

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **21st October 2014**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chairman);
Cllr. Davison (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Aaby, Apps, Bartlett, Feacey, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Mortimer.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Burgess, Yeo.

Also Present:

Cllr. Mrs Blanford.

Head of Environmental & Customer Services, Environmental Contracts & Operations Manager, Consultant Advisor, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

208 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd September 2014 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

209 Mid Kent Partnership: Recycling, Waste and Street Cleansing Contract: One Year On

The Head of Environmental & Customer Services gave Members a presentation which provided a high level review of the first year of the new Mid Kent Partnership contract which commenced in April 2013. She also introduced Jonathan Longley, the Council's newly appointed Environmental Contracts & Operations Manager, who had joined from Swale Borough Council and was therefore familiar with the Mid Kent Partnership contract. She also introduced Kevin Basford, Consultant Advisor, who had been assisting the Council during the implementation of the contract.

The presentation covered: - the background to the new approach to delivering services; what was in the new contract; contract mobilisation and service roll out (July 2013); how did we do?; service performance; the future; and conclusions. The Environmental Contracts & Operations Manager concluded the presentation saying that the Council could be justifiably proud of the amount of success they had experienced in a relatively short period of time.

The Portfolio Holder said that she would like to thank the team for all their hard work in implementing the new contract. It had been a complex matter and a steep learning curve for the team, and they had performed exceptionally well. She said that the contract had been a tremendous success and the credit should really go to the residents who had embraced the new arrangements so well. They would not have been able to do it without them. She said it was pleasing to note that the contractor, Biffa, was using Ashford Borough Council as an example of success when pursuing new business.

The Chairman opened the item up to questions/comments from the Committee and the following responses were given: -

- With regard to clinical waste, the Council did not collect medical waste from hospitals. It was purely lower grade medical waste from individuals, which had already been stored in separate containers and bags and was classified as 'non-hazardous clinical waste'. Health and safety matters were taken fully into account.
- Efforts to reduce the amount of food waste being produced were underway via the 'Love Food' campaign which gave alternative recipes and sought to teach people about using leftovers productively.
- It was accepted that there was still some uncertainty over the types of plastic that could and could not be recycled. This was an ongoing dilemma in the UK where plastic recycling was not as embedded as other parts of Europe. A local campaign to make this clearer would be pursued in the near future and further details of this could be sent to Members when ready.
- In terms of resources, there were only a certain number of vehicles allocated, so it was necessary for all operatives to come back with the same vehicle once it was full. Additional vehicles would incur costs and lose the efficiencies. This 'dead time' was useful however, as it was an opportunity to give the operatives a short break. Otherwise it was possible that they could be on their feet non-stop from 7am to 5pm.
- On the topic of Dog Wardens, it was noted that the Council's team of Civil Enforcement Officers were being given the authority to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for a number of things including littering, fly tipping and dog fouling. Such issues were more about education in the first instance and campaigns were underway, but FPNs were the ultimate sanction and enforcement would begin in spring 2015. It was hoped that this would create a difference on the streets. It would be important to have these extra 'eyes and ears', and more generic working practices, as specialist Dog Wardens could not be on duty all over the Borough. The Council had also received reports regarding dog control and waste in cemeteries and this was something that was under review. New signage had already been produced and the message was that if people could not improve the way they managed their dogs in these areas, they would be enforced against. Officers had already begun to see results from this and were considering installing signage in other areas with high volumes of dog waste. If Members had their particular areas of concern they were urged to advise Officers.

- With regard to dog bins, there were currently 1200 dog and litter bins across the Borough and often these were situated next to each other. However, under the new arrangements these no longer needed to be separated and it was acceptable to put bagged dog waste into normal bins. There was a need to get this message out, but perhaps initially to ensure that the Council was supplying the right type and size of bin and that these were being emptied more regularly.
- The Head of Environmental & Customer Services said she would investigate a report about Biffa lorries depositing liquid waste on to the roads as they entered the Cobbs Wood Estate.
- The issue of the condition of bus shelters was an area of focus in the street cleansing part of the contract.
- Generally, if residents produced excess recycling, but this was presented in clear sacks/another container as 'side waste' it would be collected, however this would not be the case for normal refuse. Operatives had to be strict on only accepting what was in the bin and that the bin's lid was able to be closed. Small electricals and clothing/textiles could also be left bagged on top of bins on alternate weeks and these would be collected. However, at present these could not be collected from communal bins, and the Head of Environmental & Customer Services said she would come back to a Member once she had explored the options for this.
- A significant amount of non-recyclable waste did still go to the local waste-to-energy plant.
- The team were aware of areas where parked cars were making it difficult to get refuse vehicles through. The test was generally whether an emergency vehicle could get through and there was one example in the town where this had not been the case and the police and other authorities had had to get involved. Members were again asked to advise Officers if they were aware of any particular problem areas.
- Working relationships and practices with Biffa were extremely good. However, they were monitored and if performance was not up to scratch, ultimately the Council could default payments as part of the contract. Any complaints regarding the service should be made to the Council.
- It was recognised that the functions of the street cleansing contract, grounds maintenance contract and KCC's highway maintenance regime, including weed clearance, did overlap somewhat and ultimately there was a need for greater clarity. Discussions had already commenced with KCC ahead of the new contract as the current one was coming to an end shortly and one of the early suggestions was for each Ward/Member to have an Officer who was a dedicated point of contact. A land management plan was also being drawn up with regard to street cleansing and grounds maintenance including open spaces, parks, play areas, grass verges etc. Any developments on these matters would be passed on to Ward Members.
- The provision of bins and collections to new build houses was an issue that

needed close attention. Occasionally new builds were beginning to be occupied and the Council were not being made aware. Under the new policy, developers were responsible for providing bins for new houses and informing the Council, but Officers were also trying to be pro-active with developers to make sure they were keeping the Council informed.

- No firm decision had yet been made on the future of Parish Council Street Cleansing grants but Parish Councils would be kept fully informed.
- In terms of on-line reporting, efforts were now focussed on the Council's own website rather than developing any separate apps.

The Committee said that the achievements in the first year of the contract had been fantastic and thanks should go to everyone involved, particularly the local residents, for embracing the new regime and adapting to the new rules so quickly. With regard to the staff involved, to be able to devise a policy, implement it and begin to make savings in such a short period of time was seen as an amazing achievement.

Resolved:

That the update report be received and noted.

210 Budget Scrutiny Task Group – Scrutiny of the Council's Draft 2015/16 Budget

The report advised that the Committee's Budget Scrutiny Task Group would scrutinise the Council's draft budget and report its findings and recommendations back to the full Committee. The Committee would then report to Cabinet on the soundness of the budget.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

211 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Chairman advised of the items to be discussed at the November Meeting and asked whether there were any comments on the Future Reviews and Report Tracker.

A Member asked if the annual review of the Community Safety Partnership in February 2015 could include the British Transport Police. The Chairman said he would investigate this point.

Resolved:

That the Future Reviews and Report Tracker be received and noted.

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
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