

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS O&S COMMITTEE –
PUBLIC MEETING**

1400 hours on Monday 26th September 2022

Committee Rooms 3&4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Mohammed Idrees (Chair)

Councillors: Kerry Brewer, Marje Bridle, Ray Goodwin, Roger Harmer, Saqib Khan, Lauren Rainbow and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Councillor Adrian Delaney

Councillor Izzy Knowles

Councillor Bruce Lines

Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment

Emma Pavans de Ceccatty, Pesticide Action Network

Beth Clay, Co-organiser of Petition (On-line)

Laura Hackett, Lead Petitioner

Matt Hageney, Partnership Manager, Street Scene and Parks

Joe Hayden, Head of Parks

Nick Mole, Pesticide Action Network

Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement

Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene

Jayne Bowles, Scrutiny Officer

Christian Scade, Interim Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's meeting You Tube site (www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2)

The following matters were raised:

- **List of HMOs by ward** – Cllr Harmer asked that a request be made for an updated list;
- **Missed Bin Collections and national performance indicators on recycling** - Cllr Bridle asked for reassurance that this information will be included in the November performance report. The Cabinet Member confirmed this will be provided and updated Members on work already commenced to modernise the service in depots and with the “slabs in cabs” to provide more live data;
- **Voids** – Cllr Wood reminded Committee that a deep-dive piece of work on Voids still needs to be programmed.

RESOLVED:

- The action notes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022 were agreed;
- The action tracker was noted.

5. PETITION – BAN USE OF PESTICIDES

(See documents 3, 4 and 5)

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Laura Hackett, the Lead Petitioner, Beth Clay, the Co-organiser of the Petition (attending on-line), Emma Pavans de Ceccatty and Nick Mole from Pesticide Action Network, Cllr Izzy Knowles, Presenting Councillor, Cllr Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment and Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene.

Cllr Mahmood advised that although he was attending in his capacity as Cabinet Lead, he had also presented the Petition jointly with Cllr Izzy Knowles.

The Lead Petitioner and Co-organiser set out the case for the Petition and the required action, with contributions also from the two representatives from Pesticide Action Network and Cllr Izzy Knowles.

The following were among the main points raised:

- The negative impact of the use of chemicals to control the growth of plants was highlighted – including the loss of pollinators and the detrimental effect on human health and the health of pets and wildlife;
- The Petition clearly shows the support from the people of Birmingham with signatures from 12,000 residents – and additional support from across the West Midlands and global community;
- Since starting the campaign they have been on radio and TV and have been contacted by concerned residents asking why the Council continues to use pesticides despite the effect on the health of humans, animals and plant life;
- More bold changes are needed, not just a reduction in grass cutting, and there is a need to phase out the use of glyphosate;
- We should be proud of the City of Nature work and have a duty to make the city a better place to live;
- Although the use of pesticides to control weed growth might have seemed like the right thing to do at the time, the opportunity to increase habitats for wildlife and leave local areas untouched for nature should be welcomed;
- We have an obligation for bio-diversity and going pesticide-free doesn't mean streets will look any worse. Other countries manage well without the use of herbicides and PAN UK (Pesticide Action Network) can give advice to the Council to help develop policies;
- Cllr Izzy Knowles added that she was proud of the city in 2019 with the cross-party announcement of a climate emergency and with so many parks and green spaces in the city, this petition is a chance for the Council to step up and act.

Cllr Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment, responded and the following were among the main points raised:

- Cllr Mahmood put on record his thanks to Bee Birmingham, especially Laura and Beth, and the 12,000 residents, as well as more petitioners across the region and nationally, who had signed the Petition;
- This is one of the largest petitions we have had and the Council needs to respond to it;
- Thanks were also given to PAN UK who have vast experience;
- There have been a number of email exchanges and meetings on the back of the Petition to talk through the ask of the petitioners and Cllr Mahmood gave his reassurance that he is in listening mode and there is a strategy included in the response;
- A final response will be provided after the meeting, taking on board the comments made during the session;
- Reducing the use of pesticides will result in more weeds, however it was acknowledged that there is a need to reduce or eliminate the use of glyphosate and it is sensible that the Council should work towards reducing chemical use;

- They want it to be a joined-up approach with stakeholders and there is a need to identify the best way forward;
- There have been approaches from North Edgbaston, Moseley and Bromford and Hodge Hill to take part in trials and they will see how that works out and how it can be extended to other wards and other elected members are encouraged to come forward;
- They will also make sure the Council's annual flower display uses pollinator friendly plants and they are already planning to develop tree canopies and increase the amount of wild flowers;
- They will work with partners to promote pollinator friendly open spaces;
- The next stage is to refine the document presented in response to the Petition, taking in all the comments made, and to take soundings from other local authorities, as well as reviewing work programmes across the city and start a training programme.

Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, made the following additional points:

- This is the right thing to do and there is 100% commitment to take this forward;
- The document put forward is a draft and will be refined in more detail and developed with partners;
- Tougher actions can now be added and education will be included.

During the discussion and in response to Members' questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- Members thanked the petitioners and organisers for bringing this matter to their attention;
- It was acknowledged that seeing more weeds, or plants that are not normally known as the "right" plants, is the price of accepting we don't use chemicals in the future and that we need to adapt to this and councillors would need to be willing to take comments from residents who might not like what they see;
- However, it was stressed that the Council is committed to a cleaner and greener city and residents want to see their streets clean and so reassurance was sought that we will find a way to keep pavements weed-free;
- A request was made for a crib sheet to be produced for councillors to enable them to deal with queries from residents and explain why the street scene might look slightly different;
- Members were reassured that it doesn't have to be "either, or" – it is possible to have clean streets and bio-diversity. There are plenty of alternatives and what is needed is a well thought out strategy and good communication strategy with the public;
- One outcome of not using glyphosate will be taller grass growing around trees and there will also be a need to look at, for example, whether a row of dandelions on a grass verge is a problem;
- The Cabinet Member confirmed the aspiration is to go chemical free and it was up to the Council to allocate appropriate funding to keep streets clean;
- The pilots will help with educating people;

- The Committee's support in terms of what had been put forward in the draft report was confirmed, although there were still some concerns that need to be addressed and these will be put in writing;
- It was agreed that the final report will be brought back to a future committee meeting (timing to be confirmed).

RESOLVED: -

- A letter setting out the Committee's resolution to be sent to the Cabinet Member;
- Final report to be brought back to a future committee meeting (timing to be confirmed).

6. REQUEST FOR CALL-IN: CAPITAL FUNDING BID FOR THE PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF CAR PARKING CHARGING ACROSS SELECTED BCC PARKS

(See documents 6, 7, 8 and 9)

Cllr Adrian Delaney, Cllr Bruce Lines, Cllr Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Environment, Darren Share, Assistant Director, Street Scene, Matt Hageney, Partnership Manager, Street Scene and Parks, and Joe Hayden, Head of Parks, were in attendance for this item.

The Chair invited Cllrs Delaney and Lines to explain the reasons for their request for this decision to be called in and in doing so the following were among the main points raised:

- They are opposed to charges in principle;
- **Criteria 5: the Executive appears to have overlooked some relevant consideration in arriving at its decision** – The Business Rates impact is at odds with the view of Bromsgrove District Council and it is clear they think the introduction of charges will change the valuation;
- The report states mitigations are in place but doesn't say what they are;
- There is an obligation to take equalities in consideration and although Equality Impact Assessments are referenced they were not included in the report and the public health impact has not been taken into account;
- **Criteria 6 – the decision has already generated particular controversy amongst those likely to be affected by it or, in the opinion of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it is likely so to do** – There has been previous backlash around the plans to impose charges at Sutton Park some time ago. The plans were unpopular because people enjoy access to parks and open spaces and they are vital for physical and mental health; not everyone can walk long distances or use public transport;
- **Criteria 7 – there is a substantial lack of clarity, material inaccuracy or insufficient information provided in the report to allow the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to hold the Executive to account and/or add value to the work of the Council** – as per Criteria 5, more information is needed, in particular on Equality and public health impacts as well as business rates;

- The Committee might also wish to consider **Criteria 9 – the notification of the decision does not appear to have been in accordance with council procedures** – it was pointed out that the word “charging” in the title of the report had been missed off the title in the Forward Plan.

The Cabinet Member responded and the following were among the main points raised:

- Cllr Mahmood thanked Cllrs Delaney and Lines for the request for call-in and the Committee for hearing it at short notice;
- He noted the comments in relation to controversy around the proposed introduction of charges and asked that the Committee note the recommendations in the report, ie to commence consultation and that individual business cases will be prepared;
- With regard to Lickey Hills, Bromsgrove District Council has chosen to wait to make a request to the Valuation Office;
- The Equality Impact Assessments had not been included in the original report due to a clerical error but have now been included;
- Public Health Assessments are not required for Cabinet reports;
- With reference to dropping the previous proposal for parking charges in Sutton Park, this followed discussions with members and officers and ward forum discussion, and no business case was formulated;
- This report allows us to go out to consultation and the resources for that will come from the resources for Parks;
- There will be full consultation with the public and with Sutton Town Council and a Full Business Case will come back;
- There will, therefore, be another opportunity to request a call-in at that time.

During the discussion and in response to Members’ questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- Members asked for reassurance that there will be a full and meaningful consultation carried out with service users, stakeholders and elected members;
- When it comes to preparing individual business cases, there needs to be some form of economic impact assessment to reflect the differences between different parts of the city and that one size does not fit all;
- Members were told that the separate business cases will set out what the charges might be and who might be exempt – not all parks will have the same charges applied to them;
- It was pointed out that as a Council we have a duty to maximise our assets;
- Cllr Bridle made reference to Shustoke Reservoir where there are notices on the parking meters explaining why there are parking charges and that the money is used to make improvements;
- Members agreed that charges should be recycled into the improvement of parks;
- The Cabinet Member advised that in the case of Cannon Hill Park, they have managed to use the charges to improve the car park and 50% of the car parking charges go to the MAC;

- Equality Impact Assessments will be produced again for each individual business case;
- With regard to the assessment of parking displacement in the locality of the parks, it was confirmed that the parking engineer would be speaking to local businesses, etc;
- In terms of timescale, this will depend on each consultation and no decision will be made until that has been done;
- There has been some slippage – an initial consultation in Lickey Hills had been done and they are looking at whether that needs to be repeated;
- The Committee agreed not to call in the decision but to put the concerns raised in writing to the Cabinet Member, with committee members to have sight of the draft for comment before being sent.

RESOLVED: -

- The decision was not called in;
- A letter setting out the Committee's concerns to be drafted and shared with committee members before being sent to the Cabinet Member.

7. DELAYS IN BIRTH AND DEATH REGISTRATIONS

(See document 10)

Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement, attended for this item to update Committee on the Resolution from the June City Council Meeting.

The following key points were highlighted:

- The Muslim section of Quinton Cemetery had opened today;
- They are moving forward with the development of shroud burials;
- They have invested in IT systems and they are assessing where they have the greatest demand in telephone calls so they can then look at an operating model;
- Evening burials will be commencing in Sutton this winter – with an extension to 6pm at Sutton New Hall;
- The times fit in with when dusk falls;
- Work is continuing with faith communities;
- Discussions are taking place with the portfolio holder in relation to the formal launch of the new Customer Charter;
- With regard to work with the Coroner, there is positive news on staffing with an extra member of staff to assist with administration processes;
- There is some benchmarking being done within the UK to check the balance of staffing is right to assist the Coroner;
- They are meeting with the West Midlands Guild regarding an efficient registration service and will be re-instating the funeral directors meetings they used to have pre-Covid;
- They are meeting with the Muslim Steering Group to work on terms of reference, friends of cemeteries groups, etc;
- The CTPM scanner contract has been extended for another year;

- With regard to Registration Services, 90% of deaths that can be registered have appointments. It was pointed out that deaths are not taken in date order, but in the order the required documentation is received;
- They are heading in the right direction and recruiting extra staff as quickly as they can, and will be recruiting to a new post of Head of Bereavement and Registration Services.

During the discussion and in response to Members' questions, the following were among the main points raised:

- The time taken to register births and when we will get back to pre-Covid levels was queried and Members were told that the problem has been exacerbated by vacancies, as staff need to be experienced or trained and that takes time, however they are doing their best to fill vacancies;
- Reference was made to other Local Authorities which have birth registration in maternity hospitals and whether this is something we could trial, for example at the Women's Hospital;
- This had been looked at in the past and a briefing could be provided on why it was felt that model won't work, although it could be looked at again. However, flexibility is lost if staff members are put into a particular area as they are inter-changeable and don't work solely on births or deaths registration;
- It was suggested that a further report be brought back to committee in 4-6 months' time and that perhaps the Coroner or a representative of the Coroner's Office could be invited to attend.

RESOLVED:

- The report was noted and a further report to be brought back to Committee in 4-6 months' time.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 11)

Cllr Bridle proposed, and it was agreed by Committee, that the Cleaner Streets work be programmed for November, December and January, to allow time to influence the budget.

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

The date of the next meeting was noted.

10. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None.

11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 1546 hours.