

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

30 November 2016

Present: Councillor T Williams (Chair)
Councillor A Rindl (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Cavinder, J Dhindsa, K Hastrick, A Joynes and P Kent

Also present:

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Client Manager - Waste and Recycling
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

17 Apologies for Absence/ Committee membership

There were no apologies for absence.

18 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

19 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 08 November 2016 were submitted and signed.

20 Waste and Recycling contract with Veolia

The Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets gave a presentation on the waste and recycling contract with Veolia.

During the presentation he responded to member's questions as follows:

- Explained that there had been approximately 150 members of staff when the contract was previously 'in house'. He understood that the staff employed on the present contract were paid over the living wage and that none were engaged on zero hours contracts. He undertook to clarify this and report back to the Panel.

- Informed the Panel that some residents, who had little space for storing bins on their properties, used the smaller 140 litre commingled bins. In some instances recycling could be placed in to the old boxes but this was not ideal.
- Discussed how the council compared to other local authorities in respect of recycling. Watford had a unique and urban demography - with Stevenage Borough Council being the most similar to Watford. Councillor Taylor explained that the figures were 2% higher than last year. However, the large number of flats in the borough caused a challenge with regard to organic waste. It was difficult to compete with Three Rivers District Council owing to the demographics of Watford.

The Chair discussed issues around the frequency of collections and the emptying of bins when they did not contain much waste. Members suggested other possible collection methods and the Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets explained that he was open to consider other approaches.

In response to further questions from members; the Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets:

- Clarified that when rubbish was transferred to Veolia they took on the risks. These risks related to such issues as contamination and whether a vehicle was overloaded for example.
- Explained that the move from West London to the company Envar (in Cambridge) had enabled compostable waste sacks to be accepted. Incentives were given to residents to encourage them to use these sacks.
- Informed the Panel that good practice on planning policy (in respect of commercial premises turned in to domestic properties and the waste implications) had been sought from other councils – although there were limitations on what could be done. The objective was to get owners to sign up to a particular means of collection. The intention was to seek a robust planning policy; such as in relation to high rise properties. He advised that a high rise property was defined as having in excess of five floors. He added that there were many homes in multiple occupation in Watford, and the council was looking to work with other local authorities to identify the best collection methodologies.
- Advised that residual waste comprised of items that could not be recycled; and went to landfill for example.
- Explained that the council was supportive of any measures to encourage manufacturers to make all plastic recyclable. Environmental Services constantly looked at ways of reinforcing messages – such as with supermarkets.
- Clarified that it was appropriate to put used tea bags in to composted waste.

- Advised how cardboard waste from shops was disposed of; with reliance placed on the shop owner. He understood that this waste was collected by a private company, but undertook to find out the exact procedure from Veolia.
- Informed the Panel that with regard to green compost bins, the first bin in every household was emptied free of charge. There would then be a cost of £35 a year for every extra green bin to be emptied. This was because the service was expensive and not a statutory obligation. The recent consultation (where everyone with an additional green bin was approached) had indicated that 50% of households had and been in favour of the charge. In fact, Three Rivers District Council charged for all green waste and still had a very high take up with the service. The council would be conducting publicity in advance of the green bin charging. He concluded, in relation to homes with larger gardens generating more garden waste; that the council was promoting home composting as a way of reducing household costs.

Members discussed perceived problems around the removal of leaves from streets in the autumn. The Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets undertook to speak to Veolia about processes in the Park Avenue, Mildred Avenue and New House Crescent areas. Councillor Taylor explained that if the general Veolia number was contacted, leaves would be removed within 48 hours. He added that high winds could impact on the volume of leaves in localities and that Veolia had a detailed programme of leaf removal. In response to a question from members, the Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets explained that he believed that street sweepers (when removing litter) were encouraged to report on locations with a high deposit of leaves – he would investigate whether this was the case and report back to the Panel.

In response to additional questions from the Panel; the Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets:

- Confirmed that there was a schedule of works for tree and verge maintenance. He undertook to find out how this was aligned to the County Council work programme - and with particular regard to Hudson Close. He also undertook to investigate with Veolia whether they conducted litter removal on verges before cutting the grass.
- Explained that 'high speed road' cleaning referred to the cleaning of arterial and main roads – this was mainly conducted at night.

RESOLVED that –

1. the Panel note the presentation.
2. the actions requested be undertaken.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head introduced the report and went through the various sections. In response to questions from members; the Partnerships and Performance Section Head and Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets:

- Explained that the council had a good relationship with Veolia. The Section Head, Waste, Recycling and Streets spoke daily with the contract managers and there was a regular diary of meetings with Veolia staff (and with rigorous finance meetings).
- Clarified that prosecutions for fly posting could only take place when the actual posting was witnessed. A current scrap metal fly posting issue was discussed and it was explained that it was satisfactory for some posters in relation to fairs and circuses to be displayed. The officers discussed matters in relation to a fly posting task group involving planning services, and emphasised that Watford dealt with illegal fly posting robustly (as compared to some other areas) – albeit legal procedures were complicated.
- Clarified, in relation to item ES4 in the report (levels of litter), that a lower figure was good for that indicator. It was explained how work was conducted with various businesses seeking to ensure that their litter was cleared – although legislation placed the onus on the business to do so in these circumstances. The Watford Bid Team could be asked to look further in to this issue.
- Explained, with regard to item ES8 in the report (waste, street and parks complaints), that the figures related to individual complaints escalated to the Client Team when the complainant was not satisfied with the Veolia response. The escalation process was explained and a paper circulated to members in this regard. Councillor Taylor commented that the table gave a comparison of performance over time – with a trend that the service was improving. The officers outlined how the condition of a street was assessed after it had been cleaned.
- Confirmed that the pop up toilets were still available in the High Street.
- Undertook, with regard to item LC4 in the report (number of complaints and compliments at the Woodside Leisure Centre), to establish the accuracy of the apparent low level of complaints.
- Undertook, in relation to item LC6 in the report (throughput at the Central Leisure Centre that were concessions), to discuss the matter with SLM to ensure they had a consistency of approach.
- Undertook, with respect to item LC7 in the report (Central Leisure Centre membership), to raise with SLM whether the number of women only swimming sessions were sufficient and to discuss the apparent lack of

ethnic minority group membership at the centre. Councillor Taylor explained that he had spoken about the women only swimming issue with the Corporate, Leisure and Communities Section Head and it would appear that at some sessions the participants were on occasion talking as opposed to swimming - and that all sessions were not fully subscribed. He had asked for more information on the subscription levels.

- Undertook to establish whether there was any relationship between the number of complaints increasing at the leisure centres and the number of people using the facilities falling (as indicated in items LC8 and LC5 respectively in the report).

The Panel discussed catering contracts in relation to weddings at the Colosseum and the provision of alcohol at such events. Members also discussed how the identity of meter and resident's parking bays were indicated so that the difference between the two was clear to motorists.

In response to a question from members with regard to item RD2 in the report (tribunal appeals), the Partnerships and Performance Section Head undertook to investigate whether a target in relation to the number of appeals lost should be introduced (although this might be difficult to apply due to the variable reasons for losing cases). Members commented that the number of appeals lost as compared to the number of parking tickets issued was very low. The Chair explained that he had recently had a meeting with Parking Services where issues around appeals and the Parking Services Annual Report (an agenda item for the next meeting) had been discussed.

The Panel debated issues around delays in the reinstatement of parking bays following their suspension and the involvement of the Parking Shop and the County Council. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head undertook to suggest to Parking Services that steps should be taken to prevent wardens issuing tickets when works at a parking bay were completed but the bay had not been officially reinstated.

In response to further questions from members, the Partnership and Performance Section Head:

- Undertook, with regard to items RB1 and RB2 in the report (the average time to process housing benefit claims and change of circumstances), to suggest that the targets be reduced to 20% and 13% respectively.
- Clarified, in relation to item RB3 in the report (collection rates of council tax), that the above target figure was indicated as a percentage.
- Undertook, in relation to item HR1 in the report (sickness absence days lost per employee), to obtain a break-down of the sickness absence days. She explained the return to work interview procedure and how this was

designed to assist those returning to work.

Members discussed stress in the work place and the Partnership and Performance Section Head explained that the council employed a health and welfare champion. There was also a stress policy for managers. The best approach was to try and identify issues before they became a problem. The Panel talked about the provision of relaxation classes and the closure of the canteen (and how staff were consulted) – they considered that officers being properly cared for lead to a more motivated workforce. The Partnership and Performance Section Head undertook to feedback to the council’s Human Resources that the Panel considered relaxation classes would be beneficial to staff.

With reference to item IT1 in the report (incidents closed by Amicus), the Chair informed the Panel that he had recently had a meeting with IT Services and that this was early days for key performance indicators. However, a full report in regards to IT Services (the new structure, plans for the future and the challenges to overcome) would come before the panel at its next meeting on 17th January.

RESOLVED that -

1. the Panel note the report.
2. the actions requested be undertaken.

Chair
Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel

The meeting started at 7.00 p.m.
and finished at 9.00 p.m.