

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 6 February 2006

Present: Councillor T McGowan (Chair) and Councillors T Gray, H Heaton, Miss I Iddon, M Lowe and S Smith

Also in attendance: Councillors T Brown and J Walker

06.ENV.08 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors David Dickinson, Heaton and Livesey.

06.ENV.09 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No Members declared an interest in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

06.ENV.10 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 5 January 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

06.ENV.11 REVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES BUDGET

The Panel received a joint report of the Director of Finance and Head of Environmental Services setting out the spending on Environmental Services as well as analysing the detailed findings of the Audit Commissions review of costs undertaken as part of their use of resources value for money review.

Environmental Services had been identified to be looked at in more detail because it appeared as upper quartile costs in the Value for Money (VFM) Self Assessment and the purpose of the Scrutiny was to explore in more detail why the service was showing in the upper quartile in cost terms.

The Panel received a report of the Director of Finance which summarised and commented on the key issues arising from the Audit Commission's report. The assessment had entailed a basic benchmarking of the costs of providing Environmental Services by comparing the absolute costs of each Authority included in the Audit Commissions' 'family group' of Councils that exhibit the same attributes in terms of demography, population etc.

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member whose portfolio covers Environmental Services and the Head of Environmental Services and a number of questions were put to them. The questions and responses would form part of the basis of a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 February 2006.

In order to evaluate whether the service was providing value for money, the Council needed to determine the total cost base for each element, together with comparative costs from similar authorities. The Panel, therefore, urged the pursuance of a more probing benchmarking exercise into issues surrounding the cost and quality elements of Environmental Services.

It was **AGREED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to submit the following comments to the Executive Cabinet as part of this year's budget consultation exercise.

1. That the Executive Cabinet be requested to pursue the provision of more detailed comparative data from the Audit Commissions' 'family tree' authorities, particularly in relation to the output, cost and quality of services, in order to enable a more reasonable value for money assessment of the whole of the Council's environmental service.
2. What steps will the Executive Cabinet take to achieve a better understanding of the perception gap in the measurement of residents satisfaction with standards of cleanliness within the Street Cleaning Contract.
3. The Executive Cabinet is requested to examine the quality of design of litter bins and the capability of the contractors Cleanaway to emptying the litter bins whilst on collection rounds.
4. The Executive Cabinet is requested to ensure that high profile cases on enforcement are publicised.
5. The Executive Cabinet is requested to ensure the enforcement of the managements of the Cleanaway contract and that they clean up whilst waste collecting.
6. The Executive Cabinet is requested to introduce policy targets for the Neighbourhood Wardens relating to their street scene duties.
7. The Executive Cabinet is requested to examine the need for improved co-ordination of services to bring efficiency. Particular attention should be paid to problem areas and neighbourhoods as well as a wider promotion of the hot line number.

06.ENV.12 REFUSE AND RECYCLING COLLECTION SERVICE

The Panel agreed that this item had been dealt with under the previous agenda item

Chair