

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, 17th September, 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, Hill, James, J Martin, Stanley, Taylor and Waltho

Officers

Director of Law and Property (As Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director of Housing Management and Head of Housing Options (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Assistant Director Environmental Management, Head of Street and Green Care and Mr D Bates (Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property).

14 **COMMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman referred to a recent accident that had occurred to Manjit Johal, Democratic Services Officer. Members asked that a letter be sent to Manjit expressing their best wishes to her and for a speedy recovery.

The Chairman also referred to the recent success in the Stourbridge in Bloom competition and thanked those Officers involved from the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Body, P Harley, Mrs Jordan and Lowe and the Assistant Director Development and Environmental Protection.

16 **APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBER**

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

17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

18

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That, subject to the following amendments to Minute 10 (1) and (2), the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th June, 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed: -

10 (1) – The deletion of the name of Councillor James and insertion of the name of Councillor Hill in the membership of the Recycling Working Group; and

10 (2) – The addition of the name of Councillor James to the membership of the Choice Based Lettings Working Group.

19

PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

20

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the Annual Report of the Committee for 2007/08.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Report of the Select Committee for 2007/08 be received and noted and referred to the Council.

21

CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), it was

RESOLVED

That agenda item 8 – Managing Green Care on Open Spaces – be considered as the next item of business.

22

MANAGING GREEN CARE ON OPEN SPACES

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Council's responsibilities in respect of managing and maintaining the Borough's Green Open Spaces.

The Head of Street and Green Care in his presentation of the content of the report expanded on a number of the points contained therein.

Following the presentation given members made a number of comments relating in particular to

- Concerns over the standard of grounds maintenance provided in certain areas and safety implications of this in particular for pedestrians.

In response the difficulties experienced with climatic factors was emphasised and the position whereby not all public rights of way were included in a grounds maintenance programme.

The member raising the query indicated that the areas involved were links to Cotwall End Valley and the Head of Street and Green Care indicated that the position would be investigated.

- The position over the emptying of rubbish and dog bins.

In response details of revised working arrangements on a trial basis for this year were given in that individual teams were now undertaking this work as well as inspecting playgrounds.

It was also noted that park patrols were still required to empty litter bins in parks.

- The need for a more proactive approach to be given to tree pruning and an enhanced budget to enable this to happen.

In response the comments made were supported and a further comment made that the Directorate would continue to press for such funding and would ask that the Select Committee support them in this. Members agreed to this.

- Clarification as to the current arrangements and responsibilities for grounds maintenance.

In response the position involving changed arrangements undertaken some four to five years ago was outlined with individual Directorate budgets for grounds maintenance being included in one Green Care budget so that works could be prioritised on a Borough wide basis. These budgets however did not take account for example of new developments and environmental enhancements which had to be accommodated from the existing revenue budget. Also, if Directorates required additional works to be carried out they would need to fund these from their existing budgets.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, on the management of the Green Care budget, providing pre-determined standards of maintenance across the Borough with an emphasis on managing the Council's priorities, be noted.
 - (2) That the impact of climate change on the delivery on the Green Care service, as outlined in the report submitted, be noted.
 - (3) That the actions of the Green Care section in considering requests for new maintenance on merit and in its consideration of other service commitments provided for within the Green Care budget, be noted.
 - (4) That this Committee support the making of a bid for additional resources for tree pruning.
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23

REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted updating the Committee on the work carried out by the Choice Based Lettings Working Group and making a number of recommendations for changes to the Lettings Policy.

Following presentation and consideration of aspects of the proposals contained within the report submitted it was

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to implement the following proposals for change to the Lettings Policy: -

- Houses should generally only be allocated to families with children (including expected or adult children)
- Four bedroom houses should generally only be let to families with three or more children or other dependent relatives.
- Families with four or more children should be considered for three bedroom houses at their own request and subject to overall benefit and suitability.
- Exceptions to general occupancy standards should be able to be made through delegated authority by senior and specialist officers.

- Current equity limits should be dispensed with and households with sufficient equity to have other housing options should only be considered for vacancies if there are no other applicants.
- Exceptions to equity rules should be able to be made for older people and people with support needs and disability needs, through delegated authority by senior and specialist officers.
- Exceptions to the general rules on previous tenancy history (rent arrears and anti-social behaviour) should be individually made through delegated authority by senior and specialist officers.
- An incentive scheme should be developed to reward good tenants and to incentivise moves that are of benefit to the Council in meeting housing needs.
- Homelessness priority should be time limited and discharged on receipt of two reasonable offers.
- Service and key worker tenancies should generally be flats or maisonettes, and should not automatically default to secure tenancies after twelve months.

TRANSPORT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN (TAMP) – 2008-2011

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on an overview of the TAMP, highlighting Government initiatives behind asset management planning and showing how the Council would use this approach to deliver and improve its Transport and Highways Service.

A copy of the TAMP presentation had previously been circulated to members of the Committee and Mr Bates, a member of the Asset Management Team, elaborated on points contained within that presentation.

Arising from the presentation given members made a number of comments and queries relating in particular to costs, benefits and implications of the TAMP.

In response comments were made on the benefits of the Plan in particular in highlighting those aspects that were done well and those in which there were weaknesses. Overall the development of a TAMP could form the basis for additional funding in the future. To date implementation of the Plan had not involved much expenditure and its development would involve Government funding available through the Local Transport Plan. Although there would be a shortfall between these monies and the costs involved in ,say, providing a top of the range Plan there was the possibility of further Government monies, if it could be seen that the Council was spending money on developing the TAMP, involving match funding.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and presentation given on the Transport Asset Management Plan, highlighting Government initiatives behind asset management planning and showing how the Council would use this approach to deliver and improve its Transport and Highway Service together with the work carried out to date, be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended that the Council adopt the principles of an asset management approach to transport and highways service provision.

The meeting ended at 7.17 pm

CHAIRMAN