

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 30 AUGUST 2007 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Jones, R. (Chairman)
Faulkner, B. (Vice-Chairman)

Bullock, L. W. Easton, R.
Dixon, D. I.

By Invitation: Councillor C. Collis, Safer & Stronger Communities Leader

(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs. D. M. Easton, J. T. Kraujalis and D. M. Todd).

6. Minutes

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2007 be approved as a correct record.

7. Nuisance Neighbours and Anti Social Behaviour by Occupiers of Non Council Housing

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Environmental Protection Manager and the Tenancy Services Manager.

It was explained that under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 the Council had mandatory powers which required all allegations of statutory nuisance to be investigated.

Under the Legislation what constituted a statutory nuisance, rather than a 'mere annoyance' were classed as those which were 'prejudicial to health or a nuisance' and included:-

- Premises – private sector housing (i.e. damp – poor facilities etc.)
- Smoke (bonfires/chimneys etc.)
- Fumes/gases from residential premises
- Dust/steam/smell/other effluvia from industrial, trade or business only
- Animals
- Noise nuisance from any source

Under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, the Council had discretionary powers to deal with such issues as litter, flytipping, abandoned vehicles and flyposting problems. Zero tolerance was in place with respect to flytipping and once the waste had been inspected to endeavour to locate its source, Environmental Services were instructed to remove it.

With regard to issuing licences to premises under the Licensing Act 2003, the key objectives were the prevention of public nuisance and crime and disorder and the protection of public safety and children from harm. Should a variation to a licence be requested the responsible authorities which included the Police, Fire & Rescue, Trading Standards, Health & Safety, Planning, and Children's Board were notified and they also had the powers to review a licence should problems occur.

The Tenancy Services Manager explained that the Environmental Health Department and Housing Department worked in corroboration to overcome problems that occurred with Council house tenants. All complaints were noted and responded to. Initial warning letters were issued and if repeated complaints were received residents were requested to complete diary sheets and the perpetrators were interviewed. Every effort was made to resolve the complaints including using an external mediation service.

The Housing Department also worked closely with the Legal Section and options for action included:-

- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- Post criminal convictions ASBOs
- Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) injunctions and other injunctions
- Demotion Orders on secure tenants
- Extension of introductory tenancies
- Possession action secure tenancies

During 2007 there had been 2 evictions for ASB, 1 possession warrant for illegal occupation, 4 possession hearings were outstanding at Court for breaches of tenancy (non rent) and 8 notices of possession proceedings for ASB had been served.

A pilot estate walk had been carried out during the summer and it was intended to cover all 56 estates in the future, with some being covered twice a year and others eight times. The aim was to increase tenant involvement and to monitor more closely the ground maintenance contract. The Housing Department had also signed up to the Respect Agenda.

The Environmental Protection Manager explained that the Department had a target response for noise issues within three working days. In 2005/06, 777 complaints had been dealt with of which 90% were within target, in 2006/07, 916 were received and 63% were within target. Staffing problems and the increase in the number of complaints had impacted on the reduction in target.

As an affect of the no smoking policy in premises, the number of complaints reported had increased particularly in the summer months when people were in gardens and windows were open.

Procedures were in place whereby complaints were acknowledged and an information leaflet sent out within 21 days for those considered to be 'one offs'. Those of a more serious nature were investigated and should the matter go to Court then those who the complaint was being made against would be aware of who had made the complaint.

Under the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005, the Council had discretionary powers and could issue Fixed Penalty Notices which they were doing in increasing numbers. Street Litter Control Notices were also served to premises such as shops and take-away outlets. Graffiti on Council property was dealt with by Environmental Services and Streetwardens also assisted with this problem. If the graffiti was on private land the Environmental Protection could take steps they considered necessary.

The Select Committee felt that some form of recognition could be made to businesses that endeavoured to keep the street areas clean in their vicinity be explored.

Work was ongoing with respect to Waste Transfer Notes and it was explained that firms were required to provide evidence of how their waste was being disposed of. Those caught flytipping were always prosecuted and the publicity concerning the successful cases acted as a deterrent to others.

It was reported that the Dogs (Fouling of Land Act) 1996 applied to all land in the district of Cannock Chase except for farmland, woodland, moor or heath, common land (other than urban common land) and land adjacent to highways where the speed limit was over 40 mph.

The Select Committee sought clarification with regard to the enforcement of dog fouling on private land. The representative from the Legal Section agreed to investigate this matter.

Members were also provided with information on the work of the Street Wardens and of the work undertaken by the Environmental Health Department with the Joint Operations Group (JOGs), Police & Community Together (PACT), Staffordshire Flytipping Forum.

The Select Committee enquired whether they could attend a meeting of the JOGs and the Partnership Development Manager agreed to pass the request to the Chairman, Sergeant Peter Davies.

AGREED:

- (A) That the possibility of issuing some form of recognition to businesses who endeavoured to keep the street areas in their vicinity clean be explored.
- (B) That whether the Dogs (Fouling of Land Act) 1996 covered private land be investigated
- (C) That the Chairman of the Joint Operations Group be requested to invite Members of the Select Committee to attend a future meeting.

8. RESPECT Agenda

The Select Committee received a presentation by the Partnership Development Manager on the RESPECT agenda and the implications for Cannock Chase Council.

Respect was a cross-Government strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour and nurture good behaviour and in order to create a modern culture of respect. Central government, local agencies, local communities and all citizens were encouraged to work together to build a society in which there was respect for one another and where anti-social behaviour was rare and tackled effectively and communities could live in peace together. The Respect drive, as laid out in the Respect Action Plan, built on the current drive to tackle anti-social behaviour and reclaim communities for the law-abiding majority.

Key measures of the Respect drive included:-

- A new approach to tackling problem families through intensive family intervention programmes.
- A wide-ranging programme to address poor parenting. Additional investment would be available to fund parenting programmes across the country.
- Strengthening communities through more responsive public services. Local services would be encouraged to hold regular face the people sessions.
- Improving behaviour and attendance in schools. Targeted action on persistent truants and a range of new measures to tackle poor behaviour in schools.
- The funding of constructive activities for young people such as youth intervention projects and sports programmes.

Partners had been asked to provide concise details of the work in which they were currently engaged to tackle anti-social behaviour. Not all partners had been able to respond and therefore there was not a definitive guide to current activity in Cannock Chase.

Members were provided with information on the Council's Street Wardens Scheme and the Junior Warden and Student Warden Programme. It was intended that the Junior Warden and Student Warden Programme would be offered to all Primary and High Schools within the District in order to encourage take up.

Work was also being undertaken by Staffordshire Youth Offending Team to reduce anti-social behaviour through the work of the Youth Inclusion and Support Panel and Youth Crime Prevention Panel. The Service was also raising the awareness of anti-social behaviour in high schools through the use of the Youth Anti-Social Behaviour and Criminal Justice System Citizenship Pack. A detached Youth Service Team had also been working with youngsters in Hednesford with some success.

The Select Committee were also advised that contained within the police reform White Paper, Building Communities, Beating Crime, a power had been introduced that would give local communities a formal way to request and ensure that action was taken by the police, local authorities and others in response to persistent anti-social behaviour or community safety problems. It placed a duty on district level Ward Councillors to consider issues, and respond within a prescribed timescale and the Council would have a new power to refer them to the Scrutiny Committee of the local authority. The Committee would have a duty to consider any referred issue and respond within a prescribed timescale.

A duty was also placed on responsible authorities, co-operating bodies and registered social landlords to respond to the Committee's report again within a prescribed timescale. At every stage local agencies would have to make public the action they would take or the reason they would not take action.

Members asked whether the Council could use the 'Respect' logo where appropriate and were informed that discussions would need to take place with the P. R. & Marketing Section.

AGREED:

That Officers be requested to investigate the possibility of the Council using the 'Respect' logo where appropriate.

9. Development of the Work Programme 2007/08

Consideration was given to items to be included in the Work Programme (Enclosure 6.1 – 6.6 of the Official Minutes of the Council)

AGREED:

- (A) That an update on the Respect agenda and the implications for Cannock Chase Council be provided at each meeting of the Select Committee.
- (B) That with respect to the LAA Block Two – Safer and Stronger Communities quarterly updates being provided to the Select Committee on whether the County and District were meeting targets, be further investigated.

CHAIRMAN