

Cllr John Feilding report 4 July 2022

The Leader comments on the LGA conference:

Most people appear unwilling to accept that the Government cannot protect everyone from the cost of living crisis.

I developed a very real sense that few people are facing up to the nature of the changed world. There are expectations being raised that simply cannot be met. This is dangerous.

Climate change has slipped down the agenda - still important but not as dominant.

I picked up through a casual conversation that there is a concern that many Local Authorities have over borrowed - shades of WDC.

If I had to summarise the picture coming across it would be that we live in a very fast changing world where a week is a long time and not just in politics

Against this rather challenging backcloth, we do have some advantages:

We are far from complacent

We have relatively robust finances and are not over borrowed

We have a strong Cabinet and Officer team

We have a strong local economy and a growing District.

The following comments are from various portfolio holders

Garden Waste subscription

SDC has sold 45,757 permits and raised £1.92m as of Monday 27 June. The numbers sold are slightly down on the same point last year (400 permits down). This could be that residents are getting better at composting, utilising one bin instead of two green bins, the current financial climate etc. Overall, we are around £219k ahead of the revenue raised at the same point last year and have (probably) the most successful local authority green waste scheme in England.

Finance

Overall SDC's financial position remains sound. We will be able to show both a strengthening of our General Reserve Fund in 2021/22 and an increase in Earmarked Reserves.

Homechoice

The list is being made simpler. Applicants will no longer have to supply the reams of detail asked for in the past to go on the Homechoice plus list. Only once they near the top will this be required. This should speed up what has been a ludicrous process! Progress is being made with the rest of the list too.

Customer Services

Brilliant team – most of them in the building at EH providing phone or personal support, particularly to the vulnerable. I am pushing for more duty officers from other teams to be in so that queries are answered quicker. We expect an increase in August when the 321 system comes in.

Legal Services

The very significant expansion of legal services following the taking on of part of the WCC legal team, as part the merger negotiations with WDC. This has given SDC a very significant boost in the range of legal services supplied in-house. Further it is saving money by avoiding having to buying in those services from the private or public sector. By providing those services to WDC, we are able to recover a significant proportion of costs.

Enforcement

The Enforcement Team continues to be extremely busy, and hopes to be back to full strength next week following staff on an extended paternity leave and another on compassionate leave; plus of course it is the holiday season coming up.

A planning breach in itself is NOT illegal and, like all councils, SDC will usually request a retrospective application where planning permission has not been sought.

If, however, the breach involves a previously rejected development (or the retrospective application fails), SDC can issue an enforcement notice requiring the applicant to put things back as they were. SDC can serve an enforcement notice when it considers planning control rules have been broken. Normally this will occur when it is considered what has or is being done, is harmful to the neighbourhood. The decisive issue should be whether the breach would unacceptably affect public amenity or the existing use of land and buildings merit protection in the public interest.

For information, the Enforcement Team at SDC has issued: four Breach of Condition Notices and two Enforcement Notices between January and March 2022

five Breach of Condition Notices and two Temporary Stop Notices between April and June 2022.

There is currently one enforcement appeal in progress. The above activity highlights that the Enforcement Team takes the appropriate action as and when required.

Land Charges

The Land Charges Team is currently achieving a turnaround time of 10 – 11 days against a target of 15 days.