

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, 19th January, 2005 at 6.00 p.m.
In Committee Room 2, Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Turner (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Banks, Body, Mrs Collins, Stanley, Tomkinson and
C Wilson

Officers

Director of Finance, Assistant Director of the Urban Environment
(Development and Environmental Protection), Assistant Director of the
Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Head of Public
Protection, Head of Street Care, Senior Solicitor (Gary Collins) and Mrs
M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property).

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th
November, 2004, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Turner declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda
Item No 5 (Proposed Revenue Budget 2005/06) in view of having a
granddaughter who was in receipt of a contribution from the home to
school transport fund.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor G
Davies.

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PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2005/06

A joint report of the Director of the Urban Environment, the Director of
Housing and the Director of Finance was submitted on the proposed
Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2005/06.

During the discussion that followed the presentation of the report, a Member referred to paragraph 6.1 of the report and commented that, if it was found that there was not enough money for waste collection and disposal, an assurance should be given that all those people who had indicated that they wished to receive black boxes would do so. In relation to paragraph 3.6.1 of the report that referred to rationalising the bathing and nail cutting services, it was commented that it was vital for people with diabetes to have their feet attended to and further assurances were sought that the service would be continued.

In response, the Director of Finance reported that the nail cutting service was not provided across the Borough and advised that in relation to people with diabetes, the onus on provision lay with the health service. In relation to seeking assurances on the points mentioned, the Director of Finance suggested that the issues be raised at the meeting of the Council where the budget would be finally agreed.

In response to a query from a Member, the Director of Finance confirmed that there were no proposals to withdraw funding from the WHAT Centre for 2005/06.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Government's proposals for Revenue Support Grant in 2005/06 be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet's Budget proposals for 2005/06 be noted.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted presenting the second Quarterly Corporate Performance Report for 2004/05, relating to performance for the period 1st April, 2004 to 30th September, 2004 that had been submitted to the Cabinet on 15th December, 2004.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report now submitted be noted.

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TREE RISK ASSESSMENT – SERVICE UPDATE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted informing the Committee on the progress made in respect of the Council's Tree Risk Assessment and advising members of the measures taken by Green Care to more effectively manage the Council's tree stock.

In presenting the report the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) introduced Mr Garry Dean who had been appointed as the new Head of Street Care.

The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) informed Members that a new portable data mechanism was now being used to enter tree data whilst on site and information was then downloaded onto the database. Members were informed that the device was available to view after the meeting.

During the discussion that followed, a Member expressed concern at the number of trees that were felled and not replaced. A further Member agreed with the comments made and stated that trees that were felled should be replaced, however it was pointed out that the replacement of trees did not have to be like-for-like and could be replaced with another type of tree. In response, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) advised that a number of factors must be considered when replacing trees, such as the suitability of the general location, Health and Safety implications and consultation across the local community, however he undertook to pursue the matter and to report back to a future meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on the work undertaken by the Arboricultural Section in respect of the Borough's tree stock, be noted.
- (2) That, subject to approval of additional funding for 2005/06, the measures proposed by the service to maintain existing workloads and to undertake additional work identified as a result of proactive inspections be noted and endorsed.

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DECLARATION OF AN AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA – SEDGLEY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted seeking support for the declaration of an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in the centre of Sedgley.

The Head of Public Protection circulated an amended map for consideration by the Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the declaration of an Air Quality Management Area for the centre of Sedgley, as shown on the amended map, be supported and referred to the Cabinet.

RESOLUTION OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC REGENERATION

A report of the Lead Officer to the Select Committee on Economic Regeneration was submitted seeking consideration of the recommendation of the Select Committee on Economic Regeneration (Economic Regeneration Working Group) in relation to the need to update signposting in the Borough.

During the discussion that followed the presentation of the report, a Member commented that signs were placed inappropriately and referred to a 30 mph sign that had been placed for safety during inclement weather conditions on a 40 mph dual carriageway that caused confusion. It was requested that before erecting new signs consideration be given to where and how they are placed.

Another Member commented that signage was a general problem in the Borough and he explained the confusion that people who did not know the area faced whilst following the signs for Gornal. He stated that the signs should be made more clear and separated as Upper Gornal and Lower Gornal.

The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) commented that signage issues were a concern throughout the Borough. He referred to a current sponsorship initiative that was currently under negotiation and stated that the funds from the company concerned would be diverted to signage and further informed Members that the company would also be providing boundary signs.

In response to a query from a Member in relation to the regular cleaning of signs and the replacement of corroded and illegible signs, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment advised that only illuminated signs were cleaned on an annual basis, however he assured Members that if there were concerns with signs, and if details were provided, they would receive attention.

The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) reported that in relation to the tragedy that had occurred on King Street, a Coroner's Inquiry was currently underway and the recommendation from that Inquiry would be taken on board and addressed at that time. It was further reported that under the Traffic Management Act that came into force earlier this month, one of the requirements was for the need to implement a procedure that ensured all signs and notices were accurate and appropriate. The first step to be taken was to undertake a survey and to review all signs in the Borough with a view to ensuring that signs are legible and accurate.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and referred to the Cabinet Member for the Environment.

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SCRUTINY PROTOCOL FOR SELECT COMMITTEES

A report of the Director of Law and Property on was submitted seeking consideration on a Draft Scrutiny Protocol for Select Committees.

RESOLVED

That the Draft Scrutiny Protocol be accepted and approved as submitted.

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PROTOCOL FOR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEMBERS AND OFFICERS OF DUDLEY MBC

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted seeking consideration of a Draft Protocol for Relationships between Members and Officers of the Council.

The draft Protocol essentially codified exceeding good practice in the Council and should not involve any major cultural change on the part of Members or officers.

During the discussion that followed the presentation of the report, Members commented that there was some lack of communication and information that was available to Members. A particular incident was referred to whereby the telephone numbers for the Directorate of Housing had been changed and Members had not been made aware of this. Another incident was highlighted which involved the employment of the new Town Centre Managers. Ward Members would have found information useful earlier rather than later. It was felt that information about particular issues sometimes only came to light when reading newspaper articles. It was suggested that various ways of conveying information should be used such as e-mail, intranet and Internet.

The Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) advised that in relation to the change of telephone numbers for the Directorate of Housing he would circulate a list of changes to Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the draft Protocol be accepted and approved as submitted subject to the concerns expressed in respect of the lack of communication and information to Members.

- (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) circulate to Members a list of changes in telephone numbers in respect of the Directorate of Housing.

The meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.

CHAIRMAN