

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Thursday 24th June, 2010 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs. Cowell (in the Chair)
Councillor Mrs. Turner (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Aston, Mrs. Blood, Hill, Islam, J Jones, Mrs Jordan, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor and Waltho.

Officers

Director of Corporate Resources (As Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health, Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards, Principal Environmental Health Officer, (All Directorate of the Urban Environment), Assistant Director of Finance (Revenues, Benefits and Management Support), Principal Officer, Corporate Management, (Both Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement), Assistant Director of Housing Management, (Directorate of Adult Community and Housing Services) and Miss K Fellows (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

1

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Finch and James.

2

APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Mrs Aston and Taylor had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors A Finch and James respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

3

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member made a Declaration of Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

4

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4th March, 2010, be approved as a correct record and signed.

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2010/11

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the Work Programme for the Select Committee for 2010/11.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme for the Committee for 2010/11 be approved as follows:-

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| • | Food Service Plan | June 2010 |
| • | Work Programme | June 2010 |
| • | Quarterly Reports on Corporate Performance Management | September and November 2010 and January and March 2011 |
| • | Appointment of Working Groups | June 2010 |
| • | Local Authority Housing Void Property Review | June 2010 |
| • | Equality and Diversity | June 2010 |
| • | Annual Report of the Committee to Council | September 2010 |
| • | Animal Welfare | September 2010 |
| • | Trading Standards work on Doorstep Crime and Age Restricted Products | September 2010 |
| • | Area Housing Panels | September 2010 |
| • | Update of Council's Capital Strategy | November 2010 |
| • | Food Service Plan | November 2010 |
| • | Recycling Working Group | November 2010 |
| • | Air Quality Management Progress | January 2011 |

- Proposed Revenue Budget 2011/12 March 2011
- Outline Work Programme 2011/12 March 2011
- Equality and Diversity Action Plan March 2011
- Drainage Report March 2011
- Tenancy and Estate Management March 2011

APPOINTMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the appointment of Working Groups of the Committee for 2010/11.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member raised a question in relation to the remit of Recycling Working Group and the Assistant Director of Planning and Environmental Health confirmed that the remit would include consideration of recycling feasibility options as a whole, together with those options in relation to plastics.

During a further discussion it was agreed that the name of the Choice Based Lettings Working Group be changed to the Housing Working Group.

RESOLVED

- (1) That, the Recycling Working Group be re-appointed with the remit to consider recycling feasibility options and to look further at the recycling of plastics and that the membership of the Working Group comprise:-

Councillors Mrs Turner (Chairman), Mrs Cowell, Hill, Islam and Mrs Shakespeare.

- (2) That, the name of the Choice Based Lettings Working Group be changed to the Housing Working Group and be re-appointed with the remit to oversee and monitor the progress of the choice based lettings pilot scheme and the banding proposals and that the membership of the Working Group comprise:-

Councillors Mrs Cowell (Chairman), A Finch, James, Mrs Jordan, Mrs Turner and Waltho.

DIRECTORATE OF FINANCE, ICT AND PROCUREMENT'S EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

A report of the Interim Director of Finance was submitted on the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement's Equality and Diversity Annual report for 2009/10. A copy of the annual report was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member asked questions in relation to the technology provided by the Council to provide improved access to council services for those with hearing impairments. The Assistant Director of Finance responded by stating that, in addition to the text read facility provided, self service facilities in relation to Council Tax had also been introduced.

It was also reported that the Council subscribed to a service in relation to the provision of Digi TV and the Assistant Director of Finance indicated that he believed that in relation to the number of people utilising the service the Council may be aware of the number of hits the service received, however monitoring the above would be dependant upon the management information provided by the service.

RESOLVED

That, the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report submitted, on the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement's Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2009/10, be noted.

LOCAL AUTHORITY VOID PROPERTY REVIEW

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on a proposed Local Authority Void Property Review to scope the remit and agree a process of scrutiny.

Arising from the presentation of the report Members raised questions, made comments and suggestions.

In responding to Members questions the Assistant Director of Housing Management responded as follows:-

- It was reported that in relation to void performance indicators there were no set guidelines and the Council were able to choose the most effective way of measuring performance of their service. The rent loss indicator was seen as the most reliable as it captured all void properties and not those often described as routine;

- If Funding for the external support to assist with the end-to-end lettings review was not successful, provision had been made for this within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) on the understanding that considerable savings for reinvestment into the service achieved which would outweigh the cost to the HRA;
- Home checks continued to be carried out where repairs and associated issues could be dealt with including those caused by damage and vandalism which the tenant was required to rectify or be recharged;
- That elderly tenants may only have had basic repairs to properties during the terms of their tenancies which resulted in high cost voids once tenancies were ended to achieve decent homes standard;
- The budgeting regime would not allow for monies to be set aside for properties that may need extensive works should they became void in the future.

Following further discussion it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That, the information contained in the report submitted, on a proposed Local Authority Housing Void Property Review be noted and that the scope of the scrutiny to be undertaken be confirmed.
- (2) That, the Housing Working Group be requested to scrutinise Void Property Performance and that the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to submit reports in relation to the scrutiny to future meetings of the Committee.

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Food Service Plan 2010/11. A copy of the Food Service Plan Summary 2010/11 was attached as an Appendix to the report.

In presenting the report the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards referred in particular to the items of note regarding performance in 2009/10, reported that the figures for compliance of premises in Dudley were improving, confirming that the achievement on National Indicator for 2009/10 was 88.9% including unrated premises, which was an improvement from 81.7%.

It was noted that an additional sentence reading “businesses deemed to pose an imminent health risk were closed using emergency closure powers requiring a court order” should appear following the final bullet point at paragraph 8 of the report submitted.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members asked questions and the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards responded as follows:-

- There was no definite date for the introduction of the National Scores on the Doors Scheme, which was currently being piloted across the Country;
- That in relation to the officers in both Food and Occupational and Trading Standards who were responsible for a wide range of duties including food safety there were five officers in each team who were hard working and well motivated and that two yearly reviews were undertaken with each team member when work allocations were discussed to ensure that a work life balance was maintained;
- That the Primary Authority Scheme related to national companies however, there were few national companies in the Dudley Borough thus there would be very few occasions when the Council would have to apply to the primary authority prior to taking any enforcement action;
- That should the primary authority take the view that action should not be taken there was a process of appeal.
- It was confirmed that there would be no public statement in relation to the Council commencing any legal action until approval had been obtained from a primary authority to take such action.

RESOLVED

That, the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the Food Service Plan 2010/11, be noted and referred to Cabinet and full Council.

The meeting ended at 6.40pm

CHAIRMAN