

Area West Committee - 15<sup>th</sup> June 2011

### 13. 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 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 (see also background papers).

#### **Report**

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 are having to be found and since the last report several posts have been lost mainly due to retirements, these include the Council's in-house Health and Safety Officer, the district Health & Safety Officer, a part time Food & Safety Environmental Health Officer, a part time Health & Safety Officer and an Environmental Protection Officer. As over 90% of the service's costs are staff costs any cost savings inevitably will mean the loss of staff. In addition other Government cuts in capital funding outlined below are starting to feed through and will affect the work of the service. Clearly we are facing challenging times and it will be necessary to focus our resources on the highest priority work and to work as efficiently as possible.

#### **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 Somerset' and healthy eating. The health and safety element includes inspection, advice, complaint and accident investigation. In Area West in the last 12 months 266 food inspections have been carried out, 77 cases of suspected food poisoning have been investigated, 102 health & safety visits have been made and 22 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. Significant points to note;

- The roll out 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. The businesses are encouraged to put up their score certificates in a visible location. Their scores have been put up on a national website, linked to the SSDC website, so that consumers can make an informed decision about where to eat. Anyone can now see how their local restaurant or pubs rates in terms of food hygiene. The aim is to drive up standards in food businesses.
- The investigation of an outbreak of Legionella in Area North with significant health implications for those involved.
- The future reduction in Health & Safety work although 'Workwell Somerset' will go ahead.

### **Environmental Protection Team**

The Environmental Protection 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 126 noise complaints have been investigated and 698 pest treatments have been carried out in Area West. Significant points to note;

- The introduction of new private water supply regulations
- The introduction of charges for the pest control service as part of SSDC's on going cost savings exercise.

### **Housing Standards Team**

The 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 WRT home loan scheme. The team 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 working to deal with empty homes.
- Delivery of over 100 Warm Streets Grants to tackle fuel poverty.
- Completion of the HMO Licensing scheme.
- Running of two Landlord Forum events.
- Launch of the landlords accreditation scheme.
- Future impact of Housing Benefit changes on rented accommodation.
- Increased enforcement action to do with substandard housing.

As part of the latest Local Government spending settlement the funding for HMO grants/empty property grants/home repair assistance grants and loans is being cut. Last year we received £448K in Government grant to pay for this work and next financial year we are expecting no funding. This will greatly affect our ability to work with landlords to improve standards and create affordable housing. Grants to tackle fuel poverty will be cut, work on empty homes will be curtailed, home repairs assistance grants that fund essential wind and weatherproofing for vulnerable homeowners will be cut. With changes in Housing Benefit regulations it is expected that more HMOs will be created but there will be no grant funding to drive up standards. It is also expected that demand for disabled facilities grants will continue to rise without a commensurate rise in funding. As already mentioned the next few years are going to be extremely challenging.

### **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 (NI188)**

The work of the unit contributes towards this NI with its work on fuel poverty.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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

**Background Papers:**      *Environmental Health & Community Service Plan 2009-12*  
   *Private Sector Housing Strategy 2007-12*  
   *Food & Safety Service Plan 2010-11*