

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

12 JANUARY 2010

SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT - CLEANSING ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose:

The aims of the scrutiny review were to investigate a range of environmental issues under the broad heading of 'cleansing arrangements.'

Background/aims of the scrutiny investigation

The public is increasingly aware of environmental issues, such as the condition of their local area, and the Council's responsibilities. The scrutiny panel sought to investigate a number of areas which impact on the condition of the environment and cleanliness in Middlesbrough.

Terms of reference:

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

- a) *To examine cleansing arrangements for back alleys, including inspection and enforcement and assessing the impact of these on improving the condition of problem areas.*
- b) *To consider specifications/standards for grounds maintenance (including weed control), street cleaning and back alley cleansing and determine whether these require amendment.*
- c) *To examine links with Vale Contracts in respect of grounds maintenance, particularly how service standards are devised to ensure a consistent approach.*
- d) *In the light of moves towards a seven day/24 hour economy, to examine existing arrangements for flexible/weekend working in areas such as Area Care.*
- e) *To assess existing depot arrangements and how these impact on service delivery.*
- f) *To assess what the Council is doing to educate and change behaviour in relation to littering, fly tipping and general environmental cleanliness.*

Findings:

Evidence was gathered from officers from the Environment Department and from Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton Borough Councils.

The scrutiny panel identified a number of key issues in relation to each of the terms of reference above and these formed the basis of its conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions:

The panel's conclusions are shown in full in the final report and relate to:

1. The importance of cleanliness of the local environment as a highly visible and very important Council service, which is often seen as a priority by the public
2. Ongoing problems of back alley cleanliness.
3. The importance of education and public engagement is key.
4. The need to take effective enforcement action, with a balance being struck between education and enforcement.
5. The possible impact of work being undertaken by the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel (in respect of the selective licensing of private landlords) on back alleys.
6. Moves towards more flexible specifications for grounds maintenance, street cleaning etc to reflect changing demands on services.
7. Continuing to improve service standards in respect of the Erimus Housing grounds maintenance contract.
8. The process relating to the ongoing review of Council depot arrangements.
9. Operational changes which will be needed to provide the necessary level of service which is increasingly demanded in relation to the 24-hour economy.
10. The Environment Department's involvement in a number of initiatives to educate the public in respect of environmental cleanliness.

Recommendations:

The panel's recommendations are shown in full in the final report and relate to:

1. The need for more enforcement action for offences such as dumping in back alleys, littering and dog fouling.
2. Greater publicity of enforcement activities to deter potential offenders.
3. Introducing Dog Control Orders to reduce dog fouling problems in back alleys.
4. Encouraging all Council staff working in the public domain to report any environmental problems.
5. The introduction of local 'Street Champions' in the worst problem areas.
6. The submission to the scrutiny panel of the results of working methods and patterns to meet cleaning needs in respect of the 24 hour economy.
7. Linking moves towards more flexible specifications for grounds maintenance, street cleaning etc with the review of fleet/vehicle provision and the review of working methods and patterns which is to take place in regard to the 24 hour economy.
8. Continued monitoring to ensure that there is no reduction in standards as the Erimus Housing grounds maintenance contract comes to an end.

9. Continuing work with Erimus Housing and Vale Contracts to ensure no visible gaps or differing standards in the cutting regimes of Vale and the Council.
10. The need to explore all options regarding the review of Council depot provision.
11. Submitting information to the scrutiny panel on the work undertaken by the officer responsible for monitoring standards in respect of performance indicator NI 195 relating to street cleanliness.