

BOROUGH OF BARROW-IN-FURNESS
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting:- 9th November, 2011
at 2.00 p.m. (Committee Room No. 4)

A G E N D A

PART ONE

1. To note any items which the Chairman considers to be of an urgent nature.
2. To receive notice from Members who may wish to move any delegated matter non-delegated and which will be decided by a majority of Members present and voting at the meeting.
3. Admission of Public and Press

To consider whether the public and press should be excluded from the meeting during consideration on any of the items on the agenda.

4. Disclosures of Interests and any declarations under Paragraph 16: Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Party Whip).

A Member with a personal interest in a matter to be considered at this meeting must either before the matter is discussed or when the interest becomes apparent disclose

1. ***The existence of that interest to the meeting.***
2. ***The nature of the interest.***
3. ***Decide whether they have a prejudicial interest.***

A note on declaring interests at meetings, which incorporates certain other aspects of the Code of Conduct and a pro-forma for completion where interests are disclosed will be available at the meeting.

5. Apologies for Absence/Attendance of Substitutes.
6. Confirmation of Minutes of the meeting held on 28th September, 2011 (copy attached).
- (D) 7. Street Cleansing.
- (D) 8. Allotments.

NOTE (D) – Delegated
(R) – Referred

Membership of Committee

Councillors Roberts (Chairman)
Doughty (Vice-Chairman)
Biggins
Derbyshire
Hamilton
Husband
Johnston
R. McClure
Opie
Preston
C. Thomson
M. A. Thomson

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BOROUGH OF BARROW IN FURNESS

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting, Wednesday, 28th September, 2011
at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillors Roberts (Chairman), Barlow, Biggins, Derbyshire, Hamilton, Husband, Johnston, R. McClure, Opie and M. A. Thomson.

15 – Apologies for Absence/Attendance of Substitute Members

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Doughty (Vice-Chairman).

Councillor Barlow had replaced Councillor C. Thomson for this meeting only.

16 – Minutes

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27th July, 2011 were taken as read and confirmed.

17 – Street Cleansing

The Policy Review Officer reported that the Work Group had met with the Street Care Manager who had explained the current street cleansing arrangements and issues that the Council were experiencing. Members had recognised that street cleansing was a complex service and had asked for a story board to clarify how the operation was carried out.

There were two types of street cleaning processes; there was the routine cleaning which meant that all streets were cleaned on a routine basis and should meet national standards on completion of cleaning. These streets were cleaned using a combination of mechanical road sweepers, pavement sweepers and manual litter collection and sweeping teams. The frequency of routine cleaning for each street was based on the Code of Practice for Litter and Refuse as set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Secondly, there was supplementary cleaning. Streetcare Officers undertook daily auditing of the street cleaning operations and identified areas where the cleanliness standards had not been achieved or residents reported incidents of littering and flytipping through the Customer Relationship Management System. The Cleansing Contractor then had a Response Team which dealt with the non-routine cleansing issues.

Members suggested that it would be beneficial for all Councillors to have a list of street cleaning schedules within the Borough.

Members also referred to the amount of dog mess around the town which was not dealt with through street cleansing. It was thought that this was exacerbated by the lack of litter bins within the town. The Policy Review would raise this issue with the Streetcare Manager and report back to the next meeting regarding problem areas within the town.

The Policy Review Officer tabled information regarding the number of fly tips, tonnage of street cleaning and the street cleansing complaints for the years 2010/11 and 2011/12, as shown below:-

| Fly Tips | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| April | 133 | 122 |
| May | 123 | 94 |
| June | 126 | 122 |
| July | 153 | 98 |
| August | 118 | 98 |
| September | 143 | 86 |

| Street Cleaning Tonnage | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| April | 183.26 | 72.34 |
| May | 155.27 | 81.12 |
| June | 138.76 | 78.06 |
| July | 131.80 | 75.57 |
| August | 117.00 | 82.40 |
| September | 103.29 | 76.18 |

| Street Cleansing Complaints | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| April | 8 | 17 |
| May | 18 | 13 |
| June | 21 | 13 |
| July | 24 | 42 |
| August | 26 | 17 |
| September | 19 | 6 |

He reported that the graphs indicated that the situation was getting better although there were still some areas which needed further improvement.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Council was still below the target of 40% for recycling. He suggested that further education was required for the public on recycling issues.

RESOLVED:- (i) That the information be noted; and

(ii) That the Streetcare Manager report back to the next meeting regarding problem area within the Borough.

18 – Allotments

The Policy Review Officer reported that the Allotments Work Group had met and agreed that the focus of this review should be to reduce the costs of administering the Council's allotments to ensure that the Council could continue to provide a viable service.

A review of the allotment budget indicated that the three main costs were:-

- Grounds maintenance, which included the removal of rubbish;
- Collection of rent; and
- Provision of water.

The Work Group had met on 22nd September, 2011 and the Policy Review Officer provided Members with a verbal update from that meeting.

He reported that it was the Council's aim to make all allotments self-financing by 2015. In the meantime measures were being looked at to reduce the cost to the Council. It had been agreed to aim for all allotment fees to be paid by direct debit as a cost saving measure and that all new allotment tenants after April 2012 would automatically pay by direct debit. Allotment prices were also being standardised.

The Policy Review Officer tabled detailed costings of the Allotments Grounds Maintenance for 2011/12 and Members discussed these matters in detail.

One of the issues raised was the cost of water for allotments being paid by the Council. Water readings were now being monitored to identify any leaks etc., thus reducing costs to the Council.

Members also agreed that Allotment holders would be thoroughly consulted throughout the review and the changes implemented.

RESOLVED:- That the information reported be noted.

19 – Scrutiny Work Plan

The Policy Review Officer reported that at the meeting in June 2011 Members had agreed to develop a four year work programme up to March 2015. Members were requested to submit potential items to the Policy Review Officer by the end of August 2011. Items had been identified and chronological prioritisation had been suggested, as shown in the table below. Additional urgent items may be identified during the period and they would be considered in an appropriate timeframe.

It was anticipated that the Committee would complete two or three reviews per year depending on the availability of resources.

| Item | Topic | Scope of the review |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1 | Allotments | To review the Council's arrangements for managing tenancies and the waiting list. Ensure the allotment service was financially sustainable |
| 2 | Street Cleanliness | To review to Council's arrangements for working with the contractor to deliver a higher standard of street cleanliness. To ensure appropriate arrangements were in place to manage external factors and the impact on street cleanliness e.g. seagulls and fly tipping. |
| 3 | Coastal Protection | The implementation of phase four of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy has resulted in changes to the way in which coastal defence projects are funded. The review will focus on the Council's medium term project plan and how it would be funded. |
| 4 | Estates and Asset Management | To review arrangements for maximising income from the Council's assets and the potential for the disposal of redundant assets. |
| 5 | Town Centres Development and Supporting Local Traders | Review arrangements for supporting local traders in the current economic climate. |
| 6 | Highways and Car Parking | Review the provision of highways maintenance by Cumbria County Council. Review street lighting and on-street parking arrangements. |
| 7 | Economic Development, Planning and Development Control | Review arrangements for planning and economic development in light of the reduced funding as a result of the Government's deficit reduction programme. Ensure the Council still has appropriate arrangements in place to access development funding. |
| 8 | Cultural Services | Review the impact of the Council's service review on cultural services. The review will consider events, distribution of funding and service charges. |
| 9 | Policy and Strategy | Monitor the development of and performance against the council's key priorities. |

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|----|------------------|--|
| 10 | Housing Strategy | Review availability of private sector and social housing and consider partnership arrangements to ensure that the availability of housing in the Borough met demand. |
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It was proposed by the Chairman that Coastal Protection be reviewed by this Scrutiny Committee within the next twelve months. Implementation of Phase 4 of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy had resulted in changes to the way in which coastal defence projects were funded. The review would focus on the medium term project plan and how it would be funded.

RESOLVED:- (i) That the Work Programme for 2011-15 be agreed; and

(ii) That Coastal Protection be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee within the next twelve months.

The meeting closed 2.40 p.m.

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| OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE | | Part One (D) Agenda Item 7 |
| Date of Meeting: | 9th November, 2011 | |
| Reporting Officer: | Policy Review Officer | |
| <p>Title: Street Cleansing</p> <p>Summary and Conclusions:</p> <p>Provide Members with an update of the scrutiny review into street cleansing.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>Members are invited to consider the information and determine how this review should be progressed.</p> | | |

Report

The street care team are continuing to focus on improving heavily contaminated areas and it is clear that presentation of side waste particularly food waste is a major contributor to the lower standard of cleanliness s in some areas. The street care team and the waste collection contractor are working to reduce side waste and therefore reduce the burden on the street cleansing teams. A more effective street cleaning programme has been developed and I am awaiting details of this programme so that I can share it with members of this committee.

Councillor Mrs Thomson continues to attend the contract meetings and is kept up to date with any significant issues.

Members of the work group have requested to meet the contract staff and I have asked the contractor provides me with a number of potential dates in November. I am anticipating that I will have these dates by the time of this meeting.

The Council is proposing more stringent methods to control the amount of side waste being presented and I suggest that we consider the potential impact this may have on the cleanliness of the streets.

Background Papers

Nil

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| OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE | (D) Agenda Item 8 |
| Date of Meeting: 9th November, 2011 | |
| Reporting Officer: Policy Review Officer | |
| <p>Title: Allotments</p> <p>Summary and Conclusions:</p> <p>Provide Members with an update of the scrutiny review into allotments.</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members are invited to consider the recommendation from the Work Group and the feedback from allotment representatives; and 2. Submit report and make recommendations to the Executive Committee. | |

Report

The Council currently provides 770 allotment plots on 17 different sites. The number of people on the waiting list for allotment plots is estimated to be in excess of 600. In 2010/11 the cost for the provision of allotments was £88,380 of which £33,200 was recovered in rent so the total expenditure was £55,180. The review was undertaken to explore options for reducing the cost of allotment provision so that it is cost neutral to the Council. In addition the review considered options for reducing the current waiting list.

Costs

The review identified the main direct costs for allotment provision as:

1. Grounds maintenance which includes the removal of rubbish;
 2. Collection of rent; and
 3. Provision of water.
1. The cost of grounds maintenance for 2010/11 was £26,230 and over 80% of this cost was removal of rubbish from allotment plots. There are two categories of rubbish removal one is the provision of trailers to remove the accumulation of waste generated by typical allotment activities. The review concluded that waste generated in this way is the responsibility of the allotment holders and they should be encouraged to dispose of their own rubbish. To support this transition the Council continue to provide a restricted number of trailers at specific times of the year and these should be used for disposing of bulkier items. The other category is the removal of

rubbish from allotment prior to letting, the cost of this disposal is significantly disproportional to the rent value and the Council should consider other methods of removing the waste or in exceptional circumstances leave the plot vacant.

2. In 2010/11 the recharge cost to the Borough treasurers was £12,550 which includes the collection of rent. Currently the rent for each allotment is charged on size and although the calculation is electronic we have to generate individual invoices, which is inefficient. The Council should consider moving towards a fixed rent for a standard size allotment and a higher fixed rent for larger allotments.

Currently there are a number of methods for collecting rent and for some the Council incur external charges. The most efficient way of collecting rent is via direct debit and the Council should move to this method of collection for all new tenants and encourage existing tenants to switch to direct debit. The Council should also consider introducing a surcharge for tenants who do not wish to use direct debits.

3. The cost of supplying water is currently included in the rent for the plot and on average is equivalent to a third of the rent. The Council has undertaken a monitoring exercise to identify areas of high usage or wastage to try to reduce water charges. The output from this exercise has indicated that there are significant variations in water usage. The council has carried leak repair and tap replace work at a number of sites and has reduced water usage. The Council should encourage allotment holders to work towards reducing water usage and should consider having a separate charge for water based on the usage at site.

The review recognised the internal recharges for allotments where significant because as with other Council departments allotments have to bear their share of the Council's overheads. Although these costs will be reduced as the Council reduces its budget it is clear that more significant savings would be made if allotments were self-managed.

Waiting list

There is not a statutory number of allotment plots that local authorities have to provide but most authorities use the arbitrary figure of 15 per 1000 properties which was recommended in the 1969 Thorpe report. The Council provides 770 allotment plots which is equivalent to 23 plots per 1000 properties so we exceed the recommended number but despite this we still have a significant number of residents on the waiting list. We have contacted those residents to confirm their interest and as a result the numbers of residents who still want allotments and has reduced from 644 to 493.

The review recognised that the process for re-letting allotment plots had become unwieldy and has made a number of recommendations to improve this:

- Vacant plots are let on an “as seen” and a temporary rent reduction should be considered for heavily contaminated plots.
- Residents should be allowed three weeks to respond to an offer and if there is no response after three weeks the resident will be removed from the waiting list.
- If a resident rejects an offer they should be informed that they will only be offered one more plot and if that is rejected they will be removed from the waiting list.
- Plots may be handed over to a family member provided that person is on the waiting list and with written agreement from the Council. If a tenant has more than one plot only one of the plots may be handed over to a member of the family.
- The Council should produce a clear procedure for the process of cancelling a tenancy agreement for non-payment of rent or for dereliction of a plot.

The Council should review the tenancy agreement for future leases and include:

- Restrictions on keeping livestock so that at least 75% of all allotments are cultivated for growing plants.
- A clear procedure for the process of cancelling a tenancy agreement for non-payment of rent or for dereliction of a plot.

Members of the group will be discussing these proposals with allotment site representatives at a meeting on 2nd November and I will provide feedback from that meeting for your consideration.

Background Papers

Nil