

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12 September 2016

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday 12 September 2016 at 7.30 pm in the Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors S.Johnston (Chairman)
J.Cragg (Vice-Chairman)

H.Beckett, J.Broach, G.Clark, K.Holman. H.Quenet,
B.Fitzsimon (for L.Sparks), M.Spinks, N.Taylor, J.Weston

ALSO Councillor H.Bromley (Executive Member – Environment)
PRESENT: (For Minutes 15-23)

OFFICIALS Director (Finance and Operations) (P.Kettle)
PRESENT: Head of Public Health and Protection (N.Long)
Risk and Resilience Manager (A.Cremer) (For minutes 15-20 only)
Licensing Team Manager (K.Payne) (For minutes 15-21 only)
Waste Services Officer (C.Nicholls) (For minutes 15-22 only)
Community & Environment Officer (C.Simpson) (For minutes 15-22 only)
Senior Performance & Strategy Officer (G.Crawford) (For minutes 15-23 only)
Governance Services Officer (M.Lowe)

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, expressed her thanks to Pam Kettle, Director (Finance and Operations) for all her hard work and good wishes for an enjoyable retirement.

15. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of a Committee Member had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 19-22.

Councillor B.Fitzsimon for L.Sparks.

16. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L.Sparks.

17. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting of 4 July 2016 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12 September 2016

18. ACTIONS UPDATE

The report of the Director (Governance) identified actions agreed at the meeting of the Committee held on 4 July 2016 and their current status.

Energy Centre – University of Hertfordshire Site:

Whilst Members welcomed the update provided by Environmental Health they expressed concern that unpleasant smells continued to be emitted from Energy Centre and asked what would be done to remedy the situation?

The Head of Public Health and Protection reported that, according to comments made on social media, the smell still persisted. During the recent warm weather local residents had been unable to open their windows, particularly at night or to hang out washing during the daytime. Steps would be taken to resolve the issue and undertook to provide an update at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman stated that Officers would continue to monitor the complaints received in connection with the Energy Centre.

The Head of Public Health and Protection confirmed that the Council was very willing to investigate and deal with the problem at the Energy Centre, however was reliant upon members of the public to gather evidence in the form of diary sheets. Without which bringing a case or taking any action against the University of Hertfordshire would be very difficult.

Councillor Broach and the Head of Public Health and Protection undertook to work together on the problem at the Energy Centre.

RESOLVED:

1. That the status of actions which were identified at the meeting of the Committee on 4 July 2016 be noted.
2. That Councillor Broach and the Head of Public Health and Protection work together on the smells being emitted from the Energy Centre at the University of Hertfordshire.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor S Johnston declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of any items on the agenda as appropriate by virtue of being a member of Hertfordshire County Council.

20. FLOOD RESPONSE FUNCTIONS

The report of the Director of Governance, which was accompanied by a presentation, summarised the Council's role in connection with preparing for, responding to, and recovering from flooding incidents within the Borough.

Members noted the following:-

- Over the last few years there had been an increase in flooding from surface water and that the Council's policy on the provision of sandbags was not to supply them under any circumstances.
- Detailed information regarding the Council's policy on flooding and contact details of other agencies was on the Council's website. Information on the national flood forum's Blue pages directory, which shows products available and survey information was also available.
- Members were advised that a new report on flood risk management – the Letwin Report - had recently been published. Officers would bring a further report to the Committee if any implications for WHBC were identified and assessed.
- Members thanked Officers for supporting the smooth operation in Welham Green following the loss of the gas supply to a large number of properties when water had leaked in to a gas main. The emergency planning had worked really well.
- Members noted, following concerns raised regarding fluvial flooding arising from excessive rainfall in certain areas of the Borough, which in their view was as a result of grids blocked, that there was little the Borough Council could do as this was a County Council responsibility, and they would not deal with blocked drains except on a rota basis. This had been an issue for the Borough Council for some time. Members were advised to contact the Flood Risk Management Department at the County Council.
- Officers undertook to provide feedback to the County Council if Members believed that the severe flooding experienced in the Borough on 23 June 2016 was as a direct result of gullies blocked solid with soil, leaves etc.
- Members were further advised that it was Highways money which funded gully clearance and Members should contact their County Councillor directly in relation to this function.
- In response to concerns raised regarding the out of hours service provided on the 23 June 2016 when many members of the public had been unable to get through to the Fire and Rescue Service or had been diverted to Essex Fire and Rescue, officers advised that Fire and Rescue Service call centres had been unable to deal with the level of calls and the Fire Service had advised that it could not respond to any more flood related calls. Officers further advised that the number of staff in the Council's out of hours call centre had been quadrupled once the scale of the rainfall had been ascertained. On June 23rd the situation had been overwhelming due to the sudden rainfall on a massive scale.
- Members stated that it was the owner's responsibility to protect their property and to be aware of whether there was a possibility of the area or property flooding when they purchased the property. For privately rented properties or for Council tenants it was, in theory, again the owner's responsibility.
- Many residents in the Borough did not know where flooding was likely to occur and should make themselves aware of risk areas if possible.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12 September 2016

- The council's response is primarily concerned with providing support to vulnerable residents in the Borough by setting up reception centres if requested by the emergency services and also in assisting with the identification of vulnerable residents.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the contents of this report, the Council's responsibilities, preparations and the work to date.

21. CONSIDERATION OF A FLY GRAZING PROTOCOL

The report of the Director (Finance and Operations) related to the introduction of a fly grazing protocol to deal with the practise of leaving horses on someone else's land without permission.

Officers provided the following responses to concerns raised by Members:-

- The Police, who had traditionally been responsible for fly grazing, had had problems with horses escaping on to roads.
- Legislation had been deemed to be inadequate for this purpose. New legislation had been enacted and power had been devolved to enable Local Authorities to act against the horse owners.
- The horse owners were responsible for their horses in the first instance or it would default to the Local Authority.
- Fly grazing, a Local Authority function could not be ignored and funding had not been transferred from the Police.
- The information received from the Police had indicated that nationally Hertfordshire had the highest road traffic instances concerning escaped horses and Welwyn Hatfield was the third highest borough.
- In relation to fly grazing, 300 instances had been reported to the Police in the last year.
- Now that the powers had been devolved, the Police would expect the Local Authority to use its powers quickly and to have the necessary protocols in place.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report and protocol on Fly Grazing be noted.
2. That the report and protocol on Fly Grazing be recommended to Cabinet for adoption to form the basis of a working document to be updated as operationally required.

22. ENVIRONMENT SERVICES 1ST QUARTER 2016/17

The report of the Director (Finance and Operations) combined Environment Services information and Serco's customer satisfaction performance for quarter 1 for 2016/17.

Recycling Performance

Members welcomed the increase in the recycling rate to just over 54% and the explanation from Officers that the street sweeping materials, which went to a different facility where material was extracted and was either recycled or composted. This was landfill in the last quarter whereas this quarter was estimated that approximately 70% was now recycled.

Recycling Collection (blue-lidded bin)

Members requested that some context be provided in relation to the dissatisfaction referred to in the report relating to the perceived infrequency of collections, missed collections and recycling bins not being big enough at the next quarter.

Ground maintenance

Officers, following queries raised by Members regarding the new low figure for the satisfaction for verges, hedges and shrubs, with the agreement of the Chairman undertook to look into the reasons should the figure remain low and would flag it up for the Committee's attention.

General Discussion

Officers, in response to the point raised by Members that no reference to local recycling centres was made, advised that the satisfaction survey did not ask the direct question relating to local recycling centres e.g. those at shopping parades. Members were not satisfied with their local one as it was always full and had to make the call all too often to the contact centre.

The Director (Finance & Operations), in response to a question from a Member regarding the fly-tip prosecution, reported that the money the guilty party was ordered to pay costs in the region of £3,000 would be paid to the council via the Court costs, which would take some time to be received. The guilty party also had to complete a significant number of hours on community service. Although the money may be slow in coming through should it not come the Court would enforce it and the Council would pursue this matter.

Officers undertook to advise the Committee when the money had been received.

Members welcomed the action taken by the Council with regards to the fly-tip prosecution and the message which it portrayed to the public was that the press attention was very welcome.

With regards to Recycling Collection (blue-lidded bin), Members queried whether residents were asked open questions and noted that some residents had stated that they were not happy with the frequency of the service.

The Chairman reassured the Committee that satisfaction with Grounds Maintenance – verges was lower than previously and that Officers would look into the information and keep the service under close review. If performance remained low then Officer would look into the matter further and bring it to the Committee's attention.

Litter and Sweeping Services

Performance Indicator 18 – Members asked that Officers report the actions being taken to improve the dissatisfaction rates for this target at the next meeting when performance would be reported.

Members applauded the support given by Officers to residents who had formed groups in localities to litter pick and were of the view that this support should continue.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

23. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT - QUARTER 1

The report of the Director (Finance and Operations) and accompanying presentation provided the Committee with the performance indicator data collected for those services that fall within its remit. It provided Quarter 1 data for 2016-17, along with comparative information.

Performance Indicator 18 – Cleaner local streets survey rating based on amount of litter and detritus

Members were informed that following the street cleaning Officers carried out random inspections and assessed the cleanliness according to strict DEFRA graded criteria. It was not a survey question.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

1. That the performance indicators data collected and reported be noted.
2. That the feedback on the trends shown in these performance indicators from Members be provided to the Council's service teams.

24. CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The Chairman reported that a scrutiny Sub-Committee to carry out a specific piece on trees in the Borough had been appointed at the meeting of the Committee on 4 July 2016. The first meeting of the Sub-Committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 22 September 2016 at 7.00pm in the Council Chamber. Nominations for Membership had been received.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12 September 2016

25. COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

Members noted the amendment to the Committee Scrutiny Work Programme of Health Promotion to Health Protection, which may be put back to the January 2017 meeting of the Committee.

Meeting ended at 8.30 pm
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