

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Monday, 10th November, 2008 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Turner (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Blood, Body, Hanif, Hill, James, Jones, Mrs Jordan, Stanley,
and Waltho

Officers

Interim Director of Law and Property (As Lead Officer to the Committee),
Assistant Director of Housing Management (Directorate of Adult, Community
and Housing Services), Assistant Director Environmental Management and
Food and Occupational Safety Manager (Directorate of the Urban
Environment), Head of Financial Services (Directorate of Finance, ICT and
Procurement) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property).

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COMMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed Philip Tart, Interim Director of Law and Property to this, his first meeting as Lead Officer to the Committee and asked that he convey best wishes to the previous Lead Officer, Mr Polychronakis, on his recent appointment as the Interim Chief Executive.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Harley and Lowe.

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APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Hanif and Jones had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors Lowe and P Harley respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

29

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th September, 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

31

UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S CAPITAL STRATEGY

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the update of the Council's Capital Strategy, a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

Following the presentation of the content of report and comments made thereon it was

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted be noted and that the Cabinet be informed that there were no matters that this Committee wished to be taken into account when the Strategy was considered by full Council.

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FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2008/2009

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress with the activities detailed in the Directorate of the Urban Environment Food Service Plan 2008/2009.

The Food and Occupational Safety Manager in her presentation of the content of the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted commented in particular on the information contained in Appendix 1 to the report detailing progress up to 30th September, 2008 and paragraph 7 of the report, items of note contained in that Appendix.

Arising from the presentation given members asked a number of questions and made comments relating in particular to the frequency of inspections of premises included in the 'Scores on the Doors' Scheme and to recent publicity given to the Scheme by the media.

In responding to the points made, the Food and Occupational Safety Manager reported that her colleagues would be sympathetic to a request for a review of the premises, should one be received, in respect of the premises mentioned at the meeting and indicated that she would also look into this matter.

In response to a request from Councillor Hanif, she indicated that she would e-mail to him the details requested in respect of the number of restaurants in Lye currently included in the 'Scores on the Doors' Scheme together with details of their rating.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on progress with the delivery of service within the Food Service Plan 2008/2009 at the half year stage, be noted.

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on performance in the first quarter of 2008/09, for the period April – June, 2008 in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee.

The Lead Officer to the Committee in his presentation of the report, and report summary in respect of the activities of this Select Committee, referred to a number of issues with particular reference to those issues where there was an indication that there was below target performance. Members also commented on these and other related matters and the following particular points were made:-

Housing Matters

- The percentage change in the average number of families placed in temporary accommodation. It was reported that the current financial climate was beginning to impact on potential homelessness and there had been a 20% increase in those presenting themselves as homeless. The Council had set itself a stringent target and although this had not been met the Government target had been achieved. With an increase in homelessness claims it was likely that the numbers placed in temporary accommodation would increase and this in turn would have financial implications.

A greater emphasis on homelessness prevention was becoming a priority and this was in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau. This was particularly applicable to owner/occupiers.

- In response to concerns raised by relocating/decanting families into flats and the below performance indicator for the average time taken to re-let local authority housing, it was reported that when the target was set the impact of the North Priory Estate clearance was not fully appreciated and this had been a major factor that had

impacted on performance. Although Choice Based Lettings had only just been rolled out borough wide, this change was not impacting adversely on performance. It was also noted that performance was well within the upper quartile of performance for Metropolitan Authorities.

It was stated that void rent loss was a more accurate indicator and in this regard a target of 1.9% had been set for 2008/09 and 1.5% had been achieved in quarter one. This reflected the number of reducing voids from 324 at the end of March, 2008 to 312 at the end of June, 2008. As at the end of October voids of 292 represented 1.26% of the Council's stock and this in itself was of concern in business terms.

- Regarding the disposal of priority land declared surplus to housing requirements including garage sites to release capital receipt and provision of land for affordable homes, it was noted that it was unlikely that all sites would be disposed of in the stated timescale. Although some progress had been made, there were complicating factors in respect of the disposal of some of the sites and the current financial climate may not be conducive to disposal.

In response to queries regarding disposal of land and its implications it was reiterated that reference E3.1c, referred to land already declared surplus to requirements. The Interim Director of Law and Property indicated that this covered some 50 sites. A member expressed concern about anti social behaviour associated with disused garage sites and asked if demolition was an option. The Assistant Director Housing Management undertook to explore the viability of this request.

Currently a review of garage sites was being carried out so that issues such as disposal, particularly involving social partners, and possible retention in the current financial climate might be clarified. The review was intended to go to the Area Housing Panels.

The Assistant Director Housing Management would arrange for all members of the Committee to be sent details of the analysis in respect of garage sites once completed. Although the Council was under a legal duty to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable for land there were also wellbeing powers.

- In respect of a query raised on the provision of electric storage heating, the Assistant Director Housing Management undertook to have the position checked and for members to be e-mailed with the details.
- In respect of a query regarding the numbers of homeless people under 21 and whether any were housed outside the Borough, the Assistant Director Housing Management indicated that she would have the position checked and arrange for members to be e-mailed with the details.

Environmental Matters

- Arising from a query regarding the use of English in respect of the first four references regarding Priority EM1 – Environment Matters Key Performance Indicators 2008/09 – it was reported that in respect of the first reference – NI195a – the word should be ‘acceptable’ and not ‘unacceptable’ in that reference and that the wording was possibly a direct reference from the relevant regulatory body document.
- In response to a query as to what was being done to encourage people to recycle, it was reported that operatives were asked to report back on properties not setting out their recycling bins and such properties were leafleted. This was found to be a successful approach. The Recycling Officer also carried out visits to community groups and other organisations
- In respect of the poor performance indicated in the time taken to repair a street lighting fault, it was agreed that the performance of the responsible body and the other electrical companies was poor and that steps had been taken with the appropriate bodies to try and ensure that performance was improved.

It was the case that the quarter 2 figures were an improvement on quarter 1.

A response time of within 20 days was considered to be the appropriate target.

- Regarding the recycling of Yellow Pages, it was reported that they could be recycled but that coloured paper should not be mixed with other paper. It was for this reason that special campaigns, for example through schools, had been organised in respect of Yellow Pages.
- The Assistant Director Environmental Management undertook to report to Councillor Stanley direct regarding his comments about damaged recycling boxes.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and colour copy of the extracted report circulated separately, on performance in the first quarter of 2008/09, for the period 1st April to 30th June, 2008, in relation to activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee, be noted and that the officers concerned be requested to respond to the particular points raised, as indicated above.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

CHAIRMAN