

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 JUNE 2011

Present:

Cllr Anderson (Chairman)	Cllr Macdonald
Cllr Bhinder	Cllr White
Cllr Elliot	Cllr Wixted
Cllr Guest (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Wood
Cllr Harris	Cllr C Wyatt-Lowe
Cllr Lloyd	

Councillor Holmes attended as Portfolio Holder for Planning & Regeneration.
Councillor Laws attended as Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services.

Officers:	D Austin	Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery
	J Doe	Assistant Director Planning, Development & Regeneration
	G Patterson	Operations Manager - Waste
	P Hamilton	Valuation & Estates Manager
	M Anderson	Corporate Support Team Leader- Democracy (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30pm

OS/095/11 MINUTES

The minutes of the Strategic Planning & Environment OSC meeting held on 8 March 2011 were confirmed by the Members present and signed by the Chairman.

OS/096/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Lawson, McKay & Reay.

Councillor Lloyd substituted on behalf of Councillor Lawson.

Councillor Wood substituted on behalf of Councillor McKay.

OS/097/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe declared a personal interest in item 7 of the agenda 'DBC Allotment Overview', as she had a family allotment.

OS/098/11 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mary Harris – Resident

Mary Harris highlighted a few points with regards to the allotments. She said she was pleased that Councillors were reviewing the Allotment sites as there had been poor management of them for years. In total there were 400 on the waiting list, yet there were many sites unoccupied, which was increasing. The Multiple Exchange Scheme should allow for more flexibility and the introduction of notice boards on the entrance to sites would be beneficial. Mary Harris also pointed out that Section 106 money should be allocated to allotments. In conclusion she noted that the lack of residents was obvious; however there would be a benefit from the changes proposed.

Councillor Anderson asked the residents how they would feel if the rules surrounding allotment owners selling food was taken away.

Mary Harris said that they had a very informal process at the moment. She said that she was unsure how it would be monitored as she didn't want owners to be classed as businesses.

Councillor Anderson asked how active the Hemel Hempstead Allotment Association was and if there was a management Committee.

Mary Harris confirmed there was a management committee. Originally there were 4 in Grovehill and they were currently preparing other sites.

Councillor White arrived at 7.40pm.

Councillor Anderson pointed out that Councillors needed to be satisfied that the association could run the allotments.

Mary Harris said that she was unsure as the main priority was to get Grovehill up and running.

Councillor Guest asked how the allotment owners would see an effective way of managing the waiting list.

Mary Harris said that the list was inaccurate. Some people were listed more than once, some had a choice of many options and some were on the list even though they already had an allotment.

Karen Kelly – Resident

Karen Kelly informed the committee that she had many ideas for the future. She said that the waiting lists never disappear and needed to be updated on a regular basis. She mentioned that she had worked on the plot for over 15 years; however there were still lots of work to be done. She stressed that newcomers found it difficult to start up on the allotments and thought that it would be a good idea if they were to introduce sharing plots as a way to start up. That way they could see if they liked it prior to developing. She added that the council should talk to those plot owners who had been involved for years, for their help and assistance.

OS/099/11 DBC ALLOTMENT OVERVIEW

Key points of discussion

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said that some of the plots were very large and noted that the report had no specific plans of plots. She asked whether it was practical for plots to be reduced and larger plots to be shared.

P Hamilton Valuation & Estates Manager, said that newcomers could be daunted by the size of the plots and therefore could be possible to downsize.

Cllr C Wyatt-Lowe asked if there was any indication on the number of large plots that existed.

P Hamilton added that he had plans of all the sites however they all varied in size.

Councillor Macdonald asked if there were many newcomers who gave up after the first year had passed and whether there was any continuity in keeping the waiting list managed.

P Hamilton said that it was difficult to intervene prior to officially closing the plots.

Councillor Macdonald suggested that a mentoring system for newcomers should be introduced.

P Hamilton said that he hoped this would be monitored by the wardens.

Councillor Harris noted that Tring Town Council did not issue notices unless no payment had been received. He asked if this was something DBC could do to save the money on issuing notices.

P Hamilton explained that the £15 was a general admin fee however the costs involved with producing these were higher; he said they would need to monitor who paid and who did not.

Councillor Harris suggested that notices to quit could be reviewed by DBC Portfolio Holders or the relevant officer. He asked if there was a liaison committee.

P Hamilton said that each site had a spokesperson and agreed that it would be good to have a joined up approach and an overall control mechanism.

Councillor White asked what it was that plot owners were paying for as the income received by the council, did not cover the costs incurred by the council. He felt that there were no clear guidelines of what owners can and can't maintain and what the council would maintain.

Councillor White asked if the plot owners would want to look at cooperatives to manage and be operational as an alternative. The council could then support the cooperative group to help reduce costs.

Councillor Anderson noted that Nash Mills and Kings Langley allotments were run by volunteer associations who did all of the management. He suggested that this set up was explored further as an ideal position. He added that the council must be sure that the association would be able to manage them.

Councillor Lloyd declared a Personal interest as he was a Flamsted allotment owner. He explained that parishes run the allotments themselves and were more than capable. He felt that this could be an opportunity for Localism to be in action and the local community could be asked what to do and if need be, to be involved in doing it. He suggested this is tried for a set number of years to be able to notice the savings made.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe agreed with Councillor Lloyd's suggestion. She wanted to counteract any criticisms made of the council in that they did maintain plots as and when required. Keeping costs low would encourage people to own a plot; this was not a 'make money' service.

Councillor Harris felt that some sites could be too large to maintain individually. He welcomed the fact that some old sites had been brought back into use as the

demand was necessary. He also welcomed the idea of communities running the allotment sites but did not see this as a solution.

Councillor Wood said that the associations could cover the allotments in a certain ward, rather than by individual plots.

Councillor Elliot welcomed the fantastic ideas made by the members of public.

Councillor Guest summarised the committees discussion and highlighted that the allotment holders clearly valued their plots and welcomed the suggestion that smaller plots could be given to new starters.

Councillor Guest proposed that a task and finish should be set up to look at the issues in more detail. Councillor Anderson seconded this proposal.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning & Environment OSC agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources be asked to set up a Task and Finish Group to examine Allotments in more detail.

The Committee requested that allotment owners be invited to co-opt onto the committee.

Many of the committee members expressed an interest in sitting on the Task & Finish Group.

OS/100/11 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Environmental Services

D Austin introduced the quarter 4 performance report and explained that the service was currently developing new performance indicators, which included the time taken to remove fly-tipping and graffiti and not just the number of incidents.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Macdonald asked if reports of repeat locations of graffiti and fly-tipping were logged.

D Austin replied they were, as part of the neighbourhood action links with PCSO's, local schools and the ASB team. There was a very good level of intelligence across the authority.

Councillor Anderson highlighted the legal issues of graffiti removal if it was not on a council owned building. He hoped that the graffiti would be removed first and the owner charged afterwards, rather than waiting for them to remove.

D Austin said this would be an enforcement issue. His understanding was that a statutory notice had to be given to the owner first and they had 28 days to respond. Only after this time could the council then act.

Councillor Harris asked if crews removed fly-tipping as they were out on their rounds, and therefore not always reacting to incidents which had been reported. He agreed that it would be better to measure the time taken to remove it.

D Austin reported that the crews only cleared reported incidents, and waited for the enforcement to investigate.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if the same rules applied to racist graffiti.

D Austin explained that racist or abusive graffiti would be cleared as quickly as possible and it was hoped this would be within a day.

Councillor Wood congratulated the service for all its work and said there had been a fantastic difference across the borough.

Councillor Bhinder was very impressed with Grovehill and the attention to detail was welcomed.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe appreciated the good work carried out on the roundabouts and asked why this had not been publicised more. It was of little cost to residents as it was funded by company sponsors.

D Austin replied that the roundabouts had new sponsors and therefore new signs were being produced. Interviews and press releases had been planned with those involved.

Councillor Macdonald asked if the on street recycling facilities would be a rolling programme.

D Austin said that they would be monitoring success of the new split bins and then look to develop them if it was going well. This would be subject to funding.

Councillor Wixted asked if compost bin facilities were planned for flats and maisonettes.

D Austin said that this would be subject to resources, but could be looked at as part of a future committee report.

Strategic Planning & Regeneration

J Doe explained the report and appendices and highlighted the projects currently underway and the current outturn of the performance indicators.

Councillor Holmes explained that they were trying to bring forward work on the Strategic Homes and were also seeking to increase the number of businesses and employees in the area. The council will benefit from the new homes bonus, for which the first award was over £300k.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning & Environment OSC noted the reports.

OS/101/11 DISRUPTION TO THE REFUSE & RECYCLING SERVICE DUE TO THE ADVERSE WEATHER 2010/11

G Patterson introduced the report and highlighted the timetable of events, the problems experienced, the corporate policy implications, the legal and employment law, future service provision and the recommendations for the OSC to consider.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Macdonald expressed huge sympathy with the health and safety issues experienced. She enquired as to whether or not the level of tonnage of garden waste falls during the winter months. She also asked if the council logged the type of complaints received during adverse weather conditions.

G Patterson explained that the recycling rate was 48% and therefore the peaks and troughs balanced out. The lack of garden waste during the winter is replaced with Christmas wrapping paper. He added that all complaints were logged.

Councillor Harris welcomed the idea of snow chains on boots as well as the idea to introduce winter tyres on the fleet. He also supported continuing with all grey or all green bin collections throughout this period. The complaint Councillor Harris raised was the lack of communication to councillors during the last time there was adverse weather and felt that it was useful to have up to date information to pass on to residents.

G Patterson replied having winter tyres on the fleet would not reduce the road blockages by abandoned vehicles. He felt that communications to councillors had improved last time and explained that it was very difficult; however they worked closely with the Communications team

Councillor White asked if the poor grit regime from Herts County Council (HCC) had impacted on DBC. He felt that residents understood the problems involved when there has been heavy snow, however they should be informed of the reasons behind the service disruption and explain what to expect. He suggested looking at other forms of communication than just social media sites and the website.

G Patterson understood resident's frustrations with regards to methods of communication; however it was not possible to reach everybody.

D Austin added that judgements had to be made as to the level of preparation and information given to residents prior to the adverse weather arriving. This could result in the council paying for provisions that were not required. He was satisfied that the HCC gritting was better than in previous years. He explained that now the council were doing all grey/all green bin collections it would be easier to communicate arrangements. The hanger distributed prior to the adverse weather did advise residents to check the website for details.

Councillor Anderson understood that it was difficult to reach everyone in the borough and suggested perhaps looking at adopting a collect all policy during these difficult periods. Following the points raised by committee members, he felt that the impact of snow chains on the vehicles and the roads was a big issue. He noted that the suggestion of winter tyres for the fleet would cost in excess of £120k. He concluded to note that he hoped the green bin collection would not get suspended over the Christmas period.

Councillor Bhinder suggested that DBC look to see what other council's do during these periods as it was a national problem. He felt that the snow chains were impractical and the cost of the winter tyres was ridiculous. He felt that resources should be spent on communicating with the residents.

Councillor Lloyd was grateful for the excellent collections in Flamsted. He felt that the report came across as being defensive yet there was no need for it to be like that. He did not feel it appropriate to say HCC provided poor gritting in a report, as this service was good and they were experiencing the same difficulties as DBC when trying to access roads. He agreed with Councillor Anderson that the green bin collections should continue during the Christmas period. He also suggested

that the council produces a communications policy and advertise the likely arrangements on a hangar and direct people to the website or the gazette.

Councillor Wood asked what the Clean, Safe and Green (CSG) team do during periods of bad weather. He also asked if it was possible for staff from different areas to help the crews with the catch up process.

D Austin explained that the CSG teams have a list of high priority areas to assist with gritting, for example neighbourhood centres and elderly dwellings. He added that it would be less efficient to have other services assisting with the catch up. There would also be issues with their terms and conditions. He reported that the cage vans did assist in picking up excess waste and any staff with a LGV licence contributes. The service was currently looking at communication issues and flexibility in response.

Councillor Anderson felt that the information leaflet given to residents about the grey/green bin collections could have been explained more clearly.

G Patterson said it was very difficult when designing leaflets as there was a fine balance between providing too little or too much information. The hangars had vastly been improved over the years.

Councillor Macdonald said that managing expectations was key. The policy and process should be explained to people and ensure that they all receive the same level of communication. The council should react to whole roads or neighbourhoods who clearly have not received any communication and therefore left the incorrect bin out for collection.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe felt that lots of information was being communicated, but the messages should be kept simple. Residents should be able to leave both bins out and therefore leaving it up to the crews to collect the correct one.

G Patterson would take this point forward; however there could be potential issues with restricting the footpath.

Councillor Wixted suggested using a recorded message on the telephone to advise the daily updates.

D Austin explained that they had used the telephonetics recorded system. It was very difficult to provide such a high level of detail as it was difficult to know how long there would be disruption.

Councillor Laws thanked the committee for their comments and asked for their thoughts on collecting recycling boxes over the Christmas period.

The committee felt that this should continue. If the green bin was not being suspended there was no need to suspend the recycling box collections.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning & Environment OSC recommended that:

- Officers improve communications during the periods of disruption.
- The green bin collection is not suspended over the Christmas period
- That residents can be allowed to leave both bins out during difficult periods and have the correct one collected

OS/102/11 WORK PROGRAMME

The following additions were made to the Strategic Planning & Environment OSC work programme:

19 July 2011 – Add:

- Core Strategy James Doe
- Photovoltaic Cells on Council property – C Taylor/F Williamson

20 September – Add:

- Verge Parking – David Austin

Members were reminded that they could email the Chairman of the committee or the relevant officer, should they wish an item to be added to the work programme.

The meeting ended at 9.55 pm.