

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 at 6.00pm  
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

### PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs Turner (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Mrs Blood, Mrs Coulter, A Finch, Hanif, P Harley, Hill, James,  
and Waltho.

### Officers

Director of Corporate Resources (As Lead Officer to the Committee), Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Interim Assistant Director Financial Services and Corporate Finance, Principal Officer Corporate Management (both Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement), Assistant Director, Housing Management and Head of Housing Options, (Both Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) and Miss K Fellows (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

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45            APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

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46            APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBER

It was reported that Councillor Mrs Coulter had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor Mrs Jordan for this meeting of the Committee only.

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47            DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

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48            MINUTES

### RESOLVED

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th January, 2010, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

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DIRECTORATE OF FINANCE, ICT AND PROCUREMENT'S EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2010/11

A report of the Interim Director of Finance was submitted on the annual equality and diversity action plan for 2010/11 for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement.

The Interim Assistant Director of Finance, in his presentation of the report outlined the proposals contained therein and the Principal Officer Corporate Management referred to three areas contained within the draft action plan including the achievement of the Charter Mark for all Finance directorate services and the plan to progress to the new Government standard of customer service excellence.

The work in relation to benefit take-up was specifically referred to, whereby it was reported that Benefit Services were conducting a matching up exercise in order to identify people over the age of sixty failing to take up benefits that they were entitled to. Also referred to were developments in the use of ICT systems in order to help improve access to all Council services.

In responding to a question from a Member, the Principal Officer Corporate Management stated that benefit home workers utilised the secure council system, thus protecting all data entries.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11, be noted.

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51

PROGRESS WITH THE DUDLEY MBC AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN.

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the details of the progress with the Dudley MBC Air Quality Action Plan.

In presenting the report the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards confirmed that the first draft of the Action Plan had been submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for comments and referred to the various methods of consultation upon the Action Plan.

Particular reference was made to the proposed action including road network improvements, minor road and junction improvements, improving public transport and rail freight facilities.

It was reported that action in order to reduce vehicle emissions included possible future roadside emission testing, improving the Council's fleet of vehicles and controlling industrial, commercial and domestic emissions.

The travel plans for Council employees and the assisted bike purchase scheme as outlined in the report was referred to and the introduction of new initiatives in order to benefit air quality in all areas.

Arising from the presentation of the report Members asked questions and made comments and the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards responded as follows:-

The Council should be in a position to exert some pressure upon National Express in order to encourage them to provide an efficient bus service throughout the Borough in order to facilitate the Council's efforts to ensure that more people utilise public transport and leave their cars at home.

In relation to smoky vehicles, the possibility of utilising current legislation for enforcement purposes would be investigated by the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards.

It was stated that the Council promoted car sharing through the Directorates and referred to the cycle purchase scheme that had recently been introduced by the Council in order to promote green travel. The Action Plan outlined above would encourage green travel within the Council's Directorates.

#### RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on progress made with developing the Dudley MBC Air Quality Action Plan, together with Members comments, be noted.

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted updating the Committee on the work that was taking place to make the Housing Allocations Scheme simpler and more transparent.

The Head of Housing Options in presenting the report outlined the main areas of work involved within the replacement of the points scheme with a Bandings Scheme, advising that the project had been delayed beyond its original target, however the work that was required was progressing well, with the main aim to ensure that the scheme was working correctly and identify and eliminate any potential problems prior to implementation.

It was reported that final testing would be required when the new system was refreshed in April.

It was stated that in relation to updating existing applications, four thousand had been fully updated with work in relation to these being due for completion during mid March, following which those on the waiting lists would be advised of their band, the band start date and the reason for being placed within the band, this would ensure that applicants knew their place upon the waiting list.

It was further stated that, of those whom had failed to respond to the letters relating to remaining on housing waiting lists, personal contact would be made with those over sixty and those with significant medical needs. Those cases would be offered support as part of the re-registration process. It was expected that the implementation of the Bandings Scheme would be achieved in June, 2010.

The intention to utilise the services of housing occupational therapists for assessment of medical needs for re-housing, the new policy for dealing with exceptional cases outside normal policy guidelines and the introduction of an Incentive Scheme was referred to, as set out in the report submitted.

Arising from the presentation, Members asked a number of questions and made comments and the Head of Housing Options responded to particular Members questions as follows:-

It was intended that the assessment of medical needs for re-housing would be addressed by consideration of the effect the consideration would have upon a persons day to day life and what accommodation would be required in order to address those effects rather than gain details of purely the illness and prognosis, and those applying for re-housing would also be asked whether they would authorise housing occupational therapists to obtain other medical reports that had been prepared in relation to their condition;

Elected Members could represent their constituents in relation to reviews and appeals;

The incentives available for people who were under-occupying family homes, suggested to date, were mainly relating to providing assistance with moving redecorating and handyperson support with small jobs around the new home such as fitting curtain rails.

It was confirmed that Member briefings would take place in relation to points to bandings;

That the budget for payment of assessments of medical needs would be re-directed to the Housing Occupational Therapy Team, and it was hoped that this would provide a more efficient system of assessments reducing assessment times. Work was continuing with a review team and the Manager of the Housing Occupational Therapy team and once the detail of the system had been considered this would receive further consideration;

In relation to the vulnerable people referred to in the report they would include those who were considered more likely to require help, those who were known to Housing Officers as vulnerable and those over sixty years of age. It was confirmed that contact would be made with as many people as possible that had not responded to the waiting list letters that had been distributed.

#### RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the work that was taking place to make the Housing Allocations Scheme simpler and more transparent, be noted.

#### QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on Performance in the third quarter of 2009/10, for the period October to December, 2009 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 the request of the Member Performance Management Sub Group for further scrutiny by this Committee in relation to longer term voids as outlined at paragraph three of the report submitted.

The Assistant Director, Housing Management referred to the additional information that had been submitted to the Sub Group in relation to vacant properties, indicating that the void period would begin once tenants vacated properties, repairs would be carried out and properties re-advertised, there would follow a viewing and signing of the tenancy. Once the tenancy agreement was signed the void period would end.

It was reported that a number of issues had occurred in relation to void properties including the Council's stock of low demand properties such as properties which were designated as mature, whereby properties were ready to let but there was no demand from the designated age group thus resulting in increased letting times and the void period. It was stated that a further aspect that had contributed to rent loss had resulted in vacant possessions by elderly tenants who had refused modernisations to their properties resulting in large amounts of work and money being required to bring the property up to the standard to re-let. Further consideration would be given to this matter.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management responded to Members' questions relating to the void loss indicator noted that there had been some improvement but the target of 1.5% had not been reached and 1.5% was seen as an acceptable level.

It was further reported that an end-to-end review relating to the void process would be undertaken in order to instigate changes to improve the lettings process and a working group had been formed to develop a specification including the achievements that were required, with the review commencing during April, 2010.

The performance indicator in relation to priority land was referred to and the Assistant Director of Housing indicated that the improvement was not due to the sale of land but that garage sites were to be developed as part of the Council House Building Programme.

A Member raised a question in relation to the geographical split of void work being allocated to the contractor and Building Services and it was agreed that the Assistant Director, Housing Management would respond direct to the Member.

The Director of Corporate Resources referred to a briefing note received from the Assistant Director of Environmental Management, stating that the performance indicators relating to the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and posting were travelling in the right direction and that he and his team were working with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture in order to develop a waste strategy.

It was reported that the Director of the Urban Environment would present a report to Corporate Board dealing with the highway deterioration following the winter weather, detailing the measures the Directorate would put in place recognising the Council's budgetary position.

A Member queried the decline in recycling over the year.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and colour copy of the extracted report circulated separately on performance in the third quarter of 2009/10 for the period October to December, 2009 relating to the activities relating to the Terms of Reference of this Committee, be noted.
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing Management be requested to advise Councillor A Finch of the geographical split of void work being allocated to Building Services and the Contractor.

- (3) That the Assistant Director of Environmental Management be requested to email to Members of the Committee the reasons for the decline in recycling during the last municipal year.

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COMMENTS OF THE CHAIRMAN

This being the last meeting of the municipal year, the Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their hard work throughout the municipal year.

The meeting ended at 7pm.

CHAIRMAN