

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26 March 2018

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday 26 March 2018 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors S.Glick (Chairman)

H.Beckett, M.Birleson, J.Broach, N.Chapman,
M.Cowan, P.Mabbott (substituting for H.Bower),
N.Taylor, J.Weston

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: J.Armstrong-Bridges (Tenants' Panel Representative)
J.Corson (Tenants' Panel Representative)

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) (N. Long)
Head of Public Health and Protection (J. Harding)
Head of Planning (C. Haigh)
Head of Environment (D. Reyner)
Environmental Health Team Leader (C. Brown)
Senior Performance and Strategy Officer (G. Crawford)
Governance Services Officer (H. Johnson)
Governance Services Officer (M. Lowe)

ALSO PRESENT: Contract Manager, Serco (R.Guy)

46. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

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

Councillor P.Mabbott for H.Bower.

47. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.Bower, H.Bromley, K.Holman and B.Sarson.

48. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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49. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 30 January 2018 in the report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

50. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT Q3

Report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) and accompanying presentation provided the Committee with the Quarter 3 2017-18 performance indicator data collected for services within its remit, along with comparative information.

The report and presentation helped to identify which of the Councils' services had improved, not improved or remained the same in their key performance areas. Service comments were also included to explain the performance, along with any further action needed.

Most the Performance Indicators (PI's) performed well, targets were met or just missed.

Following Members' questions, the Head of Environment informed Members that targets for PI 18 "Percentage of household waste collected and sent for reuse, recycling and composting" were not set at 100% and would never be set at that level due to the fact that residents composted material at home, which was unquantifiable. The target for Q3 of 2017/18 was 42% and it was narrowly missed at 40%.

Members noted that Officers set the targets each year in light of what they considered to be achievable. It was noted that the recycling rate was above the National Average but also that the introduction of a charge for brown bins by the Council last year would have impacted on the figures.

A number of Members expressed the view that more ambitious and stretching targets should be set across the board and in particular for PI 18, "Percentage of household waste collected and sent for reuse, recycling and composting" and PI 19 "The cleaner local streets survey rating based on amount of litter and detritus" It was felt that the current level of cleanliness was not acceptable and residents were not satisfied with the level of service as indicated in PI 20 "The percentage of residents either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with street cleansing (e.g. litter and sweeping services)".

Members also queried PI 28 "The percentage of planning enforcement investigations completed within the stated timescale". There were no figures for the categories and the Head of Planning advised he would get back to the Member in question as to why there were no figures.

The following answer was circulated to Members on 28 March 2018:

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The graph showed performance in Q3 of 2017/2018 as 0% and the accompanying explanation was “No cases in the relevant categories were received in this period and so no investigations were completed”. For clarification, the performance target related to Priority A investigations which were serious enforcement breaches in the form of works to a listed building, works to protected trees and works to trees in conservation areas. Because there were no such investigations during Q3, the performance was null.

Regarding PI 23 “Completion rate of all tree maintenance work within the planned programme” Members requested a breakdown of the tree maintenance jobs completed, rather than just the % figure. The following answer was circulated to Members on 9 April 2018:

“There were 248 tree jobs completed during Q3: 153 in October 2017, 51 in Nov 2017 and 44 in Dec 2017”.

The Chairman congratulated the Officers in their performance and stated that the targets would be revisited and revised in the new municipal year.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the performance indicator data collected and reported be noted.
- (2) That the views expressed during the discussion of the Performance Indicators be noted.
- (3) That consideration be given to the revision of the performance indicators for the new Municipal Year by the relevant Service Teams be agreed.

51. TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY

Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) setting out the amendments proposed to the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy following comments received through the consultation. It was recognised that the most important addition to the draft strategy was the clarification of the inspection regime for trees which was more clearly stated in Policy 1.

Policy 1 indicated the areas where the Council would carry out tree work (such as in instances of pedestrian safety, decay or structural damage to the tree) and in particular the frequency of tree inspections which would be on a three year rolling program. For the avoidance of doubt an example was given: a tree inspected in the spring in the first year could be inspected again in the autumn in the fourth year.

In addition to the frequency of tree inspections it was noted in Policy 3 that 300 trees would be planted annually and a monthly tree felling list would be produced.

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The Committee noted that tree planting would be a potential response to mitigating air quality issues in Hatfield Business Park and Comet Way.

Members felt that some of the comments in the consultation were not fully taken on board and that the recommendations of the tree scrutiny sub-group concerning issues in Policy 2 had not been incorporated into the draft strategy.

Policy 2 outlined where the Council would not carry out tree work, for example in instances to increase the amount of sunlight reaching a property, to improve mobile phone reception or alleviate problems caused by natural phenomena such as leaves or algae.

Some Members expressed regret at what was in their view the excessive focus on trees at the expense of the Borough's residents and the failure of the Committee to take on the views of the tree scrutiny sub-group.

Following discussion the Chairman moved that the Committee agree Recommendation 2.2 in the report that the Strategy be recommended for adoption to the Cabinet and this was lost (4 voting for and 5 against).

The Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) highlighted to Members that the critical safety regime would not be implemented if the strategy was not adopted.

Members agreed that the safety regime needed to be implemented.

It was suggested by the Head of Planning that the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy be adopted by the Cabinet apart from Policy 2 which would be subject to further discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.

In the interim, the Head of Planning suggested that the current policy, which detailed areas where the Council would not carry out tree work, would be used until the discussion by the Committee on Policy 2 had taken place and a recommendation made to the Cabinet.

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

- (1) That Policy 2 of the Tree and Woodland Strategy be subject to further discussion at the next meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- (2) That, with the exception of Policy 2, the amendments proposed to the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy as the result of the comments received through the consultation be accepted.

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- (3) That the amended draft Tree and Woodland Strategy, less Policy 2, be recommended to the Cabinet for adoption.

52. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2018/19

Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) setting out (in Appendix A) the Food Safety Service Plan for 2018/19 for Welwyn Hatfield which was a requirement of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

As agreed by Members last year Appendix B was a review of performance against the previous Food Safety Service Plan and would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee in the New Municipal Year.

Members received a presentation published by the FSA called "Regulating Our Future" which highlighted forthcoming changes by central government due to be implemented at the local level. Members noted that no decisions had been made by the Council in terms of how it would be delivered.

The majority of Members were of the view that it should be compulsory for businesses to display their food hygiene ratings

Members noted that food ratings of some businesses had improved due to the training and education provided by the Environmental Health Team (EH).

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the performance against the previous Food Safety Service Plan be noted.
- (2) That the Food Safety Service Plan as set out in Appendix A be agreed and recommended to Cabinet and adopted by the Council.

53. NOISE UPDATE - REPRISE AND BALSAM

Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) updated Members on the work carried out by the Environmental Health team in relation to the programmed out of hours noise initiative provided through Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam.

Operation Reprise provided a response service every Friday and Saturday night throughout the year between the hours 22:00 and 03:00.

Operation Balsam provided a response service by working with part of a larger police operation targeted to coincide with the start and end of the University of Hertfordshire academic year over a two to three week period.

Members congratulated the teams on the work on Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam. It was noted that residents were aware of the projects, in

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part thanks to social media and that the residents appreciated the service and the impact it had had on their community.

RESOLVED:

That the work undertaken by the Public Health and Protection and the Street Warden team taking part in Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam be noted.

54. CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) updated Members on the work undertaken to produce a Corporate Enforcement Policy which covered the enforcement work of a number of Council service areas. The report also explained the results of a consultation process and presented a final draft of the policy at appendix A.

RESOLVED:

That the final draft of the Corporate Enforcement Policy as set out in Appendix A agreed and recommended to Cabinet for agreement and ultimately, approval by the Council.

55. ENVIRONMENT SERVICES (QUARTER 2 & 3) 2017/18

Report by the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) combining Environment Service's information and Serco's customer satisfaction performance for Quarter 2 and 3 2017/18.

The figures for the independent customer satisfaction survey which were disappointing, were noted at 73.9% for Quarter 2 and 69.90% for Quarter 3 across all Streetscene services.

It was also noted that the number of missed bins remained low with Serco collecting on average 99.8% of bins.

In particular, Members noted that satisfaction for street cleaning was 70% for Quarter 2 and 60% for Quarter 3.

Members noted that there had been a small but gradual decline in the service and felt strongly that the overall rating for Streetscene services needed to significantly improve for the next quarter.

The Contracts Manager for Serco stated that they recognised there were service issues and were reviewing the cleansing section which would improve performance in the future.

Then Councillor J. Broach moved and Councillor M. Cowan seconded that:

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“This Committee notes the service concerns raised by residents to litter clearance in Welwyn and Hatfield and expresses its sincere disappointment in the poor service currently provided by Serco. This Committee requests that all changes to targets are notified to Members before they come into effect”.

And on being put to the vote was unanimously agreed.

There was also discussion about the performance of Highways England and their performance in terms of the collection of litter around highways.

It was then moved and seconded that:

“The Committee asks Highways England to clear the litter around the motorways intersections in our district”.

And on being put to the vote was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Environment Services (Quarter 2 and & 3) 2017/2018 report be noted.
- (2) That Members be notified of any changes to targets with regards to Serco's services before they come into effect, particularly with regards to street cleaning.
- (3) That Highways England be asked by the Committee to clear the litter around the motorway intersections in the Borough.

56. REVIEW OF THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLE LICENCE TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) setting out a proposal which recommended a review of the licence conditions in respect of the vehicles suitability in regard to The Equality Act 2010.

Members noted that currently there were no wheelchair accessible taxis licensed by the Council in the borough and welcomed the report.

Members also noted that from a risk management perspective failure to introduce wheelchair accessible vehicles could leave the Council open to challenge under the Equality Act 2010. However the cost of adapting vehicles would be financially challenging for the owner and in some cases would not be viable.

There was a suggestion from a Member that the license fee could be reduced to balance the cost of adapting of a vehicle.

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RESOLVED:

- (1) That further consideration be given by the Council of the introduction of a condition to the licence of Hackney Carriage vehicles, licensed by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, in respect of Wheelchair Accessible vehicles.
- (2) That a consultation process be undertaken in respect of the introduction of wheelchair accessible vehicles should the licence conditions change.
- (3) That the results of the consultation process be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.

57. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The pro-forma, which set out the Committee's overview work programme, had been updated since the last meeting to enable the forward planning of items to be considered to take place. Items which the Committee agreed it would like to consider would be scheduled into the work programme.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme as agreed be noted.

58. COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the final recommendations of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (EOOSC) Sub-Committee on the Prevalence and Eradication of Rats in the Borough.

The Committee had appointed a Sub-Committee at its meeting on 13 November 2018 to scrutinise the prevalence of rats in the district and the methods of eradicating them.

Members noted that a number of meetings of the Sub-Committee had taken place. At the meeting on 7 March 2018 the Sub-Committee agreed that, due to the need to complete the Scrutiny review before the end of this Municipal Year, the recommendations be reported to the next meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at the next Cabinet meeting.

Following a brief discussion, some Members expressed interest in seeing the background papers together with the actual figures for the number of rats in the district.

RESOLVED:

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- (1) That the recommendations made by the EOOSC Sub-Committee on the Prevalence and Eradication of Rats in the Borough be noted.
- (2) That the recommendations of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee as listed in the appendix to the report be referred to Cabinet for consideration with the outcome reported back to the Committee.
- (3) That the recommendations of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee be made available to Officers undertaking the procurement exercise for the pest control contract so they can be taken into account for the award of contract.
- (4) That a presentation from the pest control contractor and the Council's Contract Manager be given at the next Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman thanked the members and officers for their attendance and work on the Committee for the past year.

Meeting ended 9.30pm
HJ