

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

PRESENT: Councillor D Abbott (Chairman)
Councillors W Ashley, P Ballam,
E Buckmaster, M Pope, C Rowley,
K Warnell, B Wrangles and J Wyllie

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors R Beeching, P Moore and
P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Trevor Watkins	- Waste Services Manager

561 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor P Gray.

562 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

563 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that there was one place available on a course at Westminster on 28 February 2014, “Maximising the Impact on Overview and Scrutiny”. Any Member interested should contact the Scrutiny Officer.

The Chairman stated that Members were due to receive a report on the agenda this evening on temporary road closures and the associated timescales and application process. This had not been possible as the Officer responsible had been involved with urgent flooding matters. He apologised and intended to submit the report to the next meeting of Environment Scrutiny on 10 June 2014.

Councillor J Wyllie expressed his disappointment that the report was not on the agenda, stating that he had been trying to get the item on the agenda since last year and that its absence was “suspicious” and “disrespectful”.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services apologised on behalf of the Officer, adding that no disrespect had been intended and that he would ensure that the report would be presented to the next meeting.

The Chairman asked the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services to provide a brief verbal update of the events relating to the flooding which had occurred earlier in the month.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that the Council had responded well on the three critical days of flooding and had worked well with Emergency Services. He stated that there were some

lessons to be learned which Members had raised.

He summarised events. After the downpour of the previous evening, on Friday morning, 7 February 2014, it had been clear that there had been significant flooding across the District and the Council had been alerted about flooding along the A120 and at Little Hadham. Officers had attended the scene with Police and the Fire Service and helped organise a refuge in St Andrew's School. A reception centre had also been set up at the Charis Centre in Bishop's Stortford, staffed by three Officers. A First Incident Team meeting had been organised and attended by the Community Safety Officer and Emergency Services. Locally, a wall had collapsed into a brook / culvert causing flooding. Drainage contactors had been brought in to assist and along March Lane.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services referred to the closure of the M11 and M25 and the difficulties this had created in the District. A meeting with the Incident Management Team had taken place at midday when it had been decided that refuges should be open for as long as necessary, including at Standon and Puckeridge and a full reception centre at Wodson Park, but that the Charis Centre, St Andrews and Standon should close.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services referred to flooding at Hertingfordbury which had affected 7 people who either went on to stay with friends or their insurers provided a resolution to the problem. He praised Social Services for their rapid response and the relief volunteers who had kept Wodson Park open all night.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services referred to the Gold Group meetings which had taken place with the Police, the Council and Emergency Services when it had been agreed that Wodson Park could be closed, but that volunteers would be kept on "standby" for that weekend. There had been concern about one evacuee but this issue had been resolved with Social Services' intervention. A further Gold Group meeting took place on the Sunday, by which time, the bad weather was

heading in a westerly direction.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that throughout the District, 26 residences and three businesses had been affected by the flooding and might be able to claim recompense for damage. He stated that there had been some particular difficulties in terms of a Contact List and referred to the restrictions of Data Protection in giving out an individual's personal telephone number, but said that Officers would consider how Members might be better prepared and equipped for future emergencies.

In response to a query from Councillor E Buckmaster regarding overcoming Data Protection issues by sending and asking for information via Twitter, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that few Officers were on Twitter.

Councillor P Ruffles referred to Hertford residents' anxieties, where a lot of people had left their properties because three of the town's four rivers were having problems. He referred to the geographical impact of all three rivers and asked for greater clarity between interfacing with the Council and its partner agencies. Councillor P Ruffles referred to responsibility issues involving the opening of the sluice gates, adding that the Council needed to learn from the recent flooding. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services agreed that there was a need to clarify areas of responsibility in terms of the sluice gates and this was an issue which the Council would address. He suggested Officers bring a report to the next meeting of this Committee to review the actions during the February flooding and the lessons learned. This was agreed by Members.

Councillor B Wrangles referred to the drains and the fact that these were only cleaned every 18 months. She urged the Council to put pressure on Hertfordshire County Council for increasing the frequency of their clean. Councillor R Beeching confirmed that this was every 18 months and that the contractors were now under pressure to clear the gullies

more frequently.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services thanked Officers and Members for helping out during the recent emergency.

The Chairman stated that this was his last meeting as Chairman and thanked Officers for their hard work and professionalism.

The Chairman stated that there were two travellers in Hertford Car Parks and this matter was being dealt with by Officers.

564 COMMINGLED RECYCLING COLLECTION SERVICES (SPARC) UPDATE AND BUILDING ON ITS SUCCESS

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment submitted a report updating Members on the initial outcomes following the introduction of the Comingled Recycling Service (SPARC) and the proposed further measures to enhance recycling, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

Members were provided with a presentation which set out the background to the drivers for change. The Waste Services Manager advised that the Supplier Contractors had delivered more than 47,000 blue lidded bins and 25,000 inner paper boxes. Veolia had delivered a further 1,260 bins and over 3,570 inner paper boxes with nearly 60% of residents opting for an inner paper box.

It was noted that call volumes in the first three weeks had been three times the usual level and staff were praised for their efforts in handling the increase which, in the main, related to collection day changes and requests for containers. The Waste Services Manager provided a summary of the comingled recycling tonnages achieved since the new service had been introduced, but was cautious regarding ongoing figures, given the fact that this was a new scheme and that figures reflected the Christmas period.

The Waste Services Manager commented that increased satisfaction levels with residents about the comingled service were encouraging and summarised the proposals to extend the service to communal properties including flats.

The Waste Services Manager referred to the need to remove soft plastics from the blue lidded bins and that a 5p 'bag tax' was due to be introduced by the Government in August 2014. He also referred to the need to ensure that plastic bags were reused and disposed of properly. He commented that food waste capture was low considering how much of the waste in the black bin (30 – 33%) was food. He added that the feedback from residents at roadshows was that using kitchen caddies could be "messy" and that not being able to use a starch caddy liner was seen as an inhibitor. The Waste Services Manager referred to the need to use a specific type of compostable liner (with the "seedling" logo) for the caddies and ways of communicating this information to local residents.

Councillor J Wyllie praised Officers for the "good start". In response to his query about communicating the messages further, the Waste Services Manager provided a summary of how further changes would be disseminated to residents. Councillor Wyllie was not in favour of "hangers" on the bins preferring instead, some form of sticker. The Head of Environmental Services commented that the stickers had a tendency to become dirty and explained that the hangers were the most effective way of getting the message across to residents and these would provide further links to information, including websites and a waste services campaign. Stickers were also used to let residents know if they were not putting their waste in the correct bin.

Councillor P Ballam was disappointed that shrink wrap could not be included in the bins for recycling adding that this would increase the black bin waste.

In response to queries from Councillor R Beeching regarding carrier bags going to landfill, soft plastics around food such as sandwiches and the provision of liners for kitchen caddies, the Head of Environmental Services stated that North Herts

District Council had provided liners to residents for caddies which had cost the Council £100,000 to make two deliveries per year. They no longer did this. He said there was no difficulty obtaining the “seeding logo” compostable liners for kitchen caddies from local retail outlets. With regard to the issue of the carrier bags, the Head of Environmental Services said that some were sent to the Edmonton Incineration Plant, but most went to landfill. He explained the problems of pre-sorting out the carrier bags which was expensive, especially when many were contaminated with other non-recyclable waste. The Head of Environmental Services stated that plastic sandwich boxes could be recycled in the blue lidded bins.

In response to a query from Councillor M Pope regarding recycling provision at schools and care homes, the Waste Service Manager explained that some schools already received a collection service but that care homes were classified as commercial/business premises.

Councillor P Ballam referred to the 5p ‘bag tax’ to be imposed and stated that some shops (in Wales) had offered goods in a black bin bag to get around this. She also referred to Charity Shops and their use of plastic bags. The Waste Services Manager stated that the Council was awaiting detailed information on the 5p tax and how this would be applied. He stated that in Wales and Ireland there had been an 80% reduction in the use of carrier bags.

Councillor C Rowley stated that the big supermarkets would be taxed, but the tax would not apply to smaller retailers or to retailers using biodegradable bags. He further stated that retailers could choose whether to pass this tax onto customers or not.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked the Officers for their report and presentation.

The Committee supported the proposals as now submitted.

RESOLVED – that the update setting out the

successful implementation and performance of the Comingled Recycling Services (SPARC) be noted and that the Executive be advised that;

- (A) an extension of the service to as many communal properties as practically as possible, be supported;
- (B) a communication programme to remove soft plastics from the comingled mix, commencing by May 2014, be supported; and
- (C) a communication programme to promote the use of caddy liners to improve the capture of food waste, to be undertaken in line with (B) above, be supported.

565 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY HEALTHCHECK: OCTOBER 2013 TO DECEMBER 2013

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators for Environment Scrutiny Committee for the period October to December 2013.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services summarised why six indicators were shown as “red” and anticipated that performance would be on track by the next report.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED - that the reported performance for the period October to December 2013 be received;

566 ENVIRONMENT WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the future work programme for Environment Scrutiny Committee for 2014/15, the detail of which was set out in Essential Reference Paper “B”.

The Chairman sought Members' approval that the Road Closures report mentioned under Chairman's Announcements, be added to the agenda for the meeting on 10 June 2014.

Members had also supported a suggestion that an update on the recent flooding and the "Lessons learned" be presented to Members on 10 June 2014.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that it might be necessary to move reports around which were not "time sensitive" in order to make that meeting's agenda manageable and agreed to liaise with the Chairman where necessary.

It was noted that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees would be held on 27 January 2015 and not 20 January 2015 as detailed in Essential Reference Paper "B".

The Committee approved the work programme, as amended and as now detailed.

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

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman
Date