

## **OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**19 September 2018**

Present: Councillor S Cavinder (Chair)

Councillors J Dhindsa, K Hastrick, R Martins, G Saffery and N Bell

Also present: Nick Graham, Veolia Contracts Manager Streets and Parks  
(minute numbers 8 to 11)  
Darren Harding, Veolia Senior Contracts Manager (minute  
numbers 8 to 11)  
Councillor Williams (Portfolio Holder)

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

### **8 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hofman and Mauthoor.

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Bell replaced Councillor Mauthoor.

### **9 Disclosures of interest**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### **10 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2018 were submitted and signed.

In response to a question from members, the Chair clarified that the Watford Market had not been discussed at the meeting.

## **Parks and grounds maintenance**

The Veolia Senior Contracts Manager introduced the report to the panel. The Chair explained that members would ask questions as the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager went through the report.

The Veolia Senior Contracts Manager read the document focussing first on the OSSP questions contained in the report as follows:

- How the grass cutting regimes were determined.
- How did Veolia respond to weather conditions and what capacity was there for spikes in demand.
- How did Veolia plan for peaks in visitors to the parks.
- What were the processes for ensuring grass cutting and litter picking worked well together.
- What were the main challenges faced this summer and how did WBC and Veolia respond.

In response to a question from the chair as to how grass cutting schedules were met when there were problems, the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager explained that more resources would be utilised where possible. Also, equipment would be replaced and there would be regular meetings with the client team. It was not usually necessary to prioritise – rather to keep to the pre-determined schedule but with some flexibility around cutting dates.

Members discussed how Veolia, Watford Community Housing and the County Council grass cutting services were coordinated. The Veolia Senior Contracts Manager explained that Veolia and Watford Community Housing used the same contactor that included some cutting of highways verges.

The chair reminded the panel that Veolia street cleansing was not an agenda item for the meeting.

In response to a further question from the chair, the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager explained that when additional resources were required these came both from existing staff through re-deploying to other duties and from agencies.

Members discussed how weather impacted on grass growth. The Senior Contracts Manager advised that staff were deployed to other duties (such as hedge trimming) when growth levels were low.

Members turned discussions to risk assessment in relation to trees to ensure safety in inclement weather. The Veolia Senior Contracts Manager and Section Head – Parks, Open Spaces and Projects explained that a tree manager was

employed who checked on all trees over a three year cycle. Veolia mapped the location of the trees documenting their condition and when they had been inspected. If a problem arose with a tree on a highway this was a county matter; and information on when the tree had last been inspected was provided to them. This was a much improved system.

In response to questions from members, the Head of Community and Environmental Services and the Section Head – Parks, Open Spaces and Projects:

- Clarified that SLM were responsible for the maintenance of paddling pools in parks.
- Explained that large cage refuse bins were deployed in parks during periods of high public usage and were taken away subsequently. These were very effective in managing litter.

The Chair discussed apparent problems with coordinating litter picking prior to grass cutting by the county council. The Veolia Senior Contracts Manager explained that the matter was being taken forward by the Veolia Contracts Manager Streets and Parks. Councillor Williams confirmed that liaison was taking place with the county council and that improved coordination was required.

Members debated how a range of volunteer groups could provide support to Veolia services and agreed to discuss the matter in more detail with the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager outside of the meeting.

The Veolia Senior Contracts Manager continued reading from the report in relation to:

- Forward planning.
- What activities did the Veolia parks team undertake to invest in the local community.
- How effective was the team and what impact does it have for Watford residents.
- What was planned for the future.

Members discussed the extension of the Green Gym in to Garston Park and wondered whether this could include extending in to the King George Playing Fields. The Section Head – Parks, Open Spaces and Projects explained that this would be a matter of resources as Garston Park had just embarked on the project. It would be good to see a further extension in to King George Playing Fields with the potential of seeking the award of the Green Flag also under consideration. Community engagement would be important and the Council would look in more detail in to the Green Gym extension - and also working with Watford Community Housing.

The panel discussed the bulb planting programme; and the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager agreed that it would be helpful if ward councillors were informed of particular events.

Members discussed the awarding of Green Flags to parks and considered this valuable in the Borough. They requested a break-down of the funding provided to help in the achievement of the awards and also information spent by other local authorities where possible. The Section Head – Parks, Open Spaces and Projects undertook to provide this to the panel explaining that some Heritage Lottery monies had been utilised. Watford had an ambition to increase the number of parks awarded the Green Flag to 16 and other local authorities in the county were very positive about Watford's approach. The Head of Community and Environmental Services added that local residents were happy for the Green Flag programme to continue and that Cassiobury Park was in the top ten best parks in the country.

Members discussed wild life corridors and how these were taken in to account. The Section Head – Parks, Open Spaces and Projects explained that there was a Green Infrastructure Strategy and that work was ongoing to restore the River Colne for example. This work would prove challenging but the objective was to improve biodiversity. He discussed the work at five local nature reserves and the activity to improve biodiversity at Garston Park.

In response to a question from the Chair about what Veolia would do differently this year compared to last, the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager explained that scheduling, planning and monitoring would be improved, there would be closer liaison with the Client Team and equipment would be better monitored.

The Chair thanked the Veolia Senior Contracts Manager for his contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED –

1. that the report and the panel's comments be noted.
2. that the actions agreed be undertaken.

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## **Conclusions and recommendations**

This had been covered in the previous item.

**Quarter 1 2018/19: key performance indicator (KPI) report**

The panel received a report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications. The report provided the results for the key performance indicators identified for Watford Borough Council's outsourced services for Quarter 1 2018/19.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications advised the panel that version three of the report had mistakenly been circulated instead of version four so there were some minor errors. She clarified that with regard to the ICT chart on page 13 – that this related to indicators 35, 36 and 37 (and not indicator 34) as shown in the report. She apologised for the error.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications explained that this was a good time to reflect on performance and to make improvements where necessary, including the provision of extra resources. She discussed the areas to note from the report as outlined on pages 13 and 14.

Members raised a number concerns with reference to the virtual platform provided by NSL Ltd who now managed the parking service – with an emphasis on difficulties experienced by the elderly and people having problems registering multiple vehicles. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications commented that officers were sympathetic to the issues and the Customer Service Centre provided useful guidance to the public in relation to on-line processes. She undertook to bring the matters raised by members to the attention of the Parking Service. The Chair advised the panel that the new parking contract would be discussed at the March OSSP meeting.

The Chair discussed the setting of targets and how these were determined. He noted that last year's targets were not shown in the current report so it was difficult to draw a comparison. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications undertook to include these in future reports.

The Chair commented that apart from the ICT data, Quarter 1 provided a good set of figures. This prompted the question as to whether targets were set at a sufficiently high level. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications was asked to investigate the matter and report back to the panel. She would also report back on what action would be taken by the ICT Client Team to ensure targets were met going forward.

The Chair made reference to indicator 32 in the report; asking why the target for staff performance development reviews being completed on time had not been met. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications explained that this

could relate to a range of issues such as sickness and leave and also to more complex matters. She undertook to provide further information to the panel.

In response to a question by members, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications explained how six ward's data was examined in respect of levels of litter and detritus (indicators 9 and 10 respectively) per quarter followed by the remaining six in the next – and so on. The Head of Community and Environmental Services added that different land usage was also taken in to account.

Members discussed the issue of take away premises generating litter and how this was responded to. The Head of Community and Environmental Services explained that when a specific instance was raised the Council would work with the premises concerned to try and resolve the issues – this could involve litter picks for example. He undertook to find out from Veolia whether any particular action was being taken with regard to premises in Vicarage Road.

RESOLVED –

1. that the key performance indicator results for the Quarter 1 2018/19 be noted.
2. that the actions requested be undertaken.

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## **Work programme**

The panel received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK) outlining the agreed work programme. The Chair introduced the report asking the panel to consider whether any further items should be included at future meetings.

Members discussed the programme and felt it important that partners came to meetings and articulate how they added social value in the provision of their services.

It was agreed that street cleaning, in relation to the leaf fall programme in the autumn, be discussed at the December meeting (with Veolia being invited) and the ICT contract discussed at the March meeting; with consideration to be given as to whether this would focus on internal or external providers.

The panel discussed the proposed visit to the depot and it was agreed that this should include members going out with teams (such as on refuse trucks) and visiting parks where possible.

RESOLVED –

1. that the work programme be updated.

**Chair**  
**Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel**

The meeting started at 7.00 p.m.  
and finished at 8.15 p.m.