

## **ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 7th September, 2011 at 6.00pm  
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Mrs. Shakespeare (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs. Turner (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Mrs Cowell, A Finch, Hill, James, Mrs Jordan, Ms Partridge, Mrs Rogers, Waltho and Mrs Westwood.

### **Officers**

Director of Corporate Resources (As Lead Officer to the Committee),  
Assistant Director Environmental Management and Head of Environmental  
Health and Trading Standards, (both Directorate of the Urban Environment),  
Construction Manager, (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing  
Services) and Miss K Fellows (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

### **Also in Attendance.**

Councillor Islam.

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#### 12. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

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#### 13. **MINUTES**

##### **RESOLVED**

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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#### 14. **PUBLIC FORUM**

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

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#### 15. **CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY) REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY THE PETITION'S OFFICER**

No Petitions had been referred to the Committee.

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO COUNCIL

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the Annual Report of the Committee for 2010/11.

In responding to a question from a Member, the Head of Construction stated that the End to End Lettings review was a strategic internal review looking at the whole void and allocations process from when the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services received notice of vacation from a council tenant to the stage when the new family moved into the property. He also indicated that the review was being undertaken in order to maximise rental income and create sustainable tenancies.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Report of the Select Committee on Environment for 2010/11 be received and noted and referred to Council.

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8. RECYCLING TRIAL COLLECTION SCHEME

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the outcome of the plastic and card recycling trial and containing details in relation to a possible Borough-wide roll out.

In presenting the report submitted the Assistant Director of Environmental Management made particular reference to the increase in participation rates after the introduction of the recycling trial and the increase in tonnage which reflected the improved participation.

In relation to the phased expansion of the scheme referred to at paragraph 5 of the report submitted, it was reported that new types of vehicles that would lend themselves to plastic and recycling card and the ability to compact these materials was being investigated.

The new Blowers Green Recycling Depot was referred to which would accommodate an expansion of the recycling service together with the estimated additional recycling income assuming existing participation rates and market rates. Incineration costs savings assuming no contract penalty and the additional income that would offset the risk of reduced recycling prices in the event of a deterioration of the market price was also referred to.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted Members asked a number of questions and made comments and the Assistant Director of Environmental Management responded as follows:-

- In relation to the current recycling service across the Dudley Borough, that pre-trial participation was slightly below 70%. In order to prevent distorted results the recycling trial had taken place in areas which were chosen to reflect different social classes and demographics across the Dudley Borough.
- Incineration and landfill costs were referred to and it was reported that as metals were broken down into varying types, the Assistant Director of Environmental Management agreed to provide Councillor Hill with specific details in relation to income generated from current metal recycling costs.
- It was reported that all commodities were processed in the United Kingdom although it was acknowledged that steel serviced a world wide market.
- In relation to the expansion of the scheme across the Borough it was intended that two vehicles would be purchased in phases to support the roll-out with the expansion being monitored in order to ensure that the desired affect was being achieved with a further two vehicles being purchased within a two year period should the scheme continue to be successful.
- In relation to schools and high rise flats that recycling was not carried out in the same way as that for other residential properties and the Assistant Director of Environmental Management undertook to provide Councillor Ms Partridge with a briefing note in relation to how recycling was dealt with for schools and high rise flats.
- In relation to the cost of the trial, the Assistant Director of Environmental Management undertook to provide Councillor Ms Partridge with details of grant funding obtained for the recycling trial collection scheme.
- In relation to the expansion into the remainder of the Borough, the roll-out should be completed by the end of the 2013/14 financial year, however the roll-out could be phased to allow for fluctuations in the market and any contractual issues associated with disposal.
- The Assistant Director Environmental Management undertook to provide Councillor Ms Partridge with a more detailed breakdown of costs in relation to the new service.

- It was reported that fleet vehicles were referred to as revenue expenditure as they were purchased by way of a leasing scheme with the lease term recently being increased to 7 years.
- In relation to the incineration facility it was reported that a 25 year contract had been entered into with the contractors with 14 years of the contract term remaining.
- A Member raised concerns in relation to the proposals for recycling as contained in the report submitted supporting the continuation of an incineration service in relation to plastics stating that this contributed to the provision of electricity and with the continuation of rising electricity prices this provided a more sustainable source of income for the authority. The same Member also raised concerns in relation to the new service given the volatile markets at the present time.
- In responding the Assistant Director Environmental Management advised that there was always an element of risk with the introduction of a new service, however there was considerable demand for a third party waste stream and the market had been tested tentatively which had established that the recyclable market was extremely healthy and that the council could sell that capacity to third parties. It was indicated that there would be minimal risk in relation to the above service which could be managed.
- The Assistant Director Environmental Management advised that the Local Authority did not receive any income from the National Grid, however the plant operators would, and that income would be offset against the original tender for the contract.
- He also advised that refuse vehicles were spread across the Dudley Borough on a daily basis and the new vehicles referred to in the report submitted would also be available borough wide.
- That funding in relation to the provision of services and cost effectiveness were investigated with various projects being considered and the position in relation to trade waste would be investigated, together with the provision of possible funding and a report in relation to the same would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.
- In relation to the disposal of waste monthly meetings were taking place with Dudley Waste Services with dialogue being developed in relation to the new service.
- The Assistant Director Environmental Management invited Members to attend the Blowers Green Depot for a site visit.
- He confirmed that tenders were sought for recyclable materials in order to obtain the best possible price.
- Members advised that they would not support a residential food waste collection service, although it was noted that this had been introduced in other areas due to fortnightly refuse collections.

In responding to questions from the Chairman, the Assistant Director of Environmental Management advised that:-

- There was ample capacity to deal with recycling at the Blowers Green Depot and the process for recycling at the depot was explained in detail.

- In relation to selling the extra capacity that investigations had revealed that Wolverhampton City Council had been selling their extra capacity for some time as given the penalties in relation to landfill it was more attractive for third parties to incinerate than landfill.
- In relation to recycling facilities for high rise flats that Housing Management should be approached in order that they could advise tenants of the appropriate recycling point for their area.
- In relation to the recycling trial collection scheme that there had been a high participation rate and he was confident that the roll out of the service would not fall below the break even point, although it was again accepted that there was an element of risk and if there were issues with the market for recyclable materials there was a sufficient buffer in the figures referred to in the report submitted to cover running and recycling costs of the scheme.
- It was anticipated that recycling rates could be improved following the roll out of the service in those areas where previously recycling had not been taking place.
- Regarding the achievement of savings relating to the roll out of the service it was indicated that there would be major capital outlay in respect of purchasing additional vehicles and results would be closely monitored with a cautious approach for delivering the service being adapted in relation to risk assessment.

In responding to further questions from Members he advised that:-

- Savings had been made following the introduction of the trial, however a certain degree of the savings had been absorbed as they had been reinvested into the service.
- Trading in recyclable materials had been taking place for the previous ten years and the authority had always managed to sustain adequate income from recycling collections and the authority would look to sustain income from recyclable materials. It was accepted that there would always be a risk, however this was minimal.

The Chairman referred to concerns and views of Members in relation to the roll out of the recycling collection scheme as referred to in the report submitted and the reservations expressed in relation to the financial aspects of the same requesting that these be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture.

The Chairman also referred to the positive aspects of the report submitted.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report and Appendices to the report, submitted, on the outcome of the plastic and card recycling trial giving details in relation to a possible Borough-wide roll out, be noted.

- (2) That Members' concerns, views and reservations in relation to the financial aspects of the possible Borough-Wide roll out as outlined above be reported to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture by the Director of the Urban Environment.
  - (3) That the Director of the Urban Environment submit a report in relation to Trade Waste to a future meeting of the Committee.
  - (4) That the Assistant Director Environmental Management be requested to provide the following:-
    - (a) The income generated by the council from metal recycling recycling costs to Councillor Hill.
    - (a) Recycling for Schools, trade waste and high rise flats to Councillor Ms Partridge.
    - (b) The amount of grant funding received from the Waste and Resources Action Programme to Councillor Ms Partridge.
    - (c) The expenditure of the Council in relation to the recycling trial collection scheme to Councillor Ms Partridge.
    - (d) A breakdown of the revenue cost of replacing existing fleet over two years and the necessary realignment of staffing levels as referred to in paragraph 12 of the report submitted to Councillor Ms Partridge.
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9.

#### QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE 11.8

The Lead Officer to the Committee outlined the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11.8 and reported that two questions had been received from Councillor Ms Partridge. The questions and the responses were read out to Members as follows:-

##### Question one

Confirmation is requested on the number and location of high cost voids being considered for disposal by Dudley MBC. (The definition of high cost being that described in the minutes of Environment Select Committee for June 2011, item 10 para, 6).

##### Response

As reported to the June 2001 Scrutiny Committee, 24 to 30 disposals were

considered necessary to 'kick start' the high cost void (HCV) reduction strategy. Members have been sent a list of the properties, currently being considered for disposal (via Democratic Services) following the June Committee and this list had not changed.

For clarification – Any void property where the initial works survey exceeds £10k is regarded as a HCV for budget management purposes. An options appraisal is then undertaken, considering the available/approved budgets. The values exceeding £25-£30k as stated in the minutes relate to 24 properties currently being considered for disposal.

#### Question two

Confirmation is requested on what assessment has been done which relates to the local impact on visual amenity of properties falling into the high cost voids category which are left un-inhabited and un-attended for significant periods of time. Information is requested on both the general consideration and the specifics relating to breaches of regulations which are normally enforceable by the Council.

#### Response

Where major refurbishment works will not commence on a property within approx 2 weeks of it becoming void, officers will arrange for valuable items, e.g. boilers etc, to be removed to reduce the risk of theft/vandalism. Appropriate security measures are also employed, i.e. security screens, temporary intruder alarms, etc. Any obvious hazards within the gardens are also removed. Officers retain discretion to undertake external works, e.g. strimming lawns etc, where the property becomes a nuisance to the neighbouring occupants.

Hard copies of the above questions and answers were circulated to Members at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm

CHAIRMAN