

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee – 3  
January 2018

**Subject:** Leaf Removal Update

**Report of:** Deputy Chief Executive (Growth and Neighbourhoods)

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**Summary**

To provide the Scrutiny Committee with an update on this year's leafing programme.

**Recommendations**

To consider and comment on the content of the report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Contact Officers:**

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

None.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the leaf removal programme; to review the progress made so far; and an overview of the approach taken this year.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1. Biffa are responsible for the removal of leaf fall from the highway and the City's Grounds Maintenance Team manage leaf fall in parks.
- 2.2. The Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee discussed concerns about Biffa's street cleansing performance in December 2016. Biffa had struggled to achieve expected standards through the most challenging part of the year and the management of the leaf removal programme was a significant factor to this. As part of the City's street cleansing inspection programme, issues were noted in relation to the cleanliness of streets across the City, which were not consistently meeting the specification standards either in terms of quality or coverage.
- 2.3. Since Biffa implemented their 'Service Improvement Plan' in February 2017, they have implemented significant changes to make Supervisors and Operatives more accountable for their work. Biffa have sought to create a culture of performance improvement, using data more effectively to measure the output of teams and identify areas where improvements were needed. In August 2017, the Strategic Board noted that improvements have been made in performance, but that further time was needed to ensure that improvements continued to the level that is contractually expected. The service needed to be fully tested in the high demand periods of the year where failures previously occurred.
- 2.4. As part of the Service Improvement Plan, extension additional targets and milestones were set for Biffa to stretch their performance and demonstrate more intelligent methods of performance management are being deployed. This year Biffa have delivered an improved leaf removal plan, compared to 2016/17, and demonstrated they can maintain street cleansing performance to expected standards during this high demand period.

## **3. Approach**

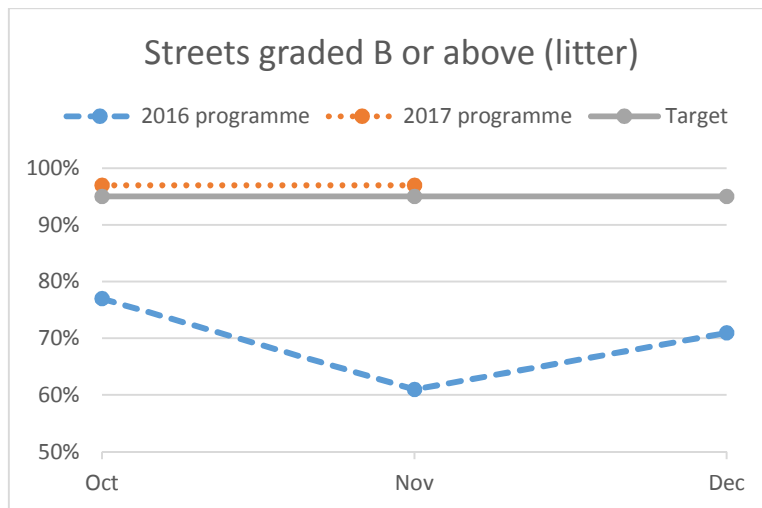
- 3.1. Preparatory work commenced in late summer with Biffa to develop this year's leafing programme. Lessons learnt from 2016 informed a more robust delivery programme which corrected fundamental issues with operational deployment of resource to manage leaf removal and how this responded to intelligence and feedback from stakeholders.
- 3.2. It was anticipated that leaf removal would commence to coincide with the switch to fortnightly organic collections in October. This proved to be the correct approach this year as favourable dry weather conditions at the start of the schedule helped get the programme off to a strong start; a cold turn in the

weather helped bring a large amount of leaves down through the middle of the programme.

- 3.3. Key to Biffa's improved performance this year, has been the full utilisation of the full workforce through training and double shifting of vehicles. This has ensured a greater degree of ownership from Biffa staff and less reliance on additional contract staff. This has also provided greater flexibility to attend at different times of the day and helped resolve many of the issues caused by parked cars.
- 3.4. This year's programme saw greater co-ordination with Members, Highways, Grounds Maintenance, Neighbourhood Teams and Contact Centre to ensure the approach was understood, progress against the programme clearly monitored and that there was flexibility to respond to localised issues when needed. This has been particularly useful in quickly targeting hotspots, joining up the approach to gully cleansing and building confidence in the service. There are a number of opportunities to build upon and improve the outcomes of this partnership working.
- 3.5. In parks the Grounds Maintenance Team blow leaves off paths onto grassed areas and flower beds. The leaves are broken down to provide a valuable mulch which adds nutrients to the soil. On some grassed areas this is carried out mechanically in other areas leaves are left in-situ to breakdown naturally.

#### **4. Performance**

- 4.1. This year's leaf fall programme began on 23 October 2017, the bulk of the heavy leaf removal programme due to be completed before Christmas – with smaller amounts being collected thereafter by the regular sweeper programme. In terms of street cleansing performance, the programme was more effective and standards far exceeded 2016/17 levels. Operationally, the programme was far more efficient and effective at removing leaf fall. By the end of November 2017, the bulk of the leaf removal was complete with in excess of 2600 tonnes of leaves collected and the majority of leaves fallen. The focus of the final stage of the programme being detailed removal as opposed to the removal of large tonnages – which will be completed as part of 'business as usual' sweeping.
- 4.2. In previous years, leaf fall season has had a significantly negative impact on both the level of cleanliness of the streets and the number of streets attended on each scheduled day (completion rates). The performance of this year's leaf fall programme has ensured that high standards of street cleanliness which Biffa had established through the Service Improvement Plan period, have been maintained. The graph below shows the cleanliness of streets when checked after the scheduled day of clean by the Council.



4.3 Following feedback from Members, there was closer scrutiny of Biffa's performance around cycle lanes – as these areas were problematic in previous programmes. Whilst this was much improved this year, compared to 2016, there exists a number of opportunities to make further improvements. Some cycle lanes prove more challenging to sweep than others, due to their design and difficulty gaining access with mechanical sweepers.

4.4 The number of requests for leaf removal have been monitored throughout the period, Officers have been asked to use CRM to log any areas which they felt required attention as part of the process. As leaf fall occurred at a different time in 2016, much later in the season, direct comparisons have been difficult to draw.

## 5. Conclusion

5.1 Officers are encouraged by Biffa's improved performance this year and are supportive of a similar approach being taken in 2018/19 - subject to a lessons learnt review. Biffa and Officers now have a much better understanding of hotspots within neighbourhoods and how these need to be approached through joint working with Highways and Grounds Maintenance. It's recognised, that whilst performance is better than last year, there are still a number of areas of the programme where improvements can be made.

5.2 It's also understood that this year's weather conditions were particularly conducive to supporting Biffa's leaf fall removal programme. Forecasting the onset of the start of leaf fall will continue to be a challenge each year and it will be important to ensure that future programmes are as much as possible, flexible to account for this uncertainty.

5.3 Next Steps

5.4 Conduct a review of this year's programme in January 2018 and capture any lessons learnt.

Build upon the model developed this year to further develop a joint response to problematic locations such as cycle lanes and areas of dense parking.