

Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee

20 September 2019 – At a meeting of the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr Barrett-Miles (Chairman)

Mr S J Oakley	Lt Col Barton, left at	Mr McDonald, left at
Mr Barling, left at	1.40pm	4.35pm
4.10pm	Mr Jones	Mr Purchase, arrived at
Mr Barnard	Mr Jupp	1.45pm, left at 4.10pm
		Dr Walsh

Apologies were received from Mrs Bridges and Mr R J Oakley

Absent:

Also in attendance: Ms Goldsmith, Mrs Russell and Mrs Urquhart

Part I

111. Declarations of Interest

111.1 In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following interests were declared

- Mr S Oakley declared a personal interest in items 7 and 8 as a Member of Chichester District Council.
- Mr Jupp declared a personal interest in items 7 and 8 as a Member of Horsham District Council.
- Mr Jones declared a personal interest in items 7 and 8 as a Member of Crawley Borough Council.
- Dr Walsh declared a personal interest in items 7 and 8 as a Member of Arun District Council.
- Lt Col. Barton declared a personal interest in items 7 and 8 as a Member of Adur District Council.
- Mr Purchase declared an interest in items 7 and 8 as a member of Arun District Council

112. Minutes of the meeting of the Committee on 20 June

The Committee is asked to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2019 (cream paper).

112.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee held on 20 June 2019 be approved as a correct record, and that they be signed by the Chairman.

113. Minutes of the meeting of the Committee on 10 July

The Committee is asked to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2019 (cream paper).

112.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee held on 10 July 2019 be approved as a correct record, and that they be signed by the Chairman.

114. Responses to Recommendations

a) Framework for Managing Planned Events Requiring Closures of Highways

114.1 The Committee noted the Cabinet Member's response to the Committees Recommendations on the Framework for Managing Planned Events Requiring Closures of Highways.

114.2 The Chairman reminded the Committee that it had requested that the Framework came back to Committee before it was finalised. This did not happen but the Chairman agreed to work on the Committee's behalf. Not all the points were taken on board but that the new Framework has been agreed. The Committee expressed disappointment that this was sent for Cabinet Member decision before it could be reviewed at this meeting.

b) Highways, Transport and Planning Service Area Review and Highway Maintenance Infrastructure Plan

114.3 The Committee noted the Cabinet Member's response to the Committee's Recommendations on the Highways, Transport and Planning Service Area Review and Highway Maintenance Infrastructure Plan.

114.4 The Committee are concerned that changes were implemented before the Cabinet Member had made his decision. Social media is suggesting that no communication has been made with the public and it is still unclear whether West Sussex County Council is going to provide any assistance to community groups who come forward.

114.5 Resolved – That the Committee noted these concerns and have requested that they are shared with the Cabinet Member.

115. West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service HMICFRS & IRMP Improvement Plan progress report

- 115.1 Before the report by the Chief Fire Officer, the Chairman requested that members of the Committee do not put forward any motions but that it is here to hold the Cabinet Member to account.
- 115.2 The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Communities and asked her to address the Committee regarding her initial views of the Fire and Rescue Service. Cabinet Member confirmed that the portfolio has been changed to reflect the new clarity around governance and that she has attended the Improvement Board. A programme of fire station visits has been started and she would like to extend an invitation to any local member who would like to visit their local station with her. Weekly meetings with the Chief Fire Officer have also been programmed in.
- 115.3 The Chief Executive responded by saying that the eight recommendations are all showing progress but that we need to ensure that the governance is accountable and that the pace of improvement is reasonable.
- 115.4 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to signed minutes).
- 115.5 Before introducing her report Dr Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Chief Fire Officer, thanked everyone present for their warm welcome and special thanks were expressed to Neil Stocker who has been Acting Chief Fire Officer over the last three months. She then introduced the report with a presentation (copy of slides appended to the signed minutes), which highlighted progress but also asked the Committee to identify whether there are particular areas of service improvement planning which the Committee wishes to consider for future scrutiny. Further that staff morale is poor as a result of the "inadequate" rating from the Inspector's Report, and that this does need to be reflected in the work that is carried out, and the pace of improvement required.
- 115.6 The Chairman once again invited verbal evidence from representatives of the four unions and this invitation was accepted by Antony Walker on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union, Dan Sartin on behalf of Unison and James Diston on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Services Association. Apologies were received from the Fire Officers Association.
- 115.7 The Fire Brigades Union representative thanked the Committee for the opportunity to again address the Committee, and expressed gratitude for their involvement on the Improvement Board. Also thanked the Cabinet Member for her visits to fire stations. Capacity to deliver the change required is an issue which must be noted, and that the time to complete the improvement journey should not be underestimated.

115.8 The UNISON representative thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak again and stated that the points he will make refer to the whole Council, not just Fire and Rescue Service. Asked that councillors become more involved in staffing issues, which would require a change to the current approach. Confirmed that UNISON together with the other unions had taken up the offer from the Leader at the previous meeting to meet with her and two Cabinet colleagues. Engagement at higher levels was welcomed, and it was hoped would be maintained. The staff survey had revealed concerns among respondents that they did not work in an environment in which they felt able to speak out honestly. Take-up on the listening project had been poor. Many staff members still did not have PDR objectives. However, it is still early days.

UNISON had requested that formal stress assessments are used as a tool to help safeguard staff welfare. Across the Council, unions appear only to be seen as of relevance when consultation is a legal requirement, rather than as a supporting resource for people and culture workstreams.

115.9 The Fire and Rescue Services Association representative thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak and confirmed that recruitment and retention is an issue and the subsequent loss of experience is an ongoing concern. He also echoed the concerns of the other union representatives regarding the capacity and workload and the culture of bullying.

115.10 The Chief Fire Officer thanked the unions for their observations and she will pick up the stress surveys with UNISON outside of this meeting.

115.11 The Committee made the following comments including those that follow. It:

- Asked whether Houses in Multiple Occupation are included as high risk? Yes, HMO's are included and Fire and Rescue Service will supply these figures to the Committee.
- Welcomed the stress surveys but asked whether there is sufficient support to managers to be able to spot the signs of stress.
- Noted the ongoing concerns around retention and recruitment of "on-call" firefighters and the lack of mentors that are now available but acknowledged that this is a long-term issue.
- Noted the ongoing concerns around bullying and how this also affects staff morale.

115.11 Resolved – That the Committee:-

1. Welcomes the progress and the Implementation Plan and that the prevention and protection work will be addressed before the next inspection.

2. Acknowledged that the staffing element will take longer to resolve.
3. That union engagement in the improvement plan delivery process is continued and that the unions continue to provide evidence and input to the Committee as required.
4. Recommends that all local members visit their local fire stations.
5. Supports the use of the stress surveys and acknowledges the high workload that staff are under.
6. Would like to receive an update of the project plan for the Blue Light project.
7. Supports the prioritising of workloads to avoid staff burnout, and asks the unions to help monitor progress.
8. Would like to monitor and scrutinise, at the appropriate time, but potentially in January 2020:

Business Process Review
 Gap Analysis
 FC20 Project Process
 Progress on the Improvement Plan (including information on retained recruitment and retention)
 Communication Engagement Plan (potentially in Nov 2019).
 Progress on addressing bullying
 The Inspector's report from the planned January visit
 The equality impact assessment.

9. That any change to response standards is scrutinised by the Committee, as/when any change is proposed.
10. Supports the need for a separate Select Committee to cover the Fire and Rescue Service.

116. Limit Use of Household Waste Recycling Sites to West Sussex Residents

- 116.1 The Committee considered the draft decision report by the Cabinet Member for Environment (copy appended to the signed minutes).
- 116.2 Steve Read, Director of Environment and Public Protection introduced the report with a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes), which highlighted the need to limit the use of Household Waste Recycling Sites to West Sussex residents and that West Sussex County Council is one of the last waste disposal authority's to do this.
- 116.3 The Committee made comments including those that follow. It:
 - Welcomed the report and was supportive of the proposal.

- Raised concerns around the need for a utility bill in addition to photo ID and requested reassurance that there would be sufficient information, signage and staff on site to deal with residents' admission, and any attendant queries.
- Raised concerns that 1 months' notice is not long enough to ensure that people turning up at sites are aware of the new conditions.
- Questions whether the checks could be limited to sites situated close to a county border.
- Concern was raised as to whether this action will result in an increase in fly tipping and was reassured to hear that there has been no significant increase in other areas that have a resident's-only policy.

116.4 Resolved –

That the Committee supports the proposal but asks that the Cabinet Member looks again at instead requiring only one form of ID.

That the Cabinet Member takes account of the Committee's concerns about fly-tipping and the risk of long queues forming. Also that the proposals will overly impact areas of deprivation.

That it is verified that there is sufficient space at sites for rejected vehicles to turn around.

That the one-month notice period is lengthened

That the proposal should be subject to public consultation

117. Revisions to Recycling Credit Payments

117.1 The Committee considered the draft decision report by the Cabinet Member for Environment (copy appended to the signed minutes).

117.2 Before the report was introduced the Chairman invited the Cabinet Member to speak and she reminded the Committee that there had already been an initial change to credits, resulting in very little improvement in recycling rates.

117.3 Steve Read, Director of Environment and Public Protection introduced the report with a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes), which highlighted the lack of momentum in increasing recycling rates across the county and confirmed that £2 million will be put aside to introduce a food waste recycling scheme.

117.4 The Committee made comments including those that follow. It:

- Welcomed the report but expressed disappointment that the £40 million of recycling credits paid to West Sussex's district and borough councils had not led to rises in recycling rates.
- Welcome that some of the funding would be used to push ahead with a kerbside food recycling scheme quickly, rather than waiting for the outcome of the Government's Review.
- Acknowledged that the withdrawal of the recycling credits could lead to a deterioration in relationships with the district and borough councils.

117.5 Resolved – That the Committee agrees that this proposal is sensible as some of the savings will be invested in projects that will work more effectively. That the Committee welcomed the creation of the £2m fund for such new initiatives.

118. Review of Library Offer

118.1 The Committee considered the draft decision report by the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Communities (copy appended to the signed minutes).

118.2 Lesley Sim, Head of Libraries, Heritage and Registration introduced the report with a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes), which highlighted potential areas to make savings to meet the budget gap faced by the Library Service.

118.3 The Committee made comments including those that follow. It:

- Raised concerns regarding whether the loss of the mobile library service would result in more social isolation in rural areas but welcomed that support would be available to help the 50 or so people who would now have difficulty in accessing the Library Service.
- Questioned whether the reduction in evening opening times was necessary in view of the very small savings that this would make.

118.4 Resolved – That the Committee

1. Supports the proposal to remove the mobile library service providing sufficient mitigation is put in place.
2. Suggests that more is done to publicise the Home Service
3. Supports the proposal for 6pm closures but would like reassurance that this will not affect the Community Hubs strategy.

119. Business Planning Group Report

119.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Business Planning Group (copy appended to the signed minutes).

119.2 Resolved – That the report be noted.

120. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

120.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan dated 12 September 2019 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

120.2 Resolved – That the Forward Plan be noted.

121. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

121.1 The Committee requested further details on the A29 Realignment Scheme and asked that officers obtain an update on the Arun Local Plan.

121.2 The Committee would also like to have 278 agreements brought to Committee at some point.

122. Date of Next Meeting

An additional meeting of the Committee will be held on 21 October at 2.00pm at County Hall, Chichester. This will be to discuss the County Council's draft response to the Highways England consultation on the latest proposals for the A27 at Arundel.

The meeting ended at 4.49 pm

Chairman