

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 19 January 2016 commencing at 4:30 pm

Present:

Chair	Councillor P W Awford
Vice Chair	Councillor Mrs G F Blackwell

and Councillors:

G J Bocking, K J Cromwell, Mrs J E Day, R D East, D T Foyle, Mrs R M Hatton, Mrs H C McLain, T A Spencer, Mrs P E Stokes, P D Surman, M G Szymiak, H A E Turbyfield and M J Williams

OS.64 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 64.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was taken as read.
- 64.2 The Chair indicated that Rachel Capon, Contracts Team Leader for the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Team, would be attending the meeting in relation to Agenda Item 8 – Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee Action Plan.

OS.65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 65.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.
- 65.2 The following declaration was made:

Councillor	Application No./Item	Nature of Interest (where disclosed)	Declared Action in respect of Disclosure
P W Awford	Item 9 – Flood Risk Management Group Monitoring Report.	Is a non-pecuniary member of the National Flood Forum. Is a Borough Council representative on the Lower Severn (2005) Internal Drainage Board. Is a representative on the Severn and Wye Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and on the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.	Would speak and vote.

- 65.3 There were no further declarations made on this occasion.

OS.66 MINUTES

66.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2015, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OS.67 CONSIDERATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

67.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 16-20. Members were asked to determine whether there were any questions for the relevant Lead Members and what support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give to the work contained within the plan.

67.2 A Member drew attention to the request for an increased budget allocation to complete delivery of the Joint Core Strategy examination, which was due to be considered by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 3 February 2016, and he queried how much additional money was required. The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that the exact amount was currently being reviewed and the full details would be included in the report to the Executive Committee. A Member noted that a report to accept the surrender of leased land at Canterbury Leys was due to be included as an Agenda Item at the same meeting and he questioned what this related to. The Deputy Chief Executive undertook to seek a response from the Asset Management Team and to advise Members accordingly.

67.3 It was

RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.68 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

68.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16, circulated at Pages No. 21-24, which Members were asked to consider.

68.2 It was

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16 be **NOTED**.

OS.69 SYRIAN REFUGEES MOTION

69.1 The report of the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 25-36, related to the following Notice of Motion which had been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the Council meeting on 8 December 2015: 'Tewkesbury Borough Council notes that more than six million Syrian people have been displaced by civil war within their homeland and three million have fled to neighbouring countries. The Prime Minister and the United Kingdom government are keen to support 20,000 refugees seeking sanctuary and have pledged £215M over the next five years to help rebuild their lives within this country. I would ask Members of this Council to join with other agencies, including Severn Vale Housing Trust and Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS), to help coordinate and support limited numbers of displaced Syrian families settle within the county of Gloucestershire'. Members were asked to recommend to Council whether or not the Motion should be supported.

69.2 The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that many Districts Councils and Registered Housing Providers had offered to house families within Gloucestershire. Three Syrian refugee families had already come through the rehousing scheme with one going to Gloucester and two to Cheltenham.

Whilst the family in Gloucester had settled in well and the children were attending school, the two in Cheltenham had been more complex as it had emerged that they were actually from the same extended family. Assurance was provided that all of those initial teething problems had been resolved and the families had been successfully managed through existing links to social care, health etc. Gloucestershire had agreed to a coordinated countywide approach to Syrian refugees and representatives had access to a 'move-it' portal which contained details of the families who needed rehousing. Gloucester City Council was looking at accommodating 10 families within the first year, not necessarily from its own housing stock; Cheltenham Borough Council had indicated that it would look to rehouse up to 15 families; and Cotswold District Council had housed five families in private rented accommodation. As a non-stock holding authority, Tewkesbury Borough Council would have a very limited role, however, Officers had held discussions with the principal local social housing provider, Severn Vale Housing Society, which would like to be involved in rehousing, pending the outcome of the motion. Two Members of the public had offered properties in the Borough to be used by Syrian refugees but this would not be possible without a commitment from Tewkesbury Borough Council. GARAS had 18 years of experience of working with refugees and would be looked to for support; it was noted that GARAS had helped to rehouse several families in Churchdown as part of a different scheme. There were already a number of organisations in place to assist refugees with learning and translation etc. and Government funding had been made available for a five year period on a tariff basis to assist local authorities with the costs of resettlement. There was an expectation from the Government that all public bodies would be supporting the commitment to help Syrian refugees and local MPs were keen for Gloucestershire to be part of the national agenda.

- 69.3 A Member explained that he fully understood and supported the good intentions behind the motion but he felt that it had been put together in haste and without consideration for the consequences. By supporting the motion, the Council would be making an open-ended commitment as there was no indication of the number of families which Tewkesbury Borough Council would be asked to re-house. Furthermore, he raised concern regarding costs and whether Government funding could be relied upon in the longer term. In addition, he questioned what kind of message this would send in light of the Royal British Legion's statement that 30,000 ex-service personnel were suffering from Gulf Syndrome and were not getting the support and treatment which they needed. He indicated that he spoke from a very informed position, having lived and worked in the Middle East, and he did not consider that helping refugees settle in the UK was the best way of helping; he suggested that it would be more beneficial to teach them the skills to go back to Syria to rebuild shattered lives. Another Member supported this view and indicated that there was not enough housing for UK citizens with infrastructure and services already under considerable pressure. A Member agreed that, as long as there was a housing waiting list and over-subscribed schools and GP surgeries, she could not support the motion.
- 69.4 A Member indicated that she took an opposite view and felt that the UK Government, and local authorities as public bodies, had a humanitarian duty to help the refugees. Nevertheless, she was concerned about the financial implications and how much support would be provided by the Government. A Member shared this concern, particularly in terms of the cost to the Council. In response, the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager advised that the Government had pledged £129M to help support 20,000 refugees. There would be no cost to Tewkesbury Borough Council and Severn Vale Housing Society would be helping one family initially and, if that worked well, it would look to help another. She explained that refugees could also be housed via Chapter 1, a private sector leasing project, or through offers made by members of the public, however, the Council would need to pledge its support in order for that to happen.

- 69.5 A local Member for Churchdown raised concern that the accommodation being used in the area to rehouse refugees was not always occupied by families and she questioned if there was any way to ensure that they were not used as transit properties. The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager clarified that Gloucestershire was a dispersal county for refugees and the Member was referring to a completely different scheme to that being debated as part of the motion. Notwithstanding this, Tewkesbury Borough Council was working with the company responsible to ensure that the properties were used for families as opposed to single persons. It was noted that Gloucester City had taken the brunt in terms of rehousing refugees via the dispersal system but consideration was now being given to other options so it was likely that there would be more refugees living within Tewkesbury Borough going forward.
- 69.6 A Member questioned what help the Council would be expected to provide and whether that could be claimed back from the Government. The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager clarified that the only help which was required was coordination and support; properties would be provided by Severn Vale, or other housing providers, and the Council would work with GARAS to help families to link into existing services e.g. GPs, education, social care. The Deputy Chief Executive reiterated that the Government expected local authorities in each geographical area to offer 'in principle' support for the scheme; Tewkesbury Borough Council was not a stock holding authority and therefore its role would be limited. The Member noted that two members of the public had offered properties to rehouse Syrian refugees and he queried why the Council had to confirm its support for the scheme in order to facilitate that. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that it was a national Government programme and it was expected that local authorities would support the scheme in order to enable GARAS to go ahead and do the work which was needed to assess the families. A Member questioned whether the Council would be acting as a guarantor in the event that funding was withdrawn and he was informed that the Government had made it very clear that funding would be provided for five years, during which families would be supported to settle properly in the UK; there was no expectation of funding from local authorities. The Deputy Chief Executive stressed that the majority of refugees coming into the country were professional people who were able to work and, after five years, refugees would have UK status and would be able to support themselves.
- 69.7 A Member explained that his main concern was that Syrian refugees may be housed in Severn Vale properties at the expense of others and would be accused of queue jumping. He had no issue with other people providing privately owned accommodation for that purpose. The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that it would be possible for the Council to give its support to rehousing Syrian refugees without using social housing. Another Member noted that the average Syrian family was significantly larger than a UK family and that could lead to difficulties similar to those already experienced by Cheltenham Borough Council. In response, assurance was provided that the portal contained information about each particular family, including size and ages. In terms of the family in Cheltenham, this was one of the very first cases and improvements had been made since that time to ensure that the same mistakes were not repeated. Several security checks were made by the Home Office, border control and the

Department of Work and Pensions before families were passed to local authorities which had the ability to accept or reject cases. Members were reminded that the people needing homes were those who had suffered torture and atrocity in their own countries and were families in the first instance, mainly mothers and children.

69.8 The Chairman drew attention to Page No. 27, Paragraph 5.4 of the Officer report, which stated that a maximum number of five families were being considered and it was his personal opinion that the impact on the Borough would be much less than some Members feared. The Deputy Chief Executive reiterated that the Government had set up the programme to settle Syrian refugees and there was clear commitment and funding which would not burden local tax payers. Gloucestershire was a rural county and was looking at very limited numbers compared to urban areas which would be expected to take more. Other local authorities in the county had signed up to the scheme to help coordinate support and Members needed to be mindful of the reputational impact of failing to support the motion.

69.9 Having considered the information provided and views expressed, it was

RESOLVED That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the motion to work with partners across Gloucestershire to assist displaced Syrian families to settle within the county should be supported.

OS.70 GLOUCESTERSHIRE JOINT WASTE COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN

70.1 Attention was drawn to the report on the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee Action Plan, circulated at Pages No. 37-46. Members were asked to consider the progress made in relation to the Action Plan during 2015/16.

70.2 The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that Tewkesbury Borough Council had joined the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee (GJWC) at the end of 2014. The GJWC Action Plan replaced the individual plans of each of the member authorities and therefore superseded the Tewkesbury Borough Annual Waste and Recycling Plan which had been monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee since June 2012. Rachel Capon, the Contracts Team Leader for the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Team explained that the GJWC had been monitoring the Council's contract with Ubico since the transfer of its waste services in April 2015. Monthly meetings were held to discuss service delivery, problem areas, communications etc. and health and safety of the contract was also monitored with different crews followed on a monthly basis to ensure that they were following the procedures set out by Ubico. In terms of the monitoring of the Grundon Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) contract, new sampling laws had been introduced during 2015 and consideration had also been given to health and safety procedures; Members would be aware of the recent problems with needles being found in recycle and GJWC was working with various agencies in order to address this e.g. Turning Point, doctor's surgeries, pharmacies etc.

70.3 There were a few projects in relation to communications which were specific to Tewkesbury Borough, for instance, production of recycling calendars and promotion of waste mitigation measures in Tewkesbury Borough News. It was noted that initial results indicated that food waste collection volumes had increased by 20% following the delivery of a bin stickering campaign. Food waste caddies had been issued for free during the campaign which had helped to increase participation. Once the final figures had been received at the end of the month, it would be beneficial to get a message out to the public to show how much waste had been diverted from landfill.

70.4 In terms of other work, a TEEP (Technically, Environmentally and Economically Practicable) review had been carried out at all authorities to ensure that the way material was collected fitted with the new waste regulations. The regulations suggested that comingling did not always achieve the best recycling results with

recyclate not always being made into pure materials e.g. glass being made into aggregate as opposed to a glass bottle. The GJWC had undertaken the review and had found Tewkesbury Borough Council to be compliant with the exception of glass. A follow-up assessment had demonstrated that it was not economically feasible to have a separate glass collection and therefore the Council's approach was acceptable. The waste vehicle fleet contract was due for renewal in 2017 and a service review had been carried out looking at the way the service was currently delivered and how it might be delivered in the future. A report would be taken to the Executive Committee meeting in February which would then go to Council for consideration. Another project currently underway was the production of a developer's pack which was intended to assist planners and developers when designing new estates in terms of ensuring that there was appropriate access for vehicles and bin storage; this should be delivered within the current financial year. It was noted that there was a lot of non-specific work contained within the Action Plan and this was set out in full at Appendix 1 to the report.

- 70.5 A Member welcomed the developer's pack as access for waste and emergency vehicles was a big issue on new estates and he questioned whether it would hold any weight. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that, whilst it would not be part of the statutory planning framework, it would help to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts. A Member noted that she had recently seen refuse crews helping one another after one of the vehicles had got stuck in the road and she had found this to be a very positive approach and something for which they should be congratulated. The Chair thanked the Contracts Team Leader for her informative report and it was

RESOLVED That the progress made in relation to the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee Action Plan during 2015/16 be **NOTED**.

OS.71 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT GROUP MONITORING REPORT

- 71.1 The report of the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 47-57, provided an update on the progress of the Flood Risk Management Group Action Plan. Members were asked to consider the progress which had been made.
- 71.2 Members were advised that the Flood Risk Management Group Action Plan, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, was monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis and this update was based on the Flood Risk Management Group meeting held on 14 December 2015. It was noted that the Action Plan now included a table detailing potential future maintenance issues outside of the general maintenance on Council-owned watercourses i.e. collapsing banks, substantial erosion etc. The Environmental Health Manager made particular reference to the fantastic work which had been done at Tirley where a suite of flood protection measures were being implemented in partnership with the Parish Council. With regard to Tewkesbury, he indicated that work had been carried out with Tewkesbury Nature Reserve and people had commented that this had had an impact on areas which normally accepted water during the recent seasonal flooding. It was hoped to undertake joint work with Gloucestershire County Council and the Environment Agency, once the water had subsided, to ensure watercourses around Tewkesbury Town were cleared and water could move quickly. More detailed information regarding watercourse maintenance was set out within the report.
- 71.3 A Member queried whether the Flood Risk Management Group was able to ensure that houses were not built below the road level and the Environmental Health Manager clarified that the Action Plan looked at specific actions relating to watercourses which were being carried out jointly with other agencies, or by Tewkesbury Borough Council itself, however, this was an issue which had been discussed. A Member of the Flood Risk Management Group advised that the Group

had been particularly concerned about the amount of watercourses which the Council would have to maintain with the new development which was expected as a result of the Joint Core Strategy. In response, the Environmental Health Manager advised that the Council did own many pieces of land which it had a responsibility to maintain and the Council had agreed to increase the budget for watercourse maintenance some three to four years earlier in order to ensure that the statutory responsibility as a riparian owner was fulfilled. In the future there would be issues with ensuring that the Council received appropriate payment for the maintenance of any watercourses it would be expected to maintain via the planning process, however, it was noted that developers were increasingly looking towards Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) which were based on the idea of replicating natural drainage and working with the land. A Member indicated that another flooding issue relating to planning was the use of permeable paving, which only had a 15 year lifespan, and he questioned whether the local authority would become responsible for its replacement. The Environmental Health Manager confirmed that this had previously been discussed at a meeting of the Flood Risk Management Group and consideration was being given to inviting Planning Officers to a future meeting of the Group in order to give explanations on such matters. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that more was now being done by Gloucestershire County Council, in its role as Lead Local Flood Authority, to ensure that detailed responses were provided in relation to planning applications. Members were advised that other agencies were invited to attend Flood Risk Management Group meetings as this presented a good opportunity for Members to ask questions about their roles, for instance, the last meeting had been attended by Gloucestershire County Council. A Member commented that the Supplementary Planning Document around flood risk had been introduced less than two years ago and he would like to see it referenced in planning documents. The Environmental Health Manager agreed and indicated that the document needed to be revisited on a regular basis and the correct forum for such discussions would be the Flood Risk Management Group.

71.4 Having considered the information provided, it was

RESOLVED That the progress against the Flood Risk Management Group Action Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.72 ENVIRO-CRIMES REVIEW MONITORING REPORT

72.1 The report of the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 58-61, provided an update on the progress against the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Enviro-Crimes. Members were asked to consider the report and to approve closure of the review.

72.2 Members were advised that an Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group had been established to review the Council's approach to tackling environmental crimes such as dog fouling and fly-tipping. The Working Group had been very productive and its report had been adopted by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 16 July 2014. The report contained a series of recommendations, progress against which was set out at Appendix 1 to the report. In the report which had been presented to the Committee in July 2015, all but two of the review recommendations had been completed: organise a training session tailored to the Police, explaining how they can help in tackling dog fouling; and carry out an educational campaign at local schools to make them aware of the dangers of dog fouling, and explore partnership working with other agencies. Both of these actions had now been completed. Members were advised that, in November, Tewkesbury Borough Council had arranged a multi-agency 'Day of Action' in Churchdown which put Officers in the community to highlight and tackle issues relating to dog fouling, littering and fly-tipping. The day had also promoted

volunteer litter picking and the Council's Paws on Patrol scheme which encouraged dog walkers to observe and report any crimes they may witness. A 'drop-in' information stand had been set up in the GL3 Churchdown Community Centre where Officers had been on hand to give advice and information. The Police had been heavily involved in the event; they had brought a mobile vehicle to the GL3 car park to inform the community about burglaries, and had accompanied Tewkesbury Borough Council Officers on early morning and evening dog walking patrols, giving information to dog walkers about the consequences of allowing dogs to foul, as well as information on how to report incidents of dog fouling they may witness. The exercise had also served to educate those in the Police most likely to get involved in such issues in what to do if they witnessed dog fouling. Another 'Day of Action' was planned for the spring in a different Parish with the intention of holding the events on a regular basis in future. Members suggested Longford and Winchcombe as areas which would benefit from an event and the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that the information which was received via the Achieve system regarding dog fouling, fly-tipping etc. would be reviewed initially in order to identify hotspots.

- 72.3 A Member noted from the Officer report that the Police had played an educational role in terms of the work which had been carried out in Churchdown and he sought further information as to the information they had been given and what their role would be going forward. The Environmental Health Manager explained that one of the main difficulties with enviro-crimes was gathering the necessary evidence to take action; the Police may be able to provide valuable information about incidents they had witnessed when out on patrol and they had been advised to report any evidence to Environmental Health to take this forward. The Member welcomed the community days of action and indicated that he would like to see them take place year on year.
- 72.4 Attention was drawn to Page No. 60, Paragraph 2.4 of the Officer report, which set out the proposal for Tewkesbury Borough Council to lead on a project to employ an Officer to complement the work which was done by the Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils in terms of tackling enviro-crimes. A Member noted that Town and Parish Councils would be expected to pay a contribution for the project to operate for a two or three year period and he asked whether any feedback had been received given that the majority would already have set their precepts for the forthcoming financial year. The Environmental Health Manager recognised that the opportunity may have been lost for 2016/17 but the anecdotal feedback from the Town and Parish Seminar was largely positive with the majority stating that the community was already doing the work themselves. He was hopeful that a business case could still be put together as a dedicated role would help to ensure a co-ordinated approach and would secure good coverage across the whole Borough. He recognised that it would be important to frame the post in the right way i.e. as a street/community warden who would cover a wide range of activities.
- 72.5 A Member indicated that Officers had provided him with signs to try to deter people from letting their dogs foul near his property and they had been very successful, however, he continued to have concerns regarding fly-tipping which was a particular problem in his Ward. The Environmental Health Manager explained that there had been a number of changes within Environmental Health as a result of both the enviro-crimes review and a systems thinking review of the department which had changed the approach to enforcement. Officers were now regularly examining litter as well as using surveillance and signage; however, it was a difficult problem. He provided assurance that, although the actions arising from the Enviro-Crimes Review were now complete, Officers would not be resting on their laurels and this would be used as a basis to inform the work which would be done going forward. A Member queried whether an electronic leaflet could be sent to Parish Councils and schools for display on their notice boards and the Environmental Health Manager advised that a leaflet was already available and he

would be happy to re-distribute it.

72.6 Having considered the information provided it was

RESOLVED That the progress against the recommendations arising from the Enviro-Crimes Review be **NOTED** and the closure of the review be **APPROVED**.

OS.73 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS REVIEW UPDATE

73.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 62-65, which set out the progress which had been made in respect of the Disabled Facilities Grants Review. Members were asked to consider the report.

73.2 Members were informed that, at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 July 2015, it was agreed to establish a Working Group to review the Council's approach to Disabled Facilities Grants. The Terms of Reference for the review were attached at Appendix 1 to the report and Members were advised that Councillor T A Spencer had been elected as Chair of the Working Group. Councillor Spencer indicated that he was pleased with the progress that had been made over the course of the two meetings which had been held to date. The first meeting had been an opportunity to give an overview of the existing process and financial arrangements, including how Tewkesbury Borough Council compared with other local authorities in the area. The second meeting had continued discussion on the improvements being carried out with specific consideration being given to better and earlier information being provided to those with a disability regarding their options; streamlining of the application process; and potential improvements in the procurement of contractors and equipment, including the benefit of using schedules of rates. It was anticipated that the final meeting of the Working Group would be held at the end of the month with a draft report and action plan to be presented at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

73.3 It was

RESOLVED That the progress of the Disabled Facilities Grants Review be **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 5:55 pm