

REPORT OF ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW PANEL

(Meetings held on 20 April and 14 June 2001)

1. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE REVIEW (REPORT A 20.4.01) (MINUTE NO 33).

The Panel noted a briefing report on the current grounds maintenance standards across a range of activity areas within the Council. The main contract for grounds maintenance will expire on 5 January 2002. A grounds maintenance review panel, which includes the Environment Portfolio Holder and two representatives from this Panel, has been established to examine all options. This includes detailed discussions with Town and Parish Councils to establish the level of service they want, the extent to which they will fund any enhancement of that service, and the best delivery option. The Panel considered it is important that there is a very flexible approach to this.

The grounds maintenance review panel would be hearing from the current contractor at their next meeting to further inform the process.

The review of the contract is being carried out in parallel with the Best Value Review of the service. It was hoped that the contract review would establish what was wanted in future by mid June to July. From September 2001, consideration will begin on how best to provide what is wanted.

The Panel asked to receive a statistical evaluation of the complaints received about grass cutting standards, to include the number of complainants (rather than individual complaints) and areas.

The Panel also discussed the value of using open cell block work to support verges in Council estates where car parking on verges is a problem, and commended this course of action to the Housing service.

2. FOOT AND MOUTH UPDATE (MINUTE NO. 9).

The majority of services in the Forest have returned to normal, including refuse collection and street cleansing. The only exception is where farmers request the Council not to go onto their land.

At the time of the meeting some forest car parks remained closed. Some of these were because of the proximity of cattle, others because ground nesting birds had nested in vulnerable places when everybody had been excluded from the Forest. The majority of footpaths were also now being re-opened by Hampshire County Council following a direction from the Rural Task Force. This was very unpopular both with the County Council and with many farmers who had responded to a consultation from the County by asking for paths to be kept closed until the end of the foot and mouth outbreak.

Members discussed the Forestry Commission's request for dogs to be kept on leads in the Forest during the foot and mouth crisis and to recent reports that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act would impose such restrictions in the longer term. Members were aware that there is a huge ground swell of opposition to this, and there would be a public meeting in Lyndhurst on 3 July 2001. Members requested that an item should be included on the agenda for a future meeting for Panel to explore the implications of such restrictions on dogs on local people. Members were also advised that it was understood that the Government was considering measures under the Animal Welfare Act to enforce this. For the Crown Lands it was believed that the Forestry Commission would be responsible for enforcement, although consideration should be given to authorising the Dog Wardens under such provisions, so they might take action if they saw anything.

3. AIR QUALITY REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT (MINUTE NO. 10).

The DETR's initial comments on this report have been received. They have required further investigation of the sulphur dioxide levels close to the Fawley Refinery. The report had shown that sulphur dioxide levels were on the borderline of breaching consent. As a consequence, the Environment Agency have been asked to re-examine the emission data and map on a more sophisticated model. The results of that exercise will inform the recommendation to the Portfolio Holder as to whether an air quality management area should be declared. This will have to be thought through extremely carefully, because of the wider implications of declaring such an area.

Funds have recently been vired to allow the purchase of an additional real time sulphur dioxide monitor for installation in Fawley. This is in the process of being commissioned. In the longer term this will provide vital information. The decision on the need for an air quality management area will however have to be taken before such data is available.

It is expected that a report on the air quality review and assessment will be considered by the October meeting of the New Forest Environmental Protection Liaison Committee which will be held in Marchwood to allow wider participation from the local community.

4. OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT B, 14.6.01) (MINUTE NO. 12).

The Panel reviewed its work programme.

RECOMMENDED:

That the outline work programme, as attached at Appendix 1 to this report, be approved to continue to guide the Panel's activities and programme of work.

**5. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES – CHARGING (POLICY DISCUSSION)
(REPORT F, 14.6.01) (MINUTE NO. 17).**

The Panel was advised of legislative constraints that prevent the Authority from charging for the use of public conveniences. The Panel considered that members of the public would be happy to pay a charge where an enhanced service was offered. It was accordingly agreed that the support of the Local Government Association and other professional bodies should be sought to persuade the Government to change the Law to allow charging for the use of public conveniences where the Council can demonstrate that they are seeking to improve facilities by providing attended services.

Cllr J M Hoy
CHAIRMAN

(ES140601)

ENVIRONMENT PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW PANEL

OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME

23 JULY 2001

Review of Expenditure Plan bids

13 SEPTEMBER 2001

Review of Expenditure & Performance (Feeds into Performance Review Reports)

Performance Review Reports

- Public Conveniences)
- Customer Services)
- Cemeteries) BV Review
- Street Naming)
- Abandoned Vehicles)

Grounds Maintenance

Public Convenience Management Review

Food, Health and Safety and Licensing Best Value Review (this is split between this Portfolio and the General Purposes and Licensing Committee)

Contaminated Land Strategy

18 October 2001

Expenditure Plan Proposals

15 November 2001

Expenditure Plan Proposals

17 JANUARY 2002

Expenditure Planning

Also for consideration at a suitable time –

Policy of back door refuse collection

Land Drainage Strategy

Coastal Protection Review – emphasis on the principle of managed retreat

CROW Act - Implications for local people of the possible restrictions on dogs

For further information:

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Background Papers

None