

Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor Igbon – in the Chair
Councillors Appleby, Butt, Flanagan, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Kilpatrick, Lynch, Lyons, Razaq, Whiston, White and Wright

Apologies: Councillors Azra Ali, Lynch and Sadler

Also present:

Councillor Akbar, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods
Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

NESC/20/39 Minutes

Decisions

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2020 as a correct record.

NESC/20/40 Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Update

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

The main points and themes within the report which included updates and information on a range of activities relating to: -

- The impact of pandemic (COVID-19);
- Service Update;
- Cycle lane cleansing;
- Bin collections;
- Collections and Quarterly cleansing of passageway bins;
- The Passageway Container Service Improvement Programme;
- Apartments;
- Contamination of recycling bins;
- Fly tipping;
- Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC) and analysis of the impact of HWRC policy changes on incidences of flytipping;
- Keep Manchester Tidy – COVID Response;
- Littering in parks and green spaces;

- Love parks week and campaigns; and
- Engaging with residents in tackling litter and case studies.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods introduced the report by placing on record his thanks to all Neighbourhoods staff and Biffa crews for continuing to deliver a service during the challenging time of the COVID pandemic. He stated that those staff delivering these services are rightly regarded as key workers.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods stated that despite the challenges presented by COVID the city had maintained its recycling rate of 40%, commenting that this was an achievement when compared with the performance of other core cities. He stated that following conversations at previous scrutiny meetings and in response to concerns raised by Members significant work had been undertaken to improve aspects of the service, such as bin returns and passageway cleaning. He stated that Members had been kept regularly updated with these planned improvements. He further advised the Members that the 27 electric wagons were expected to be delivered before Christmas.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods described that challenges remained regarding the incidents of flytipping, collections from passageways and the sweeping of the areas around container bins. He described that he and officers were continuing to work closely with Biffa to address issues with the ambition to return stability to the service. He stated that when the green bin collection had moved to the winter schedule the staff resources that had been released had been redeployed to other duties.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods concluded by thanking the residents of Manchester for their understanding during the COVID period and continuing to recycle appropriately.

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

- The Committee wished to place on record their thanks to all staff and Biffa crews for delivering the service during the COVID period;
- Welcoming the positive case studies provided that described resident participation in Keep Manchester Tidy Campaigns;
- Noting the increase in PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) being disposed of irresponsibly and what was being done to address this;
- Noting that the implementation of physical measures to support social distancing had become traps for litter to accumulate and what was being done to address this;
- Had any analysis of capacity been undertaken of container bins been undertaken to ensure they meet the demand;
- Noting the incidents of missed bin collections was a recurring problem, causing frustration for residents;
- Passageways were not being swept;
- More detail was requested on contingency planning for the service;
- Questioning the issuing of a schedule for 2021 that had been sent to residents that had implied that it would remain on the winter schedule;

- Clarification was sought as to what constituted a passageway and information on the schedule and contract standards for the cleaning of walkways and ginnels would be welcomed;
- Had representations been made to government to help fund the additional demand on waste services that had arisen as result of lockdown;
- Communications with residents needed to be improved so that they fully understood the challenges experienced by the service; and
- Bins were not being emptied fully.

The Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing responded to the Members by advising that a review of container bins had been undertaken and information had been shared with Members, adding that a certain points on the year such as when students arrive and leave their accommodation additional resources were deployed, adding that if there were particular issues with certain locations Members could raise this with the local team.

The Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing stated that during the COVID lockdown period the service had experienced a 30% increase in residual waste and post lockdown this was still at a 15% increase level. She explained that to address this a decision had been taken to reduce the frequency of the green bin collections so that staff resources could be released and deployed to clear residual waste, adding that in Manchester side waste had also been collected. She acknowledged the comment regarding the information that had been circulated to residents regarding the green bin collection schedule for 2021 stating that the decision had been taken to issue this information and any subsequent changes would be relayed to residents. She commented that relevant information regarding the service was regularly reviewed and update on the Council's webpage in addition to the use of social media. The Chair stated that it was important that Members were informed of any changes to services in a timely and appropriate manner.

The Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing advised the Members that representations had been made to government to seek additional funding to address the increased pressures on the service, noting that this was being experienced by all authorities across the country.

In regard to missed bin collections, the Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing stated that Biffa crews would inform the contact centre if this occurred and crews would return the next day as a priority to collect. She further stated that in terms of priorities for service it was to successfully navigate the service through the COVID pandemic and all of the challenges that it presented with the hope of returning to pre COVID stability and delivering continued improvements to the passageway service. Further commenting that the impact of test and trace on Biffa crews and the subsequent use of agency staff had impacted on the stability of service delivery, noting that this situation continued to be monitored. She further clarified that no Biffa staff had been furloughed, however staff would have been deployed to other functions within the service and street cleaning had continued through the pandemic.

The Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing acknowledged the comment regarding the accumulation of rubbish around physical social distancing

measures, commenting that this was an unfortunate consequence, however they continued to work with Biffa to resolve, including the use of manual cleaning when mechanical cleaning was inhibited.

With reference to the return of bins by crews, the Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing acknowledged that this had been raised previously by the Committee and as a result this had been raised with Biffa and they had been tasked to look at their practice. She described that Biffa were actively monitoring this activity through the use of the cameras on the wagons and then providing feedback to crews. With regard to half emptied bins she described that she was unaware that this was an issue and explained that this could be as a result of bins being compacted so the waste was not released into the wagon when lifted and agitated.

The Contract Manager informed the Committee that the contract for passageways did not include every ginnel and walkway in the city, stating that the cleaning of those areas would be addressed in other service contract agreements.

The Keep Manchester Tidy Project Manager stated that during lockdown they had experienced an increase in interest from residents wishing to form groups to address litter in their local communities. She stated that they had run a campaign to address discarded PPE, and this would be re-run as an increase in discarded masks was being witnessed, adding that partners such as CityCo and local housing providers were also supporting this key messaging. She stated that 'Bin it or take it home' signage had been deployed around the city centre area, with a view to rolling this campaign out across the city following evaluation.

The Chair commented that despite the reported improvements in the service delivery, Members continued to receive complaints from residents on the same issues. She stated that a meeting would be arranged for Members from each district to meet with the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and relevant officers so that they could articulate their concerns and those of residents with the view to resolving recurring complaints. She further added that the cleaning of district centres needed to be improved and the communications strategy needed to be reviewed with due consideration given to access and equality. The Chair recommended that an update to Members on the review of communications strategy be circulated to Members when this was available.

In response to comments regarding the cleaning standards and areas prescribed as district centres the Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing commented that this would be recirculated to the Committee, this will also include maps for all district centres, the schedule for cleansing work and the agreed service standards. In addition she would also circulate the latest data relating to recycling rates in apartment blocks.

In respect to a discussion on the budget the Chair advised that this would be looked at in further detail as the Committee began to consider the budget options and proposals.

Decision

1. To note the report.
2. Recommend that the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and relevant officers arrange a meeting with local Members so that the concerns of both Members and residents regarding the delivery of waste, recycling and street cleansing services be addressed.
3. Recommend that the Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing circulate an update to Members of the Committee on the review of communications strategy at the appropriate time.
4. Recommend that the Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing recirculate to Members the maps of all district centres, the schedule for cleansing work and the agreed service standards.
5. Recommend that the Strategic Lead, Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing circulate the latest data relating to recycling rates in apartment blocks to Members.

[Councillor Appleby declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as her partner is employed by Biffa.]

NESC/20/41 Highways Maintenance Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Highways that provided an update further to the report that was considered by the Committee at their meeting on 6 November 2019. The update was provided in the context of a service that had progressed well through an improvement journey and provided an overview of both key successes over this period alongside some ongoing challenges and areas that continued to need further improvement.

The main points and themes within the report included: -

- The Highways Service Key Achievements and Challenges
- Inspections and Repairs
- Highways planned Maintenance Programme update – year 4 progress and year 5 programme confirmation;
- Major projects update;
- Dashboard Performance Monitoring;
- Social Value;
- How information about how major schemes is provided to both local Ward Councillors and residents;
- Managing disruption caused by major projects;
- An update on the Winter gritting programme;
- Motorcycle Parking; and
- Covid response and Active Travel.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport introduced the item by expressing her gratitude to all staff and contractors for their continued work during the pandemic. She described the Highways department as a proactive and positive

service. She explained that work had continued to be delivered whilst complying with all local and national COVID guidance and that progress had continued to be made on the delivery of projects. She stated that the service had delivered social distancing measures and facilitated road closures so as to support people and business return to the city in a safe manner. In addition consultations had continued and the programme of active travel had continued and major schemes such as the CYCLOPS had been successfully completed. She further paid tribute to the contractors who had assisted the city's response to the pandemic and supporting residents by delivering food parcels, supporting homeless charities, delivering PPE and helping with social distancing measures so that schools could reopen safely.

The Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport stated that Manchester remained committed to encouraging active travel for all residents across the city, however to successfully deliver all of the schemes adequate funding needed to be allocated by government. She informed the Members that despite statements being made by government on this issue funding to deliver this was not forthcoming.

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

- Consideration needed to be given as to when works were to be delivered, noting that in residential areas it was not appropriate to undertake works at night that would cause a disturbance to local residents;
- Residents needed to be appropriately informed of the intention to undertake works;
- An update was sought on the green screening of the Princess Road roundabout;
- Noting the delivery of Social Value through the contracts an assurance was sought that Manchester residents benefited from this and all companies undertaking works were appropriately vetted;
- Road marking were not reinstated in a timely manner following patch repairs;
- Utility companies needed to be held responsible for reinstating highways following works;
- Welcoming the successful delivery of the Fallowfield Loop scheme;
- Welcoming the information that had been provided by ward on gullies;
- Welcoming the review to be undertaken relating to the provision of motorcycle parking and clarification was sought regarding what was meant by off road parking; and
- Did the Highways Department consult with the Neighbourhoods Department to mitigate disruption to services.

The Director of Highways advised the Committee that there was an officer within the Department who oversaw Social Value and contracts and if Members had any specific concerns they should pass on the information and this would be investigated. He further stated that he recognised the tension that arose as a result of late night working and said it was always a difficult balance to achieve between disturbance and progressing the projects, noting the particular challenges presented by the location and physical environment of the Princess Road roundabout scheme. In response to the specific question regarding the green screening he advised that he would provide local Members with an update on this following the meeting.

A Member commented upon the impact of construction works and building sites on highways and enquired what the approach to monitoring these was. The Director of Highways advised that section 8 of the report described the approach taken to managing disruption caused by major projects

A Member recommended that the Committee received a report at their next meeting that detailed all of the social value achieved to date as a result of contracts awarded through the delivery of the Highways Maintenance Programme. The Member requested a breakdown of each scheme, the social value achieved (including employment and apprenticeship opportunities) with this information provided at a ward level where possible, to identify where those residents who had benefited from this lived in the city. The Chair endorsed this recommendation.

In regard to communications the Director of Highways informed the Committee that both he and the Executive Member had convened meetings to hear the views, feedback and suggestions from Members with a view to lessons learnt from the delivery of major schemes and improving communications with both residents and Members. The Chair welcomed this dialogue and recommended that these meetings continued, to include all Members of the Committee and that a briefing note on the outcomes and identified actions arising from these meetings are circulated to Members at an appropriate time.

The Director of Highways stated that road markings should be reinstated within three weeks of works being completed and if Members were aware of cases where this was not being done to alert the team, similarly with any issues with drains and gullies following resurfacing. He stated that work was underway to prioritise the schedule for gully emptying, however reassured the Members that the service would always respond to emergency repairs. The Director of Highways stated that information and data on the cyclical gully cleansing programme would be included in the Members performance dashboards that was regularly circulated.

With regard to the Fallowfield Loop, the Director of Highways stated that the department had received a significant volume of detailed responses to the consultation that were currently being reviewed. He further stated that appropriate drainage formed part of the design of any cycle scheme, having due regard to the users safety.

In response to the issues raised regarding works undertaken by utility companies the Director of Highways stated he recognised the frustration of Members, adding that whilst some companies responded better than others it remained an ongoing challenge and Manchester did have representation on a national body to identify improvements in this area.

In answer to the question relating to off street secure parking spaces for motorcycles, he said this related to consideration for options to locate these in multi storey car parks.

The Director of Highways confirmed that following organisation redesign the service now worked closely with the Neighbourhoods Department and had an officer

dedicated to this role, adding that this had greatly improved dialogue between the services.

In respect to a discussion on the budget the Chair advised that this would be looked at in further detail as the Committee began to consider the budget options and proposals. The Chair further advised the Committee that at their November meeting the Committee would be receiving a report on active travel.

Decision

1. The Committee requests that information is submitted to the November meeting, detailing all of the social value achieved to date as a result of contracts awarded through the delivery of the Highways Maintenance Programme. The information should provide a breakdown of each scheme with the information provided at ward level, where possible, to identify where those residents who had benefited from this lived in the city.

2. The Committee recommend that regular meetings are convened by the Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport with all Members of the Committee to discuss Members issues or concerns relating to the delivery of highways projects, and that a briefing note on the outcomes and identified actions arising from these meetings are circulated to Members at an appropriate time.

3. Recommend that the Director of Highways include information and data on the cyclical gully cleansing programme in the Members performance dashboards that was regularly circulated.

NESC/20/42 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.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.