

Meeting of the Council – 12th October, 2009

Annual Report of the Select Committee on Environment for 2008/09

Purpose of Report

1. To submit to Council the Annual Report of the Select Committee on Environment for the 2008/09 municipal year.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually to the full Council on their work and make recommendations for future work programmes and amend their working methods, if appropriate. The Select Committee Chairmen have agreed that the annual report for this Select Committee should be submitted to the October meeting of the Council.
3. In deciding its work programme for 2008/09, the Committee chose to concentrate on a manageable list of important issues to ensure that they could be properly scrutinised, whilst at the same time giving the Committee some flexibility to add some additional items that arose during the course of the year.
4. Accordingly, items included in the planned work programme for the Committee in 2008/09 were as follows:-
 - Food Service Plan
 - Aids and Adaptations
 - Enforcement of Tenancy Conditions
 - Highways and footpath maintenance
 - Maintenance of Green Care Open Spaces
 - The Recycling Working Group Report
 - Air Quality Management Progress Report
 - Choice Based Lettings
 - The Gardening Initiative
 - Provision and Condition of Public Conveniences
 - Equality and Diversity Action Plan
 - Patchworking

Analysis of the Work Programme for 2008/09

Appointment of Working Groups

5. At the meeting held on 24th June 2008, we approved the re-appointment of the Recycling Working Group with the remit to consider recycling feasibility options and to look further at the recycling of plastics.

The work programme for the working group comprised the following matters:-

- Site visits to a new Recycling Plant at Aldridge and Peterborough Council to include a report in relation to co-mingle bins;
 - Consideration of issues relating to Waste Strategy and Waste Minimisation Strategy;
6. The Choice Based Lettings Working Group was also re-appointed at that meeting, with the remit to oversee and monitor progress of the choice based lettings pilot scheme and the banding proposals.

Equipment and Adaptations in Private and Public Sector Housing in the Borough.

7. At our meeting on 24th June 2008, we received a report in respect of Equipment and Adaptations in Private and Public Sector Housing in the Borough. Arising from the presentation of the report, it was determined that the information on the number of private sector grants for adaptations and the percentage and types of complaints that were received relating to work undertaken by building contractors should be provided by the Head of Service for Private Sector Housing.

Conditions of Tenancy

8. A report on the conditions of tenancy and enforcement was also received at our June meeting and arising from the presentation of the report, concerns were raised in relation to:-
 - untidy gardens and enforcement action;
 - the position in relation to Choice Based Lettings and multiple viewings resulting in tenants having their hopes raised but failing to secure the property concerned.

Arising from the presentation of the report, it was requested that the Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services investigate an issue about multiple viewings.

Managing Green Care on Open Spaces

9. It was confirmed that in relation to a more proactive approach to tree pruning an enhanced budget would be required to enable this to happen, and members agreed to support the Directorates requests for such funding.

It was indicated that in relation to the arrangements and responsibilities for grounds maintenance, that Directorate budgets were included in one Green Care budget in order that works could be prioritised on a Borough wide basis, however these budgets did not take into account new developments and environmental enhancements which had to be accommodated from existing revenue budgets, and should Directorates require additional works to be carried out they would need to fund these from their existing budgets.

Review of Housing Allocations Scheme

10. A report was submitted to the meeting of the Committee held on 17th September, 2008, providing an update on the work carried out by the Choice Based Lettings Working Group, making a number of recommendations for changes to the Lettings Policy.

Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) – 2008-2011

11. A further report was submitted to the September meeting, of the Committee on an overview of the Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP), highlighting Government initiatives behind asset management planning and demonstrating how the Council would use this approach to deliver and improve its Transport and Highways Service.

Update on Air Quality within Dudley Metropolitan Borough

12. The Committee at its meeting held on 26th January, 2009 considered a report submitted on the progress of air quality monitoring within the Dudley Metropolitan Borough, addressing various areas of work in relation to air quality, including action plan progress and statutory requirements for 2009.
13. Arising from the presentation of the report, the Committee considered ways in which air quality could be improved and in particular at the locations identified in the report, when it was considered that there was a need for a national and international lead to be taken on such matters, together with the development of new technologies in order that matters could be addressed on a number of fronts.

Interim Evaluation of the North Dudley Gardening Initiative

13. A further report was submitted to the January meeting of the Committee in relation to the interim evaluation of the North Dudley gardening initiative that had been established as a pilot on 1st July, 2008. Photographs were circulated of properties that had been the subject of the initiative.

Details were also provided of the criteria by which people could be included as part of the initiative, and it was indicated that the amount of work that could be undertaken would be subject to budgetary constraints.

Provision and Condition of Public Conveniences

14. A report was also considered at the meeting on the provision and condition of the Council's public conveniences, together with details of the Council's resource capacity to maintain the provision in good order and on the Government's Strategic Guide on public toilet provision and its strong encouragement for local authorities to recognise the needs of all those who use public space.

Arising from the presentation of the report and appendix to the report a number of questions were asked and comments made relating to the provision of public conveniences in the Marketplace, Dudley; Bank Road, Lower Gornal and Enville Road, Wallheath, and it was suggested that consideration should be given to the refurbishment of the facilities in Bank Road, Lower Gornal. It was noted that methods of provision and use of additional sources of funding, had already been investigated and funding would be utilised from Section 106 monies.

The Committee in noting the information reported upon, also noted the internal and external factors that were adding greater pressure on the capacity of the existing budget to provide and maintain the provision referred to above.

Recycling Working Group

15. Consideration was also given to information provided upon the continuing work of the Recycling Working Group, including a site visit on 14th January, 2009 to the Aldridge Recycling Facility, whereby it was noted that this facility could deal with co-mingle waste, taking up to three streams of waste, including glass enabling this facility to produce an end recycling product.

Review of Housing Allocations Scheme

16. At our meeting held on 6th March, 2009 we received a report updating the Committee on the roll out of Choice Based Lettings and the outcome of the consultation on, and testing of, the proposed bandings scheme for housing allocations.

It was noted that the consultation process that had taken place between October, 2008 and January, 2009 had involved a series of consultation sessions 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, when it was noted that although the proposed banding scheme for housing allocations would be more transparent in order for council staff to interpret and those applying for

council properties to understand, this would not resolve the problems of council housing stock, and it was acknowledged 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 the age of 18, as opposed to 21, and had lower thresholds for the age at which it was considered it would be unsatisfactory for opposite sex children to share a room.

It was further reported that prior to implementation of the scheme the whole process of medical applications would be investigated and although bungalows had been originally intended for older people, following comments and suggestions received as part of the consultation in relation to adapting them for younger people with disabilities, it was noted that this would be a matter of managing supply and demand, and that the banding of applications and further labelling of vacancies should assist in making sensitive and sustainable lettings.

Tenancy and Estate Management (Patch-Working)

17. A further report was submitted to our March meeting on Tenancy and Estate Management Services, more commonly referred to as 'patch-working' in Housing Services, when it was reported 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.

Other Items Considered

18. During the year we also considered the following principal items:-
 - Food Service Plan 2008/09
 - Quarterly Reports on Corporate Performance Management regarding housing and environment;
 - Update of the Council's Capital strategy;
 - Emptying of Cesspits;
 - Equipment and Adaptations in Private and Public Sector Housing in the Borough;
 - Revenue Budget for 2009/10
 - Annual report of the Select Committee to Council

Key Issues Arising

Review of Housing Allocations Scheme

19. Arising from consideration given to this matter by the Committee at its meeting on 17th September 2008, the Cabinet Member for Housing was 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 be let to families with three or more children or other dependant 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.

Interim Evaluation of the North Dudley Gardening Initiative

20. Arising from the presentation of the report, and consideration of photographs circulated at the meeting it was agreed that a final evaluation report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Review of Housing Allocations Scheme

21. The Choice Based Lettings Working Group considered the roll out of Choice Based Lettings and the outcome of the consultation on, and testing of, the proposed bandings scheme for housing allocations. It was agreed that the Choice Based Lettings Working Group would continue to monitor the development and implementation of the bandings scheme, and consider other issues relevant to housing allocations.

Recommendations that were made

22. Regarding the Equipment and Adaptations in private and public sector housing in the borough, the information contained in the report and appendices to the report submitted were noted, and the Head of Service Private Sector was requested to provide members with responses to their requests for information on the number of private sector grants for adaptations and the percentage and types of complaints that were received relating to work undertaken by building contractors.
23. The information contained in the report submitted on the conditions of tenancy and enforcements were noted.
24. Managing Green Care Open Spaces
 - The information contained in the report 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 was noted;
 - The impact on climate change on the delivery of the Green Care Service was noted

- 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 were noted;
 - The Committee supported the making of a bid for additional resources for tree pruning.
25. Regarding the Transport Asset Management Plan for 2008-2011.
- The information contained in the report submitted and the 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 was noted.
 - A recommendation was made to the Cabinet Member for Transportation that the Council adopt the principles of an asset management approach to transport and highways service provision
26. In respect of the update on Air Quality within Dudley Metropolitan Borough and on the progress made with air quality monitoring, the information contained in the report and as reported on at the meeting and the support given to the continued monitoring in 2009/10 of air quality were noted.
27. The information contained in the report submitted, on the interim evaluation of the North Dudley gardening initiative which was established as a pilot on 1st July, 2008 was noted, and that a final evaluation report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.
28. The information contained in the report submitted on the provision and condition of the Council's public conveniences and related matters were noted together with the work undertaken by Environmental Management in managing the Council's public convenience provision and the internal and external factors that were adding greater pressure on the capacity of the existing budget to provide and maintain the provision.
29. In respect of the update 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 together with the endorsement of the submission to Cabinet to approve the proposals contained in report submitted and reported on at the meeting were noted.
30. The information contained in the report submitted on Tenancy and Estate Management Services and the request that the Assistant Director of Housing submit a report to a future meeting was noted.

Changes as a Result of Recommendations

31. Arising from the work undertaken by the Choice Based Lettings Working Group, changes will arise from the development, further testing and implementation of the bandings scheme relating to Housing allocation, and from continued scrutiny and regular progress reports to be submitted to the Select Committee by the Working Group.

Any Issues which were Not Reviewed during the Work Programme

32. None

Any Areas/ Opportunities for Improvement

33. The Committee continues to recognise the value of having separate working groups to undertake detailed analysis of major issues, such as the Housing Allocation Scheme and Recycling.

Areas of Focus for the Year – Keys Issues to be Considered

34. At our meeting held on 23rd June 2009, the following outline work programme was proposed for the 2009/10 municipal year:-
- Food Service Plan;
 - Presentation on the Work of the Pest Control Team;
 - Outline Work Programme 2009/10;
 - Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Reports;
 - Appointment of Working Groups;
 - Equality and Diversity Report for the Directorate of Finance ICT and Procurement;
 - Drainage Report;
 - Annual Report of the Committee to Council;
 - Final Evaluation of the North Dudley Gardening Initiative;
 - Use, Abuse and Effectiveness of Speed Cameras;
 - Civil Parking Enforcement and respective roles of the Council and the Police in dealing with cases of obstruction;
 - Food Service Plan Progress;
 - Update of the Council's Capital Strategy;
 - Tenancy and Estate Management – Patch-Working Report;
 - Air Quality Management Progress;
 - Proposed Revenue Budget 2009/10;
 - Outline Work Programme 2009/10;
 - Equality and Diversity Action Plan;
 - Choice Based Lettings – Points to Banding;
 - Recycling Working Group Report.

Finance

35. There are no direct financial consequences arising from this report.

Law

36. The requirement for Select Committees to make an Annual Report of the Council is contained in Article 6 of the Constitution.
37. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council's Constitution are contained in Part 11 of the Local Government Act 2000, together with regulations, orders and statutory guidance, issued by the Secretary of State.

Equality Impact

38. This report complies fully with the Council's policies on equal opportunities and diversity.
39. This report has no specific effect on children and young people. There is no requirement for consultation with children and young people or the involvement of children and young people in producing the report or the development of proposals.

Recommendation

40. That the Annual Report of the Select Committee on Environment for 2008/09, as set out above, be noted.



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Chairman of the Select Committee on Environment.