

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 14 February 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **14 February 2006** when there were present:

Chairman: Cllr Mrs T J Capon

Cllr Mrs R Brown

Cllr R G S Choppen

Cllr C J Lumley

Cllr D G Stansby

Cllr Mrs M S Vince

Cllr Mrs C A Weston

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr T Livings.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr D Merrick

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

R Peacey - Safety, Food and Regulation Manager

G Dawson - Senior Monitoring Officer/Parks Officer

M Martin - Committee Administrator

53 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the Schedule relating to Progress on Decisions and in response to Member questions the following was noted:-

Car Parking Charges – Blue Badge Holders (Minute 344/05)

Officers confirmed that the temporary amnesty had been removed and blue badge holders were now being penalised where appropriate. (HRHM)

55 SERVICETEAM – GROUNDS MAINTENANCE UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) inviting Members to note the content of the Serviceteam's progress report on the grounds maintenance contract.

Officers advised that Mr Such, Serviceteam's Regional Manager had tendered his apologies for the meeting, due to ill health.

Members noted that in response to Serviceteam's request relating to increased pitch hire charges, provision had been made within the budget for an increase in line with inflation, although it was noted that the figure would still remain below that of some neighbouring authorities. This would be flagged up for addressing in the future.

Members complimented Serviceteam on their detailed report and confirmed that the inclusion of photographs had added interest.

In response to Member questions, the following was noted:-

- Ditch clearance of water courses took place as detailed in the contract and working from east to west across the District. An annual clean up would involve levelling where appropriate and the clearing out of rubbish. This was done during the Winter months when more time might be available.
- New developments utilised the ditch network in the Fairview area for surface water drainage.
- It was hoped to arrange more training which would give the team added interest in their jobs and demonstrate a commitment to them. The training in shrub pruning, arranged with Writtle College, would be extended. The budget for training was controlled at the centre by the Training Manager for Serviceteam nationwide.
- The issue of lorries parking on grass verges and ruining the work done by Serviceteam was the responsibility of Essex County Council, as the Highway authority.

The Committee wished their thanks to be passed on to Serviceteam for the excellent work that was being carried out within this contract.

56 REPORT OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report of the Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee relating to its meeting held on 9 February 2006.

During Member discussion, the following points were noted:-

- In relation to the section on Angling, officers would confirm which organisation issues the licences and how the Council could best enforce these recommendations.
- The section on Animal Hoarding would make public the Council's intention in this area and encourage people to make such instances known to officers.

- Due regard would be paid to ensuring tenants retained the option to keep pets in a responsible manner where this was currently permitted.

Resolved

That the remit of the Animal Welfare Sub-Committee be extended to allow it to meet again from time to time as relevant matters arise.

Recommended to the Community Services Committee

- (1) That the following amendments to the Animal Welfare Charter be agreed:-

Circuses, Performances, Exhibitions and Displays of Animals

- The extension to the original heading of 'Circuses', as above to cover, for example, the growing number of animal shows and displays of police dogs.
- The deletion of the first paragraph from the original documents, as advice indicated that a blanket ban was open to legal challenge.
- The insertion of the following replacement paragraph:-
 - Having regard to the District Council's premises and land, either owned or managed, it is unlikely that they would be suitable for circuses, performances, exhibitions or displays of animals. However, it is Council policy that all applications to hold circuses, performances, exhibitions or displays of animals on any Council land or premises will be considered individually and the decision to grant or refuse such applications will be based on a wide range of considerations, including animal welfare.

Responsible Pet Ownership

- The insertion of the following additional paragraph with the aim of encouraging pet owners to act responsibly.
 - Pet owners are encouraged to control their animals properly to avoid the possibility of them causing annoyance or distress to members of the public or to other animals.

Angling

- Some re-wording and numbering from the middle of point 3 onwards, as follows:-
 - 3. ... All anglers should be equipped with disgorgers and unhooking mats and be properly trained in their use.

4. Employment of the pike-gag should take fully into account the size of the fish for which it is used.
 5. Barbless hooks should be favoured.
 6. Holding periods in keep-nets should be as brief as possible.
- The addition of two new paragraphs to include reference to the existence of national and regional byelaws controlling angling and to a guidance document produced by the Environment Agency, as follows:-
 - All anglers are encouraged to ensure that they comply with national and regional byelaws relating to angling. Details of these byelaws can be found by visiting the Environment Agency website at www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

The Environment Agency has produced a useful free leaflet 'Golden Rules – Angling and Wildlife' which can be obtained by contacting 08459 333111. Alternatively pages from this leaflet can be viewed on the Environment Agency website at www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

Animal Hoarding

- The addition of this new sub-heading, in view of the fact that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) advises that the keeping of large numbers of animals is a growing problem.
- Officers report cases that come to their attention to the RSPCA. Action can be taken under the Environmental Protection Act, where issues such as public nuisance exist. Members suggested that the wording be further strengthened, as follows, and that this advice should be added to the animal welfare section of the Council's web site.
 - An increasing number of cases are coming to light nationally where individuals, including some private animal sanctuaries, keep many animals in unsuitable conditions. Anyone keeping large numbers of animals needs to consider carefully whether they have adequate suitable facilities, sufficient knowledge and resources to care properly for all the animals. Professional advice should be sought. People are encouraged to report any suspected instances of animal hoarding to the Council or the RSPCA.

Publicity

- Amend the existing paragraph to take account of the fact that the animal welfare pages of the Council's website have been extensively upgraded over the past years as follows.
 - The Council regularly updates the information it provides to promote animal welfare through articles in Rochford District Matters and by maintaining pages on the Council's website www.rochford.gov.uk. It provides information on animal welfare legislation, advice and links to useful related websites.

Pets in Sheltered Housing Schemes

- The error in the existing wording be corrected in that there are only 12 flats at Chignal House.

Horses

- The re-wording of the paragraph from the second sentence onwards as far as the final sentence to strengthen the guidance on the long-term tethering of horses, as follows:-
 - ... The Council also supports the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988 and will not allow long term tethering, as a method of managing horses or ponies, in an open environment, on any land owned or managed by the Council. In line with the RSPCA, the Council does not oppose an animal being tethered for short periods, eg for grooming or having a short break in a journey or working period. Equally the Council would not oppose an animal being tethered for a short period whilst boundary fencing was installed or repaired. ... (HHHCC)
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Property, Maintenance & Highways Manager in consultation with the Chairman of the Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee and the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care to decide whether to grant or refuse applications for circuses, performances, exhibitions and displays of animals on Council land or premises. (HHHCC)
 - (3) That the housing stock transfer process pays due regard to ensuring that tenants retain the option to keep pets in a responsible manner where this is currently permitted. (HRHM)
 - (4) That, once revisions to the Charter have been agreed, a press release be issued advising that the Council has strengthened its Animal

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Welfare Charter. Particular reference should be made to the inclusion of issues such as animal hoarding and tethering of horses. Appropriate photographs could be added. Reference should also be made to the animal welfare section of the Council's web site. (HHHCC)

- (5) That the revised Charter be circulated as widely as possible, to include veterinary surgeries, libraries, parish councils, citizens' advice bureaux, the County Council's Cabinet Member for Localism and all Members of this Council. (HHHCC)
- (6) That a copy of the revised Charter be sent to other local authorities, commending it to them and inviting them to consider publishing their own. (HHHCC)

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm.

Chairman

Date