

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

8 January 2018

Present: Councillor T Williams (Chair)
Councillors J Dhindsa, K Hastrick, M Hofman, P Kent and
B Mauthoor

Also present: Councillor Peter Taylor, Portfolio Holder
Matthew Crane, Senior Contract Manager, Veolia

Officers: Head of Community and Environmental Services
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks & Streets)
Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK)

23 Apologies for Absence/ Committee membership

There were no apologies for absence. Councillor Cavinder was absent without apologies.

24 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

25 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2017 were submitted and signed.

26 Overview of Veolia contract with focus on parks and open spaces

The panel received a report of the Head of Community and Environmental Services updating them on the delivery of the parks service. The report included an overview of the services provided by Veolia and those which remained in-house. The council had a strong partnership with Veolia in undertaking the projects. Some of the recent successes included:

- the achievement of 11 Green Flags
- Cassiobury Park voted as one of the top 10 parks in the country
- the completion of the Cassiobury Park restoration
- the adoption of various 10-year strategies to underpin park work

- the relocation of the Gaelic Football Club.

All the parks and green spaces had been audited and their high value to the community was important. There were some which needed improvement but many had been brought up to Green Flag standard.

A strong partnership with Veolia, continued support from the community, the significant investment programme and the strategic approach to delivery ensured that the parks service performed well. While resources in the service were stretched with operatives being shared with street cleansing, standards still remained high. The panel was also given an overview of the forthcoming issues which included:

- income generation and a more commercial approach to the service, including at the cemetery
- charges for other services
- grant opportunities.

The Section Head – Parks, Open Spaces and Projects then made a presentation to the panel; the slides were included with the agenda. The presentation covered:

- The parks improvement programme
- The allotments improvement programme
- The play improvement programme
- The adventure playground projects
- The relocation of Glen Rovers
- Cassiobury Park restoration
- Other events and activities
- Future plans.

Matthew Crane, Veolia, informed the panel that Veolia enjoyed working with Watford Borough Council and there had been a lot of successes that they were proud of. The teams worked well together and the pride employees took in the work was evident.

There was a discussion about the challenges faced in the first summer of operation of the paddling pools. A number of issues had been encountered including the failure of certain components which had now been replaced. The pools had been independently assessed and were considered to be a very good and safe facility. The pools would be open after Easter and a number of additional sun shades would be available. There were no plans to hire out parasols.

Officers worked with Daisy's to ensure that there was capacity at busy times. The council received a set amount per year from the café and a percentage of profits above that level. The prices were set by Daisy's as an independent business.

Following a question about the occupancy level of the allotments, it was confirmed that overall there was 90% occupancy. At Paddock Road, which had been extended, 22 of the 24 plots were in use. Most allotment holders who were previously at Farm Terrace had moved to Holywell or Brightwell Allotments.

It was reported that satisfaction levels with the parks remained high at 95%; the panel asked how this figure was established. Officers agreed to report back to the Panel on how the engagement was undertaken, how respondents were chosen and how the surveys were publicised.

Discussing the achievement of Green Flags, it was explained there were strict criteria to be met and the parks were reassessed annually on a pass or fail basis. Green Flags were awarded through a peer review covering areas including health and safety, heritage, cleanliness and marketing. The applications for the 2018 Green Flags were being written and it was a challenging process. It was noted that Oxhey Park had received a very high score in its assessment.

Following concerns about whether assistance was being given to a rough sleeper in one of the parks; assurances were given that the person in question was regularly offered help and chose to remain there.

Members discussed the adult gyms which were available in a number of parks and whether these were sufficiently well-used. Officers advised that they were used by the public, often at specific times of the day. There had been a number of introductory training sessions when they were first installed and the panel felt that more of these sessions would be beneficial. It was noted that this kind of activity would dovetail well with the incoming new leisure contract's focus on the community. It was also possible that there were apps available to assist in the use of the equipment.

The programme of events at Cassiobury Park had been successful and marketing was undertaken through banners in the park as well as posters and social media. Planning was underway for the 2018 programme.

Discussing those parks due for improvement works, officers advised that Woodside was being reviewed in the context of the wider local environment and a feasibility report would be available soon. King George V playing fields had had some improvements including fencing and a new footpath but the car park required further investment.

The cedar tree in Cassiobury Park was in poor health and would fall at some point; it had been fenced off for this reason. It was a much-loved feature of the park and similar trees had been planted nearby.

The biggest challenge faced in managing the parks was the intensity of use experienced and the resulting maintenance required. Litter was an ongoing issue and consideration was being given as how to best introduce recycling into the parks. The council was also considering a smart bin pilot; these bins notified the team when they were full.

Problems with the grass-cutting regime in Meriden Park were raised; it was agreed that Veolia would take this feedback away to ensure the grass was cleared.

There was a discussion around the effectiveness of CCTV as a deterrent for fly-tipping; some of the limitations of this solution were outlined.

RESOLVED –

1. that the content of the update and the panel's comments be noted.
2. that the actions agreed be undertaken.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.35 pm