

Minutes of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board

12th November, 2014 at 5.30 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Khatun (Chair);
Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair);
Councillors K Davies, Eaves and Tranter.

In Attendance: Adrian Scarrott (Director - Neighbourhoods)
Steve Handley (Director – Street Scene)

Apologies: Councillor Downing.

22/14 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 1st October, 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

23/14 **Request to Review Action Taken by the Authority in Relation to a Petition Requesting Prohibition of Culling of Badgers on Council Owned Land and Investment in Vaccination Programmes Locally**

The Board was informed that a petition had been submitted to the Council in May, 2014, requesting that it prohibits the culling of badgers on Council owned land and invests in local vaccination programmes.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment had considered the petition and responded to the petitioners advising that the Council had no plans to cull badgers on land in Sandwell. The lead petitioner was not satisfied with the response given and had subsequently requested a review of the matter. In accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme, the Board was therefore asked to review the action taken by the Authority in dealing with the petition.

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The lead petitioner was present and addressed the Board. She reported that the same petition had been sent to a number of local authorities nationally. She felt that the Council had not satisfactorily responded to the issues raised, in particular with regards to the request to implement a local vaccination programme. She advised that vaccination programmes were being carried out by volunteer groups in some areas.

The Area Director – Street Scene was also present and reported that the number of badgers in Sandwell was not significant and was most likely contained in and around the Sandwell Valley area. He informed the Board that the Council had no plans to implement a vaccination programme and no funding to do so. However, he added that he would be happy to allow volunteers to deliver a vaccination programme in the Borough, subject to it being at no cost to the Council.

After considering the process undertaken by the Council, the Board was satisfied that the petition had been dealt with correctly in accordance with the Council's petition scheme. However, the Board was supportive of a vaccination programme, subject to this being done by volunteers and at no cost to the Council.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Board is satisfied that the petition entitled '*We, the undersigned, call on Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to prohibit the culling of badgers on council-owned land and invest in vaccination programmes locally. We ask this because we believe culling to be inhumane, inefficient, and unscientific.*' has been dealt with correctly, in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme;
- (2) that, in the event that the Council is approached by an interested group or organisation offering to carry out a badger vaccination programme, the Area Director – Street Scene liaise with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment to facilitate its implementation, subject to the programme being at no cost to the Council.

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Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss her portfolio of responsibility and forward plan and give the Scrutiny Board opportunity to fulfil its role as critical friend.

The Area Director – Street Scene and the Director – Neighbourhoods were also present.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following areas of work:-

- The annual review of the Highways Asset Management Plan had been considered by the Cabinet on 12th November, 2014. The Plan set out the Council's funding for maintaining highway infrastructure assets in 2014/15 and outlined preparations for changes in the financial reporting and funding mechanisms in future years. It was noted that the Council had recently been successful in securing a capital funding allocation of £537,587 from the Department for Transport's Pot Hole Challenge Fund to help repair damage to its local roads.
- Legislation from the European Union regarding recycling practices was due to come into force in January 2015 that would require the Council to review its collection methods for certain materials to ensure that it was as clean as possible. The Council currently had 13% contamination rate (i.e. the incidences of non-recyclable waste being placed in a recycling bins) so efforts were being made to better educate the public to address this. The Cabinet was due to consider a report on the matter in November 2014.

Councillor Preece asked the Cabinet Member for feedback on the success of the Council's Camera Car, which monitored parking outside Sandwell's schools. The Cabinet Member reported that the Camera Car had only been launched at the beginning of November 2014 but early indications were that it was successful. She did not however have any information at present on the number of fines that had been issued.

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Councillor Preece asked for further explanation with regards to item HE020 (Review of Fees and Charges 2015/2016 for Street Scene Services) on the Cabinet Member's Forward Plan, which was scheduled for consideration in January, 2015. The Area Director – Street Scene advised that the fees and charges list was an extensive one and included such things as fees for the rental of football pitches. It was proposed to increase the charges at the rate of inflation.

The Area Director – Street Scene informed the Board about the Council's Facing the Future Programme, which was a programme of cross-cutting change management that sought to re-shape the Council over the period 2015-2020 to address the continued budget reductions from central Government. Following a period of consultation, a work programme would be drawn up to investigate new methods of delivering services going forward. Examples were given such as volunteer groups managing parks, through the use of external funding that the Council was not eligible to apply for, but the groups could. The Chair expressed concern that some groups were inexperienced in making such funding applications and would require support. The Director – Neighbourhoods advised that Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations had been given funding to provide this type of support. Members requested that further updates be provided on the programme to future meetings as it progresses.

(The meeting ended at 6.04 pm)

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