

Notes of the Planning and Environment Commission's meeting on 6 December 2005 with Councillor Sara Bolton – Council Cabinet Member for Environment and Direct Services

Those present:

Councillors: R Baxter, P Berry (Chair), S Bolton, L Care, M Carr,

Officers: I Donnelly, N Norwood, D Romaine J Winters

The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed Councillor Bolton and thanked her for her attendance. The Chair then explained that the purpose of the meeting was to enable the members of the Planning and Environment Commission to update Councillor Bolton on the outcomes of the reviews they had conducted on the Council's use of energy and on the abatement of mercury emissions from the Crematorium. He said that the Commission also wanted to obtain feed back from the Cabinet member on the actions that had been taken in response to the recommendations made as a result of its review of dog control and dog fouling.

Those attending the meeting were provided with an agenda and background information on each of the three items that were to be discussed.

The meeting first considered the outcome of the Planning and Environment Commission's review of the ways in which the Council might comply with DEFRA's requirement to control Mercury Emissions from Crematoria.

Councillor Bolton thanked the Commission for the work that it had carried out and confirmed that she would inform Council Cabinet of the Commission's recommendations.

Councillor Bolton said that the Environmental Services Directorate would need to get clarification from DEFRA on how burden sharing would work and she pointed out that there would be a need for Markeaton Crematorium to work in partnership with Bretby and Bramcote Crematoria so as to co-ordinate their refurbishment work.

Councillor Bolton told the Commission members that she and John Winters – Director of Environmental Services, both agreed with the recommendations of the Commission, although she said it would be necessary for Environmental Services to do some more work to investigate the viability of the Commission's Recommendation 3(b).

The meeting then considered the outcome of the first stage of the Planning and Environment Commission's review of energy use by the City Council. The Co-ordination Officer gave the background to the work that had been done and outlined Professor Fleming's recommendations which were to:

1. Develop a comprehensive energy strategy addressing both Council buildings and the wider community

2. Establish a member led working party to take an overview of the energy issues facing the Council
3. Identify the location of all electricity and gas meters on Council property and introduce a centralised billing system. This will help to ensure that the Council only pays for the energy it uses and will enable a better understanding of energy use

Neil Norwood – Energy Manager (NN), said that he had done some further work on estimating future energy costs and was of the opinion that they were likely to increase next year by 40-75%. He confirmed that at present the Council was only recording the cost, not the amount, of the energy it used. He said that there were problems with the current billing arrangements and gave an example of a site with no gas supply where a gas cost of £3500 had been charged against its budget. NN also said that the Council had received energy bills for sites that had been demolished. He said that an exercise to identify the location of all the energy meters and a centralised billing system would help to resolve this kind of problem and would help the Council to monitor and control energy use.

NN also said there were issues with water use and billing, and he told the meeting that the Council had received a bill for £29,000 for water use at Markeaton Park. He thought this might be due to a leak.

There was general discussion about what the Council might do to resolve these issues. Councillor Bolton expressed her positive support for the work that the Commission was doing. She confirmed that she would move the matter forward.

The final item was in response to the decision of the Commission at its meeting on 21 November 2005 to ask the Council Cabinet member about the action would be taken in response to the recommendations resulting from the review of dog control/dog fouling.

Councillor Bolton outlined the actions that had been taken so far in response to the Commission's recommendations. She said that monitoring forms had been provided and were being used by Pest Control Officers when they went out on routine visits. Councillor Bolton also confirmed that a meeting with the Parks Department had been arranged for 16 December at which it was hoped to make arrangements for the Rangers to monitor dog fouling on the parks.

Councillor Bolton said that Environmental Health and Trading Standards was awaiting guidance from DEFRA on the new legislation and was talking to other local authorities about best practice so that it could benchmark its services. She said that she was disappointed it had still not been possible to take any prosecutions but thought that one way forward was to make dog owners more responsible, especially in the vicinity of schools and parks.

Ian Donnelly – Group Leader, Public Health (ID), then told members of the actions that his Group had taken in response to the Commission's recommendations.

ID said that DEFRA had put back the date when Dog Control Orders will become effective to October 2006 or possibly October 2007. ID confirmed that he had received some training on how the new legislation would work. He said that the legislation would enable local authorities to include all land in Dog Control Orders and to set their own fixed penalties.

ID said that local authorities would have to justify Dog Control Orders to DEFRA and that it was a requirement of the legislation that they consulted the public on the making of the Orders. He said that the level of the fixed penalty that could be imposed would need to be realistic and this was something they hoped to explore through the benchmarking exercise.

ID confirmed that they had contacted the Police to see what they would be transferring to the Council when they stopped being responsible for stray dogs. He said they had been told by the Police that they had no resources to transfer. ID said that he had been in contact with the RSPCA about the possibility of using kennels at Abbey Street as holding kennels.

On staffing and resource levels ID said that they had gone back to basics to see how they might improve the service and make savings.

The Chair thanked ID for the information he had provided but said that he felt the public had the impression that the Council was not doing anything. He said that there was a need to tell the public what the Council was doing.

Councillor Carr said that there was a need to improve the efficiency of the service and make better use of resources. He did not think that it was reasonable to spend so much time transporting dogs to kennels. He suggested targeting particular areas with the aim of making an example of offending dog owners. He was disappointed that DEFRA had put back the date when Dog Control Orders would come into effect.

Councillor Baxter also considered that the Council should concentrate on particular areas and try to take action against offending dog owners. He suggested that observations might be more effective if the Council Officers were not in uniform. ID agreed that this might be a way forward but said that it would require Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) authorisation.

Councillor Bolton confirmed that this was a matter she wished to make progress on. She said that Environmental Health and Trading Standards were doing what they could within the constraints that had been imposed on them but agreed that there was a need for the Council to be seen to be taking action and for the public to be made aware of what was being done.

DRR 7 December 2005.