

Member questions for officers and witnesses

Members have been undertaking their own desk top research and they have been in discussions with officers asking for specific information and questions to help them formulate the questions they wish to address when they interview officers and witnesses at the formal Select Committee meeting, as detailed below.

**Complaints**

Cllr Lorraine Bell:

Cllr Lorraine Bell had met with Chris Dorow to discuss Complaints relating to refuse and recycling. She had received a lot of written data from Chris which detailed the complaints from April 2008 to June 2013 (43 pages in total). This described the nature of the complaint, whether upheld and what action was taken to respond as well as how long it had taken officers to respond and whether the complaint had been raised by a Member. A large number of the complaints were grounds maintenance related, but only complaints that are linked to refuse and recycling are of interest to the review. Cllr Bell has been advised that there will be a new complaints system in place very soon that will provide officers with more data regarding missed bins etc but also if particular residents raise repeat incidents.

Question(s):

Cllr Lorraine Bell would like to ask officers how the new complaints system helps improve recording complaints and the response time to complaints also how it might make service improvements?

Has there been an improvement in the Officers response time to complaints referred to by Members?

Is there a way forward to resolve the problem of the residents putting the bins out after collection etc?

**Service provision during Inclement Weather**

Cllr Robin Parker:

Regarding complaints resulting from bad weather Members discussed the current policy of inviting the driver to decide whether to take the freight vehicle out or not if there is severe snow or ice conditions. Members understand that it is a difficult judgement where health and safety/litigation issues are paramount. However, they queried whether there could be a protocol to offer guidance which could lay down some specific "red lines" so that a uniform decision can be taken to carry out a round or not?

Question: At the time of publishing the agenda no written question had been received. Any questions identified by the Member before the meeting on 30 September will be provided to officers ahead of the meeting.

## **Nappies & the Nappy Collection Service**

Cllr Phil Bibby:

Cllr Phil Bibby has discussed this issue with Lizzie Moring and has conducted his own desk top research. The term disposable or biodegradable nappies is a misnomer as 85% of nappies can biodegrade but there is a residual 15% that will not degrade. This is unlikely to change unless the market leader Pampers (Proctor & Gamble) takes a lead. Promoting the use of real nappies is the area that would appear to be the most beneficial in avoiding increased landfill. The convenience of using disposable nappies is a major barrier to overcome but little is known by prospective parents about alternatives such as real nappies.

Question:

Cllr Bibby would like to ask officers what can the Council do to promote the use of real nappies?

Nappy Collection Service – Members are of the view that there is little justification for continuing this free service to the public when it is only being used by some 600 residents but costs the Council £20k to provide. This could be a recommendation from the review and will help the Council in its on-going savings targets. There could be scope for modest growth items such as enhanced promotion campaigns regarding real nappies/recycling if such a significant saving can be made.

There are 574 households on the scheme. It is also interesting to note that since we launched the scheme in October 2010, 1018 households have been removed from the scheme without a single stage 1 complaint.

If we didn't offer the nappy scheme residents would need to place spoilt disposable nappies in their refuse bin as they do in their refuse week currently. The alternative is to switch to 'real' or reusable nappies for which residents can receive a £50 cash back reward.

For residents the main concern is likely to be whether they have space in their refuse bin for all their disposable nappies. The nappy scheme was originally designed to counteract resident's concerns with smelly nappies sitting in refuse bins for two weeks when we moved to an alternative weekly collection service. It appears however, from discussions with residents on the scheme, to be used to increase capacity in their bin for other refuse. Stevenage offers one of the largest standard refuse bins (240L) available to its residents and with the substantial recycling offer available, we have no reason to believe that residents should not be able to cope without this service if they are recycling to the maximum.

Question:

Cllr Bibby would like to know why 1018 residents that were originally signed up to the nappy collection service had "dropped off" was it because they no longer required it i.e. their Children had grown up or was there another reason?

## **Waste re-use and reduction to Landfill, neighbour disputes and missed bins**

Cllr Jim Brown:

Cllr Jim Brown has been in dialogue with officers who have presented data for National Indicators & Best Value Performance Indicators for 2008/09 to 2010/11 and Waste Data Flow for 2011/12 & 2011/12 for various Household Waste Indicators (circulated separately)

Question:

Cllr Jim Brown has asked why there is an apparent reverse of performance for 2012/13?

Also Cllr Brown is interested in pursuing the issue of neighbour disputes and how this might be addressed (using neighbours bins)

Question:

How can we avoid more use of landfill? Are we running out of places to take the residential rubbish? Are we running out of landfill sites?

Response:

Yes we are running out of land fill sites across the whole country which is why national government is looking at alternative ways of dealing with our waste.

SBC can only have a limited role to play in this area as the borough is not a disposal authority, only a waste collection authority. Herts County Council are responsible for deciding how and where our waste goes.

At a regional level there are plans to introduce an "energy from waste" plant close to St Albans. It is now going through the planning stages. (presently awaiting decision from the Secretary of State). Clearly if this was to be approved it would have a dramatic impact on waste going to landfill. (in theory waste going to landfill would be reduced by 97%).

What can SBC do? We have already run smaller campaigns focusing on reduce and re-use and we need to continue to do this. We have to be realistic though what a small, local authority can realistically achieve in changing ingrained habits. Most of the drivers for change will need to come from HCC, national and European levels. Resource permitting there is the potential to run future campaigns next year focusing on reduce and reuse.

Question:

What is the policy on neighbour disputes?

Response:

The CRM does not record this as a separate category to report on so we are unable to get any stats. I have spoken to the CSC who handle the calls and this issue does not appear to be a problem. Our experience of handling calls in the back-office would also suggest this is the case.

Question:

What do we do with Missed Bins?:

Response:

As highlighted in the presentation missed bins is a costly activity for the council. Our missed bin figures are relatively high, but they do also include returns due to blocked roads and when we return to empty a recycling bin that has contamination.

You raised the issue about whether the issue may be because the operational staff are continually missing properties. It is difficult to know as we do not investigate any reports made – this is part of the problem. All residents have to do to get on the missed bin list is to phone up and we will go back to collect it.

Question:

What could SBC do to reduce waste (e.g. plastic bag initiatives, working with retail, promotional campaigns, and decisions about our own practices)?

Response:

We are part of WasteAware (Herts Waste Partnership) and together we are working in partnership with national companies (supermarkets, recycling companies etc.) who are looking to launch national campaigns on plastic bags and packaging. With this in mind and the types of campaigns work we can offer ourselves, it is better for us to ensure we support the WasteAware work and national campaigns.

There are things we can promote through a campaign/regular events in terms of reducing waste such as:

- Promote reduction to food waste utilising the national 'Love Food Hate Waste' Campaign from WRAP (using up leftovers, writing shopping lists/shop smart, understanding food labels, storing food properly)
- Smart Shopping- how to reduce the packaging waste you get and avoiding buying disposable items such as razors, plates & cups, paper napkins, nappies, batteries etc.
- Promote options to hire, borrow and share e.g. hiring suits, car sharing and borrowing items used rarely such as gardening equipment.
- Promote real nappies to reduce nappies sent to landfill
- Promoting going paperless- billing, no junk mail
- Packaging free present ideas

Question:

What could SBC do to encourage re-use (support for things like the Wheels project might be relevant here – I will take your advice)?

Response:

Reuse has become more fashionable recently given the economic climate and TV presenters such as Kirsty Allsopp.

We can promote in terms of reuse:

- Reusable shopping bags to eliminate carrier bags- we have these which we give away as freebies.
- Reusable lunch boxes and water bottles & link waste free lunch campaign to schools and work places.
- Promote Stevenage Furniture Recycling Scheme
- Promote reuse websites such as freegle and freecycle
- Encourage buying/acquiring second hand e.g. charity shops, swishing events (clothes swapping, take back events, car boot sales, hand-me-downs).
- Promote Christmas reuse- swap shop of unwanted gifts, using old cloth or newspaper to wrap gifts, gift tags cut out of old cards.
- Repair broken items such as electrical goods or find a new use for broken things e.g. broken handle on a mug- use it for storing pens or as a plant pot instead.

**Recycling in town & neighbourhood centres & campaigns to encourage recycling**

Cllr Pam Stuart:

Cllr Pam Stuart has discussed the provision of recycling in the town and neighbourhood centres and what we are doing to encourage recycling. Pam is concerned that the vandalised bins in the town centre have not been replaced. Cllr Stuart she feels that more robust and clearer recycling bins could encourage more recycling in public places. Also a publicity campaign would help. Cllr Stuart is concerned about what residents can do with bulky packaging.

Comment:

There does not appear to be many facilities to recycle in Stevenage Town Centre but I wondered if there are any in Fairlands Valley for instance?

Response:

There are currently 2 joint litter and recycling on street bins in the town centre. However, these are in a poor state after having been vandalised. Officers are

investigating how much it would cost to repair the vandalised recycling bins. We also have a couple in the Old Town high street which are fully working, although they are not used correctly and are frequently too contaminated to recycle the contents. We don't have any in Fairlands Valley Park or the Community Shops. Recycling facilities are available at most if not all Community Neighbourhood Centres and supermarkets throughout Stevenage.

Question:

Do any of the other District Councils have any recycling facilities in public places?

Response:

Yes, some of the other Hertfordshire districts do have on-street recycling facilities in their high streets e.g. Hertsmere. Others have them in key places around the town e.g. North Herts have them by the train station.

Question:

Does everyone in Stevenage recycle?

Response:

This is a difficult question to answer accurately. There is no legal requirement for people to recycle so if they could manage their waste without recycling they could choose to do so in theory. Some residents who live in flat blocks without any space for bins do not have access to kerbside recycling facilities, if they wish to recycle then we provide the community bring bank recycling facilities which are well used generally but currently we do not know who is using them. We are currently conducting our annual recycling participation survey and initial indications are that the majority of residents do recycle some of their waste.

Question:

Is there anything in place to encourage people to recycle?

Response:

There are no specific incentives e.g. financial incentives for residents to recycle. We do produce regular communications materials to residents advising them of how we're getting on and reminding them of how and why to recycle. We sometimes run competitions linked to specific recycling campaigns e.g. for cardboard recycling currently residents can enter a county-wide competition to win a Kindle. Localised advertising through vehicle banners on refuse and recycling vehicles, articles in Chronicle magazine delivered to residents (Summer 2013), information on SBC website <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/recycling-and-waste/> and waste aware <http://www.wasteaware.org.uk/>

Question:

What are residents who do not drive supposed to do with bulky packaging waste?

Response:

Residents are required to manage their own waste, if they have more than their bins worth in a given collection day they will need to wait until their next collection to dispose of it. Our crews will not take any additional side waste.

-The resident could spread the polystyrene out over a few weeks in his refuse bin.

-If the resident gets on well with their neighbours they could ask one of them to put some waste in their bin on this occasion (would need to obtain permission)

- The resident could ask for a friends' help to take the additional waste down to the HWRC

- The resident could arrange and pay for a junk collection for us to come and remove the waste

-Suppliers of electrical products delivered to a customer's property will more often than not remove and take the packaging away, suppliers know the value of these materials and wish to recover as much revenue from waste streams as possible. They are also required to meet targets set out in the "Waste Packaging Regulations".

**Issues facing residents of flats and tower blocks**

Cllr Brian Underwood:

Cllr Underwood has been unwell during the research preparation period so this question will be addressed by another Member at the Select Committee.

**Cardboard and recycling away from home**

Cllr John Mead:

Cllr John Mead has met with Chris Dorow to discuss the recycling of cardboard. The discussion covered the reasons for the cardboard being no longer able to go into the compost bin.

Cllr Mead is surprised with the large reduction in the price per ton the Council will get by mixing card and paper. £130 approximately per ton of paper opposed to £60 approximately per ton for mixed, but this had been factored in to the budget.

Question(s):

Could the officers clarify the figures and show how much paper we recycled last year?

Could the officers and Portfolio Holder explain the thinking that went into the policy decision to mix cardboard and paper, given that the Council will now lose circa £56k a year income by mixing the materials?

Could officers consider how they can address the issue of a peak in cardboard at Christmas? The advertising literature for the new cardboard recycling regime does not mention peaks like Christmas where residents could place excess cardboard under the recycling box and it still be collected. If the Council doesn't

inform residents then an excess will find its way into landfill eating into our tonnage quota for landfill.

**Equalities & Diversity issues**

Cllr Jackie Hollywell

At the time of publishing the agenda no written question had been received. Any questions identified by the Member before the meeting on 30 September will be provided to officers ahead of the meeting.