

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
 HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
 WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 9
 SEPTEMBER 2014, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Pope (Chairman).
 Councillors D Abbott, W Ashley, R Beeching,
 E Buckmaster, A Dearman, C Rowley,
 G Williamson and B Wrangles.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Alexander, D Andrews and
 P Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
David Thorogood	- Environmental Co- Ordinator
Trevor Watkins	- Waste Services Manager

220 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of
 Councillor C Woodward. It was noted that Councillor R
 Beeching was substituting for Councillor Woodward.

221 MINUTES – 10 JUNE 2014

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

222 CHANGES TO RECYCLING SERVICES: REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The Executive Member for Community Safety and the Environment submitted a report providing Members with an update following the implementation of the changes to the recycling service in November 2013. The report also provided an update on the outcomes of those changes, the detail of which was set out in the Essential Reference Paper.

Members were reminded of what had been implemented by the Authority under the SPARC project, which had been delivered on time and slightly under budget. The Head of Environmental Services advised that the residents survey had indicated a high level of awareness of the changes and the survey showed that satisfaction levels had risen from 77% in 2011 to 80% in 2013. Waste services satisfaction levels had also increased from 77% to 83%.

Members were reminded that the Authority had addressed the issue of removing card from the organic waste stream, which had resulted in a positive effect on the composting operation and there was now a very low level of card contamination of organic waste.

The Head of Environmental Services stated that the changes in the service had engendered a marked increase in recycling performance allied to a reduction in waste levels. Members were advised that the amount of paper collected was slightly below the 2012/13 levels (4.3%) but this was much better than expected.

Members were reminded that, nationally and in East Herts, the quantity of paper being captured for recycling

had been falling for several years due to people moving to electronic media. In East Herts, the 2012/13 level for November to March was 11% below the 2011/12 figure for the same period.

The Head of Environmental Services reported that the smaller recycling vehicle fleet and associated collection round efficiencies would deliver a saving of around £94,300 for 2014/15 compared with the previous year.

Members were advised that there had been an expected spike in missed collections when the new SPARC collection rounds were introduced. Members were further advised that the numbers of missed collections had returned to normal levels and the service was now performing well.

Councillor R Beeching queried what the 4% reduction in waste sent to landfill would actually save in disposal costs. He also commented on what this equated to in terms of tonnage. The Waste Services Manager undertook to provide a written response after the meeting.

In response to a query from Councillor G Williamson regarding whether soft plastics could be recycled in future, the Head of Environment Services advised that this would depend on whether there was a market for such material. He advised that the recycling industry responded well to technological advances and was very innovative. Members were advised that new processes might mean that there was a market for such material in future.

In reply to a comment from the Chairman, Members were advised that there might be capacity in future for commercial recycling collections once the residential collection rounds had been completed. The Chairman thanked the Waste Services Manager for his hard work for East Herts Council over many years.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the implementation and the outcomes of the recycling service changes be noted.

223 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY HEALTHCHECK: APRIL 2014 TO JULY 2014

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report setting out the performance of key indicators relating to Environment Scrutiny for the period April to July 2014, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and supporting Essential Reference Papers.

In respect of EHPI 157a, Processing of planning applications: 'Major', Members were advised that the workload of Officers was very high and additional staff had been recruited and they were working through a backlog of applications.

In respect of EHPI 2.4, removal of fly tips, Members were advised that the data on page 35 was incorrect and an updated health check spreadsheet had been tabled for the Committee. Adjusted performance data was detailed in the report on page 27.

In relation to EHPI 191, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised that the residual household waste per household was 441 kilos against a target of 448 kilos. Members were also advised that, in respect of EHPI 192, the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting was 54.4%.

In response to a query from Councillor D Abbott in respect of EHPI 2.4, the removal of fly tips, Members were advised that there was no correlation between the closure of household waste and recycling sites and fly tipping in East Herts.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the performance for the period April to July 2014 be noted.

224 UPDATE REPORT ON FUEL POVERTY IN EAST HERTS

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report setting out the key points of the Government's draft consultation document for addressing Fuel Poverty in England and suggestions on what could be done locally to assist with fuel poverty.

The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager advised that Officers had now received a long awaited draft report from the Government in respect of Fuel Poverty in England. Members were advised that, once the final report was published, Officers hoped to produce a specific Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan for East Herts.

Members were also reminded that the generally accepted definition of Fuel Poverty was when more than 10% of the household income was required to be spent on heating a dwelling to a comfortable level.

The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager stated that, under the new definition, a household was in Fuel Poverty when fuel costs were above average in reference to the national median level and if a household spent that amount, the occupants would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

Members were advised that the main effect of the new definition was to reduce the number of households in apparent fuel poverty, since the old definition was heavily influenced by fluctuating fuel prices. The new definition aimed to better understand the number of ongoing fuel poor.

The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager reported that 7.5% of East Herts local households were fuel poor and this was in line with the Hertfordshire average. Watford Borough had the largest proportion of

fuel poor at 10.3% whilst Stevenage and Broxbourne were the least at 6.3%. Members were reminded that East Herts had a very similar level of fuel poor as a typical inner London Borough, backing up the evidence that fuel poverty was not solely an inner city problem.

Members were advised that communities that were off gas towards the rural north of the District and owners of hard to treat properties with solid walls were the most likely to be in fuel poverty. Officers hoped that further data on specific communities maybe available for a future report and this reflected a similar picture across the UK where there was usually a significantly greater proportion of fuel poor in more rural communities, off mains gas and living in “hard to treat” properties.

The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager detailed the role of local authorities and the Health and Wellbeing Boards in helping residents in a Fuel Poverty situation. Members were advised of a number of measures that were already in place across the District and the progress that had been made against these measures.

In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching, Members were advised that landlords would soon be obliged to ensure that a property was energy and heat efficient and it would soon be impossible to rent a property that was not at an acceptable standard. Grants were available for landlords in East Herts to assist with maintaining these standards.

In reply to a query from the Chairman, the Environmental Strategy and Development Manager stated that assistance for those in Fuel Poverty had to be assessed on a geographic basis so that only those who genuinely needed help would receive assistance.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised that, if support was going to be offered for measures such as loft and wall insulation, this would need to be included within the Medium Term

Financial Plan. The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager commented that the Green Deal on energy had been seen by some as an expensive way to borrow.

The Committee received the report and Members agreed that Officers be asked to bring forward costed proposals that take forward the Fuel Poverty Strategy for East Herts.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received;

(B) Officers bring forward costed proposals that would take forward the Fuel Poverty Strategy for East Herts;

(C) the Fuel Poverty Strategy must be supported by costed proposals being brought forward by Officers; and

(D) a further report and Action Plan be presented for Members' consideration when the Government's Fuel Poverty Framework was published.

225 WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the future work programme for Environment Scrutiny Committee for 2014/15. The Scrutiny Officer advised that, subject to national government guidance, a further report on fuel poverty would be submitted to the February 2015 meeting.

Members were advised that a report on pavement and grass verge parking would be submitted to the November 2015 meeting. A graduate trainee would be carrying out a 6 month study on the subject of pavement and grass verge parking from April 2015.

The Head of Environmental Services advised that the report to the 10 November 2015 meeting would set out the hot spots of pavement and grass verge parking and

would also summarise what needed to be done locally to address this issue.

RESOLVED – that the work programme, as amended, be approved.

226 EAST HERTS CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The Executive Member for Community Safety and the Environment submitted a report setting out the progress achieved during the first four years of implementing the East Herts Climate Change Action Plan.

Members were reminded that the Authority had adopted a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in December 2009. The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager advised that the waste contract had delivered considerable ongoing CO₂ savings and the total reduction in carbon emissions achieved since 2008/09 to date was 27%, which was in excess of the Council's agreed carbon reduction target of 25% by 2020.

Members were also advised that, since 2009, there had been a reduction of 15% in total CO₂ emissions, from major sources achieved so far (a further 2% improvement from 2012/13). If all sources were included CO₂ emissions from East Herts Council's service delivery had fallen by almost 17% since the baseline year.

The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager stated that, whilst overall CO₂ emissions for the Council's leisure facilities have risen by 4% last year, there had been a corresponding increase in usage of an additional 11,668 customer visits. Since the baseline year of 2009, average CO₂ emissions per visit to the Council's leisure facilities have fallen by almost 50% per visit in 2013 and this represented a major efficiency in terms of energy savings per user.

Members were advised that the past refurbishment of Castle Hall into Hertford Theatre, which included the

installation of a range of energy efficiency measures, had resulted in considerable ongoing carbon reductions year-on-year with an overall 29% reduction in CO₂ emissions.

The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager concluded by setting out the support offered by East Herts Council in support of the Government's Community Energy Strategy. The support on offer centred on grants from East Herts Council or facilitation work for the provision of community energy schemes.

In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching, the Environmental Strategy and Development Manager advised that reductions in fuel costs or reductions in CO₂ as less energy was used in the form of Kilowatt Hours, had come about due to a number of energy efficiency measures. A voltage regulator was in use at Wallfields and pool covers at the leisure facilities resulted in a significant direct saving due to the heat that was no longer being lost from the Council's pools.

Councillor P Ruffles encouraged Officers to develop contacts with the Environment Agency to get things moving in respect of progress regarding the Micro Hydro scheme at Hertford Theatre. The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager advised that it generally took about 3 to 4 years to get a micro hydro scheme through the Environment Agency.

Members were advised that the Council's negotiations with the Environment Agency were nearing conclusion and the latest piece of work being undertaken was acting on an Environment Agency requirement for an Eel Pass. The Environmental Strategy and Development Manager undertook to update the Committee at the next meeting.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress achieved in implementing the East Herts Climate Change Action plan since its adoption in 2009, be noted;

(B) an update report be submitted to the next meeting in respect of the Micro Hydro Scheme at Hertford Theatre; and

(C) Officers bring forward some budgeted proposals to progress the Council's policy for the assistance being offered to Community Energy Groups.

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm

Chairman
Date