

CABINET – 25 JUNE 2013

ITEM 4 - PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Members' Questions

Question (1) from Mr Tim Evans (Lower Sunbury and Halliford) to ask:

The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment will be aware of the strength of feeling of many residents of Shepperton, Halliford and Sunbury regarding the location and safety of the proposed Eco Park on the Waste transfer site in Charlton Lane, which lies in my division of Lower Sunbury and Halliford. Since the preparation of the papers for this meeting he has attended two meetings with residents at which their concerns were very forcibly expressed.

The Member for Laleham and Shepperton has also laid questions which relate particularly to the location of the site and the safety concerns related to the technology. Whilst strongly sharing those concerns I shall not repeat them here.

Noting also that I am the Cabinet Member for Finance on the Spelthorne Borough Council I wish instead to turn to a different concern, namely that this project is being forced through purely for financial reasons without due regard for the safety of neighbouring residents.

In particular, I would ask the Cabinet to clarify the nature of the Value for Money test that the Council must undertake to justify its investment in the new plant. How is this test undertaken by whom and how independent is it of the Council's desire to press ahead with the project. Moreover, some residents are aware of the Central Government PFI grant available to the Council for waste disposal and are suspicious that the possible loss of this grant if the project does not go ahead is being taken into account as part of the Value for Money calculations. I seek both explanation and reassurance from the Cabinet on this point.

Reply:

The development of the Eco Park is an essential component of the Council's Waste Strategy to increase recycling and divert all waste from environmentally damaging landfill using modern technology to deal with waste that cannot be recycled. The project is not proceeding purely for financial reasons or without due regard for the safety of neighbouring residents.

My first consideration is the safety of residents, which I have addressed in my answer to the question from Councillor Walsh.

Regarding value for money, the assessment will consider the cost to the UK Taxpayer and be subject to rigorous external scrutiny. This means that the value of the Waste Infrastructure Grant (formerly known as PFI grant) cannot be taken into account when making this assessment and all options will be considered on the same basis i.e. without the effect of the grant.

The value for money assessment will be undertaken by the council's Chief Finance Officer advised by external advisors (Deloitte) with involvement from the council's finance officers and waste officers. The value for money assessment will be subject to rigorous scrutiny including by the Council's external auditor. In addition, the business case relating to the

development of the Eco Park will be subject to scrutiny and approval by Defra. All assessments will be required to comply with HM Treasury best practice guidance.

Landfill costs the council £1 million per month in tax alone and the cost of landfill is likely to rise further as a result of tighter regulation and the scarcity of available sites. It is therefore imperative that we find alternatives to landfilling waste that cannot be recycled.

John Furey
Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment
25 June 2013

Question (2) from Mr Alan Young (Cranleigh and Ewhurst) to ask:

The county council's Pay Policy Statement 2013-14 states that "The Chief Executive is on a contract which is like Chief Officers i.e. he is on an all-inclusive single status Surrey Pay contract and there is no variable pay or bonuses made."

Would the Leader agree that any decision to award the chief executive any additional future payment over his all-inclusive single status Surrey Pay contract would be a departure from the council's Pay Policy Statement?

Does the Leader further agree that, notwithstanding the role of the PPD Committee, any significant departure from the Council's agreed pay policy in respect of senior officers should be subject to ratification by the Council?

Reply:

What Mr Young is asking is already encapsulated in law within the Localism Act of 2011.

The County Council's Pay Policy is agreed annually by the Council for all County Council employees, including the Chief Executive. Any variations regarding the pay terms and conditions of the Chief Executive would be reflected in the annual pay policy statement in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. Council agreed its 2013/14 Pay Policy Statement at its meeting on 19 March 2013.

David Hodge
Leader of the Council
25 June 2013

Question (3) from Mrs Hazel Watson (Dorking Hills) to ask:

There have been a number of failures of webcasts and recordings of webcasts of Surrey County Council meetings. For example:

The last meeting of Cabinet in May was live webcast without audio, and there was also no recording made which included audio of the meeting.

There is no recording of the February meeting of Planning and Regulatory Committee.

To ensure openness and transparency, will the Leader undertake:

1. To examine the webcast provision to ensure that future failures are reduced?

2. To examine the possibility of local recording of webcasts at County Hall to be made so that if there are future failures by the service provider downstream of County Hall a recording of meetings can still be provided on the Surrey County Council website? Webcasts prior to January 2013 are no longer available on the Surrey County Council website. Will the Leader undertake to ensure that a complete archive of webcasts is maintained permanently in the future?

Reply:

It is extremely regrettable that there was no audio record of the Cabinet meeting in May. The lack of sound in the Ashcombe suite for web streaming the Cabinet meeting was due to a technical problem resulting from the re-fit of the audio equipment. Tests that had taken place before the meeting had not identified an audio problem. Since that meeting, diagnostic checks have been carried out and the system is up and running, with contingency arrangements in place. Two meetings have been webcast from the Ashcombe since the May Cabinet meeting and no further problems have been experienced.

The morning session of the February Planning and Regulatory Committee is available as a webcast. The meeting unexpectedly continued into the afternoon and had to move to another committee room for that session, where webcasting equipment was not available.

In order that we can swiftly solve any problems that may arise in future, the audio engineers are arranging with the Facilities Manager for a maintenance contract to be put in place as soon as possible. The IMT service is also liaising with the webcast provider, Public-i, to ensure the suitability of our equipment. In relation to local recording, whilst we do have the option of "backing up" the live stream of a webcast onto a DVD using our webcasting equipment, in this instance, because of the break in the chain which supplies the power and handles the audio feed from the microphones, we would still have had a situation where we had a visual recording of the meeting, but with no audio captured. However, we will look into the possibility of other ways of locally recording webcasts with our provider.

Webcasts are normally archived and uploaded by our webcast provider within one to two days of the meeting date and are available to watch for six months from the live date, in line with the terms of our contract. This is standard practice for all Public-i clients. The provider retains a complete archive of our webcasts, and these are accessible at a cost, in line with the provisions of the contract. Currently any backed up copies of the webcast are deleted unless needed to resolve technical issues arising in a live stream but it would be possible to look at retaining the back-up copies for a longer period if there was an identified need.

David Hodge
Leader of the Council
25 June 2013

Question (4) from Mr Richard Walsh (Laleham and Shepperton) to ask:
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After the public meeting in Spelthorne regarding the Eco-Park at Charlton Lane the residents within the surrounding villages of Charlton Village, Shepperton, Halliford & Sunbury have strong concerns regarding the following items.

1. Residents are concerned about emissions and the proximity of homes to the Eco-Park. They feel that insufficient information has been provided and they seek assurances that due diligence has been done to ensure that every possible safety measure has been taken to minimize any risks to the quality of their lives.

2. The lack of a similar gasifier, processing similar product in the world, is of further concern to residents as it is co-located on site with other waste processing plants, administration offices, and educational facilities for children and although technology risks can be mitigated and then regulated by the Environment Agency what assurance can residents be given that due consideration has been done to ensure that the risk to both workers and visitors is minute and that Charlton Lane is an appropriate site for this type of technology surrounded by residual properties and people.

Reply:

1. Both the anaerobic digestion plant and the gasification plant will have to meet stringent emission standards set by the Environmental Permit, required by the Environment Agency. The emissions standards are designed to ensure that there is no risk to human health or the environment from the operation of the plant and will take into account the location of the plant in terms of its proximity to homes.

The council's technical adviser has confirmed that they are confident that the plant will meet the requirements of the Waste Incineration Directive, which sets the relevant emissions standard.

The plant will be designed to ensure that levels of emissions are minimised. This will be achieved primarily by ensuring well managed combustion and by maintaining optimal combustion conditions; with further removal of pollutants by a gas-cleaning system. All thermal waste-treatment plants have to be operated in accordance with a permit from the Environment Agency and this will only be granted if the operator can show that they are using the Best Available Techniques (BAT) to control emissions. The permit would require the cleaned exhaust gases to be monitored continuously for a wide range of compounds (typically CO, NOx, PM, HCl, SO₂, total VOCs), and this provides a continuous indication of the combustion conditions (and potential for dioxins formation), which are to be maintained below stringent emissions limits. Further monitoring is carried out periodically (usually several times per year) for pollutants including those such as dioxins that are present at too small a concentration to be able to be monitored continuously. The cleaned process exhaust is then released to air from a chimney stack of a height designed to ensure appropriate dispersion. The results of the continuous emissions monitoring have to be submitted to the Environment Agency; and, additionally, the Environment Agency sends in its own monitoring teams to make periodic unannounced spot checks on emissions.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is the government body responsible for protection of public health.

The HPA's position is that well run and regulated modern municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health. This view is based on detailed assessments of the effects of air pollutants on health and on the fact that modern and well managed municipal waste incinerators make only a very small contribution to local concentrations of air pollutants.

2. Waste gasification is a relatively new technology in the UK and therefore SITA have conducted a robust due diligence assessment to ensure that the gasification process technology proposed by Outotec is appropriate for the Eco Park. The county council has also commissioned its technical consultants to undertake a review of the

technology and of SITA's proposal.

The fluidised bed technology proposed by Outotec is proven, although its use to date has largely been in combustion rather than gasification, as proposed for Charlton Lane. Outotec has supplied over 100 plants that use a variety of fuels, however only a small number of these operate in gasification configuration with the majority being combustion plants. Whilst there are a number of Outotec combustion plants that process refuse derived fuel, there are currently no gasification plants that have been built to use this fuel. The three Outotec gasification facilities similar to that proposed for Charlton Lane, are in operation in the USA and Canada although operating on different types of fuel.

The chemistry of the gasification of refuse derived fuel and combustion of the subsequent synthesis gas (syngas) is well understood. The gas clean up systems, that are proposed for the Eco Park are robust and proven on many thermal treatment plants throughout the UK and overseas.

In the answer to your first question, I highlighted the fact that emissions from the Eco Park would be controlled through the Environmental Permit to ensure that there is no harm to the environment or to human health, this would include the impact on users of the community recycling centre and workers on site.

In addition, general hazards associated with the operation of the site will be managed through health and safety legislation and will be informed by a hazard and operability (HAZOP) study, which will be completed at the detailed design stage.

Both SITA and the council's technical advisors consider that Outotec has a good level of understanding of the complexity of waste gasification and the requirements of the UK regulatory system, and has the ability to design a plant to operate using residual waste from Surrey households for fuel.

John Furey
Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways and Environment
25 June 2013

Question (5) from Mrs Hazel Watson (Dorking Hills) to ask:

In an answer to a written question from me to the Cabinet meeting of 5 February 2013, the Cabinet Member for Assets and Regeneration Programmes stated: "An occupancy study was carried out in 2010 for our major offices which showed an average desk occupancy of 47%".

He went on to state: "A programme of revised desk occupancy surveys are of being carried [sic] at present to measure the impact of these changes. We will provide the update information when we have completed the occupancy studies."

Please could the Cabinet Member provide an update on the desktop occupancy surveys, and an explanation of why it is taking so long to count the number of staff and number of desks?

Reply:

Update on occupancy studies

Desktop occupancy studies have been carried out at the following buildings since the completion of the Making a Difference Programme, County Hall, Fairmount House, Consort House, Esher Local Office and we are currently at Quadrant Court and Runnymede.

The peak utilisation in these buildings is as follows.

County Hall 62.5%
Fairmount House 76%
Consort House 62.5%
Esher Local Office 68.5%

Which is an average of 67.3% compared to 47% previously, a movement of 20.3% and an increase of 30%.

Results for Quadrant Court and Runnymede will be back by the end of July, further studies are being undertaken at our Borough and District locations and will be completed before the school summer holidays.

Method

The programme of utilisation studies is undertaken on a phased basis. Each building is carried out at independent times with slots selected to avoid school holidays, we also allow time for the buildings to settle down following the recent moves. The reason this is done is to get a true picture of how the portfolio is being utilised so informed decisions can be made.

Future

Once the other results are returned, we will then develop an action plan to further enhance the flexible working principles that Making a Difference implemented and look at further opportunities to identify efficiencies that could become income generation opportunities.

Tony Samuels

Cabinet Member for Assets and Regeneration Programmes

25 June 2013