

MINUTES of the meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18th January 2011 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Pauline Tolson (Chair), Diane Revell, Steve Liddiard, Mike Stone and Wendy Curtis (substituting for Sue Gray).

Apologies: Councillors Sue Gray and Steve Veryard

In attendance: L. Magill – Head of Public Protection
A. Murphy – Head of Environment
S. Clark – Head of Finance
A. Winterflood – Park and Open Space Development Manager
M. Boulter – Principal Democratic Services Officer

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 2 November 2010 were approved as a correct record.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

17. OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

The Committee was given a brief update on the service and learnt that 259 complaints had been made last summer, mainly on days where there was hot weather, world cup football matches or bank holiday weekends. The service had worked over twenty six weekends and had served seven abatement notices, three of which had been breached. These had progressed to prosecutions and two seizures of equipment.

There were currently no plans to change the service. Following a further question it was clarified that residents could contact the service during the week and usually the day after the event. If someone was making persistent noise, the Council would go out and witness it before

taking action.

Police very rarely attended call outs for noise nuisance as they considered it not one of their priorities. However, if they had capacity they would attend. In most cases Environmental Health officers would attend a site.

The Council was working to publicise prosecutions and officers had met with the editor of the Thurrock Gazette to discuss such issues.

18. GENERAL FUND DRAFT 2011/12- BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Council had made nearly £10 million worth of savings for this year but this was based on a number of assumptions:

- Council tax would not increase next year.
- The Council would receive a grant of £1.4 million from central government to keep council tax at the same level. (Although it was noted this grant would be taken out of the Council's budget in four years time).
- Capital Programme spending was restricted but grants were being accessed to spend on ICT and Health and Safety.
- There was a pension fund deficit, although payments into this would be less this year.
- The Council would not contribute two lots of £1 million into two different reserves.
- Inflation would remain a pressure for the Council.

It was confirmed to the Committee that the Environment department's spend priorities contained in the report were considered the most important and essential. All costs were based on actual quotes the department had received for the work proposed.

In terms of playgrounds, officers explained that they proposed twelve flagship areas because this allowed for a good spread of flagship play areas across the borough and also allowed for further funding into pathways, bins, furniture and signage. It was confirmed that Aveley, Grays Beach and Corringham Town were high priorities for this scheme because there had associated youth schemes and other projects linked in with them.

There was a debate on the ICT spending proposals and Councillor Liddiard felt that no money should be spent on these projects until a third party had assessed each project for cost, proposed plans, benefits and necessity as he felt they needed further scrutiny. Officers agreed and stated that these proposals would require further investigation and sign off by Cabinet before they were agreed. The Committee felt, as a whole, that the ICT department needed some attention to bring it up to date.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The Committee consider the assumptions, including those on prudential borrowing and that the minutes recording the discussion be included in the budget report to Cabinet in February 2011.**
- ii) The Committee agree to the principal of reporting back to Full Council should the 2011/12 budget forecast not be contained within an overspend of £0.5 million.**
- iii) The comments on the capital spend programme be forwarded for Cabinet's consideration in February 2011.**

19. PLAY BUILDER

The Council was awarded funds for the play builder programme in December 2008. The Council took the opportunity to use the money to build a number of new playgrounds. The programme was a great success and the Council's work featured in a number of government documents including the Play Strategy and the Risk and Play report. In addition to this, officers attended national conferences to talk about their experiences on the programme, as well as held a seminar at Blackshots to engage communities and colleagues on the first play area in Fobbing.

The first seven play areas were chosen by the Council but the following areas for development were decided by the community through forums. Many residents felt the play areas were of no use because they were regularly vandalised but officers turned this perception around by working closely with young people in the areas to ensure the play area was valued and looked after.

Officers identified additional funding through partners such as Veolia but also the Lottery Fund. It was at times a challenge, especially as one play area was heavily vandalised, but officers persevered to identify community needs. In particular it became apparent that children preferred steel and modern play areas rather than traditional wood.

In response to questioning, officers stated that they had expected the worst vandalism to be in Aveley but this had not happened. This was due to a lot of community work pre-installation but also, the presence of youth community work around the play area after it was installed. Security presence during the construction and the design of the area that separated the young children and the teenager's area were also contributing factors.

Others successes included South Ockendon and West Thurrock where the play equipment had introduced more families into areas where there had been high instances of anti-social behaviour, which due to the presence of more families, was decreasing.

The success of the programme had been measured through the Tell Us Survey where Thurrock had improved 37% in terms of children enjoying and feeling safe in play areas in the borough. This had served to push Thurrock up the league table of Councils in this particular area.

There was a brief discussion around the placement of bins in these new play areas and it was explained that new bins could be introduced, although this would have a knock on effect on the cost of bin collections. If litter was dropped on the play area itself, this was collected by play area supervisors.

RESOLVED: The success of the Play Builder Programme be noted.

20. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That:

- i) Probation Service be invited to attend March's meeting.**
- ii) A Review on Human Trafficking be agreed with terms of reference and panel members to be agreed outside the meeting through group leaders.**

The meeting finished at 8.14pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**