



Councillor Amy Kennedy

Brighton & Hove City Council
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Grand Avenue
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John Barradell
Chief Executive
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12th July 2010

Dear John

Sustainable Procurement

I would be grateful if you could place this letter on the agenda of the Sustainability Cabinet Committee which will meet on 23rd July 2010.

At the meeting of the Sustainability Cabinet Committee on 16th March 2009 Cllr Paul Steedman asked for details of the environmental performance of the Council's purchases over the preceding year, judged against some simple criteria. The answers were not wholly encouraging.

While in some areas (such as the purchase of timber furniture) there were clear benchmark criteria, in many other areas of purchasing it was clear that the Council did not know or record the relevant information on environmental performance; or its performance was poor.

By way of example, the Council could not tell members how energy efficient any of the white goods it had purchased were, and confirmed that none of the chicken it bought was free range. At the time, Cllr Steedman was also promised further information on the performance of our vehicle fleet which I understand he never received. (The full extract from the minutes is appended for reference.)

At that meeting Cllr Steedman suggested the '*Procurement Code of Practice – Sustainability*' was failing and that, as many Whitehall departments have done, we should set minimum standards for the environmental, social and ethical performance of our purchasing.

Cllr Mears informed the meeting that: "*Setting minimum standards could have a negative effect with suppliers doing the bare minimum, instead of striving for higher standards. We want to ensure that we can demand higher standards wherever possible.*"

The pilot Environmental Management System adopted at the same meeting (and greatly welcomed by Green councillors in its own right) was also to play a role in driving up standards.

I have not seen any evidence over the year following that meeting that much has changed, and nor do I believe that, freed from the supposed lowest common denominator of minimum standards, officers or suppliers have striven for the very highest standards in ethical procurement.

The Council's purchase of goods and services adds up to a significant sum which could be a powerful force for driving up sustainability standards in the marketplace. The Council is also in a unique position in being able to set an example and a benchmark for local business and enterprise in this respect.

As it stands, taxpayers' money is, in some cases, being used to support mediocre or poor ethical performance by suppliers. This does not support the authority's corporate objectives, nor its LAA targets, nor the ambition set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy of living within environmental limits.

Like Cllr Steedman I believe that minimum standards have a key role to play in driving up performance; but the issues concerning Council procurement (such as its highly fragmented and devolved nature, and whether this delivers value for money) are much more wide-ranging.

In consequence, I would request that the Sustainability Cabinet Committee writes to the relevant Scrutiny Chair, asking that a scrutiny panel be created to investigate the issue of the Council's procurement processes and outcomes, with a particular focus on sustainability.

I feel that this is an opportunity for the Executive to benefit greatly from Scrutiny's policy development function in pursuit of greater efficiency, better value for the taxpayer, stronger accountability on public spending and the improved environmental, social and ethical standing of the Council.

I offer my thanks in advance for the Sustainability Cabinet Committee's consideration of my request, and for your time and attention in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Cllr Amy Kennedy