
To: All Members of the County Council
All Chief Officers

From: County Secretary's
Department

Cc: Environment Officers)
Officers named for action) e-mail
Committee Section)

Ask For: Nicola Hayden
Ext: 25560
My ref:
Your ref:

**ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 JANUARY 2003**

ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

S A Batson, M V Bayes (Vice-Chairman), N K Brook, K J Coleman (substitute for J Anderson), R N Copping, D J Drake, H M Saunders, S Jones, C J White (Chairman), B A York

Also present:

Executive Members: I E M Tarry (Environment), D Beatty (Resources)
D A Ashley (Community Information)
R J M Ellis (Leader)

Other Members: N E Agar, E M Clarke, P V Goggins, P A Ruffles,
D T F Scudder, I Simpson, R J Smith, G F Wenham

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Membership Changes

Ken Coleman replaced Janet Anderson for this meeting only.

Charlie Watson's Retirement

The Chairman announced the retirement of Charlie Watson, Director of Environment from the County Council on 28 February 2003, having been with the authority since 1995. The Committee joined the Chairman in thanking him for his exceptional professionalism and hard work in serving the current Environment Scrutiny Committee and previously the Environment Committee and wished him well in a long and happy retirement.

St Albans City Centre Enhancement Scheme

The Chairman informed the Committee that Hertfordshire County Council, in partnership with St Albans City and District Council, had been chosen by the Department for Transport to receive £1 million of funding for a road safety scheme for St Peter's Street and Chequer Street in St Albans. The extra funding had been won against stiff competition from other local authorities across the country and was one of only five to gain awards from the Government.

Delay of SERAS

The Chairman advised the Committee that the public meeting on the proposals in the SERAS consultation scheduled for 11 December 2002 had been postponed to take account of the extension to the consultation period and the production of further material by the Government.

EMS

The Chairman announced that following an external assessment by Lloyds Register Quality Assurance in December 2002, the Transport Management Group of the Environment Department had been successful in achieving certification to the international standard ISO 14001 for its Environmental Management System (EMS).

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October 2002 were confirmed as a correct record.

PUBLIC PETITIONS

None

QUESTIONS

1. **Nigel Agar** asked the Executive Member for Environment, **Iris Tarry**, the following question:

“What plans are there to get enhanced composting equipment for organic waste in the County?”

Iris Tarry replied:

“It is likely that future composting facilities for organic waste will use enhanced technologies to ensure adequate temperatures operate throughout the process. In accordance with the Waste Strategy, these facilities will need to be procured by the County Council so as to meet the demand generated by the level of District Councils' collections required to meet our collective statutory recycling and composting targets.

The Government has promised that it will publish guidelines on the composting of municipal waste, sometime in spring 2003 to assist in the procurement process. The Waste Management Panel is overseeing the County Council's role in implementing the Waste Strategy and I am sure that your contribution to its debate will be welcome.

I would also like to take this opportunity for a PR exercise and confirm that the next meeting of the Waste Strategy Development Group will be on Monday 27 January 2003 at St Albans District Council offices at 7.00pm. All Members are welcome to attend as observers, as only one voting Member from HCC is allowed by the Constitution.

2. **Brian York** asked the Executive Member for Environment, **Iris Tarry**, the following question:

“What are the full costs to the County Council for preparing and appearing at the Stevenage Local Plan Enquiry and specifically what is the cost of employment of Counsel overall and per hour?”

Iris Tarry replied:

“In terms of officer time, spent in the preparation of evidence and the appearance at the Stevenage Local Plan Inquiry, the total estimated cost is approximately £5,000, including attendance at all preliminary meetings.

The costs for Counsel appearing at Inquiries is not usually calculated on an hourly basis. It is more usual for costs to be based on a set fee or daily rate. In the case of the Stevenage Local Plan Inquiry, the payment will be based on a set fee and expenses, covering preparation and appearance. Whilst the final bills are yet to be submitted, it is anticipated that the total cost of Counsel associated with preparing for and appearing at the Local Plan Inquiry will be in the order of £12,000.”

Brian York asked the following supplementary question:

“Does the Executive Member now feel that the costs in order of £12,000 for employing Counsel to appear at the Stevenage enquiry are justified when there are competent officers who could have put the case and saved on expenditure?”

Iris Tarry replied:

“There were complicated legal arguments for the Stevenage Local Plan Inquiry which is why Counsel was needed. This was money well spent and the expenditure is justified.”

3. **George Wenham** asked the Executive Member for Environment, **Iris Tarry**, the following question:

“Is the Executive Member for the Environment aware that the Public Transport Area Guide for the Harpenden, St Albans and Borehamwood (area) was last published in November 2001 and that the Area Guide for WGC, Hatfield and Potters Bar was last published in December 2001, both hopelessly out of date and that the Herts CC Intalink Strategy on page 7, section 5.7 states that these will be published at least annually? Moreover will the Executive Member tell me what has happened to the promises in page 7, section 5.12, which refers to bi-monthly changes in its Intachange magazine? Has she ever seen this document?”

Iris Tarry replied:

“Publication of both of the Area Travel Guides, to which Councillor Wenham refers, has been delayed. This has been caused by a review of the production process aimed at making it more efficient and compatible with new government and industry standards. New guides for these areas will now be published in March to coincide with some service changes planned by Sovereign Bus. However, in the meantime service changes have been

widely publicised via alternative methods agreed through the Intalink Partnership. This has included use of the Intachange magazine.

As far as the Intachange magazine is concerned, I can confirm that this bi-monthly publication is being produced regularly and on schedule, and that it carries the updated information to honour the promises made in the Intalink Strategy. The current print run is 15,000 copies, delivered to over 250 outlets across the county. Copies are always available in the Members' Room.

In due course, Passenger Transport Unit intends to have all of this information accessible on the new Intalink website."

George Wenham asked the following supplementary question:

"Is the Executive Member aware that I look regularly for travel information and that it was only yesterday that I picked up a copy of the magazine in the members' room, It was not there last Wednesday when last I looked, nor has it been there before either. Could the department spare a copy of the 15,000 copies printed, one for each member, so that we may be kept up to date when members of the public ring and ask us for travel information?"

Regarding misleading and out of date information, does the Executive Member know that I had an apology from Rob Smith in respect of travel information given me by his department so that two 15 year old girls were stranded at Watford for two hours as darkness approached waiting for a bus that was never going to arrive – the stopping place being altered?"

Iris Tarry replied:

"I do not know the details of the two girls so if you can let me have these I will provide a written reply.

Members can have a copy of the magazine. However there are different versions for different parts of the County. These are all available in the Members room if Members want copies."

PART 1 (OPEN BUSINESS)

1 SCRUTINY UPDATE REPORT

[Officer Contact: Clare Kaye, Scrutiny Support Officer
Tel 01992 555300]

1.1 As agreed at the recent Chairman/Vice Chairman/Spokesmen scrutiny training, the Committee received a report detailing action taken on scrutiny issues since the last meeting on 15 October 2002.

1.2 Conclusions

- (a) The Committee noted the report.
- (b) The Committee agreed that in future the minutes of all Topic Groups should be circulated to all members of the committee.

Nicola Hayden
(attached)

2 ENVIRONMENT PROPOSED RESOURCE BUDGET 2003/04 – 2006/07

[Officer Contact: Mike Collier, Assistant Director (Resources)
Tel 01992 556010]

2.1 The Committee considered a report detailing the proposals made by Cabinet on 19 December 2002 for the revenue budget and capital programme for the Environment Department.

2.2 Conclusions

- (a) The Committee welcomed the significant increase in resources for road and footway improvements.
- (b) The Committee welcomed the extra resources for street lighting that will enable the Environment Department to begin to address the problems of the ageing lighting infrastructure.
- (c) The Committee asked the Director of Environment to keep under review the resources required for inputting into Local Plans and noted that a Best Value Review was underway to consider staff resources following enactment of the new Planning Bill.
- (d) The Committee expressed concern over the demands on the Council caused by climatic change – in particular flood alleviation.

Charlie
Watson/John
Wood

2.3 Comments to Cabinet

- (a) Members expressed concern that there was a pressing need for improvements to secure better bus services, including the provision of information, and urged the Cabinet to continue to explore every possible option on this front.
- (b) Concern was expressed that the Cabinet and Director of Environment should continue to rigorously pursue efficiency savings in all areas of the department. The particular example of contractor working practices was highlighted.
- (c) The Committee recognised the work that has been done through the Waste Strategy. However the Committee felt that action on a national level to limit packaging is required to address this issue and urged the Director of Environment, the Cabinet (and indeed all of us) to continue to press for change at every opportunity.

David Roberts

Charlie
Watson/John
Wood
David Roberts

David Roberts

2.4 Recommendations to Cabinet

- (a) The Committee broadly welcomed the overall budget and supported the split of the LTP allocation.

David Roberts

3 HERTFORDSHIRE'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN – A REVIEW OF ACTIONS TO DATE

[Officer Contact: Frances Hassett, Head of Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre
Tel 01992 556157]

3.1 As agreed at the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to form part of the work programme for 2003, the Committee considered a report that reviewed the County Council's progress in implementing its agreed actions in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (HBAP).

3.2 The Assistant Director (Environmental Management) informed the Committee that approximately £120,000 has been spent by the County Council over the past four years on the more significant HBAP projects, and that approximately £350,000 is the proportion of the current annual budgets of the Countryside Management Service and Biological Records Centre spent on this area of work.

3.3 Conclusions

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| (a) | The Committee requested that the Assistant Director (Environmental Management) provide a briefing to all members on the significance of Green Tourism. | Richard Brown |
| (b) | The Committee agreed to support the review of the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan and felt that in particular it should: | |
| | – Consider the significance and contribution of the HBAP to Green Tourism. | Richard Brown |
| | – Review the targets and ensure they are realistic and have been prioritised. | Richard Brown |
| | – Consider the structure that is in place to allow the targets to be achieved and ensure that responsibilities for these are clear and agreed. | Richard Brown |
| (c) | The Committee agreed that further scrutiny of this issue should be undertaken at an appropriate time in the future when the review has had time to show improvement. | Richard Brown
Nicola Hayden |

4. THE PROVISION OF THE HIGHWAY GRASS CUTTING SERVICE

[Officer Contact: Chris Allen-Smith, Principal Strategy Development Manager
Tel 01707 356573]

4.1 As agreed at the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to form part of the work programme for 2003, the Committee considered a report that looked at different arrangements through which highway grass cutting is procured. This included directly through the Highway Works Contract and indirectly through the various district councils. The report also looked at possible future developments, which included proposed service improvements in the Highway Asset Management Plan.

4.2 Conclusions

- (a) The Committee noted the report.
- (b) The Committee supported the rural grass cutting standards for safety purposes.
- (c) The Committee supported the move to Contractors Frequency Method for grass cutting.
- (d) The Committee expressed their regret at the action taken by Three Rivers District Council.
- (e) The Committee requested a brief report in 12 months time when it would be possible to review the adoption of the new method of specification throughout the county.

Mike Palmer
Nicola Hayden

5 WORK PROGRAMME 2003

[Officer Contact: Nicola Hayden, Committee Administrator
Tel 01992 555560]

- 5.1 The Committee considered a report confirming the work programme for 2003 that had been agreed at the previous meeting.

5.2 Conclusions

- (a) The Committee agreed to add the following items to the agenda for the meeting on 21 October 2003:
 - A review of drainage/flooding. To incorporate current legislation and policy changes, the implications of becoming an independent drainage authority and the possible joint working with Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee on flooding.
 - Street Lighting Contract
- (b) The Committee agreed to add the following item to the agenda for the meeting on 18 March 2003:
 - Section 106 Agreements
- (c) The Committee requested that an information note setting out the current situation with street lighting repairs be sent to all members of the County Council.

Richard Brown
Nicola Hayden

Mike Palmer
Nicola Hayden

John Wood
Nicola Hayden

Mike Palmer

REPORT TO COUNCIL

None

Andrew Laycock
County Secretary