

Your Plymouth

Monday 30 September 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Tuffin, in the Chair.

Councillor Bowyer, Vice-Chair.

Councillors Casey, Damarell, Philippa Davey, Jarvis, Jordan, Michael Leaves, Rennie, Ricketts and Tuohy.

Co-opted Representative: Mr Steve Meakin

Apology for absence: Councillor Martin Leaves.

Also in attendance: Councillor Vincent, Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, Jayne Donovan, Assistant Director for Environmental Services, Ann Thorpe, Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits), Andy Netherton, Manager Health Safety and Licensing, Darin Halifax, Lead Officer, and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 4 pm and finished at 5.40 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

12. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by councillors in accordance with the code of conduct in relation to items under discussion at this meeting.

13. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

Unauthorised Encampments

The Chair and Democratic Support Officer reported on the difficulties encountered in progressing the cooperative review into Unauthorised Encampments. Due to the large number of members who had expressed an interest in participating, it had not been possible to identify a date where all members could attend prior to mid-November 2013. The Chair therefore requested that the panel consider reducing membership of the cooperative review in order to facilitate an earlier start.

Agreed that membership of the cooperative review into Unauthorised Encampments is reduced from nine to five with a political ratio of 3:2. Chair and Vice-Chair to confirm their respective group nominations to the Democratic Support Officer.

14. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2013.

15. **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

The panel heard from the Cabinet Member for Environment who was in attendance to provide an overview of his portfolio responsibilities and identify areas which he felt may benefit from scrutiny. Accompanied by the Assistant Director for Environmental Services, the following three areas were highlighted as being in need of policy review / criteria development –

- Roadside Memorials;
- Tree Management; and
- Public Funerals.

In response to questions raised, members were advised that –

(a) with regard to roadside memorials –

- there is a growing trend for people who have lost loved ones in fatal accidents to adopt ‘temporary’ roadside memorials;
- some sites were more prominent than others and therefore had more of an impact on those living nearby or passing, however, all sites had to be treated with the same sensitivity and sympathy;
- consideration needed to be given to the length of time such memorials were permitted to remain;

(b) with regard to tree management –

- a new policy had been established in 2012;
- significant improvements had been made in reducing waiting times from two years to six months;
- on receipt of a complaint, an inspection would be undertaken and an assessment made as to whether any immediate action was required. If no immediate health and safety action was required the tree would be placed on the waiting list. If the tree was an immediate health and safety risk it would be dealt with expediently and any other priority I trees dealt with within six months;
- the council was working with developers to ensure that development proposals which included provision for tree planting would not present problems in the future;
- councillors could use their community grant scheme funds to assist their constituents in dealing with tree-related issues;

(c) with regard to public funerals –

- public funerals were those where a person had died without leaving finances in place to cover the cost of their funeral and there was no-one else willing to pay;
- whilst the number that the Council had to pay for was relatively low (between 10-15 a year at a cost of £1,000 each), the number was rising and, given the current economic climate, members need to be aware of areas impacting upon the council's already stretched resources;
- this number was expected to rise as whilst the majority of our older generation continued to make provision in their wills this was not the case with the current generation.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Assistant Director for Environmental Services for their attendance.

Agreed that separate briefing reports in respect of Roadside Memorials, Tree Management and Public Funerals are submitted to the next meeting of the panel in order that members can consider more detailed information and review facts prior to deciding whether to take any of these issues further.

16. **REVIEW OF THE LICENSING ACT STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY AND INTRODUCTION OF THE LATE NIGHT LEVY**

The Chair welcomed Andy Netherton, Manager Health, Safety and Licensing, who was in attendance to inform members on progress with the consultation being undertaken in respect of a review of the Licensing Act Statement of Licensing Policy and introduction of the Late Night Levy. Members were advised –

- although the current Licensing Policy had been adopted in 2011 and the requirement was for it to be reviewed every five years, the Government had, over the last 18 months, introduced a series of additional controls which amended the Licensing Act and it was, therefore, appropriate to review the policy in light of these legislative changes;
- the new controls provided Councils with additional opportunities to exercise greater local discretion on licensing matters and control the negative aspects of the consumption of alcohol in the evening and night time economy (ENTE);
- the consultation had been broken down into three areas:
 - Late Night Levy
 - Changes to the Cumulative Impact Policy
 - Amendments to the Current Policy
- that the main changes to the current policy were inclusion of consideration of:
 - alternatives to the use of glass
 - increasing maximum occupancy
 - provision of free tap water
 - greater controls on the number of off-licences and how they trade
 - greater controls on opening hours

- inclusion of off-licences and take-aways within the Cumulative Impact Policy
- the consultation would close on 5 October 2013.

In response to questions raised, members were advised that –

- (a) the Late Night Levy would only impact upon businesses with alcohol sales taking place after midnight;
- (b) members of a Business Improvement District (BID) would be exempt from a Late Night Levy, however, they would be required to submit a work plan to demonstrate how they would address issues of crime and disorder in the ENTE;
- (c) supermarkets were classed as off-licences and therefore were covered by the same controls;
- (d) the ENTE was a large employer and as such a major contributor to the City's economy. Consideration was therefore being given to employment of an Evening and Night Time Economy Manager to help promote the ENTE and grow this economy further;
- (e) the amount of levy required from each business was set and controlled nationally. It was calculated based on a sliding scale depending upon what business rates they paid, e.g. £299 Band A, £768 Band B, £1,493 Band E etc.;
- (f) monies received from the levy would go into a centralised ringfenced pot administered by the Plymouth Community Safety Partnership for use in schemes that contribute to making the ENTE a safer environment such as extra CCTV, policing, street marshalls, street lighting improvements etc.;
- (g) a response to the consultation had not yet been received from the Police, however, the officer was aware it had been drafted and was confident it would be received before the closing date on 5 October;
- (h) to date, the public responses received could be split as follows –
 - those residents living outside of the ENTE and not directly affected had general concerns about how much alcohol harm was costing;
 - those residents living within the ENTE had two concerns:
 - lateness of disturbance/crime and disorder;
 - street drinkers.
- (i) following closure of the consultation, a report would be submitted to Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the officer for the update and his attendance.

17. **EMERGENCY WELFARE SCHEME**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, and Ann Thorp, Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits), who were in attendance to update the panel on progress with the Emergency Welfare Scheme following its introduction in April 2013. Members were offered an apology for the submission of a late amendment to the report which presented a much better financial overview of the situation to that included within the report.

In response to questions raised, members were advised that –

- (a) it was thought that the difference between the number of applications expected and the number of applications granted was due to –
 - the fact that people were traditionally used to going to the DWP and had initially continued to do so;
 - people were using crisis loans as a form of revolving credit;
 - people had applied to the council for funds which were still available from the DWP and had therefore been referred back;
 - the particularly good summer which has resulted in a lesser demand on many services;
- (b) there was still currently no facility in council offices to allow customers to top-up payments in respect of their gas and electricity meters, however, this was being moved forward particularly in regard to the Civic Centre;
- (c) it was acknowledged that in tough economic times more people were turning to payday loans as a means of addressing their financial difficulties and a lot of work was being done with the City's credit unions to tackle this issue. However, funding for this work was met from the social inclusion budget and not the Emergency Welfare Scheme. One of the areas being discussed was the possibility of credit unions helping those with energy debt over £500 and who were prevented from switching suppliers as a result;
- (d) the EWF was about grants and not loans, recipients were not expected to pay the money back. Staff from Money Advice Plymouth were working with Plymouth City Council staff to help co-ordinate and signpost people in crisis to the relevant agencies in order that they can receive appropriate support and advice about managing their finances better;
- (e) specific organisations and internal departments had been identified and presentation sessions run in order to promote the scheme, the council would continue to work and engage with as many agencies as possible to ensure that they understand the benefits of the scheme to their

clients, this included the Foodbank where consideration was being given to allow for financial support based on the referrals actually made;

- (f) all enquiries commenced with a requirement for applicants to complete a form which would then help staff to identify areas of concern and signpost applicants on to other agencies who can provide support;
- (g) it was possible for customers to achieve savings of between £100-£150 per year on pre-payment meters and work was ongoing to raise awareness of Plymouth Energy Community and offer support to help engage with the scheme. In addition, the Council had negotiated a very favourable rate on pre-payment meters.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet member and the Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits) for their attendance.

Agreed that a further update is submitted to the panel in six months' time when the scheme will have been in place for a year.

18. **WORK PROGRAMME**

In considering its work programme for 2013/14, the panel noted the requests made under minutes 15 and 17 and agreed –

- (1) the co-operative review into Customer Services be deferred pending submission of a situation update report to, and attendance by the Assistant Director for Customers Services, at the panel's next meeting;
- (2) that a situation report in respect of the level of personal debt in the City and how this is being managed (to include rent arrears) is submitted to the next panel meeting.

19. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.