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## **Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)**

**Report of the meeting held on 9th October 2012**

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### **Matters for Information**

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#### **18. CHARGING FOR A SECOND GREEN BIN**

The Panel has considered a proposal to charge residents for collecting a second green bin from domestic properties. The Council is looking at ways to increase its income and some London Councils charge for the collection of all green waste. Huntingdonshire District Council will continue to collect the first green bin from all its residents free of charge but it is argued that the collection of the second green bin should be regarded as a premium service and, therefore, should attract a charge. It is suggested that this would be fairer to all residents and provide a significant return for the Council because currently the majority of additional green bins are in seven wards and other wards are effectively subsidising their service.

Councillor P L E Bucknell has addressed the Panel on this matter. He has expressed the view that residents will not pay for the collection of the second green bin and will instead put green waste in household waste bins, which will have an adverse effect on the waste service budget. In addition, he is of the opinion that the change could lead to an increase in fly-tipping, that the charge amounts to a significant sum compared to the District Council's portion of the Council Tax and that properties with additional green bins tend to pay higher levels of Council Tax, which should afford them collection of a second green waste bin without having to pay an additional charge. He has suggested that VAT would apply because the charge being incurred was for a service. A Cabinet Member of a London Council has informed Councillor Bucknell that his authority made a mistake by introducing a similar charge.

The Panel has stressed that the waste collection service is the most highly valued service provided by the Council. Members have drawn attention to the fact that it is a universal service and is one of the best performing in the Country. There is a concern that this performance will worsen if this proposal is adopted. It could also damage public perception of the Council. It has been argued that the Council should instead promote recycling. In this respect, the Council could take steps to encourage composting of green waste. It has been suggested that the Council should focus on non-statutory services when looking to make savings.

The Executive Councillor for the Environment has pointed out that the change will not affect the majority of residents and that if every second green bin is returned there will be a reduction of 3.4% of waste collected. At the same time the Council has extended the range of materials it collects, which will increase recycling. He has further indicated that fly-tipping is a criminal offence and the Council will undertake enforcement action if necessary. During discussions on fly-tipping it has been established that the additional cost of enforcement has not been factored into the business case presented in the report. Experience at other authorities suggests that there will be an initial increase in fly-tipping but this will decline over time. However, if fly tipping continues to be a problem there will be a need for additional resources to deal with it.

In response to these points the Executive Councillor for the Environment has advised the Panel that, in the current economic climate, imaginative ways of raising income are needed. It is anticipated that implementation of the proposal will lead to an increase in complaints to the call centre, the majority of which will come from the seven wards which have the most additional green bins. This has been allowed for in the business case. Furthermore, the proposed charge does not represent an increase to residents' Council Tax bills; it is a charge for an additional service which residents can choose not to receive. While it is expected that adoption of the proposals will lead to many residents returning their second green bins, but it is felt that the practicalities of finding alternative means of disposing of green waste will result in residents choosing to take back their additional green bin. If the proposal is adopted, a communication strategy will be devised and implemented to educate residents about waste disposal.

Having regard to the practicalities of the proposals, the additional green bins will need to be easy to distinguish as operatives should not be tasked with responding to complaints and arbitration in questions of eligibility when going about their rounds. For reasons of cost the preferred approach is to fit new lids to additional green bins so that they can be easily identified by operatives and residents. Payback of this cost is expected to be achieved in year two.

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet not to introduce a charge for second green bins on the grounds that it will have an adverse effect on recycling rates, it is likely damage to the public's opinion of the Council, it will lead to an increase in fly tipping and the level of the charge represents a significant portion the District Council's element of Council Tax. Representatives of the Panel have attended the Cabinet meeting for consideration of this Item. (Item No. refers)

## **19. CORPORATE TRAVEL PLAN UPDATE**

The Panel has reviewed the Council's updated Corporate Travel Plan. Having questioned how the updated Travel Plan differs from the original, the Panel has been advised that a number of minor modifications have been made, most notably relating to the incentives

offered to owners of low carbon vehicles who are able to purchase car parking permits at a reduced rate.

Members' attention has been drawn to a mapping exercise, which has been undertaken to establish where Council employees reside. The Panel has suggested that the Council should use this information to explore the possibility of providing a staff bus service from the main settlements to Pathfinder House. The viability of this suggestion will be evaluated. Similarly, the effectiveness of car sharing as a means of meeting the Travel Plan's objectives has been stressed. However, at present, while car sharing is actively encouraged there are no incentives for employees choosing to car share.

The Panel has discussed the increase in the percentage of employees cycling to work from 2006 to 2010 and has requested an analysis of the usage of cycling routes. Having commented on the lack of information relating to staff travel in 2011, Members have also requested updated statistics for the staff travel behaviour. With reference to the Council's Objectives, Targets and Indicators and specifically the Objective 'to reduce local traffic and road congestion', the Panel has questioned whether the targets are sufficiently challenging to cover a five year period. It has been suggested that these targets should be revised so that they are more challenging.

Having recognised that an increase in home working could be a means of delivering the Travel Plan's Objectives, it has been suggested that the Council should place more emphasis on home working and that there should be a systematic analysis of posts for which home working is appropriate.

The Panel has recommended the Cabinet to adopt the updated Corporate Travel Plan 2012/13 to 2017/18.

## **20. JAPANESE KNOTWEED**

The Panel has considered a report on Japanese Knotweed, which has been produced following a request for this information from a Member. Given that the occurrence of Japanese Knotweed in Huntingdonshire is very limited and that where the Council is responsible action has been taken to deal with it, Members have decided not to pursue a study on this matter.

## **21. DRAINAGE**

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee has acquainted the Panel with progress made by the Drainage Working Group. The Working Group has been established to engage with Anglian Water to establish its general powers and responsibilities and the limitations on its ability to prevent flooding. Members have been pleased to note that, following discussions with representatives of Anglian Water and the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and the County Council are working together to find a solution to longstanding drainage issues in Yaxley.

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## **Other Matters of Interest**

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### **22. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY: ANNUAL REPORT**

In conjunction with the Panel's for Social and Economic Well-Being, the Panel has reviewed the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2011/2012. Having been reminded that there is a constitutional requirement to produce a report each year, Members have approved the Report for publication.

### **23. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING) PROGRESS**

Following a request for information at the Panel's previous meeting, Councillor D M Tysoe has clarified the Cabinet's position regarding stickers on wheeled bins. Members have been advised that Speedwatch had approached Councillor Tysoe, in his capacity as Executive Councillor for the Environment, regarding the display of speed limit signs on wheeled bins across the District. Following this request, a trial has been undertaken. Councillor Tysoe has outlined his concerns that stickers can be distracting for drivers and, therefore, have an adverse impact on road safety. In this light, he has advised Members that he needs to be assured that firm evidence has been produced by Speedwatch of their benefits before he would take any further decisions regarding the Council's policy on stickers on wheeled bins. Any scheme would have to be well thought out, managed and policed.

### **24. WORK PLAN**

The Panel has reviewed the programme of studies being undertaken by the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

### **25. SCRUTINY**

The Panel has considered the latest edition of the Decision Digest and discussed the matters contained therein. In so doing Members have been informed that testing of proposals for changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions has been undertaken to ensure they can be implemented and will increase the Council's income

D Harty  
Chairman