

ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 16th January, 2014

Present:-

Councillor Lang (Chair)

Councillors	Callan	Gibson
	Dyke	Hawksworth
	Flood	Simmons
	Gibson	Martin Stone++
	Hawksworth	

Jackie Brobyn – Democratic Services Officer
 Peter Corke – Sustainability Officer++++
 Anita Cunningham – Scrutiny Officer
 Carole Grew – Senior Waste Management Officer+++++++
 Mel Henley – Environmental Services Manager+++++++
 Jane Thomas – Private Sector Housing Manager+
 Scott Webster – Project Officer+++++
 Darran West – Head of Environment+++++++

+ Attended for Minute No. 36
 ++ Attended for Minute Nos. 36 & 38
 +++ Attended for Minute Nos. 37, 39 & 40
 ++++ Attended for Minute No. 37
 +++++ Attended for Minute No. 38
 ++++++ Attended for Minute No. 39
 ++++++ Attended for Minute No. 40

34 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Councillor Flood declared an interest in Minute Number 41 as the Chair of Appeals and Regulatory Committee.

35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bradford and McManus.

36 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING REPORT ON APPOINTMENT OF GREEN DEAL ECO PARTNER**

Councillor Martin Stone, Assistant Executive Member for Housing and Jane Thomas, Private Sector Housing Manager attended the meeting to report on the progress made in respect of Energy Company Obligation (ECO)/Green Deal.

The ECO and Green Deal schemes were launched in January 2013 by Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to replace the nationwide CERT, CESP and Warm Front schemes. The purpose of the funding is to achieve significant carbon saving reductions through the installation of a range of domestic energy efficiency measures which will improve thermal efficiency and efficiency of domestic heating.

The funding was provided as a result of an obligation placed on the 'big six' energy companies by central government and targeted low income and vulnerable households.

It is anticipated that the funding will help low income families to obtain basic heating and insulation measures and subsidise the cost of solid wall insulation in Hard to Treat properties for both Social Landlords and private home owners.

The Council has an opportunity to tender for an ECO partner to carry out solid wall insulation to both Council housing stock and privately owned houses which are interspersed throughout the Council housing estates. It was noted that where the ECO subsidy did not meet the full cost of work to privately owned homes, the house owner would have to make up the difference.

Chesterfield Council, as a member of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Local Authority Energy Partnership (LAEP) has supported the development of a funding bid. The LAEP has a good track record of securing funding and enabling delivery of basic insulation and heating measures across the county. Chesterfield Home Improvement Agency delivered heating measures worth £184,500 to vulnerable low income home owners across the borough using Affordable Warmth grants.

Householders will be offered free Green Deal Assessments and 80% of installation costs will be covered by CERO (Carbon Saving ECO funding -

40%) and DECC – 40%. Householders will be offered the remaining 20% of the cost by Green Deal finance at around 10% APR. All households will be eligible for £650 government cashback, equivalent to well over half of the interest payments.

On average each council will be able to insulate 50 solid wall homes at an average cost of £8,500 per property.

A separate scheme which is being developed by the LAEP is 'warmth on prescription pilot project' which will help identify vulnerable householders with health conditions exacerbated by cold homes to benefit from energy efficiency measures and advice.

There are three strands to ECO funding:

- Carbon Saving Communities (CSCO)
- Carbon Saving Obligation (CSO)
- Affordable Warmth (HHCRO)

The only strand of ECO funding which is expected to fully fund the cost of measures is the Affordable Warmth ECO.

It was suggested by members of the Committee that the scheme should be branded to ensure that tenants could distinguish that this was a scheme run by the Council, ensuring that they did not become victims of private companies who preyed on low income families.

It was confirmed the Council were looking at branding the scheme not using reference to 'ECO Deal', and that tenants would only be approached using branded letters.

RESOLVED -

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That clear branding be included on all Council correspondence to tenants.

37 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT REPORT ON ALLOTMENTS STRATEGY**

Councillor Ludlow, Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Member for Environment and Peter Corke, Sustainability Officer attended the meeting to report on the progress made on the Allotment Strategy 2012-2016.

There are 5 objectives which are monitored via an Action Plan:

- To cultivate the improved management of the Council's allotment sites
- To promote allotments as a benefit for the whole community
- To highlight the role that allotments play in developing a more sustainable environment, encouraging biodiversity and conservation
- To develop a health agenda for allotments, focusing on benefits, in terms of improving health in the borough
- To review existing provision of allotments in Chesterfield and to seek to identify area of potential future allotment provision

The Sustainability Officer reported that the majority of the actions had now been implemented and 98% of the sites were being managed superbly. He confirmed that the Strategy had aided development of the allotments going forward.

RESOLVED -

That the content of the report be noted.

38 **SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUP REPORT ON WATER RATES**

Councillor Simmons and Councillor Flood updated the Committee on the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Project Group in respect of the review of Water Rates and presented the final report and recommendations.

The review aimed to focus on the policy in respect of evictions for non-payment of water rates and the main objectives were to:

- Review the operation of the Housing Policy on water rate arrears evictions.

- Find out more about the water rates collection contract with Severn Trent Water Company and the annual sum of money received by the Housing Revenue account for the collection of water rates.

It was noted that there was a lack of information relating to Housing Policy in respect of tenants with water rates arrears and the key issues identified were:

- Costs for collection
- Payment for debt
- Effect of current economic situation on arrears
- Effect of arrears on homeless budget
- Cost of collection to General Fund
- Increased need for Tenant Support
- Provision of advice and help available to tenants.

A number of officers were interviewed and the following issues were identified:

- The current CBC response to water rates arrears
- Differences between CBC policy and water companies' policy on arrears
- CBC advice to tenants on installing water meters
- CBC advice and support to tenants, especially new tenants and those in changing circumstances, and need to encourage tenants to take up offer of Tenancy Support
- Advice given to Members of Council on CBC water rates policy
- Reasons why CBC collects water rates – costs and benefits
- Information on services delivered in Chesterfield by Severn Trent and Yorkshire Water, and how this was reflected in water bills
- Details of 'other charges' in Revenues documentation, and the need to list water rates as a separate charge
- Statistics on how many tenants asked that water rates be listed separately from rent and other charges
- Wording of tenancy agreements and communication with tenants on water rate payment
- Details of recent evictions for non-payment of water rates and other charges
- Role of Customer Services Centre staff in water rate collection

- Comparisons with other local authorities' policies on water rate collection, and with the policies of housing associations and other social housing providers
- impact of changing payment methods on tenants and arrears
- Details of water company response to non-payment of water rates
- Continuing impact of Welfare Reform and future impact of Universal Credit on water rate payment
- Identifying links with the Corporate Plan.

The proposed Contract was reviewed and it was apparent that the renegotiation was long overdue. The Review Group were supportive of the transfer of Contract monies from Housing Revenue Account to the General Fund as the costs were incurred for recovery and collection by Revenues and it was difficult to quantify how much it was costing to deal with water rates in addition to other costs.

The Review Group concluded that the new contract would provide a proper framework which could be monitored and provide a more realistic level of reimbursement for the level of debt and costs to collect. It allowed flexibility to terminate/renegotiate the contract should either party find it was not mutually beneficial, without incurring a cost.

It was recognised that the service provided by the Tenancy Support officers was limited and that they were unable to provide support to every tenant. However the group were satisfied that support was provided to all those who were referred to them or who asked for help, and that a variety of charities were used to assist them.

It was noted that the Tenants' Pack included some advice about water meters and assistance available, but that this was included with information relating to gas services.

Concerns were raised that there was no way of separating water rates payments from rent and it was suggested that Members of the Committee arrange to meet with the Customer Services and Revenues Manager to make suggestions for ways of improving the processes and technology.

Reference was made to the 'write off' policy and how these would be operated in the future. It suggested that a discussion take place at a future business meeting about the possibility of removing reference to write-offs from the policy or including a sentence that 'write-offs' be an officer recommendation to be carried out by Executive Members.

The good work and support to the project group provided by Councillor Flood and Mary Stead, Democratic Services Officer were acknowledged.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That Officers report to Scrutiny in six months time, as to the outcome/progress on the water rate collection process and technology review
- (2) (i) That an update be made to Scrutiny when the Contract with Severn Trent Water is formally signed
- (ii) That an update on the Contract be given to Scrutiny after one year
- (3) That an informal meeting take place between the Scrutiny Chairs, Executive Member and Review Lead to discuss the operation of the 'write-off' policy to confirm with Revenues and Housing that they either remove the sentence about 'write-offs' from the policy, or insert " 'write-offs' to be Officer recommendations carried out by Executive Members";
- (4) That support be given to reviewing the Tenant's information to include:
 - (i) more robust and prominent information on support available and advice regarding water rates and water meters;
 - (ii) re-emphasis to all tenants of the importance of communication with Revenues and Tenancy Support, if it is likely that the tenant may be approaching financial difficulties that may lead to arrears.
- (5) That a progress report be given in six months time, monitoring the number of evictions for water rates arrears.

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EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT REPORT ON STREETSCENE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Councillor Ludlow, Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Member for Environment and Mel Henley, Landscape and Streetscene Service Manager attended the meeting to inform Members of the progress in delivering the route optimisation project for street cleansing and to discuss the Council's performance in maintaining a high quality street scene.

The work on the route optimisation was progressing well, with all targets being met on all the major cleansing routes. All mechanical and manual routes had been imported on to the system and the rounds were currently being tested and refined.

Cashable savings of £95,700 had been achieved together with efficiency gains of £7,500.

Overall, performance had exceeded the original targets set with the exception of detritus.

The number of fixed penalty notices issued had fallen over the last 12 months. During 2013 there had been a 10% reduction in complaints about dog fouling and cigarette littering had reduced.

The Council had achieved four Green Flag Awards, in Poolsbrook Country Park, Brimington Crematorium, Queens Park and Holmebrook Valley Park.

The Neighbourhood Environment Team (NEAT) had been working on part of Barrow Hill Housing area and the HRA share of the funding for this was still set at 80%. This would be reviewed again at year end but at the moment was felt to be accurately reflecting the proportion of work completed.

It was proposed that a target be set in the updated Corporate Plan for 2012-2015 for the satisfaction with cleanliness. This would replace the NI195 style observational surveys.

The Corporate Plan also sets a target in respect of Green Flag awards and having gained the four flags as mentioned previously it was anticipated that Eastwood Park would be the next park to achieve this status following its recent refurbishment.

Reference was made to 'fly tipping' and whether there had been an increase in respect of this. The Landscape and Streetscene Services Manager agreed to look in to this and email the year on year figures to all Members of the Committee.

Councillor Dyke raised concerns about dog bins at Poolsbrook fishing club being emptied out in the park and asked for this to be investigated. It was agreed that this would be looked into and the outcome reported back.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That the service improvements and savings be welcomed.
- (2) That figures for fly tipping be provided to the committee and the emptying of dog bins be investigated.
- (3) That progress with ongoing actions and improvements in service delivery and environmental quality be received and monitored.

40 EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF PLAN TO COLLECT, FOR COMPOSTING, FOOD WASTE IN THE GREEN BIN

Councillor Ludlow, Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Member for Environment and Carole Grew, Senior Waste Management Officer attended the meeting to give an update about the agreement with Derbyshire County Council (DCC) regarding the provision of a composting facility that will allow Chesterfield Borough Council to collect food waste for composting.

Work started in November 2013 and, in line with the project plan, was due to complete in May 2014. The plant would need a commissioning period and DCC and the three Waste Collection Authorities had agreed that deliveries of mixed food and garden waste would start in May 2014 which would give DCC opportunity to delay the start if the project suffered delays due to bad weather. However there was an agreement that the start date would not be further delayed beyond the end of June 2014 and if the plant was not complete and ready to receive loads by then, DCC would, at their own expense find alternative sites to deliver the mixed waste composting.

The facility would allow Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) to collect food waste with garden waste in the green bin. The inclusion of food waste could increase the tonnage of materials collected for recycling by 1000 tonnes assuming every household put approximately 0.5kg of food waste in the green bin each fortnight. This would increase the recycling rate by 3%.

The list of acceptable items for the composting facility had been issued and did not allow the use of any type of compostable bag, other than paper bags which met the European Standard EN 13432, which could be bought at most major supermarkets and DIY stores.

There was discussion taking place regarding providing all residents with a kitchen caddy for use when collecting food waste prior to putting it into the bin and a survey was being undertaken among staff to establish whether it was felt this would encourage householders to use the scheme.

All three councils planned to issue a consistent message by delivering the same publicity material at the same time and the Chesterfield's Communications and Marketing Manager would be working with the publicity officer for Bolsover and North East Derbyshire Council's to formulate the publicity plan and material.

RESOLVED -

That the introduction of the scheme be welcomed.

41 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUP REPORT ON HACKNEY CAB CAPPING REVIEW PROCESS - RETROSPECTIVE APPROVAL

Councillor Lang presented the submitted report on behalf of the Scrutiny Project Group in respect of the Hackney Cab Capping Review Process.

It was noted that the Council was currently undertaking its first review of the cap on the number of hackney cab licences since the cap was introduced 3 years ago.

The aim of the review was to ensure that the review process had the confidence of both members and the taxi trade within the borough and that it was robust enough to aid the Council with its aim of reducing the number of Hackney cabs to an acceptable level, allowing Hackney trade within the borough to thrive, pending legislation.

The project group found that drivers were concerned that the survey conducted at the station this year differed from that which was undertaken previously. It was felt that the observation process needed to be reported clearly in order for a true comparison to be gained.

It was therefore recommended that a clear comparison be produced and broken down into each rank to aid members of the Appeals and Regulatory Committee at decision making stage.

The project group also found that there was no clear internal process for the capping review to follow and that this was essential for both members and the trade in order to instil confidence in the process and it was recommended that this be produced.

The number of Hackney plates in the borough was falling at a very slow pace which was undermining the aim of the cap and it was felt that in order to keep to process robust the capping number needed to be more achievable.

It was recommended that the Appeals and Regulatory Committee consider taking action to resolve the number of Hackney plates within the borough, such as removing the option to transfer the plate.

A discussion took place around the taxi licence subsidy and it was noted that this had reduced considerably over the past few years. It was anticipated that with the proposed increase to fees over the next 2 years that the subsidy would be eliminated.

Members expressed their concerns about the way this was being approached and suggested and agreed that the taxi licence subsidy should be reviewed.

RESOLVED -

- (1) That a clear comparison of the survey be produced and broken down into each rank to aid members of the Appeals and Regulatory Committee at the decision making stage
- (2) That a clear written process be put together including the reviews inclusion in the Council's Forward Plan in future
- (3) That the Appeals and Regulatory Committee considers taking action to resolve the number of Hackney plates within the Borough such as removing the option to transfer the plate, when legislation permits.

42 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1st February, 2014 to 31st May, 2014.

RESOLVED -

That the Forward Plan be noted.

43 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Committee considered an update on the implementation of approved Scrutiny recommendations.

RESOLVED -

That the update be noted and the Parking Policy item be removed from monitoring.

44 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered a list of items raised to date for its Work Programme.

RESOLVED -

(1) That the Work Programme be agreed.

(2) That an update on the following items be considered at the meeting in March 2014:

- Chesterfield Sport & Recreation Strategy
- Leisure Scrutiny Review Report
- Homeless Prevention Service Restructure

45 SCRUTINY PROJECTS PROGRESS UPDATES**New Sport and Leisure Facilities**

Councillor Flood gave an update on the review currently being undertaken in respect of the new sport and leisure facilities.

She reported that the group had reviewed the process which had been undertaken including:

- The Covenant
- The decision
- Contracting processes

A questionnaire was being compiled in consultation with the trade unions to gain staff opinion and this was to be circulated.

The next steps would be to look at the new contract for the building of the Queens Park Sports Centre which would include looking at the planning application when it became available.

It was anticipated that the whole process would be completed by April 2015.

Councillor Flood wished to thank both Darran West and Mick Blythe for their assistance with the review, noting that anything which had been highlighted by the group had been picked up and acted on.

She confirmed that a written report would be ready for consideration by the Committee at the meeting on 20th March 2014.

Taxi Licence Subsidy

It was suggested and agreed that a review group be set up to look closely at the taxi licence subsidy. The following members expressed an interest in being involved in the review:

- Councillor Simmons
- Councillor Dyke
- Councillor Hawksworth (Lead)
- Councillor Callan
- Councillor Gibson

It was agreed that other Members of the Council be invited to join the group.

RESOLVED -

(1) That the updates be noted.

(2) That a scrutiny project group be set up to look at taxi licence subsidy.

46 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members of the Committee that a training session had been arranged at 4.00 pm on Thursday 30th January 2014 on Chairing skills.

RESOLVED -

That the reminder relating to the Chairing skills training be noted.

47 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7TH NOVEMBER 2013 AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th November, 2013 were presented.

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.