

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Tuesday, 27th January, 2004 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor Sheppard (Chair)
Councillor Mrs. Coulter (Vice Chair)
Councillors Banks, Davies, Hanson, Mrs. Millward, Ryder, Stanley and Whitehouse, together with the Director of Law and Property (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Director of the Urban Environment, the Assistant Director of Housing (Building Services), the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Mr. Butler, Mr. Isherwood, Ms. Palmer and Mr. Powell (Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mr. Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property).

IN ATTENDANCE AS AN OBSERVER

Councillor J. Woodall (Lead Member for Transportation).

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8th December, 2003, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Whitehouse declared a personal interest in paragraph 3.4.1 of agenda item no. (5) (Proposed Revenue Budget 2004/05) insofar as it related to Credit Union Support in view of his membership of the Castle and Crystal Credit Union.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Jackson and Mrs. Patrick.

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SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Davis and Mrs. Millward were serving in place of Councillors Mrs. Patrick and Jackson, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee, only.

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2004/05

(At this juncture, on being advised that the proposals for budget reductions relating to health research referred to the Council's contribution to the Centre for Health Action Research and Training (CHART), Councillor Whitehouse declared a Prejudicial Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in view of his directorship of CHART).

A joint report of the Director of the Urban Environment, Director of Housing and Director of Finance, was submitted on the proposals of the Executive for the revenue budget and Council Tax for 2004/05.

In introducing the report, the Director of Finance referred to the perceived implications of the anticipated revenue support grant settlement in terms of the effect on services for 2004/05 and the level of increase of the Council Tax. He also outlined the nature of the proposals for growth and savings, with particular reference to the Urban Environment and Housing elements, for which this Committee had responsibility for overview.

In the discussion, concerns were expressed by certain Members about the savings proposed in relation to home to school transport, Sustainability Advice and Reserves and Environmental Awareness. Regarding the latter issue, particular reference was made to the desirability of maintaining support for the Environment Zone.

RESOLVED

(1) That the Government's proposals for revenue support grant in 2004/05, as indicated in the report now submitted, be noted.

(2) That the Executive be advised of the concerns of the Committee regarding the proposed budget reductions in home to school transport, sustainability advice and reserves and environmental awareness.

HOUSING REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS

A report of the Director of Housing was submitted updating the Committee on the work being undertaken by the Working Group on Housing Repairs and Housing Improvement Options.

The Working Group had met twice. At the initial meeting, at which its work programme was agreed, the Group had decided that it wished to consider whether there should be changes to tenants' responsibilities for repairs and had also agreed to invite Chairs of Area Housing Panels to attend to discuss the management of devolved repairs budgets.

At the second meeting, which the Lead Member for Housing had attended, the draft Programme for 2004 to 2007 had been considered, together with the methodology for dealing with, and resourcing the backlog of routine repairs. The Working Group had considered that the draft Budget should also be considered by Area Housing Panels. The second meeting had also received a comparison of the repairs service in Dudley with that provided by Leicester City Council, a Beacon authority which had received a 3 star rating from the Audit Commission for its repairs service. Practices in Leicester differed from those in Dudley in a number of respects and, in particular, offered a different level of service to elderly and disabled tenants, compared to other tenants. In considering the Leicester model, the Working Group looked at the aspects it would like to have included in Dudley's provision.

In the discussion on this issue, the Assistant Director of Housing (Building Services) indicated the likely funding streams which it was proposed would resource the reduction in the backlog of routine repairs. These would include monies from other programmes within the Housing Service, which were drawing to a close.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, and the work being undertaken by the Working Group, be noted.

An interim report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress on Sustainable Development and Local Agenda 21, over the previous twelve months.

Appendix A to the report now submitted summarised the main activities and processes being carried out to further sustainable development aims within the Borough. These included aspects relating to renewable energy and energy management within both the Council and the Housing Sector and indicated how the Council was engaging with the strategic environmental partnership and communities in this regard. In relation to the latter issue, the Appendix reported progress on working with DOSTI to set up a community and environmental project and on the Green Steps Campaign, school activities, and the Community Pride competition. The report also gave brief details on the issues being reviewed by the various Local Agenda 21 Working Groups which had been set up.

In the discussion on this issue, the Director of the Urban Environment empathised with one member who emphasised the importance of the Eco Schools Initiative, in the context of sustainable development. The Director indicated, however, that while officers would be looking at all options to enable the continued funding of the Environment Zone, this was likely to be dependent on assistance from schools in funding being forthcoming. Regarding the use of wind turbines, some concerns were expressed about the siting of the apparatus, especially when this was in close proximity to housing. The issue of the purchase of green energy by the Council was raised, in response to which the representative of the Directorate of the Urban Environment, Claire Palmer, confirmed that this was already being used at the Council House, Dudley, and that consideration was being given to extended purchases to other properties in the future.

Reference was made in the discussion to the limitations of the application of the Home Energy Grant and on its impact on elderly people. Consideration was also given to issues regarding energy management in so far as the sustainability agenda was concerned.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted be noted.
- (2) That further reports be submitted to a future meeting in relation to home energy grant and energy management within the Council.

GREEN FLEET ISSUES

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted indicating current environmental activities pertaining to the Council's fleet of alternatively fuelled vehicles and issues relating thereto.

An example of an electrically- powered van had been available for inspection prior to the meeting.

In the discussion on this issue, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) confirmed that vehicles were procured on the basis of the technical specification being matched to the needs of the customers and the surrounding terrain. Tenders requested options for alternatively powered vehicles.

RESOLVED

That the report now submitted be noted.

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CAR PARKING STRATEGY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted setting out the current position in respect of car parking strategy and seeking consideration of proposals for a revised policy.

RESOLVED

That the proposals in the report be supported and that, accordingly, the Executive be recommended:

- (1) That in accordance with the recommendation of the government guidance and in support of the policies promoted in the West Midlands Local Transport Plan and Draft Dudley Unitary Development Plan, a comprehensive Car Parking Strategy be developed that addresses the following issues:
 - On street parking
 - Off street parking
 - Tariffs
 - Private non residential parking
 - Social inclusion
 - Information security and design
 - Enforcement
 - Parking standards
 - Secure a car parking regime at Merry Hill consistent with car parks in other town centres of the Borough
- (2) That the strategy be developed in accordance with the programme specified at appendix 1 to the report now submitted becoming a Supplementary Planning Document, which provides the detailed guidance to car parking policies contained within the Revised Deposit Unitary Development Plan and to policies which will be contained within the Core Policies of the Local Development Document.
- (3) That the resources to carry out the development of the strategy be sourced internally and financed from the Local Transport Plan settlement Integrated block to the value of £100,000.

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THE ENFORCEMENT POLICY OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DIVISION OF THE DIRECTORATE OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted seeking support for the Enforcement Policy of the Development and Environmental Protection Division of the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

RESOLVED

That the Enforcement Policy for the Development Environmental Protection Division of the Directorate of the Urban Environment, as appended to the report now submitted, be supported.

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FOOTPATH/CYCLE WAY AT KINLOCH DRIVE, EARLS KEEP ESTATE, DUDLEY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on issues relating to the requested closure, by residents, of a footpath/cycle way link from Kinloch Drive, Earls Keep, Dudley, to the Dibdale public open space area.

The history to the matter and the legal position appertaining to it, were indicated in the report now submitted. In the discussion on the matter, the Lead Officer to the Committee clarified the latter issue.

Residents of Kinloch Drive were in attendance and were permitted to speak by the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the committee recommend the Lead Member for Transportation to agree to the making of an application be made to the Magistrates' Court under Section 116 of the Highways Act, 1980, for an Order to stop up the footpath/cycle way link from Kinloch Drive, Earls Keep, Dudley, to the Dibdale public open space area.

The meeting ended at 9.05 p.m.

CHAIR

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