



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2005 IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.42 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs C M Aston (Chairman), Mrs P Lindsley, Mr M Oram, Mr J Ryman, Kathie Webber and Mr R K Woollard

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr C Richards (Aylesbury Vale District Council)

OTHERS PRESENT

Ms A Fitzwalter	Acting Group Manager Traffic Systems & Parking
Mrs P Francis	Senior Technician Traffic Management Strategy
Mrs K Jones	Democratic Services Officer
Mr D Sweetland	Policy Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

The Head of Legal and Administration Services reported apologies for absence from Mr D A B Green, Mr W Lidgate, Mr D J Rowlands, Dr B Stenner, Mr J Warder (Chiltern District Council) and Mr A Walters (South Bucks District Council).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Kathie Webber declared that on the Speed Limit Review Update, she would be speaking on as the Lead Spokesman for Transportation.

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Environment on 23 February 2005, copies of which had been circulated, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

The Policy Officer provided an update on the following items:

Joint Working –a draft report had been prepared.

Local Transport Plan – Marcus Rogers had agreed to revisit the Committee in June 2005.

South East Plan – as agreed a letter had been sent to Rodney Royston incorporating the comments of the Committee.

2 MATTERS ARISING

A member asked if any plans were in place for tackling air pollution. The Policy Officer replied that the new Committee could form a Working Group. The Chairman requested that members of the new Committee should support the Policy Officer in revisiting issues that have been covered in the past.

3 SPEED LIMIT REVIEW UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Anuradha Fitzwalter Acting Group Manager Traffic Systems and Parking and Pat Francis Senior Technician Traffic Management Strategy to the meeting who gave a presentation on the Speed Limit Review. The presentation covered background to the review, current status, issues affecting delivery and the way forward.

Background

- The original estimate had been that a review would take 10 years to complete.
- A revised estimate had been to complete a countrywide review of speed limits by March 2006.
- The county was divided into 14 areas and they were prioritised on casualty record.
- The work commenced in April 2003 with a project budget of £450k.

Current Status

- Area 1 had been completed.
- Area 2 was the most advanced.
- Area 4 - public consultation had just been completed.
- Work on different areas was taking place concurrently.

Issues affecting delivery

- Production of guidelines.
- Tasks have been more time consuming than anticipated for example measuring road lengths although this has since been sub-contracted to Babtie.
- Participation/consultation has had an adverse impact on time.

- Working Group meetings proved difficult to arrange. The working groups were composed of county councillors, officers and the police. Currently there were difficulties with the availability of county councillors due to the forthcoming election.

Project Management Budget

- Original budget £150k
- Approximately £20k had been spent in 2003/04
- Approximately £320k had been spent in 2004/05.

Costs

- Approximately £175k per area. Legal costs include payment of advertising notices.
- Many costs are still unknown for example signing and legal Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs).
- Total project costs have risen to £2m. Members were advised that it was felt that the initial costing and estimates of time were unrealistic.

Members were advised that Cabinet were aware of the slippage in the timetable but that they remained committed to the completion. BCC has not received an allocation from Central Government for this work through the LTP. Previously more funding was made available if an authority was not performing well. However, the Cabinet Member for Transportation has made a commitment that £500k will be available in 2005/06 and a similar amount for the following two years representing a total of £2m funding.

Options for reducing costs/time

- Implement speed limits in communities only
- Undertake TRO/schedule preparation internally (although this would impact on officer time)
- Press advertisements – possible changes nationally
- No roundel markings
- It may be necessary to review contributions from Parish Councils.

The Policy Officer suggested that the Committee could identify where cost savings could be, include them in the future work programme and revisit them in approximately a years' time.

The Way Forward

- A short report was presented to the Transportation Board in February 2005
- SLR team tasked with identifying cost savings
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee input
- Report back to Cabinet member with recommendations.

Recommendations

- Continue project in same manner
- Extend deadline
- Additional £1.6m required
- Additional staff
- Continued support for ETP measures to ensure project's success.

Members were advised that less detailed reviews had been completed in Suffolk and Oxfordshire and that it had now proved necessary to revisit the speed limits. A member advised the Committee that he had visited Suffolk who had pioneered the introduction of speed limits. One of the consequences of this was that the first attempt is not always right.

The Committee had a lengthy discussion on the length of time taken already on the project during which it was noted that a consequence of involving the general public was changes to the original proposals. The Committee concluded that expenditure to date had been good value for money because there had been a reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads.

The Committee expressed disappointment that County Councillors were declaring themselves unavailable to attend meetings of the Working Groups. It was suggested that members of the next council who make a commitment to attend the meetings should honour this. It was also suggested that the Working Groups agree a quorum so that decisions can be taken and that they are binding on those unable to attend.

Patricia Lindsley joined the meeting at 10.56am.

Members discussed the basis of establishing speed limits and it was noted that there were issues in defining communities.

Another member noted that in his opinion measurement of value for money could be achieved by evaluating changes in attitudes and how well people stick to speed limits. He noted that the majority of offenders were local and that often the only effective measure of control would be the introduction of other measures and that this was often costly. The member suggested that BCC considers introducing physical measures to reduce speed for example cameras. He supported the plans but cautioned that they must be measured to be effective. He questioned whether or not speed limits might not be an effective means of control.

It was noted that there was generally an improved public perception of speeding as a consequence of the introduction of speed cameras. Anuradha Fitzwalter welcomed the members' suggestion in addition to introduction measurement was an integral part of the campaign.

It was agreed that speed limits were a top priority in the rural areas. The Committee also supported that Chairman's suggestion that a commitment should be made to introducing realistic speed limits across the county. It was further noted that there was a need to work with neighbouring counties because casualty reduction does not end at the county borders. The Committee agreed to the suggestion to target the KSI areas first.

Members were advised that the revised date for completion of the project is now 2009. The Chairman suggested and it was agreed that the Policy Officer drafts a letter to the Cabinet Member advising him of the Committee's concerns and asking that the slippage of the reviews be communicated to local Members and parishes. The letter should be circulated to the committee members.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their good work and hoped that it continued.

4 JOINT WORKING AND 3-TIER LOCAL GOVERNMENT DRAFT CABINET WORKING GROUP

The Committee considered the draft Cabinet Report on Joint Working between the Three Tiers of Local Government. The Policy Officer explained that the report reflects the Strategic Joint working recommendations that had been agreed at the previous meeting. These included the Parish Path Partnership, public land maintenance with a focus on highway verge cutting the Joint Waste Committee and community transport. The report included consultees comments including the need for community transport changes to health service to reflect housing growth.

One contributor to the report noted that the urban/rural split continues and that 65% of the population in Buckinghamshire is urban. They also said that there still appeared to be a lack of leads in the major policy areas such as waste. The Contracts Manager at Wycombe District Council expressed concern about the report regarding grass cutting and the BCC Contract Manager has requested a review by the Wycombe Area Manager. Members agreed that there was a need to emphasise the importance of the role played by the Local Area Coordinators.

The Chairman reported that with the introduction of Local Community Working coordinators would play a bigger role. Members were advised that the proposal was that there would be 24 local communities based on market towns and they would have local area offices. The aim is to move people away from County Hall to the local areas.

Members were advised that BALC support cluster working and that they want to encourage and support the work of local members to work with parishes. It was agreed that it was important that when cluster working is rolled out that county councillors feel involved in order to secure their support. The example of 'speed dating' in Aston Clinton was highlighted. Members were advised that cluster working would comprise of representatives from the district, parish and county.

Concern was expressed that there was a danger that cluster working would duplicate the work of local committees. It was suggested that clarification be obtained from the Chief Officer on the proposals. The Policy Officer explained that central government were keen to promote more local service delivery although the general feeling was that this had been pushed too small an area. In response to concern being raised about consultation with the local member an assurance was given that they would be involved.

During a discussion on attendance at Parish Council meetings members explained that they had been informed not to attend unless required. It was agreed that attendance at Parish Council meetings should be encouraged. A member noted that a standing item on the agenda for Marlow Town Council meetings was a report from both Wycombe District and Buckinghamshire County Council.

The Committee considered and accepted each of the revised draft recommendations.

R K Woollard and M B Oram left the meeting at 12.37pm.

The Chairman explained that a report was being presented to Cabinet on 4 April 2005 and to Aylesbury Vale District Council Cabinet on 17 May 2005 although the date of the latter meeting may be deferred.

5 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME
A. WASTE STRATEGY AND PROCUREMENT
B. REVIEWS 2001 TO 2005

The Policy Officer reported that a draft strategy on Waste Management would be available in July and on Procurement in September 2005. He suggested that the Committee should consider these reports.

It was also suggested that consideration be given to inviting the Cabinet members for Community Services and Planning and Transportation to the June meeting to outline their priorities for the next Council. This was supported by Members.

The Vice-Chairman noted that this was the last meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the Environment of Buckinghamshire to be chaired by the current Chairman and thanked her on behalf of the Committee for steering them through some very good work. Those members present supported the Vice-Chairman's comments, thanked the Chairman and noted how much they had enjoyed being on the committee. The Chairman replied that she had enjoyed the work and that she would miss it but she hoped that the views of the current committee would be fed into the new one.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 25 May 2005 at 10am in Mezzanine Room1.

MRS C M ASTON
CHAIRMAN