

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **16 January 2003** when there were present:

Cllr M G B Starke (Chairman)
Cllr T Livings (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr Mrs T J Capon
Cllr T G Cutmore

Cllr D F L Flack
Cllr Mrs M A Starke

Apologies for Absence

Cllrs H L A Glynn and Cllr C J Lumley

Substitutes

Cllr C I Black

Officers Present

G Woolhouse	Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
J Bourne	Leisure and Contracts Manager
C Evans	Trainee Solicitor
M Martin	Committee Administrator

15 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2002 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

16 SKATEBOARDING EVENTS

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which apprised Members of the cost of providing skateboarding events in Rayleigh and Rochford around Easter 2003.

Details of the Holiday Activities held during the Summer had been reported to this Committee at its meeting on 14 November 2002. In noting the success of the skateboarding day which had been held in August in the Market Car Park in Rayleigh, Members had requested that the possibility of providing further such events around Easter 2003 be investigated, costed and brought back to this Committee for further consideration.

Members noted that:-

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2003

- of the two companies which had been identified as being able to provide mobile skateparks, the cheapest quotation had been from the company who had been involved in the event held last Summer.
- if a charge were to be made for the use of the skatepark, it is estimated that the net cost of provision would be around £400, based on a charge of £3.50 for a 5 hour session and on the assumption that similar numbers as last Summer would attend.
- this cost could be met from the existing budget.
- since the report had been written, Sweyne Park School in Rayleigh had expressed an interest in making their site available for such an event.
- the company is fully insured and only those wearing safety equipment, provided by the company, would be allowed access to the ramps.

In response to Member requests, the Leisure and Contracts Manager agreed to confirm to Members whether the number of complaints about skateboarding in other areas of the district went down on the day of the event.

Members welcomed the provision of further such events, to include the use of Sweyne Park School Rayleigh as one of the venues and agreed that the levying of a charge for these events would raise their profile.

A Motion moved by Cllr C I Black, and seconded by Cllr T Livings that a lower fee of £2 per person be levied was lost on a show of hands.

Recommended to Community Services Committee

That officers attempt to arrange 3 skateboarding events to be held over the Easter period; one in the centre of Rayleigh, one in Rochford and one at the Sweyne Park School, Rayleigh, at a charge of £3.50 per person for a five hour session. (CD(F&ES))

17 POOLES LANE RECREATION GROUND – PROVISION OF ACOUSTIC FENCING TO BOUNDARY OF CAR PARK/CARAVAN PARK

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which provided Members with estimates for the provision of acoustic fencing on the boundary of the Pooles Lane Recreation Ground Car Park and the adjacent caravan park.

Members noted that:-

- following the construction of the skateboard park in 2000, a series of noise complaints had been received relating particularly to the use of this facility and the noise made by a gathering of young people such as music playing and the use of the skate park equipment.

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2003

- residents of the caravan park were also faced with problems from users of the recreation ground's car park.
- the most likely measure to address this problem would be the installation of acoustic fencing between the Pooles Lane boundary and the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground. A possible location for the fencing was detailed on an appendix to the report.

In noting that assaults on residents in that area had been reported, Members were concerned that residents of the caravan park living in close proximity to the recreation ground needed to feel secure. Other Members were concerned at the high costs involved in providing acoustic fencing, particularly as officers had reported that this type of fencing might not solve the problem, due to the necessary positioning.

During debate it was felt that a greater feeling of security for residents of the caravan park might be provided by the provision of a good quality close boarded fence on the boundary, together with planting of shrubs adjacent to the fence, on the caravan park side. Whilst this might not necessarily deal with the noise nuisance, it would provide an aesthetically pleasing barrier.

Resolved

That costs associated with the provision of the following be provided to Council on 28 January 2003:-

- (a) a good quality close boarded fence together with planting
- (b) additional planting (CD(F&ES))

18 PUBLIC REGULATION, INSPECTION AND PROTECTION BEST VALUE REVIEW – INTERIM REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care which apprised Members of the progress so far with the review of services that deal with public regulation, inspection and protection and sought agreement on the process for consultation. Members noted that this interim review would also be reported to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as some of the services under the review fall within the terms of reference of that Committee.

The Head of Service reported that this had not been an easy review to undertake, due to the diverse nature of the front line service areas. In some areas there exists a national guidance framework such as the Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement on local authority food law enforcement, but in other areas these factors are not so clearly defined.

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2003

Members noted that:-

- the review work undertaken had shown that in many areas very little existed in the form of structured customer feedback.
- there was a need to consider what type of consultation should be conducted as part of the review
- it is proposed that the consultation should be concentrated on the higher profile service areas.
- based on experience with other consultation exercises, a sum of £10,000 should be allocated from the provision for Best Value consultation
- contact could be made with a company who are currently providing a similar service for a London Borough, to discover whether they could assist with the needs of this Council.
- should these discussions prove positive, a soft market testing exercise could be undertaken using external consultants and this stage would be reported back to this Committee with costings.

The full analysis of current service performance and actions to address weaker performance had been placed in the Members' Lounge at Rayleigh. The Head of Service provided a resume of that analysis as follows:-

Animal welfare

Officers had looked at areas where no statutory controls existed and which were therefore difficult to control, such as issues surrounding tethered horses, foxes, badgers, homing pigeons. As a result of a recent Motion to Council, an Animal Welfare Charter would be drafted. There is a need to build strong links with partners such as the RSPCA, and animal sanctuaries and to get information out to residents.

Caravans

This includes licensed sites, such as parks/holiday homes and itinerant encampments. Enforcement standards are not always to the satisfaction of all residents, although the Council aims to prosecute where the law allows. The issue of whether to provide short term sites for itinerant encampments needs to be explored.

There are difficulties surrounding the removal of illegal itinerant encampments. The Council is trying to improve the liaison with Police and landowners and if the level of delegation to Officers can be improved, the process could be speeded up. The review had concluded that there is room for improvement in terms of keeping customers informed.

Food Safety

Relations with local businesses are good, together with standards of food safety in the District. Members noted that this Council does not do much health

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2003

promotion work as this is a discretionary activity. Some work is carried out by partner agencies.

Health and Safety

There is a low rate of accidents and ill health in places of work. The Council's enforcement work has been externally audited. For a number of years very little has been carried out on proactive inspection. There is a need to investigate ways of releasing labour from other areas to boost performance in this function.

Housing Standards

Generally there is a high rate of satisfaction of residents with their homes, particularly as this District is generally an affluent area where people invest money in their homes. The Council is good at responding to problems within this area, but often takes a long time to resolve issues as workloads currently have to be balanced across several areas of activity, such as grant aid and caravan site enforcement.

Communicable Diseases

The Council has a good relationship with partner agencies such as the health authority, but the system for notification could be improved.

Pest Control

Residents seek help from the Council. The rodent control service is free to residents of the District and is provided by a Contractor at a competitive rate. This contractor can also offer residents a very competitive price for dealing with other pests, such as fleas and wasps. The Community Services Committee at a recent meeting had requested that this Committee give consideration to the issue of whether the service should remain free.

Public Entertainment

This Council is good at regulating public entertainment and generally very little nuisance is reported. Legislative work is currently being undertaken dealing with this and liquor licences. Responsibility will transfer to the local authorities, and will consolidate the existing legislation. The Bill has been published, but changes are still likely to be made. Members noted that the processing of applications can be slow and customers are often not kept very well informed about progress. Links with community safety issues could be improved. Very few in-performance inspections are currently carried out. This situation will need to change with the new regime.

Small lotteries, street and house to house collections

Good advice and guidance is given to members of the public. Often the information which is available for small lotteries is not easily understood and needs to be explained. Very little pro-active monitoring is undertaken, as this would require officers to sacrifice work in another area.

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2003

Trading Controls

These include Sunday trading, street trading consent, pavement permissions. The latter two are not particularly effective and are time consuming to administer. The penalty for non-compliance is relatively low and therefore does not deter people from re-offending.

The Head of Service reported generally to Members on some common issues that have been raised by the review:-

- the need to prioritise the use of resources so there is greater clarity both about the overall use of resources, and about dealing with higher risk issues.
- work is required to improve the provision of information to customers, particularly when a quick solution is not achievable.
- if longer opening hours are required in the future, there will be cost implications.

Members thanked the Head of Service for his very frank assessment of these service areas.

During debate, the following Member comments were noted:-

- the introduction of a charge for the rodent service could deter residents from dealing with this serious issue.
- there is a need to address the issue of short term sites for itinerant travellers
- other authorities might be prepared to co-operate to provide cover for emergencies over a wider area. The Head of Service agreed to investigate and report back to this Committee, as one option for taking forward the current arrangements.
- there is a need to prove a demand for longer opening hours
- the provision of basic information to Members about key services would assist them in dealing with constituents, including outside office hours.

Resolved

- (1) That progress so far on the Public Regulation, Inspection and Protection Best Value Review be noted.
- (2) That informal discussions be held with contractors to determine the level of interest in contracted service provision, with a further report, if appropriate to this Committee on soft market testing. (HHHCC)

**Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee –
16 January 2003**

On a Motion moved by Cllr D F L Flack and seconded by Cllr T G Cutmore it was

Recommended to Community Services Committee

That this Council continues to offer a free rodent service to residents of the District. (HHHCC)

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Chairman

Date