

Public Document Pack

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
8 July 2014 (7.30 - 9.30 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Alex Donald, Ray Morgon (Chairman), Patricia Rumble, Carol Smith (Vice-Chair), Keith Roberts and Viddy Persaud (In place of Garry Pain)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Garry Pain

1 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced the details of the arrangements in case of fire or other events that might require the meeting room or building to be evacuated.

The Chairman asked that any mobile phones be either turned off or on silent.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Garry Pain, Councillor Viddy Persaud was substitute.

3 DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no pecuniary interests.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 April 2014, were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

5 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee noted its membership.

6 INTRODUCTION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee received a presentation giving an insight into how Overview and Scrutiny worked in Havering. It was important that the committee understood the difference between Executive decisions and those made by the Council. Members were informed that Council functions were explicitly the responsibility of the full Council and/or its Committees or staff on their behalf. Whereas Executive functions, were the responsibility of the Executive, meaning the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members, or staff on their behalf. The principal interest of an OSC was the Executive decision making function.

Overview and Scrutiny was the function by which Council decisions, or indeed any actions taken in connection with Council functions, can be reviewed and/or scrutinised. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are able to make reports and/or recommendations to each of full Council, Cabinet or any policy committee. These reports can be in connection with the discharge of any functions.

The Committee noted that the former local government minister, Nick Raynsford MP, once stated *“Scrutiny is a powerful tool to help identify weaknesses in existing policy and practice, as well as driving improvement”*

In Havering there were seven overview and scrutiny committees, five dealt with various aspects of Council services and were aligned with the overall goals of the Council. These were:

- Children and Learning
- Environment
- Individuals
- Towns and Communities
- Value

The other two – Crime & Disorder and Health were principally outward looking and scrutinised local crime and disorder-related issues and local health services respectively.

The Committee noted that only non-Cabinet members may sit on an overview and scrutiny committee, however there was nothing to prevent a Committee meeting with or questioning a relevant Cabinet member in order to aid aspects of scrutiny. Overview and Scrutiny meetings are open to the public and anyone, including Cabinet Members, may attend.

Each overview and scrutiny committee consisted of between six and nine members. Under the political breakdown rules, the political breakdown of the seats reflected, as far as was practicable, the make-up of the Council as a whole.

The Committee were informed that a major part of their work would be undertaking Topic Groups, either as part of an agreed work plan, or because a specific issue arises that needs investigation. The Committee itself would approve the terms of reference and the scope of its Topic Groups and can set parameters within which they will work. A recent change is that Council has agreed that Topic Group may include – or indeed be wholly comprised of – members who are not actually members of the parent OSC. Therefore if a member not on a particular OSC has expertise or an interest in an area being investigated by a Topic Group, he or she can take part if the committee agreed to their inclusion as a member of the Topic Group.

The factors for successful scrutiny Topic Groups were outlined to the Committee. The more tightly and realistically framed that the recommendation are, the more likely they are to be adopted/ implemented. Members are encouraged to look at various aspects of Council services, by meeting Council officers, holding discussions with the public and community groups and undertaking site visits both within Havering and to gain an understanding of the situations in other Councils.

The Committee was informed of the call-in process and how this would be dealt with by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The officer explained that often a special meeting of the OSC would have to be fixed at a date and time which may not be popular with all members of the committee.

The Councillor Call for Action (CCA) was a power that allowed any Member to bring a matter of concern to an OSC. The issue could not relate to planning, licensing, health and crime and disorder issues, as separate powers covered these areas. Members must have attempted to resolve the issue directly with the department concerned prior to bringing them to scrutiny in this way.

The Committee was informed that one change, enacted by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, was the requirement of each Council to nominate a Statutory Scrutiny Officer. This person was required to promote the role of Overview and scrutiny in the Authority as well as support all Members and officers in their work and dealings with Overview and Scrutiny. In Havering the Statutory Scrutiny Officer was Andrew Beesley, Committee Administration Manager.

7 INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE AREAS WITHIN THE COMMITTEE'S REMIT

The Committee received a presentation on the services within the remit of committee. These included all services covered by Streetcare, Public

Protection and Energy Strategy. Officers set out the Streetcare Objectives and how the service operated in order to meet these objectives.

Street Cleaning and Street Scene

The Committee was shown examples of street cleansing around the borough. Officers explained that the public litter bins now have clear sacks and more bins had been introduced over the last 5-6 years. By having clear sacks it was easier to identify the black bags that were residents waste or flytipping. The service worked with the 6th Form College, the Utilities companies and the Probation Services, on a non-paid service to assist with the cleaning of graffiti. Flytipping was one of the biggest problems for the enforcement team. The enforcement team consisted of 6 officers, which given the size of the borough was a relatively small team.

Waste and Recycling

Officers explained that the biggest area within Streetcare was around waste and recycling. Year on year improvements in recycling had been seen from 17% in 2005/06 up to 35% in 2013/14. Havering had the lowest cost of collection in London of £4.2 million.

The Committee were shown details of the Waste Disposal Unit at Frog Island. This was an established disposal facilities in place until 2027 with an additional 5 years should the contract wish to be extended. The contract was held with East London Waste Authority (ELWA) which included Havering, Barking and Dagenham, Newham and Redbridge.

There were a number of waste prevention events, the latest one was "Love Food, Hate Waste". This had been attended by over 4,500 people. Customer satisfaction had increased from 63% in 2008 to 85% in 2012.

Rivers and Water Courses

The Committee noted that following the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 the duty to maintain the water courses in the borough fell to the Council. This included the flood prevention as well as maintaining areas of natural beauty, conservation areas and wildlife habitats. Officers stated that there had been a lot of work on the River Ingrebourne around Hacton ward where ecological improvements had been made to reduce the risk of flooding. There were a number of flood plains in the borough, however the maintenance can only be carried out in the spring and summer months so it was short term work. Not all water courses can be dredged, as there are some sensitive sites in the borough with wildlife.

The Committee noted that when the Thames Barrier is closed the water backs up and it is often the water courses in the borough that then burst their banks and flood.

Highways

The Committee was informed that there was an inspection regime which was a rolling programme. Over the last 4 years there was a capital spend of £25 million. (£4.19 million spent by LBH on Carriageway & Footway works and £1.79 million spent by TfL on principal roads). There were often joint initiatives between Regeneration, Community Safety and the Police.

The inspection regimes looked at trip hazards of 25mm or over and potholes of 50mm and over. All the Area Liaison Officer adhered to this regime, given that Havering was the third largest borough in London there are a lot of roads and footpaths to assess and maintain.

The Committee noted that within the remit of Highways was the gritting of the roads in the severe weather conditions. There was a winter plan in place, and the new Central Depot which was built in 2010, had a new salt storage facility constructed in 2012 which held 2500 tonnes of salt. Each truck that went out in the winter months held approximately 5 tonnes of gritting salt. If the snow continued to fall, the services runs 24 hours, 7 days a week to ensure that each refuse run is clear. However some roads (cul-de-sacs) cannot be gritted as the lorry is unable to get down the roads. The team also have the obligation of ensuring that all schools are safe for the children to get into school.

Street Lighting

The Committee were informed of the inventory of street lights in the borough. These included:

- Cast Iron Column = approximately 524 (3%)
- Concrete Column = approximately 2350 (11%)
- Steel Column = approximately 14030 (69%)
- Belisha Beacons = approximately 200 (1%)
- Illuminated Signs = approximately 2200 (11%)
- Illuminated Bollards = approximately 900 (4%)
- Unlit Bollards = approximately 200 (1%)
- Housing Lamp Columns = approximately 2500

The structural testing of all columns is carried out over a 6 year rolling programme. If a column is found to be unsafe it is removed and a new one installed. However the utilities companies have to transfer the electricity, so it is often the case that there will be a new column and an old column next to each other until the power is transferred. Once the power is transferred then the old column can be removed.

All lighting is moving to LED lighting. This is better for safety and the fear of crime. There are already 6000 LEDs in place, with 8000 to be done and a further 4000 over the next 4-5 years. Overall this is a total saving of £150,000-£200,000. Members were shown photos of the difference in lighting with the new LED replacement lights.

Traffic and Parking Control

The Committee were informed that there were 6000 on-street parking places, and 2000 parking spaces in public car parks. 7 of the car parks in Havering had Park Mark status, a Police accreditation which recognises safe car parking facilities which are reviewed annually. There were a number of parking permits which were monitored as well as parking enforcement and challenges.

Members were reminded that all enquiries and reporting should be done through the Self Service section on the internet, or on the Members Portal. This way a reference number can be assigned and the enquiry can then be tracked.

Energy Strategy Team

The Energy Strategy Team was a team of three which was within the Corporate Policy Team. They were responsible for:

- Managing the Council's energy use.
- Delivering energy saving projects in Council buildings, fleet vehicles and street lighting.
- Delivering energy efficiency measures in Council housing.
- Securing grants for insulation and boiler replacements for Havering residents.
- Helping residents lower their energy costs, particularly those who struggled in the winter with their fuel bills.

The Energy Strategy Achievements were saving £1.3 million off the Council's energy bills over the past three years through heating, lighting and insulation upgrade; securing £4.5 million in grants for heating and insulation measures for Havering residents since 2010. They had provided assistance to over 2500 vulnerable residents facing fuel poverty over the past three winters by providing emergency assistance by way of food pack or warm packs.

Public Protection

The Committee were informed of the main functions covered by Public Protection, these included:

- Food safety (The testing of foods for quality and contamination. The service delivery was closely controlled by the Food Standards Agency. Animal feeding stuffs were also monitored to prevent disease spreading between animals and to humans e.g. Foot and Mouth Disease.)
- Health and Safety enforcement (The inspection of all non-manufacturing outlets in the borough. There now had to be a valid

reason for an inspection to be carried out, and these were now more topic based i.e. legionella.)

- Licensing (This came under the remit of Towns and Communities OSC)
- Trading standards (This was a very broad area, and was about protecting the consumer and vulnerable people in the community)
- Metrology service (A weights and measures service based at Langtons)
- Consumer Landscape Project with Havering CAB (The national CAB can refer to this service who can give more detailed advice to consumers.)
- Private sector housing (dealing with overcrowding, disrepair, houses in multiple occupation and illegal evictions/ harassment)
- Air quality (The service monitors air quality in the borough and works alongside the Energy Strategy Team to improve air quality for which the Mayor of London and TfL have granted funding. Officers explained that there was an “AirText” service which gave free air pollution forecasts on request using SMS for vulnerable people e.g. asthmatics.)
- Contaminated land (There were some 400 uncontrolled sites where waste has been deposited, largely uncontrolled, mainly in the south of the borough. Investigations were carried out on the land, as many had now been developed and had residential properties on them.)
- Noise, odour, light and other statutory nuisances. (Particularly for large works that were carried out, including the replacement of a railway bridge on the A127 at Ardleigh Green. There would need to be traffic diversions, and the trains would still have to operate.)
- Pest control advice (The council service for this ended some 8-10 years ago, however there are a number of private services who are members of the Trading Standards approved Buy With Confidence scheme that residents can be signposted to.)
- Financial investigations – into proceeds of crime.
- Stray Dogs service. (This service transferred from the police approximately 6-7 year ago. Officers stated that a dog is never put down, unless it has to be, they are either rehomed or returned to the owner.)

The officer outlined a number of achievements from Trading Standards, these included a major investigation into an international conspiracy to import and distribute counterfeit golf clubs and equipment which began in 2008. Although nine of the twelve conspirators were brought to trial in 2009, three were based in Thailand and opted to try and say there. They were finally brought to justice in 2013. As a result of this the authority had been nominated by Acushnet Golf, for the “Excellence in Anti-Counterfeiting Award” in recognition of the high level of success and commitment demonstrated by the authority.

Another successful scheme was the Banking Protocol Scheme, which had 30 local members and was about to sign up local post offices, the scheme

so far had saved residents over £600,000. The Halifax bank in Romford had won a Trading Standards Institute 'Hero' award in 2014 for their work with the Banking Protocol.

The Committee were informed of the priorities for Trading Standards under the National Intelligence Model. This included the control of doorstep crime (including the Banking Protocol) counterfeit goods, (especially, increasingly, electrical goods posing safety concerns) unsafe consumer goods (especially aimed at babies and young children), the sale of illicit alcohol and tobacco products, scam mail, business scams and underage sales.

Parks and Transport

The Committee was informed that there were 100+ Parks and Open Spaces within the borough. Seven of the parks had Green Flag Award status. The grounds maintenance for all these areas was in-house. There was a parks enforcement regime in place whereby patrols were done of the parks.

The Council owned a fleet of approximately 300 vehicles, these ranged from small van, mobility buses up to gritting lorries. The fleet is managed and maintained in-house and all driver and operators are training in the use of the equipment (cranes /tail-lifts). Most vehicles are fitted with a tracking device.

Waste and Recycling Collections Contract

The Committee were informed that from 4th August 2014, there would be a new waste and recycling collection contract with Serco Direct. Currently there were two vehicles that collected household refuse, one for the black bags and one for the orange bags. The new contract would be a new vehicle with two compartments. The contract runs for 7 years plus 3, this covers the cost of the 16 new vehicles. The vehicles would be a 65% /35% split, and this had been calculated on the refuse collected throughout the borough. The new service is being advertised in the "Living" in Havering publication that goes to all households, and a members briefing will be taking place on 27 and 28 July 2014. New doorstep collections will be introduced including the collection of batteries, textiles and small electrical appliances within the early stages of the contract. Collections in flats will remain the same, and will continue to have separate collections for black and orange bags.

Members asked questions about prosecutions in relation to littering and flytipping. Officers explained that it was very difficult to control, as you could not follow someone as this was very time intensive. The key was to educate residents and young children. If littering was occurring every day and residents could pinpoint exactly when and where it was happening, an enforcement officer could be in the area at that time.

Members felt that if prosecutions were made public this may prevent any offences.

The Committee thanked officers for a very full and interesting presentation.

8 **COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman suggested that since there had been a number of presentations on the remit of the Committee that members think about suggested topics for the work programme and inform the Committee Officer in due course.

Chairman

This page is intentionally left blank