

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 24 February 2015

Time: 6.00 p.m.

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

Present: Councillors: J Hollywell (Chair), P Bibby (Vice-Chair), D Bainbridge, L Bell, L Briscoe, J Brown and E Connolly

Start/End Time: Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
End Time: 6.30 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Saunders, G Snell and P Stuart.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – 3 FEBRUARY 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 3 February 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE MAINTENANCE OF TREES, HEDGES AND SHRUB BEDS

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review into the maintenance of trees, hedges and shrub beds that had been carried out by the Environment and Economy Select Committee over a series of 6 meetings and site visits from June 2014 to October 2014.

Concerns were expressed that a 'one Council' approach to the service contracts for the maintenance of trees, hedges and shrub beds could result in a lessening of the service provided. It was requested that the recommendation be amended to reflect Members' desire that the service be maintained at the highest levels.

Members requested that recommendation 7 be amended to reflect the Council's commitment to Equalities and Diversity issues.

A Member requested that a recommendation be added to recognise the work carried out by Officers to introduce a range of diverse species to increase the variety of flora in the town and to mitigate against possible disease and climate change threats.

In reply to a question concerning the timescale for the review of the recommendations the Committee was advised that a review usually took place about twelve months after the initial response from the Portfolio Holder had been received. In order to formalise reviews Members requested an additional recommendation that the Scrutiny Officer investigate and report back to Members on a mechanism for diarising automatic review dates to avoid the chance of recommendations and agreed actions being lost.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the recommendations below be presented to the Environment and Regeneration Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director (Environment) and that a response be requested from these and any other named Officers and Partners within two months of the publishing of the report.
2. That Officers from Environmental Services and Housing be requested to reconsider the current service level agreements between the two services (that were drawn up for the former ALMO, Stevenage Homes), whilst still complying with the rules governing separate funding arrangements for the Housing Revenue Account, in order that a one Council, uniform service, approach to the maintenance of trees, hedges and shrub beds on Council land in the town be achieved. Members requested that officers ensure that in delivering a 'one Council' approach there be no drop in service of frequency or standard of maintenance to whichever of the current service, HRA or General Fund, is currently offering a lower specification, as it is hoped that some efficiencies would be achieved by adopting this approach.
3. That Officers be requested to undertake a full survey of the shrub beds on Council land to provide a cost benefit analysis to see which sites would be suitable and cost effective to be grassed over.
4. That Officers be requested to consider ways that the service could further promote gardening services to those residents that who are unable to maintain their own gardens, be this through directing residents who require help with maintaining their gardens to a list of trustworthy and affordable local gardeners, to promoting Groundwork Hertfordshire's 'Green Aiders' scheme or North Herts CVS 'Time Bank' volunteer garden service.
5. That regarding volunteering: (i) Officers be requested to negotiate with the Council's insurers, ensuring that sufficient safeguards are in place, so that suitable volunteers can be trained to lead future volunteer activity, which would extend the opportunities currently available to volunteers; (ii) That the Campaigns Officer be requested to work on linking up with a local secondary school to become an Eco School so that in time the Officer could promote the opportunity of become involved in volunteering for those interested in working in Environment based jobs which they could use in their CVs; and (iii) That Officers be requested to take every opportunity to publicise

the great work that the Green Space Volunteers are doing.

6. That Officers be requested to access any external funding linked to biodiversity work that the Green Space Volunteers are undertaking.
7. That when designing new planting schemes or developments to the town's green spaces that Officers be requested to give consideration to and make adequate provision for making those spaces accessible to all people with disabilities in line with the Council's commitments to Equalities and Diversity.
8. That notwithstanding the complications of entering into Licences to Cultivate and Licences Occupy, Members are keen to promote these as an option for residents but the current system appeared to have a number of disincentives including entering into a legal agreements with the Council (for licences to cultivate) and the fee (for HCC licences to occupy). Members suggested that perhaps with better publicity using the Council's resident magazine, Chronicle, it might encourage more residents to take on areas adjacent to their property to smarten its appearance. Officers are also requested to consider the current issuing of licences to see if it is possible to simplify the process in any way and take away some of the perceived bureaucracy that may put off potential take up from residents.
9. That with regard to the way Officers select the planting of trees and shrub beds as detailed in the report at paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7, It be recorded that the Committee supported Officers' approach regarding the careful selection of species, keeping up to date with research on the implications of climate change and disease to safeguard the long term viability of the Borough's tree and shrub stocks.
10. That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to investigate and report back to Members on a mechanism for diarising automatic review dates to avoid the chance of recommendations and agreed actions being lost.

The Chair expressed her thanks to all those involved in the review.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

Members were reminded that the next meeting was scheduled for 24 March 2015 when the agenda would include possible scrutiny topics for 2015/2016. Members were requested to consider potential topics for this item.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR

