

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

26 NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor P Taylor (Chair)
Councillor K Hastrick (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Counter (Minute numbers 26 to 30), J Dhindsa,
A Joynes, R Martins and K Collett

Also present: Councillor D Scudder (Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks & Streets)
Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was one change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Collett replaced Councillor Greenslade.

The Lead Member for Shared Services, Councillor Matthew Bedford (Three Rivers District Council), had sent his apologies.

24 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

25 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2014 were submitted and signed.

26 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Panel received a report of the Partnership and Performance Section Head providing the quarterly performance indicators for quarter two of 2014/15.

The Partnership and Performance Section Head introduced the report and invited questions.

In response to a question from Councillor Dhindsa, the Partnership and Performance Section Head explained the structure of the report and how to interpret the various symbols, targets and trends. She commented that the

analysis provided context for the results so members had a fuller picture of performance.

The Chair asked if there were any questions on pages five to seven in relation to the Veolia contract and there were none.

With reference to item LC5 in the report, Councillor Dhindsa asked what were the percentages for memberships that met council targets. The Partnership and Performance Section Head explained that this was not measured last year (hence there was no results shown for 2013/14) but there will be baseline data to compare next year. With further reference to item LC5, in response to a question from the Chair, the Partnership and Performance Section Head explained that the 29.4% BME membership of Woodside was below the proportion for Watford as a whole, which includes all those who are not White British (such as Eastern European members of the community).

With reference to item LC1 in the report, Councillor Counter commented that there was no information as to what the complaints were; in effect the data gave a feel for the situation but lacked detail. The Partnership and Performance Section Head explained SLM were working on providing more detailed data.

ACTION – Partnership and Performance Section Head

With further reference to item LC1 in the report, Councillor Collett complimented SLM with regard to their agreement to meet local people to discuss some of the complaints relating to the Woodside Leisure Centre.

With reference to item LC11 in the report, Councillor Counter commented that more information would be helpful with regard to the complaints and compliments but she appreciated that this was work in progress.

With reference to item LC15 in the report, Councillor Martins considered that the comments outlining why there were dark days were more excuses than reasons. He felt that income was being reduced due to the number of these days and suggested that community use should be encouraged with the possibility of setting up a special group to examine the issue. Councillor Counter commented that dark days were sometimes unavoidable due to cancellations. Councillor Scudder mentioned that getting greater flexibility from the BBC tenant would enable better use to be made of the facility. Councillor Hastrick discussed her marketing experience and was of the view that cancellations to events were unavoidable as it was not possible to plan a year in advance with certainty; consequently, flexibility for the BBC was vital. Councillor Dhindsa commented that there used to be days set aside for community events (in the region of six a year) and asked how such events were advertised. The Partnership and Performance Section Head undertook to find out this information.

ACTION – Partnership and Performance Section Head

With reference to item RD1 in the report, Councillor Joynes asked whether it was possible to pay penalty charges on-line. The Partnership and Performance

Section Head said that it was but that she was aware that sometimes the system had been slow. .

With reference to items IT1-4 in the report, the Chair asked whether there was likely to be significant improvement before Christmas as had been discussed by the ICT Client Manager at the last meeting of the Panel. The Partnership and Performance Section Head explained that enhancements were being made but there was a lot of work to get through. However, good quality staff were now in place and it was important to bear in mind that this was a very large project.

With reference to item HR1 in the report, in response to a question from Councillor Dhindsa, the Performance and Partnership Section Head explained that the figures related to all staff in the Council and not to Capita employees.

The Chair pointed out that WBC had put more resources in to Revenues and Benefits to manage Benefit cases than Three Rivers District Council - the Partnership and Performance Section Head provided reassurance that these would be used for WBC business.

With further reference to item HR1 in the report, Councillor Martins commented that the Revenues and Benefits figures were very encouraging but wondered how the workload might be increasing. The Partnership and Performance Section Head undertook to find out this information for the Panel.

ACTION – Partnership and Performance Section Head

27

VEOLIA CONTRACT - PARKS AND STREETS

The Panel received a presentation from the Client Manager Parks and Streets on the operation of the Veolia Contract – Parks and Streets.

During the presentation Councillor Dhindsa commented that fly tipping was a problem in west Watford (particularly in relation to discarded mattresses) and asked whether analysis could be conducted at the village level. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that the software allowed for drilling down to determine hot spots.

Councillor Hastrick raised the issue of overgrowing trees in North Western Avenue (an unadopted road) that were causing problems to residents and asked how this issue could be resolved as it was private land. The Client Manager Parks and Streets asked that Councillor Hastrick send him the details and he would progress the matter.

ACTION – The Client Manager Parks and Streets

Councillor Collett asked why there had been no award ceremony for the Green Flag award in Woodside. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that

there had only been a ceremony in Oxhey this year but he was looking to expand this more widely in 2015.

Councillor Dhindsa commented that there seemed to be a poor service from Hertfordshire County Council with regard to the maintenance of overgrown hedges. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that previously issues were reported to WBC but now reports were made direct at the county level. However, if problems were experienced he asked that Councillor Dhindsa should inform him and he would take matters forward.

At the end of the presentation the Chair asked if Members had any questions.

Councillor Dhindsa expressed the view that since Veolia had taken over the contract all was not negative; with the graffiti removal service extremely good. However, he expressed concern about the street cleaning service in Vicarage and Whippendell Roads making particular reference to leaves not being properly cleared from the surrounds of a local school. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that Veolia had a cleaning plan with regards to leaf removal but their deposit on the streets was somewhat weather dependent (such as in windy weather). Consequently, the problem could return quite quickly after initial removal. As a result, Veolia did not have a set measurable standard but rather would respond to issues as they arose and return to the same location where necessary.

In response to a question from Councillor Joynes about the methodology for clearing chewing gum from streets, the Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that this was removed by Veolia in response to reports. Such removal was priced in to the contract and he advised that the Councillor should report any issues to him and he could then give instruction to Veolia to clear.

Councillor Scudder returned to the issue of leaf clearing explaining that he had recently been talking with the contractor. They had commented that this had been a particularly bad year for leaf deposits as the autumn period had been elongated. Consequently, demands on their services had been greater putting added pressure on delivery.

The Chair asked for clarification on the zero percent figure in respect of finds of graffiti and fly tipping in certain locations. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that this meant that this could mean minor amounts found resulting in this having a 'B' score rather than A; which meant completely clear.

The Chair asked whether Veolia carrying out self monitoring was a good idea; drawing the analogy of children marking their own work resulting in higher grades. The Client Manager Parks and Streets said that his department was able to access the figures and that with regard to the N195 measure; they conducted joint inspections with Veolia. This was a new process and the measures would become more accurate over time. Also, a forthcoming independent review would highlight any discrepancies and enable Veolia to be formally approached. Information from communities and Members would also help provide an accurate picture.

Councillor Dhindsa raised an issue about overflowing bins in Harwoods and Chester Roads. The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets undertook to investigate the issue.

ACTION – Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets.

In response to a question from Councillor Dhindsa in relation to funding streams for the planting of trees, the Client manager Parks and Streets explained that a £15K annual budget for the service was cut as part of savings approximately three years ago. However, it was open to Members to seek funds for such issues through Neighbourhood Forum budgets, for example.

Councillor Dhindsa asked how frequently subways were cleaned as there was a smell of urine on the ring road subway at Vicarage Road. The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets explained that such areas should be cleaned and she would find out about frequency and report back to the Panel.

ACTION – Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets

Councillor Dhindsa expressed concern about the cleanliness of the pond in the High Street making particular reference to litter being blown in because there was now no verge surrounding the pond preventing this. He asked who was responsible for the cleaning. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that this was the responsibility of Veolia. The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets commented that the pond was cleaned daily – the outside by 7a.m. and all of the pond water by 10a.m.

Councillor Martins asked whether the cleaning of the surfacing around the pond could cause damage. The Client Manager Parks and Streets advised that damage would not be caused as cleaning was conducted gently and advice had been taken on this aspect.

Councillor Dhindsa complimented the Watford town centre for the general good standard of cleanliness.

In response to a question from Councillor Dhindsa about problems with the weeding of footpaths in Vicarage Ward, the Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that work was ongoing in this regard and there had been some issues with a new herbicide which it was hoped would be resolved thereby improving the situation.

Councillor Counter made reference to item ES14 in the Performance Report stating that she would have liked to have seen more detail in respect of the 18 complaints - but it was good that there had been no actual objections. The Client Manager Parks and Streets said that he was seeking to get more descriptive information in this regard which he would provide to the Panel.

ACTION – Client Manager Parks and Streets

Councillor Dhindsa asked whether it was possible to determine the take up of recycling by the public – drawing an analogy of his knowledge of practices in a local prison. The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets explained that some analysis had recently been conducted at Wiggshall Depot which she could make available to the Panel. She also undertook to inform the Panel of how Veolia publicised recycling schemes to the public.

ACTION – Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets

Councillor Scudder commented that the research could be used to target recycling approaches to the right areas.

Councillor Joynes asked whether food waste should be wrapped before being discarded. The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets said that this was not necessary and the waste could be put straight in to the appropriate receptacle.

The Chair asked when the ballot was to take place with regard to Oxhey Grange and Paddock Road allotments. The Client Manager Parks and Streets said it was hoped these would take place sooner rather than later but commented that two recent meetings had been poorly attended. As a result the matter may not go straight to ballot. He stated that the Council would not proceed if the ballot outcome was negative.

Councillor Hastrick asked about the importance given to Green Flag awards. The Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that this was a real priority and the ideal would be that more parks in Watford achieved the award. However, some parks needed investment and the funding available would reduce owing to Section 106 monies being replaced by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) In the future, growth bids would be made on capital which may provide funds for the next four to five years. There was also the potential to obtain grant funding for improvement projects.

In response to a question from Councillor Dhindsa about the cricket pitch at Cassiobury, the Client Manager Parks and Streets confirmed that this was maintained by the trained staff that also looked after Woodside. He undertook to check why the Cassiobury pitch was not roped off out of season.

ACTION – Client Manager Parks and Streets

In response to a question from the Chair about the removal of fencing around the tennis courts in Cassiobury Park and some concerns around this expressed by Councillor Dhindsa; the Client Manager Parks and Streets explained that this was part of the restoration of the park with particular regard to enhancing its historic features and this included the former Carriage Drive which runs alongside the redundant tennis courts. He explained it would have been disproportionate to retain the fencing having regard to the low number of people using the former tennis courts. Also, modern design principles did not provide for the fencing of areas and as such the redundant courts were now restored

back to the park. He concluded by saying that there were no adverse comments about removing the fencing during an 18 month consultation period.

Councillor Collett expressed concern about the number of staff available to Veolia to clean the Woodside ward – particularly in relation to Nottingham Close and Sheriff Way. She felt that after the cleaning of shop fronts there was insufficient capacity for street cleaning. She explained that she had received a number of complaints from residents groups in the locality and suggested that another member of staff should be employed. The Client Manager Parks and Streets undertook to look in to the issue and report back to the Panel commenting that agency staff were being replaced by full time employees that should improve the situation.

ACTION – Client Manager Parks and Streets

28

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These were as follows:

- The Client Manager Parks and Streets to progress the issue of overgrown trees in North Western Avenue with Veolia.
- The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets to investigate the issue of overflowing bins in Harwoods and Chester Roads.
- The Contract and Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets to find out how frequently subways were cleaned.
- The Client Manager Parks and Streets to try to obtain more detailed information in the Performance Report regarding complaints at item ES14.
- The Contract Monitoring Officer Parks and Streets to provide the Panel with details of the findings of research conducted in to recycling at the Wiggshall Depot and to inform the Panel how Veolia publicised recycling schemes to the public.
- The Client Manager Parks and Streets to check why the Cassiobury cricket pitch was not roped off out of season.
- The Client Manager Parks and Streets to examine the staffing capacity deployed at the Woodside ward.

29

UPDATE ON ACTIONS

The Panel received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer updating Members on outstanding actions from previous meetings.

With regard to item PR9 in the report - the Partnership and Performance Section Head introduced a short paper providing details of customer satisfaction levels at the Palace Theatre. Councillor Dhindsa commented that both cafes in the premises were small resulting in large queues during intervals. He asked that information be included in the Performance Report about the use

made of the theatre by ethnic minority groups and also in relation to the age of patrons.

ACTION - Partnership and Performance Section Head

Councillor Joynes commented that it appeared the age of people attending the theatre had increased due to fewer younger people's events being held.

ACTION - Partnership and Performance Section Head to ask the theatre about the youth programme and provide information to the Panel

The Chair then reminded the Panel of the proposed visit by Members to the Woodside Leisure Centre on Tuesday 9th December 2014, at 6.30p.m. and encouraged attendance.

With regard to item PR16 in the report - the Partnership and Performance Section Head introduced a further short paper outlining the most common reasons exercise classes were cancelled at leisure centres. Councillor Joynes commented that really popular classes should be put on more frequently .

With regard to item PR17 in the report - the Partnership and Performance Section head clarified for Councillor Dhindsa that the table included the percentages of the various groups in relation to the population of Watford as a whole. Councillor Dhindsa commented that usage of the leisure centres by those aged over 55 and people with a disability appeared to be low. The Partnership and Performance Section Head said that there may be many reasons for this; such as non-declaration by users as to their age or disability. Also, the over 55's may go elsewhere because of the variety of choice available to them and preferences for exercise options. The Chair asked that the issue of apparent low usage by the disabled and those aged over 55 be raised with SLM at the Panel meeting in January.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

Councillor Dhindsa raised concerns about the manner in which some Central Leisure Centre staff may be addressing certain sections of the community attending swimming. The Chair asked that the matter be raised with SLM at the Panel meeting in January.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

With regard to item PR19 in the report - the Chair asked if there was now any data to hand. The Partnership and Performance Section Head that she should shortly be in a position to circulate the information to the Panel.

ACTION - Partnership and Performance Section Head

The Chair inquired whether there was any information as to climbing wall usage at the leisure centres. It was decided this matter should be raised at the meeting with SLM in January.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

Councillor Dhindsa commented that favourable remarks had been made by a member of the public at a recent meeting about the swimming sessions at the leisure centres.

30

WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the Work Programme and asked for any questions - there were none.

The Chair asked what strategic issues the Panel would like to focus on at the meeting with SLM in January. In addition to the items raised under the 'Update on Actions above', the Panel wished the following matters to be discussed at the meeting:

- Cleanliness, redecoration, equipment replacement and maintenance issues (such as the length of time taken for repairs).
- How to meet demand to ensure effective usage.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.03 pm