

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY 8 MAY 2013 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Layden (Chairman), Councillors Bainbridge, Bowditch, McDevitt, Nedved, Scarborough (as substitute for Councillor Watson) and Whalen.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Allison - Observer
Councillor Bloxham – Observer
Councillor Mrs Martlew – Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Local Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Manager

EEOSP.21/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Graham and Watson and the Director of Economic Development

EEOSP.22/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Bainbridge and Whalen declared an interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item A.4 – Migration of Purple Sacks to Wheeled Bin Refuse Collection. The interest related to the fact that they were part of the consultation process.

EEOSP.23/13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Chairman reminded the Panel that at a previous meeting the Deputy Chief Executive had agreed to explore the possibility of a representative from the City Council taking up a place on the University of Cumbria Board. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that he had contact the University but had heard nothing to date. He agreed to follow up the action and keep the Panel informed of the outcome.

Members were in agreement that the City Council should have representation on the Board as the University was important to the City. It would provide a platform for the Council to have an input into discussion about the activities of the University and be part of the decision making process. The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder added that the University should acknowledge that the University was the University of Cumbria and not all facilities should be based in Lancaster.

RESOLVED – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2013 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

(2) That the Deputy Chief Executive follow up the contact with the University of Cumbria and feed the information back to the Panel.

EEOSP.24/13 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

There were no matters which had been the subject of call in.

EEOSP.25/13 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman advised that, since publication of the agenda, consultation had begun on the migration of purple sacks to wheeled bin refuse collection. Therefore the item was moved from the private part of the meeting to the public part.

EEOSP.26/13 OVERVIEW REPORT INCORPORATING THE WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN ITEMS

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.10/13 which provided an overview of matters related to the work of the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Details of the latest version of the work programme and Key Decision items relevant to the Panel were also included.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that:

- The Notice of Key Executive Decisions had been published on 5 April 2013. The items that related to the work of this Panel were:
 - KD.01/13 – Purple Sack Review – to be considered later in the meeting.
 - KD.07/13 – Bring Sites Review – to be considered later in the meeting.

Since publication of the agenda a further Notice of Key Executive Decision had been published on 1 May 2013. That notice included the above items as well as:

- KD.11/13 – Processing of Penalty Charge notices for Cumbria County Council
- KD.14/13 – Carlisle Local Plan 2015-2030 – Preferred Options
- There were no Minute Excerpts from the Executive's meeting held on 8 April 2013.
- Task and Finish Groups
 - Carlisle Tourist Information Centre (TIC) Task Group – The Task Group had undertaken a visit to the temporary TIC based at The Lodge, Carlisle Cathedral on 26 March 2013. An update note was submitted by the Chair of the Task Group, Councillor Bainbridge. The note covered suggestions for the Assembly Rooms and the redevelopment of the TIC and improved external signage which Members believed would help to increase footfall into the TIC. The note also stated that there had been positive feedback on the temporary siting of the TIC.

An Officer led Steering Group had been set up in Economic Development and Members were concerned that work may be duplicated. Therefore it was suggested that there ought to be some level of representation or feedback between the two groups. The TIC working Group would meet again in a further 6 months.

Councillor Bainbridge stated that staff had identified a few teething problems in the temporary location and were looking forward to being back in their permanent building.

A Member advised that the Council had received praise from a member of staff regarding the new computer equipment.

- Work Programme – The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the current work programme and advised that whilst the meeting was the last in the current municipal year some items would be carried over into the new municipal year. She suggested that Members may wish to give thought to what issues they may wish to be included in the coming year. The Chairman reminded Members that there were already some big issues in the work programme for the coming year, including waste management, car parking, events policy, review of tourism, Talkin Tarn and the Local Plan.

A Member believed it was important that waste management was given priority and more meetings may be required as the issue was crucial.

The Chairman believed that if there were up to 3 items on the agenda those issues could be considered at length and the Panel could be more proactive and be able to inform the Executive in a positive way.

RESOLVED –1) That, subject to the issues raised above, the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Forward Plan items relevant to this Panel be noted.

2) That the Tourist Information Centre Task and Finish Group meet on a 6 monthly basis to monitor the work of the Tourist Information Centre.

EEOSP.27/13 TALKIN TARN

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.11/13 that included a draft report of the Talkin Tarn Task and Finish group. Four meetings of the Task and Finish Group had been held that included consultation with Officers from the Green Spaces team, the Chief Accountant, stakeholders and a meeting to share findings with the Portfolio Holder.

The report outlined the conclusions and offered a number of recommendations that the Executive were requested to consider and respond.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

A Member believed that the shortfall of £10,000 was not a huge amount if the Tarn was to be of benefit to the people of Carlisle.

A Member, who had been a member of the Task Group, reminded Members that the report was draft and provided a series of recommendations to the Executive. He acknowledged that the central charges were to be reduced. The Council needed to look at the development potential of the Tarn. There was scope for improvement in the marketing strategy and that could be achieved by better advertising, media and use of the Council's Communications team. It was also necessary to make the Tarn more accessible from Brampton station as a survey undertaken 3-4 years previously had determined that there were a large number of visitors from the North East so that should be looked at as part of

the catchment area. There was no specific transport to the Tarn at present so the Member requested that Officers look at whether present bus routes could be extended or whether an individual operator would be willing to run "summer specials".

The Member also suggested that Officers look again at the performance of the tea room and outlined the options indicated within the report. The Member believed that the poor performance over the previous 2 years had been due to bad weather.

The Chairman invited Councillor Allison, who had also been a Member of the Task Group for his input. Councillor Allison stated that he had enjoyed working on the Group but he was concerned about the central charges and the Blue Green algae. He suggested that the Tarn could be set up as a Trust or a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council.

A Member was opposed to the Tarn becoming a Trust but believed that the Tarn could be better used and suggested something along the lines of a country fair may be popular. Young people should also be encouraged to visit the Tarn and the Council should taken advantage of the proximity to Hadrian's Wall and Brampton station. The Member also suggested mystery tours to the Tarn could be reinstated. He believed that the Tarn was a benefit to the community but more could be done by working with the community.

A Member pointed out that the cost to the Council to maintain the Tarn was £35 per day and that the Tarn was a valuable asset. The Member queried whether the Tarn was included in the events profile and suggested it could be part of the Events City and Brampton folk scene.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that there had been events at the Tarn in the past and reminded Members that an outside event staged at the Tarn last year had been a wash-out while a similar event the previous year had attracted 1,000 visitors. He agreed that Officers could integrate the Tarn with regard to events but reminded Members that there was often a cost to stage events. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that it was important to maintain a balance between the tranquillity of the Tarn and the number of events.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder agreed that the Tarn could be a possible venue for future events and suggested that it could also be marketed as a venue for outside events. The Portfolio Holder suggested that, in light of the poor summers over the previous 2 years, things may not be as bad as they appeared. She confirmed that the central charges were to be reduced and commended the Working Group on the level of detail undertaken.

With regard to Brampton station the Portfolio Holder believed that it could not be compared to Penrith as it was not in the town itself and usually only carried commuters rather than tourists. Marketing would be required but it would be difficult. The Portfolio Holder stated that the local residents were aware of the Tarn but would return home for refreshments rather than have a coffee in the tea room. She suggested that a marketing strategy would be useful but it was important that the Tarn was not overwhelmed. The Portfolio Holder agreed that the performance of the tea room needed to be looked at and reminded Members that the Council had invested money to ensure the future of the facility. The report provided a lot of food for thought and some recommendations had been well researched.

A Member suggested that the Council should recruit a Business Manager to look at obtaining grants for the Tarn. He believed that it would be better to have someone with a business background.

The Chairman advised that the Task Group had not come to that conclusion and highlighted Recommendation 3 of the report that suggested that the vacancy for a Green Spaces Officer be filled as soon as possible to allow the Site Manager more time to manage the Tarn.

The Director of Local Environment advised that 2 years ago, before the reduction in the grant from the County Council there was a Business Manager in post at the Tarn and she had brought the Tarn up to the standard of other open spaces within the City Council. When funding ended that post was withdrawn and the role was covered by the Green Spaces officer and Site Management Team Leader who explored grant funding and income streams.

The Member also praised the City council for restoring the Tarn to its present state.

A Member stated that the Tarn End hotel had had potential at the time of the purchase but it was now derelict.

A Member believed that the tea room was under achieving in respect of the overall income achieved. In 2006 an Overview and Scrutiny Panel had suggested that closing the tea room at 4:30 was inadequate and that 11:00 until 5:00 would be more appropriate. A review of the opening hours was a recommendation within the report.

A Member stated that it would have been better if the hotel had been included in the purchase of the Tarn but the County Council refused. Income and activities at the Tarn was weather dependent and it was not helpful that in good weather part of the amenity closed early. With regard to advertising that needed to be further afield as local people knew about the Tarn. The Member made no apologies for the car parking charges. People from Newcastle and Hexham had complained about the charges but the Member did not agree with local people paying for an amenity that was accessed by people from outside the district.

The Member agreed that the previous Talkin Tarn Manager had done a good job in turning the site around but stated that people had to be more business minded but be mindful that they did not spoil the character of the Tarn. The Manager had brought in people who engaged in crafts such as wood turning. These were offered a small pitch to show off their crafts and there was no cost to the public. Those events could be put on again and would be environmentally acceptable.

There were also events where the car park was taken over for storage of boats which led to cars being forced to park on the grass. Because they were not on the car park there was no income from those cars. The Member suggested that in future the boats should park on the grass and leave the car park available for cars.

A Member suggested again that the first recommendation be amended to include the recruitment of a Business Manager for the Tarn.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there was information that explained how the costs for Talkin Tarn were apportioned. She agreed that the matter could be discussed with the

Executive and while the answer may be a negative one the Member would be given the reason why the post of Business Manager at the Tarn was not possible.

A Member stated that the Group had worked hard and had a wide cross section of Councillors who had come up with some recommendations. The Group had consulted with a lot of people as part of the work and he believed it would be inappropriate to alter the Group's recommendations.

Following a vote Members of the Panel agreed the Task Group's recommendations without any amendments.

RESOLVED: (1) That Report OS.11/13 – Talkin Tarn report be noted and the recommendations be submitted to the Executive for their consideration and response.

(2) That the implementation of the recommendations be monitored over the coming year.

EEOSP.28/13 PURPLE SACKS REVIEW

The Director of Local Environment submitted report LE.13/13 that set out proposals to change the purple sack service and minimise the litter currently created by the purple sack collection. The Director gave a presentation that expanded on the issues raised within the report.

The Director explained that the purple sacks were often split open by seagulls and other animals and would-be vandals. The proposed changes would support the Clean Up Carlisle campaign and significantly improve the quality of the local environment.

Where it would be impractical to move a property onto wheeled bin collection it was proposed to provide "gull sacks". The Director showed Members a sample of a Gull sack currently used by another authority.

It was anticipated that an increase in the number of wheeled bin collections would result in an increase in the levels of recycling in those areas thus reducing the residual waste presented for collection.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder thanked the Director and her team for the work undertaken. The Portfolio Holder hoped that the consultation would encourage people to comment on the proposals. No decision had been made and the discussions at the Panel were the first to be undertaken. It was important to get the balance right as purple sacks being ripped was detrimental to an area but rows of wheelie bins at the front of properties could also cause visual disamenity and should therefore be stored off the street where possible and where that was not possible then gull sacks could be used. Those were the reasons for the consultation.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

A Member offered to trial the gull sacks as he believed they would be a great improvement on the purple sacks.

A Member agreed with looking at the principle of bag collections and believed that part of the problem was that bags were put out for collection too early. With regard to recyclates the Member stated that some plastics were light and were blown out of the sacks; he did

not believe gull sacks would address that problem. With regard to health and safety the Member informed that the fire service had advised that wheelie bins should not be placed at the front of properties as they could impede emergency vehicles accessing the property. The Member stated that care was needed by refuse vehicles accessing back lanes and reminded Members of an incident some years ago when a resident was injured by a refuse vehicle reversing along a back lane.

The Director of Local Environment explained that crews were fully trained and if a vehicle had to reverse the crew assisted the driver. If it was not safe to access the back lane the bins would be wheeled to the end of the lane and replaced when emptied.

A Member advised that some authorities had carried out a small pilot to gain a response to the changes and queried whether that could be considered.

The Director explained that due to the small number of properties involved it would not be appropriate to carry out a pilot. Therefore, dependent upon the decision made by Executive, the scheme would be rolled out and monitored.

A Member queried what the consequences were if residents continued to put out purple sacks.

The Director explained that the Council had powers to specify how household waste should be presented and action could be taken by the waste team if not presented properly. Residents would be advised of the requirements by letter and if waste was presented incorrectly a Section 46 notice could be served on the resident.

In response to a comment by a Member the Director confirmed that the gull sacks would not prevent identity theft but would make it more difficult.

The Portfolio Holder advised that her property had been converted to wheelie bin collection and there had been no problem.

The Director confirmed that if a resident presented a purple sack the correct approach would be to provide support and advise. She believed that most householders would be supportive of the proposed changes and that was part of the purpose of the consultation. If the Executive agreed to the proposed changes residents would be advised how to present their refuse.

A Member believed it was right that the refuse rounds were reviewed but he did not wish to see bins on the front of streets. The Member suggested that Euro bins could be used in some areas where wheelie bins were not suitable.

The Director explained that Euro bins would also be considered and they would be classed as a wheelie bin.

A Member suggested that sponsorship on the gull sacks could be a way of reducing costs.

The Portfolio Holder agreed to look into the issue.

A Member queried what the handling implications would be of the gull sacks.

The Director advised that the cost may change in the final report to the Executive due to ongoing investigations into the proposal. The Director advised that Option c would have more impact on crews than Option b as with the gull sacks there were more handling issues and better gloves would be required due to the higher risk of stabs and cuts from sharp objects.

The Director explained that the sacks could be folded and stored by the resident and filled at the front door on the day of collection.

RESOLVED – (1) That Report LE.13/13 – Migration of Purple Sacks to Wheeled Bin Refuse Collection be noted.

(2) That the Panel agreed that change was required and agreed that Option a (to do nothing) was not an option. With regard to Options b and c the Panel agreed that their preferred option would be Option c as they did not want wheelie bins stored at the front of houses.

(3) That consultation should include Cumbria Fire Service for their advice on storage of waste receptacles at the front of houses so that the Executive were informed of this when they made their decision.

(4) That the recommendations from the Panel be submitted to the Executive for inclusion into the Executive Report “Migration of Purple Sacks to Wheeled Bin Refuse Collection”.

PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Public and Press were excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they contained exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in the paragraph number (as indicated in brackets against the minutes) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act.

EEOSP.29/13 BRING SITES REVIEW

The Director of Local Environment submitted Report LE.14/13 that considered options available to the Council and the costs and risks associated with each option. The Director gave a presentation that expanded on the issues raised within the report. She explained that the Bring Sites were in operation before kerbside recycling collections were introduced and relevant contracts were due to expire in 2014 and 2015. The use of Bring Sites had reduced as more people used the kerbside recycling. Therefore it was decided to undertake a review the current level of service provision required alongside the popular kerbside recycling collection and bring the contracts into line.

In considering the report Members raised the following questions and comments:

A Member was impressed with the proposal and believed that it would save money and create a better service. He suggested that supervision of the contract should be taken into account in any tender process.

The Director confirmed that an e-mail had been sent to all City Councillors advising them of the consultation on the bring sites review and the purple sacks review. With regard to

the impact on education if sites were removed from schools, the Director advised that education would continue and children would be encouraged to convince parents to recycle more.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder advised that the meeting of the Panel was the first discussion on the issues and there would not be time to feed back information from the consultation before the report was presented to the Executive for consideration.

The Director explained that sites that were performing well would be retained while those that were not used would be closed.

A Member agreed with the proposal in principle but queried whether distances between sites had or would also be taken into account.

The Director explained that Officers had looked at the provision of the service and those that were being used would be retained. The service began before kerbside recycling was introduced and a review should have been undertaken at that point as there was now an overprovision of service.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that no decision had been taken and the provision of sites would be part of the consultation.

A Member was pleased that the Panel were being consulted at the start of the process as it gave the opportunity to scrutinise the proposals and make recommendations to the Executive.

A Member would have preferred to have had more information about the criteria for which sites would potentially be removed before the meeting.

The Director circulated a document that indicated which sites may be removed if the Executive approved the proposals.

A Member stated that if Members were not happy with the decision made by the Executive on 31 May 2013 their decision could be called in for further scrutiny.

The Director advised that the consultation period would end on 28 May 2013 and a summary of responses could be circulated to Panel Members prior to the Executive meeting.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the consultation period gave Members the opportunity to raise issues prior to consideration by the Executive.

RESOLVED – (1) That Report LE.14/13 – Bring Sites Review – be noted.

(2) That the Panel agreed with and supported the recommendations within the report. Following scrutiny of the evidence of the use of the Bring Sites, Members agreed that the criteria followed for the proposed closure of a site had been fair.

(The meeting ended at 12.50pm)