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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE Town Hall, Main Road, Romford 2 September 2015 (7.35 - 10.10 pm)

Present:

Councillors Barbara Matthews (Chairman), Carol Smith, Michael White, Alex Donald (Vice-Chair), Patricia Rumble and Stephanie Nunn (In place of Barry Mugglestone)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Barry Mugglestone

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 18 June 2015 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

6 TREES AND WEEDS PROGRAMME

Weed Control

The Sub-Committee received an interesting presentation on the current maintenance programme for weeds in the borough. It was noted that the current contract was held by S.H. Goss. This contract would soon be renewed or retendered as the two years contract was due to expire.

The cost to remove weeds on the carriageways in the borough was approximately £76,000 per annum. All roads were treated with a Glyphosate based herbicide this was the only approved chemical for use on the highway. This herbicide had a “contact action” therefore there needed to be active growth for the spray to be effective.

It was noted that previously a residual weed killer was used, much the same as could be used be purchase in local stores, however these could not be used on the highway as it was found that too much was contaminating the water system.

The roads were sprayed four times a year, during the growing season March to October. Each period of spraying takes approximately 7 – 8 weeks, and it took 21 days for the weeds to die back once they had been sprayed.

At times of inclement weather when the herbicides were not as effective, the teams manually removed weeds from the roads. Particular problem species for example, Knotgrass and Mares Tail were particularly resistant.

The contractor supplied weekly updates to the service, detailing areas completed, areas where manual removal had taken place and any ward specific issues.

Members enquired about where weeds were coming through from resident's gardens or on privately own land. Officers stated that it was the landowners/ residents responsibility to ensure that weeds were kept under control. Where necessary a Community Protection Notice could be served stating that the weed should be cleared from their property and to avoid it from trailing onto the highway.

Members asked about how the service dealt with the contractors spraying the wrong plants? Officers stated that this did happen, however if it is reported then the service would investigate and get the contractor to put it right.

Tree Maintenance/ Pruning

The borough had in excess of 273,000 trees made up of various species. This was at a cost of approximately £530,000 a year for the maintenance and pruning. All highway trees were scheduled for pruning as part of the Whole Street Pruning Programme. This was either three or five years depending upon the size and species of the tree. Trees are inspected prior to any pruning to confirm the works required to maintain the tree. During these inspections further information was gathered about each individual tree, including the species, current size and any damage to the tree. All this information was stored on a database and was used to provide an up to date record of the management of each tree. This information was used to plot the history of the tree, along with any complaints, insurance queries and amenity value.

The Sub-Committee noted that some species produce a large amount of basal growth, which can create hazards on the highway along with sightline problems for drivers. During Early May the contractor was instructed to remove this basal growth, this was relevant to approximately 3000+ trees. The feathering programme was specifically to Limes and The Sugar Maple species and took two months to complete.

Members asked if trees were ever removed at the request of residents. Officers stated that unless there was an issue with the health of the tree, or it was damaged or dangerous, then the tree would not be removed. Where trees were removed, due to damage or health, a replacement was always sited in keeping with the street scene. The stock of trees was kept at the same level.

Officers informed the Sub-Committee about the encroachment of tree roots. When a resident reports a suspected tree root problem a “Burden of Proof” letter is sent. This asks the resident to expose any roots evident on their property. A Tree Officer will carry out an inspection to confirm if the intrusion is evident, if only minor roots are evident on site, with the resident’s permission, the Tree Officer will remove them. If major roots are evidenced then pictures and a report are sent to the borough’s Insurance Department to make a decision on the actions to be taken.

Officers explained that tree roots on the public highway would be looked at if they were causing damage. In high footfall areas resin bases at the bottom of trees helped, and were also easier to sweep and clean.

The Sub-Committee thanked officers for a very informative presentation.

7 FLYTIPPING AND ENFORCEMENT

The Sub-Committee received a presentation on Flytipping in Havering. Officers explained that the definition of fly-tipping by DEFRA was the unlawful deposit of waste on land without the authority of the land owner. This could be a single black bag or one or more tipper loads. The responsibility of removing the fly-tip was dependant on whose land it was on and the nature of the waste. The removal of fly-tipping had a large financial impact to the Council.

The Sub-Committee was shown a number of graphs setting out the number of fly-tips reported in Havering, the type of waste and the size of waste. It was noted that not all fly-tips would be reported as the majority could be collected by the street cleansing team, who would not report as a fly-tip.

The majority of fly-tips were household waste (54%), commercial waste was a smaller proportion (1%). Certain areas in the borough were more prevalent for fly-tipping, the known costs of fly-tipping in Havering were over £400,000 but the unmeasured costs are likely to be nearer to £1 million.

The role of a Streetcare Enforcement Officer was explained. The primary task was to reduce waste which would in turn save a large sum of money. It was noted that it was often difficult to identify flytipping, and where this was the case, the landowners or residents in the area would have to pay the cost of the removal. Where evidence was found of the source of the flytip, the individual was invited to attend an interview to explain why they lost control of their waste. The officer would then decide on the appropriate action. Where sufficient evidence to the substantiate enforcement action is found, and it appears to be in the public interest to proceed, officers will prepare a legal file.

Officers outlined the causes of people flytipping and examples of where CCTV had been erected in more remote parts of the borough which had been successful in catching people flytipping which had led to convictions.

The Sub-Committee thanked the officers for a very informative presentation.

8 FUTURE AGENDAS

At its next meeting the Sub-Committee would look at the following items:

- Food Standards Scheme
- Parking in the Borough for residents
- Commuter Parking
- Corporate Performance Indicators
- Composting Scheme (Bags and Bins)

Chairman