



AGENDA ITEM 9

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

3 JUNE 2008

SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT: ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

Purpose:

The aims of the scrutiny review were to investigate how the important function of environmental enforcement is undertaken in Middlesbrough and how the relevant regulations and legislation are applied.

The panel sought to investigate the Council's powers in this area, its responsibilities and the effectiveness of environmental enforcement.

Terms of Reference:

The terms of reference of the scrutiny review were as follows:

- *To examine the Council's environmental enforcement activities, including legislative background and statutory powers.*
- *To investigate the range of enforcement options available to the Council and to assess their effectiveness in ensuring compliance with the law.*
- *To assess the impact of any relevant national guidance or directives.*
- *To examine the impact of any relevant performance indicators or performance measures.*
- *To examine resource arrangements, including staffing, budgets, income and expenditure and also how services are prioritised.*

Findings:

Evidence was gathered from officers from Environment.

Environmental enforcement is an important Council function which protects the environment through the effective enforcement of relevant regulations.

The function is a high profile service which is at the forefront of public expectations. A growing awareness of environmental matters is increasing the importance of enforcement, especially as poor local environmental conditions have been linked to anti-social behaviour, vandalism and crime.

The scrutiny panel identified a number of key issues in relation to each of the terms of reference above and these form the basis of its conclusions and recommendations, as follows:

Conclusions:

Based on the evidence considered during the investigation, the Panel concluded that:

1. Poor local environmental conditions can be linked to anti-social behaviour, vandalism, disorder and levels of crime. Effective environmental enforcement can assist in making improvements in these areas.
2. Environmental enforcement is an important, high profile service which is at the forefront of public expectations. In terms of outputs and results, the Community Services Respect Team performs very well, especially given the increasing level of demand for the service and the staffing problems which have been associated with the grant funding of posts.
3. Historically, the service has had no budget and has had to rely on grant funding to fill temporary posts. This has led to problems in staff recruitment and retention. The panel welcomes the fact that the Environment Department is now looking to mainstream funding for staffing in this area.
4. Work undertaken with The Dogs Trust to neuter and microchip dogs has significantly reduced stray dog problems in Middlesbrough. However, Dogs Trust funding for microchipping has now ceased and its funding for the neutering scheme is under review.
5. There will be financial implications for the Council following changes from April 2008 which mean that the authority will take on increased responsibilities for stray dogs from the police.

Recommendations:

As a result of the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

1. Mainstream budget funding should continue to be provided in the future for the Community Service's Respect team.
2. The future position regarding joint work undertaken with the Dogs Trust to neuter dogs should be clarified. If the Trust discontinues the scheme, the Council should identify funding to ensure its continuation.
3. All options should be explored to ensure that the scheme of microchipping dogs, to assist in identifying and re-homing strays, is also continued.
4. The implications of the Council's recent increased responsibilities for providing an out of hours stray dogs service (taken on from the police) should be closely monitored to determine the financial implications and steps taken to ensure that the service operates cost effectively. An update on the operation of the service, and any financial implications, should be reported to the scrutiny panel after approximately six months.
5. The position concerning increased cigarette litter outside business premises, offices, pubs and social clubs etc should continue to be monitored. Discussions should be continued with premises owners and appropriate trade and licensing bodies to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities and to consider how this problem can be reduced. The issue should also be publicised and enforcement action taken where appropriate.
6. The Environment Scrutiny panel should be consulted, prior to the Executive, on any significant changes to the Environmental Enforcement Policy.