

**STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR JONATHAN DIXON, CABINET MEMBER FOR
HOUSING, PUBLIC HEALTH, PROPERTY MAINTENANCE
AND SUSTAINABILITY**

HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

Members will recall that in my last briefing I announced that funding had been secured to support the work leading to the introduction of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme within the Borough. I am pleased to announce that progress with this scheme is on target for a local launch on 30 March. All food businesses affected by the scheme have recently been contacted by letter indicating their rating where appropriate. Officers are holding workshops for businesses in March to explain the scheme and answer questions. Members have also been sent information and further training is planned.

Crematorium and Cemeteries

I have considered reports and approved fees and charges for 2011/12 in respect of the services offered in respect of the Crematorium and Cemeteries service and various Environmental Health functions including pest control and animal welfare licensing.

Health and Safety Enforcement

I have also recently received a report relating to the Health and Safety Enforcement undertaken by the authority. I have noted that the Health and Safety Executive have issued new guidance as to how they expect enforcers, including local authorities, to comply with the duties laid down in Section 18 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, which requires local authorities to perform their duties as enforcers in accordance with such HSE guidance. The new guidance reinforces the principles of sensible and proportionate risk management in connection with the enforcement of health and safety. I have therefore pledged the Council's support for this approach and approved an action plan to ensure the Council will be compliant with these requirements.

Affordable Housing

I have been working closely with officers on assessing the impact of proposed changes to how new affordable housing is to be funded in future years. As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government announced big future reductions in the level of Homes and Communities Agency grant to be made available to fund affordable housing. The Government is proposing a new 'affordable rent' that equates to 80% of the market rent, for all new affordable homes. The idea is that the extra income generated from this rent will replace Homes and Communities Grant. Unfortunately, because of the relatively low rents within the Borough, this new finance model is unlikely to be sufficient on its own to pay for many new affordable homes. I am pleased therefore that officers are working closely with RSLs to develop new funding models. On a more positive note I am pleased to announce that during the last quarter there were 34 completions of new affordable homes within the Borough.

Empty Homes Strategy

Officers have been consulting on a new Empty Homes Strategy over recent weeks. Given the local housing shortage, bringing empty homes back into use is just as important as efforts to build new housing and I am pleased to see that a range of new actions are being proposed to tackle the problem of empty homes over future years.

Homelessness

In recent briefing notes I have highlighted the difficulties the Council is facing in relation to homelessness. Unfortunately demand for the Councils housing options and homeless service is growing as more and more people are struggling to make ends meet. This situation is likely to get much worse over coming years due to changes in the way housing benefit is to be calculated. I was pleased therefore that in January Cabinet approved plans to borrow funds to help pay for additional temporary accommodation for homeless people. This funding, when matched by RSLs is likely to enable around 15 new units of temporary accommodation to be provided.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Shelter at Shuttleworth Gardens, Scarborough

Works to restore this historic shelter are underway, the project is set for completion by the end of March 2011. Parks and Countryside Services are assisting with the opportunity to reinstate the retaining wall at the rear of the shelter whilst it is off site for repair.

Scarborough Town Hall

Works to prevent a repeat of last years problem with kittiwakes and herring gulls nesting on ledges, and subsequent fouling of facades and footpaths, have been carried out with netting and spiking to three elevations of the old part of the Town Hall. Their effectiveness will be monitored throughout the nesting season.

The stonework surrounding the Council Chamber Windows is in a very poor condition and is in need of urgent attention as any further deterioration may cause them to become unstable.

A survey has been commissioned to fully asses these works. This is being undertaken by Anelay Masonry LLP who will provide a full breakdown and specification of the works required in order for tenders to be sought.

Energy Management

The Salix Energy Fund initiative is proceeding with various projects at different stages of development , these are reported and discussed monthly at the Sustainability Working Group meetings.

Public Conveniences

The freezing weather at the end of last year caused major problems at a large number of sites even where pipework had been fully insulated. Asset Management were grateful for the efforts of Property Services in getting premises back open early in the New Year even though this often meant a full re-piping of the premises.

Station Avenue toilets at Filey are due to be handed back to the Council next month after undergoing a full refurbishment as a result of a Section 106 agreement with Tesco regarding the building of their new store.

A programme of painting is due to start shortly in an effort to brighten up the existing toilet blocks and wherever feasible to provide more and brighter light fittings.

Sustainability Section of the Council website

The sustainability section of the Council's website is now live (www.scarborough.gov.uk/sustainability). A media release has been issued promoting the sustainability section of the website.

Successful Sub-Regional Funding Bid for Climate Change Adaptation and Carbon Reduction Projects

The Sustainability Officer is on the steering board for two Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) funded projects. This work is in conjunction with other Sustainability Officers from York and North Yorkshire. Through the steering board and RIEP project funding a part-time project officer has been employed to undertake comprehensive climate change risk assessment for each participating local authority across their operations. This work has now been completed for Scarborough Borough Council. A report on actions that the Council will need to address is being produced (to be completed by the end of February 2011). The report will also be used to take forward workshops with partner organisations on climate risk to their own operations.

Environmental Business Action Plans

The Sustainability Officer has in conjunction with CO2 Sense and support from economic regeneration developed an environmental support action plan to work with businesses to improve their resource efficiency and to reduce their energy and water usage, and waste going to landfill. Whilst helping to improve businesses' environmental performance and to reduce carbon emission, this will also help them to save money as less resources are being wasted. The action plan will be rolled out to businesses at business events, workshops and presentations, and involves sustainability assessments and developing a bespoke business energy reduction action plan.