

## **Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 2 October 2023**

### **Minute Extract – Agenda Item 40 - Proposed Approach for the Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance Service Review**

The Committee considered a report, set out in the Supplementary Agenda, which gave details of the outcome of a public consultation and engagement exercise relating to potential changes and associated savings relating to the Council's Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance services.

Steve Brown (Assistant Director for Environment and Safety) and Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist – Place Clienting) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions. In the absence of the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure, Prue Bray (Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Children's Services) attended the meeting.

The report stated that, earlier in the year, work was undertaken with the Council's street cleaning and grounds maintenance contractors to identify potential service efficiencies relating to the respective services. Options included reduction of the number of litter bins and reduced emptying frequencies, reduced road and footpath sweeping, reduced town centre cleaning, reduced cleaning around bottle banks and reduced grass cutting frequencies.

The work with contractors identified that there could be significant savings for both street cleansing (c£200k – excluding the removal of litter bins) and grounds maintenance (c£100k). In July 2023, the changes were implemented by the respective contractors to begin realising the savings. However, the method of implementation was not compliant with established Council protocols and this oversight meant that a formal decision-making process was now being revisited with formal consultation, followed by a report to this Committee and the Executive.

The report stated that the public consultation had generated 1,650 responses alongside engagement with Town and Parish Clerks and CLASP (Caring, Listening and Supporting Partnership). The Borough-wide consultation ran from Monday 14 August to Sunday 10 September 2023. The responses covered all aspects of potential savings and flagged potential impacts. The full results of the consultation were appended to the report. Feedback included constructive and insightful comments which would be considered and, where possible, incorporated into existing activities. These included:

- Campaigns to support behaviour change to prevent litter and fly tipping;
- Increasing Anti-Social Behaviour enforcement (fixed penalties for littering);
- Increasing support for volunteer groups participating in environmental clean-up initiatives;
- Increasing joint initiatives with Town Councils to support town centre presentation.

In addition to the public consultation, the discussion with CLASP aimed to understand how the changes could affect those residents with disabilities. This feedback helped to shape the Equality Impact Assessment – also appended to the report.

Consultation with Town and Parish Councils featured three sessions in August and September 2023. There were several positive and constructive suggestions for a collaborative way forward such as possible local support i.e. assistance of staff to undertake some services such as litter bin emptying. The opportunity to conclude these discussions and explore efficiencies, service improvements and localisation of some services would continue. However, proposals relating to litter bins were the key concern and this was echoed in the public consultation. Other areas of proposed reductions raised concerns but not to the same level.

The Committee was asked to consider the results of the public consultation and the associated engagement with key stakeholders and to make recommendations to the Executive, as appropriate. Draft proposed service reductions for consideration by the Executive were set out on pages 10 and 11 of the report. These proposals did not include the removal of litter bins and the reduction of bin emptying frequencies. It was also noted that a petition relating to the possible removal of litter bins would be debated at Council on 19 October 2023.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

It was clear that the number of consultation results (1,650) constituted less than 1% of the Borough's population and, as a result, was unlikely to provide a representative view of resident opinions. Officers commented that this level of responses was not uncommon in similar local authority consultation exercises. However, some useful qualitative responses had been received allied to positive discussions with Town and Parish Councils. It was noted that the consultation exercise was not the same as a referendum on the potential service changes.

It was noted that the original process relating to proposed service changes and associated savings had been flawed and that a sensible decision making process had now been established, involving consultation, engagement and scrutiny prior to referral to the Council's Executive. It was confirmed that the range of constructive/innovative comments generated by the consultation and engagement exercise would be included in the Executive report.

Members noted that there was most public concern about the potential removal and reduced emptying of litter bins. It was suggested that, if the proposal to remove bins went forwards, there should be a further review of locations, as the current list did not appear to make sense. It was further suggested that the proposals relating to bins be put on hold pending a Borough-wide review of locations and frequencies, possibly via a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group. This could include proposals to the Executive for a more joined-up, streamlined service, with input from Town and Parish Councils and other local stakeholders.

Members highlighted the importance of effective communications with residents about these key local services. As an example, it was felt that more could be done to

communicate with residents on the grass cutting service. This could include more clarity on grass cutting frequencies, locations and quality standards. There remained potential for more effective use of IT and the Council's new website. Another issue was communication with residents on new housing developments in relation to the requirement for the adoption process to be completed before bins were emptied.

Opportunities for greater commercial involvement should also be investigated, for example in relation to shops and food outlets taking responsibility for the provision of bins outside their premises. This could be pursued through the existing planning and licensing regimes.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Prue Bray, Steve Brown and Richard Bisset be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the following recommendations be submitted to the Executive:
  - that the reduction of litter bins and frequency of emptying some bins is not implemented;
  - that the proposed service reductions on Pages 10-11 of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee report be approved;
- a) the Committee establish a Task & Finish Group, later in 2023/24, to scrutinise the provision and emptying of litter bins across the Borough and submit its recommendations to the Executive in due course.

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