

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 in the last twelve months and to look forward to future challenges. Alasdair Bell, Environmental Health Manager will attend the meeting to give a verbal update and answer any questions.

Recommendation

That Members note the report

Public Interest

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 very little discretionary work.

Report

The work of the service continues to go well with staff dealing with a wide variety of matters including routine inspections and enforcement activity.

Food and Safety Team

The Food & Safety Team both enforces legislation and provides advice and assistance to food and other businesses. The main emphasis of the team is to contribute to the success of the local economy by helping food businesses avoid problems of food poisoning etc and the severe economic consequences that can result. The food safety element of the work of the team 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 health and safety element includes inspection, advice, complaint and accident investigation. In Area East in the last 12 months 316 food inspections have been carried out, 64 cases of suspected food poisoning have been investigated and 11 accidents reported/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. More detailed information about the number and different types of food premises dealt with and the inspection regime can be found in the Food & Safety service plan on the SSDC website. This is a statutory document that SSDC is obliged to produce every year. Significant points to note;

- The continued development of the National Food Hygiene Rating scheme ('scores on the doors'). This is a national scheme whereby all food catering businesses are given points dependant on their food hygiene and management practices. Food businesses are encouraged to put up their score certificates in visible locations. Their scores are

then put up on a national website, linked to the SSDC website, so that consumers can make an informed decision about where to eat. The scheme has proved very useful in driving up food hygiene standards in food businesses. Whilst most businesses accept their results, some are aggrieved if they do not get a top score. The Western Gazette recently ran a series of articles on the scheme, highlighting the score of a range of businesses and also ran a front page feature on one restaurant that received a zero score. Other areas of work of interest include;

- The second rollout of the turkey 'pop up' thermometer scheme at Christmas which generated much positive publicity for the council.
- The on-going work of the South Somerset Safety Advisory Group with the 'Blue Light' services to monitor safety planning at future public events.
- Work on the hygiene side of the development on the Government's of 'Food for Schools' project.
- Roll out of new 'Allergen in Food' regulations.
- Investigating a complaint of a cigarette butt cooked in a pizza.
- Planning for a possible Ebola outbreak
- Councillor Cathy Bakewell successfully argued for a change in the Consumer's Rights Bill to allow EHO's to visit food premises unannounced.

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 regime. The Team also undertakes private water supply sampling, contaminated land assessment and the investigation of private drainage complaints as well as acting as a statutory consultee on planning and licensing applications. The delivery of the Pest Control service and public health burials are also part of the service provided. During the past 12 months 62 noise complaints have been investigated and 457 calls were taken regarding pest control in Area East. Significant points to note;

- Work has continued on the planning for the remediation of an old gas works site in Langport.
- The Streetscene enforcement team has been moved across into the EP Team to generate more efficiencies.
- New anti-social behaviour legislation has been introduced
- Completion of the 5 year private water risk assessment programme has been achieved on time.
- Seizure of 35 animals from a private house in Montacute
- The dog warden organised a 'fun dog' show with the countryside rangers at Ham Hill County park to promote responsible dog ownership.

Housing Standards Team

The Housing Standards Team deal with private sector housing advice and enforcement. This includes investigating complaints about sub-standard rented housing, the inspection and licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) 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 Wessex Home Loans scheme (see website for further details of scheme-www.wrcic.org.uk/whil.) The team also

works closely with the Housing Options Team in seeking to tackle the potential housing crisis that is developing in South Somerset. Significant points include;

- Increased work to bring more back empty homes into use. From October 2013 to November 2014, 110 empty homes were brought back into use due to the work of the Empty Homes Officer. Information on how we deal with empty homes can be found in the Empty Homes Strategy on the SSDC website a copy of which is attached to this report.
- The running of two Landlord Forum events
- The future impact of Housing Benefit changes on rented accommodation
- Increased enforcement action to do with substandard housing and HMOs.
- The team is still dealing with applications for £5000 'flood grants' and loans and the after effects of the flooding last year. Visits have been made to numerous properties and both individuals and group schemes are being assisted. To achieve this has involved much joint working with voluntary bodies such as the Somerset Community Foundation, the Village Agents and a range of other voluntary and statutory bodies. The team has also been working closely with other departments of the Council such as the Economic Development Unit to provide grants to businesses affected by floods.

Financial Implications

There are none attached to this report

Corporate Priority Implications

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

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications

The work of the unit contributes towards reductions in carbon emissions with it's work on fuel poverty and home insulation.

Equality and Diversity Implications

As part of the EH service plan a full equalities and diversity assessment was undertaken.

Background Papers:

Environmental Health Service Plan 2014/15
Private Sector Housing Strategy 2007-12(currently under review)
Food & Safety Service Plan 2014/15
SSDC Corporate Plan 2012-15
Empty Homes Strategy 2012-15