

URBAN ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 9th September, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Tyler (Chair)
Councillor Hale (Vice Chair)
Councillors Ali, Hanif, Harley, J Jones, Jordan, Sykes, K Turner and Mrs Westwood

Officers

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Housing Strategy and Private Sector) (Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Culture and Leisure), Project Development Manager, Team Manager (Green Care), Countryside Manager, Head of Traffic and Transportation, Manager of Executive Support, Principal Executive Support Officer (All Directorate of the Urban Environment) and the Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources);

Councillor Islam was in attendance as an observer.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

8 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th June, 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed.

9 PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this Agenda Item.

10 PARKS, NATURE RESERVES AND OPEN SPACES STRATEGY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted together with a detailed presentation on the current development, management and maintenance arrangements for the Borough's parks, nature reserves and open spaces and to highlight to Members the key management issues and to seek agreement to any areas where more detailed scrutiny may be needed in the future.

Following the detailed presentation, Members commended Officers on the excellent report, presentation and work currently undertaken and asked questions, made comments and recommendations.

A Member requested details of the services that would no longer be able to be provided if a further reduction in funding was made and asked if the same level of service could be provided by alternative ways of working such as the privatisation of certain services or the setting up of an arms length company. It was suggested that the cost of services should be addressed as some schools no longer used the Council service for maintaining school grounds as cheaper options had been sourced.

Arising from a question raised in relation to land management issues and the large waiting list for allotment sites, it was stated that to convert land into an allotment site would require planning permission for change of use of the land, but it would also be dependent of the type of land and whether it was contaminated or not. It was also stated that costs would be accrued by the Council for the initial set-up of the site but once complete the site could become self-maintained.

In response to a further question raised the Team Manager (Green Care) stated that there had been targeted break-ins at depots across the borough in the past, but not at a huge cost to the Council, however an investment in higher security in these areas had been addressed over the last few years.

The Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management) agreed to look at the issue raised in relation to fridges being left at the road side and stated that fly tipping was a costly problem.

A Member requested that consideration be given to how the Council could develop and make current services more effective rather than reduce services. It was requested that ways in which to promote green space areas more widely to attract tourism be investigated and that help continued with 'Friends of Parks' to maximise any external funding received.

Information in relation to current tree disease issues was requested and what contingency plans did the Council have in place to deal with these issues.

In response to a question raised the Assistant Director of Urban Environment (Environmental Management) confirmed that there was only one budget held within Green Care for fly tipping issues which was monitored and controlled.

The Lead Officer to the Committee suggested that the Committee may wish to hear the views volunteers; 'friends of parks' groups and other stakeholders.

A Member asked if ways to generate income from green spaces had been explored and a list of what services would be lost if funding was to be cut further was requested.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, the detailed presentation and comments made at the meeting in relation to the development, management and maintenance arrangements for Borough's parks, nature reserves and open spaces, be noted.
- (2) That a copy of the presentation be circulated to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee.
- (3) That a further report, taking into consideration all the comments and requests made at the meeting, be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 29th October, 2013.

11

TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER PROCESSES

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the virtual scrutiny process suggested by Members to review Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) processes.

The Lead Officer presented the report explaining the virtual process and in doing so stipulated that would be for a trial period. The role of the proposed cross party working group advising on future TRO programmes was outlined, emphasising that the TRO process is determined by a legislative legal framework and that the final decision on programmes would still ultimately remain with the Cabinet Member for Transportation.

The Head of Traffic and Transportation explained the current lengthy process for TRO's and stated that a more streamlined robust process was required to enable an annual programme of works to be established and to make the process more efficient and transparent to elected Members and the public.

Members referred to and raised concerns in relation to the TRO Score Sheet, Appendix C to the report submitted, stating that they considered the document not to be user friendly and clarification was required on how the scoring would be applied. The Head of Traffic and Transportation agreed to circulate to Members an explanatory note detailing how the scoring process would work.

A Member suggested that when consulting on a TRO that a time limit for responses was applied and that any responses received after that date would not be taken into consideration.

The Chair requested that any issues Members had in relation to the TRO score sheet be raised electronically as part of the virtual scrutiny process.

In response to a question raised it was confirmed that temporary TRO's would not be included in this process, as this type of order were usually in relation to works that were required to be carried out.

Arising from a question raised in relation to the length of time it currently takes for TRO to be implemented and how these were prioritised, it was stated that current TRO's were implemented in area blocks and could take up to four years to be applied.

It was requested by the Lead Officer that a worked example on one particular road be provided to Members to help them understand the TRO score sheet and how the process would work. Information on how neighbouring authorities operated was also requested.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted and presented at the meeting, in relation to the Traffic Regulation Order Processes, be noted.
- (2) That the Scrutiny Committee agree to trial a virtual scrutiny process to review the Traffic Regulation Order process and for a cross party working group to be established.
- (3) That the Head of Traffic and Transportation be requested to provide an explanatory note in relation to the Traffic Regulation Order Score Sheet, together with a worked example of a particular road within the borough and circulate direct to Members of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 8pm.

CHAIR