

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Vice-Chair), Mark Hurrell, Cathy Kent, Maureen Pearce, Aaron Green (Substitute) (substitute for Valerie Morris-Cook) and Andrew Jefferies

Apologies: Councillors Alex Anderson

In attendance:
Michael Dineen, Assistant Director Counter Fraud, Enforcement and Community Safety
Charlotte Edwards, Trading Standards Manager
Paul Southall
Luke Tucker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

34. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

35. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

36. Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Sport, and Leisure

Councillor Jefferies (Leader), Cabinet Member for Environment, Economic Development and Directional Leadership answered members questions on his annual report Environment, Sport, and Leisure.

The following points were raised:

- Member asked whether small food bins will be affected by changing legislation.
 - Food waste trial will continue.
- Member asked whether the £52,000 which was allocated to 16 Active Thurrock projects had been spent in its entirety or if it is planned spend. Member also asked where the money had been spent.
 - The money has been spent on the 16 Active Thurrock projects.

- **ACTION:** Leader informed the committee he will provide a full list of locations
- Members asked questions and for clarity on bin collection schedules.
 - Brown bins (garden waste) collection will continue after Christmas in January fortnightly.
 - Blue bins (recycling) collection will continue fortnightly, looking to increase collections around Christmas time.
- Member asked when the waste strategy will be ready to be presented to the committee.
 - Waste strategy will be ready for next committee meeting in January 2024
- Members asked whether the waste education campaign in primary schools would be increased or if there were any further initiatives.
 - **ACTION:** to find out if there are any more plans or initiatives for further waste education campaign programmes in primary schools
 - **ACTION:** Paul Southall, will include in the waste strategy how the local authority engages with other stakeholders and schools.
- Members acknowledged the hard work of enforcement officers who deal with fly tipping and asked if there was a strategy to increase capture of fly tippers.
 - Leader appealed that members of the public report fly tipping.
- Member asked if there was any statistical difference in fly tipping between the East and West of the borough.
 - Michael Dineen stated, there is no differential across the borough, and would target hotspots when they come up.
- Members asked if there was an increase in attendance at events organised by the active parks team when compared to previous years.
 - **ACTION:** To find attendance figures of events active park team has organised.
- Member asked if the cleaner team would continue to provide services (pavements, cubs and brick walls) biannually.
 - Yes, it will continue. There was an unsuccessful trial, but it has since been reverted back.
- Member gave praise to improvements of park and new football goals.
- Members asked why the new food waste vehicles couldn't be utilised as originally envisioned and why 21 vehicles were bought instead of 1 for test purposes.
 - The side pod of vehicle was too high when lifted. Health and safety also deemed them unsafe for refuge crews to use.
 - Leader - The people responsible for the purchase of 21 vehicles are no longer in the employment of the local authority.
 - Paul Southall added that only 10 vehicles had the side pod which was deemed unusable.
- Member said in relation to high level of contamination in recycling from flats in the borough, that it takes a long time for recycling bins to be changed round.
 - **ACTION:** Paul Southall, will investigate how recycling bins are managed at flats.

- Member asked if there was any update on providing bigger communal bins for flats instead of individual bins.
 - **ACTION:** Paul Southall, will investigate
- Member asked how much money was lost regarding the 21 vehicles bought if they are unusable and of if any checks and balances have been put in place to stop scenarios like this re-occurring.
 - Vehicles are not completely useless only food pod isn't being used.
 - Processes are being put in place to ensure that this scenario doesn't happen again.
- Members wanted more information on Operation Collie (cleaning alleyways) and which alleyways were cleared. They wondered if these types of partnerships would continue with the Section 114 notice in place. Members also asked if there was going to be a plan setting out who owns what alleyway.
 - Leader – we are abandoning silo working.
 - **ACTION:** Leader stated he will find out information on what alleyways were cleared
- Member requested to come back in January with regards to Alleyways
 - **ACTION:** Paul Southall, will come back with coordination plan for clearing of alleyways
- Member asked if anything could be done about bins blocking pavement access.
 - Michael Dineen, the local authority does not currently have the power to issue a fine/tickets. Presently the local authority would like to encourage and engage with those residents.
- Member gave praise for playground inspection and maintenance and asked how we maintain play equipment.
 - Leader - All play equipment is inspected regularly.
 - Paul Southall – Frequency of inspections is fortnightly, and repairs are actioned quickly.
- Members gave praise for work on war memorials and landscaping work taking place across the borough.
- Member asked if refuge workers could return bins to their original setting to ensure driveways and path access especially for disabled people is clear.
 - Paul Southall will remind refuge workers to return bins to the original setting.

At 19:43pm, Councillor Jefferies (Leader), Cabinet Member for Environment, Economic Development and Directional Leadership left the meeting.

37. Financial penalties for the enforcement of consumer protection legislation relevant to Letting Agents and Landlords

Charlotte Edwards, Trading Standards Manager • Trading Standards introduced the report in relation to a new policy for imposing financial penalties for breaches of legislation relating to letting agents and landlords. The recommendation is that the committee note the contents of this report and also supports this policy to go forward to be agreed at cabinet.

- The private rental sector in the housing market is second only to owner occupation in England and the rapid growth of the sector has prompted a need for property management standards.
- The Tenant Fees Act prohibits landlords and agents from charging any fees to tenants other than those that are permitted in the act.
- Consumer Rights Act requires agents to display a list of relevant fees that tenants and landlords are required to pay.
- A property agent holds client money, and they must be a member of an approved or designated client money protection scheme.
- All letting agents need to be member of a redress scheme.
- The local authority has a statutory duty to enforce this legislation and can impose a financial penalty. Any decisions on imposing penalty financial penalties will be made in line with the policy.

The following points were raised by members:

- Member asked if the client money protection scheme was regarding deposits taken by landlords and asked how we check that landlords are members of the scheme.
 - Trading Standards would check directly with the businesses. All schemes have to be registered and the local authority can ask for information.
- Member further asked if there was interdepartmental collaboration between trading standards and housing and also if it effected HMOs (house in multiple occupation)
 - Trading standards work very closely with housing, and they are cited on the report and fully support it.
 - This would also apply to landlords of HMOs.
- Member asked if the policy would also cover land, an example was given of a person in a rent property. The member asked if they would have to pay towards an agent/groundsman to maintain their local road, cutting grass, tree management and bin sheds.
 - A landlord or letting agent can only charge certain fees under the legislation: -
 - Rent,
 - A refundable tenancy deposit,
 - A refundable holding deposit payments to change the tenants,
 - Payments associated with early termination of the tenants,
 - Payments in respect of utilities,
 - Communication services,
 - TV licencing,
 - Council tax,
 - Default fee for late payment of rent

RESOLVED:

That the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Note the contents of this report.**

2. The Committee supports the financial penalties policy for the enforcement of consumer protection legislation relevant to Letting Agents & Landlords, so it can be implemented within our Enforcement Policy once agreed at Cabinet.

At 19:53pm, Charlotte Edwards, Trading Standards Manager • Trading Standards left the meeting.

38. Annual Status Report on Air Quality in Thurrock

Peter Bond, Air Quality Pollution Officer • Environmental Protection introduced the report in relation to the annual status report on air quality in the borough of Thurrock.

The local authority has an obligation under part four of the Environment Act wherein the local authority is required to declare an air quality management area where the air is monitored or modelled exceedances of the national air quality objectives. Within 18 months of declaration, the local authority is required to produce an air quality action plan.

- All of the monitoring sites for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) were compliant in 2022.
- Only two monitoring sites were still within 10% of the relevant air quality objective. Lakeside Tesco and Purfleet-on-Thames
- There has been a slight increase in levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) at some of our monitoring stations between 2021 and 2022. Possibly related to impact of traffic returning after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The increase compared with 2021 still is a substantial decrease compared with 2019 pre the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Particulate matter (ultra fine dust and one of the key pollutants of concern in the borough) were compliant with the national air quality objectives for 2022 across all stations in the borough.

The following points were raised by members:

- Member asked what a diffusion tube is.
 - A diffusion tube is a passive sampler, passive meaning that there's no electricity. It is a 5cm long Perspex tube with a cap on either end. In one cap there's a filter coated in a substance that degrades predictably with exposure to nitrogen dioxide (NO₂).
- Member asked for the locations of the diffusion tubes and if there were present on A roads and particularly London Road.
 - Most of the monitoring sites are near residential buildings.
 - London Road in Purfleet-on-Thames had the highest recording of nitrogen dioxide 39.3 micrograms per cubic metre, 40 micrograms is the annual air quality objective.

- Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) did decrease on London Road between 2021 and 2022
- Member asked about a site on Pilgrims Lane and if the lorries were adding to pollution.
 - Possibly, due to the type of monitoring you can't exactly tell what a source of the pollution is from the data.
- Member asked the reason for the reduction of air pollution and if it was related to an increase in electric vehicles.
 - Private diesel vehicles that are the dominant emitter of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), electric vehicle will be responsible for some improvement and an increasingly in regulation from the European emission standards.
- Member asked if pollution in Purfleet-on-Thames was due to vehicles more than anything else and if it was nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) that is high in the area.
 - The dominant emission source of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) on London Road in Purfleet-on-Thames will be from road traffic a substantial amount of HTV traffic connect to the ports.
 - Has legal levels of air pollution.
- Member asked if there were an extra 2,000 vehicles on London Road over the next a couple of weeks to a month, would that increase that nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels.
 - Yes, it is likely that 2,000 extra vehicles would have some impact on the nitrogen dioxide levels.
- Member asked how use of river taxis/ferries would alter the data.
 - In general, providing more sustainable transport options will reduce emissions.
- Member asked if monitors are located near schools.
 - Yes, a list can be found in the report.
- Member asked if environmental protection has an input in other departments to keeping air quality low regarding the development in the borough and if there were any concerns regarding funding.
 - Air quality action plan works with a wide range of other departments and external partners.
 - It's a statutory obligation for the local authority to produce the report, thus funding will continue.
- Member brought up the issue of people sitting in their cars with an engine on by schools, known as idling.
 - Reduction of engine idling is one of the actions in the local authority's air quality action plan.
 - Parking enforcement officers go to schools and inform drivers who are idling of the law to create awareness.
 - **ACTION:** member said with the motion going through at the moment regarding school, too also make schools aware of engine idling
- Member asked if the wind direction make a difference to the air quality.
 - Finer particles like PM 2.5, can travel thousands of kilometres, which is why we often see impacts of Saharan dust in Thurrock.

- Easter time the borough gets high pollution episodes because the prevailing wind direction reverses and transports emissions from the continent which contributes to background levels.
- Member asked if the rest of the country had cleaner air would the borough receive cleaner air due to prevailing westerly winds.
 - Yes, and there is national work on going to improve air quality.
 - Background air pollution is one of the main sources of air pollution in the borough.
- Member asked if there was monitoring of air pollution on the River Thames.
 - Monitoring of emissions from the river is something that the Port of London Authority is looking into.
 - Not a great concern with pollution from the river
- Member asked how the borough of Thurrock compared to other local authorities with regards to air quality
 - All monitoring stations are showing compliance with the national air quality objectives.
 - The borough of Thurrock probably has far better air quality than any metropolitan authority in England or the United Kingdom.
- Member shared her concerns regarding the impact of development in the borough on air quality.
 - Air Quality Pollution Officer is a statutory consultee on planning applications. If a risk of increasing air pollution is identified an air quality assessment will take place with suggestions on reducing emissions further from the development.

RESOLVED:

That the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the contents of this report.

At 20:24pm, Peter Bond, Air Quality Pollution Officer • Environmental Protection left the meeting.

39. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme. Members requested to hear the report on the Provision of Tree Surgery Contract (Vincent Taylor, Head of Clean and Green Services) in January 2023. The report wasn't presented in June and was withdrawn to go to Cabinet on 12th July 2023.

The two deferred reports the Waste Strategy Update Edward Brotherton and Verbal Update on Clean and Paul Southall Assistant Director - Street Scene and Leisure / Vincent Taylor, Head of Clean and Green Services requested to be heard for the January meeting.

Members noted that January would be the last meeting before purdah and discussed a possible need for a meeting in March before purdah.

A full recording of the meeting can be viewed from the following link:
[Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 7th November 2023, 19:00 – Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**