

MINUTES of the meeting of Regulatory Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday 12 March 2013 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor JW Hope MBE (Chairman)
Councillor RC Hunt (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: CM Bartrum, BA Durkin, PJ McCaull, FM Norman and GA Vaughan-Powell

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors PL Bettington, Brig. P Jones CBE and C Nicholls.

62. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no named substitutes.

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

64. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

65. REPORT ON REGULATORY ACTIVITY BY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & TRADING STANDARDS

The Head of Consumer & Business Protection presented a report on the regulatory activity undertaken by the Environmental Health & Trading Standards service between 1 April 2012 and 31 January 2013.

He advised Members that Environmental Health & Trading Standards was now part of the Places and Communities directorate, this move had taken place on 4 March 2013.

The presentation focused on specific areas of the Environmental Health & Trading Standards service, with the following comments made regarding each department.

Licensing Team

It was noted that service requests were down on the previous year but that response times had improved. The Head of Consumer & Business Protection drew Members' attention to the current freeze on discretionary spend which had been introduced across the Council in late 2012. He advised members that this had impacted on night time checks previously undertaken by the licensing team.

He then advised Members in respect of the successful introduction of the taxi marshalling scheme. Members wished their appreciation to be put on record and noted that the scheme had been well received by the trade.

Members raised the issue of test purchase operations and were advised that these had been reduced as a result of the current pressures on the budget. Members were concerned that the reduction in test purchase operation could result in an increase in underage sales throughout the County. The Head of Consumer & Business Protection advised that in the future test purchase operations would be undertaken on an intelligence led basis. In response to a question he advised that the issue of proxy sales was significantly more difficult to address.

Environmental Protection Team

The Committee Members thanked the Environmental Protection Team for their assistance in various matters throughout their wards. Some concern was expressed in respect of the out of hours phone number as it was noted that on occasions calls were not answered or messages were not forwarded to the relevant officer. The Head of Consumer & Business Protection advised that the out of hours service had been operated by an outside company and that there had been some issues. He added that this breakdown in communications was not acceptable.

Air, Land & Water Protection Team

The Head of Consumer & Business Protection advised the Committee that there were still on going issues at Sutton Walls. In response to a question he advised the Committee that in some cases homeowners needed to be present when officers needed to visit. He added that whilst visits were pre-booked there were occasions when people were not home. It was noted that although this could occasionally cause a delay it was not a significant problem.

Gypsy & Traveller Team

Members were advised that there had been 15 unauthorised encampments over a 10 month period, one of these encampments had caused significant concern as it took place on the King Charles Playing Fields prior to the queens visit and the associated jubilee celebrations.

It was noted that in line with other Council services the Gypsy & Traveller Team were aiming to become cost neutral. It was also noted that a £493,000 had been allocated to refurbish the existing Bromyard traveller site. Members were of the opinion that there was a need for additional transient sites throughout the County and that a better provision of these types of sites could reduce the cost of enforcement as a result of unauthorised encampments. It was noted that there had been some work undertaken in respect of transient sites in the Old Gore ward.

Pest Control Team

The Committee were advised that the Pest Control Team currently had 130 contracts with external clients and had recently revised their fees in order to move towards full cost recovery.

Business & Agriculture Support Team

The Committee were advised that a considerable amount of work had been undertaken by the team in respect of both pay day loans and log book loans.

Environmental Health Commercial Team

It was noted that the Council had now adopted the national FSA scheme regarding food outlet ratings. All of the premises inspected by the team could now be viewed on the national website.

Premises falling within the A,B, and C1 categories (highest risk) were being inspected by the team, this was not in keeping with the FSA Code of Practice which required an inspection programme to also include C2, D and E premises which were defined as medium and low risk.

The Head of Consumer & Business Protection advised Members that there was a need to make £336,000 in savings and as a result of this all vacant posts had been frozen. He added that this had impacted on the service as whole. In response to a question he added that had concerns in respect of the service area's ability to respond to a major outbreak in the County.

In response to a further question he advised that self-regulation was already in place in some areas and that the government were moving towards a light touch method of regulation. However he noted that deregulation could lead to future problems as had been highlighted by the recent horse meat incidents.

The Committee were concerned in respect of the issues raised and requested that regular updates be forwarded to Members regarding any significant issues arising as a result of budgetary savings.

Members received an update regarding the recent media attention regarding horse meat. It was noted that Herefordshire Council had been requested to undertake testing on behalf of the FSA and that out of 13 samples taken there had been no traces of horse meat found. The Head of Consumer & Business Protection advised that the sampling budget had also been reduced recently and that the current sampling had been funded by the FSA.

RESOLVED:

That: the Committee express concern in respect of the budget cuts to the Regulatory Service;

the Committee propose that the existing quarterly reports received should include further details regarding any impacts of the budgetary cuts and matters related to staff shortages;

the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 3.10 pm

CHAIRMAN

