

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON WEDNESDAY, 31 OCTOBER
2007**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R Rowe - Chairman

* Cllr T J Hewitt - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr R J Carter

* Cllr P Coulson

* Cllr M J Hicks

* Cllr D M O'Callaghan

* Cllr R Vint

* Cllr A Ward

* Denotes attendance

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs K J Baldry, J Brazil, B E Carson, P W Hitchins, R M Lawrence, C M Pannell,
J W Squire and R J Tucker

In attendance but not participating:

Cllrs R D Gilbert and M J Howarth

Officers in attendance:

All agenda items: Strategic Director (Operations), Strategic Director (Resources), Head
of Business Development and Acting Head of Service for Operations

Item 5 (minute EPDG.6/07 below refers): Strategic Director (Community) and Building
Services Manager

EPDG.4/07 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group held on 5 June 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.5/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none was made.

EPDG.6/07 CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND STRATEGY

In December 2005, the Council introduced climate change as a new cross cutting theme. Consequently Members were being asked to consider the climate change policy, strategy and action plan which, it was anticipated, would be an important milestone in making progress on this matter.

In presenting the report, the Strategic Director (Community) highlighted the cross cutting theme of Climate Change which particularly related to Council corporate priorities CP3 (distinct environment), CP4 (clean environment) and CC2 (sustainability). Members were also reminded that during the 2007/2008 budget consultation process, Members were minded to agree a 'one-off' sum of £15,000 to undertake work to establish the Council's carbon footprint in collaboration with Teignbridge District Council (TDC). However, following changes at TDC, part of the budgeted money was being utilised for preliminary work on the Council's carbon footprint which was being carried out by a TDC employee who had practical experience of the Carbon Trust Assessment process.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- a) a Member's belief that climate change should be made a higher priority of the Council. It was felt that the 'spend to save' initiative which the report highlighted insinuated that climate change was not high on the Council's list of priorities. In response, Members were reminded that the previous Council Membership had agreed that the Climate Change agenda, although important, should be considered as part of existing priorities and that funding of additional staff resources will be supported on the grounds of a 'spend to save outcome'. Based on preliminary work it appears that the proposed post may not generate the scale of savings initially envisaged, therefore funding for the post may become a desirable rather than essential matter compared to other financial pressures faced by the Council. However, if Members were minded to readdress the Council's corporate priorities, and include placing more emphasis on climate change, then Members had an opportunity at a forthcoming review meeting;
- b) the consultation process. Following a query it was noted that, a limited number of observations had been received in relation to the action plan from key services and agencies;
- c) the importance of addressing the negatives and positives of climate change and the opportunities they may present in terms of adaptation. In response, the Strategic Director (Community) informed the Group that the policy referred briefly to the Councils need to understand how services and communities would be affected by changes to the climate and begin to adapt services. However, the essence of the proposed policy was to aid the Council in its role as an asset manager and to guide to future decisions that may have implications for climate change. This would include addressing issues such as reducing fuel bills and increasing awareness of officers and Members;
- d) the increasing oil prices due to global demand and the need to address the consequent economic viability of businesses in parallel to this. However another Member questioned whether this issue was directly related to climate change;

- e) a Members concern that the policy did not lend itself to public consumption. Moreover, the Member felt that there were a number of unqualified statements in the introduction to the policy in that it did not relate specifically to how the Council was in position to take leadership on educating and involving the community. It was felt that the policy should address strategic aims, communication and corporate commitment. In response, it was noted that the policy was not designed specifically for the public. Although accessible by the public, it was anticipated that it would guide Members and Officers, with a series of actions, to ensure that the Council met the obligations of the Devon Wide Declaration on Climate Change and Fuel Poverty. If Members were minded to take a community leadership role then this could be achieved but funding would need to be obtained and therefore a bid would need to be considered as a part of the Council's budget process;
- f) a Members impression that the policy should incorporate more detailed reference to man made climate change due to the use of CO₂ gases in industry. In response the Strategic Director (Community) informed Members that reference to the causes of climate change was included, but the policy was not intended as a scientific document but provided context for the Council's actions;
- g) paragraph 7 of the presented policy and the need to emphasis potential opportunities created through the impacts of climate change;
- h) the Climate Change Policies link to a number of strategic and internal policies and a Members suggestion that these policies be listed. However, during discussion, it was felt that this would not be practical in terms of keeping the list maintained and updated and ensuring that all relevant policies were incorporated;
- i) the need to incorporate targets into the policy/action plan. A Member was of the strong opinion that targets should be incorporated into the action plan otherwise it may be seen as aspirational only. In contrast, a non-Group Member felt that this would not be achievable especially in light of the proposed new community at Sherford and the effect it would have on the District's Carbon Footprint. Moreover, a fellow Member noted that this policy was an umbrella document for the Council's management of its assets and to guide other actions and Members should not concentrate wholly on setting targets within a policy document such as this. Establishing targets at this stage would be difficult especially with continued pressure from central government to fund a range of other issues. However, a number of Members still expressed concern that the policy needed to be quantifiable and carbon emissions could not be measured if targets were not set. Officers explained that for some actions, for example formulating the green travel plan, the development of detailed action plans would be the time that targets could be set;

- j) paragraph 21 of the presented policy. A Member expressed concern that this paragraph was complicated in explaining the role of the action plan and felt that officers should readdress it in simpler terms;
- k) actions which officers were already being asked to consider through regular reminders such as turning off lights when rooms were not in use;
- l) the need to develop a comprehensive Green Travel Plan but other Members felt that in a rural area the opportunities maybe limited to effectively promote none car use;
- m) areas of fuel poverty in the South Hams. A Member felt that it was important to highlight these areas to the public. However, Officers stated that the policy was not an audit of everything the Council already carried out in relation to managing climate change. Fuel poverty was helped by a grants system through the Council's Environmental Health section, and the British Gas Cavity wall and installation initiative which is linked to Council Tax discounts.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group has commented on the strategy and action plan, as recorded above, and requests that it be adopted.

EPDG.7/07 **REVIEW OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES**

Members considered a report which provided information on the current household waste collection services to enable decisions to be taken on the future delivery of these services in light of the current overspend position and impending council budget pressure from 2008/09 onwards.

The report had captured a number of elements associated with the task of managing household waste. The waste collection service had been changed dramatically over the past three years to accommodate changes in customer expectation and legislation imposed on local authorities. The residents of the South Hams want to recycle and compost their waste and this was reflected in the Council's high recycling/composting rate. However, there were substantial financial issues relating to the ongoing delivery of this service which needed resolving.

Highlighted to Members was the organic waste collection aspect of the report. Members were reminded of a Motion which was passed at Council on 28 June 2007 (minute 2/07 refers) to investigate the viability of introducing a weekly organic waste collection.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- a) the organic waste collection. A Member expressed the belief that organic waste should be collected on a weekly basis. It was felt that not only would this reduce the perceived adverse effects of organic kitchen waste but would also encourage residents to use the organic waste collection as opposed to placing it with the household collection waste. In response, a fellow Member noted that government research had found no evidence of adverse health impacts from organic waste. However, a number of Members were still concerned with the build up of bacteria and spores resulting from a fortnightly collection of organic waste;
- b) a Members concern that residents may become despondent that they were separating domestic waste yet trade waste was not subject to the same policy. In response, the Strategic Director (Operations) informed that Group that the Prosperity Policy Development Group, at its meeting of 25 October 2007, considered the issue of trade waste where it was agreed that further investigative work be carried out in this area (PPDG.07/07 refers). It was also noted that a questionnaire had been distributed to all businesses which utilised the Council's trade waste service to establish what they were doing in terms of separating their waste prior to collection;
- c) the importance of promoting long-life bags along encouraging retailers to charge for disposable bags. It was noted that retailers in Modbury had been actively encouraging this initiative and it had been found to be very successful. Officers advised that the Council would be happy to advise those wishing to follow this initiative and would assist where possible. Furthermore, the Don't let Devon go to Waste campaign was highlighted;
- d) the government's initiative of charging residents for additional/excessive amounts of waste. It was noted that this initiative was due to be trialled by a number of local authorities and the Council would await the outcome of this prior to investigating its viability in the South Hams;
- e) using waste for energy. Following a Members query it was noted that currently it was ultimately more expensive to convert waste into energy than disposing of waste;
- f) the current operational review and round restructure. Following the recent round restructure of the domestic waste collection, rounds had been found to be not as effective as they should be. Work had therefore commenced to reschedule the rounds in a structured manner with expert assistance from Webspex. A number of scenarios for round re-organisation had been proposed in relation to working practices in order to identify the best routing from depot to

processing/disposal plants. During discussion on this issue, Members highlighted the importance of seasonality and the local knowledge of the refuse collectors. It was noted that the scenarios, as presented in the circulated report, were not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, in terms of local knowledge, the idea of installing computer technology into the refuse collection vehicles was being investigated in order assist operatives. A non-Group Member also highlighted that importance that all possible days be considered for collections when designing the rounds restructure;

- g) confirmation that since there had been a change to the regulations governing commercial drivers' hours, the Council was unable to collect domestic and commercial waste together;
- h) clarification that when complete, the round re-structure would be consulted upon with town and parish councils prior to implementation;
- i) the high recycling/composting rate achieved in the South Hams. It was felt that although this was to be applauded, it may be a contributing factor to the current overspend. Also highlighted to Members was the level of performance attributed to the number of council-supported recycling and composting services such as recycling banks and voluntary groups. A non-Group Member queried how officers were intending to address the current overspend, if recycling rates continued to increase. In response, it was noted that this was the reason behind the rounds being re-assessed. It was felt that with an improved operational strategy, the Council would be better placed to deal with the increase in demand.

If Members were minded to increase either the types of material the Council collected separately and/or the frequency of each collection, this overspend should be borne in mind. A Member commented preference that, as the Council's recycling rate was sufficiently high, it would be more pragmatic to focus on the overspend prior to further increasing the frequency of collections or further kerbside services.

A non-Group Member wished to congratulate officers on the recycling rate. The Member then enquired as to whether any financial incentive could be obtained for this achievement. Officers advised that currently there was no such incentive. More importantly, as of the 2008/2009 financial year, the Council would not receive direct financial subsistence from central government as it would be distributed through the Devon Local Area Agreement administered by Devon County Council (DCC). The non-Group Member, who was also a DCC Member, ensured officers that he would lobby DCC to ensure that high achieving Council's were rewarded accordingly through the LAA into the future;

- j) garden waste. A Member commented on the quantity of garden waste which was being produced. Officers felt that the gardening season was extending due to recent good weather during the Autumn months. However, Members were advised that as garden waste was compostable, residents should be encouraged to do so where practical;
- k) amended policies. Members were advised that following the implementation of waste related Council policies, it had become apparent that a number of policies may need adjusting to take account of certain circumstances when a greater flexibility would result in an improved customer service. These proposed amendments, as presented in the circulated report, were highlighted to Members;
- l) the proposed recommendation. Members were informed that officers would welcome suggestions in relation to the level of waste service provided by the Council in relation to dry recycling, organic waste collection services and the policy amendments identified in the presented report. During discussion, the following amendment was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared **LOST:-**

‘that the level of service for the organic waste collection service be a weekly collection for three months during the summer’

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- (i) the ongoing Waste Review Programme be agreed and as part of that review, the level of waste service provided in respect of the dry recycling service and the organic waste collection service remains unchanged; and
- (ii) the policy amendments as outlined in the presented report should be incorporated.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.00 pm).

Chairman