

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Monday, 31st October, 2005 at 6 p.m.
In Committee Room 2, Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Chairman)
Councillors Banks, Body, Mrs Collins, Ms Partridge, Stanley,
Tomkinson, Wright and C Wilson

Officers

Assistant Director of Housing, Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Development and Environmental Protection), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Head of Waste Care, Food and Occupational Safety Manager, Principal Policy Officer and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property).

19

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th September, 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed.

20

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

21

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Turner.

The Chairman reported that Councillor Mrs Turner was out of hospital but still awaiting an operation, which would be in approximately six weeks time and she undertook to extend good wishes to her on behalf of the Committee.

22 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE FOR THIS MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

It was reported that Councillor Wright had been appointed to serve as a substitute for Councillor Mrs Turner for this meeting of the Committee only.

23 CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

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

RESOLVED

That agenda item number 5 be considered as the last item of business.

24 FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2005/2006

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 2005-06.

Arising from the presentation of the report, the Food and Occupational Safety Manager responded to queries raised by Members and confirmed that the Dudley Food for Health Award was not only to encourage premises to promote healthy eating and compliance with hygiene regulations, but also to offer nutritionally balanced meals. Currently the award was limited to caterers but would be extended to take-aways. The Food and Occupational Safety Manager further confirmed that vacuum-packed meats, once opened, had a shelf life of approximately three to four days. Routine checks were made and premises and market traders were visited to verify the opening dates on packets and often packs of meat were bought and sent off for further inspection to determine the quality of the product. It was further reported that the prosecutions register, which included the name of the proprietor, address and penalty, was now in the public domain and available to view on the Internet.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, and as now presented, on progress with the delivery of service within the Food Service Plan 2005-06 at the half-year stage be endorsed.

25

BLACK COUNTRY WASTE MANAGEMENT STUDY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted, and considered together with a presentation, on the progress of the Black Country Waste Management Study.

During the presentation, the Head of Waste Care reported that the Black Country Waste Management Forum had existed since 2001. At a meeting held with Black Country Chief Executives on 29th March, 2004 barriers to progress had been identified. These included a lack of a cohesive profile, similar but separate strategies, systems and objectives and no overall coherent strategic plan for the Black Country. The Black Country would, by joint working, achieve regional self-sufficiency in municipal waste management and committing to landfill only those wastes that could not, through the adoption of best practice, be re-used, recycled or recovered as energy. The project sponsors and parties were Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Councils and Wolverhampton City Council, Government Office for the West Midlands, Black Country Consortium and Atkins Ltd (Consultants).

Arising from the presentation of the report, a Member commented that to enable officers to move forward, there was a need to make an urgent decision on whether the Council wished to proceed independently or by joint working and it was suggested that the Recycling Working Group should consider the options. The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Protection) commented that an environmental workshop was to be held on 28th November, 2005 at the Black Country Museum and members could attend to air their views.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted and in the presentation given on the progress made on the Black Country Waste Management Study, be noted and that a further presentation be made to the Committee upon completion of the study.

26

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN DECISION MAKING

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the findings of initial research on sustainability and decision-making, making recommendations for further detailed analysis and on practical examples of sustainability initiatives.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Committee agrees to oversee further evaluation of:-
 - (a) the practical application of a sustainability appraisal tool by:-
 - Assessing the practicality of the sustainability toolkit that was currently being piloted by the Dudley Community Partnership for wider Council use; and
 - Consideration of the level of projects/initiatives that should be subject to a sustainability appraisal, in practical terms and how it would be built into the Council's decision-making processes
 - (b) the practical application of State of the Environment reporting in connection with Dudley Community Partnership and in particular monitoring the outcomes of the Community Strategy.
- (2) That the Committee do not undertake further evaluation of Eco-management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in the immediate term due to concerns raised about significant staff and financial resources.

27

DUPLEX PROPERTIES

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the position with regard to Duplex properties in the Borough.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members expressed concern at Duplex properties and commented that several complaints were received in relation to noise nuisance caused in flats from vacuuming or the use of washing machines from the tenants either above or below the property. It was suggested that if sufficient money was not available to convert the properties back to their original status, then resources should be allocated to make the properties soundproof. A Member further queried the costs involved in such conversions. In responding, the Assistant Director of Housing advised that there was no extra money available and all capital had been allocated to achieving decent homes by 2010. The Government has also made it clear that Councils that

retained their stock would not be eligible for any additional funding. In relation to the costs involved in converting properties, the Assistant Director of Housing undertook to provide the figures direct to the Member concerned. However, she indicated that it was in the region of £30,000.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and in the attached Appendix, now submitted, be noted.

28

PROJECT PLAN : CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the proposed Project Plan for implement Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

During the presentation of the report, the Assistant Director of Housing referred to paragraph 16 of the report and advised that an additional point should be included indicating that, following submission of the report to the Committee, it would be submitted to Cabinet in September 2007 for approval.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members commented that the reason for the 50% refusal rate could be due to properties being in a state of disrepair. It was suggested that tenancy conditions should be made stronger and enforcement action taken on those that wrecked properties or did not leave them in a reasonable state. A Member further requested a breakdown in figures of the 50% refusal rate according to specific areas and properties in the Borough. In responding the Assistant Director of Housing reported that enforcement was part of a new condition and training would be provided to relevant officers. She undertook to provide the member concerned with a breakdown of figures, by area, for refusal rates in the Borough.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, now submitted, be noted.
- (2) That the methodology for progressing Choice Based Lettings as detailed in paragraphs 16 and 17 of the report, be approved.
- (3) That it be noted that, following submission of the report to the Committee, it would be submitted to Cabinet in September 2007 for approval.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PROGRAMME – RECYCLING WORKING GROUP

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted setting out the terms of reference applicable to the Working Group. A verbal report was also given on its proposed programme of activities.

RESOLVED

- (1) That approval be given to the terms of reference of the Recycling Working Group as detailed in the report now submitted.
- (2) That approval be given to the following work programme for the Recycling Working Group:-
 - Black Country Study – Waste Management
 - Recycling Plastics
 - Green Waste
 - Performance Management and In-House Recycling

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Director of Law and Property (Lead Officer to the Committee) was submitted on the first Quarterly Corporate Performance report for 2005/06 relating to performance for the period 1st April 2005 to 30th June 2005.

A Member commented that congratulations should be given to certain officers who were achieving targets. However, the under-achievers should be addressed. In relation to targets that were not being met, it was suggested that a programme of maintenance works should exist whereby contingency plans were in place when the incinerator was shut down and rather than go to landfill, waste should be stored. In relation to improving the street scene target, it was suggested that the presence of enforcement officers would deter litter dropping which would solve some of the problems.

In responding to queries the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) reported that this was the first quarterly report and an accurate view would not be seen until later in the year. The incinerator had been shut down in April which had resulted in the figures increasing to landfill and storing waste at Lister Road would lead to complaints from the smell.

The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) undertook to respond to the Member concerned in relation to the query on the exact number of children killed as mentioned on Page 24 with regard to key performance indicator BV099bii.

A Member expressed concern in relation to the road works currently taking place on Tipton Road and on the impact on traffic around the Castle Hill area. It was queried whether there was a plan in place when undertaking the railway works, as this would further impact on traffic in the area, as people would be using Priory Road. A Member further suggested that bus lanes should be opened for use by cars during essential maintenance road works. The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) undertook to refer the query to the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) for a response direct to the Member concerned.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and in the attached Appendix, be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm.

CHAIRMAN