

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
26 JUNE 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Abbott (Chairman).
Councillors S Basra, R Beeching,
E Buckmaster, P Gray, M Pope, C Rowley
and J Wyllie.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews and M Carver.

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
Siobhan Smith	- Waste Services Officer

101 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor P Gray and seconded by Councillor C Rowley that Councillor J Wyllie be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 civic year.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, Councillor J Wyllie was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 civic

year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor J Wyllie be appointed Vice–Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 civic year.

102 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors W Ashley and B Wrangles. It was noted that Councillor M Pope was substituting for Councillor B Wrangles.

103 MINUTES - 13 MARCH 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

104 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all new and returning Members to the first meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 Civic Year. He hoped that the Committee would have a productive year.

105 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY HEALTH CHECK JANUARY THROUGH TO MARCH 2012

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators relating to Environment Scrutiny Committee from January to March 2012, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. The report also covered the appropriate 2011/12 Performance Outturns.

The Director stated that updated health check graphs and tables had been provided to Members. He apologised that the Committee had been provided with the trend charts covering the previous year's figures in the Agenda

papers.

The Director stated that, in respect of NI 191 – Residual household waste per household, the reported outturn for the year was 474kg, which exceeded the 2011/12 annual target of 459kg by 3%. Members were advised that Officers were reasonably satisfied with this outturn.

The Director advised that, in respect of NI 192 – Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting, the reported outturn for the year was that 48.35% of household waste collected had been sent for reuse, recycling or composting, which fell slightly short of the 50% target for 2011/12.

The Director commented that, in respect of NI 157c – Processing of planning applications: Other applications, the end of year performance outturn for 2011/12 was just below target at 92% against a very demanding target of 93%. Members were advised however, that performance was still exceeding the national target.

In response to a query from Councillor P Gray, the Head of Environmental Services stated that wheeled waste bins were the most appropriate solution for blocks of flats. At most locations the provision of recycling boxes was not considered appropriate due to health and safety concerns regarding the long distances and stairs that the residents or refuse crews would have to negotiate to empty the boxes. There are often storage issues for residents if recycling boxes were issued.

In response to a query from Councillor M Pope regarding the number of missed collections per 100,000 properties, the Committee was advised that this target often fluctuated and a target figure of 50 missed collections per 100,000 households was a very low figure.

The Chairman advised of two minor changes to the wording in the recommendations as detailed in the report now submitted. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received;

(B) the reported performance for the period January to March 2012 be received;

(C) the Outturns for 2011/12, as detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'C' of the report submitted, be received; and

(D) the 2013/14 target of 75% for EHPI 90b – Satisfaction with waste recycling, be supported.

106 2011/12 END OF YEAR SERVICE PLAN REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report which detailed the 2011/12 Service Plan actions that had been achieved and those requiring a revised completion date.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services expressed the gratitude of Corporate Management Team (CMT) towards Heads of Service and Officers for the progress which had been achieved against the 2011/12 service plans. Members were invited to ask questions of Officers in respect of the report now submitted.

Councillor P Gray praised the achievements of Officers in meeting service plan actions, as detailed in the report now submitted and noted that two of the three incomplete actions were due to external delays and the third item was in hand. Councillor D Abbott also praised Heads of Service and Officers for a job well done.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the summary of achievements against the 2011/12 Service Plan actions be received; and

(B) the Service Plan Actions which required

revised completion dates be noted.

107 CONTRACT PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENTAL OPERATIONS

The Head of Environmental Services submitted an annual report detailing the 2011/12 performance of the two main contracts for Waste Services (Refuse and Recycling and Street Cleansing) and Grounds Maintenance.

The Committee was advised that there had been a slight increase in the level of missed bins per 100,000 collections from 34.56 in 2010/11 to 36.80 in 2011/12. Officers were not unduly concerned however, as this covered the peak period when the new contract had been introduced with vehicles and day round changes. The figure was still within target and the contract was progressing very smoothly.

The Head of Environmental Services advised that the percentage of household waste recycled and composted had increased again slightly from 48.28% in 2010/11 to 48.35% in 2011/12, falling slightly below the expected target of 50%. Members were advised that the economic downturn had had a negative effect on performance as the amount of material being recycled by residents had decreased as they were not buying as many newspapers, magazines.

Members were advised of a slight fall in commercial waste collection income although the Authority had maintained its customer base and continued to secure new customers. The Head of Environmental Services stated that the performance of street cleansing had decreased slightly. The East Herts performance was 1% for litter and 10% for detritus in 2010/11. In 2011/12, litter had increased to 2.3% and detritus fell to 6.9%.

Members were reminded that East Herts had a very low

level of litter problems compared to many local authority areas and the low percentages reflected this. The Committee was also advised that there had been a significant decline in fly tipping due to increased. The level of enforcement activity has contributed to this.

Councillor M Pope referred to the methodology used for measuring performance of street cleansing on major roads. He also referred to how the Authority addressed the build up of rubbish on the smaller roads across the District. The Head of Environmental Services undertook to respond to Councillor M Pope after the meeting.

Councillor D Andrews commented on whether Officers could update Members in respect of the current position regarding the treatment of weeds across East Herts. The Head of Environmental Services undertook to respond to this query after the meeting.

Councillor J Wyllie expressed concern that on a number of occasions the grounds maintenance staff had cut some grass on a verge on his garden adjacent to his house in Bishop's Stortford and in so doing had damaged some plants.

The Head of Environmental Services undertook to investigate the matter and respond outside of the meeting. He commented that East Herts Council grounds maintenance contractors covered numerous areas of grass verge and communal gardens and this occasionally resulted in confusion regarding ownership of some of these areas.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the performance of the Council's main environmental management contracts be received and noted.

108 INCREASING DRY RECYCLING CAPTURE

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a report updating Members in respect of what was being done to improve recycling performance in East Herts.

Members were advised that recycling levels had fallen across East Herts, most likely due to the recession and an increasing trend towards the use of electronic media. This is a national trend. This reduction had had a significant impact on the Council's income from the sale of recycling materials.

The Head of Environmental Services stated that in an effort to increasing dry recycling capture, Officers would be sending information to residents in areas with a lower than average recycling weight per household, in an effort to encourage them to recycle more. Areas with large numbers of flats had not been targeted by this exercise as their recycling tends to be lower anyway.

The Committee was advised that bin hangers are being left on residents' bins to encourage increased recycling and, where necessary, ensure any extra demand for recycling boxes was met. Officers had issued 2000 bin hangers already and there had already been 91 requests for additional boxes. Officers would report back to the Committee in terms of whether the campaign had been successful.

Councillor E Buckmaster emphasised the importance of reaching the right people with this campaign to avoid inadvertently upsetting residents who already recycled as much as they could under current arrangements.

Councillor M Carver, as the local ward

Member, advised that he would have preferred more notice of the start of the scheme. He stated that he had been contacted by a number of residents.

Councillor P Gray commented that it was important to target young people to encourage recycling behaviour early. He asked whether there was work taking place with local schools to educate pupils throughout East Herts.

Councillor J Wyllie supported the use of the bin hangers to promote recycling and felt that, while the environmental benefits had its place, communicating the costs of not recycling was important. Residents needed to know that landfill was expensive.

In response to a question about the content of the bin hanger and how it communicated which materials could be recycled, the Head of Environmental Services stressed that leaflets and bin hangers were not the primary method of communication as a comprehensive calendar was issued several times a year that explained the “dos and don’ts” of using the brown bin and the blue and green boxes for recycling.

Members were reminded of the wide range of activities which had been taking place in schools across Hertfordshire as part of the Waste Aware campaign.

Members were advised of the methodology residents should use when leaving out recycling for the refuse crews, and also explained what could not be recycled and why. The Committee was also advised of the costs associated with landfill and recycling.

The Head of Environmental Services advised Members of the style of wording that was used in the literature sent to the areas where recycling rates were low. He stated that individual residents were not being targeted. It was not possible to know how much individual households were recycling. The tonnage of waste collected by each collection round had been divided by the number of properties to establish the average weight per household. This showed which areas produced the lowest amount of recycling per household. It was possible that some households in an area were recycling as much as they could while others were not recycling at all.

The Committee was advised that research had indicated that the groups that recycled the least were the most affluent residents and the poorest. The residents who were classed as middle income were the group that often achieved the best rates of recycling.

Members were advised that some villages appeared to be highly motivated to recycle but collection rounds were designed for efficiency and cut across a number of different communities.

The Head of Environmental Services agreed to meet with Councillor M Carver outside the meeting to consider the methodology and the specific implications for his ward.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained that Officers saw this campaign as a simple, non judgemental and inexpensive way to improve recycling rates across East Herts, particularly in the areas where the rate was low.

In response to comments from Councillors R Beeching and P Gray in respect of the Council's policy regarding brown bins, the Head of Environmental Services reiterated the policy of the Authority.

The Committee received the report and agreed to have a report later in the year when the recycling rates in these areas had been reviewed following the campaign.

RESOLVED – that the approach taken to improve recycling performance in areas where take up was low, be supported.

109 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the Committee's future work programme for 2012/13, the detail of which had been set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B' to the report now submitted.

Members were advised that pages 78 – 79 of the report now submitted detailed items that Members had raised at the topic planning workshops. The Committee was advised that the highest priority item related to the 5 year review of the grounds maintenance contract.

The Scrutiny Officer stated that the Council would need to decide whether to extend or re-tender the Grounds Maintenance contract. Members were advised that a Task and Finish Group would be required to carry out this work and any interested Members should contact group leaders with their expressions of interest. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group would be a Member of Environment Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee approved the report, as amended.

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

The meeting closed at 8.41 pm

Chairman

Date