

**MINUTES OF THE SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 7.30 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WEELEY**

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Aldis, R Callender, Colbourne, V E Guglielmi, Simons, and Talbot.

Also Present: Environment Portfolio Holder (Councillor Turner), Housing Portfolio Holder (Councillor P B Honeywood (except items 13 – 16 (part)), and Councillor Platt.

In Attendance: Head of Public Experience, Democratic Services Manager, Food and Health and Safety Manager (except items 18-21), Private Sector Housing Manager, Pollution and Environmental Control Manager (except items 18-21), Environmental Health Officer (PR) (except items 18-21), Democratic Services Officer (JCN).

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

14. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 July 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ABOVE MENTIONED MINUTES

The Committee wished it placed on record that it thanked the Facilities Manager (Damian Williams) for his help and support to the Chairman and Committee during the period before the new Democratic Services Manager commenced his employment with the Council.

15. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 15.3

There were none.

16. IMPACT OF THE NEW WASTE AND RECYCLING CONTRACT

The Environment Portfolio Holder (Councillor Turner) introduced his team and gave the political background to the Report of the Head of Public Experience, which sought to review the impact of the new Waste and Recycling service that commenced on 2 April 2012.

During questions from Members concern was raised about green waste not being collected for recycling and the plastics which were no longer collected by Veolia. It was confirmed that it was too expensive to collect green waste and that the Council would have opportunity to deal with residual waste including plastics in 2014 when the new Mechanical Biological Treatment Plant, opened in Basildon.

The Pollution and Environmental Control Manager gave highlights from the aforementioned report which gave comparisons between the previous and new contracts. The Council still had a weekly refuse collection from all properties with the addition now of a weekly food waste collection which had been funded by Essex County Council through an Inter Authority Agreement with a one-off capital sum for the purchase of food caddies and a linked revenue sum for the ongoing contract cost.

Prior to the commencement of the new service information was given to the public via six roadshows, radio advertisements on Dream 100, leaflets being delivered to every household and a series of presentations to town and parish councils.

The rollout of the service commenced in April with the delivery of red recycling boxes for paper and cardboard, food caddies, leaflets and calendar collection dates to households which took eight weeks to complete.

When the new service started in April 2012 the Council received 4,249 telephone calls which was six times higher than the figure from February. This number reduced in May to 1,805 and 1,134 in June. During the rollout period it was estimated around 8,000 calls were received and the Council also received over 1,700 emails during and after the rollout.

The aim of the Council was to increase recycling rates in the District by 5% from 28.22% (for the previous year) to 32.6%. It was reported that Council had achieved 33.28% for June which was the first full month of the new service.

RECOMMENDATION TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

(a) The Committee wished it placed on record that it had received a report on the progress of the new Recycling and Waste Contract and that it expressed its satisfaction of the new system.

(b) The Committee recognised communication with the public and publicity of the new system, and the reasons why different plastics could not be collected, could have been explained more clearly to them.

17. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR REGULATING CARAVAN ACCOMMODATION IN THE DISTRICT

The Committee had before it a report to enable it to review the Council's current arrangements for regulating caravan accommodation in the District.

The Environment Portfolio Holder (Councillor Turner) gave a brief overview of the report and informed the Committee of the Council's statutory duty to comply with Statutory Regulations such as food hygiene and health and safety requirements.

The Environmental Health Officer introduced a map showing the location of caravan sites in the District which varied from a small residential site of three units to larger sites which contained in excess of 1,000 units. The 35 licensed sites included seven privately owned licensed residential sites, 26 holiday sites and a further two mixed sites of holiday/residential units.

Details were given of legislation controlling caravan sites which was issued in 1989 by the Government and updated in 2008 and approved by the Council's Regulatory Committee in 2009, following consultation with the site licence holders. The revision incorporated new requirements particularly in relation to maintenance of sites and flood protection measures. The Environment Portfolio Holder had requested a review of the standard model conditions for holiday sites which was currently being undertaken by Environment Officers and, in consultation with the Fire Authority and site operators, additional conditions were being proposed to be added to site licences. He confirmed that the Cabinet was looking at best practice for all sites in the District.

The sites were routinely inspected by Enforcement Officers from Public Experience to ensure site conditions were met. Distance between caravans was an important safety issue and sanitation and toilet provision and electrical hook ups were also an issue.

During questions from Members it was raised that the conditions of the licence should include all caravans and not just those that were static. Concern was also raised about sites which currently had planning permission but which would be refused now due to flooding issues.

RECOMMENDED TO OFFICERS:

- (a) That the site licence apply to all caravans not just those that were static.
- (b) Ensure that all sited caravan units (new sited or relocated) were provided with an electrical hook-up point which met the current standard.
- (c) That each caravan unit had adequate sanitation facilities such as a shower/bath and toilet with satisfactory provisions for foul drainage, by the connection to a public sewer, or sewage treatment works, or by discharge to a properly constructed septic tank or cesspool.
- (d) That responsibilities be clarified for fire safety enforcement under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- (e) That the Emergency Planning Officer be asked to look at flood prevention issues at sites near or behind seawalls throughout the District.

18. REDUCING THE NUMBER OF EMPTY PROPERTIES IN THE DISTRICT

The Private Sector Housing Manager introduced a report for the Committee to review the success of the Council's Empty Homes Strategy 2009/2012 in bringing long-term empty properties back into use.

The Council had been given a real incentive to bringing long-term empty properties back into use by a financial reward to help deliver the Strategy. Between 2009 and August 2012 there had been a fall of 419 long-term empty properties which equated to 33% and exceeded the original target of 115 properties (10%).

There were a number of factors which were the reason for long-term empty properties and when a property had been vacant for more than six months and especially those vacant for a year or more, this was a matter for concern and needed further investigation. When there were no clear plans to bring those properties back into use then intervention on a staged basis was usually required to get things moving and there were a number of options available to the Council which were highlighted in the afore-mentioned report.

The Government had announced it was considering allowing Councils to reduce some of the Council Tax exemption periods for empty properties (uninhabitable up to a year, or empty for up to six months). This would allow Councils to raise a Council Tax charge after a shorter period to discourage a property being left empty. Additionally, allowing Councils to charge an extra 50% where the property had been left empty for more than two years, was also being considered.

The Housing Portfolio Holder (Councillor P B Honeywood) who was invited to give a political overview believed that people should be allowed to do with their own property what they wanted, however he added that if a property had been left neglected or empty for a long period the Council should intervene.

Members asked about lost Council Tax revenue, what would happen to a property that had been compulsorily purchased and how the value of the property would be worked out for compulsory purchase. Concern was also raised that a safety mechanism be put into place if the Council was given the power to take over a property under compulsory powers.

After further consideration of this item the Committee **RECOMMENDED:**

That if it was decided that a property was to be compulsorily purchased then it be referred to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee to be reviewed before being sent to the Secretary of State.

19. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the new items relevant to the terms of reference of the Committee contained in Forward Plan Numbers 130 and 131.

20. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the items to be discussed at the next three formal meetings of the Service Development and Delivery Committee.

21. URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

The meeting closed at 9.40 p.m.

Chairman