

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL MONDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2012

Councillor Alexander, Bloch, Gibson, McNamara (Chair) and Stanton
s

In Councillor Weber
attendance

LC1. APOLOGIES

None received.

LC2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Cllr Stanton indicated that he was on the Board of Homes for Haringey and thus would need to declare this interest in housing related matters of the Panel.

LC3. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair indicated that Steve Russell, Housing Improvement Manager (Private Housing) had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) issues in relation to the new waste and recycling service and would be invited to speak under the relevant agenda item (number 8).

LC4. DEPUTATIONS

None received.

LC5. ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The panel noted the report which outlined the agreed terms of reference of the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Panel (E & H SP).

The panel wished it to be noted that there should be a visual public record of the scrutiny process which should include scrutiny panels as well as the main overarching Overview & Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that webcasting would aid transparency of scrutiny process and help to develop public engagement and it should therefore be an aim of the council for webcasting to be introduced for all scrutiny panels.

AGREED: That the necessary adaptations can be made to appropriate committee rooms to enable future webcasting of scrutiny panel meetings and for more than one room to be webcast if the Council Chamber is already in use. (OSC)

LC6. PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair highlighted the main issues that the E & H SP would be considering during it's work in the year ahead. These included:

- The roll out of the new waste and recycling contract
- Strategic review of parking (CPZ) in North Tottenham in relation to THFC
- Community engagement within the regulatory process e.g. planning & licensing
- Strategic enforcement (integration of enforcement functions across the Council)

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The panel requested that it be noted, that there was an unacceptable time gap between when the new structure for scrutiny was agreed by Council (May 2012) and the first meeting cycle of scrutiny panels (September 2012). It was hoped that there would be a reduced delay in the next municipal cycle.

LC7. BUDGET MONITORING 2012/ 13

The panel noted the budget monitoring report which was presented to Cabinet in September 2012.

The panel noted that there were a number of budgetary pressures in relation to services covered by the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Panel these included:

- a £800k spending pressure on the housing repairs budget
- impact of benefit changes
- budget pressures from the increasing cost of landfill (tax) and,
- a projected income shortfall (£200k) derived from parking fees and charges.

Parking fee income

The panel briefly discussed the issue of income from parking further to the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the last municipal year and the discussion had at this Committee on 23/7/12. The main points of this discussion were:

- An income of £5.8m was forecast for parking fees and charges against an expected total of £6.0m (£200k shortfall);
- Panel members noted that charges had increased recently and noted claims by local residents and businesses that this was having an impact on local businesses and that greater consideration needs to be paid to the sustainability of local town centres in setting charges;
- Parking income performance was not uniformly across local town centres, as in some areas this had increased (Green Lanes, Muswell Hill and Crouch End) though in others it had declined (Wood Green)
- It was noted that the Council undertook regular assessments of parking pressures in local town centres and evaluated vacancy rates at points throughout the day.

The panel also noted, that at a meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee (July 2012), the Leader had agreed that any further scrutiny of parking pay and display charges should be delegated to the Environment & Housing Scrutiny Panel. The panel noted that although no decisions had been taken, this may be explored further by the panel in the future

Welfare reforms

The panel noted that there were likely to be significant but as yet uncertain budget pressures on the whole council budget welfare reforms coming in to effect from April 2013 onwards. It was noted that the introduction of a welfare cap (£26k) and changes to housing benefit rules would have a far reaching impact on local people. These reforms would present major operational and financial pressures in relation to homelessness and temporary accommodation services. Initial estimates suggested that together this may result in an additional £5.9m service pressure.

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It was noted that the AD for Adults and Housing would be producing a report for Cabinet in November 2012, which would provide further detail of the welfare reforms, the anticipated impact and mitigating actions that the Council might take. The panel felt that it would be useful if Overview & Scrutiny Committee could receive this report at a future meeting.

AGREED: That the report by the AD for Adults and Housing on the impact of (housing) welfare reforms (due at Cabinet in November) is also sent to a future meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC).

The panel noted that as part of its work programme for 2012/13, Overview & Scrutiny Committee were scoping the impact of welfare reforms to ascertain if there were any benefit of scrutiny involvement.

AGREED: That the project work relating to welfare reforms undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is communicated to members once this has been agreed. (OSC)

Budget Scrutiny Process

The panel discussed the current budget monitoring process (12/13) and the scrutiny of the prospective budget (2013-2015). It was noted that in the region of £25m of savings would have to be found across the Council within the new budget (2013-2015) and approximately £4m of this would need to be achieved from savings in the Place and Sustainability Directorate. The departments are currently preparing savings plans how these will be achieved to be published in the new Medium Term Financial Plan (November 2012).

In considering the future budget monitoring process and the dedicated budget scrutiny meeting planned for December 2012, it was suggested that the panel should focus on five key issues within the service areas covered by the E & H SP.

AGREED: The panel indicated that the 5 themes on which it may wish to focus at the dedicated budget scrutiny meeting on the 4th December 2012 would be:

- Financial impact of the housing welfare reforms
- Waste costs (landfill and levy) and possible mitigation through increased recycling
- How projected Council savings of £25m (over 2013/14 and 2014/15) will impact on Environment and Housing budgets
- Existing budgetary plans (12/13)
- Other items (e.g. concessionary fares). (OSC/ Corporate Finance)

The panel discussed future budget monitoring and requested that a short summary of financial monitoring information be provided on service areas relevant to the E & H SP.

AGREED: It was agreed that Corporate Finance would provide a short and simple summary of budget lines for the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Panel (budget, variance, risks) once this data has been seen by relevant Cabinet member(s). (Corporate Finance)

LC8. WASTE AND RECYCLING SERVICE

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Terms of reference

The panel reiterated that it wanted to undertake an objective assessment of the service which encompassed both successes and areas for service improvement. The panel also wanted to reinforce that the purpose of this work was to (1) provide feedback that could assist the phase 3 roll out of the new service and (2) identify how the Council could encourage more people to recycle.

AGREED: The terms of reference report for scrutiny involvement with the waste and recycling service was noted and agreed by the panel.

Report back from Panel visits

The panel visited a number of areas around the borough on the 18th September 2012 to look at 'case studies' in relation to the waste and recycling service. A report of the panel visit was tabled at the meeting (attached). These case studies were also discussed by Single Front Line in the following agenda sub-item.

Evidence from Single Front Line Service and Housing Management

Officers from Single Front Line Service provided a presentation on a number of case studies to illustrate issues which it has faced in the implementation of the new waste and recycling service across Haringey. In addition, an officer from the Housing Improvement Team discussed the regulation of houses of multiple occupation (HMO) with the panel. The following provides a summary of the discussions of the panel, which has been categorised in to themes for ease of reference.

Community engagement / consultation

The panel visited Milton Avenue (N6) to view the problem of wheelie bins in a conservation area. The properties in this area had little front garden space to store wheelie bins and so these were kept on the street. The panel noted that some residents felt that the presence of bins on the street detracted from its character. Whilst there had been some rationalisation of bins (new 360l bins being shared among residents), there was a perception that there was still an unacceptable number of bins on the street.

It was noted that residents of the street had been visited twice as part of a consultation for preferred receptacles for waste and recycling collection that involved two rounds of door knocking for each property. Of the 140 households surveyed, there were 42 responses of which 76% indicated that they wanted to retain the wheelie bins. It was noted however, that there was still some ongoing dissatisfaction with the new service by some local residents who would have preferred twice weekly collections for residual waste, a system which was operational in adjacent Camden.

AGREED: The panel requested clarification on waste collection arrangements in Camden and that this is reported back. (EHSP)

The panel noted that community engagement was important prior to the establishment of the new waste and recycling service to ascertain the preferred options of local residents. It was noted that street assessments were undertaken in all areas in Phase 1 and Phase 2 to identify specific street issues (i.e. small gardens) and assess what waste receptacles would be most appropriate. Given the expected difficulties in areas in Phase 3, all properties would be visited beforehand to help assess local needs prior to bin distribution and to identify potential hotspots.

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The panel were keen to assess the comparative level of engagement undertaken by the contractor (Veolia) when similar fortnightly collection schemes had been introduced in other boroughs. It was reported to the panel that the level of engagement has been much higher in Haringey than in other boroughs: for example in Southwark, surveys had been undertaken on a street by street basis, though in Haringey, this was property by property. It was noted that in the east of the borough (phase 3) this will mean that every household will be contacted.

Agreed : The panel requested that comparative data of the communication and engagement processes used in other boroughs be communicated to the panel. (Veolia)

The panel noted that the Single Front Line Service may find it helpful to include local ward councillors in engagement strategies ahead of the planned roll out what with their local knowledge and ability to access local contacts and forums (for awareness raising).

Agreed: That it would be beneficial if there was engagement with local ward Councillors ahead of the phase 3 roll out of the waste and recycling service in relation to street assessments particularly where problems were anticipated. (Veolia/SFS)

The panel noted that there were significant problems with encouraging a culture of recycling, particularly in areas where there was a high churn rate in the local population. In some areas, it was estimated that there was a 40% population turnover which would make engagement, awareness and education to promote recycling difficult.

The panel suggested that a wider process of community engagement should be developed ahead of phase 3 roll out to ensure that hard to reach households are contacted, particular those properties which are let. In this context, it was suggested that landlords, Estate Agents and residents associations should be contacted as this would provide an indirect means to contact local residents to promote the new service and help to develop greater compliance. This was supported by the officer from the Housing Improvement Team.

The panel were keen to understand what planning had taken place to engage local communities ahead of the phase 3 roll out of the new waste and recycling service. It was noted that Veolia had developed an engagement plan and would be forwarded on to panel members.

Agreed: The panel requested that it is sent a summary of the community engagement plan ahead of the phase 3 roll out (Veolia/SFS)

The panel noted that in preparation for Phase 3 of the roll out, 95 out of the 400 roads had been identified as potentially problematic (for example, small or no front gardens or high concentrations of houses of multiple occupation). It was noted that Single Front Line Service would verify all the decisions that Veolia had made to ensure that the appropriate collection system/ receptacles for each street/ property were selected.

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The panel noted that the resident population within areas covered in Phase 3 may be significantly different from those in earlier phases, and that community engagement ahead of this should reflect that. The panel noted that Veolia now used pictorial flash cards to help communicate the new system to householders who may not have English as a first language. In phase 3, the panel noted that Veolia would also be using the assistance of Language Line (a telephone translation system) to further improve communication with residents whose first language was not English.

Bin rationalisation

The panel discussed the visit to Lyndhurst Road N22, where the issue of bin proliferation was evident. The structure of properties (4 close entrance doorways in close succession meant that there were large numbers of bins in a relatively small space. In some parts of this street, the panel noted that there were 11 or 12 bins in these doorways.

The panel noted from their visit, that there clearly had been some engagement between Council officers and local residents in that there was evidence of bin rationalisation (i.e. there were smaller 240l bins at some properties, and some properties were sharing larger 360l bins). The panel noted that there was probably further potential for bin rationalisation on this (Lyndhurst) and other streets (Milton Road) which they visited and local groups would be key to this.

The panel noted that many households preferred to have a bin which they identified as belonging their property which made attempts to rationalise bins before distribution problematic. In addition, it was noted that it was also difficult to rationalise bins as they were being introduced as the new system would take some time to 'bed down' with residents and for them to identify the capacity and number of bins they needed. It was noted that rationalisation would have to be with the consent of any residents affected.

The panel noted that, for efficiency purposes, it was important to have some level of standardisation when introducing the new waste and recycling service. It was reported to the panel however, that where appropriate, it may be possible to develop a hybrid system to respond to local conditions (i.e. different bins or sacks).

The panel noted that there was some reticence to return to the use of bin bags as these were liable to be ripped open by foxes, cats or other such animals. The panel noted that there was a persistent problem with foxes across the borough which affected waste collection systems. There was felt to be a particular issue with foxes in the east, and this should be a consideration in the phase 3 rollout especially when householders do not wash their dry recyclables which may have food residue.

The panel wished to note that wheelie bin clustering and bin rationalisation was a significant issue that needed to be addressed, in particular, how residents could engage with the Single Front Line Service / Veolia to commence this process. In addition, it was not clear how this process was communicated to local residents and that further clarification may be needed in phase 3 roll out.

Bin lids

The panel noted that there were a number of properties where wheeliebins for both residual waste and recycling did not have a proper lid. It was reported that collection personnel are required to record those properties where lids were absent and that

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replacement lids would then be delivered (via a special vehicle). It was not possible to deliver new lids alongside the collection of green boxes.

Houses of multiple occupancy (HMO)

There was some debate as to what properties constituted an HMO. Estimates from SFS, derived from survey work ahead of the introduction of the waste and recycling service suggest that there were about 20,000 HMO (though these did include those properties which had been legally subdivided into flats). Other definitions were those which were licensable (5 or more people in two or more households).

The panel noted that they had visited Eldon Road (N22) where there was a problem with overflowing bins and side waste at a number of properties. The problem was attributable to multiple occupancy flats, where the volume of waste being generated exceeded capacity of residual bins. This problem was exacerbated by tenant's failure to recycle (this was evident upon inspection of green bins and residual bins).

In the above instance (Eldon Road, N22), it was noted that officers had visited the properties but had not managed to contact the tenants within the properties concerned. It was noted that for some tenants, there may be some reticence in responding to face to face contact for communication or other reasons.

More generally, it was noted that there had been an engagement process adopted by SFS with landlords in an attempt to communicate the prospective changes to waste and recycling services to tenants. It was noted that the Landlords Forum had been contacted and that landlords had received written notification (letter and enclosed poster) notifying them of the new service. The panel indicated that it would be useful to have some assessment of how effective this process had been. The panel also indicated that it would be helpful to receive letters and posters sent to landlords as well as assessments of how much emphasis was placed on chasing up problems with the landlords and or letting agents as opposed to only the tenant.

AGREED: The panel requested examples of letters and posters sent to landlords to ensure compliance with new waste and recycling service. (SFS)

The panel noted that so far, there has been limited enforcement action with landlords in respect of tenants who were not complying with the new waste and recycling service. The approach that had been adopted thus far had been centred on awareness raising and education. A different and more enforcement led approach may be adopted after the final phase of the roll-out and where the borough wide service had bedded in.

The panel noted evidence from officers which suggested that there were between 400-450 properties (from a total of 44,000 households) in Phase 2 which were problematic (i.e. repeat offenders). Of these 400-450 properties, approximately 20% were HMO's pointing to the problem not being exclusively associated with HMOs but more to behaviour.

The panel noted that enforcement options may be available through the Discretionary Licensing Scheme which is being introduced in parts of Tottenham (under Article 4 Direction). HMO's would be required to be licensed in this area (estimated cost of between £5,000-20,000). Licensing conditions and costs may be varied in relation to HMO compliance with other enforceable actions (e.g. waste and recycling, benefits,

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council tax, noise and nuisance, ASB etc). In addition, there may be opportunities to enforce greater compliance with the new waste and recycling service under existing Management Regulations, as per Housing Act 2004.

Further discussions of the licensing scheme noted that:

- it would need to demonstrate an impact in a given area
- would require a multidisciplinary approach to support its operation and enforcement (e.g. local services collaborate and pool information on waste and recycling, benefits, council tax, noise and nuisance, ASB etc)
- the above would need to be cross referenced with properties that require a license or are in the licensing scheme
- the council would determine the duration of license held by a landlord (depending on compliance behaviour)
- fines for non compliance would be kept by the court, though the council would retain income from actual licensing process (to support operation of the scheme)
- Newham were developing a special licensing scheme which operated borough wide and not in a defined location.

Overall, this pointed to a clear rationale for the linking the future success of the phase 3 roll out with the work on HMO's and the operation of the Discretionary Licensing Scheme over the next 1-2 years.

Agreed: Further details of the Newham special licensing scheme (applicable across the whole borough) to be circulated to the panel (EHSP/ Housing Improvement).

Agreed: That a short note on the current and future operation of the licensing scheme (and current Management Regulations) in relation to the management of private sector housing be provided to the panel. (Housing Improvement)

The panel noted that although the licensing scheme is due to be rolled out Tottenham in June 2013, it is already effective in Harringay ward. In this context, it was suggested that local services develop a pilot project or case study approach to sharing enforcement data in Harringay area to support the operation of the HMO licensing scheme in this area what with the existing scheme being in phase 2 and there being significant learning opportunities for phase 3.

Agreed: Local services to liaise in linking enforcement data with HMOs in Harringay ward, for possible action under the licensing scheme. (SFS/Housing Improvement).

The panel noted that work had commenced within the council to assess how enforcement functions of the council can work together more effectively (e.g. licensing, planning). It was noted that SFS were leading on this work and it was agreed that an update report would be provided to the panel at its meeting on January 8th 2013.

AGREED: Single Front Line to attend E & H SP on January 8th to report back on preliminary work to integrate enforcement functions of the council. (SM/SFS)

Resolution of resident concerns

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The panel sought clarification as to the first point of contact for residents if there was an issue with the waste and recycling service. Officers present indicated that in the first instance, residents should contact the Veolia call centre. SFS will become involved if the issue has not been resolved or where a site visit is required to support further investigation.

Veolia reported that they had learnt from the operation of Phase 1 and 2 where there had been a major spike in calls after the introduction of the new service and some residents had experienced problems in getting through to the call centre. The panel noted that call centre staffing had been doubled (6 to 12) to increase capacity and handle resident concerns better and that the situation with this had normalised.

Litter

The panel questioned whether the rise in litter (recorded at an earlier Cabinet meeting) was in any part attributable to the introduction of the new waste and recycling service. Officers present, indicated that given the types of areas included within this assessment, it was unlikely to be affected by the new service. It was also indicated that this data related to the first ¼ of 2012/13 and was subject to seasonal fluctuations and that the full year figure would offer a better comparison for performance.

AGREED: In response to the question about the rise in litter, the panel did request further information on how litter scores were compiled and assessed. (SFS)

The Chair thanked officers from SFS for attending and giving evidence to the panel.

Officers from the waste and recycling collection contractor (Veolia) gave a presentation to the panel on the key aspects of the new service and plans for future phase 3 roll out (attached). A summary of the main points of this presentation and subsequent panel discussion are presented below.

The panel noted the volume of calls in to the contacts centre to report missed bin collections or other issues with the new waste and recycling service. Contacts to the call centre peaked during the service change (Phase 2) and the service responded by placing additional staff within the centre. This will be maintained for Phase 3 rollout.

The panel noted that October 22nd marks the commencement of the final phase (3) of the roll out, and the date when the collection day changes for all kerbside properties in the borough. Currently the collection day for local residents forms a 'patchwork of areas' across the borough which is inefficient. From 22/10/12, collection crews will work in 5 defined zones (Monday to Friday) which will be more efficient, help to cover missed collections, back up in the event of a truck breakdown and other such issues. The panel noted that engagement and raising awareness within the community would be important ahead of this important change.

The panel noted that Veolia had received and delivered more bins (recycling and food waste) to local residents in Phase 2 than planned. This was seen at a positive development in that the community were engaging and responding to recycling initiatives.

The panel noted that there were a number of additional service developments to help assist with the final phase 3 roll out and identify and respond to potential problems

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(e.g. roads missed off schedule, incorrect information or bins delivered, missed collections and residents not being aware of bin change date). These included:

- Additional crews to increase collection capacity/ flexibility for 2+ weeks
- Saturday working
- Joint monitoring with Haringey Council
- (as above) additional call centre staff.

The panel suggested a number of ways in which to assist the roll-out for phase 3, which included:

- Coloured stickers to go on bins that noted what can items of waste can be put in to different bins and which would also remind residents of their collection days
- Education work in local schools (longer term to improve awareness and take up of recycling)

The Chair thanked for officers from Veolia for attending and giving evidence to the panel.

LC9. REPRESENTATIONS FROM AREA CHAIRS

None.

LC10. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

Cllr Stuart McNamara

Chair