

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

2 FEBRUARY 2016

Present:

Members:

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

Officers:	David Austin	Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning and Regeneration
	Nicholas Egerton	Environmental Protection and Housing Team Leader
	Katie Mogan	Member Support Officer
	Caroline Souto	Financial Planning & Analysis Team Leader
	Lucy Tash	Accountant (Finance and Operations)
	Chris Taylor	Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

12 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 January 2016 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

13 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor S Hearn.

14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

15 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

17 **BUDGET REPORT**

The Chairman, Councillor Anderson, asked for any questions from members.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to Appendix E2 and asked if N Egerton could clarify what 'Animal and Public Health covered and why is it classed as an expenditure.

N Egerton said it mainly covered the dog warden service which would deal with stray dogs and kennel costs. It also includes things like cess pools and clinical waste.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if the department was moving towards an extended collection period.

N Egerton said that the clinical waste collections in some areas have been on a weekly basis but there has been a move towards moving the offensive waste stream into the normal waste collection which has been agreed with Herts County Council and the Environment Agency. Therefore the main bulk of that service would now involve things like sharps collections and they are picked up on a more ad hoc basis and some people bring them into the Civic Centre to dispose of them. The general collection where the yellow bags are collected has changed.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked what the saving attached to that was.

N Egerton said there would be a saving but could not quantify it at this current time. The department is no longer buying or distributing the yellow sharps bags and there will be a reduction in fuel costs due to the combined collections.

Councillor Ransley asked if there would be larger bins available for those who produce a lot of clinical waste.

N Egerton said they will be working through lower level service usage but having difficulties with a significant numbers of properties with larger waste needs. Ultimately, the disposal costs for offensive waste with yellow bags is higher than black bin collections so there is a saving there.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said it was disappointing that there wasn't a savings figure and some people disposing of clinical waste will need larger bins. Councillor C Wyatt-

Lowe said she was concerned that the savings are not quantified and residents are also concerned about the rescheduled collections.

C Thorpe said that the collections were running in phases for diverting clinical waste collections through the normal waste stream. 80% of customers have been diverted through the general waste stream with no problems. A letter has been sent to residents explaining that if they need a larger bin, these can be provided. 25-30 larger 360L bins have been given out and at the moment, these will stay on dedicated waste stream. The main savings are for Herts County Council, the cost of incinerating the waste in yellow bags is £400 a tonne compared to the cost of incineration of black bags through the general waste stream is £94 a tonne.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said that some countries have machines that can recycle clinical waste, is there anywhere in the UK that can do this? This may be a way of generating an income stream.

Councillor Marshall apologised for the lack of quantified savings figures. Unfortunately, the savings can't really be identified without putting into practice. Hopefully, an answer can be brought to Committee at a later date.

Councillor Anderson asked if these changes were county wide.

N Egerton said yes, as of April no yellow bags will be able to be disposed at any of the waste disposal centres in Hertfordshire. This has been agreed by members at County level.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to Appendix I regarding commercial assets with regards to cemeteries. Is there a government ceiling on the charges?

C Souto said it fell under the Finance and Resources Committee's remit.

Councillor Anderson said the question will be passed to Nicholas Brown, the group manager.

Councillor Anderson expressed concerns surrounding the reliability of the Herts County Council funding. Also, the Outturn reports throughout the year have shown an over spend in the service. Is there information on where the £60,000 identified is coming from and has the problem with the current over spend been resolved?

D Austin told the committee that the department had some consultants come in to work in five areas (Commercial waste, vehicle repair shop, etc.) and as part of that work, they identified areas to improve. They are mainly operational savings, for example, a piece of work was done on waste haulage and the average weights on vehicles. They looked at a piece of kit that loads the vehicles and the council pays per load so by increasing the average load taken to disposal, this will generate a saving in the region of £20,000 a year.

C Thorpe said that previously, it was found that the department wasn't reaching full productivity and so extra staff and resources were brought in to complete work. In the

last 6 weeks, a lot of work has been done with the crews and have rebalanced the rounds through a process called route optimization. As a result, the extra round has been dropped as it is no longer needed. The crews are working together better so there has been a significant saving in terms of productivity.

Councillor Hicks asked if the £60,000 savings were a one off.

D Austin said the £60,000 would be a short term saving. There are more ideas and larger projects mainly around the Clean, Safe and Green service to create further savings.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to page 62 and questioned the spending on air quality monitors.

N Egerton said this was a one-off investment. The department has an annual spend on air quality which will be in the budget. There is an amount for data management and diffuser tubes. Last year, there was a grant from Herts County Council to install new monitoring equipment.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe felt it was quite significant to keep this as air pollution is a public health issue.

Councillor Anderson said there were three places with air quality issues in the borough. He hopes that more news regarding air quality will be presented to the committee.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe questioned the disabled facilities grant on page 62.

C Souto said this was part of the five year capital program and was a new item for 2021.

Councillor Fisher asked about pest control and why some prices and charges were increased more than others.

N Egerton said that the cost to the public doesn't reflect what the actual cost to the Council is. The Council has a duty to keep land pest free so the service is subsidised. These costs are reasonable compared to private company charges.

Councillor Marshall said that when setting the charges, other local authorities and private companies were looked at to see what they were charging.

Councillor Ashbourn asked about the trends in the requirements of the pest control service and of other local authorities.

N Egerton said there wasn't a significant decline especially considering the service used to be free of charge.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if a service was offered for bed bugs.

N Egerton said there was not at the moment. Bed bugs are extremely difficult to get rid of and are resource intensive. The easiest way to get rid of bed bugs is by disposing of the mattress and other items, but some people do not want to do this.

Councillor Anderson asked about the volume of planning applications.

J Doe said they were picking up and sees a long term general increase.

18 **WORK PROGRAMME**

C Souto asked to change the title of the 'Provisional Outturn Q3' report to 'Budget Monitoring'.

Councillor Anderson said that the agenda for the March meeting had nine items and this was too large. He suggested to members an addition of another meeting on Tuesday 12th April to ensure all reports are covered before the end of the year. This additional meeting must be agreed at Full Council.

The Meeting ended at 8.46 pm