

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2018

Present:

Councillor Igbon – in the Chair

Councillors Appleby, Harland, Hewitson, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lyons, Reid, Sadler, White and Wright

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

Councillor Davies, Member for Deansgate ward

Clare Benson, Hulme resident

Apologies: Councillors Azra Ali and Noor

NESC/18/40 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2018 as a correct record.

NESC/18/41 Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Update

The Committee heard from a resident of Hulme, Clare Benson who had been invited to inform Members of her experience in her neighbourhood in relation to waste. She said that she had become concerned about the levels of debris accumulating in her neighbourhood and had decided to take action. She explained that she had set up a local campaign, including the use of social media to organise communal clean ups to improve the local environment.

The Committee then considered the report of the Chief Operating Officer which provided an update on progress in delivering waste, recycling and street cleansing services (including ward level cleansing), cycle lane cleansing, weed control and the apartment service change. The report also included information on flytipping, and the role of planning to address issues of waste associated with both domestic and commercial properties; permitted development and its impact on waste and the impact of short term lets on flytipping.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:-

- The financial context in which all of these services were delivered;
- Operational performance of Biffa, following commencement of their contract in July 2015, noting that Biffa were responsible for providing domestic residual and recycling waste collection services; planned and reactive street cleansing services for defined land types;

- Information on the Service Improvement Plan implemented by Biffa in February 2017;
- Performance data measured across a range of activities that included bin collection; cleaning of communal passageways; street cleaning services; district centres and city centre cleaning; litter bins and flytipping;
- Leaf removal activity noting that the leaf removal programme in 2017/18 delivered an improved leaf removal plan, compared to 2016/17;
- Weed removal services, noting that the standard required Biffa to complete two cycles of weed treatment across the City on an annual basis. This included all highways for which the City has maintenance responsibilities;
- The approach adopted to the cleansing and leaf removal in cycle lanes;
- The approach to the gritting of highways;
- An update on the first phase of apartment service changes and the lessons learnt;
- The approach adopted to the education, engagement and enforcement to improve levels of recycling, including information on the partnership work with the national charity WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) to deliver a range of campaigns with residents;
- Activities undertaken to address issues associated with commercial waste and flytipping on private land;
- The waste management considerations when assessing planning applications; and
- Planning legislation in relation to short term lets and permitted development.

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

- The Biffa contact and how this was monitored and their use of agency staff and zero hour contracts;
- How effective was the monitoring of the service provided by Biffa and who undertook this;
- Who was responsible for removing side waste;
- Could the scheduling of road sweeping be coordinated to follow bin collections;
- The problems associated with flytipping and the response to this issue;
- The cleaning of communal bin areas and lighting of these areas;
- The cleansing of gated alleys and the associated difficulties;
- The removal of contaminated bins;
- The cleaning of public litter bins;
- Leaf cleaning of both pavement and cycle lanes;
- What was being done to address the issue of commercial waste including litter and debris, such as discarded cigarette butts and takeaway cartons associated with the night time economy;
- Recycling rates in apartments;
- The importance of behaviour change and education to improve rates of recycling across this city; and
- The need to publicise widely when prosecutions had taken place to act as a deterrent.

The Committee heard from Councillor Davies, Member for Deansgate ward who commented on the good relationships she and other ward Members had established with the managers at Biffa and that the Biffa operatives she had engaged with had

been very professional. However she expressed concern that the cleanliness of the on street bins was inconsistent, stating that poorly maintained and dirty bins gave a very poor impression to residents; visitors to the city and people working in the city. She further commented that bins were not emptied on a daily basis and sought clarification as to what the agreement was for emptying on street bins and asked if inspectors just looked at the waste or did they consider what the cause of any waste was.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services responded to the questions and comments from the Committee by informing them that Biffa were responsible for removing any side waste that was presented when bins were collected, however it was stated that if residents recycled effectively this would reduce the need for additional side waste to be collected. In regard to road sweeping she said that this did generally occur after bin collection however encouraged Members to contact the relevant Neighbourhood Team if they experienced persistent problems.

In regard to Bulky Waste collections the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services advised that teams would only collect what had been requested for collection, stating that this avoided any counter claims against operatives taking items that they should not have. She said that if operatives witnessed any flytipping they should then report it to be collected. The same applied to contaminated bins, stating that if crews were unable to accept a bin because it was contaminated this should be reported immediately to the correct team who should then arrange for the collection of the bin. Members were asked to report any issues if this was not happening and it would be pursued with Biffa.

In response to the discussion around the Biffa contract the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services informed Members that Biffa did not use zero hour contracts and the agencies used by Biffa to cover any staffing capacity issues at times would be subject to Biffa's procurement process. To reassure the Committee she advised that the contract would be checked to ensure this was the case. The Chair recommended that a referral should be made to the Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Subgroup to review the Biffa contract to ensure that zero hour contracts are not used.

With regard to the monitoring of staff and their behaviour following observations of Members the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services confirmed that it was Biffa who were responsible for this. She said that Biffa's vehicles were now equipped with CCTV cameras that could be used to monitor staff activities and practices as a way of improving performance and standards.

In response to performance monitoring the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services described that inspections were undertaken by both City Council and Biffa staff to provide an assurance that standards were maintained; areas for improvement identified and solutions implemented. In addition to this the cleanliness of streets was also independently assessed and reported by Keep Britain Tidy noting that Manchester compared favourably to other core cities.

With regard to the cleaning of alley ways and communal bins the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services reported that a deep clean of alley ways was to be undertaken every quarter and Biffa were responsible for quality inspection checks following a clean. In addition these areas were expected to be cleared of any rubbish that may occur following a bin collection. She said an assurance and evidence of this was being requested of Biffa to ensure this was routinely undertaken. She further confirmed that Biffa were responsible for ensuring that any gated alley was locked following a collection and if any locks were faulty they should be immediately reported. She also advised that a bespoke review of the cleaning of communal bins and passageways would be undertaken to address the issues associated with these areas.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services informed Members that the cleaning of on street litter bins should be undertaken once per year and accepted that bins in certain locations were problematic as a result of continued vandalism and graffiti. She clarified that bins would be emptied when they are full as assessed by Biffa operatives and continued by commenting that the location of bins could be reviewed to ensure they were being used most effectively noting that the number of complaints received about on street bins was low, clarifying how complaints were counted.

The Neighbourhood Compliance Manager (Citywide) responded to the comments regarding flytipping by informing the Committee that cases were investigated and pursued for prosecution. He said that following prosecution press releases were prepared and that had made both local and national news. In addition to this social media was utilised to promote the message that this antisocial behaviour would not be tolerated and perpetrators would be pursued. He also advised that targeted work had been undertaken to address the issue of commercial waste, describing that premises had been required to provide evidence of their waste management contacts and where these had not been in place formal notices had been served. He said a successful exercise had been undertaken in the China Town area of the city centre following complaints raised by residents and local Members regarding commercial waste and he also described an exercise undertaken to address builder's waste that had resulted in prosecutions and vehicle seizure.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that work was ongoing with Biffa to address concerns raised about cleanliness and commercial waste in the city centre. She said that discussions were underway with CityCo to develop links with local businesses to address issues that were raised. She said that a number of workshops would be organised to facilitate this and an input from Members would be welcomed. In response to a specific question she confirmed that the Northern Quarter area of the city centre was routinely inspected and solutions to problems identified, such as spillage caused when collecting rubbish would be addressed.

The Section Planning Manager commented that commercial waste management was a condition of planning consent and if a premises were found to be in breach of these enforcement action could be taken. The Chair requested that the planning conditions relating to waste management be circulate to Members of the Committee for information.

In regard to recycling rates in apartment blocks the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that the capacity of collections remained unchanged and if the Member wished to discuss specific concerns outside of the meeting she would be happy to meet with him. She said that in the initial stages of Phase One additional collections had been arranged to support tenants during the changes.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport responded to the comments regarding the lighting of communal bin areas by saying that if there were specific areas of concern these could be looked at with a view to finding solutions. In response to the issue of leaf clearing and gullies she said that although this remained a challenge work was ongoing with teams to work smarter to deliver this service. The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that in segregated cycle lanes liquid de-icer would be used rather than using grit.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that despite of the financial cuts imposed on the Council improvements across the city in rates of recycling had been achieved over the previous eight years, and he was confident that this would continue to improve. He said that the rates of recycling activity was different across different types of tenure and behaviour change amongst residents was important to increase levels of this activity and commended the positive approach demonstrated by the resident who had addressed the Committee. He said by adopting the Our Manchester approach residents would be empowered to initiate local solutions and community projects. He said that a lot of proactive work was undertaken by officers to address and prosecute those responsible for flytipping and he encouraged all Members to retweet those messages when action was successfully taken, stating that this would give residents confidence that this issue was taken very seriously by the Council and would also act as a deterrent.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods further gave an assurance that the Biffa contract was continually monitored to ensure improvements were made, noting that when issues had been identified previously improvement plans had been agreed and implemented. In response to a suggestion that the bulky waste collections policy should be changed he said that this would need to be discussed further.

Decisions

The Committee:-

1. Requests that the planning conditions relating to waste management be circulated to Members of the Committee;
2. Requests that the leaf clearing and gritting schedule be circulated to Members of the Committee;
3. Recommends that gulley cleaners are deployed in a timely manner to address the issue of blocked gullies;

4. Suggests that positive stories regarding resident engagement and community activities to improve their local neighbourhoods should to be promoted, and Members need to engage with residents in these activities.

5. Recommends that the Ethical Procurement and Contract Management Subgroup review the Biffa contract to ensure that zero hour contracts are not used.

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

NESC/18/42 Keep Manchester Tidy Update

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Operating Officer that provided Members with an update on the Keep Manchester Tidy campaign.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:-

- Providing a background to Keep Manchester Tidy following feedback from the Manchester Strategy consultation exercise;
- A schedule of activities planned for 2018/19; and
- Information on how the impact of these activities are to be collected and measured;

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

- The need to reduce the use of single use plastics, noting that this contributed to litter in the immediate areas and contributed to wider, global issues of pollution and this impact this had on the environment and wildlife;
- Schools needed to be supported to undertake activities, education and campaigns around this issue;
- Licensing conditions needed to be used to address the issue of litter association with takeaways; and
- Why was Manchester not engaging with the campaign to tackle discarded chewing gum.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services agreed that schools played an important role in promoting this area of activity, in addition to other important areas such air quality and road safety, however it was recognised that teachers needed support to deliver this and this was being looked into.

In response to the issue of takeaways the Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services said that good relationships had been established with the national brands and they had supported local campaigns around this issue of litter.

The Strategic Lead: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Services noted the comments regarding chewing gum, commenting that currently this was removed using steam cleaning. She said that whilst this was not a current campaign, consideration could be given to future campaigns to specifically address this issue.

Members gave examples of resident and community groups in their respective wards who arranged regular litter picks and clean ups, noting that a lot of litter in district centres was related to the night time economy, such as discarded cigarette butts and broken glass. The Chair recommended that a Task and Finish Group should be established to look at good practice, hear from resident groups of their experience and how this could be used to support groups in other areas of the city. The Members supported this recommendation.

Decision

The Committee recommends that a Task and Finish Group be established to look at good practice, hear from resident groups of their experience and how this could be used to support groups in other areas of the city.

NESC/18/43 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.

A Member requested that an update report on Improving Road Safety Around Schools that had been considered at the July meeting be added to the Work Programme. The Chair said that she would speak with the relevant Executive Member and schedule this report for an appropriate meeting.

Decisions

The Committee notes the report and approve the work programme.