

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT**

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 at 6.00pm  
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Mrs. Cowell (in the Chair)  
Councillor Mrs. Turner (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Mrs. Blood, Mrs Coulter, P. Harley, Hill, James, Lowe, Stanley  
and Waltho

### **Officers**

Interim Director of Law and Property (As Lead Officer to the Committee),  
Assistant Director, Environmental Management, (Directorate of the Urban  
Environment), Assistant Director of Finance (Revenues, Benefits and  
Management Support), Principal Officer Corporate Management (both  
Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement), Assistant Director, Housing  
Management, Head of Housing Options, and Head of Housing Management-  
North, (Directorate of Adult Community and Housing Services) and Miss K  
Fellows (Directorate of Law and Property).

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44                    **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of  
Councillors Body and Mrs Jordan.

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45                    **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor P Harley declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item  
no. 8 – Review of Housing Allocations Scheme - as he had a close family  
relative who had been bidding for a property on the Dudley at Home  
Website.

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46                    **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup>  
January, 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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47                    **PUBLIC FORUM**

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

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DIRECTORATE OF FINANCE, ICT AND PROCUREMENT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2009/10

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the annual equality and diversity action plan for 2009/10 for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement.

The Assistant Director of Finance, in his presentation of the report, outlined the proposals contained therein, making particular reference to the priority to contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough, by maximising the take-up of Council Tax and Housing Benefits by increasing customer awareness. It was stated that this was a new initiative which would be dealt with by accessing various computer databases in order to identify those residents in the Borough who continued to be entitled to benefits but had failed to apply for them. He also referred to the new initiative to extend home based working, which was an initiative aimed at retaining staff, their skills and improving employee productivity.

Arising from the presentation given members asked a number of questions to which responses were given by the Assistant Director of Finance, who reported that any increase in the value of benefit awards would be met from the Central Government subsidy; risk assessments in relation to both health and safety and secure information issues would and had been carried out for home workers; confirmation that all personal information would continue to be held on a central database at the Council, with home assessors utilising a dumb terminal that did not retain any information; confirmation that the working from home initiative would continue to be upon a voluntary rather than a compulsory basis, and would not therefore preclude potential employees; the expectation that the number of employees who were to take part in and were satisfied with the performance review and development process, and have a training plan should rise to 100%, and in relation to employees training needs, should training needs be agreed which could not immediately be met, then these would be included on a training waiting list, which would be prioritised accordingly.

The home based working initiative was welcomed by members.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the inclusion of the words “with jointly identified and agreed training priorities” in Appendix 1 to the report, page 11, Priority Objective 4.1, following the word plan in line three, the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on the Action Plan for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement, be noted.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Management gave a verbal report on the site visit by the Recycling Working Group that had taken place on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2009 to the Aldridge Recycling Facility. He stated that this facility could deal with commingle waste, taking up to three streams of waste, to include glass, and that the facility could produce an end recycled product. It was reported that South Staffordshire, Walsall, Lichfield and Sandwell utilised the facility.

#### RESOLVED

That the information reported, in respect of the site visit made to the Aldridge Recycling facility on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2009, be noted.

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#### REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted updating the Committee on the roll out of Choice Based Lettings and on the outcome of consultation on, and testing of, the proposed bandings scheme for housing allocations.

The Head of Housing Options in presenting the Report outlined the proposals contained in the report and referred to the Appendix to the report.

The Members expressed praise to officers and members of the Working Group in relation to the Choice Based Lettings project, and the constructive manner in which this had been dealt with, as it had previously been acknowledged by members that the points scheme to prioritise the order for council housing had been unsatisfactory and there were issues about how the system worked.

It was reported by the Head of Housing Options that the consultation process that had taken place between October 2008 and January, 2009, had involved a series of consultation session with elected members, tenant representatives, and other directorates and agencies represented on stakeholder groups.

Arising from the presentation of the report, a number of comments were made and questions raised in relation to:-

- Clarification of obtaining medical points;
- That although the proposed banding scheme for housing allocations would be more transparent in order for council staff to interpret and those applying for properties to understand, this would not resolve the problems of council housing stock;
- Acknowledgment that the Dudley Standard would be more generous than the Bedroom Standard that had been supported by Central Government, whereby the council considered that each single adult ideally required their own room at age of 18, as opposed to 21, and had lower thresholds for the age at which it considered it would be

- unsatisfactory for opposite sex children to share a room.
- The position in relation to bungalow housing stock;

In responding to the questions raised, the Head of Housing Options responded by stating that prior to any implementation of the scheme, the whole process of medical applications would be investigated;

It was further reported that the position in relation to bungalows, had been commented upon during the consultation by the consultee stating “in relation to bungalows being originally intended for older people, they should not be let for adaptation for younger people with disabilities” In response it had been stated that “this would be a matter of managing supply and demand, and the banding of applications and further labelling of vacancies should assist in making sensitive and sustainable lettings”.

#### RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments made at the meeting, the proposals contained in the report, and Appendix to the report submitted, on the review of the Housing Allocations Scheme be noted and endorsed for submission to Cabinet.

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#### TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT (PATCH-WORKING)

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on Tenancy and Estate Management Services, more commonly referred to as ‘patch-working’, in Housing Services.

Arising from the presentation of the report and Appendix to the report a number of questions were asked, and the Assistant Director of Housing Management responded by stating that:-

The housing refocus had been undertaken to improve the service for customers and took into account the reduction in the housing stock and efficiency savings that could be made through mobile technology and improved working practices. Staff, Area Housing Panels and Unions had been involved throughout the process.

The decision to separate out income was, in part, influenced by staff stating that they had too many competing priorities.

Following a query raised by Councillor Mrs Coulter, it was considered that investigations should be carried out regarding repair managers and Dudley Council Plus in relation to repairs being logged. The Head of Housing Management North, would report further to Councillor Mrs Coulter on this matter following investigation.

Following further discussions it was

RESOLVED

- (a) That information contained in the report ,and Appendix to the report, submitted on Tenancy and Estate Management (Patch-Working), be noted and that the Assistant Director of Housing be requested to submit a report to a future Meeting of this Committee.
- (b) That the Assistant Director of Housing be requested to provide Members with contact details of named Housing Officers who dealt with each individual housing problem.

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QUARTERLEY CORORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on performance in the third quarter of 2008/09, for the period October to December, 2008 in relation to the activities relating to the Terms of Reference of this Committee.

The Lead Officer to the Committee in his presentation of the report, and report summary in respect of the activities of this Select Committee, referred to a number of issues with particular reference to those issues, where there was an indication that there was below target performance, and the significant achievements and points of Note section of the report. Members commented on these and in doing so made particular reference to the current financial climate affecting the key performance indicators.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and colour copy of the extracted report circulated separately, on performance in the third quarter of 2008/09, for the period October to December, 2008, in relation to activities relating to the Terms of Reference of this Committee, be noted.

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OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2009/10

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on proposals for the Outline Work Programme of the Committee for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED

(1) That the following Outline Work Programme for 2009/10 be considered by the Select Committee at its first meeting to be held in the next Municipal Year:-

- Food Service Plan – June 2009
- Drainage Report – June 2009
- Presentation on work of the Pest Control Team – June 2009
- Food Service Plan Progress – November 2009
- Update of the Council's Capital Strategy – November 2009-
- Tenancy and Estate Management – Patch-Working Report – January 2010
- Air Quality Management Progress – January 2010
- Equality and Diversity Report for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement – March 2010
- Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Reports – June and November 2009 and January and March 2010
- Proposed Revenue Budget 2009/10 – March 2010
- Annual Report of the Committee to Council – September 2009
- Outline Work Programme 2010/11 – March,2010

(2) That the following reports also be included within the work programme:-

- Choice Based Lettings – Points to Banding;
- The Final Evaluation of the North Dudley Gardening Initiative

And that should any member wish to include any further items to the Work Plan, they be requested to contact the Lead Officer and/or the Chairman of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.05 pm

CHAIRMAN