

## ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

### A meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel was held on 18 January 2018

**PRESENT:** Councillor Higgins (Chair), Councillor Goodchild (Vice Chair); Councillors Biswas, Hubbard, Lewis, McGee and McGloin (substitute for Councillor Davison).

**OFFICERS:** J Dixon, A Mace and J Parry.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** D Roberts, Deputy Director of Campus Services, Teesside University.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Branson, Coupe and Davison.

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

### **\*\* MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 9 November 2017 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### **FLY-TIPPING AND ENFORCEMENT – FURTHER INFORMATION PROVIDED BY TEESSIDE UNIVERSITY**

As part of its current investigation into fly-tipping and enforcement, the Panel had invited a representative from Teesside University to the meeting to provide information regarding the arrangements in place between the University and students/landlords in relation to house clearances and bulky waste disposal and the expectations of landlords and students regarding end of term clearances.

Debby Roberts, Deputy Directory of Campus Services (Facilities), Teesside University, was welcomed to the meeting and introductions were made.

A Mace, Head of Environment Services and J Parry, Environment Services Manager, were also in attendance at the meeting.

The Deputy Director had submitted a report for the Panel's consideration which addressed the issues outlined above.

It was explained that Teesside University had 979 University-owned bed spaces in several locations close to the Campus. A map attached at Appendix 1 to the report showed the locations of the accommodation as follows:-

- King Edward Square
- Parkside Halls and Houses (between Park Lane and Park Road North)
- Woodlands Halls, Woodlands Road
- Central Halls, Borough Road.

It was highlighted that the University adhered to the UUK Accommodation Code of Practice for student accommodation and that this covered general waste and recycling but made no specific reference to disposal of large items of waste.

Teesside University also had 50 bed spaces in University Managed Housing, owned by various local landlords, but where the relationship was managed by the University. The University closely

monitored these properties, including regular checks of the condition of the accommodation, and held meetings as required with landlords. The University did not keep a check on the landlords' processes for disposing of their own property.

It was noted that where students moved to Middlesbrough but did not use the University-owned properties or University Managed Housing, other arrangements were not monitored or managed by the University. The landlords concerned were not connected to the University in any way and the University did not keep a record of such arrangements.

The Panel was also provided with information regarding the Students' Union (SU). It was highlighted that the SU was a separate entity to the University. Teesside University's SU recognised a number of good student landlords and letting agencies but had no part in the contracts between students and landlords. Any student landlords/letting agencies that appeared on the SU website were accredited, either by ANUK or by the SU – the purpose of this being to encourage, acknowledge and raise awareness of actively promoting good standards and management practices in student accommodation. A list of the accredited landlords and agencies were listed on the SU website.

The SU offered free guidance to student tenants, including a Student Housing Guide. The Guide included a section, 'Be a Good Tenant', that provided advice to students on how to report disrepair, keep garden and bin areas clean and tidy, and to respect property. The guide highlighted the importance of leaving the property as it was found and details of the moving out inspection. Students were dependent on this to recover their deposit from the landlord.

In terms of waste management, the Panel was advised that all furniture and white goods in University-owned residences were the property of the University and were disposed of appropriately, via the University's waste disposal contractor, under the relevant legislation. In addition, all building waste generated by the University or its contractors was collected and disposed of in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Waste generated by students in University-owned accommodation was collected in various waste compounds around the campus where it was collected by either the Council or the University's waste contractor. Students' domestic waste was collected by University staff every weekday morning to ensure it was dealt with quickly and stored in the correct place until collected.

Mattresses were disposed of at the end of every academic year by the University's waste contractor and were recycled, as far as practical, however, none were sent to landfill.

The University worked with the British Heart Foundation and encouraged students to donate unwanted good quality items to the charity. There were two large permanent donation bins on campus and smaller temporary collection bins were made available at various times during the year. In 2017, 532 bags were donated by University staff and students to the British Heart Foundation, weighing approximately 4.2 tonnes, with a value of around £7,000.

In the University Managed Housing properties, all large furniture and white goods were the property of the landlord and the disposal of such items was not monitored by the University. The Panel was informed that the University had no formal relationship with other landlords and considered it would not be appropriate to liaise with them regarding waste disposal.

The University indicated that it would be happy to amend its 'exit' letter sent to students in University-owned accommodation requesting that they ensure waste was properly disposed of and that they ask Campus Services Accommodation for assistance with large items. The University also indicated that it would be pleased to provide a point of contact at the Council to landlords of University Managed Housing regarding the disposal of large items of waste and the end of leases. However, it did not believe it was appropriate for the University to monitor the disposal of waste from landlords as it felt this was beyond the University's remit.

In conclusion, the University considered it had robust procedures in place to ensure that waste generated from all properties for which it had responsibility, was disposed of appropriately and in accordance with legislation and environmental impact.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- The Panel acknowledged that the University had no control over landlords that were not part of the University Managed Housing scheme, however, the Student Union (which operated as a separate body) kept a register of accredited landlords and felt that the Council could explore making contact with those landlords, as a starting point, to discuss arrangements for the disposal of large/bulky waste items.
- It was queried whether new students were provided with information regarding having a pride in the town and taking responsibility for proper waste disposal. The Panel was advised that the University would be happy to consider a form of wording to be included within the information currently provided to students within University-owned properties and University Managed Housing, however, in order to reach all students consideration would need to be given to including a welcome message, perhaps directly from the Council, via the Student Recruitment Team. The Panel considered it would be worthwhile for the Council to also liaise with the Student Union to explore the possibility of including such information within the welcome packs it provided to new students.
- In response to a query as to whether the guidance provided to students included how to dispose of their waste, the Deputy Director of Campus Services confirmed that all waste, including bulky items, in University owned properties was disposed of by the University through its waste contractor and that very few students would have bulky items to be disposed of as such items (eg furniture) were the property of the landlord and it was the landlord's responsibility to dispose of bulky waste.
- It was queried whether the landlords under the University Managed Housing scheme followed good practice guidelines in terms of waste disposal. The Deputy Director stated that the University had a contract with the landlords under the UMH scheme and would expect them to behave responsibly and did not check on how those landlords dispose of their waste, however, should the Council find any problems with any of the UMH landlords, the University would reconsider its arrangements with that individual. In terms of the other private landlords, the University had no contractual obligations and any arrangements were between the landlord and student.
- When asked whether the University promoted the good practice guidelines with its partner landlords, the Panel was advised that it did, however there was no specific reference to the disposal of large items of waste.
- The Panel considered that the Council could liaise directly with the University Managed Housing landlords in relation to waste disposal arrangements, however, it was highlighted that the University Managed Housing had reduced significantly in recent years. In terms of the landlords accredited by the Student Union it was noted that the SU did not manage those landlords, however, details of those landlords it accredited were available on the SU website.
- It was further highlighted that landlords of multi-occupancy housing (with a certain number of occupants) were exempt from paying Council Tax, therefore, this would apply to private landlords (giving the location of the properties) and the department could explore liaising with those landlords regarding waste disposal arrangements.
- A Member of the Panel asked how much of a problem this actually was and what the associated cost was. The Council's Head of Environment advised that the biggest issue was at the end of the academic term, especially with mattresses being dumped – with 12 being removed from one alleyway in one day. It was difficult to prove which properties they had come from, however, this was a problem at the same time each year.
- The Panel discussed ideas around working with landlords to mark or colour-code furniture items so that they were easily identifiable, although it was acknowledged that this would need to be voluntary on the landlord's part. Volunteering for any potential schemes could be recognised

as good practice by the Council and written into any codes of practice or selective licensing agreements it had in existence.

- The Panel noted that the University had donated a significant amount of unwanted goods, with a value of approximately £7,000, to the British Heart Foundation and considered that the University and students should be commended.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Director of Campus Services, Teesside University, for attending and for the useful information provided. The Deputy Director withdrew from the meeting at this point.

The Panel continued its discussion in relation to fly-tipping and enforcement with the Head of Environment Services and the Environment Services Manager and the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a question, clarification was provided in relation to the numbers of vehicles and operatives available for bulky waste collections. It was confirmed that, covering the whole of the Middlesbrough area, there were two wagons used for the collection of household items and one for electrical goods. In relation to fly-tip collections, there was one van and two operatives.
- In terms of whether this was adequate to deal with the levels of junk job collections and fly-tip removals, the Panel was informed that levels tended to be steady throughout the year, however there were seasonal increases. Reports of needles and dead animals were dealt with as a priority within two hours and approximately 80% of fly-tips were collected within the 24 hour service promise.
- The Panel acknowledged that staff worked very hard and whilst the Panel had heard that the levels of fly-tipping were being kept on top of, Members felt that this was not always reflected within ward walk-about, however, it was also noted that some incidents of fly-tipping were not reported.
- The Panel also expressed a wish to see joint working between the Council and Thirteen Housing to provide better services for all residents of Middlesbrough (particularly in terms of fly-tip collections, enforcement and grass cutting) to improve the quality of life for residents across the borough.
- Reference was made to the Council's website and the junk job collection webpage which the Panel felt could be made clearer in terms of charging and items that could be collected. It was also highlighted that there was no telephone number for the Contact Centre. In response, the Panel was advised that 'digital by default' is the position for access to the Council's services, ie residents were encouraged to report issues/request services on-line. The webpage was currently in the process of being updated and it was highlighted that Contact Centre operatives would assist residents to complete the forms on-line or on their behalf should they not have access to the internet.
- The Environment Services Manager informed that a new reporting app had been introduced for residents to report a range of issues, however, sometimes issues may have been reported under the wrong category (eg cleaning rather than fly-tipping) which also affected the numbers recorded.
- It was queried whether mechanical road sweepers were still in use. The Panel was advised that they were. The largest machines had been reduced from four to two several years ago and four smaller machines were also in use on planned routes. Two small mechanical sweepers were used within the town centre and staff were encouraged to take blowers out to blow rubbish into the road so that the street sweepers could sweep it up.
- Reference was made to the Panel's previous meeting when an Officer from Redcar and Cleveland Council had attended and had provided information on some interesting initiatives. The Panel felt that the Council needed to consider whether any of those ideas might work in Middlesbrough, particularly low-cost, high-impact initiatives. It particularly felt that fast food

outlets across the town needed to have a responsible approach regarding waste disposal and litter and that the Council may be able to undertake some work with such outlets and also with community groups to promote keeping the town clean and tidy.

- The Panel was updated in relation to fly-tipping prosecutions and informed that it had undertaken three prosecutions in December 2017. CCTV images printed in the local press had prompted a response whereby the perpetrator was identified and successfully prosecuted.
- The Chair requested the updated figures on the number of fixed penalty notices issued in respect of fly-tipping for the current year. The Environment Services Manager agreed to forward this information.
- Reference was made to non-registered waste disposal operators and it was noted that it was the responsibility of the person disposing of the waste to ensure that they only used a properly registered contractor or they would be liable for prosecution for the offence if their waste was discovered to have been fly-tipped.
- In response to a query, it was confirmed that the Council's Enforcement Team only carried out enforcement of environmental issues (fly-tipping, litter, etc) and dealt with stray dogs one day per week.
- It was queried whether the enforcement team also carried out an educational work, for example in schools. It was confirmed that the educational element was carried out by Area Care, however, the Enforcement Team Manager was linking up with PCSOs who visited schools with a view to carrying out joint talks which would include information around enforcement and recycling.
- The Panel considered that it needed to take a responsible, balanced approach. Whilst it wanted to ensure that the town was kept clean and tidy, it also needed to deliver a tougher message that fly-tipping would not be tolerated and this would be achieved by including the use of FPNs and prosecutions, however, this was a final resort following educating the perpetrator.

**AGREED** that the information provided by the Deputy Director of Campus Services, Teesside University, be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current investigation.

#### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 15 February 2018 at 1.30pm.