



<u>Committee and Date</u>
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9
Public

Councillor Vince Hunt, Protecting and Enhancing our Environment Committee Chairman

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2010-2011

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This is an overview of the work of the Protecting and Enhancing our Environment Scrutiny Committee during 2010-2011 and an insight into its future plans.
- 1.2 Reporting itself is a useful experience, as it provides a means of evaluating the health of the scrutiny function, of reviewing the preceding year's activities and scrutiny projects from within the Committees Work Programme, and of assessing the extent to which the Committee's recommendations have begun to make a difference.

2.0 Background

The Protecting and Enhancing our Environment Scrutiny Committee was one of five Scrutiny Committees established in October 2010, following an Overview and Scrutiny Fitness Check undertaken by Shropshire Council and the Improvement and Development Agency. The Committee's remit includes:-

- Monitoring delivery of the agreed lower carbon footprint and emissions targets, by the Council and its local partners.
- Reviewing actions to protect the natural and built environment, and heritage, balanced through innovative design, build and technology.
- Reviewing arrangements to safeguard and promote a clean and green environment.
- Reviewing arrangements for ensuring access to the countryside and green open spaces.
- Monitoring that natural resources are maintained and managed sustainably.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of agreed targets for reduction in the generation of landfill and waste.

- Monitoring of the delivery of housing options which meet local needs, particularly in relation to the availability of affordable housing.

3.0 What have we done?

- 3.1 The Work Programme has covered a variety of issues, these are summarised in the points below.
- 3.2 The Committee considered the Bad Weather Waste Collection Protocol. This report recommended a number of key guidelines to resolve the operational and communication issues which had arisen during the periods of disruption to the waste service. The Committee accepted the new approach to waste management and the new communications protocol.
- 3.3 The Committee received a report reviewing the performance of the Council's Winter Maintenance Service. They congratulated Officers on their efforts last winter to keep the network running noting that the performance had been much better than in previous years. They suggested some areas which could be improved, including the regularity of filling empty grit bins, additional strategically placed grit bins in the county and the enhanced use of snow ploughs.
- 3.4 The Protecting and Enhancing our Environment Scrutiny Committee has only received one Call-in to date, which was on the Street Cleansing Service in the Highways Maintenance Contract. After a lengthy debate of the issues the Committee resolved not to refer the matter back to Cabinet for further consideration.
- 3.5 At the request of the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Committee the Committee considered the Draft Local Transport Plan and Bus Strategy. A number of important contributions were made as a consequence which Officers took on board as part of the consultation process. These included the importance of working with neighbouring authorities when considering changing bus routes and linking rail travel to the local transport plan, having due regard for the needs of evening workers, and the effect of satellite navigation systems on the network.
- 3.6 The Committee reviewed the effectiveness of the Council's energy efficiency measures. The highly commended report and presentation from the Council's Sustainability Manager gave the Committee a number of ideas for scrutiny items in the future. These included street lighting and the energy efficiency of the Shirehall.
- 3.7 The Committee received a report on Decent Homes Funding. They were pleased to hear that Shropshire had been allocated over £3.1 million in funding over a period of 3 years to help bring Council homes up to decent homes standard. A thorough debate on the decent homes standard was undertaken.

- 3.8 As part of the School and Post 16 Transport Review the Committee considered the proposals for the forthcoming year making a number of important points as part of the process. These included suggestions for development of the risk appraisal process and for young people to obtain extra added benefits of having a buss pass to achieve greater value for money. Members suggested the idea of young people being able to use their bus pass at weekends or in the holidays.
- 3.9 A review of the report from the Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Task and Finish Group was undertaken. The other two Scrutiny Committees who jointly commissioned the report were invited to this meeting. Members praised the report, suggested a few additions and recommended it to the Council's Cabinet Committee for consideration.

4.0 What are our future plans?

- 4.1 There a number of important items which the Committee will be considering in the future. Members are keen to look at issues where they can suggest recommendations which can make a real difference to the county. The Committee is becoming more outcome focussed which was one of the most important recommendations of the scrutiny review last year. Future items include:-
- A report on Community Transport and Voluntary Car Schemes. This is an important topical issue particularly given the rising fuel costs, economic climate and changes to the local bus services in the county. The Committee will try and determine if there is anything more the Council can do to help facilitate or encourage these schemes.
 - The Committee will be scrutinising the impact of utility companies on the Council's Highway network and making recommendations for improvement.
 - There will be a meeting where a number of sustainability issues will be scrutinised including the energy efficiency of the Shirehall, street lighting in the county and school heating systems.
 - In the New Year the Committee is hoping to look at the Customer Access Strategy from an environmental perspective and flexible ways of working for Council staff.
 - The Committee will review Compressed Natural Gas and Charging Stations in the County.
 - The Scrutiny Committee will consider whether to recommend that Incentive/Reward Schemes be introduced for Housing Tenants and what these schemes should entail.