

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS held at 7.30 pm at the COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 9 FEBRUARY 2005**

Present: - Councillor S Flack – Chairman.  
Councillors R M Lemon, D J Morson, J P Murphy and F E Silver.

Officers in attendance: - V Borges, M Brean, M T Purkiss, R Pridham, P J Snow, A Stewart and T Turner.

**SC2.38 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H D Baker, C A Bayley, E Gower, M A Hibbs and S V Schneider.

**SC2.39 PARKING FEES AND FINES – ANALYSIS OF TRENDS**

The Chairman agreed to the early consideration of this item as the Community and Development Manager had another urgent appointment.

Members considered a comprehensive report which provided a break down of car park usage and associated charge structures and provided information with regard to the number of excess charge notices that had been issued since the introduction of decriminalisation of parking enforcement in October 2004.

The Chairman referred to the disparity between the figures contained in this report and those in the budget for the Environment Committee and asked that there should be standardisation of such figures in future. The Community and Development Manager said that this would be rectified and in response to further questions said that quarterly reports would be provided to enable Members to access the impact of increases in charges. He also outlined the consultation which had been undertaken with regard to the increases in charges and updated Members on the staffing situation. In response to a question from the Chairman he said that the establishment of 7 parking enforcement officers was based on the model put forward by the County Council which had previously been agreed by Members.

Comparative figures were provided with other Authorities in the County and these would be considered by the DPE Task Group when undertaking its review in the spring of 2005. However, he said that in looking at the income generated to date from the issuing of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN), the Council was on target and had received full payment for 1,026 on street PCNs.

Councillor Silver said that he had received a complimentary communication from a doctor in Great Dunmow regarding the prompt and satisfactory response which had been made by the parking section to a recent problem.

**SC2.40 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2004 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**SC2.41 BUSINESS ARISING****Courier Service**

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Democratic Services Manager reported that the Resources Committee had decided to discontinue the Members' courier service and revert to two deliveries per week by Royal Mail.

**SC2.42 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF REVENUE SERVICES**

The Executive Manager Customer Services presented a report providing Members with an update on the progress of the Revenue Services Best Value Review Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

He said that the Resources Committee had approved the SIP on 22 January 2004. The Member Reference Group had agreed to meet every six months to monitor the SIP and meetings had been held on 3 June 2004 and 18 January 2005 to review progress.

An updated SIP detailing progress was submitted. The Executive Manager said that one of the objectives in the SIP was to maximise take up of benefit and a separate action plan was submitted for this.

He said that the Council had been visited on 20 and 21 October 2004 by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate to look at the steps taken by the authority to maximise take up of Council Tax Benefit. He added that this was a specialist inspection and the Council was one of only 12 selected at random throughout the country. He would report further to the Committee once the inspection report had been received.

Members considered the report in detail and emphasised the importance of using Parish magazines to publicise issues, providing comparative information with other Councils and, in particular, sharing information with Councillors. Members also considered that some of the objectives such as the introduction of payment cards would be more appropriately provided on a County or regional basis and it was felt that more information and "template" guides could be provided by the national organisations such as the Local Government Association.

The Executive Manager said that during the benchmarking exercise the cost of IT had been questioned and it was proposed that this would be reduced by £60,000 by returning the Managed Revenues IT Service back in house.

### SC2.43 **EVALUATION OF TELEPHONE AND INTERNET REGISTRATION 2004/05**

The Electoral Services Officer reported on the changes which had been made last year which enabled entries on the Electoral Register to be confirmed by telephone or by Internet without the need to return the annual registration form. He explained how the process had evolved and said that the streamlining of the registration process had proved successful. There were a total of 5,369 successful registrations, 4,144 of these by telephone and 1,225 by Internet. The total amounted to 19% of all completed registrations and about 25.5% of no change registrations. A small number of people had reported that they could not complete their registrations this way because their telephone receiver did not have a touch-tone facility.

As a result of the changes some 5,000 pieces of paper did not have to be received, opened and stored. Also, the Electoral Services Officer reported that last year saw the introduction of electronic scanning of forms. This meant that forms did not have to be sorted into register order as they could be viewed or retrieved either on screen or by reference to batch number details. This had saved on clerical costs as the opening and sorting process was much simpler and quicker.

He concluded that an analysis of costs indicated a reduction from £17,700 in 2003 to £16,700 last year. However, he said that it needed to be borne in mind that the level of response had declined from 98-99% achieved prior to 2002 to a figure of no more than 92-93% now but the response rates in 2003 and 2004 were broadly comparable.

Councillors congratulated the Electoral Services Officer for a clear and well presented report.

### SC2.44 **BULKY HOUSEHOLD COLLECTIONS**

The Services Officer submitted a report outlining the future proposals and recommendations contained within the waste strategy for the collection of bulky household waste and changes made as a result of a Member Workshop held on 27 January 2005.

Councillor Murphy considered that the report did not enable Members to scrutinise the service adequately. He also considered that the cost of £100,000 was excessive. He suggested that reference needed to be made to risk assessments and sustainability assessments and the impact on pensioners and the disabled and also suggested that a scavenging service be introduced. He also said that there should be evidence of public consultation in the report. Councillor Lemon shared his concerns about the impact on the elderly and disabled.

Councillor Silver accepted some of the points which had been made but emphasised that the Uttlesford service was one of the best in the County.

Councillor Murphy also suggested that an Officer other than an Environmental Health Officer, should look at the issues to see how they could be tested and scrutinised properly. The Executive Manager Strategy and Performance said

that she would be looking at the work programme and welcomed any ideas and key issues from Members.

The Services Officer concluded that the driving force behind the suggestions in the report were about reducing the amount of waste and not just about cost savings.

**SC2.45 MATTERS ARISING FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

Members received the decision lists of recent meetings of the Licensing Transport and Highways, Environment and Resources Committees but there were no matters arising from these.

**SC2.46 ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING**

Members identified options for discussion for the next meeting and it was suggested that the emphasis should be on planning procedure, advice and complaints. It was also suggested that pensions could be examined at a future meeting subject to the relevant experts being available.

The meeting ended at 9.25pm.