

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Thursday, 8th March, 2007 at 6 pm
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Turner (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Ameson, Banks, James, Lowe, Simms and Tomkinson

Officers

Director of Law and Property (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Senior Assistant Director of Finance, Assistant Director – Housing Services, Assistant Director – Environmental Management, Head of Street Care, Area Housing Manager (Brierley Hill), Area Housing Manager (Halesowen), Management Support Officer, and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property).

44 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ms Craigie, Finch, Harley, Ms Harris, Kettle and Stanley.

45 **APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillors Mrs Ameson, Banks and Simms had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors Stanley, Kettle and Harley respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

46 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

47 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29th January, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

48 **PUBLIC FORUM**

Future Public Forum Items

A Member referred to the discussion that had taken place at the previous meeting under the public form item and due to the length taken to debate the issue, it was requested that future items should have a time limit placed upon them.

RESOLVED

That a time limit of fifteen minutes be placed on the consideration of all future items raised under the Public Forum agenda item.

49

DIRECTORATE OF FINANCE, ICT AND PROCUREMENT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2007/08

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2007/08 for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report and Appendices attached to the report, submitted on the Action Plan for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement, be noted.

50

CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

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

RESOLVED

That agenda item No 7 be considered as the last item of business.

51

MANAGING GREEN CARE ON HOUSING ESTATES AND OPEN SPACES

A joint report of the Directors of the Urban Environment and Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on progress made in respect of enhanced joint working between the two Directorates in managing the Council's responsibilities for grounds maintenance on Housing Land and on the introduction of a 'Green Care' Service Level Agreement between the Directorates.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member referred to paragraph 21 of the report regarding Section 106 Agreements and commented that it would be useful if part of that money was retained and allocated to measures that would benefit the community as a whole. She further referred to paragraph 11 of the report regarding changing seasonal demands and queried whether staff employed on a casual basis could have their contracts extended to cover demand.

In responding the Head of Street Care said that an element of the Section 106 money from new developments was put aside but stipulated that the funding was time limited. Regarding long-term sustainability the Council did not benefit, as when the Section 106 funding ran out the Council had to take on the responsibility, which impacted on the overall budget. Regarding temporary staff the Head of Street Care confirmed that due to climate change and milder winters the period when grass was cut had been extended from October to December. To accommodate the extra work contracts for temporary and casual staff had been extended, which again impacted on the budget. He further reported that the recruitment process had to be followed when an employee left and the process was sometimes slow due to the length of time taken to obtain Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance. However, he commented that the process was being reviewed to consider the best way forward.

A Member suggested that whilst undertaking the review process and considering the budgetary implications, consideration should be given to weighing the overall costs of temporary and permanent staff, as it may be cheaper to employ permanent staff. He further referred to paragraph 15 of the report regarding improvements and priorities being reviewed via Area Housing Panels and commented that there was a need to ensure consideration was also given to including and addressing people's priorities and that requests were followed up and actioned. It was suggested that a short guide or summary should be drafted to help people through the process of making a request.

In responding the Assistant Director – Environmental Management confirmed that Dudley Council Plus now handled all calls and that they were the first point of contact for all queries.

During the ensuing discussion a Member referred to the community safety budget and commented that quotes for work differed and seemed to change when the order was later placed. In responding the Area Housing Manager (Halesowen) reported that when a bid for community safety had been placed it was submitted with a costing but it did not reflect green care issues. However, this matter had now been addressed, as staff had been informed that they should consider and include green care issues and submit proper quotes.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix attached to the report, now submitted on the work undertaken by the Directorates of Urban Environment and Adult, Community and Housing Services in respect of introducing a Service Level Agreement for grounds maintenance on Council land in Housing ownership, be noted.
 - (2) That the management of the Green Care budget, by the Green Care Section to provide consistent standards of maintenance across the Borough and to more effectively manage the Council's Green Care priorities, be noted.
 - (3) That the impact of new landscape developments on the Green Care budget and on overall standards of maintenance, particularly where schemes were introduced without adequate revenue funding, be noted.
 - (4) That the proposal that further monitoring of the Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement be established formally with the Housing Area Panels and that each Area Panel receive a report twice a year on Grounds Maintenance issues arising within their respective areas, be received and noted.
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52

PROVISION OF A MATERIALS RECYCLING FACILITY

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on proposals by the Select Committee on Environment (Recycling) Working Group for a Materials Recycling Facility within the Borough.

The Director of Law and Property (as Lead Officer to the Committee) reported that the recommendation should be changed to refer the matter to the Cabinet Member for the Environment and not the Cabinet and Council as stated.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for the Environment be requested to include a suitable site for a Materials Recycling Facility in the Borough in the capital programme and that approaches be made to the land owners to purchase the site.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for the Environment be requested to consider a working model and definite proposals for a Materials Reclamation Facility to secure any available Government funding for such a site.

OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2007/08

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on proposals for the Outline Work Programme of the Committee for the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member referred to paragraph 5 of the report regarding the Orchard Partnership and suggested that a single to all Select Committees should be arranged.

RESOLVED

That the following Outline Work Programme for 2007/08 be considered by the Select Committee at its first meeting to be held in the next Municipal Year:-

- Food Service Plan (June 2007)
- Food Service Plan Progress (November 2007)
- Air Quality Management Progress (January 2008)
- Update of the Council's Capital Strategy (November 2007)
- Equality and Diversity Reports for the Directorate of Housing (March 2008)
- Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Reports (June and November 2007 and January and March 2008)
- Proposed Revenue Budget 2008/09 (January 2008)
- Outline Work Programme 2007/08 (March 2008)
- Annual Report of the Committee to Council (June/July 2008)
- Choice Based Lettings (to include a report back from the Working Group to the Committee in January/February 2008)
- Recycling
- Health Act 2006 – No Smoking in Public Places Progress
- Cross Border Issues
- Fixed Penalties for Dropping Litter
- Patch Working and Estate Management (June 2007)
- Highways and Footpath Maintenance
- Update on Green Waste Composting Facility and Outcomes of the Probiotic Compound Trial

REPORT OF WORKING GROUP ON CHOICE BASED LETTINGS AND SUCCESSION – POLICY ON SUCCESSIONS AND JOINT TENANCIES

A report of the Select Committee on Environment (Choice Based Lettings) Working Group was submitted on the findings and recommendations made in respect of policy and procedure relating to successions and joint tenancies.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member queried the position with couples that had separated consequently causing financial hardship and queried whether any leniency applied when allocating another property. In responding the Area Housing Manager (Brierley Hill) acknowledged that financial hardship could occur and undertook to investigate the number of such cases being dealt with prior to considering whether any additional assistance could be offered.

The Chairman thanked all Members and Officers involved with the Select Committee on Environment (Choice Based Lettings) Working Group for contributing to all the hard and meaningful work that had taken place.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Housing be requested to review and take appropriate action regarding the policy on successions and joint tenancies as outlined in the report submitted and that should the proposals made be subsequently approved, staff receive training and procedural guidance on the revisions approved.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm.

CHAIRMAN