

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
30 October 2012 (7.30 - 9.30 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Jeffrey Brace (Chairman), John Mylod (Vice-Chair), Dennis Bull, David Durant, Barbara Matthews and Linda Trew

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Billy Taylor

10 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 October were agreed, subject to one minor change to item 6, (the outsourcing of the Blue Badges was done by Department for Transport (DfT) not TfL). The minutes were signed by the Chairman.

11 HAVERING FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

The Committee had invited local representatives from Friends of the Earth (FoE) Havering to attend, following a letter that had been sent to all Councillors. FoE raised concerns in relation to Recycling in Flats and Energy Saving Measures they felt the Council should be undertaking. The representatives stated they understood the financial pressures on the Council; however they felt that there could be a real improvement made around recycling in low and high rise blocks. This would minimise the amount of waste going to landfill, given that the landfill tax would only increase. Friends of the Earth stated that it was their understanding that there was no doorstep collection available for residents of flats. They also felt there was a lack of education between staff and tenants about recycling.

Members explained that the Committee had carried out a lot of work on recycling and explained about the visits they had carried out to Shanks and other sites where the recycling is taken.

An officer informed the Committee that there were doorstep collections for flats and tabled a number of leaflets, both on recycling generally and also specifically for flat recycling. The scheme started in 2005/6 and had grown, so that all flats in Havering now received a recycling service. The officer agreed that the landfill tax would be increasing, however Havering was focussed on this, and had two plants which diverted between 500,000 –

600,000 tonnes of waste, which was in the region of 75% of waste being diverted. This was one of the largest diversion rates in the country.

The FoE also raised concerns about the predicted 2° rise in temperature of the earth by 2015. This needed to be reduced by 2050, and therefore emissions needed to be cut. The FOE representatives referred to the Havering Climate Change Strategy, but felt this did not address all issues. They had been working with Redbridge in the past, which had reviewed all Council services and had saved £500,000. This was through Transport, Energy and Housing. Officers stated that the Havering Transport Fleet had been reduced by 20% plus alternative vehicles had been trialled including LPG and natural gas. Officers would be interested in seeing the Redbridge paper as it was felt that there needed to be a lot of capital investment to achieve so many savings. Other initiatives that had been put in place from an energy efficiency view included LED lighting in all main council buildings, refitting of street lighting with LEDs and Solar Panels being used on Central Depot, MyPlace and Elm Park Library. Solar Thermal heating was also being introduced in the Leisure Centres.

Officers stated that each London Borough has a different amount of capital and other boroughs also have a larger amount of housing stock which could be sold for further capital. A Member stated that they had read in a recent newspaper article that scientists had discovered the actual temperature of the world had not increase in the last 16 years, and that it is likely in the 2020s that the both the Pacific and Atlantic cycle will be cold at the same time, therefore the world temperature may decline as it did in the Forties. However following this there is likely to be another warming trend that follows.

The representatives of FoE felt that all new build developments should include solar panels as part of the construction. Members stated that planning was legislated by Government and was not something that Havering could do in isolation. The Committee agreed that CO2 is necessary for plants to live, however there was also manmade CO2, which was harmful, although in the bigger picture this was very minimal.

The Committee thanked the representatives from Friends of the Earth for attending the meeting and sharing their concerns and hoped that they could see that Havering were carrying out a number of measures that would contribute towards the Climate Change Strategy.

The Head of Streetcare agreed to meet, at a later date, with the representatives from Friends of the Earth to discuss the recycling measures & performance in flats.

12 RIVER ROM MAINTENANCE

The Committee received an informative presentation on Flood and Water Management in Havering. The Flood and Water Management Act provided for better, more comprehensive management of flood risk for homes/business, and helped safeguard community groups from unaffordable rises in surface water drainage charges as well as protecting water supplies to the consumer. The Committee was informed that Havering was a lead local flood authority. Part of its duties included:

- Producing preliminary flood risk assessments in conjunction with Planning.
- Producing flood risk and flood hazard maps.
- Producing flood management plans.
- Co-ordination of flood risk management at a strategic level.
- Improve public participation in flood risk management.
- Co-ordination of flood risk management with the Water Framework Directive.
- Asset Management Register (Designation of structures).
- Consent body for ordinary watercourses (Environment Agency for main rivers).
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) and SuDs Approval Body for development works, the latter which would be in late 2013.

The Committee noted that the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) would run alongside any planning applications. SuDs are a technique that manages surface water and groundwater sustainably. It was extremely effective and key to source control. The benefits of SuDs were to reduce flooding, minimise diffused pollution, maintain or restore natural flow regimes, improve water resources and enhance amenities.

A member raised a concern about the River Rom at King George's Playing Field where new fencing had been erected. The officer stated that the issue had been taken up with the Environment Agency, as the Rom was a main river. The Committee were informed of other issues regarding the rivers in Havering, including a company who had been dumping cement into the River Ingrebourne at Dover's Corner in Rainham. Enforcement action was being taken by the Environment Agency.

The officer stated that he was consulted at the initial stage of any planning application for building on flood plains, and that an inspection is carried out during the construction stage to ensure that the correct and sufficient materials are being used.

13 UPDATE ON THE CARBON REDUCTION COMMITMENT AND ENERGY SAVING MEASURES

The Committee received a report updating them on the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) and the actions which the council had taken to improve its energy efficiency this year.

The Committee were informed that the CRC was a mandatory scheme aimed at improving energy efficiency and cutting emission in large public and private sector organisations. Organisations with over 6 millions kWh emissions were obliged by law to report their energy consumption figures back to the Department for Energy and Climate Change. In turn they were required to purchase “carbon credits”, the charge for which was calculated according to their consumption.

For Havering, the total emissions in 2011/12 were 23,000 tonnes. The total carbon allowance paid by the council for 2011/12, which came from the 2012/13 budget, was £280,000. The Committee were concerned that of this, 60% was attributed to schools, some of which were Academies, and therefore out of the Council’s control.

The officer informed the Committee that local authorities had lobbied the Department for Energy and Climate Change in order to review the CRC so that the Academies would be responsible for their own energy consumption.

The Committee were informed of the energy efficiency measures that had been carried out in the last year. The main focus had been on lighting, as this accounted for approximately 45% of the Council’s total electricity.

Energy efficient Light Emitting Diodes (LED) had been installed in the Town Hall and all subways. LED lights used up to 75% less energy than conventional light sources and lasted up to ten times longer. All road signs under the control of the Council were now lit by LEDs and operated only dawn to dusk, instead of a 24 hour operation. The Angel Way multi-storey car park was now completely lit by LED lighting and four schools had undertaken lighting conversions to LEDs.

14 BLUE BADGE ENFORCEMENT

The Committee received a verbal update on the Blue Badge Scheme. The Government had introduced a new scheme from January 2012, following a high level of fraud and abuse. This was categorised into two main areas: applying for a badge and not being entitled, and misusing a blue badge.

The administration of the scheme had been outsourced to Northgate. However the Council still received the applications to ensure they fit the criteria, but Northgate were responsible for issuing the badges.

Officers explained the criteria. If an applicant qualified for the higher level of disability allowance, then the application was sent direct to Northgate as an automatic qualification. All other applications were the subject of assessment, this could be a paper assessment, where the application and relevant other documents are assessed and then passed to Northgate. Alternatively a physical assessment was necessary, and the applicant was invited into the office to assess their eligibility.

All physical assessments were carried out by an Adult Social Care Occupational Therapist. This was the area where the backlog of applications had occurred, however an increase in resources had rectified this situation.

Officers explained that they received between 70 and 80 applications a week, of these 20-30 are automatic qualification and 50-60 need assessments. Approximately 10-20 physical assessments are carried out a week. At the time of the update the wait for a physical assessment was just over a week.

A member asked if applicants were unsuccessful whether they could reapply. Officers explained that if the applicant had a change of circumstances then they could reapply. Equally applicants could appeal against the decision, where an independent assessor would be employed to assess the application.

The Committee raised concern about signage to get to the PASC. They stated that there was no signage either from the shopping centre or the Liberty car park, and this needed to be improved especially for applicants coming for physical assessments.

15 SERVICE PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Given the time taken on previous items, the Committee agreed to defer this item to the next meeting.

16 FUTURE AGENDAS

A member requested that budgetary information should be made available for the next meeting of the Committee.

Chairman