

Area West Committee – 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014

## 7. 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. Pressures on the Council's budget mean that since the last report further budget savings have had to be found which has reduced the ability of the team to do much beyond the statutory minimum requirements.

### 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 West in the last 12 months 423 food inspections have been carried out, 60 cases of suspected food poisoning have been investigated and 8 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 continued 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 visible locations. 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 scheme has proved very useful in driving up food hygiene standards in food businesses;

- The prosecution of the owners of the Travellers Rest public house Roundham who were found guilty of 8 food hygiene offences and banned from selling food;
- An audit by German inspectors from the Food & Veterinary Office of the EU that resulted in many positive comments about the Team such as 'exemplary' and 'a standard setting performance'. A really excellent result;
- The rollout of the turkey 'pop up' thermometer scheme at Christmas which generated much positive publicity for the council;
- The development of a South Somerset Safety Advisory Group with the 'Blue Light' services to monitor safety planning at future public events;
- Advice given to food businesses that were flooded.

### **Environmental Protection Team**

The Environment 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 51 noise complaints have been investigated and 469 calls were taken regarding pest control in Area West. Significant points to note:

- Work has continued on the investigation and remediation of an old gas works site in Langport following the successful bid for funding from the Government;
- Staff featured on a TV programme serving notices to deal with anti-social behaviour resulting in eviction of problem tenants;
- The Streetscene enforcement team has been moved across into the EP Team to generate more efficiencies;
- Members of the Team heavily involved in the recent flood relief work, visiting people in their homes and giving advice/assistance on pollution related issues.

### **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 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 work to bring back more empty homes into use. From October 2012 to November 2013, 126 empty homes were brought back into use due to the work of the Empty Homes Officer resulting in £806,440 of New Homes Bonus for the council. This is a significant achievement;
- 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 currently dealing with applications for £5000 'flood grants' and loans. Visits have been made to numerous properties and both individuals and group schemes are being assisted. Setting up the processes and systems for dealing with these grants has involved a lot of effort and South Somerset has led the way across the County with this work. To achieve this it has involved much joint working with voluntary bodies such as the Somerset Community Foundation who are also providing funding, the other district and county councils in Somerset, the Village Agents and a range of other voluntary and statutory bodies. The team is also 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 & Climate Change Implications**

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

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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

**Background Papers:** *Environmental Health End of year Report 2012/13*  
*Environmental Health Service Plan 2012/15*  
*Private Sector Housing Strategy 2007-12*  
*Food & Safety Service Plan 2013/14*  
*SSDC Corporate Plan 2012-15*

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