

10. Environmental Health Service Update Report

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Purpose of the Report

To provide members with a brief update of the work of the Environmental Health Service. Alasdair Bell will attend the meeting to give a verbal update and answer any questions. There are no additional financial implications and no extra resources are being asked for.

Recommendation

That Members note the report

Introduction

The Environmental Health Service is a frontline service committed to protecting public health and safeguarding the environment. The majority of work undertaken by the service is required by law with only a limited amount of discretionary work. An annual Service Plan, published on the SSDC website, provides further detailed information on the costs, structure and work of the unit as well as performance information.

Report

Since the last report the service has undergone restructuring as part of the wider Council management reorganisation and Alasdair Bell has been appointed Environmental Health Manager. The work of the service continues to go well with staff dealing with a wide variety of matters including routine inspections, enforcement activity and project work. Pressures on the Council's budget mean that savings must be found and it is likely that posts in the service may be lost. Clearly we are facing challenging times and it will be necessary to focus our resources on the highest priority work. It remains to be seen what effect the proposed link up with East Devon will have with the service.

Food and Safety Team

The Food & Safety Team both enforces legislation and provides advice and assistance to food businesses. The food safety element includes the approval and audit of food manufacturers, food sampling, premises inspections, the investigation of food complaints and food poisoning as well as responding to national food alerts. The Team also deals, time allowing, with issues related to wider health promotion such as 'Smokefree' and health eating. The health and safety element includes inspection, advice, complaint and accident investigation. In Area South during 2009 236 food inspections were carried out, 85 cases of suspected food poisoning and 27 health & safety incidents were investigated. Much of the work carried out is routine 'behind the scenes' and the public is generally unaware of what is going on until something significant happens such as a

major food poisoning outbreak. Having said this, the following more high profile work has recently been carried out;

- Safer Food Better Business (SFBB)-this has involved the training of a number of proprietors of food businesses from ethnic minorities in advanced food hygiene practice.
- The Zero Project-this has involved the Team, along with the Police, Community Safety and the Youth Services in running alcohol free events for young people.
- Nutrition Training-The team has run a project to encourage food proprietors to adopt healthy food choices to reduce obesity in children. All of the above were provided with external finance following successful bids.
- Review of food hygiene in butchers shops following the Pennington Report concerning the outbreak of food poisoning in Wales.

Environmental Protection Team

The EP Team deals with pollution control and environmental monitoring as well as the enforcement of environmental legislation. The Team checks local air quality and investigates a range of complaints about nuisance, in particular noise and smoke. The Team issues permits and inspects premises under the Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) regime. The Team also undertakes private water supply sampling, contaminated land assessment and the investigation of private drainage complaints. The delivery of the Pest Control service and public health burials are also part of the service provided. During 2009 94 noise complaints were investigated and 463 pest treatments carried out in Area South. The team is currently taking enforcement action in relation to a number of difficult cases across the district. Recent significant developments include;

- Work on gull control in Yeovil with the setting up of a working party to look into the issues
- The introduction of new private water supply regulations and a new inspection regime.

Housing Standards Team

The Team ensures legal housing standards in the private sector are met and provides advice and grants/loans to improve private sector housing. This includes investigating complaints about sub-standard rented housing, the inspection and licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) of which there are 49 in Area South and the licensing of caravan sites. The team also provides advice/assistance/grant aid to improve energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty. The team also processes applications for home repairs assistance grants, disabled facilities, HMO and empty property grants, and helps administer the WRT home loan scheme. Recent developments include;

- Increased working to deal with empty homes- a new strategy is being developed.
- Launch of solar panel grant/loan scheme.
- Completion of HMO Licensing scheme including enforcement work.
- Running of Two Landlord Forum events

Home Aid and Handyman Services

Our home improvement agency called Home Aid was part of a joint arrangement with Taunton Dean Borough Council. The agency organised works for disabled facilities grants applicants as well as providing the Handyman Service. The Home Aid service is

jointly funded by Social Services, Somerset PCT and Supporting People who have decided to tender for a County-wide service. Home Aid was one of the highest performing and most cost effective agencies in the South West and it remains to be seen if the new agency can match its performance. We are awaiting the results of the tender.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The work of the unit helps contribute towards the delivery of a range of our Corporate Priorities but perhaps most importantly towards Aim 3 To improve the Health and Well-being of our citizens and to Aim 5 to promote a balanced natural and built environment.

Background Papers: *Environmental Health and community Service Plan 2009-12*
Private sector Housing Strategy 2007-12
