

Council Meeting – 30 July 2019

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Environmental Services

Section 1 – Environmental Health and Private Sector Housing SW

Overall summary

- 1.1** This is an area where we have lost experienced staff, either through movement to other areas of the business, moving to other roles elsewhere or through voluntary redundancy. This has had a significant effect and has meant a considerable rebuild of the team is required. This is ongoing but has not been straight forward. We have had some successes in attracting new staff. However, in the round, we have been unable to attract sufficient quality of staff through external recruitment. There have been two recruitment rounds so far in addition to those secured during the initial recruitment to the new Council. The first of these was an external recruitment through our normal channels, advertised widely. The second went to the trade journal (Environmental Health News). Again, we were unable to successfully recruit the numbers that we required. Therefore, some of these roles are being filled by agency staff currently. Many of these roles have been vacant for a period as we undertook recruitment in the belief that they would be filled quickly, which has not proven to be the case. Further recruitment will take place in September/October. At that stage, we will re-visit our recruitment strategy to give the best chance of securing good candidates.
- 1.2** As a result of some of the above, there are some backlogs in this area of the business. Most significantly, this is in scheduled food inspections and Private Water Supplies within the old Taunton Deane area. The food inspections have been scheduled and responded to on a risk basis, as outlined further below. The Private Water Supplies are planned to be tackled through the summer.
- 1.3** The service has received 227 Service Requests across Environmental Health in quarter 1 (e.g. noise, nuisance, housing, food, etc) in addition to those known proactive inspections scheduled and described above and below.

Private sector housing standards

- 1.4** An experienced agency member of staff has been carrying out routine inspections. A new permanent member of staff for this area started on the 15th July. A comprehensive training plan is being put into place as they are newly qualified. This will involve Sedgemoor and Bristol Councils. The plan is to replace the agency member of staff with a permanent staff member in due course but the last round of recruitment only picked up one member of staff rather than two, as described above.

- 1.5 The small backlog that had built at the start of the year has been removed and all inspections are up to date.
- 1.6 Work is needed to identify Houses in Multiple Occupation within the district that may require inspection or licensing and are not on our radar. This work is likely to involve liaising with council tax, electoral roll etc. The recent changes in legislation have meant that there are properties which would not previously have qualified which need to be considered.

Food safety, infectious diseases

- 1.7 There remain some gaps in recruitment as described above.
- 1.8 149 inspections have been completed in quarter 1. The backlog stands at 53 for 2018/19 and 64 for 2019/20. This has increased marginally as some lower risk premises have been included that were not previously accounted for. (Premises are rated A-E, A being highest risk – these are D grade inspections). 99 alternative enforcement questionnaires carried out for lower risk premises. There is also a backlog of 66 Alternative Enforcement Questionnaires but these will be prioritised after new member of administrative staff starts on 15th July.

Environmental protection / pollution

- 1.9 Edward (Agency) EP Officer starting 29th July to help with complaints work and backfill for maternity leave. This is a busy time of the year for complaints e.g. noise.

Private water supply inspections

- 1.10 All inspections in old West Somerset area up to date and on track with current scheduled inspections. There is a backlog of 45 inspections in the old Taunton Deane area. Officer tasked to prioritise PWS inspections until backlog cleared.

Environmental permitting e.g. petrol stations, dry cleaners etc.

- 1.11 The team are processing two new applications for concrete batching and concrete crushing at Hinkley Point A and Hinkley Point C. There will be 15-20 inspections due this year. The number depends on a review of the current risk ratings and any changes in order to finalise this.

Air quality monitoring

The Council has a duty to review and assess air quality in its area. This includes monitoring air quality, which in Somerset West and Taunton is carried out using diffusion tubes to monitoring levels of nitrogen dioxide at 47 locations. The tubes are changed monthly and are a cost effective way to obtain an annual average level. If there are locations where air quality does not meet national objectives, and where people are exposed to the pollution, the local authority must declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and

prepare an action plan outlining steps that can be taken to try and improve air quality, SWT has two AQMAs for high levels of nitrogen dioxide, one at East Reach in Taunton and the other on the A358 in Henlade. The main source of pollutants in these area is traffic, and most of the actions in the Action Plan are the responsibility of the highway authorities (Somerset County Council and Highways England). However, it is likely to be difficult to restrict traffic in both AQMA areas as they are through routes. SWT can play a role through the planning process, by sponsoring particular initiatives and trying to minimise any increase in traffic that will be result of building thousands of new houses and encouraging new business development in the area. The most recent Air Quality reports are available on the Council's website: - <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/environmental-health/environmental-protection/air-quality/>

External health & safety investigations

1.12 There are two ongoing investigations.

Dog warden service contract

1.13 Contract with St Giles is working well. No specific issues.

Section 2 - Licensing

- 2.1 Updates at regularly scheduled Licensing Committee – agenda and draft minutes from 24th June meeting
<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=329&MeetingId=2315>
- 2.2 The report presented to the licensing committee at its meeting last month gave a fairly comprehensive update on the state of play in the service, including staffing:
<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/s4939/Licensing%20Update%20Report%20June%202019.pdf>
- 2.3 Appendix A:
<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/s4940/Update%20Report%20Appendix%201.pdf>
- 2.4 Appendix B:
<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/s4941/Update%20Report%20Appendix%202.pdf>
- 2.5 Since writing that report, there have been some further staffing changes. Generally speaking, there is a small backlog of finance related work. Namely customers and contracts which need setting up on the system. A colleague who is joining us soon has a finance background and will be initially be tasked with getting us back to where we need to be. With that in mind, it has been arranged to have an informal meeting to discuss the work with the Licensing Committee in July.

2.6 In addition, John Rendell also said he would provide a link to the webpage he devised which sets out the licences and permits issued by other authorities. It is designed to signpost those who end up on our website to the correct people. Here is the link:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/licensing/other-licences/other-licences-permits-and-consents/>

2.7 Licensing Service Overview

Ongoing commitments	Upcoming tasks/projects (with expected start date)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair and organise the monthly meetings of council’s Safety Advisory Group and engage with event organisers; • Deliver a temporary refreshment concession within Blenheim Gardens, Minehead; • Support work to decide on the long-term future of CCTV in Minehead and Watchet and deliver any solution; • Investigating officer for internal staff disciplinary proceedings (ad hoc). • Review and publish Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Licensing Principals (policy) • Review and publish Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal staff disciplinary investigation (August 2019) • Fee setting for licensing, land charges and private sector housing (September 2019); • Appeal against refusal to grant a hackney carriage vehicle licence at North Somerset Magistrates Court (September 2019) • Review and re-publish Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) for Taunton/Wellington (September 2019) and Minehead/Watchet/Williton (April 2020); • Support the delivery of customer self-service licence application forms on the council’s website, across the various licensing functions (start not known); • Support the procurement of a single back office system for Env. Health, Licensing and Private Sector Housing (October 2019);

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp