

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday 6 January 2014

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Stevenage SG1 1HN

Present: Councillors: J Hollywell (Chair), P Bibby, J Brown, J Mead, R Parker CC and P Stuart.

Also Present: L Myers (Head of Environmental Services)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
Ended: 7.20 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B Underwood to whom the Committee extended its best wishes.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – 21 OCTOBER 2013

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 21 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. THE REVIEW INTO REFUSE AND RECYCLING

The Committee received the draft report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Refuse and Recycling.

Members identified a number of typographical errors in the report which the Scrutiny Officer undertook to correct in the final version.

In reply to a question concerning a suggestion that residents should be charged for replacement recycling boxes if it could be proved that their requests were unreasonable the Committee was advised that such individuals might possibly put all of their recyclables into the residuals bin and all of their refuse would then be sent to landfill. The Committee was of the view that this situation would be unacceptable and requested that the recommendation be amended to delete any suggestion that additional bins should be charged for.

Members expressed concerns that following a change to the segregation arrangements for cardboard and other recyclables the blue recycling bin was no longer of sufficient size to satisfy the needs of many residents. A number of options were discussed, which included the pros and cons of mixing recyclable materials at the point of collection. The Committee was advised that robust segregation, as was the Council's practice, generated 'a good' income. The Scrutiny Officer was asked to add a recommendation to the report requesting that Officers initiate a review of the service in light of the changes to the cardboard collection arrangements and make operational recommendations as appropriate.

In reply to a request to clarify the complaints data in paragraph 3.6.1 of the report the Scrutiny Officer undertook to reword the final sentence to show that the number of complaints included those for missed bins.

The Committee was advised that the Council was planning to undertake a recycling survey of those residents living in flat blocks. It was noted that the survey would only be for those living in Council properties and would not cover the issue recycling provision in future developments which Members asked Officers to address.

Concerns were expressed that should building works be required to enable the installation of improved recycling facilities in flat blocks then the cost would be borne by rent payers through the Housing Revenue Account, and not private tenants or leaseholders.

In reply to a Member's comment that the communal recycling facilities for residents living in flats above the shops at the Oval were being used by commercial contractors the Head of Environmental Services undertook to investigate and feedback.

A question was raised concerning the recycling rates obtained from revamped recycling facilities in the Town. The Committee was advised that it was impossible to isolate data from specific recycling bank collection points; however the Head of Environmental Services undertook to provide data on overall recycling rates.

In reply to a further question it was confirmed that the final sentence in paragraph 3.8.3 should be completed to read 'to further improve the recycling rates in the County'.

In response to a Member comment the Scrutiny Officer undertook to amend the sixth bullet point of paragraph 3.9.4 to better emphasise actions that the Council could take to promote recycling.

Members were divided over whether to include a comment agreeing with the Portfolio Holder that the waste and recycling service was best delivered at a local level as the Committee had not researched this and suggested that this was a matter for the Executive and Officers to explore. Therefore Scrutiny Officer was requested to delete the final sentence of paragraph 3.10.1 from the report. Councillor J Brown requested that his objection to this be recorded in the minutes.

Members requested that an extra sentence be added to paragraph 3.11 to highlight the issue of tenants with disabilities or mobility issues who would struggle to lift the paper

recycling bin when full.

The Committee was advised that the Council would make use of roadside signs wherever possible to inform residents of changes to refuse and recycling collection schedules as a result of poor weather. The Committee requested that the recommendation in respect of the information cascade to residents in the event of service alteration be amended to reflect this.

The Committee also noted the success of the text messaging service in Dacorum and further requested that the relevant recommendation be strengthened to include an officer review of the text messaging service for Stevenage Borough Council in the event of service disruption in adverse weather.

Members requested that paragraph 5.1 be amended to reflect that the cashable savings from the removal of the dedicated nappy service could partially, or wholly, be ringfenced to enhance recycling campaigns.

Members further requested that paragraph 5.3 be amended to state that any proposed changes to refuse and recycling arrangements would not impact on those services already provided to residents with mobility or other incapacitating disabilities.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the Portfolio Holder should reply to the report within two months and that the Committee would review the response at an appropriate meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be amended to reflect the views of the Committee and circulated (as a track changes copy) for final approval to all Committee members prior to the report being submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and the Head of Environmental Services for consideration and formal reply. The Scrutiny Officer was also requested to send a copy of the final report to Duncan Jones and Craig Thorpe who had both attended the October meeting.
2. The recommendations in the report be amended as follows:
 1. That the Environment and Economy Select Committee considers the findings of the review contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Environment and Regeneration Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director (Environment) and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.
 2. That notwithstanding that each inclement weather incident produces a different outcome, that Officer look to draw together an agreed action plan that can be followed during inclement weather so that Members and the public are kept informed of the impact to services by such means as the use of roadside signage and text messaging and that this information is displayed prominently and updated regularly on the Council's website.

3. That Officers investigate how the reviews 'Critical Friend' from Dacorum Borough Council has managed to encourage 5000 residents to sign up to the text scheme, with a view to increasing usage of the Council's own parallel scheme, which would help during periods of service disruption.
4. That Officers report back to Members on the data trends that have been recorded with complaints following at least six months of using the Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) IT software.
5. That Officers develop further the policy for missed bins. Officers to consider adopting the 'Critical Friend' Dacorum Borough Council's approach to missed bins which involves classifying them as 'justified or unjustified' as described at paragraph 3.2.1 of the report. The policy could determine when and whether to revisit an unjustified missed bin at a time that is convenient to the service and therefore not incur any additional expense. Members recommend that Officers use the experience described by Dacorum as a starting point for further developing the policy for missed bins, including recycling contamination, with a view to making savings in future years.
6. That the service continue to replace broken or stolen/misplaced bins but monitor patterns via the CRM from specific addresses for both commercial and residential to challenge any misuse of the service.
7. That Officers consider a pilot to provide a smaller residual waste bin to new properties or for replacement bins to encourage recycling.
8. Consider withdrawing the disposable nappy collection service and making a direct cashable saving of £3500 which could partially, or wholly, be ringfenced to enhance recycling campaigns.
9. Investigate alternative simpler vandal proof on-street recycling facilities for the centre and community shopping areas around the town to replace the current vandalised facilities.
10. That Officers provide Members with the results of the surveys currently being undertaken with residents of flats and tower blocks into the recycling available at these properties, acknowledging that funding for any amendments would have to be drawn from the Housing Revenue Account and noting that the surveys do not cover those living in privately rented, or owned, accommodation.
11. That Officers be requested to undertake a review of the cardboard recycling blue box service as the current receptacles were too small for most household needs.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR