

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Thursday, 22 January 2004

PRESENT: Councillor SGM Kindersley – Chairman  
Councillor \*MP Howell – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	SJ Agnew	RE Barrett
	RF Bryant	EW Bullman
	NN Cathcart	Mrs J Hughes
	EL Monks	WH Saberton
	Mrs GJ Smith	PL Stroude
	DALG Wherrell	

Councillors JD Batchelor, Mrs DP Roberts, Mrs DSK Spink MBE and RT Summerfield were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Dale Robinson	- Chief Environmental Health Officer
	Charlotte Mills	- Human Resources Officer
	Patrick Adams	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Committee:  
Councillors MP Howell and LJ Wilson.

### **2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2003 were agreed as a correct record.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

Four public questions had been received:

#### Question 1 regarding the High Court Appeal: Planning Permission 307 Huntingdon Road

The Chairman introduced Pat Griffin and Susan Hughes, from the organisation X-cape, who were presenting a question on behalf of Andrew Tyler, Director of Animal Aid. In their three minutes speech they stated that the Council would benefit if the appeal was a success because:

- The expensive policing costs of the inevitable protestors would be avoided.
- The majority of the Council's residents opposed the laboratory and would welcome the success of the appeal.

They explained that X-cape had not been included as one of the appellants as they were not a limited company and could not afford the possible liability costs of the appeal. They asked the following question:

*Will SCDC agree to pay one third of any costs of the High Court appeal to the decision by the Deputy Prime Minister to allow Cambridge University to build a primate research Centre in the Cambridgeshire green belt? The other parts being met by Animal Aid and the National Anti-Vivisection Society.*

The Chairman stated that this Committee was not a decision making body and did not have the power to grant funding for appeals. He explained that Councillor Mrs JM Healey, the Chairman of the Development and Conservation Control Committee, was responsible for this decision. It was expected that Councillor Mrs Healey would provide a written response within the next two weeks. This question had been received on Wednesday afternoon and there had been insufficient time to gain comprehensive legal advice. For these reasons the Chairman advised that the Committee did not discuss this issue.

In their supplementary question, Pat Griffin and Susan Hughes asked why only the public order issue had been given as a reason for refusing planning permission and the additional issue of the green belt had not been highlighted.

The Chairman thanked Pat Griffin and Susan Hughes for their questions and reiterated that they could expect a reply from the Chairman of the Development and Conservation Control Committee in the next fortnight.

#### Questions 2, 3 & 4 Regarding the Green Box Collection of Recyclable Waste

Three questions had been received regarding the "Green Box" collection carried out by Cleanaway on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the questioners, the Chairman read out the three questions:

*Could the Council please explain why the recycling in the green boxes in Gamlingay was collected late twice just before Christmas, and then 4 days late after?*

Rob Warner, resident of Gamlingay

*Gamlingay Parish Council should like to know what steps are being taken to ensure that the late collection of green boxes does not become normal practice and if residents of this community can expect to receive a higher standard of provision.*

Debra Royal, Clerk to Gamlingay Parish Council

*Why does the order of collection of Green Boxes clearly change week by week between 7am and 5.30pm? How are residents to know when the collection is due?*

Dr Alison Littlefair, Chair of Harlton Parish Council

The Chairman informed the Committee that similar concerns regarding delayed collections had been expressed from Mr and Mrs Hough, residents of Gamlingay, Peter Dean, resident of Little Shelford and residents of Guilden Morden and Steeple Morden who had made their feeling known to their local member Councillor Mrs CAED Murfitt.

The Chairman informed the Committee that Councillor Mrs EM Heazell had expressed her concern over the process of returning green boxes.

The Chairman invited Linda Brighton and Ian McLees of Cleanaway to answer these questions. Linda Brighton apologised on behalf of Cleanaway for the disruption of the service. She explained this was due to:

- The unprecedented volume of recyclable waste after Christmas.
- Sickness of Cleanaway staff.

#### Rise in Demand

Linda Brighton reported that a rise in demand had been expected. The normal collection amounted to approximately 40-50 tonnes and Christmas 2002 had seen this increase to 70-80 tonnes. However, Christmas 2003 had resulted in approximately 150 tonnes being collected. This could not have been predicted and resulted in delayed collections as the vehicles had to make more trips to the depot to unload than expected.

#### Staff Sickness

In response to questioning Linda Brighton confirmed that staff sickness had been an issue. Absent staff had been replaced by agency staff but this contributed to the delay. It was noted that new staff would not know the route as well as the original crew. It was understood that there had been no industrial action by staff.

Concern was expressed that lessons had not been properly learnt from the problems experienced in Christmas 2002. Linda Brighton replied that next Christmas Cleanaway would be operating larger vehicles. Councillor CC Barker, portfolio holder for Environmental Health, stated he had expressed his concerns to Cleanaway and was satisfied that appropriate action had been taken to avoid a repeat of the recent problems. However, he warned that due to the increase in demand, Christmas was an unpredictable period. He praised the level of co-operation between Cleanaway and the Council.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer explained that extra funding had been agreed to deal with the extra demand but the final amount was under discussion. It was understood that this decision would be made by the Chief Environmental Health Officer under the terms agreed in the contract between the Council and Cleanaway.

#### Publicity and Communications

Linda Brighton promised a publicity campaign to inform residents that paper should be placed at the bottom of the green box and metal tins and glass should be placed on top of the paper in separate bags. This should avoid the problem of "co-mingling". Linda Brighton offered to attend parish meetings in an attempt to address the concerns of parish councillors. It was agreed that communication with residents needed to be improved.

Members of the Committee made the following points regarding the recent delayed collections:

- Late collections had caused problems with broken glass.
- Concern was expressed over the recorded message from Cleanaway, which failed to list all the villages that had delayed collections.
- Disappointment was expressed at the fact that the Cleanaway answer phone had been full when people needed guidance about the late collections.
- It was suggested that it would have been more appropriate to contact District Councillors on Friday afternoons instead of the Parish Clerk as the Parish Office would be closed over the weekend.

Members of the Committee made the following points regarding the dissemination of information to residents:

- The offer to attend Parish Council meetings was welcomed.
- More publicity was required on the issue of “co-mingling”.
- People who moved into area were often ignorant of the green box scheme as the previous home owners had removed the box when they moved out of the area.
- Writing an article in the village newspaper would be an excellent way of informing residents how to use the green box.
- It was understood that the addresses of the editors of the village newspapers could be obtained from the Council’s Information Section.
- An article on how to use the green box should be placed in the South Cambs News Magazine.

Members of the Committee made the following points regarding possible improvements to the Green Box service:

- Concern was expressed over the non-collection from more isolated houses.
- It was suggested that route maps should exist for vehicle crews to make it easier for new staff to complete a round they had not been on before.

It was agreed that the 3 questioners should receive a full written response and it was hoped that Cleanaway would ensure that the Parish Councils of Harlton and Gamlingay were contacted.

## 5. DRAFT AGENDA PROGRAMME AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

It was suggested that the Committee should conduct a scrutiny of the Arts Council England East as it appeared that the arts projects in the district stood to lose subsidies from this organisation. Councillor Mrs Roberts, the Community Development portfolio holder, expressed her support for this scrutiny.

It was understood that a letter had been sent out from the Grounds Maintenance Task and Finish Group to all Parish Councils. Concern was expressed regarding the complexities of the landownership issue. It was agreed that a progress report from this Group was required.

The Committee **AGREED** to add the following items to the agenda for February’s meeting:

- A Scrutiny of Arts Council England East.
- An Update from the Grounds Maintenance Task and Group.

The Committee **NOTED** the Draft Agenda Programme.

## 6. VERBAL ITEM FROM THE CHIEF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER ON THE NEW WASTE COLLECTION SCHEME

Councillor Barker updated the Committee on the implementation of the new waste collection scheme. He reported that the scheme was now District wide. The implementation of the scheme had been a huge task and he commended the Environmental Health staff who had carried out this work and expressed regret at the stress suffered by staff. The whole process had been completed in 3 months. He reported that the number of complaints per month were decreasing.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer made the following points:

- There had been approximately 1,000 more properties that required wheeled bins than had been indicated by the sack collection scheme.
- 108,000 homes had been provided wheeled bins in three months.
- This speed of implementation of a new waste collection scheme was unprecedented and this Council had been requested to publish a paper on the achievement within professional magazines.

#### Wheeled Bin Hotline

The Chief Environmental Health Officer reported that the Wheeled Bin Hotline had proved invaluable as the office staff would have been unable to deal with the number of calls during the implementation process. He informed the Committee that officers had called the Wheeled Bin Hotline, posing as a member of the public, to ensure that correct advice was being given.

Councillor JD Batchelor, the Information and Customer Services portfolio holder, informed the Committee that there had been 21,000 calls since the Wheeled Bin Hotline was set up. The average wait time for a caller was 20 seconds, the maximum wait time had been 8 minutes. The number of calls to the hotline had recently decreased.

Concern was expressed that not all queries from the call centre were being acted on by the DSO. The Chief Environmental Health Officer agreed to pass on the concerns of the Committee to the Commercial Services Director, but he reminded Members of the volume of calls received by the Hotline and the fact that the system was not yet integrated and all queries were e-mailed to the relevant officer. The Chief Environmental Health Officer stated that there would be an improvement in the service when the call centre was set up, as this would allow direct communication between the centre and the relevant officers.

#### Dealing with Queries

Between the 7<sup>th</sup> July and 12<sup>th</sup> January 6,200 enquiries had been received by Environmental Health and the aim was to deal with all queries within 3 working days:

- In July 88% of all queries were dealt with in this time.
- In August 95% of all queries were dealt with in this time.
- In September 76% of all queries were dealt with in this time.
- In October 72% of all queries were dealt with in this time.
- In November 87% of all queries were dealt with in this time
- In December 81% of all queries were dealt with in this time.
- So far in January this figure was 90%.

In response to questioning the Chief Environmental Health Officer stated that advice on how to recycle was always given over the phone in the first instance in the hope that this would make a home visit unnecessary.

#### Complaints from Residents

The Chief Environmental Health Officer informed the Committee that a small minority of residents were persistently complaining about the service and this was absorbing officer time. It was understood that three complaints had been passed to the ombudsman. The Chief Environmental Health Officer reported that despite the articles in the local media the number of complaints was decreasing and he demonstrated this by reading several complimentary letters.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer stated that a petition that merely requested a weekly black bin collection, without the background facts, would be likely to gain signatures. It was important to stress that a weekly black bin collection would be likely to

lead to an increase in Council tax and would increase the amount of refuse being put into landfill which could lead to the County Council and this District Council not meeting their obligations. It was suggested that there should be a publicity campaign to advertise these facts.

#### Performance

It was understood that there had been a low number of missed collections with a collection rate of 99.93%. This was an excellent rating for a newly introduced waste collection scheme. The scheme was on course to meet the recycling targets set.

#### Contaminated Rubbish

It was understood that the residents had been excellent at sorting out their rubbish and no loads had been rejected by Donarbon, the company that recycles the District's waste.

#### Fly-Tipping

It was noted that there had been no statistical increase in fly-tipping since the introduction of this wheeled bin scheme.

#### Sack Collections and Extra Bins

In response to questioning the Chief Environmental Health Officer stated that the percentage of those on special sack collections was in line with the figures expected and just over 200 people had been assessed as requiring extra bins to cope with their rubbish collection.

#### Recycling Animal Products

In response to questioning, Councillor Barker confirmed that the Council were still waiting for a response from DEFRA regarding the recycling of animal products. The Chief Environmental Health Officer pledged to keep up the pressure on DEFRA in demanding a response. He informed the Committee that DEFRA needed to award Donarbon (a private company) a licence and this limited the involvement of the Council in this process. It was suggested that residents needed to be able to dispose food waste once a week, in either the green bin or black bin.

#### Nappy Collections

It was expected that a separate collection service of disposable nappies would be set up later this year.

#### Publicity

The Chief Environmental Health Officer stated that a publicity campaign was required to encourage residents to put rubbish directly into their wheeled bins instead of first putting them into tied black sacks, which took up more room in the wheeled bin and so carried less rubbish.

Councillor JD Batchelor, the portfolio holder for Information and Customer Services, asserted that the timetable in the South Cambs News should be altered so that different symbols were used instead of just different colours to depict black and green wheeled bin collections to help the visually impaired. Councillor Barker replied that this issue was under review. It was suggested that the information should be enlarged and put on 2 full pages, as its current format was too small.

Members of the Committee made the following points regarding publicity:

- The signs advertising the change of rubbish collection dates had been very effective but should now be removed.
- Residents needed to be reminded that cardboard can be placed in the green bin.

Plastic Recycling

Councillor Barker confirmed that 20 plastic recycling bins would be placed in the District, 2 at each of the four supermarkets and the remaining 12 in locations to be decided; probably in the larger villages.

**7. TO AGREE SCRUTINY HANDBOOK**

The Chairman invited the Committee to agree the Scrutiny handbook. It was understood that the handbook would be circulated to all Members and would form part of the induction pack. It was noted that people who wished to ask public questions would be sent a separate guidance sheet.

It was noted that the Constitution Review Working Party had recommended that the Committee be renamed the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and a petitions process be adopted. If accepted by Council, these recommendations would alter the Scrutiny Handbook.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer was thanked for his work in producing this handbook.

The Committee AGREED the handbook, subject to proposed changes to the Constitution that would be debated by Council on 26th February 2004.

**8. FUTURE MEETING DATES OF THE COMMITTEE**

The Chairman presented this report, which invited the Committee to decide when it should meet during the municipal year 2004/05. The Chairman reminded the Committee that Cabinet had decided to meet on the second Thursday of every month.

It had been suggested that Scrutiny meet on the same day as Cabinet, the afternoon of the second Thursday of every month. However, it was understood that having two committee meetings on the same day put extra strain on the officers and councillors involved.

It was noted that Members found it difficult to attend meetings of this Committee when they were scheduled to last all day. It was suggested that in future this should be avoided and meetings should be scheduled for the afternoon only. It was suggested that this Committee should meet on an alternative day to Thursday, but it was noted that Cabinet and Council both met on a Thursday and so it made sense for this Committee to do the same.

The Committee

**AGREED** to meet on the third Thursday of every month for the municipal year 2004/05.

**9. FEASIBILITY REPORT ON FLU JABS FOR STAFF**

Councillor RT Summerfield, Resources and Staffing portfolio holder, presented this report on the feasibility of providing flu vaccinations and other inoculations to staff. He stated that there were strains of flu that the inoculations could not prevent.

Members of the Committee made the following points:

- Inoculation jabs could be provided for less than the £12 quoted in the

report.

- The cost of staff sickness due to flu outweighed the cost of the jabs.
- From first hand experience, these inoculations were effective.
- Flu inoculations were free to the elderly and other high risk groups.

The Human Resources Officer explained that it was too late to provide inoculations for this winter.

Councillor EL Monks proposed and Councillor RF Bryant seconded that no action be taken. A vote was taken and by 2 votes to 5 this proposal was **DEFEATED**.

Councillor Mrs J Hughes proposed and Councillor DALG Wherrell seconded that inoculations be offered to staff for next winter.

A vote was taken and by 7 votes to 2 the Committee **RECOMMENDED** to the Resources and Staffing portfolio holder that flu jabs be offered to all staff for the winter of 2004/05.

## 10. **INDUCTION, TRAINING AND MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

The Chairman informed the Committee that in response to this report Councillor JD Batchelor had decided to set up an Advisory Group to examine member training and development. Members of the Committee were invited to volunteer for membership of this Advisory Group. It was expected that this Group would operate as a Task and Finish Group and so would not be a large commitment on its members' time.

Councillors Mrs J Hughes, PL Stroude and DALG Wherrell volunteered to be on this Advisory Group.

## 11. **REPORT FROM MIKE MOSLEY ON COMMITTEE MEETING ON 22ND DECEMBER 2003**

The Chairman presented this report on the previous Committee meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2003 from Mike Mosley, the Deputy Chief Executive of the East of England Regional Assembly.

### Public Questions

It was noted that the rules regarding the asking of public questions had been altered to allow members of the public a supplementary question in addition to their original question.

### Focussing on Important Issues

It was suggested that issues such as play equipment and swimming pools were of importance to the public and so should be discussed by the Committee. However, it was also suggested that these issues should be discussed by sub-groups of the Committee to allow the Committee to focus on the larger corporate issues.

### Room Layout

It was agreed that the layout of the Committee room was different from that under the old Committee system and was entirely appropriate for this Committee.

### Agenda and Reports

The new agenda layout, prompted by Mr Mosley's report, was commended. It was hoped that officers would heed Mr Mosley's recommendation of shorter reports.



Officer Support

It was suggested that the Committee required a designated officer to examine and summarise information presented in the Scrutiny reports.

New Political System

It was stated that the new political structure had disempowered non-executive Councillors and this problem could not be solved by this Committee.

Comparisons with Other Authorities

It was suggested that the Scrutiny Committee of other Councils, such as the County Council, should be visited. Councillor Stroude stated that the Scrutiny Committees of the County worked well and were open to the public. He added that there was a particular focus on facts and figures but he reminded the Committee that the County was more political than this authority and their approach might not be adaptable. It was noted that the Scrutiny Committees of the County Council would publish a minority report when opinion was divided on a subject.

The Chairman concluded that it would be a mistake to attempt to adopt any radical changes so soon before the elections on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2004. It was agreed that a letter should be sent from the Committee thanking Mr Mosley for his informative report.

**12. PROGRAMME OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Committee **NOTED** the Forward Programme.

**13. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that future meetings would be held on:  
2004: 12<sup>th</sup> February, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 15<sup>th</sup> April and 13<sup>th</sup> May.  
All at 2.00pm unless otherwise stated.

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**The Meeting ended at 4.50 p.m.**

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