

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

15 MARCH 2016

Present:

Members:

Councillors: G Adshead
Anderson (Chairman)
Ashbourn
Fisher
S Hearn
Hicks
Howard
Matthews
Riddick
C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)

Officers:	David Austin	Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery
	Simon Coultas	Operations Manager - Clean, Safe & Green
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning and Regeneration
	Katie Mogan	Member Support Officer
	David Skinner	Assistant Director - Finance & Resources
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services

Also Attendance:

Councillor Janice Marshall
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

70 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 02 February 2016 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

71 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Bateman and Councillor Ransley.

Councillor Tindall substituted on behalf of Councillor Ransley.

72 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

73 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

75 **BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 3**

D Skinner introduced the report to the committee. He informed the committee about the £223,000 overspend which is consistent with previous quarters and was confident that the balance would be reduced by the end of the year.

In terms of Strategic Planning and Environment, there was an overspend in waste and planning services due to the timing of implementation of the anticipated waste collections and there was an increased pressure on employing agency staff. There is a corresponding surplus due to the income from planning charges.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to line 162 and questioned the low uptake on home improvements and asked if it had been advertised appropriately. Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said she would prefer this money to be spent on improving pockets of deprivation instead of it being removed from the capital programme.

C Troy said the scheme was not widely advertised but had been advertised nationally. There has been poor take up of the scheme across the country. It is important to note that they are not grants but loans so must be paid back.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe was concerned that it was not being advertised locally therefore not fulfilling the schemes full potential.

Councillor Tindall asked if private rented landlords were able to apply as they are often the buildings in the worst condition.

C Troy said the scheme was for homeowners. Private landlords have a legal responsibility to ensure properties are maintained. If they do not keep to these standards then enforcement action is taken.

Councillor Matthews noted that it was to be removed from the capital programme but questioned whether it should be abandon due to a low take up – would this benefit homeowners?

C Troy said the proposal had been discussed at length. The scheme has been in place for 18 months and similar schemes came before it. It has been advertised on the Council's website.

Councillor Marshall confirmed that removing it from the budget for 2016/17 was before the committee in February and approved at Full Council.

Councillor Tindall asked if this was a government requirement, so if someone comes forward for a loan, if there is no money in the budget what position is the Council in?

C Troy confirmed that it was discretionary.

Councillor Hicks asked the percentage of take up of this scheme.

C Troy said they had one application for £8,000 but this has not been processed yet.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

76 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORTS

C Thorpe introduced the report. He stated that the quality of waste collected continues to be excellent at 98% and Dacorum is producing the best waste of out of 29 disposal authorities. The new waste collection calendars have gone out and have included the green bin collection which has gone down well with residents.

Social media has been used well and more time has been spent on daily updates to encourage recycling. In October, there were 40 posts advertising food waste disposal and in December, social media was used to promote Christmas collections with the bank holidays.

After Christmas, the department held its 20th annual Christmas tree recycling event and processed 3,300 trees to shred into chippings and 11 tonnes went to composting. The department has also been working closely with Network Rail to cut down trees which have been turned into seating for play areas across the borough.

C Thorpe said that sickness has been decreasing month on month. There have been some retirements and resignations from those staff that have been on long term sick leave. Six return to works were completed late and the rest were completed within 2.5 days of the staff member returning.

Comingled waste collected has decreased slightly but food waste has increased. Obviously due to the suspension of green bin collections, the amount of green waste collected has decreased.

Councillor Ashbourn questioned the high sickness level for just three members of staff in the vehicle repairs department.

C Thorpe said that unfortunately the youngest member of the crew was involved in a car accident and has not yet returned to work.

Councillor Matthews referred to the fluctuations in the figures for food waste collection. He asked if this could be a seasonal issue or are residents getting better at recycling.

C Thorpe said they have experienced two dips in food waste collection. In June, the caddy liners ran out so it was considered this was a reason for the dip. However, now plastic carrier bags can be used in the food waste caddy. Last month, 'No Food Waste' labels were placed on all black bins to encourage residents to place their food in their green caddy. The week after, the crews collected 56 tonnes more food waste.

Councillor Marshall also pointed out that the quarter included Christmas so more food waste would be expected.

Councillor Tindall questioned the different quarters being used. He stated that it seemed the calendar year was being used instead of the financial year.

D Austin said that he would check if this was an error but stated that the financial year should be used.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said although she was pleased to see more food waste being collected, there should be a campaign to prevent such a high wastage of food. Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if this was earning any money.

C Thorpe said there was a difference in the cost of disposal. It costs £94 a tonne to send to landfill and just £30 a tonne to an AD plant.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said she was pleased to see an indirect saving.

Councillor Fisher asked what a justified missed bin was and what will happen when charges are brought in.

C Thorpe said this was a bin that was genuinely missed by the crews. C Thorpe did not think that situation would change when charges are brought in.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

J Doe introduced the report and said that quarter 3 was strong for performance. He said the workload was still high but marginally down on the previous quarter. There are a lot of applications coming in and this is reflected in the increase in fee revenue.

There is a slight error on paragraph 5, it should be 60% not 80% turnaround of major applications.

There is an ongoing concern with regard to appeals performance; it is a little higher than the national average.

There has been an improvement in land charges; the average turnaround has decreased from 13 days to 6.5 days.

J Doe drew members' attention to paragraph 12 and said that this was very important for the Council to demonstrate an ongoing supply of housing land and so far 300 houses have been built and the annual target is 430.

Councillor Matthews referred to page 11 and asked if there was any indications on the effect of turnaround now that officers have been delegated the power to take enforcement action.

J Doe said he felt it was probably too early to tell but would certainly keep an eye on it.

Councillor Ashbourn said he hoped that appeals awarded against the Council would not result in the process being any less robust. He hoped that the team took the time to analyse why the appeals were awarded against and to learn from them.

J Doe said there is a review process in place in order for the team to learn from the decision. Sometimes the appeals are awarded against the Council due to the quality of the policies in place. Due to the recent high staff turnover, all reports are checked by senior officers.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe mentioned the review of the new Local Plan and asked if members would have any input on developing the new plan.

J Doe said a task and finish group would be set up and this has worked well in shaping policy in the past. However, it is a long process formulating a new Local Plan.

Councillor Hicks said that Tring Town clerk had contacted the planning department for clarification on some plans but had not received a response. He asked if J Doe could give an average time scale for a response.

J Doe asked Councillor Hicks to forward him the correspondence and he will look into it.

Councillor Anderson said that this is a common complaint about case officers not responding to queries. He said that case officers are extremely busy and would not get any work done if they responded to every query. Councillor Anderson encouraged the other members to advise constituents that the officers do read queries and take them into account when producing reports.

J Doe said officers make the effort to respond but performance figures are key. New government measures mean that if a local authority dips below a certain level, the Secretary of State can intervene and refer applications straight to the planning inspector and although Dacorum are nowhere near this level, the key focus is performance.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

78 REGULATORY SERVICES QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

C Troy introduced the report and ran through the key performance areas. The highlights of the quarter included enforcement with regards to food establishments. The department has issued three hygiene improvement notices. C Troy highlighted that the issues were to do with the establishment's management systems, not necessarily their hygiene practices. If they do not have the correct documentation then they cannot prove they are implementing the correct management processes.

C Troy advised members that there was an ongoing situation with Bovingdon airfield in relation to motor vehicles. So far they have received over 200 noise complaints. This has been ongoing for 18 months and the department are working closely with planning.

With regards to air quality, he said that that there is a County Wide strategy and the key aim is to get all the Local Authority's working together towards common objectives to improve air quality. A key piece of work will be to ensure that there is better links with planning departments across the County to ensure improvements in air quality. The Council's own air quality action plan was agreed last year but district councils generally have difficulty achieving improvements as transport improvements are down to regional planning policy.

Regulatory Services have also been responsible for Corporate Health and Safety since 2014.

In Private Sector Housing, the department have been able to take over and manage properties with multiple occupancy where tenant's safety were being put at risk. There is currently a government consultation to extend HMO (house in multiple occupation) licensing to cover more premises and this will require extra resources if it goes ahead. The consultation has finished but there has been no update from the government.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe questioned why the Council was subsidising private sector housing.

C Troy said there would be a charge for licensing and there is currently a debate in government about charging for inspections for other aspects of Environmental Health work i.e Food Safety/H&S, at the moment this is not allowed. It is well known that there is a lack of resources in local authorities.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe hoped that the Council were fully engaged in the consultation process.

C Troy confirmed they were. He recently attended a national managers meeting at the Chartered Institute to discuss these issues.

Councillor Ashbourn referred to item 5 about air quality and he hoped that the local Action Plan aligned with the Local Plan in order to inform each other.

C Troy said at the moment they are not used in this way. The air quality priorities are isolated and are not fully embedded in Local Plans. There is currently a lack of will from the government to tackle air quality.

J. Doe said that Air Quality issues will feature in the site selection process for the new Dacorum local plan, and the planning department will continue to work with Environmental Health to help deliver the Air Quality priorities in the identified AQMAs.

Councillor Matthews said he was aware that Northchurch was one of the three sites for monitoring air quality. Where are the other two?

C Troy said they were on London Road and Lawn Lane. Berkhamsted High Street was the worst area due to the tall building funnelling the air pollution.

Councillor Matthews asked what the determining factor for private sector housing inspections was.

C Troy said number of floors and occupants.

Councillor E Collins asked what the Corporate Alcohol Policy was and is it a serious issue within the Council?

C Troy said it was responsible for employees and so they are being proactive in introducing this policy. There are two elements: one, there will be sporadic testing and two, if a manager suspects a colleague has been drinking then they have the

right to call Environmental Health or Human Resources to request a breath test. An independent company can come in to test an individual if it is serious enough to lead to a disciplinary. The target response time is one hour for the outside company, and almost instant within the Council. Obviously this will need to be tested when the policy is implemented.

Councillor E Collins asked if this would infringe on employees' rights.

C Troy said no, they have the right to randomly test employees.

Councillor Tindall highlighted that even senior management would be subject to this tests.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

79 CLEAN, SAFE & GREEN REVIEW

S Coultas gave a presentation to the committee to update them on the work of the Clean, Safe and Green team.

At the end of February, the CSG team conducted the annual A41 litter pick. The cost of the traffic management was £750 per day per side of the A41. Alongside this cost, there are staff, transport and material costs and the litter pick requires 8 members of staff per side. This year, the team collected 10 tonnes of rubbish which was an improvement on last year's 9 tonnes.

The challenges of this pick is booking the A41 in advance with Hertfordshire County Council, if there are roadworks or lighting that needs replacing then obviously the litter pick cannot happen and is considered low priority. Also, staff availability can be an issue. Only fully trained, experienced and permanent staff can do the litter pick due to the dangerous nature of the job so therefore agency staff are required to back fill the other jobs. Finally, a traffic survey must be conducted every morning and work can only begin once the volume of traffic is below a certain level. If the weather is poor, the traffic management is still conducted and paid for even if crews are not picking that day.

The Green Lane/Phoenix roundabout is to be enhanced in order to create a visual impact as this is a gateway into Hemel Hempstead. The planting will be orange and yellow to reflect the flames of Buncefield. Work has already started on the site, the crew have been spraying herbicide on the ground. However, they have found some cables for lighting underneath and so they must wait for the power supply to be isolated before the surface is dug up for planting. It is hoped the roundabout will be finished by June.

Dacorum now has four Green Flags for its parks. The three existing sites retained their flags. Tring Memorial was subject to a 'mystery shop' where inspectors turned up unannounced and the park received 75% and Chipperfield Park was also subject to an announced visit and received 74%. Berkhamsted Canal Fields was judged knowingly and received 69%. These are all very good scores. The fourth Green Flag was awarded to Bunkers Park and also received 69%. The judges declared it "a hidden gem and full of character".

The team have planted 600sqm of wild flowers in Heath Park and completed a new path layout. Clean, Safe and Green have been working closely with the Regeneration team to create this new space.

The new Town Centre team are working well; there are three members of staff plus a supervisor and team leader. They work staggered shifts to ensure the Town Centre is covered all day. They have a new electric vehicle for collecting bin rubbish which reduces noise and pollution.

The Clean, Safe and Green team are also working closely with the Regeneration team to complete the Water Gardens.

The bench replacement scheme has had £20,000 funding approved which means there are 63 new benches to replace old ones. 20 have so far been installed but there is only one staff member trained to fit them so this will be a slow process. S Coultas encouraged members to report a bench they feel is worthy of replacement.

Councillor Anderson asked when the Water Gardens would be complete.

J Doe said they have faced some delays which have been outside the Council's control. There was more silt to remove than expected and a second fish pass had to be installed because the first one was not up to standard. It is hoped the works will be finished by September.

Councillor G Adshead said as the local ward councillor for the Green Lane roundabout, he was not aware of these works and asked if it would be possible to advise the ward councillors of any roundabout works in their area.

S Coultas said yes, certainly. The roundabouts are refreshed and renewed on a rolling programme.

Councillor G Sutton concurred that Bunkers Park was definitely a hidden gem. He praised the CSG team on their hard work and record across the borough. Often other land owners allow their properties to deter from the quality the Council is trying to achieve, for example, one company in Maylands Avenue is allowing their site to be overrun with litter. These companies need to be held to account to ensure standards are maintained.

Councillor Anderson asked if this could be subject to a section 215.

J Doe advised that an informal approach to the landowner may be appropriate initially.

Councillor Hicks again praised Bunkers Park. He asked S Coultas if just some wood is damaged on a bench, can that also be replaced?

S Coultas said that this was possible. Benches can be rubbed down and oiled. Some benches in the borough are 30 years old and can make a difference.

Councillor G Adshead asked how a fish pass worked.

J Doe said that there was a ladder with mini pools for the fish to jump up. This was a requirement of the Environment Agency.

Councillor Anderson thanked the CSG team for all their hard work.

80 **WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16**

K Mogan to organise a meeting to determine to work programme for 2016/17.

Councillor Anderson asked for any suggestions from members.

Councillor Tindall suggested the implications of the Housing and Planning Bill that is currently in the House of Lords.

J Doe said this will go on the items to add as it is not yet law and will need a lot of preparation time.

The members agreed the work programme for 2015/16.

The Meeting ended at 8.52 pm