

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT**

Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2007 at 6 pm  
in Committee Room 3, The Council House, Dudley

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs Turner (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Ms Craigie, Finch, Ms Foster, Ms Harris, James, Kettle,  
Stanley and Tomkinson

### **Officers**

Director of Law and Property (as Lead Officer to the Committee),  
Director of Finance, Assistant Director – Building Services, Assistant  
Director - Environmental Management, Assistant Director -  
Development and Environmental Protection, Head of Street Care, Head  
of Engineering, Construction Manager, Area Housing Manager  
Stourbridge (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services)  
and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property).

### **Also in Attendance**

Four members of the public

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31 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of  
Councillors Harley and Lowe.

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32 **APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBER**

It was reported that Councillor Ms Foster had been appointed as a  
substitute member for Councillor Lowe for this meeting of the  
Committee only.

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33 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Member's Code of Conduct the following  
Members declared a personal interest in the matters stated, as follows:-

Councillor Ms Harris in agenda item No 6 (Proposed Revenue Budget  
2007/08) insofar as reference was made to Learning Disabilities  
Services in view of her being the Chair of Dudley Primary Care Trust.

Councillor Ms Craigie in agenda item No 12 (Review of Zonal Housing Repairs and Service Standards for Repairs) in view of her being the Secretary of Dudley Residential Leaseholders Association.

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### MINUTES

#### RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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### PUBLIC FORUM

#### Green Waste Composting Facility at Iverley Park Farm, Iverley

The Chairman of Norton and Iverley Action Group, together with three other representatives attended the meeting to object about the Green Waste Composting Facility at Iverley Park Farm, Iverley and also regarding the future development of the site, as had been indicated by Simpro Limited. Photographs that had been taken showing air pollution in the area were also circulated

The site was situated on the County Lane boundary on the A451 Stourbridge to Kidderminster Road and was operated by Simpro Limited of Wolverhampton. Staffordshire County Council had given permission for the facility in 2004 and the function was now fully operative

The Chairman of the Norton and Iverley Action Group reported that the Group were supporters of all forms of recycling of waste materials but remained vehemently opposed to this particular site, due to its location. The facility was approximately 150 yards away from Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's boundary and damaging emissions were being blown over the Norton area – in particular Sandy Road and Greyhound Lane and their tributary roads and avenues. Stourbridge Lawn Tennis Club also lay in the pathway inhaling the stench and bio-aerosols that were being emitted.

Further comments were made by the representatives regarding noise and foul odours and it was pointed out that 211 recorded complaints had been made during the period June 2005 to May 2006 and 259 complaints from May 2006 to October 2006, which showed an increase. In addition to the individual recorded complaints, the Stourbridge Lawn Tennis and Squash Club had registered 1400 complaints because outdoor activities were affected by the emissions from the site. It was further commented that local residents were being affected by foul odour, noise and bio aerosol fungal spores from the green waste site, which could damage health, particularly to individuals who suffered from asthma or who had their immune system damaged by radiation or chemotherapy treatments.

The Chairman of the Action Group further informed the meeting that a study had been conducted by ADAS UK Limited and the findings were below the level of concern for the Environment Agency. However, it was reported that the operators were aware that air quality measures were to be taken and they may have taken action to reduce the impact of the operation at that time.

In response to the concerns expressed by the Action Group, the Assistant Director - Development and Environmental Protection, advised that this Council were not the enforcing Local Authority. However, she confirmed that they were liaising closely with South Staffordshire District Council, the Environmental Agency and other regulating agencies to monitor the situation. She reported that a request had been received to commission ADAS UK Limited and stressed that they were a national independent agency but acknowledged the fact that prior notice may have been given to the operators. The Assistant Director also reported that ADAS UK Limited had been commissioned to take tests across the area in respect of airborne contaminants and that as the results from the tests were considered by the Environment Agency to be within national guidelines they were therefore at that time satisfactory. South Staffordshire District Council would look to monitor the effect of trials and look at their evidence in relation to any enforcement action.

In concluding, the Assistant Director – Development and Environmental Protection, reported that South Staffordshire District Council were undertaking work with Simpro Limited to conduct a trial to test a new probiotic compound, which should help to reduce the odour. If the odour did not improve, further monitoring without notifying the operators, would be undertaken with a view to determining whether to serve a notice on Simpro. She further reported that regular updates were being requested from South Staffordshire District Council and Officers from this Council attended regular meetings with Simpro and that the next meeting was due to be held on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2007.

A Member requested that an update on the situation be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

A Member commented that there were various cross border local authority issues and it was suggested that, as part of next year's work programme for the Committee, a Working Group should be set up to investigate these issues.

#### RESOLVED

1. That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee detailing the outcomes of the probiotic compound trial and an update on the issue.
2. That cross border issues be considered as part of the work programme for 2007/8.

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REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2007/08

A joint report of the Directors of the Urban Environment, Adult, Community and Housing Services and Finance was submitted on the proposed Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2007/08 and the Revenue Budget Strategy for 2007/08 for later years. It was noted that the proposals contained in the report had been approved by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2007.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet's Budget proposals for 2007/08 be noted and that no observations be made on the proposals.

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37

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

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A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the performance of the Council in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the second quarter of 2006/07, relating to performance for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2006 to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2006.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report and Appendices to the report, submitted on the Quarterly Corporate Performance Management report relating to the performance for the activities relevant to the terms of reference of this Committee for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2006 to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2006, be noted.

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WEDNESBURY TO BRIERLEY HILL METRO EXTENSION

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on current progress and key issues in relation to the development and the implementation phases of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report now submitted, regarding current progress and key issues in relation to the development and the implementation phases of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension, be noted.

## GULLY CLEANING SERVICE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Council's responsibilities in respect of cleaning and maintaining its highway gullies and outlining the Council's resource capacity in the delivery of the service.

Arising from the presentation of the report Members welcomed the purchase of the new large tanker and commented that it would help in cleaning gullies faster.

A Member referred to the recent spate of manhole covers being stolen and commented that this was a public danger and queried what preventative steps the Council were taking. Other Members also commented on this and concurred that it was dangerous and could present a huge liability for the Council. It was suggested that the impact of stealing manhole covers should be advertised and people should be urged to report anyone that was seen to be stealing. Further comments referred to a similar problem in that road signs were also being stolen, which created confusion. In response the Head of Street Care advised that the local police had been contacted and further commented that this was a borough wide issue and did not happen in any particular area.

A Member referred to the creeping loss of gardens resulting from either homeowners tarmac over the front gardens or by new housing developments that had smaller gardens. This, it was considered, gave rise to more flooding as gardens naturally soaked up water. It was pointed out that London Boroughs were considering the introduction of byelaws to stop people from tarmac their front gardens and it was suggested that this Council should consider a similar recommendation.

### RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report now submitted, on the work undertaken by the Street Maintenance Section in respect of managing the highway drainage maintenance budget, be noted.
- (2) That the internal and external factors that were adding greater pressure on the capacity of the existing budget to deliver an adequate cleaning and highway drainage maintenance programme, be noted.
- (3) That the 2006/07 budget growth of £50k for gully cleansing, the purchase of a new gully tanker and the measures being introduced to improve the service, be noted.

- (5) That the Cabinet Member for the Environment be recommended to consider arrangements to control paving or tarmac-ing of front gardens due to the impact of flooding.
- (6) That the Director of the Urban Environment be requested to consider advertising measures highlighting the impact of stealing manhole covers and signs and also giving out a contact number to report anyone that was seen to be stealing.

### PATCH-WORKING AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on progress made over the last two years with patch-working across the Council's housing estates and its impact on estate management.

Arising from the presentation of the report several Members commented that there were flaws in the system and that there was no consistent method used by Housing Managers. It was commented that home checks were being instigated but that there was no feedback and further "walkabouts" a few months later revealed that work still had not been undertaken. Members also commented that they were not given sufficient notice informing them of forthcoming "walkabouts" and did not receive notification or, if received, a certain date and time were dictated. Complaints were also made with regard to the time taken for enforcement action to be taken to address breaches of tenancy conditions.

In responding the Area Housing Manager for Stourbridge reported that the idea of introducing home checks was to enable the Housing Managers, Councillors, tenants representatives and the Police to work together. It was further pointed out that although upon another "walkabout" the problem may not have been solved, this did not necessarily mean that the problem had not been addressed.

During the ensuing discussion Members reported on several problems that had been encountered and commented that some Housing Managers did not have a clear understanding of the system and that there was a lack of communication. It was also suggested that Members should always be involved and consulted to ensure a smoother operation and that if patch working was to continue, and for it to be effective, it should be tied in with neighbourhood management.

In responding the Area Housing Manager for Stourbridge informed Members that the problems that were being experienced should be reported to the relevant Area Manager or the Principal Housing Manager so that they could be addressed. She further undertook to include the comments made at this meeting as part of the review process. Upon a further query the Area Housing Manager for Stourbridge undertook to provide Members with statistics and outcomes of the home check visits, including follow-up action.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report now submitted, on the work undertaken with patch working, be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to consider the comments made by Members and to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee detailing actions to address inconsistency and communication problems together with details and statistics on home check visits and follow-up action.

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TENANT PARTICIPATION

A report of the Director of the Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on progress with the implementation of the Tenant Participation review.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report now submitted, on the work undertaken with the implementation of the Tenant Participation review, be noted.

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REVIEW OF ZONAL HOUSING REPAIRS AND SERVICE STANDARDS FOR REPAIRS

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the reduction of the backlog of non-urgent repairs within Housing Services, providing an overview of how the current Housing Repairs service operated and advising of performance improvements, within the repairs service, since 2003/04.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member reported that when she had chased up certain repair jobs she had received an email indicating that the job had been cancelled because Officers had not wanted to undertake the work. In response the Assistant Director – Building Services advised that work was only cancelled if jobs had repeatedly been reported or if Officers had not been able to gain access to the property. He also assured Members that cancelling jobs because Officers did not want to undertake a job was not part of the process and requested that the email be forwarded to him for investigation.

During the ensuing discussion a Member commented that overall the repairs service was a success but complaints were received in respect of job satisfaction and the quality of work undertaken. Officers were undertaking work and hitting targets but people were not receiving quality. It was further commented that tenants were only receiving sheets to sign if a good job had been done and where the job was flawed tenants were not receiving sheets to sign. A Member also referred to the Housing Call Centre and reported that it was difficult to get through and tenants were left holding on for some considerable time. It was requested that detailed statistics should be provided on how long tenants were left hanging on the telephone, as it was very stressful. Members also complained about the time taken for repairs to be undertaken and another Member queried the procedures and steps the Council were taking to help people with low vision who were unable to read the tenant information sheets.

In responding the Assistant Director – Building Services clarified the timing for repairs and inspections and stressed that Officers were working hard and improvements had been made but acknowledged that further improvements were still required. With regard to the tenant information sheets and people who had low vision he stated that tenants usually relied on family members but he acknowledged that it was an issue and undertook to refer it to Housing Managers for consideration.

In response to a further query, the Assistant Director – Building Services reported that they had stopped providing customer satisfaction slips to tenants after every job and now only sent them out to a percentage of tenants for them to complete and send back. It was also reported that a supplementary telephone survey was also to be conducted following repairs that had been undertaken. A Member requested that findings from the survey should be submitted to Members of the Committee.

## RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report now submitted, be noted and that the principles of the new service initiatives as detailed within paragraphs 31 – 38, be supported.

- (2) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to submit the findings arising from consideration of the customer satisfaction slips that had been received to all Members of the Committee.
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CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on a recommendation from the Select Committee on Environment (Choice Based Lettings) Working Group to change the pilot area for Choice Based Lettings from Central Dudley to Stourbridge and Halesowen.

RESOLVED

- (1) That approval be given to the recommendation of the Choice Based Lettings Working Group to change the pilot for Choice Based Lettings from Central Dudley to Stourbridge and Halesowen.
- (2) That the revised timetable for the work programme of the Working Group as shown in Appendix A, attached to the report now submitted, be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.

CHAIRMAN