

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 9 October 2019

Present:

Councillor Igbon (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Azra Ali, Appleby, Butt, Flanagan, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lynch, Razaq, Sadler, Whiston and White

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Karney, Ward Member Harpurhey

Councillor Reid, Ward Member Gorton and Abbey Hey

John-Paul Coe, Wythenshawe Waste Warriors

Russell Markstein, Electra Commercial Vehicles

Apologies: Councillor Harland, Lyons, Strong and Wright

NESC/19/38 Minutes

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2019 as a correct record.

NESC/19/39 Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Update

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) that provided Members with an update on progress in delivering waste, recycling and street cleansing services.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services referred to the main points and themes within the report which included: -

- Providing a context for the service within Manchester;
- Providing a budgetary context of the service;
- Information and service specification of the Biffa contract;
- Delivery of the Biffa contract;
- Information on the contract and performance monitoring of the Biffa contract;
- Contract performance data over a range of activities;
- Data and information relating to residential street cleansing;
- Information regarding passageway cleansing;
- Information regarding litter bins and bag collection points;
- An update on seasonal leaf removal and performance data against this activity;
- An update on seasonal weed removal and performance data;
- Information on the approach to the cleansing of cycle lanes;
- Information on the Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) Local Environmental Quality study that had been undertaken in August 2019;

- Information and data relating to waste collections;
- Information and data regarding flytipping and the response to this;
- Information on unlicensed waste removal companies and flytipping;
- Recycling performance and an update on the apartment service changes;
- Partnership working with Registered Providers to support delivery of the apartment recycling project;
- Update on the work with Universities and Landlords to address issues of increased waste from student houses at the end of term;
- The approach to education, engagement and enforcement and key issues and lessons learnt from the student departure in 2018;
- The approach to student departure in 2019, using lessons learnt; and
- An update on the Keep Manchester Tidy Partnership.

The Committee then heard from John-Paul Coe, Wythenshawe Waste Warriors who described the work undertaken by himself and other volunteers in the local community. He stated that the group were keen to network and support other groups to deliver similar environmental improvements and community engagement events. He described that the group had engaged with local schools, friends of parks groups, the scouts and the local football team to encourage them to deliver local environmental projects and take collective responsibility for areas.

Mr Coe described the school mapping project that was being delivered locally that involved over thirty schools. School children were identifying and mapping their local green spaces and the ambition was to then use this intelligence to engage with local residents and businesses to maintain and care for those areas and promote a sense of community ownership and pride in the area. He stated that the ambition was to digitise these maps as a resource for people.

Mr Coe concluded by expressing his gratitude to the local Members for their continued support for this and other projects. The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked Mr Coe and his fellow volunteers for their commitment and asked that this good practice be shared with other groups who maybe experiencing challenges and barriers to delivering similar projects to physically improve their neighbourhood. Mr Coe commented that he would be willing to share his experience and offer any practical advice with other groups.

A Member praised the work and support provided by the officer from Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) to actively engage with school children, commenting that this was important as this would help influence long lasting behaviour change in regard to waste and recycling.

The Committee then heard from Councillor Karney. He stated that the reported flytipping figures for Harpurhey were very disappointing, adding that this antisocial behaviour had a negative impact on the local community and residents and that he welcomed any proactive measure to address this. He commented that he would welcome initiatives, such as the Wythenshawe Waste Warriors to be delivered in Harpurhey. He further called for increased penalties to be imposed on those that were found responsible for flytipping. He concluded by thanking the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and officers for their continued hard work in addressing this issue despite the pressures experienced by the department.

The Committee then heard from Councillor Reid. She stated that it was important to acknowledge the impact of budget reductions on the ability to deliver Neighbourhood Services, and she paid tribute to the dedication of officers working in her ward. She further commented on the issue of flytipping associated with builder's waste and that more needed to be done to monitor Household Waste and Recycling Centres to help identify builders who attend these sites but then subsequently flytipped their waste, adding that this resulted in a cost to the Council to remove this. She further added that Biffa collection crews needed to be considerate to residents and other road users when undertaking their duties. She concluded by stating that it was her opinion that there was no evidence that weed clearing had been undertaken.

The Committee also heard from Russell Markstein, Electra Commercial Vehicles. He informed the Members that his company had responded to the issue of the traditional high polluting refuse collection vehicles. He stated that his company had worked with chassis units manufactured by Mercedes Benz to deliver a fully electric vehicle that delivered the same collection capacity as traditional vehicles. He said the vehicles had proven to be comfortable for operatives and the electric vehicles saved the environment 60 tonnes CO2 per vehicle per year. He stated that the lithium batteries used in these vehicles would last approximately 10-12 years and then reduce to 85% capacity. He said that the intention would then be to repurpose those batteries for other uses.

Some of the key points that arose from the Committee's discussions were: -

- Clarification was sought on the use of agency staff by Biffa;
- Biffa workforce needed to be more reflective of the local community;
- Information was sought on Biffa and Health and Safety;
- Biffa should be responsible and proactive in removing contaminated waste from blue recycling bins, particularly black bags of rubbish;
- The use of barcodes / tokens to identify abandoned bins;
- Once emptied Biffa crews should replace bins in a responsible manner so as not to cause an obstruction to other road/path users and this should be addressed in the contract;
- Who was responsible for collecting contaminated bins;
- What was the approach taken for those occasions when a Biffa crew were unable to access a road to empty bins;
- A number of Members stated that they were not confident that the cleaning of streets and passageways were delivered as described in the schedule;
- A number of Members commented that they were not confident in the findings of the independent assessment of the environmental quality undertaken by KBT;
- A number of Members commented that they were not confident that container bins in communal passageways were cleaned as described in the schedule;
- An overall opinion that Biffa were not complying with their contract in delivering services for Manchester residents;
- Requesting an update on passageway cleansing and improvements;
- Damage caused to properties by Biffa crews;
- The definition of District Centres need to be reviewed;
- Welcoming the improved rates of recycling in apartment blocks;

- What was the approach to cleaning and maintaining public litter bins;
- Recognising the progress made to address student waste what work was being done with Universities to improve recycling rates and reduce flytipping from student homes at peak times of the year;
- What was the approach to weed removal, in particular in those streets where residents had opted not to have glyphosate used;
- Consideration needed to be given to improved ways of clearing leaves, especially where access by sweepers access was restricted due to parked vehicles;
- Questioning the use of CCTV on Biffa vehicles and concerns relating to data protection;
- Where were the flytipping hotspots that had been identified by Biffa;
- Flytipping in rivers was a significant issue that was often complex to resolve in a timely manner and a meeting should be convened with Members in who's wards this was an issue and representatives from the Environment Agency and the National Rivers Authority to be invited to contribute;
- The need to review the bulky waste collection policy as a way to address the use of illegal waste carriers who charge residents money to remove waste that was then subsequently flytipped;
- Noting that requests for service were closed incorrectly as 'complete' on the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system;
- Requests for service, such as reported abandoned shopping trolleys should be referred to the appropriate service to remove these;
- What work was being done through the Selective Licensing regime to improve waste that was often associated with Houses in Multiple Occupation;
- Concern over the economic and environmental impact that the extraction of Lithium for use in batteries to power electric vehicles had on other counties;
- Concern that fossil fuels were used to generate electricity to charge electric vehicles and the impact this had on climate change and emissions and that more research needed to be done to understand the benefits to be achieved;
- The use of crime scene tape was not appropriate in certain areas of this city as this created a negative impression of areas; and
- An intelligence based approach to street cleaning should be adopted with consideration given as to how other core cities engage with residents around the issue of waste and recycling to influence behaviour change.

In response to the comments made the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services responded by informing the Committee that officers and Keep Britain Tidy would endeavour to tackle the issue of flytipping in Harpurhey, adding that the good practice used in other areas of the city to engage with schools and young people would be deployed with the intention to achieve improvements for residents and the wider local community. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods added that flytipping hotspot areas would continue to be prioritised and enforcement officers would proactively pursue perpetrators.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services stated that following the contract that had been entered into between The Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Suez UK to manage waste across the region, Household Waste and Recycling Centres had been identified for improvements, including the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) at sites. She further commented

that there was a lack of awareness amongst small business and builders regarding the options that were available to them to responsibly and lawfully dispose of waste generated by their business. She advised that the communications team were currently looking at developing a targeted awareness campaign regarding this issue.

In regard to weed spraying and weed removal the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services stated that the programme of activity had been completed, however the unseasonal levels of rain had impacted on the efficacy of this and had presented a challenge. She commented that consideration would need to be given as to the approach to be adopted to those streets that had opted not to have glyphosate used and where residents had not chosen to remove weeds themselves.

In response to the specific questions relating to the Biffa workforce the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services stated that the concerns previously raised by the Committee in regard to the use of agency staff and zero hour contracts had been addressed. She stated that all Biffa staff were paid the Manchester Living Wage when they started employment, increasing after the 13 week qualifying period to match the permanent rate of pay. Biffa used agency workers for a variety of reasons including cover for sickness, unplanned holidays, seasonal to cover the increased organic collections and to backfill permanent staff who supported the seasonal weed removal programme. In regard to the request for information relating to Health and Safety she stated that this information would be circulated following the meeting and the comments relating to the work force reflecting the community would be fed back to Biffa. She further added that those hotspots that had been identified by Biffa would be shared with the Committee following the meeting.

Addressing the issue of contaminated recycling bins, the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services stated that nappies placed in incorrect bins presented a challenge. She described that a communications campaign that included distributing leaflets to households and using advertising bill boards to highlight the message had been delivered. She described that contaminated bins should be tagged and the onus was then on the resident to remove the contaminate from the bin. She said that a task force had been established to look at this particular issue and she further commented that the tokens in the refuse bins had never been activated – but could be in the future the requirement arise. She further commented that they were seeking to improve the response to reports of abandoned bins, adding that the complaints regarding bin collections remained relatively low. She added that whilst she was aware of a small number of issues relating to damage to property, whilst regrettable, these were low in number and Biffa's insurance would be used to address this. With regards to contamination of recycling bins, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods commented that ultimately it was the responsibility of residents to sort their waste correctly and place it in the appropriate bin ready for collection.

In response to the issue regarding Biffa crews not replacing bins in a safe and considerate manner that then caused a hazard to other users the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that if complaints were received this would be addressed with the crew concerned. She further informed the Committee that if a crew was unable to access a street due to parked vehicles they

were required to return to the location to collect the waste and recycling. She added that the CCTV equipment attached to the Biffa wagons was not a new practice, had been present under the last contractor and was primarily used as a safety feature to protect staff when working in and around the vehicle.

Regarding the comments about the survey undertaken by KBT the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services reiterated that this was an independent report using an agreed national methodology to assess and rate their findings. Surveys were undertaken without knowledge of the service standards or schedules in place and Biffa had no prior knowledge of where surveyors intended to assess standards.

In response to the issues expressed from a number of Members regarding the cleaning of passageways and passageways communal container cleansing the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that she would address the individual cases raised by the Members outside of the meeting.

The Project Manager Keep Manchester Tidy informed the Committee that projects were available for schools to drive improvements on the local high street. She said this was available through the Eco Schools programme and information regarding this would be shared with Members. In relation to District Centres the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services advised that Cheetham and Longsight were regularly reviewed and Biffa had been tasked to focus improving their performance in these areas. She stated that she would speak directly with the ward Member following the meeting to discuss the concerns he had expressed.

Officers informed the Committee that whilst progress and improvements had been made in regard to addressing waste associated with student properties, work continued to improve and strengthen this message. The Committee were informed that an app had been introduced for students to promote the message around this issue and this was currently being reviewed in consultation with Universities following feedback. In addition, a campaign had been delivered entitled 'Halls to Homes' targeted at students leaving Halls of Residence and moving into student homes in communities that was aimed at reminding them of their responsibilities. With regard to the work undertaken with private landlords via the licensing regime the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services commented that this would be addressed in the Compliance and Enforcement report scheduled for consideration at the December meeting of the Committee.

Officers informed the Committee that there was a rolling programme of cleaning and maintenance of public bins and this was checked quarterly by Biffa. Members were asked to raise any concerns they had regarding specific locations and these would be investigated.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services informed the Committee that all Members had been provided with the street cleaning schedule and that the approach to removing leaves had been improved by Biffa. She commented that they did use leaf blowers, when dry and the comments from the Committee would be relayed to Biffa.

Following the comments regarding the bulky waste collection service, Members were advised that this offer was planned to be reviewed and Members would be updated at an appropriate time following conclusion of this exercise. The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that reports of abandoned shopping trolleys would be collected by a company called Trolleywise and the mechanism for referring such reports via the CRM system would be explored, further adding that a review the CRM was currently underway.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that whilst improvements to the levels of recycling had significantly improved over recent years and Manchester's recycling performance remained one of the highest amongst the Core Cities, it was important that this performance continued to improve to achieve the financial savings and environmental benefits required. He stated that it was the responsibility of all residents to ensure that they disposed of their waste and recycling in a responsible manner. He commented that hotspots would be targeted and flytipping investigated and where perpetrators were identified they would be prosecuted.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that he remained committed to working with Biffa on behalf of the residents of Manchester to address any inconsistencies in service. He encouraged all Members to raise any concerns they had regarding the service delivery.

In response to a suggested recommendation proposed by a Member that crime scene tape should not be used in certain areas of this city, arising from concerns that this created a negative impression of an area, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that it was important to recognise that flytipping was a crime and that this illegal activity would not be tolerated and this message needed to be consistent across the city.

Decisions

The Committee: -

1. Recommend that invitations be sent to ward Councillors to accompany officers when undertaking street cleansing inspections to assess the standard of cleansing and quality of services provided by Biffa.
2. Every ward coordination meeting to include an update on the relevant schedule of street and passageway cleaning and bin washing arrangements
3. Recommend that the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods reviews the Biffa contract to ensure that it stipulates that Biffa operatives to replace emptied bins in a safe and appropriate manner so as not to cause a hazard or obstruction to other users of the highway and pavement.
4. That the passageway programme of works and cleaning for the next six months is circulated to all Members.

5. Recommend that representatives from the Environment Agency and the National Rivers Authority be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the approach to removing waste from rivers and waterways.

6. Recommend that Social Landlords continue to promote and support their tenants to recycle.

7. Recommend that the Committee receive a report on the environmental and social impact of lithium batteries, including the extraction of the materials used for the production of these and the arrangements for the safe recycling when they degrade.

8. Recommend that an intelligence based approach to street cleaning should be adopted with consideration to using intelligence from local residents; and understand how other core cities engage with residents around the issue of waste and recycling to influence behaviour change. The Committee shall receive a report on this at an appropriate time.

[Councillor Appleby declared a personal and non prejudicial interest in this item as her partner is an employee of Biffa]

NESC/19/40 Final Report and Recommendations of the Behaviour Change and Waste Task and Finish Group

The Committee considered the report of Behaviour Change and Waste Task and Finish Group that presented the Members with the findings of the detailed investigation undertaken by the Group.

Councillor Hughes, who had chaired the Task and Finish Group stated that the work of the Group had been very productive and informative. He expressed his gratitude to the Members of the Group, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Officers and those members of the public who had contributed to the enquiry. He concluded by commending the report to the Committee.

Decisions

The Committee: -

1. Note the findings of the Task and Finish Group and endorse the recommendations as set out in section 8 of the report.

2. Resolve to refer the recommendations to the Executive.

3. To request a progress report on the implementation of these recommendations at an appropriate time.

NESC/19/41 Overview Report

The report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which contained key decisions within the Committee's remit and responses to previous recommendations

was submitted for comment. Members were also invited to agree the Committee's future work programme.

Members suggested that the remit of the Highways report should also include data on the number of complaints received following preventative works and this to be provided at a ward level if available; information to be included regarding the approach taken to closing roads and lanes to accommodate building works and how this disruption is managed and information on the resident parking scheme relating to the Christie Hospital site.

The Chair informed the Committee that reports had already been prepared and that she would speak with officers to enquire if these additional requests could be accommodated.

Decision

The Committee notes the report and approves the work programme noting the above comments.