and size for Congleton, and acquisition costs. Any

comparison would need to be on a similar specification. The cost of borrowing £4million would be £250k per annum and this was not in the council budget. The recommendation did not include a replacement facility.

Ralph Kemp, Head of Environmental Services confirmed that the council had looked at the results of closing the Arclid site, and that the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) took into account a worst case scenario.

Ralph reminded the Committee that under the existing service there were rural communities that had never had access to a HWRC and those who do not have a car, and this did not feed into the fairness strand of CEC Corporate Plan.

The Chairman queried if any further work had been done, since the last meeting, on the potential to buy the current Congleton site with a sensible offer. Frank confirmed there had been several approaches to the freeholder, who had confirmed the site was not available for sale.

The Committee were invited to ask questions.

There was some discussion on:

- the validity of the effect of air quality;
- a previous Cabinet project that identified two potential alternative sites for Congleton;
- the possibility of re-prioritising funds through the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to fund a new site in Congleton;
- the fact the consultation was so unpopular and yet the proposal is to close the site at Congleton;
- that it would take between 10-15 years potentially to change the culture that related to reduction of waste;
- queries about the breakdown of the £4million costs for a new centre in Congleton;
- the impact of the Congleton closure on surrounding sites and potential road traffic incidents;
- the impact of new housing developments to Congleton;
- the impacts of more people travelling on the environment and potential issues with flytipping;
- whether the Covid-19 restrictions had impacted the data being used;
- whether any modelling had taken into account Biddulph or other areas;
- whether some of the users were small businesses and how that was represented in the data;
- the potential to relaunch the council waste volunteer programme in a bid to reduce waste;

Ralph gave assurances and advice to the Committee that:

- data showed that people did not flytip more when the Arclid site closed;
- the estimated CO2 emissions impact were listed within the report;

- Post-lockdown visitor numbers at the HWRC had been in line with other years so considered to be valid; and
- Cheshire East were in conversation with other Local Authorities to potentially use their sites too.

Visiting Members were given the opportunity to speak and raised the following points:

- Councillor Rob Moreton suggested passing the decision on Congleton to the newly formed Communities and Environment Committee in May rather than going to Cabinet in April. Councillor Sally Holland raised the issue of road infrastructure, the £4 million breakdown of costs, the CO2 figures and questioned if they were they taken during Covid closure in March 2020, the inequality in Congleton in that residents would have to travel 40 minutes roundtrip to tip, and she felt it was irresponsible to think flytipping wouldn't increase, Councillor Holland was in favour of a Task and Finish Group to find a possible solution.
- Councillor David Brown had previously circulated his concerns via email to the Committee and asked that they be considered. He felt there needed to be a case for a HWRC in Congleton.
- Councillor Denis Murphy did not accept the reasons being given to close the site at Congleton and requested that Cabinet and officers change the recommendation.

Ralph gave assurances to the visiting Members that the figures were taken after the first national lockdown and was a reasonable representation of previous years. The £4million estimated cost for a replacement site was based on an Assets assessment.

Paul Bayley, Director for Environment and Neighbourhood Services added that flytipping continued to be monitored and a pilot had been launched on a neighbourhood in Crewe where the majority of flytipping had been identified.

The Committee had some discussion about the possibility of a Task and Finish Group, and there were concerns raised as to the capacity that group would have to complete any substantial work before September 2021.

RESOLVED- That:

- Frank and Ralph be thanked for their attendance and updates to the Committee;
- Peter Skates provide any written correspondence between the Assets Team and the current landowner in respect of potential land sale and/or negotiations;
- Ralph Kemp to liaise with the Communications Team to discuss the possibility of promoting the Volunteer Waste Programme operated by ANSA;
- A Task and Finish Group be formed to urgently investigate all the options available to retain a Household Waste Recycling Centre in Congleton; and
- For no permanent closure of HWRC provision in Congleton.

65 CARBON ACTION PLAN: UPDATE

Councillor Nick Mannion, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, introduced the item before handing over to Ralph Kemp, Head of Environmental Services who gave a short presentation.

Ralph advised the Committee that part of his role including being the Responsible Officer for Council's Carbon Commitment to become carbon neutral by 2025 and that he worked across council with officers to deliver this commitment.

Ralph gave the Committee some background to Climate Change that included flooding and heatwaves across Cheshire East and the North West. These impacts were not felt equally across communities, however there was a strong ambition to reduce carbon across the borough.

The April Town and Parish Council Conference would include the launch of a carbon toolkit plus the Council was due to launch a crowdfunding project that would enable community projects to connect with business to reduce carbon, and other small scale community projects.

The Council aimed to be carbon neutral by 2025, that was for the carbon it could control and took into account everything it had operational control on by reducing emitted carbon by 45% and offset by 55%.

It was recognised that the Council needed a culture change to put carbon at the centre of plans. The Corporate plan and Environment Strategy had objectives on carbon reduction and there was a new elearning course to form part of Personal Development Review (PDR) for employees from 2022 to encourage staff in delivering their job to reduce carbon. Also there was a big procurement focus on social value and carbon reduction.

Cheshire East had received a government grant to decarbonise a number of council buildings.

The Council had learned lessons through the pandemic and part of that related to the fleet of vehicles held by the Council and business travel. Carbon reduction could be achieved through the reduction of miles travelled and carbon per mile reduction through electric pool cars. The Council had added its first electric van for community wardens. Some vehicles were harder to adapt- e.g. bin lorries, however a trial for hydrogen powered bin lorries would be carried out and the Council was now trialing an electric bin lorry.

Alongside carbon and vehicles, the Council was looking at opportunities for nature-based capture of carbon e.g. where appropriate to plant trees, replant hedgerows and peat moss. There was also the first solar farm at Leighton moss farm.

Many Local Authorities had taken commitments. Cheshire East Council aspired to be an exemplar with its approach to achieving carbon neutrality

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions, there were discussions about:

- The inequality of decarbonisation, especially those with electric vehicles that had to trail wires across the street to charge their car;
- That there had to be structural changes to grid to achieve 50% electric cars by 2030;

Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise advised the Committee that Richard Hibbert, Head of Strategic Transport was best placed to respond to future plans for electric vehicle infrastructure in car parks and residential schemes, as more people invested in electric vehicles.

Ralph advised Members that the Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure strategy would be available for review by the end of March 2021.

In terms of biodiversity, Ralph was working with the estates colleagues to identify farms, and land that was currently available to enable future committees to make decisions on land use and whether the council needed to purchase land or work with a partner.

RESOLVED- That

- Ralph be thanked for his attendance and presentation;
- That Ralph provide a written answer in respect of the electric vehicle pricing structure for the Committee; and
- The report be received and noted.

66 FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED-

That the Forward Plan be received and noted.

67 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

The Chairman noted that this was the valedictory meeting of this Committee before the Council moves into a Committee System style of governance.

The Chairman updated the Committee on the work of the Task and Finish group for Flooding. The group had a successful pre-meeting with representatives from Poynton, an area of the borough that has arguably seen the most significant amounts of flooding. Subsequent meeting with Poynton Town Council and MP David Rutley and two flooding groups (one resident led and one Town Council led) were scheduled.

RESOLVED- That the Work Programme be received and noted.

68 POST OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman opened the item and reminded the Committee that Overview and Scrutiny at Cheshire East Council has always sought to provide an opportunity for Councillors, Partners and members of the public to:

- Challenge the performance of service providers and raise standards, to ensure that services meet people's needs;
- Hold the Council's decision makers to account; and
- Examine issues that affect the wellbeing of the people of Cheshire East.

The Chairman addressed the Committee and made comment as to some of the positive impacts this Committee has had over the years:

- A Successful Call-In that related to the Well Managed Highways Infrastructure that resulted in the agreement by Cabinet to take forward recommendations by this Committee;
- Annually the Committee closely scrutinised and contributed to the development of a number of important strategies and policies, such as Cemeteries Strategy, Waste and Local Transport Plan;
- Acting as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet in making achievements in better air quality and lower emissions; and
- Finally this Committee took on the responsibility for the Council of Flood Risk management, and the work of the current Task and Finish Group all fed into the importance placed in getting the response to flooding right for the wellbeing of Cheshire East residents and businesses.

The Chairman thanked the Members of this Committee both past and present for all contributions in helping to shape overview and scrutiny and noted that as Cheshire East Council moved towards the Committee System, that the legacy of work was built upon and expanded further.

The Committee added to notable pieces of work and cited:

- The Private Landlord Licensing Schemes that was a piece of work first started with the late Councillor Brian Roberts, that was on the current Forward Plan and will make a real difference to the residents of Crewe;
- The pilot scheme for flytipping, homelessness work, HS2 and Crewe Town Regeneration was all agreed to be productive and of value to residents; and
- The Committee agreed the current work on flooding by the Task and Finish Group had made significant progress and at this time does not yet know how important that work will turn out to be.

The Committee extended their thanks to Councillor Paul Findlow for his Chairmanship and to the support of Helen Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.53 pm

Councillor JP Findlow (Chairman)