

## **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 18 October 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **18 October 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr P A Capon  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr J M Pullen

Cllr J E Grey  
Cllr Mrs S A Harper  
Cllr R A Oatham

Cllr P K Savill  
Cllr Mrs M A Starke  
Cllr P F A Webster

### **VISITING MEMBER**

Cllr K H Hudson

### **ALSO ATTENDING**

Mr G Such and Mr D Lester, Serviceteam

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

S Scrutton	- Head of Planning Services
J Bourne	- Leisure and Contracts Manager
A Meddle	- Team Leader, Local Plans
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

### **398 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **399 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS**

The Committee noted the schedule relating to progress on decisions.

#### **Overall Work Programme**

It was noted that Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn had resigned from the Waste Management & Recycling Sub-Committee and that a nomination was required to fill the now vacant seat.

### **400 SERVICETEAM PROGRESS REPORT – REFUSE COLLECTION, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) to which had been attached a progress report provided by

Serviceteam on the progress and development of the refuse collection and street cleansing contracts.

### **Recycling**

The kerbside recycling scheme was progressing well. It was clear that at the end of the first year of operation, recyclables collected would exceed the originally estimated threshold. It was, however, perceived that paper tonnages could be improved and work was taking place to try and identify ways to achieve this. It was felt that education was a key factor in this respect.

The new, narrow access vehicle would be delivered in January and it was thus anticipated that the kerbside recycling scheme would be rolled out to those properties not currently on the scheme, excluding flatted properties, at the end of January. The kerbside recycling scheme would at that stage therefore be available to 95% of properties within the District.

### **Refuse Collection**

The rounds were settled now and much improved. There had been some problems relating to missed bins and wrongly placed bins, but such instances were decreasing.

### **Street Cleansing**

The Environmental Campaign started on 5 September with an extra vehicle collecting litter from regular fly-tipping sites; this has received positive feedback from residents to date.

### **Training**

All staff were receiving refresher training in manual handling, in response to an increase in back injuries associated with the lifting of recycling blue boxes.

In response to a Member concern relating to a traffic jam caused by a recycling vehicle in Sutton Road/Ashingdon Road, leading to concentrated vehicle emissions, the Serviceteam representatives advised that although mixed recycling was much quicker than kerbside recycling; kerbside recycling bears a considerably higher revenue from the material collected and therefore helps to keep the costs to Authorities lower. Responding to a supplementary concern with respect to kerbside recycling potentially not helping to reduce greenhouse gases as a result of causing traffic congestion, the representatives said that there were more traffic movements associated with mixed recycling, as more heavy traffic circulated from the transfer stations for this form of recycling.

The following was noted, in response to further Member enquiries:-

- There was a tendency among some residents to take paper with them for recycling when they did their supermarket shopping, rather than to use the blue kerbside recycling boxes.
- The kerbside recycling rounds had been designed to avoid peak traffic times.
- There were peaks in kerbside recycling collection rates in January, immediately after the Christmas period, and drops in July and August during the school holidays, with collection rates picking up in September/October. Monthly rates were also affected by whether or not there were 4 or 5 weeks of collections.
- This summer had seen an increase in problems associated with dehydration among refuse and kerbside recycling operatives, as it had been a particularly long and dry summer.

### **Resolved**

That the report be noted. (CD(F&ES))

## **401 REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES COMMITTEE – PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services providing Members with statistical information about the operation of the Planning Services Committee and a look at the financial perspectives of the current versus a smaller Committee.

The Chairman welcomed Cllr K H Hudson to the meeting, who had been invited to attend in order to present ideas he had with respect to the operation of the Planning Services Committee.

Cllr Hudson outlined to the Committee his proposals for determining planning applications by the Committee process. The proposals were made in the context of residents' disappointment that their Ward Members were unable to represent their views about planning applications at the Planning Services Committee and in light of some Members having indicated their preference not to sit on that Committee.

The following key elements were noted:-

- The Planning Committee should comprise all 39 Members.
- 11 Members should be selected each month to sit on a Planning Sub-Committee, this to be determined according to ward location, availability and planning training, although this number could, of course, be revised.
- The Sub-Committee would have delegated authority to determine planning applications, but could refer any complex applications to the full Committee for determination.

- Ward Members would serve their residents best by being able to speak on their behalf about particular applications within their Wards, rather than having to judge such applications.
- Public speaking at any Planning Sub-Committee would not take place, as it could prove difficult to determine who should speak, and it could prove difficult to get through the business within a reasonable time. It would be preferable for Ward Members, directly elected by residents, to speak on their behalf.
- It might be the case that there would be a need to hold more than one Planning Sub-Committee per month. Meetings should be arranged on the basis of need to determine applications within particular timeframes.
- It would be for individual Members to determine whether they perceived themselves to be sufficiently trained with respect to planning. If Members felt that they needed further planning training, they should not sit on a Planning Sub-Committee until such time as they were confident that they had received sufficient training.

In response to these proposals, Cllr P K Savill felt that all Members should have the opportunity to take part in the Planning Committee. He considered that 15 Members could be rotated to form that Committee. It was also his opinion that there were some Members who would prefer not to sit on the Planning Committee and that, as such, it was important to survey all Members to determine which Members would like to be Members of the Planning Committee. Cllr Savill further believed that Ward Members should be excluded from the voting Committee, but allowed to speak with residents about applications relating to their ward.

He considered that residents should be allowed to speak at the Committee, within clearly defined time limits, or if residents did not wish to speak at Committee, Ward Members should be able to speak on residents' behalf. He did not feel that there was a need for applicants to speak at the Committee. As at present, all Members should be able to speak at the Committee and ask for items to be referred to the Committee and the Committee should be able to defer items for consideration. He also believed that all Members wishing to sit on the Committee should receive in-depth planning training. In conclusion, he felt that meetings of the Committee should be held as agendas dictated, rather than on a monthly basis.

During debate, although some Members felt that there was merit in Ward Members being able to take part in applications that related to their Ward, other Members expressed concern that this option would result in not all Members being able to vote on applications within their Wards. It was felt that residents would expect their Ward Councillors to be able to vote on applications within their Wards. Ward Councillors could also be placed in the awkward position of being approached by both the applicant and an objector.

Concern was also raised about the administrative difficulties involved in selecting Members for Sub-Committees. It was felt that there could be times when, depending on what applications were to be determined, there could be

problems associated with sufficient Members being able to sit on a Sub-Committee.

Members were of the view that all Members should continue to be able to refer any items from the Weekly List and to request planning site visits. It was, however, recognised that this proposal could result in organisational difficulties in determining membership of Sub-Committees as a result of the possibility of late referrals from the Weekly List rendering some Ward Members ineligible to sit on a Sub-Committee.

Similarly, Members felt that there should still be the possibility of deferring items for determination, although it was recognised that this could also lead to organisational difficulties with respect to Sub-Committee membership, as the same Members might not necessarily be available the next time that item came to the Sub-Committee.

Some Members were concerned about how Sub-Committee membership would be determined in the case of applications such as, for example, the Rayleigh leisure centre, which would have an impact on several wards.

Some Members were of the view that Sub-Committees should not have executive powers, but should make recommendations for the full Planning Committee to consider. It was, however, noted by other Members that a Sub-Committee operating in that way would, in effect, be carrying out a similar role to that of officers currently. It was also recognised that 'advisory' Sub-Committees would, inevitably, lengthen the process for determining applications, which could compromise the Council's ability to meet national performance targets.

It was further noted that this system could prove cumbersome, resulting in more meetings, with additional costs to the Authority.

There was a general consensus that planning site visits were poorly attended, with some Members perceiving that this could be a contributory factor in terms of the Authority losing appeals. During discussion of planning training, Members were split in their views as to whether or not this should be mandatory.

Members discussed the pros and cons of going on site visits to other Local Authorities to see how other Planning Committees Authorities but, on a show of hands, it was agreed that these should not take place.

Concluding the debate, Members concurred that there would be merit in exploring Councillor Hudson's proposals in more detail at a specially arranged meeting of this Committee. It was also anticipated that responses from the Town and Parish Councils relating to the operation of the Planning Services Committee should be available at the end of October, which could also be considered at the special meeting.

### Resolved

- (1) That no site visits be arranged to other Local Authorities.
- (2) That a special meeting of this Committee be arranged to consider proposals relating to composition and operation of the Planning Services Committee in more detail. (HPS)

### **402 REPORT ON THE INSPECTOR'S REPORT INTO THE ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services asking Members to agree the recommendations of the Inspector for improving the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan.

### **Recommended to the Environmental Services Committee**

- (1) That the changes recommended by the Local Plan Inquiry Inspector be incorporated into the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan as outlined in appendix A to the report.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Head of Planning Services to approve minor amendments to the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan as may be required to ensure the accuracy of the published plan. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....