

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
4 April 2016

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday, 4th April, 2016 at 7.30 pm in the Salvation House, 2 Sterling Court, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL7 1FT

PRESENT: Councillors S Johnston (Chairman)  
J Broach, M Cowan, J Cragg, P Mabbott, L Page,  
K Pieri, P Shah, G Clark and P Wren

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: G Clark (Tenants Panel Representative)  
P Wren (Tenants Panel Representative)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Helen Bromley (Executive Member – Environment)

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Director – Finance and Operations (Pam Kettle)  
Head of Environment (Durk Reyner)  
Head of Public Health and Protection (Nick Long)  
Community and Environmental Services Manager (Kirsten Roberts)  
Senior Performance and Strategy Officer (Grace Crawford)  
Landscape Conservation Officer (Chris James)  
Hackney Carriage Officer (James Vaughn)  
Environmental Health Team Leader (Cheryll Brown)  
Environmental Health Team Leader (Joanna Harding)  
Environmental Health Team Leader (Jeanette Hollingsworth)  
Committee Manager (Richard Burbidge)  
Serco (Sharron Connor)

---

53. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Hayes and C Storer.

54. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 25 January 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55. ACTIONS UPDATE

An updated version of the report of the Director (Governance) had been circulated. The report identified actions agreed at previous meetings of the Committee and their current status.

Arising from consideration of Minute 51 – Energy Centre, University of Hertfordshire site Councillor Broach expressed concern that problems there

were continuing and he expressed dissatisfaction that a report on this matter did not appear on the agenda for the meeting. It was confirmed that Environmental Health officers continued to receive neighbour complaints and that, as a result, officers from both the Council's Planning and Environmental Health departments were continuing to monitor the situation. Delayed noise tests were due to take place shortly and once these tests were completed and the results were available, a further update could be provided to the Committee. In the meantime if Members were aware of people experiencing noise or pollution problems then details should be passed to the Environmental Health Service.

#### RESOLVED

That the status of actions which were identified at the meeting of the Committee on 9 November 2015 be noted.

#### 56. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor M Cowan and Councillor S Johnston each declared non pecuniary interests in respect of items on the agenda as appropriate by virtue of being a member of Hertfordshire County Council.

Councillor K Pieri declared a non pecuniary interest in item 11 – Hackney Carriage Office Enforcement Review by virtue of being a member of the Hackney Carriage Committee.

#### 57. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

The Chair reported that notice of the following question had been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 31:-

Question to the Chairman Councillor Sara Johnston from Cathy Roe (Cleaner Hatfield Action Campaign)

**“Does WHBC Environment Committee agree with the following 10 points about litter and fly-tipping in Hatfield, and will WHBC implement the suggested improvements?”**

##### **1. Concern of Residents of Hatfield**

Residents of Hatfield have shown by their massive efforts in voluntary litter-picking (with over 200 bags of litter collected) in the week of March 1<sup>st</sup> – March 6<sup>th</sup> how important the appearance of Hatfield is to them. Some residents are also committed to being street-litter-guardians, to pick up litter near their homes and report fly-tipping.

##### **2. Special Need in Hatfield**

Hatfield has a special need for cleaning by the WHBC because of its large, young, temporary population of university students, and because of its large number of workers living in houses of multiple-occupation. Because of this, Hatfield's needs should be a priority for WHBC.

**3. There is need for WHBC to clean Hatfield much more regularly and thoroughly, especially the Town Centre and main streets.**

Important main streets which need to be cleaned and cleared of litter much more regularly and thoroughly are:-

i. The main B-roads radiating from the Town Centre:-

Queensway/Cavendish Way  
Wellfield Road  
St Albans Road East  
French Horn Lane

ii. The main streets used by many pedestrians (including many university students, who are walking between the College Lane Campus, de Havilland campus & Bishops Rise Halls of Residence and the rest of the town)

Woods Avenue (up to Oxlease roundabout, and from Oxlease roundabout to University)  
Bishop's Rise  
Travellers Lane  
Lark Rise  
College Lane  
Albatross Way/Mosquito Way

iii. The smaller residential streets also need to be cleaned more thoroughly and litter collected from verges and shrubberies.

**4. It is essential that there is a check on what cleaning Serco completes**

The public have been informed that "The Town Centres are visited daily, surrounding roads are swept every three days, and residential roads are typically cleaned every four to six weeks."

It is evident that Hatfield is not cleaned properly at the time intervals claimed here.

We ask to see publicised at the end of each month a list of exactly what Serco and any other firms employed by WHBC claim to have done in regard to cleaning in Hatfield during that month.

**5. Co-ordination of Cleaning and Gardening Work by Serco is needed**

Quite often Serco cuts grass without first removing the litter, thereby leaving a worse problem of sliced litter. Sometimes shrubberies are cut back without the litter in them being cleared. A co-ordinated approach is needed.

**6. Rubbish from HMOs.**

- One source of litter in Hatfield is over-flowing rubbish from front yards of houses in multiple-occupation. This rubbish is unsightly, leads to rat infestation, and blows into the streets.
- Residents in these houses are clearly struggling to deal with their rubbish using the current bin-collection system.
- We suggest that HMOs should be allowed to have the larger black bin (as now) and also a larger recycling bin (or 2 recycling bins if that is more practicable for bin-collection lorries). This would alleviate the over-flowing

rubbish problem, and also increase recycling in the borough. Much of the over-flowing rubbish in HMOs is recyclable material such as drinks cans, bottles and cardboard take-away packaging.

- We also suggest that the University is asked to give major publicity to all its students in how to handle and recycle rubbish correctly.
- We also ask WHBC to take measures to improve the behaviour of tenants of HMOs whose rubbish is persistently causing problems for other residents. (In this WHBC should be supported by the University for tenants of HMOs who are university students).

### **7. Fly-Tipping**

This is a major problem in Hatfield Town Centre and throughout Hatfield.

We ask WHBC to clear reported fly-tips very quickly and to try to identify the culprits.

We ask WHBC to clean fly-tip spots very thoroughly, so they do not still look like fly-tip spots.

### **8. Public Waste-Bins**

- There are not enough public waste-bins in Hatfield, and existing waste-bins are often over-flowing and causing litter problems in the streets.
- We ask WHBC to empty waste-bins very regularly.
- We ask WHBC to provide more waste-bins, especially on the main pedestrian routes (listed in point 3 above).
- We ask WHBC to implement the installation of agreed waste-bins more speedily.

### **9. Easily Accessible Information about how to dispose of large items**

The various ways of disposing of large items and excess rubbish need to be gathered together and displayed prominently in as many places as possible. (e.g. Hub notice-board, Town Library, Housing Office, Leisure Centres, as well as on-line on Town Council, Hatfield Hub, WHBC and University websites)

The main methods of disposing of large items and excess rubbish are:

- Household Waste & Recycling Centre at Cole Green (Off A414 between Hatfield & Hertford. Open Thurs to Monday. 10-6p.m. April to Sept. 8-4p.m. Oct to March)
- Waste Cage (Free pick-up of large items, not car-loads. Dates & Places from Hatfield Housing Office 357088. Next one - Howe Dell May 2nd 2016)
- Contacting WHBC to collect large items (£30.90 or £15.70 concessions for 4 items or 20 sacks. Phone 379160) To encourage use of this service by students, Hertfordshire University students living off-campus in Hatfield need to have the concessionary rate, even if they are not drawing benefits.

### **10. Publicity is Needed to Stop People Dropping Litter and Fly-Tipping**

Posters and on-line publicity are needed to tell local people:

that litter and fly-tipping spoils our town

that it is anti-social and is an offence

that fines can and will be imposed for dropping litter and fly-tipping.

The Chair read the following answer to the question.

**Point 1:**

Firstly, we are pleased to hear that all the litter picks that the community have organised and been a part of in the last few weeks have been a success and in particular, we would like to thank you for your efforts with the events in Hatfield. However, we are disappointed that despite the Council assisting you with your events that this has not been fully acknowledged. Of course, we all would like to harness this enthusiasm and continue to support residents wishing to continue to litter pick on an ad-hoc basis, or any other regeneration projects they are considering.

This should be done through the Council's 'Adopt A Road' scheme and we would very much welcome your support in directing people to this. This is really not an onerous scheme and residents can do as much or as little as they like and they are no way managed or directed by us. There are no ongoing obligations to us and we very rarely contact those signed up and always do our best to support the projects that they are interested in.

All we ask is that they read some information about Health and Safety and then sign a form confirming they have understood this. We can then formally issue equipment and support the collections of waste etc. We only ask residents to let us know when they are doing something so we can be sure they have the right equipment and we can arrange clearance of litter bags etc. It is in no way to monitor or check up on them and their details are never shared.

**Point 2/3**

We are aware that every area in the borough requires different levels of cleansing and this is reviewed on a regular basis. Officers will look at the list of roads you have supplied and review the schedules accordingly.

**Point 4**

All Serco operatives are monitored by their supervisors and managers. In addition to this, you are aware that there is a dedicated Community and Environment Services Officer for Hatfield Town Centre, as well as other Officers dedicated to other areas in Hatfield. These officers undertake routine inspections in their areas as well as randomly selecting roads to grade against Defra's Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. Generally this work shows that there is a high pass rate against this standard and where additional cleansing work is required, cases are raised for Serco to action, which Officers will then follow up.

**Point 5**

Serco should always collect litter before cutting the grass and all crews have been briefed. If this doesn't happen, we ensure that Serco return and collect.

**Point 6**

With regard to rubbish from HMOs, Officers continue to work closely with the University, tenants and landlords to advise on appropriate waste storage. This is done in a number of different ways, including:

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
4 April 2016

- Issue of larger bins to HMOs;
- Door knocking exercises at the start of the academic year to explain the Council's collection system. This is a joint exercise (including Officers and Street Wardens from Environment Services, Environmental Health and the University).
- Officers attend University Fairs to promote our services; and
- Specially designed leaflets for landlords.

A Community and Environment Officer and Serco team attend areas of Salisbury Village on a weekly basis to check for excess waste and fly-tipping and will also recover any evidence found. This is then followed up and since September, the Council has taken enforcement action over 100 times in this area.

#### **Point 7**

With regard to fly-tipping, it is accepted that it is increasing nationally and this is no exception on Hertfordshire. You should be aware that the Council has recently announced that they are setting up a fly-tipping task force with a view to clearing some fly-tips more quickly and also strengthen our enforcement against those that fly-tip and do not manage their waste correctly.

You are aware that we are working more closely with businesses in Hatfield to ensure that they are aware of their duty of care with respect to waste management and have recently undertaken waste trade checks in this area.

#### **Point 8**

Bins are emptied to a schedule depending on their use and we will always seek to install additional bins in areas that require it. We currently have over 700 street litter and dog bins across the Borough and we invest up to £20k each year to replace, add new, or relocate bins as appropriate.

We will always consider new locations at the request of residents and kindly ask that you provide us with further information through our Contact Centre, with specific information as to where you feel improvements can be made.

#### **Point 9**

Information about how to dispose of larger, bulky items can be found on our website and is also frequently published in the Council's Life magazine, collection calendar leaflets and through the Council's social media accounts. This information is also provided through the University.

#### **Point 10**

We agree that publicity is needed to get the message out there about what we do. We already deliver collection calendars to all properties in the borough twice per year which includes bin collection dates, but also provides other useful information and most recently have included features on recycling quality, duty of care for householders and bulky waste collections. In addition to this, a leaflet has recently been delivered to all householders about fly-tipping. We will also continue to put information on our website and social media accounts and through the local newspaper and other Council publications.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
4 April 2016

Finally, we would like highlight that it is important that if the public is aware of a problem or would like to make a service request that they contact us directly through our Contact Centre or via our website ([www.welhat.gov.uk/reportit](http://www.welhat.gov.uk/reportit)). This will ensure that cases are directly logged on to our system to be investigated and actioned.

58. NORTHAW GREAT WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The report of the Director (Governance) informed the Committee that following their approval on 21 September 2015 (vide Minute 24) of the draft of the third plan period (2015-20) of the Northaw Great Wood management plan public consultation had taken place for six weeks during November and December, closing on Friday 4 December.

Members noted that no comments had been received on the draft and so the plan was being re-submitted to the Committee for endorsement.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be recommended to adopt the revised management plan for Northaw Great Wood Local Nature Reserve 2015-2020 as set out as an appendix to the report of the Director (Governance) and to agree that the plan be forwarded to the Forestry Commission and to Natural England for approval.

59. SHERRARDSPARK WOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN

The report of the Director (Governance) informed the Committee that following their approval on 21 September 2015 (vide Minute 25) of the draft of the third plan period (2015-20) of the Sherrardspark Wood management plan public consultation had taken place for six weeks during November and December, closing on Friday 4 December.

One comment had been received in response to the consultation concerning the location of a possible incidence of ash dieback disease. Members noted in this respect that they had considered a report at their meeting on 25 January 2016 (vide Minute 45) focussing on tree pests and diseases and, in particular, the potential threat from ash dieback disease throughout the borough. The plan was being re-submitted to the Committee for endorsement.

In response to a question by a Member about Rights of Way, the Committee was informed that these were way marked but that because Sherrardspark Wood was a site of special scientific interest visitors were encouraged to use the managed path network which was thought to provide reasonable access.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be recommended to adopt the revised management plan for Sherrardspark Wood Local Nature Reserve 2015-2020 as set out as

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
4 April 2016

an appendix to the report of the Director (Governance) and to agree that the plan be forwarded to the Forestry Commission and to Natural England for approval.

60. PEST CONTROL UPDATE

An updated version of the report of the Director (Governance) had been circulated. The Committee also received a brief presentation.

The report provided Members with information relating to the pest control service provided by the Council appointed contractor, SDK Environmental Ltd ("Dial a Pest"). It highlighted the extent of pest control treatments and activities during the period 1 April 2015 to February 2016. It also provided information on the levels of pest control enforcement action undertaken by the Council's Public Health and Protection Service during the same period.

In response to a question about pricing and concessions, the Committee were informed that a Member level Procurement Board had awarded the new four year contract to SDK Environmental Ltd commencing on 1 April 2015 and that the new contract enabled the charges for pest control services to all residents of the Borough to remain the same as in the previous contract, there had been no increase. The Head of Environmental Health and Protection indicated that he would provide Members with a briefing note with more details of the pricing of services and agreed concessions.

Members having noted that regular quarterly contract review meetings were held between the Council and SDK the view was expressed that there might be value in having a representative of the contractors present when future monitoring reports were discussed.

RESOLVED

1. That the report, the performance of the contractor and the work and services that had been provided be noted.
2. That in future a representative of the contractor be invited to attend the Committee meeting when the end of year monitoring report was considered.

61. HACKNEY CARRIAGE OFFICE ENFORCEMENT REVIEW 2014-15

The report of the Director (Governance) provided the Committee with a summary of the work undertaken by the Hackney Carriage team during the past year.

Members noted the Council was responsible for the administration and enforcement of hackney carriage law which covered both hackney carriage (taxis) vehicles and drivers and also private hire vehicles, drivers and operators. Members also noted the work which had taken place during the year to keep the travelling public safe.



Reference was made to a report on risk management which had been considered by the Audit Committee recently had highlighted the risks faced by Hackney carriage office staff arising from the discharge of their duties. The Committee asked that their thanks to the Hackney Carriage Officer and his staff be placed on record.

RESOLVED

That the report and the work which had taken place during the year to keep the travelling public safe be noted.

(N.B. Councillor K Pieri had declared an interest in this item, Minute 56 refers).

62. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2016/17

The report of the Director (Governance) advised the Committee that it was a requirement of the Food Standards Agency that each local authority drew up documents and implemented a food safety service plan which was approved by Members.

The Committee noted that Appendix A to the report set out the food safety service plan for 2016/17 while Appendix B was a review of performance against the previous food safety service plan.

RESOLVED

1. That the performance against the previous service plan be noted.
2. That the Food Safety Service Plan as set out at Appendix A to the report of the Director (Governance) be approved and the Cabinet be requested to recommend it to the Council for adoption.

63. HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Director (Governance) on the Health and Safety Service Plan and also received a brief presentation.

Members noted that, as an enforcing authority for the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, it was necessary for the Council to produce a service plan which was agreed with Members. The Service Plan which was set out at Appendix A to the report dealt with the Council's role as a health and safety regulator and not as an employer.

RESOLVED

That the Health and Safety Service Delivery Plan 2016/17 as set out at Appendix A to the report of the Director (Governance) be approved and the Cabinet be requested to recommend it to the Council for adoption.

64. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT - QUARTER 3 - 2015/16

The Committee considered the report of the Director (Finance and Operations) and accompanying presentation which provided the performance indicator (PI) data collected for those services that fell within its remit and Quarter 3 data for 2015/16, along with comparative information with earlier years, where available.

Members noted that, taken together, the report and presentation enabled the Committee to identify which of our services were improving, not improving or remaining the same in their key performance areas. Service comments were also included to explain the performance shown, along with any further action needed.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the three PI's where the targets had not been met, and the responding service comments, viz -

Performance Indicator 18 (Percentage of residents either satisfied or very satisfied with street cleansing [e.g. litter and sweeping services])

The result for Quarter 3 was below target. However, it was an increase compared to the result for Q3 2014/15. Recent years had shown that there tended to be a decline in satisfaction during Q3 and Q4 compared to Q1 and Q2 and reflected the time of year.

Performance Indicator – 19 (Percentage of residents either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with local recycling and waste collection services)

The result for Quarter 3 was below target. However, it was an increase compared to the result for Q3 2014/15. There had since been some disruption to collection services after Christmas which might help explain why satisfaction levels had decreased throughout the year.

Performance Indicator – 23 (Level of planning appeals allowed against the Council's decision as a percentage of the total number of planning appeals against refusals of planning applications)

Three appeal decisions had been received this quarter, of which two were allowed. There appeared to be little consistency in decision making by the Inspectorate, which was a view also held across the county. Whilst all decisions were carefully made, it was not considered at this stage that a change in approach was required.

Members commented that with regard to PI 22 (Process and decide on all major planning applications within 13 weeks) the target set was, at 70%, somewhat low and that consideration should be given to raising it.

**RESOLVED**

That the performance indicator data collected and set out in the report of the Director (Finance and Operations) be noted and the comments on the

trends shown in the performance indicators outlined above be fed back to the appropriate service teams.

65. ENVIRONMENT SERVICES 3RD QUARTER PERFORMANCE 2015/16

The Committee considered the report of the Director (Finance and Operations) and accompanying presentation which combined Environment Services information and Serco's customer satisfaction performance for Quarter 3.

The Serco/WHBC partnership has been established in accordance with Council policy and was monitored in accordance with the agreed Monitoring Framework. There were no new policy implications arising from this report.

The Committee were informed that an overall satisfaction rate of 76% had been achieved for Q3, the key points of which were –

The total refuse to landfill had reduced in Q3 to approximately 45 kilograms/resident which was better than the quarterly target of 50 kilograms/resident.

In Q3, the total recycling rate had decreased to just below 49%. The composting rate had decreased slightly, which was typical of this period. It still remained higher than the dry recycling rate, although this had also marginally increased in the quarter. Satisfaction of the recycling and composting collection service had both slightly decreased to 75% and 79%, respectively.

The total number of missed bins has increased this quarter, compared to the previous quarter. Missed bins include customer-reported missed and dropped roads by Serco due to vehicle breakdowns, staff shortages and blocked access.

Satisfaction with the refuse collection service had decreased this quarter to 77%. Satisfaction on refuse collection could be negatively affected by the policy of not returning for the first missed bin and issuing orange sacks. This policy was originally introduced at the start of Alternate Refuse and Recycling Collections (ARRC) to discourage inappropriate use of this service. However, after five years of ARRC it was considered that this policy had served its purpose.

Satisfaction had increased for greens and open spaces, and planters and shrub beds. Satisfaction decreased marginally to 72% for grass verges, hedges and shrubs and decreased for cleansing to ~70%.

Concern was expressed about grounds maintenance crews undertaking grass cutting which resulted in 'cut up' litter being left behind. Concern was also expressed about the amount of spillage that was left in the road after bins had been emptied. The Committee were informed by Sharon Connor (Serco) that with regard to grass cutting of verges, crews should litter pick areas before grass cutting and that every refuse collection vehicle had a broom which should be used to sweep up any spillage.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
4 April 2016

With regard to Missed Bins, whilst Members were pleased to note that around 52% of total missed bins were returned for within one day disquiet was voiced about the quantum of bins that had been missed which had badly affected certain parts of the Borough such as the High Dells area of Hatfield. Many of these bins had been missed because of vehicle breakdowns or driver shortage which was not the fault of residents.

Officers informed that Committee that Serco had returned for the majority (86%) of the missed bins within 3 days and that while problems had continued during January 2016, the figures for February and March had showed an improved performance. The Head of Environment advised that a number of issues had been raised with Serco at a meeting earlier in the day and that they would be looking to take remedial action including by reviewing the training needs of their staff. Sharron Connor (Serco) reported that some measures had already been taken including the introduction of a 'narrow access round' on Wednesdays. Also that 3 different sized freighters were now being used including smaller vehicles but problems caused by inconsiderate parking persisted.

A number of individual complaints having been raised, Members were reminded that these should be reported via the contact centre in the first instance.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the Cabinet be requested to recommend the updated policy with regard to the use of orange sacks to the Council for adoption.

66. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The pro-forma set out the Committee's overview work programme which had been updated since the last meeting to enable forward planning of items to be considered.

Councillor Cowan expressed disappointment that a report was to be considered by the Cabinet on 5 April which proposed an action plan to more effectively deal with the increased number of instances of fly tipping across the Borough without having first been referred to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment. Members were advised that if the action plan was approved then monitoring it would be the responsibility of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the work programme as submitted be approved.

At the conclusion of the meeting Members expressed their thanks to Councillor Johnston and to Councillor Storer for their services as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Committee for 2015/16. The Chair responded and having welcomed Geoff Clark's return following ill health she thanked all Members for their active involvement in the work of the Committee and officers for their support throughout the year.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
4 April 2016

Meeting ended at 10 p.m.  
RB