

Pre-Scrutiny questions and answers on reports being considered by O&S on 21 September 2021

Item 5 – Briefing Note on the Park Exercise Policy and Permit Scheme

Question asked by Cllr J Dearing:

Not so much a question but an observation that only five of the organisations shown in Table One Park Exercise Permits are shown in the equivalent table on the WDC website and one seems to have changed its name. Might it also be useful to distinguish between commercial and non-profit making organisations on the website table - as in Table One?

Response:

Thank you for your observation on the Park Exercise Permits. It is a very relevant point and one that came up this week when a member of the public noticed that one of the groups exercising in our parks was not on the list on the website. That particular issue has now been addressed.

We did say to organisations that are permit holders that they had the option to go onto the website – it is a marketing opportunity for them as an additional benefit of paying for their permit, rather than a ‘register’ of organisations to which they are obliged to belong.

However, following your observation and the incident this week, I will ask my colleagues to recontact all the permit holders to remind them that they are permitted to be on the website if they wish. As you also observe, one organisation has changed its name, and so we can update our records at the same time.

Some organisations, such as “Change your life, put down your knife” may prefer not to be on the website, but to recruit to their activity in other ways.

In view of the fact that the list on the website is a marketing opportunity rather than a register, I am not sure of the benefits that we would gain by differentiating between commercial and non-profit making organisations on this list. We can certainly do this if Members think it would be useful for customers to know if they are looking at a commercial or a non-profit making organisation.

Thank you for your interest in improving this new and developing service.

Additional point made by Councillor Bartlett, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Tourism & Leisure:

Thanks Cllr Dearing for raising this and to Paddy for your response.

May I also suggest that the website introduction is altered to : “Here you can find a list of all organisations that have publicly signed up for a Park Exercise permit.”

Item 6 – HMO Licensing & Planning Permission Effectiveness Review

Question asked by Cllr J Dearing:

Regarding Item 6, section 3.9, which states '9 licensed HMOs have been identified as potentially not having planning permission and would not qualify for a Lawful Development Certificate' - is WDC confident that there are now no other HMOs like this?

Response:

It is clear from the work Planning Enforcement have done that there are indeed only a small number of licensed HMO's (i.e. those with 5 or more occupiers) requiring planning permission. 9 such properties have been identified out of approximately 600 licensed HMOs.

You should be aware though that Planning Enforcement envisage that there are 100+ non-licenceable HMOs (i.e. those with 3-4 occupiers) with potential breach or requiring further investigation. This is obviously outside of the scope of the new HMO Licensing & Planning Permission Policy, and each of these cases will be judged on their merits and taken forward as appropriate by Planning Enforcement.

Item 7 – Update on Joint Work with SDC

Question asked by Cllr J Dearing:

The update report on joint work with SDC is to be welcomed. I realise that it is presented in note form but I would suggest that the benefits section 3.6 could be usefully strengthened, particularly in terms of informing councillors - more explicitly - about the benefits to residents/council tax payers. Mergers into larger organisations do not necessarily lead to higher work efficiency and economic gain - yet that's what seems to be assumed and is presented in very general terms. So:

How will a stronger voice help residents?

Which services will be more resilient and why?

How will customer experience be improved?

What does 'strengthened workforce opportunities arising from a larger workforce' actually mean?

In scrutiny terms, the list of benefits is presented but there is no equivalent listing of particular challenges, risks or downsides (e.g. reduction in councillor representivity). For completeness, I believe the report should include these.