

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON TUESDAY,
2 DECEMBER 2008 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor W Quince (Chairman).
Councillors W Ashley, Mrs M H Goldspink,
P Grethe, G E Lawrence (substitute for Councillor
G McAndrew), M P A McMullen, D A A Peek,
N C Poulton.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors T Milner and P A Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Trevor Watkins	- Waste Services Manager

447 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors D Clark and G McAndrew. It was noted that
Councillor G E Lawrence was in attendance as substitute
for Councillor G McAndrew.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

448 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held
on 10 November 2008 be confirmed as a correct
record and signed by the Chairman.

449 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW - SCOPING REPORT

The Waste Services Manager advised that with the move from Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), there would be a more holistic approach to Environmental Quality by the Audit Commission.

The Committee was advised that the Authority would be judged on efforts made to form effective partnerships with statutory and non statutory Authorities in tackling issues of environmental quality as perceived by residents.

Members were advised that a task and finish group could be set up to examine the East Herts approach to maintaining and improving environmental quality, and also to examine how the Council could learn from the approach of other similar Authorities and opportunities for partnership working. A scoping document would be submitted to the next meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a query from Councillor N C Poulton, the Waste Services Manager advised that auditing of progress would be carried out by the Audit Commission. More detailed inspection would be carried out by the Tidy Britain Group (ENCAMs).

It was also suggested that the report could be submitted to the next meeting of the Highways Partnership Joint Member Panel so that residents' concerns could be addressed.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink welcomed the holistic approach but commented on whether there was more time for Officers to consider the issue. The Director of Customer and Community Services commented that CAA was imminent. Officers also advised it would be helpful to have the review completed before the Alternate Weekly Collection (AWC) scheme was implemented.

Councillor D A A Peek commented that this was an ideal subject for a task and finish group.

The Chairman commented that Councillor D Clark had welcomed the recommendations and had indicated her willingness to serve on the proposed task and finish group.

The Director confirmed that a scoping report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 3 March 2009 and a final report would be submitted on 16 June 2009.

The Committee supported the recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to review local environmental standards and inform future policy be supported; and

DCCS

(B) a further scoping report be submitted to the next meeting.

CE/DCCS

450 2009 - 10 SERVICE OPTIONS AND BEYOND

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support Services submitted a report outlining proposed efficiency savings for 2009-10. The report set out overall aspirational targets for savings over the next three years which would allow a balanced budget to be set and further investment for priority areas identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan. Potential savings of £999,500 had been put forward for 2009-2010.

The Director of Customer and Community Services requested that Members consider the proposals. He advised that the report sought Members' views and their "in principle" support or otherwise for each of the savings outlined in the appendix to the report now submitted.

Members referred to the Appendix attached to the report

now submitted, and requested that the following comments be referred to the Executive:

27 Env - Decommissioning of Ozone Monitoring (Env Health):

Councillor N C Poulton sought and was given clarification that decommissioning would have no adverse impact on future requirements for ozone monitoring.

In response to a query from Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink, the Director undertook to confirm in writing which other organisations monitored ozone levels in East Herts.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the Committee supported the decommissioning. Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink abstained from voting.

28 Env - Concessionary Fares:

Agreed.

Env 29 - Alternative Public Toilet Provision

The Waste Services Manager advised that public expectancy of public conveniences was such that users expected Council public facilities to be of the same standard as regularly cleaned facilities such as those found in supermarkets, shopping centres, pubs and restaurants.

The Committee was advised that the approach being adopted by some Authorities, whereby the public were permitted to use facilities in local business premises, could be considered in East Herts. A small annual fee would be paid from the Council to businesses to make facilities available for public use.

The Executive Member for Environment and Conservation commented that East Herts would not be the first Authority to adopt this scheme. Richmond and Westminster Councils had introduced such a scheme.

In response to a query from Councillor D A A Peek, the Director advised that when considering the funds for businesses compared to the financial support required for public conveniences, considerable savings could be achieved.

In response to a query from Councillor W Ashley, the Director reported alternative provisions would be put in place before any public conveniences were closed.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the Committee supported Alternate Public Toilet Provision. Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink abstained from voting.

Env 30 - Close Riverside Public Convenience

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink expressed concerns over the closure of the Riverside facility until alternative arrangements had been put in place. The Executive Member for Environment and Conservation commented that public facilities were available in a number of other locations in and around the town centre. He stated that Env 30 could be considered in conjunction with Env 29.

The Director commented that Officers had viewed the public convenience at the Riverside as an overprovision. Councillor N C Poulton commented that closure of the Riverside facility in advance of other public conveniences could result in negative publicity if the public got the impression other closures would follow.

The Committee supported Env 30 being considered in conjunction with Env 29 - Alternate Public Toilet Provision.

Env 31 to Env 34

The Director sought and received the Committee's approval to consider Env 31 to 34 collectively.

The Chairman highlighted a concern from Councillor J O Ranger in respect of building control performance

suffering due to a shortage of trained staff. Councillor Ranger had been particularly concerned that developers were not meeting their obligation to adhere to approved plans.

The Director advised that Officers had recently reviewed the planning and building control service. Consultation had taken place with all relevant Officers and there was a confidence that service delivery was possible on the basis now detailed.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink expressed concerns that approved schemes may not meet building control standards. Councillor N C Poulton requested additional information in respect of Env 35 - Historic Environmental Costs.

Env 35 - Councillor P A Ruffles expressed concern in respect of the loss of a budget code which contributed to the upkeep of the historic heritage of the District. Members commented that further information would assist the Committee in making an informed judgement. The Director undertook to ensure that Members be given clarification by the Head of Planning and Building Control in respect of Env 35 - Historic Environmental Costs before the next Executive meeting.

The Committee supported Env 31 to Env 34 in principle. It was also agreed that Members be given further clarification by the Head of Planning and Building Control in respect of Env 35 - Historic Environmental Costs before the next Executive meeting.

Env 36 - Consultancy Budget for Planning Policy

Agreed.

Env 37 - Refuse Contract Extension

The Waste Services Manager commented that the current refuse contract was due to expire at the end of 2009. He advised that Officers were renegotiating the contract to link

with the renewal of the street cleansing contract so economies of scale could be achieved by renewing both contracts together.

Agreed.

Env 38 - Countywide contract sale of paper for recycling

Agreed.

Env 39 - Cleansing and Refuse Contract

Agreed.

Env 40 - Replacement Bins

The Waste Services Manager advised that the £25 charge covered the cost of delivering a 240 litre black or brown bin. He commented that bins that were found and could be cleaned were reused.

In response to Members' comments, the Waste Services Manager advised that residents were encouraged to mark their bins.

Agreed.

Env 41 - Additional Income from recycling credits

The Waste Services Manager advised that recycling credits were based on an alternative financial model, whereby less waste was sent to landfill, which would result in rewards in the form of additional credits to Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) from Hertfordshire County Council.

Agreed.

The Chairman summarised a detailed submission from Councillor D Clark in respect of aspirational targets referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report now submitted. The

Director undertook to ask the Acting Director of Internal Services to provide a written response to Councillor Clark.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed of the Committee's comments now detailed.

451 ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY HEALTH CHECK - FROM APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2008

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a performance exception report, covering performance indicators relating to Environment Scrutiny Committee for the period April to September 2008.

In respect of EHPI 2.2 (45) - Waste: missed collections per 100,000 collections of household waste, the Waste Services Manager advised that due to new garden waste rounds, missed collections had risen per 100,000 collections earlier in the year. He commented that now new collection rounds had settled down, performance had improved significantly.

In respect of EHPI 218b - percentage of Abandoned Vehicles removed within 24 hours, Members were advised that the current ineffective contract was out to tender with St Albans Council managing this process on behalf of a consortium of 10 District Councils.

The Committee was advised that the existing contract was due to expire at the end of 2008. Members were advised that abandoned vehicles were being collected in 2 to 3 days rather than by the target of 24 hours.

In response to a request from Councillor N C Poulton, the Director advised that a report on the new contractor would be submitted to Environment Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman raised a written query from Councillor D Clark in respect of the Environment Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference. The Director undertook to ensure Councillor D Clark received a written response from officers. The Scrutiny Officer responded that a proposal to

bring all elements of Planning and Building Control under the remit of Environment Scrutiny Committee was currently being considered as part of the review of the Constitution.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED - that the report be received.

452 WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Committee considered items to be included in the work programme for 2008/09 and approved the programme as now submitted, subject to the addition of reports on Parks and Open Spaces and the scoping document for the Environmental Quality Review to the meeting on 3 March 2009.

The Committee also approved the addition of a report on Development Control Enforcement for the work programme for 2009/10, subject to agreement on amendments to the Constitution currently under consideration. It was noted that the Head of Planning and Building Control would provide a written response to Councillor Clark’s query in respect of EHPI 2.10.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that workshops would be held in spring 2009 to give Members the opportunity to formulate a work programme for 2009/10. Members were requested to suggest items for inclusion, so that the work programme could be refined at the next meeting of the Committee on 3 March 2009.

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

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.

Chairman
Date

W:\BSWP\NPS\Environment Scrutiny\2008 - 2009\2 December 2008\Minutes - 2 December