

Report of: Environment Scrutiny Committee

To: Executive Board

Date: 19th March 2007


Item No:

Title of Report : Environment Scrutiny Committee Recommendations



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To present to Executive Board the recommendations made by Environment Scrutiny Committee at their meeting  2th February 2007.



Key decision: Yes

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Goddard, Leader of the Council and Councillor Jean Fooks, Cleaner City Portfolio Holder, Councillor Alan Armitage, Healthier Environment Portfolio Holder.



Scrutiny Responsibility: Environment Scrutiny Committee

Ward(s) affected: All



Report Approved by: Andy Collett, Finance and Asset Management and Emma Griffiths, Legal and Democratic Services

Policy Framework:



Recommendation(s): The Executive Board is asked to respond to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations:



1. If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined.



2. If it agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who will take the lead.

3. If it disagrees, why?



4. If more information is required from other officers when that will be considered.



1. Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, 12th February 2007

90. ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

While noting a schedule of those issues on which the Committee had made recommendations during the council year, Members said that it was more important to ensure that the process of reporting recommendations and receiving subsequent information on progress with implementation or otherwise was sound.

The Committee asked about the outcome of a number of particular recommendations including lack of information of events in Cutteslowe Park. Sharon Cosgrove said that the events team was again currently down by one person but that she would look into the matter and report back. Andrew Davies reported on the situation with regard to other recommendations to the Executive Board where it appeared that there had been an inadequate response from the Executive Board.

Members highlighted a number of instances where they would like to see recommendations referred back to the Executive Board for further consideration. Andrew Davies agreed to progress the matter. The recommendations were:

- Draft Supplementary Planning Documents On Planning Obligations - The ESC recommended that the Executive Board consider whether anything could be done about the fact that small, piecemeal developments were outside of the s106 framework and yet the cumulative effect of these developments on the local infrastructure was very significant.*
- Oxfordshire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy - Ask the OWP to reconsider the targets for waste reduction as scrutiny felt these should be more ambitious and go beyond stabilising current levels of waste to a reduction.*
- Oxford Plan Consultation - Resolved to recommend the Executive Board that steps be taken to ensure that Council facilities and buildings be less vulnerable to the effects of climate change through such measures as the installation of covering shade for play areas and blinds for the windows in homes for the elderly to provide protection from extreme weather conditions.*

Resolved to refer these recommendations back to Executive Board for consideration.

2. Introduction

2.1 The Environment Scrutiny Committee have reviewed the recommendations it has made to Executive Board to date in 2006/07. Of the 47 recommendations, there was no specific record in the minutes of Executive Board's view on 3 of those recommendations. The Committee has decided to refer them back to Executive Board for consideration.

3. Recommendations

3.1 **Recommendation 1** - Draft Supplementary Planning Documents On Planning Obligations - The ESC recommended that the Executive Board consider whether anything could be done about the fact that small, piecemeal developments were outside of the s106 framework and yet the cumulative effect of these developments on the local infrastructure was very significant.

3.2 This recommendation was originally included on the Executive Board agenda for the meeting on 11th September 2006, to be considered with the Draft Supplementary Planning Document on Planning Obligations. At the meeting, the recommendation wasn't commented upon specifically, but the comments recorded at the scrutiny committee (and area committees) were noted by the Executive Board. Planning Officers had responded to each comment. The response for this recommendation was:

- *The threshold for residential obligations set at 10 or more dwellings or 0.25ha of land, as this was the recommendation of the Local Plan Inquiry Inspector. Applications are monitored to ensure applicants do not artificially subdivide sites or propose unacceptable low densities. A balance of dwellings study is currently being undertaken and the situation will continue to be monitored. Taking account of pressure to determine applications within Government targets, consider present threshold should continue – **no change to document.***

3.3 Despite these comments from officers, the Environment Scrutiny Committee feels that this recommendation is still relevant and should be considered again by Executive Board, as it is still an issue in the city.

3.4 Comments from the Strategic Director (Physical Environment)

3.5 The policy basis for seeking S 106 contributions is set by Government guidance in Circular 05/05 and by Policy in the Adopted Local Plan. The Audit Commission in the summer last year published best practice guidance on the matter too.

3.6 An appraisal of the City Council's approach against that Audit Commission guidance in particular indicates that the way the City Council's policy and SPD operate are completely in line with best practice. In particular the Audit Commission recommends that having detailed serviced based policy is by far the best and most efficient approach.

3.7 Thresholds are set by policy in the Adopted Local Plan and the City Council is not able to do any more to secure contributions from smaller developments. The City Council is already successful in securing contributions from developments as small as 10 residential units. It would be difficult to justify altering policy in the future to enable going to a lower threshold because this would fall outside the Circular requirements (tests).

3.8 Comments from the Portfolio Holder (The Leader of the Council)

3.9 It is not possible for a Supplementary Planning Document to alter a threshold set in the main planning document. The threshold set in the city's main

document is already the lowest of any district in the country in recognition of the great need for affordable housing in the city.

3.10 Recommendation 2 - Oxfordshire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy - Ask the OWP to reconsider the targets for waste reduction as scrutiny felt these should be more ambitious and go beyond stabilising current levels of waste, to a reduction.

3.11 This recommendation was also originally included on the 11th September Executive Board agenda, to be considered with the Oxfordshire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy. Discussion of this recommendation is not recorded in the minutes from that meeting. However, the Environment Scrutiny Committee believe that this recommendation should be reconsidered now that the new recycling scheme for Oxford has started to role out. Given that recycling levels have increased, the Committee are interested to get Executive Board's view on the possibility of setting tougher waste reduction targets.

3.12 Comments from the Strategic Director (Physical Environment)

3.13 The target set out in the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership's Strategy is already challenging for the partnership and will require investment of tens of millions of pounds. It is only through substantial investment in the New Recycling for Oxford scheme that Oxford City Council is able to meet its contribution to this partnership target. However, the existence of this target would not preclude Oxford City Council investing further funds to achieve higher results if it judged that was a priority of the community.

3.14 Comments from the Portfolio Holder (Cleaner City)

3.15 This matter was discussed at the Executive Board but I understand that that discussion was not noted in the minutes. My recollection is that we did not think that a further reduction was possible for the OWP, though the City Council could set itself a tougher target if we felt it was achievable.

3.16 Recommendation 3 – Oxford Plan Consultation - Steps should be taken to ensure that Council facilities and buildings are less vulnerable to the effects of climate change through such measures as the installation of covering shade for play areas and blinds for the windows in homes for the elderly, to provide protection from extreme weather conditions.

3.17 Executive Board discussed the Oxford Plan on 6th November 2006 and commended it to Council, subject to some specific changes. One of the changes was in relation to climate change, but did not specifically address the recommendation from Environment Scrutiny Committee. The amendment was:

- ***Strategic Priority – tackle climate change and promote environment resource management: under this add an***

extra line – “We will guard against the adverse effects of climate change, in particular flooding” (appendix 1 – summary of revised and focussed commitments).

3.18 Environment Scrutiny Committee would like the Executive Board to reconsider this recommendation, and if agreed, add it to the Oxford Plan.

3.19 Comments from the Strategic Director (Housing, Health and Community)

3.20 Current Council activity on Climate Change is focused on ‘mitigation’ i.e. reducing energy consumption, CO 2 emissions and waste to landfill. This is in line with the Climate Change Strategy agreed by Executive Board in 2005. In the future Council may also want to consider diverting resources to ‘adaptation’ activities which would make Council facilities and buildings less vulnerable to the effects of Climate Change. The scope and budget for adaptation activities would need to be established as part of the 08/09 budget process

3.21 Comments from the Portfolio Holder (Healthier Environment)

3.22 Note and endorse comments of the Strategic Director.

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Background papers:



Executive Board and Environment Scrutiny Committee agendas and minutes, 2006-07

