

## MINUTES

### STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

19 JUNE 2018

<b>Councillors:</b>	Anderson (Chairman)	Hicks
	Bateman	Howard
	Birnie (Vice-Chairman)	Ransley
	Fisher	Riddick
	S Hearn	Timmis
<b>Officers:</b>	David Austin	Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery
	Simon Coultas	Operations Manager - Clean, Safe & Green
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Trevor Saunders	Interim Team Leader - Strategic Planning
	Emma Walker	Group Manager - Environmental and Community Protection
	Rebecca Williams	Strategic Planning & Regeneration Officer

#### Also in attendance:

Councillor Janice Marshall  
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

#### **55**            **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 March 2018 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

#### **56**            **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe and Councillor Harden.

#### **57**            **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **58**            **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**59**                    **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None.

**60**                    **BUDGET MONITORING Q4**

F Jump introduced the report to members and ran through the highlights. The provisional outturn for 2017/18 is subject to the external audit process and the report has been to Cabinet, Audit and the other overview and scrutiny committees. In relation to capital programme, there is a slippage of £1.2 million and an underspend of £111k. Under employees, there is a £36k overspend with a pressure of £150k in Building Control due to resource issues but this is offset by savings of £120k in Clean, Safe and Green where performance has been maintained despite recruitment issues. There is an overachievement of income of £264k due to an increase in planning applications submitted and the increase in the set national fees has produced an overachievement of £240k. An additional income of £190k has come from an incentive payment from the Alternative Financial Model. There has been a reduction in income of £125k in commercial waste because of an on-going loss of customers. F Jump referred to section 6 of the report and explained that slippage is expenditure that was expected in 2017/18 but will be spent in 2018/19. Variance is expenditure occurred that is more or less than what was planned for.

Councillor Bateman asked F Jump to provide more information and background to the commercial waste problems. D Austin said the department has carried out some analysis on this topic. Most of the lost customers are businesses that have relocated or have stopped operating. Larger waste management companies have been able to undercut the council but the department is actively looking to resolve the issue.

Councillor Timmis asked why there is so much effort put into residential recycling but it is not the same for businesses. For example, there is no food waste recycling for bars and restaurants. D Austin said it was a fair comment and it has been looked at and a previous scheme provided a limited paper and cardboard collection. There needs to be a strategy and it needs to be properly costed and funded. The issue is that the income from recycling is dropping.

Councillor Timmis asked if the decision by China to no longer accept recycling from Europe has affected the market. D Austin said that China was a large market particularly for plastic recycling. The ban started on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 but it has had a bigger impact on mixed paper recycling. The paper collected in Dacorum is exported to India. It used to be £80 a tonne but

this has now dropped to £10. Councillor Timmis said that as we become more aware of the dangers of plastic, paper is becoming a popular solution.

Councillor Ransley asked about the recycling cost of glass. D Austin said it had been poor for some time but it is important to look at it in relation to the disposal costs. Current landfill cost is £100 per tonne. It is still economically beneficial to recycle glass.

Councillor Hicks asked why glass can't be recycled from bars and sports clubs. D Austin said there is an on-going strategy to ensure the collection is able to be funded long term.

Councillor Riddick referred to page 6, paragraph 4.1 and the overspend on employees. He said that this has been on the agenda for three years and the recurrent theme is the excessive cost of agency staff and the difficulty to recruit. He asked why there was an overachievement of income in the planning department but not within building control – are they not parallel? J Doe said that building control was a difficult area and the department is heavily reliant on agency staff. Many established staff members left before Christmas and these positions haven't been filled despite being advertised. There is a limited number of professionals in a competitive market so agencies can demand high hourly rates. The Council has about 60% of the market share in building control but the pay scales cannot compete with private companies. The underachievement of income is due to losing business to the private sector. The Council cannot make a profit out of the service and must balance the books over a three year rolling cycle. Solutions to this problem are being explored but they cannot be discussed in a public meeting. Currently, there are three trainees on a two year training programme so the department is trying to 'grow its own'

Councillor Riddick asked if the trainees were held under 'golden handcuffs' once they qualified.

J Doe said that there is a requirement to repay the course fees if they leave the council within a certain time period.

Councillor Birnie asked if the council could pool their resources with other councils. J Doe said this could be an option.

Councillor Anderson said that a part 2 discussion on the issue had been scheduled on the work programme for later in the year.

Councillor Fisher asked why recruitment was difficult in the Clean, Safe and Green department and if there was a risk to performance. S Coultas said there was an industry wide skills shortage. The department are also growing their own and there is currently an apprentice in the department. The salaries do not attract the right candidates as a high standard of qualification is

required. There are some good summer temps starting which hopefully can be turned into permanent positions.

Councillor Riddick referred to page 7 and the £450k slippage at Tring Swimming Pool. He said this was alarming as the project hasn't even started. F Jump reminded members that slippage referred to expenditure that has been delayed.

Councillor Anderson asked what the cause of the slippage is in Gadebridge Park. D Austin said it is due to the delays in the opening of the Splash Park. Wet weather has led to issues with the ground which has delayed opening.

Councillor S Hearn queried the division between the provision of services and the financial considerations and which one takes the lead. F Jump said it was a difficult question but ultimately the decision lays with members and what services they want to provide. Councillor Marshall said she concurred with that comment. The policy decision is made by members on a case by case basis.

Councillor Anderson said he was pleased to see a variance of just £75k under. This is a tiny percentage of the actual turnover and congratulated all involved.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

## **61 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES Q4 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

D Austin introduced the report to members and ran through the highlights. The waste service has been busy, with garden collections restarting for the summer months and also having to work around the industrial action. He highlighted an error in the report which should be corrected to highlight that a member of staff had achieved with seven years services without any sick days. The environmental awareness team have done some good work with the Great British Spring Clean and have lead on a project with the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership which have carried out a high profile fly tipping campaign. In Clean, Safe and Green, their hard work in the Water Gardens as lead to a nomination for being awarded a Green Flag. The performance indicators in the report are good, there is one red indicator under garden waste but this is because the denominator needs to be profiled. An update on flats recycling – a food waste trial will begin in July to collect food waste from 1,600 properties in three parts of the borough: Berkhamsted, Grovehill

and Leverstock Green. The comingled recycling will start in September on a phased basis. There are 663 blocks of flats in the borough that have no access to recycling.

Councillor Bateman asked if the member of staff with seven years' service had been recognised in any way. Recognition might give other staff something to aspire to. D Austin said he received a certificate from the Chief Executive.

Councillor Timmis congratulated officers on some of their work. She was concerned about fly tipping which she believed had increased in her ward. One resident drove down one of the lanes and counted 25 instances of fly tipping. She had attended the Herts Show and approached Herts County Council who had a stand and asked about enforcement of fly tipping. It is extremely difficult to prove who has committed the offence; CCTV cameras are not suitable in a rural location. It is becoming a huge problem and there needs to be a solution to make a difference. Councillor Timmis expressed her concern about sickness levels which she thought looked quite high. Finally, she asked about grass cutting and whether the team could cut around the edges to highlight the site lines but leave the wild flowers to grow. D Austin said he would be happy to work with Councillor Timmis and E Walker to come up with some solutions about how to try and solve fly tipping. There has been a publicity leaflet delivered to all homes in the borough with the Council Tax bill so people are aware of their responsibility. He said he would be happy to arrange a site visit with Councillor Timmis to go and have a look at the problem. In relation to sickness, it was high in January but overall there are not any major trends appearing. Considering these are front line staff, the sickness levels are the best the department has seen in 12-18 months. S Coultas said that the council does not maintain the areas that Councillor Timmis was referring to. These are maintained by a Herts County Council contractor. When grass cutting takes place, staff take great care to avoid cutting wildflowers.

Councillor Birnie asked why Berkhamsted, Grovehill and Leverstock Green were chosen as pilots for food waste recycling. D Austin said he had not been directly involved with the project but said the pilot would be looking at issues such as participation rates and contamination issues over the socio-economic groups. Councillor Marshall said they were chosen to explore the different lifestyles of different groups. Also, there are flats in every ward chosen. Councillor Birnie said the socio-economic grouping seems skewed and some wards that are marginal should be included. Councillor G Sutton said that Leverstock Green is a ward where there are households in the upper quartile and others in the lower quartile of the socio-economic scale.

Councillor G Sutton thanked S Coultas and his team for their excellent planting work around the borough. Councillor Ridick congratulated the team on their work in the Water Gardens. He said he had recently walked through and had heard three members of the public

commenting on how nice it now looked. Councillor S Hearn also congratulated the team on their work in the Memorial Garden in Tring which he said was now attracting more and more visitors and was a focal point of the town. S Coultas thanked members for their comments and said he would pass them on to the team.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

## **62 ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION Q4 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

E Walker introduced the report and ran through the highlights. She said that Q4 was concentrated on the restructuring of the new department which includes the following teams: Environmental Health, Operations and Public Health, Corporate Health, Safety and Resilience and Anti-Social Behaviour and Environmental Enforcement. The high risk food inspection rate was 91.4% for Q4 and across the year, it has hit 98.3% which is above target. The department's trainee officers are doing well and achieved top grades in their first year of study. There has been a successful prosecution for fly tipping, the offender was made to pay £1,197 in fines. The Operations and Public Health team have introduced a Term of Permission for animals, which will limit residents number of dogs per plot and try and reduce the number of strays.

Councillor Riddick referred to the interviews for a team leader in the report and asked if they were successful. E Walker confirmed they were successful and the new team leader will be starting in August.

Councillor Birnie asked why there was nothing about air quality in the report. E Walker said they were having staffing issues and have recruited a temporary officer for three days a week. Councillor Birnie asked if any new initiatives were going to be implemented. E Walker said they are tied to the plan which is controlled by Herts Highways. The council are due to review the Air Quality Action Plan this year but the staffing issues need to be solved first.

Councillor Hicks asked if the readings from the air quality stations were automatic. E Walker said one station was automatic but the others have to manually be collected and sent off for analysis every month.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

## **63 PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION Q4 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Deferred to next meeting.

## **64 STREET NAMEPLATES**

S Coultas gave a presentation to members on the street nameplate policy:

- There is a policy that gives streets with no plate present, plates that are not legible or are damaged priority to be fixed. There is currently no waiting list as the backlog has been cleared so this policy is currently not in use.
- After proof reading the plates, it takes 3-4 weeks to be manufactured and installed.
- The department carries out three surveys every financial year and approximately, 150 new street nameplates are bought.
- One plate costs £150 which includes the survey, proof reading, manufacture and installation. This price is only given when a batch of 50 are bought together.
- All the street nameplates are made from recycled plastic.

Councillors Hicks asked what the life expectancy of these signs are. S Coultas said approximately 15-20 years. The only plates the department are having to replace are those that have been vandalised or damaged in a car accident.

Councillor Timmis said some of the nameplates in her ward were weather damaged and had mould growing. Also, she asked if apostrophes are used. S Coultas said yes they are used if they are in the original street name. Councillor Timmis asked if they were cleaned. S Coultas said they were. Cleaning street nameplates was part of the winter rota.

Councillor Anderson asked about the policy on the colour of the street nameplates. The council's planning policy states that, because of its historical past, the nameplates in Kings Langley should be royal blue with white writing. S Coultas said he was unaware of this policy but would be happy to change the colour for Kings Langley. There is no difference in cost.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report

## **65                    PARKING STANDARDS**

J Doe introduced the item and his colleagues Rebecca Williams (Assistant Team Leader, Strategic Planning and Regeneration), Trevor Saunders (Interim Team Leader – Strategic Planning) and Jenny Baker (Markides Associates) to the committee. J Doe explained that the technical report being discussed is an important part of the evidential base to set a revised policy in future for car parking standards. He referred to paragraph 32-40 of the report which highlighted the next steps and the proposal to develop a new supplementary planning document in respect of car parking, taking account of the conclusions of the Markides technical evidence and members comments.

J Baker from Markides Associates gave a presentation and confirmed that the technical report should be viewed as a starting point to develop a policy. Key points to note included:

- Average car ownership per ward is based on the 2011 Census
- Recommendations for potential car parking standards set out in the technical report suggested that any standards should be a broad requirement rather than a maximum standard.
- The report recommended two ‘accessibility’ zones in future where parking requirement could be lowered. These were based on walking distances from central Hemel (800m and 1600m) and central Berkhamsted (800m)
- Outside of the ‘accessibility zones’ a degree of flexibility could be warranted but the applicant must prove the case that they cannot provide those spaces or there is no parking stress in surrounding roads through a Parking Stress Survey.
- Garages should not count as a car parking space unless they are big enough to park a car in and open the doors to get in and out.
- Evidence suggests that lower standards could be applied to affordable and sheltered housing developments where car ownership is evidenced to be less.

Councillor Ransley referred to the idea of Parking Stress surveys. She asked if there was a set standard for these surveys that developers must follow. She noted that many roads have parking both sides which would not fit an emergency vehicle down. J Baker said there is a standard method for surveying parking stress. Parking Stress is generally measured 200m walking distance from the development proposed and at times of the day which are relevant. For example, if it is a residential development then a survey should be carried out between 12 midnight – 5am and then again at 10am.



Councillor Timmis said she was concerned about restricting parking in central Berkhamsted and the potential for reduced car parking to serve any new development in the central area adding to existing pressures in trying to find a parking space to visit local shops and businesses. Also, Councillor Timmis also queried whether applying lower car parking standards for affordable housing was appropriate if those homes were not well served by a bus route and further queried whether allowance standard of 1.5 spaces for a two-bed house was appropriate, given the possibility of some of those household owning two cars. J Doe clarified that any car parking standards applied to new developments only and could not rectify any existing parking in central Berkhamsted, but pointed out that new public car parking provision might also be considered to help this situation. J Doe also pointed out that affordable housing developments have not had different standards in the past but the technical evidence is pointing towards a lower figure. The 1.5 spaces are a fraction because it is an average. Obviously, you cannot provide a fraction of a space but this is rounded up or down. It is more of a problem in the smaller developments. J Baker added to these comments. Affordable housing is generally less, but that it is an important issue for any new standards to consider. J Baker also confirmed that the average car parking is a starting point for some but factors in the need for flexibility.

Councillor Anderson said the committee should not lose sight that what is being recommended is a massive improvement on existing policy. The Sappi development in Nash Mills is a prime example of a large development with little parking provision. He asked what grounds the council would have for refusing a development when there were two conflicting parking stress surveys from the developer and objectors. J Baker said applications could be refused if the council were confident the objectors survey had been done fairly. The surveys are generally easy to verify. J Doe said objectors could find the same methodology, which would be set out in the policy and apply this.

Councillor Anderson asked if the council could use the policy to promote undercroft parking as a solution in some schemes. J Baker said it was difficult to guide developers in how they provide parking. The level of car parking required should be set by the council and then it should be left to developers to plan how they design a scheme to meet the requirement. J Doe said this relates to the site layout, design and density policy. Solutions could also include providing parking in a podium development like the Kodak tower. With regards to providing new car parking in separate locations, it could be something that is worked into the site allocations policy.

Councillor Anderson said his personal view was that there should be a hierarchy with the first factor being accessibility to public transport. If you reduce commercial parking, it seems unfair to punish those that work at these sites if they do not have access to public transport at home.

Councillor Birnie that the 2011 Census data is now out of date. Since then he suggested, the country has faced a period of austerity with a housing shortage meaning many people are forced into rented accommodation or are forced to live at home longer which means even more cars. He said that a street survey may be a safer criteria for understanding actual ownership in that locality. Also, he questioned the level of flexibility which might be applied with age restricted housing. There might be fewer drivers living there but there could be more visitors and carers. He said he had grave doubts about the accuracy of parking surveys provided by developers. J Baker acknowledged that the Census data was now seven years old however it is the only detailed data available that gives car ownerships on house type. A street survey would give you how many cars were parked but you would not be able to establish who they belonged to. It would just give an average figure which would be difficult to break down any further. She noted Councillor Birnie's point about visitor parking in age restricted homes and said she has worked with a company that provides homes for over 70s and they are still requiring broadly look to provide one space per unit.

Councillor Hicks wanted to clarify that Markides had used the 2011 Census data plus twenty percent to represent the rise in car ownership. J Baker confirmed they had added twenty percent as the figures from the Census were an average. Another twenty percent had also been added to reflect visitor parking.

Councillor Hicks referred to shopping centre car parking. He suggested that people's shopping habits are changing and have moved to the discount retailers Aldi and Lidl car parks are always full with queues to get in. If requirements are relaxed, it may make things worse. J Baker said the business models of Aldi and Lidl are different to other supermarkets. They do not build new shops but acquire existing buildings with an A1 use so they rarely have the same level of parking.

Councillor Hicks said he was pleased to see a move towards a minimum requirement especially for rural areas where car ownership is much higher. J Baker said there was huge variants within wards.

Councillor Bateman said he was also a member of the Development Management Committee. He thought that it was better to not have so many variants in parking provision. but a minimum requirement was a much better idea. J Doe said that the draft parking standards policy will come back to this committee for consideration and once adopted, briefing sessions will be held to inform members of the new standards to be applied.

Councillor Marshall asked about controlled parking zones (CPZ). She said it did not make much sense to reduce the parking standards in these areas and seems counterproductive.

J Baker said that new developments with no parking would not be able to apply for

parking permits if there are existing CPZ in place. This is a standard approach in the London boroughs.

Councillor Fisher asked what was taken into consideration when deciding if there was a good public transport provision. J Baker said that the requirement is the development being within 400m of a bus stop with a high frequency of service with no longer than a twelve minute wait for a bus is considered good access. A lot of Dacorum does not have a good bus service.

Councillor G Sutton said that parking was a highly emotive subject and one size does not fit all. The council can use this review as a basis for future policies to look at problem areas such as the parking of commercial vehicles in residential areas. The problem is forcing developers to provide more spaces. For every space provided adds another £20k on the cost. A balance must be struck – increasing parking provision too much may endanger the green belt.

Councillor Anderson said that he remembered well when John Prescott on behalf of the then Government had turned parking minimums into maximums and banned minimums. Red Lion Lane, adjacent to the Sappi redevelopment, is a prime example of the damage that the policy did to our Borough. He said parking minimums were very badly needed as soon as possible.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report

## **66 WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee agreed the work programme for the 2018/19 year. Councillor Anderson asked members to submit any suggestions for the work programme to himself or K Mogan. The Planning, Development and Regeneration Q4 Performance report had been deferred to the July meeting.

The Meeting ended at 9.52 pm