

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 14th June, 2012 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Hanif (Chair)
Councillor Mrs Shakespeare (Vice-Chair)
Councillors M Aston, Harley, Jordan, J Martin, Roberts, Mrs H Turner and Wright.

Officers

Director of Corporate Resources (As Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health, and Assistant Director of Environmental Management (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Head of Housing Management-North (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) and Miss K Fellows (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

1. **OPENING REMARKS OF THE CHAIRMAN AND INTRODUCTIONS**

This being the first meeting of the municipal year, the Chairman welcomed those present and Members and Officers introduced themselves.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

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

3. **APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS.**

It was reported that Councillors Roberts and Wright had been appointed as a substitute members for Councillors Boleyn and James respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

5. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th March, 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed.

6. PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

7. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2012/13.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the Work Programme for the Scrutiny Committee for 2012/13.

In presenting the report submitted the Lead Officer referred to the Anti Social Behaviour Review Report advising that this may not be submitted to this Committee, and may be considered by the Community Safety and Community Services Committee in accordance with their terms of reference.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted Members made suggestions as follows:-

That a report in relation to Badgers to include residential support and the Council's duties and responsibilities in relation to Badgers be submitted to the September meeting of this Committee.

That a report in relation Recycling be submitted to the January meeting of this Committee.

That the Assistant Director of Planning and Environmental Health be requested to ensure that information in relation to Badgers including residential support and the Council's duties and responsibilities in relation to Badgers are displayed on the Council's website.

RESOLVED

(1) That, the Work Programme for the Committee for 2012/13 be approved as follows:-

- Matters for information, e-mailed to Members, June 2012
that they may wish to ask questions about (eg
Equality and Diversity annual report).
- Work Programme for 2012/13 June 2012
- Food Service Plan 2012/13 June 2012
- Housing Fraud June 2012

- Any questions on matters e-mailed for information (eg Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report) September 2012
- Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee to Council September 2012
- Welfare Reforms September 2012
- Badgers to include residential support and the duties and responsibilities of the Council in dealing with Badgers. September 2012
- Matters for information, e-mailed to Members, that they may wish to ask questions about (eg Update on the Council's Capital Strategy and Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report). November 2012
- Rogue Traders and Age Restricted Products. November 2012
- Anti Social Behaviour Review Update. November 2012
- Proposed Revenue Budget. November 2012
- Any questions on matters e-mailed for information (eg Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report). January 2013
- Trade Waste and Recycling. January 2013
- Air Quality Management Report January 2013
- The Regulation of Private Landlords January 2013
- Any questions on matters e-mailed for information (eg Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report and Equality and Diversity Action Plan) March 2013
- Provisional Work Programme 2013/14 March 2013

- (2) That the Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health be requested to ensure that information in relation to Badgers including residential support and the Council's duties and responsibilities in relation to Badgers are displayed on the Council's website.
 - (3) That Members be requested to email the Lead Officer and the Chair details of any items that they wished to add to the Work Programme.
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8. FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2012/13

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Food Service Plan 2012/13. A copy of the Food Service Plan Summary 2012/13 was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted, Members asked questions and the Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health responded stating that:-

In relation to the Obesity Strategy, work was conducted in partnership with NHS Dudley. She also referred to the work that was undertaken with schools and food businesses in order to ensure that they had healthy food choices, and work with young consumers in relation to food labelling. Details in relation to the project "Dudley Food for Health Award" were also outlined.

The Food and Occupational Safety and Trading Standards Sections were separate sections undertaking all food safety and food standards inspections in accordance with Food Hygiene Legislation.

In outlining the work of the above Sections, that they were responsible for emergency closures and prosecutions, responding to a number of concerns reported by the public and investigating food poisoning outbreaks. It was noted that inspections for Health and Safety were also undertaken.

Details of routine microbiological testing were also provided.

In relation to campylobacter this was the most common form of food poisoning bacteria and that symptoms could be severe and one of the most common place that bacteria resided was in raw chicken.

There were eleven full time qualified Environmental Health Officers working on food safety.

Every food business needed to be registered and inspected and the frequency of inspections would depend upon the relevant risk involved.

Work was conducted with colleges with their catering facilities being inspected.

The procedure in relation to the permanent closure of food business was outlined together with details of the inspections following closure in order to ensure that there was no longer a risk to health and once this was established a certificate would be issued in order that those businesses could be re-opened.

The Chair and Vice Chair praised the work of Environmental Health Officers and the Council's Scores on the Doors Scheme.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the Food Service Plan 2012/13, be noted and referred to Cabinet and full Council.

9. HOUSING FRAUD

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the approach taken in Housing Services on the prevention and detection of Housing Fraud. The Housing Counter Fraud Policy was appended to the report submitted.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted Members asked questions, and the Head of Housing Management North responded stating that:-

The moral reasons for investigating housing fraud outweighed the potential cost of doing so and that non-investigation would result in losses occurring to the Council.

In relation to housing fraud regarding "right to buy", this had occurred where properties had been re-possessed and investigations in relation to those cases remained ongoing.

Investigation times would depend upon the complexity of the case.

A charge would be registered against those properties that were purchased through the right to buy scheme, however should those properties be re-possessed, the principal lender would be repaid in the first instance, which could result in the Council's charge not being repaid.

The benchmarking club on housing fraud provided by "HouseMark" had been signed up to recently with the first set of data being populated later in the year.

The agreement with Birmingham City Council to share data from housing records would result in obtaining details as to whether tenants had obtained properties in different areas.

Investigations in relation to housing fraud commenced immediately once these cases came to the Council's attention.

Work in relation to sharing national insurance numbers had commenced with the Council's Housing Benefits department.

A quality impact assessment had raised issues in relation to the use of photograph identity and a consultation exercise was being undertaken in relation to the black, minority and ethnic communities.

All data matching work was conducted with social landlords, however it was intended to widen the scope of the national fraud initiative.

There was not currently a dedicated resource to investigate housing fraud, however this was being reviewed with support being offered by the Council's Audit Services.

The Council were utilising the Corporate Group in order to deal with housing fraud.

The indicative figures referred to at paragraph three of the report submitted also included the costs of temporary housing and the cost of re-building properties.

There may be a loss to the Council should housing benefit be fraudulently claimed.

The Council Fraud Hotline had been introduced at the end of 2011 and other initiatives were being investigated in order to promote this such as posters on the Council's repair vehicles.

In relation to the Council participating with the "best use of stock summit" and the workshop on housing fraud, feedback relating to this would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

Following Members raising concerns in relation to the potential cost to the Council of housing fraud it was agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee detailing the specific costs involved.

RESOLVED

- (1) That, the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on the approach taken in Housing Services on the prevention and detection of Housing Fraud, be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of this Committee in relation to the Council's participation with the "best use of stock summit".

- (3) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of this Committee in relation to the actual cost implications to the Council in relation to housing fraud.

The meeting ended at 7.20pm

CHAIRMAN