

Minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 27 April 2006.

Present:

Members of the Committee: Councillor Ken Browne (Chair)
“ Richard Chattaway (Vice Chair)
“ Joan Lea
“ Gordon Collett
“ Jose Compton
“ Eithne Goode
“ Nina Knapman
“ Katherine King
“ Bryan Levy
“ Phillip Morris-Jones
“ Ray Sweet

Officers:

Victoria Cook, Group Assistant, Performance and Development Directorate.
Louise Denton, Group Assistant, Performance and Development Directorate.
Graeme Fitton, Head of Transport and Highways, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Jonathan Horsfield, Sustainability Unit, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Jean Hardwick, Principal Committee Administrator, Performance and Development Directorate.
Jackie Lawrence, Sustainability Unit, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Ian Marriott, Principal Solicitor, Performance and Development Directorate
Kevin McGovern, Operations Manager, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Martin Stott, Head of Waste and Environment, Environment and Economy Directorate.
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer, Performance and Development Directorate

Also Present : Councillor Peter Barnes

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Martin Heatley.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Members declared personal interests as members of district/borough councils as listed below:

Warwick District Council

Councillors Jose Compton and Eithne Goode.

Rugby Borough Council

Councillor Gordon Collett.

North Warwickshire Borough Council

Councillor Ray Sweet.

(3) (a) Minutes of the Meetings held on 17 January 2006

The minutes of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 January 2006 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

(b) Matters Arising

None

2. Public Questions Time

None

3. Referral from 11 April 2006 Council – Introduction of National Free Concessionary Travel

The Committee considered the following motion that was referred by the County Council on 11 April 2006 to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration -

“ Proposer: Councillor Peter Barnes
Seconder: Councillor John Whitehouse

“This Council welcomes the announcement made by Chancellor Gordon Brown, in his budget speech on the 22nd March 2006, to further extend the concessionary fares scheme so that from 2008, people over 60 and disabled people will be able to travel for free on any local bus across England.

In preparation for this scheme, this Council calls for adequate funding from Central Government to end the problems and uncertainties with accessibility to transport, which the local authority is currently facing. This Council calls for a letter to be sent to Warwickshire’s MPs and the Local Government Association asking each to use their respective influence to secure appropriate funding.”

Councillor Peter Barnes spoke in support of his motion and proposed the establishment of a Member Working Party to investigate the anomalies in the concessionary bus fare schemes, and the way they operated throughout the county, in preparation for the Government's proposal to extend the scheme in 2008.

During discussion the following points were made –

- The concessionary fares scheme was welcomed;
- There were anomalies in the way in which the scheme operated throughout the county;
- The anomalies should be resolved in advance of the Government's proposal to extend the scheme in 2008;
- People who lived in rural areas and who were not on bus routes would not benefit from the scheme.
- The Local Government Association's Environment Board regularly requested reports on this issue and constantly reviewed the situation.
- The scheme might be instrumental in encouraging the use of bus priority routes and an increase in bus services.

In reply to questions and concerns Kevin McGovern informed Members that –

- The concessionary travel scheme introduced in April 2006 entitled anyone over 60 years of age and those people with disabilities free bus travel in their own districts and boroughs. In Warwickshire, the scheme entitled these groups to free travel across all Warwickshire districts/boroughs and into neighbouring counties as long as the passengers alighted the bus in their home county.
- Government funding of £3.5m had been granted to districts and boroughs throughout the county.
- Confusion might have arisen because a week prior to the scheme becoming operational the Government announced its intention to extend the scheme in 2008, allowing travel throughout the country.
- Regular meetings of the Transport Consortium (attended by representatives of the districts, boroughs and county) had been held to look at achieving conformity across the County;
- With regard to a Member's particular area of concern he confirmed that the scheme applied to the Stratford Park and Ride scheme.

Resolved that the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy be asked to prepare a report for the Committee's next meeting –

- (1) Detailing the concessionary bus schemes operating in Warwickshire (each district and borough council); and
- (2) Include details of the Government's proposal to extend the scheme in 2008 and further information on any proposals to assist those people who will not benefit from the concessionary bus scheme because they do not live on bus routes.

4. Climate Change Strategy for Warwickshire

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy, which set out the policy context for a Climate Change Strategy for Warwickshire, provided an overview of the Strategy and attached at Appendix A the draft Strategy for Members consideration.

Resolved that the –

- (1) Committee supports the Draft Climate Change Strategy for Warwickshire and recommends its adoption by Cabinet;
- (2) Support revision of the final Strategy to accommodate Partners comments;
- (3) action plan be circulated to all Members of the Committee;

5. Best Value Review of Traffic Management – Report on Progress

Jonathan Simkins presented the interim report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy, which advised the Committee on progress regarding the actions in the Service Improvement Plan in connection with the Best Value Review of Traffic Management. The Committee was asked to endorse the actions completed to date and to agree to formally conclude the Review when the one outstanding item was completed.

In reply to questions Jonathan Simkins explained that Members' concerns about the use of plain English had been taken into account following discussion of this issue at a previous meeting. The technical data had, therefore, been removed from the Policy document, and replaced by text, and the formulae included in the Technical Procedure.

Resolved that the Committee –

- (1) Endorses the actions taken to complete Actions A and C to H of the Service Improvement Plan; and
- (2) Confirms that the Best Value Review can be considered concluded when Action B (delegated powers to officers to determine minor traffic orders) is complete.
- (3) Asks that future reports contain an example of how the formulae work.

6. Future Work Programme and Items Relevant to the Work of this Committee

(a) Provisional Items for Future Meetings

Members noted the table setting out provisional items for future meetings of the Committee.

With regard to the Committee's request for a report on the concessionary bus fare scheme, it was agreed that, if the timescale was too tight to report to the 8 June 2006 meeting, a special meeting would be convened later in the month.

(b) Forward Plan

Members noted the Forward Plan items relevant to the work of this Committee as follows -

Cabinet – 4 May 2006

Capital Programme for Transport 2006-07

Road Maintenance Funding

Delegation of Powers for Determining Objections to Traffic Orders with a purely local interest

Council – 9 May 2006

North-South Public transport Corridor – Public Consultation on Options

Climate Change Strategy for Warwickshire

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Chair of Committee

The Committee rose at 11:25 a.m.