

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE WAYTEMORE ROOM,
COUNCIL OFFICES, THE CAUSEWAY,
BISHOP'S STORTFORD ON TUESDAY 7
JUNE 2011, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D Hollebton (Chairman)
Councillors D Abbott, W Ashley, R Beeching,
P Gray, N Poulton, J Wyllie and J Wing.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Carver and G McAndrew.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Andrew Pulham	- Parking Manager
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

71 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Basra, C Rowley and M Wood. It was noted that Councillor J Wing was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Wood.

72 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED - that the appointment of the Vice Chairman be deferred to the next meeting to enable all Members of the Committee to be present.

73 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

74 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all new and returning Members to the first meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2011/12 Civic Year. She hoped that the Committee would conduct interesting and good work throughout the year.

75 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J Wing declared a personal interest in the matters referred to at Minute 79 – Contract Performance - Environmental Operations, on the grounds that he was involved with the Ware in Bloom project.

76 EAST HERTS TRANSPORT AND PARKING STRATEGY

The East Herts Parking Manager submitted a report inviting Members to consider work that Officers had undertaken to date on the preparation of a Transport and Parking Strategy for East Herts. Members were also requested to establish a Task and Finish Group to shape and guide the development of this Strategy to its conclusion.

The Committee was advised that Councillor M Carver had also attended Town Council meetings as well as a full round of Community Voice meetings. Hertfordshire County Council had prepared a local transport plan

(LTP3). This document had taken into account issues relevant to the East Herts District.

The Parking Manager stated that the County Council had delivered the Local Transport Plan in April 2011. They had also prepared an Urban Transport Plan for Ware and similar documents for Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth. Officers were now analysing a considerable body of evidence in drafting the strategy.

The Committee was reminded of the need to shape this evidence into a strategy document that was relevant and pertinent to East Herts. Officers were seeking authority from Members to convene a Task and Finish Group so that this Strategy could be finalised.

The Parking Manager anticipated that member's participation in the group's work would involve the reading of the background documents and he expected there to be 4 or 5 meetings during the summer and early autumn. He stated that he was seeking to draw on the local knowledge of members and this might mean a Member from each of the 5 main towns plus one rural Member to participate in the work of the Group.

Councillor N Poulton commented on whether a Member was required from each of the 5 main towns. He also queried whether the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group should be a Member of this Committee.

The Committee noted the work undertaken to date in respect of the strategy. Members also approved the set up of a Task and Finish Group to shape and guide the development of the Strategy. Members were requested to submit expressions of interest to the Chairman of the Committee by 17 June 2011.

RESOLVED – that (A) the work undertaken to date on the preparation of a Transport and Parking Strategy for East Herts be noted;

(B) a Task and Finish Group be set up to shape

and guide the development of the Strategy to its conclusion; and

(C) Members should submit expressions of interest to the Chairman of the Committee by 17 June 2011.

77 2010/11 END OF YEAR SERVICE PLANNING REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report that provided a summary of the 2010/11 Service Plan actions that were relevant to the remit of the Environment Scrutiny Committee. Members were referred to service plan actions that had been achieved, as well as details of actions that required a revised completion date.

Members were invited to ask questions of Officers in respect of the report now submitted.

Councillor J Wing referred to town maintenance and graffiti that had been cleaned up in Hertford following the success of Community Service Orders. He stated that problems of graffiti and fly posting had been controlled in Ware but there had been an explosion of both problems in Ware throughout 2011.

The Head of Environmental Services stated that there was reference later in the agenda to how the Authority worked with other bodies in getting things rectified across the District. Members were reminded of the work of the Environmental Quality Task and Finish Group in shaping how East Herts Council worked with partners.

Members were advised of useful feedback that had been received in relation to the Community Payback Scheme. The Head of Environmental Services stressed that East Herts Council was not responsible for removing all instances of graffiti but the Authority would remove graffiti from street furniture and public buildings.

The Committee was advised that for other instances of graffiti, the Authority aimed to work with partners,

residents and businesses to arrange for its removal from private property.

He stated that, when the Authority did get involved in removing it directly, this was normally undertaken by its contractors. The Community Payback scheme was, however, a good way of involving offenders in maintenance activities in the public realm.

The Committee was reminded that the removal of graffiti from private property without the owners permission posed the risk of litigation and claims for damage. The Council did offer a service to businesses and residents to remove it from private property at a cost, so long as the right to make a claim was waived.

Councillor G McAndrew commented on Southern Country Park and sought clarification on how the residents' survey information had been obtained. The Head of Environmental Services explained that the Council's main residents' survey was conducted every 2 years.

He summarised how the surveys for these specific sites were conducted and explained they were based on questionnaires completed by people who had attended community events in the parks or responded to a local survey in the case of Vantorts.

The Chairman congratulated Officers on the high level of satisfaction with East Herts parks and playgrounds which had come out of the recent questionnaires and survey.

RESOLVED – that (A) the summary of achievements against the 2010/11 Service Plan actions be received; and

(B) the Service Plan Actions that required revised completion dates be noted.

submitted a report on the performance of key indicators relating to the Environment Scrutiny Committee during the period February to March 2011.

The Director reminded Members that this report was a regular item that was submitted to all of the Scrutiny Committees as an update of performance against key indicators. The financial elements were included in a version of the report that was submitted to the Executive.

The Committee was advised that the East Herts Performance Indicators (PIs) were reviewed along with other targets every year. Members were invited to ask questions of the Director in respect of the report now submitted.

Councillor N Poulton invited the Director to detail the difference between East Herts PIs and National Indicators (NIs). The Director explained that East Herts PIs were not measured nationally and the Authority monitored the targets that were most relevant to Council business.

The Director stated that the definition of how indicators were measured had been set out by central government if they were originally national indicators. The Parking Manager commented that PCN stood for Penalty Charge Notice and was essentially the parking ticket issued by Civil Enforcement Officers. He stated that the NTO was a Notice to Owner, which was a statutory document issued to the public in pursuit of payment for parking offences.

Councillor G McAndrew sought and was given clarification on the process residents had to initiate if they wished to challenge a PCN. The Parking Manager explained that the charge was reduced by 50% if paid within 14 days. A resident would not be placed in any jeopardy by challenging a PCN.

Councillor J Wing expressed concerns in relation to the levels of repetition in the agenda papers. He stated that he had been struggling to make sense of the abbreviations detailed in the reports. He also questioned

the need to included guidance on declarations of interest in each agenda issued to Members.

Councillor Wing requested that Officers provide Members with a list of the most commonly used abbreviations. The Director commented that Members had been issued with a list of abbreviations last year. He requested that the Scrutiny Officer arrange this list be made available to all members through their weekly Information Bulletin.

Councillor Wing commented on whether a missed bin collection included the failure by a resident to present a bin for collection.

The Head of Environmental Services explained that if a bin was not presented for collection, this absence was recorded by the refuse crews. If a resident complained of a missed collection and it had not been recorded as absent on the boundary on the collection day, a crew would be sent back to the property concerned. Members were advised that the Authority was conducting about 80,000 collections each week.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

79 CONTRACT PERFORMANCE - ENVIRONMENTAL OPERATIONS

The Head of Environmental Services submitted an annual report detailing the current performance of the three main contracts for refuse and recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance.

The Committee was advised that 2010/11 provided a full year of operation of the Alternate Refuse Collection (ARC) Scheme. The previous year, 2009/10 was only 6 months of ARC, which commenced in November 2009. Members were advised that performance had exceeded targets in relation to the numbers of missed bins per 100,000 collections. Members were also advised that

such data also covered periods of severe weather.

The Head of Environmental Services, responded to a question about how waste collection information was disseminated during last year's severe weather around the festive season and stated that the Council's website had been heavily utilised during this period.

He stressed that it was very difficult to decide what to tell residents until the changes to conditions were known as the Authority always sought to avoid promising collections that the contractors could then not meet if the adverse weather continued.

The Head of Environmental Services stated that Street Cleansing Complaints had fallen by 19% and although there had been a 25% increase in small fly tips, these mostly arose from the new recording criteria used by our contractors. The smaller fly tips, such as items the size of a standard black sack or less, would be collected by the Council's street cleansing contractors as part of their normal duties.

The number of larger fly tips had decreased by 2% but there had been a trend of increasing fly tipping for the last few years. Members were advised that prosecutions on most fly tips were very difficult to achieve. Officers had carried out 124 waste related investigations last year and it was necessary for the Authority to be tough on any offenders that were caught.

The Head of Environmental Services referred to a 12% increase in recycling and composting since the introduction of the ARC scheme. He stressed that this exceeded the Authority's performance target for last year. Officers also expected this to be the case at the conclusion of the current year.

Members were invited to scrutinise the performance of the Authority in respect of each of the services covered by the Environmental Operations. The Head of Environmental Services referred to a Hertfordshire Waste

Partnership target of 50% for recycling. He advised that the Authority was on course to achieve that target.

In response to comments from Councillor R Beeching in respect of permission for residents to issue free literature, the Head of Environmental Services advised that the Authority had the powers to require anyone distributing free literature in designated areas to seek permission.

The Authority also had powers to confiscate literature and issue fixed penalty notices where an individual did not have authority to hand this out. The purpose was to discourage littering by ensuring distributors took responsibility for any discarded material. Permission is not granted for placing literature on car windscreens.

In response to a query from Councillor P Gray, the Committee was advised that the Authority charged approximately £32 for an official permission to distribute literature.

Councillor J Wing stated that unlike at some other Local Authorities, the ARC scheme had been implemented with relatively little controversy.

In response to a comment from Councillor Wing in respect of Ware in Bloom and grounds maintenance standards in the Town, the Head of Environmental Services stressed that, whilst the Authority supported Ware in Bloom with officer and contractor time, limitations in funding meant that it was not possible to support the scheme financially.

Councillor Wing acknowledged the hard work put in by Officers. He stated that more could be done in certain areas of performance covered by the contracts referred to in the report now submitted. The Head of Environmental Services encouraged Members to inform Officers of any particular issues.

The Chairman congratulated Officers for all of their efforts to date. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the performance of the Council's main environmental management term contracts be received.

80 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

The Committee considered items for scrutiny during the Civic Year 2011/12 and additional items for inclusion within the Committee's Work Programme. These were set out in the report now submitted.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the work programme contained issues that were chosen and agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee in March 2011. There had been a few changes to the work programme since that meeting to take account of the budget setting process.

Members were referred to the material in the work programme that had been highlighted in green, as those issues that were within the remit of the Committee. Members were asked to pay particular attention to the specific issues from the Medium Term Financial Plan and capital programme that had been highlighted in the report now submitted.

The Scrutiny Officer sought the Committee's views on any items in the work programme that needed clarifying. Members were asked to inform The Director of Customer and Community Services of any financial items in need of clarification within the next couple of weeks.

In reference to paragraph 2.4 of the report now submitted, the Scrutiny Officer stated that there had been interest in carrying out some detailed work in respect of Environmental Crime Policy.

The Head of Environmental Services advised Members that, when this was proposed last year, Officers had not anticipated the extent of the Government's review of anti-social behaviour legislation and its significant impact on

and overlap with Environmental Crime. Officers considered it appropriate to await clarity on the legislative position in respect of Environmental Crime before undertaking this piece of work. This was agreed.

Members approved the Committee’s Work Programme as now submitted with the addition of the task and finish group to work on the policy development for Transport and Parking and the delay in the group to review Environmental Crime policy.

RESOLVED – that the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.03 pm

Chairman
Date