



ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SUPPORT SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on 2 NOVEMBER 2005 at 7:00PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT:

Councillor Barrie Hargrove (Chair)
Councillors Mark Glover, Eliza Mann, Lisa Rajan

**OTHER
COUNCILLORS**

Councillor Columba Blango – Executive Member for Equalities,
Culture and Sport
Councillor Nick Stanton – Leader of the Council
Councillor Richard Thomas – Executive Member for Environment
and Transport

OFFICERS:

Alan Blissett – Noise and Air Quality Manager
Tim England – Environmental Health and Trading Standards
Business Manager
Carina Kane – Scrutiny Project Manager
Stephanie Fleck – Principal Lawyer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors David Bradbury and Dominic Thorncroft.
Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Lisa Rajan.

CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

The Members listed as being present were confirmed as the Voting Members.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS AS URGENT

None.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

None.

RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect to an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute File and was available for public inspection.

The Sub-Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the Minute File. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the item bearing the same number on the agenda.

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Environment and Community Support Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting held on 21 September 2005 be agreed as a correct record of proceedings and signed by the Chair.

1 EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS [pages 1-2]

1.1 The sub-committee interviewed the Executive Members for Environment and Transport, Culture Sport and Equalities, and the Leader of the Council.

Councillor Richard Thomas, Executive Member for Environment and Transport:

Q1 *Particularly in light of the unprecedented central government funding, and three and a half years into your tenure, do you take responsibility for Southwark continuing to fail to meet both national and local recycling targets?*

Councillor Thomas said he did not accept the premise of the question. There had not been unprecedented central government funding. While various one-off capital grants had become available for recycling and waste management in general, increases in costs for sustainable recycling services were not reflected in the revenue support grant from government:

| | Revenue | Capital |
|-----------------|------------|-----------|
| Southwark money | £1,340,000 | 1,070,000 |
| External money | £189,000 | £960,000 |

In terms of meeting the targets, Councillor Thomas said it was a matter of taking credit rather than responsibility. The council had missed out on the target by 10% in 2003/04 but hit the target six months later, and he was hopeful that the council would achieve an 18% recycling rate by the end of 2005/06. He contended that a reduction in funding for recycling under the previous council administration contributed to the missed targets. He said he was proud of the recycling record thanks to increased funding, political leadership and the work of officers.

Q2 *What progress has been made in making Southwark graffiti-free, particularly on sites over which the council has no direct impact?*

The council had eight dedicated graffiti removal teams across the borough, and had a 'clear-all' policy which meant that graffiti was removed free of charge from both Southwark-owned property and private property. The council's current performance was that 95% of all reported graffiti was removed within 24 hours, but it was expected that the target of 97.5% would be met by the end of the year.

Q3 *Could you give an update on the Walworth Road project and could you tell us why you have allowed it so long for any progress to be evident?*

Councillor Thomas explained how the project was funded by the Department for Transport as a 'mixed priority route road safety demonstration' project, but was also part of Transport for London's (TfL) Streets for People project. The project delay was because the council had struggled to get agreement from TfL as to how to redefine the road space given that the area had a number of different functions (e.g. traffic, residential street, pedestrian shopping area). Councillor Thomas had written to TfL and the Mayor with concerns about the delay to the project caused by TfL's lack of response.

However, TfL had recently approved in principal an approach which would involve removing the bus lanes in the central part of Walworth Road, around East Street. Councillor Thomas believed that this was the right answer to transform Walworth Road and confirmed that the £1million funding from the government had been extended into the 2006/07 year.

Q4 Will Councillor Thomas take responsibility if the scheme makes traffic worse?

It was clear that the bus lanes were not working at the moment and Councillor Thomas informed that modelling of the proposed scheme indicated that it would work. He was prepared to take joint, but not sole, responsibility. The scheme was in line with his general principle to move away from cars in favour of other road users, which was also the government position.

Q5 Following agreement by council assembly on the placement of traffic violation traps, can you tell us what role members will have in monitoring their effectiveness?

Councillor Thomas said that he disagreed with the tone of the question on the basis that it was not setting a 'trap'. The purpose of the Labour regulations were to improve traffic flow and safety, and their placement was determined in conjunction with the police. Figures and information would be made available to all Members at the appropriate time.

Q6 Were there revenue and safety targets for people caught on camera?

The cameras needed to be self-funding, but apart from that there were no revenue targets. No safety targets had been set at this stage.

Q7 What is your view on the publication of speed camera sites, and is there room for any more cameras?

Councillor Thomas disagreed with the publication of speed camera sites. He said that mobile cameras could be added.

Q8 Why are there so many incidents of binmen not returning bins to whether they found them?

The main performance measure on collection was the missed collection rate. For 2004/05 this was 788 per 100,000 household collections, and 99% of all reported failures were rectified within 24 hours. Permanent staff had been trained on the importance of replacing bins in the same place, and a leaflet had been produced for agency staff.

Q9 What is the policy to tackle litter in Peckham and Camberwell, because it currently seems to be failing?

Councillor Thomas did not accept that it was failing. The same policy was applied across the borough i.e. to put in the necessary resources to clean the streets to an adequate standard. There were instances of failure on a local basis but he believed there had been a general improvement.

Councillor Thomas undertook to look into issues raised about the cleaning of roads off Rye Lane, and to write to the railway company about the Peckham Railway Station. He also invited sub-committee members to inform the relevant cleaning manager about any other areas of concern so the council could investigate and monitor the situation.

Q10 Has Southwark been adversely financially affected by the costs incurred in discharging its new licensing duties?

Yes. In 2004/05, £115,000 was incurred in working up the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy. Another £125,000 was incurred in 2005/06 in processing licensing applications. Figures were not known for 2006/07 but the income would reduce as the second year statutory fees reduce from initial application fees. The shortfall in resources may be £134,000 which would need to be found from the council's mainstream budget. Southwark had made representations to the government on this, but the government response was that they were setting the level of fees and would not provide extra money.

Q11 What impact will the Mayor of London's single waste authority initiative have on the viability and success of Southwark's new waste facility on the Old Kent Road?

The Mayor's proposal could have serious implications. The council was about to spend £20million on a new site but this site may be taken away under the proposals. The project had received support from DEFRA, the GLA and the Mayor, so Councillor Thomas was hopeful that the project would get protection in the event that the Mayor's proposal was implemented. The comment from DEFRA Minister Ben Bradshaw, in response to questioning from Simon Hughes, had been a useful first step but was not a legal guarantee. The council was lobbying about this on all fronts and wanted support from the OPDM and the GLA.

In terms of whether the Mayor's proposal was better for London, Councillor Thomas suggested that there were arguments both ways; there was a problem with spare capacity for existing waste and there was an urgency to get something in place. Any delay would impact on local recycling targets in the long-term.

Q12 How is the Park Warden service performing since the reorganisation?

The service was now performing well and was up to its full complement of wardens. Wardens were no longer responsible for jobs such as picking up litter, and the grounds maintenance contract seemed to be working well.

Q13 What progress has been made in drawing up the biodiversity plan?

Councillor Thomas had been told that the biodiversity plan was 80% complete. The plan included actions for habitats, specific species, and generic action across all land in Southwark.

Q14 What are the reporting rates of environmental crime (vandalism, graffiti, flytipping etc) by the community wardens, broken down by month and area?

Councillor Thomas reported that the statistics varied significantly from scheme to scheme because of local priorities. He tabled a copy of the statistics for the sub-committee.

Councillor Columba Blango, Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Sport:

Q15 *What is the fall-back position if the Leisure Investment Contract proposals and negotiations fail?*

Councillor Blango first explained that all six leisure facilities were in very poor condition because of two decades of under-investment. About £25 million was needed to bring the centres up to a decent standard.

In reply to the question, Councillor Blango said two options were being considered:

- look for an alternative partner. Risks were that there was only a limited pool of operators who would want to commit that much money, this would take time (and health and safety issues with the leisure centres needed to be addressed with urgency), and there was risk of demoralising the current operator, Fusion, through this process.
- bring the contract in-house. This would impact on the capital revenue, would also take time, and was possibly beyond the council's resources.

The council was negotiating to see what Fusion and other providers could do. Officers were preparing a detailed report for Executive on the future of the leisure centres. Without seeing the report, Councillor Blango could not advise of his preference between the options but ultimately wanted a high-quality sustainable service that met public expectation. He said that closing centres was not an option yet and the council would get the £25million needed. He would not be responsible for any failure as the leisure centres were in bad condition due to previous under-investment.

Q16 *Why is it not straightforward for Fusion to raise the £25 million needed?*

Councillor Blango responded by saying that all possibilities were being considered. He made it clear that he did not have a favoured preference at this stage.

Q17 *What point have negotiations now reached between Southwark Council and Fusion in relation to securing future investments for the leisure centre?*

Negotiations had reached an advanced stage. A report was expected to go to Executive. There was still a lot of work to be done in quantifying and managing the risks.

Q18 *What issues are holding up these negotiations?*

Councillor Blango reported that nothing was holding up the negotiations. The main issue was that the leisure centres were neglected for twenty years. The funding had been increased but this just covered basic maintenance.

Q19 *Once negotiations are complete, what is the timetable for developments?*

Councillor Blango replied that it was too early to talk about timetables at this stage.

Q20 *Camberwell Leisure Centre urgently needs immediate work e.g. the women's changing rooms and storerooms leak badly every time it rains. Once a timetable for developments for leisure centre resources had been agreed, would Camberwell be at the top of the list for refurbishment?*

Camberwell was part of a huge regeneration programme and the leisure centre was valued. All leisure centres were a priority and the resources allocated would depend on the level of need. The women's changing room at Camberwell was being invested in and the council was putting pressure on Fusion for the provision of basic facilities.

Q21 Is the objective to raise the condition of existing leisure centres or to build more?

Councillor Blango said he wanted to bring existing leisure centres up to scratch. He was not aware of where the plans were at for the building of a new leisure centre in Elephant and Castle, but would like to see more leisure centres in the borough.

Q22 Can the council ensure that Fusion, when developing their plans for the future, consult with residents to ensure they continue to provide the current facilities for residents and youth provision organisations?

Councillor Blango responded that what was provided now was not enough and improvements were needed.

Q23 What are the plans for the future of Seven Islands leisure centre in Rotherhithe in the context of the Canada Water development and the proposed new leisure centre on Site C, which may or may not be deliverable?

Councillor Blango did not want any leisure centres closed and informed the sub-committee that Fusion would continue to maintain the leisure centre until a replacement site was ready. The land was not owned by the council and officers were working with developers to push for a leisure centre on the site. Other options had been considered but an alternative site had not been identified.

Q24 What are the plans for the future management/redevelopment/expansion of the Surrey Docks Watersport Centre?

The Surrey Docks Watersport Centre had attracted interest because it was a strategic site to accommodate high quality sporting facilities. Fusion was currently considering upgrading facilities to incorporate a health and fitness centre there and talks were underway about improving the watersports facility.

Q25 How are the issues elsewhere in the borough affecting the relationship with Fusion?

Councillor Blango said Fusion were not performing to expectations. It was part of their contract to upgrade the watersports centre and it was expected that they would keep to the contract.

Q26 Was any investment planned in Camberwell and Peckham for new facilities in the near future?

Councillor Blango undertook to get back to the sub-committee with this information.

Q27 Do officers monitor Fusion's centres?

Councillor Blango informed the sub-committee that the centres were monitored, and that he personally made unofficial visits. The focus was on basic health and safety maintenance instead of developing the centres.

Q28 *What is the council's plan for providing exercise for the over-sixties, and where are there suitable facilities in the Peckham and Nunhead area?*

Activities were provided across the borough, and some of these were specifically targeted to the over-sixties age group. Councillor Blango gave examples of some of the sessions held in Southwark's leisure centres including line-dancing, bowling, swimming, gymnastics. He undertook to come back to the sub-committee with information about the percentage of take-up for these sessions.

Q29 *What is the current situation with the Peckham Pulse swimming pool?*

Councillor Blango reported that the situation was critical as there had been very serious structural damage, and explained to the sub-committee how the damage had occurred. The pool should be reopened in September 2006. The Principal Lawyer clarified that liability had not yet been established, and it was her understanding that the council was not letting this hold up the work that needed to be done to repair the pool.

Councillor Nick Stanton, Leader of the Council

Q30 *Is the situation in Peckham Rye Park now quiet?*

Councillor Stanton said that as far as he was aware, the situation was now quiet. He undertook to get back to the sub-committee with information about how long the over-night security would be staying at the park.

Q31 *How many community wardens are in post (by street wardens and park wardens)?*

There were 83 community wardens and supervisors, and the council was recruiting with the aim of reaching the full complement of 112 staff in the new year. There were 18 community wardens and supervisors in parks.

Q32 *How are the community wardens going to be deployed across the borough?*

Councillor Stanton said that there would be a total of 15 across each community council area. Under the new system, which had not yet started, deployment would vary according to the area needs identified by intelligence and would be directed by the Together Action Zones.

Q33 *What are your views on the use of CCTV to combat crime?*

Councillor Stanton was of the opinion that CCTV was helpful in capturing evidence and had a role in reassurance and helping to reduce the fear of crime. He added that figures showed that street lighting was better in actually reducing crime than CCTV.

Q34 *Do you think we have enough CCTV and are you satisfied with its current operation?*

Councillor Stanton was satisfied that there was sufficient CCTV in principal town areas. However there was an issue around stations, as reducing crime and disorder appeared to be a low priority for railway companies. He suggested there were only small amounts of funding available for stations in zones 2 to 5 and commented on how the proposals to replace human presence with ticket machines had further implications for crime and disorder. The concerns had been raised with the ALG but it needed to be a co-ordinated London campaign to stress the importance of dealing with crime and disorder.

Q35 *Why have members not been briefed on the Home Office Together Action Areas?*

Councillor Stanton explained that about 50 Together Action Areas (TAA) were announced by the Home Office as examples of good practice and areas for officer-based shared learning. In Southwark, a new anti-social behaviour one-stop shop number had been developed from this. He instead suggested that there may be some confusion because Street Action Teams had now been rebranded as Together Action Zones (TAZ). Members should have had briefings on TAZ.

Councillor Stanton agreed to provide the sub-committee with a briefing note explaining the difference between TAA and TAZ.

Q36 *What are you doing to try to ensure that the fireworks period is a safe and enjoyable one for everyone?*

Councillor Stanton listed a number of procedures that were in place to ensure the fireworks period would be safe, including borough-wide investigation of fire safety leaflets, inspection of premises licensed to sell fireworks, and removal of bulk refuse that could be used to start a bonfire. This year there was funding from the City of London Police and the Fire Brigade towards a joint display with the Globe as part of the gunpowder plot exhibition. Councillor Stanton suggested that Enfield Council was a good example for firework controls and joint working.

Q37 *Are you against naming and shaming all ASBO recipients?*

Councillor Stanton said he was not against this, but he was against a blanket policy for naming and shaming. There may be cases where publicising was in the interests of public safety. However he was intuitively against naming and shaming people from who were vulnerable e.g. under-16s, those with mental illness.

Q38 *How much of a concern is it for you that in comparison with other London boroughs, Southwark performs very poorly in domestic violence refuge places per 10,000 of the population?*

Councillor Stanton informed that this issue crossed both his Executive Member portfolio as well as that of the Executive Member for Health and Adult Care. This was a huge issue, particularly in Southwark. It was not an emerging issue but the statistics were now more reliable. The Supporting People strategy had picked the issue up, and new women's refuge units were being built. There was a push to increase the amount of reporting of domestic violence, and a tightening up of council tenancies.

2 SOUTHWARK'S NOISE RESPONSE SERVICE [pages 3-10]

- 2.1 Officers took the sub-committee through the agenda report, which discussed the background, resourcing and responsibilities of the Noise Response Service at Southwark, and compared its performance and the costs with other London Boroughs. Officers explained that Southwark was one of only two authorities offering a 24-hour, 7 day a week service, and provides an on-location response across the whole borough.
- 2.2 Members discussed the impact on resourcing as a result of the new licensing regime. Officers informed that there could be a significant increase in complaints because the 'public nuisance' definition included noise outside premises, and the new licensing laws allowed for extended drinking hours which would influence the type of clientele at the premises at later hours. As presently resourced, the noise team would not be able to deal with any additional demand as it was currently at its resource capacity of about 11,000 to 12,000 calls per year.
- 2.3 Members discussed whether publicity about the new anti-social behaviour (ASB) "It's your call" phone number would increase demand for the Noise Response Service. Officers did not think this would have much impact as the Noise Response Service had always been well publicised (e.g. posters on bus stop shelters, information at every community centres, health centres and schools).
- 2.4 Officers also raised awareness of issues about the arrangements with the Customer Service Centre (CSC). The Noise Response Service relied on the CSC for receipt of calls, priority allocation, and monitoring whereabouts. However the dedicated noise team telephone line (020 7525 5777) had now been identified as the ASB Hotline. It was therefore important that CSC staff were trained to make the distinction between calls that were about anti-social behaviour and those that were the responsibility of the noise team. If the noise team was incorrectly directed to an anti-social behaviour complaint, they were powerless to do anything about the situation and, as the community wardens were not a 24-hour service, could raise false expectations with the customer. Noise team duty officers needed this separate dedicated phone line to call the CSC to pick up jobs. Currently the team had to phone the same number used by members of the public to make complaints, which worked well, but the ASB-shared facility may impact on contact and response time.
- 2.5 The sub-committee also considered the trends in enforcement activity over the years (set out at paragraph 20 of the report). Officers said about one percent of calls led to people getting prosecuted and/or equipment seized. There had been fewer calls than expected this year, possibly because noise-related calls getting lost in the transition to the new call centre or the weather over the summer.
- 2.6 There had been a move away from education and negotiation to enforcement. Next year, there would be a new regime of issuing fixed penalty notices, although the fine levels were still being debated with the ALG. Officers believed that fining people was not the best deterrent; it was more effective to seize equipment.
- 2.7 Members asked about noise created by youths/children on estates and in buildings. Officers explained that Environmental Health was not responsible for responding to noisy behaviour on estates, nor were there resources to deal with sound insulation within buildings. There needed to be something 'tangible' to serve notice against, and this particular issue was a low priority within finite resources. In the past the mediation service received funding to deal with noise from normal domestic uses, but this service was not seen to be of great value in relation to the number of cases handled.

- 2.8 Officers also clarified for the sub-committee that repeat calls were recorded against the client and/or the address. If there was no evidence of a problem after 12 visits, the service was withdrawn from that client. Officers undertook to provide the sub-committee with information about the number of one off-visits versus repeat calls.
- 2.9 Members noted the national shortage of environmental health practitioners, and how for health and safety reasons officers paired up on the job (one enforcement officer with an assistant). Officers explained how the assistants were drawn from the local Southwark area and attended a two-year HMC course for one day a week. The service could only afford for two people to be on the course at any one time. After completion of the course the assistants could progress to Acting Enforcement Officers and subsequently could fill any Enforcement Officer vacancies.
- 2.10 The Chair thanked officers for their time.

RESOLVED: That the sub-committee would seek a response to the issues highlighted in paragraph 2.4 above about the impact of the shared telephone line facilities on the service provided by the Noise Response team.

3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING [page 20]

- 3.1 Members noted the updated information that had been provided in relation to the council's performance.

RESOLVED: That officers explain the reason for the significant decrease in numbers of fixed penalty notices for litter issued in August and September 2005.

4. ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE BUDGET MONITOR [page 11]

- 4.1 The Chair commented on the major variance for Street Scene and Public Protection due to the increased costs of responsive repairs on Highways, stating that he believed the overspend to be about £150,000.

RESOLVED: That officers explain how any overspend for responsive repairs on highways would be contained within the Environment and Leisure departmental budget.

5. WORK PROGRAMME [pages 12-19]

- 5.1 Members were circulated a copy of the submission sent from the council to Transport for London about the proposed Western Extension about the congestion charging zone and were satisfied that there was no need to conduct a scrutiny into this issue.

- 5.2 The following amendments were made to the sub-committee's work programme
- Remove congestion charging as a potential item of business
 - Add the Leisure Centres Investment Management Contract [18 January 2005, if timely]
 - Add Peckham Pulse Leisure Centre [1 March 2005].

The meeting closed at 10:00pm.

CHAIR:

DATE: