

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 09 February 2021

7:30pm

Present:

Cllr Lee Croxton (Chair)
Cllr Gurbax Singh (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Conrad Broadley
Harold Craske
Dakota Dibben
Gary Harding
Nirmal Khabra
Peter Scollard
Steve Thompson
Frank Wardle

Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Operations)
Elizabeth Thornton	Service Manager (Property & Regulatory Services)
Mark Lees	Regulatory Services Manager
Debbie Wilders	Environmental Protection Team Leader
Joel Simons	Waste Projects & Compliance Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant

19. Apologies

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Leslie Pearton; Cllr Harold Craske substituted.

20. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 17 November 2020 were signed by the Chair.

21. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

22. Corporate Performance Report: Q3 2020-21

The Committee were presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2020-21 (October to December 2020).

The officers present went through each policy commitment in turn and provided an update on what activity had and/or would be delivered in order to successfully realise the policy commitments.

The officers present fielded questions from the Committee for each policy commitment and explained that:

1. Enforce High Regulatory Standards

- Unfortunately, P14 appeared to be dipping as food establishments that could not be inspected due to closure had to be counted as 'non-compliant' when in fact they were just not open for business. Many food establishments had remained closed due to the ongoing lockdown restrictions, so officers were not able to enter the establishment and conduct an inspection. In addition, the Food Standards Agency who set the inspection regimes had been releasing constantly evolving guidance over the last year informing Food Safety Teams how to react to the pandemic and prioritise limited resources.
- All Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) served had the right of appeal through the Council's internal corporate complaints procedure; the procedure was recommended by the Office for Product Safety and Standards. It provided people with the means to challenge a FPN in a clear and transparent way and in the report, it stated that two of the fourteen FPN's issued in Q3 were withdrawn after successful appeals. The defendants provided their sides of the story with relevant evidence and the decision was made to withdraw them

2. Improve the Local Environment – Environmental Protection

- During the first lockdown there was a 50% increase in the complaints and requests logged so an increase of only 20% during Q3 was seen as much more manageable by the team. The increase was directly due to Covid and level of complaints had remained elevated all through the last financial year

3. Improve the Local Environment – Waste & Recycling Update

- The Street Champions initiative continued to attract new volunteers. To date, the scheme boasted 201 Street Champions (an increase of 105.1% since January 2020) who had pledged to 'adopt' 174 streets, alleyways and open spaces. It was originally expected that the amount of volunteers would decrease during Wintertime but there was a spike in the amount of application towards the end of the last quarter which would be reflected in the Q4 report. Due to contact having to be limited with the volunteers, the new registration process had been temporarily suspended; there would be another push for volunteers in Springtime by which time hopefully some of the restrictions would have eased
- Following a question about staff welfare especially those working from home the Assistant Director (Operations) explained that most of his team were classified as key workers working on the frontline services and most of the Civic Centre staff had been working from home; the staff had been regularly communicated with throughout the pandemic and the Council had taken a very proactive approach with regards to engagement. Managers were told to have weekly meetings with their staff to make sure everyone was well and handling being at home/on the frontline. A number of health and wellbeing initiatives had been set up such as zoom coffee mornings, mental health workshops and staff talking sessions which were all created to engage with staff and promote wellbeing. The Chief Executive had made it clear to senior managers that the Council were a family and a range of guidance had been released to support that notion
- A larger number of Recycling 'on the go' bins were being trialled at St Andrews Gardens as the team recognised that there were problems every summer with bins overflowing

Cllr Broadley informed the Waste Projects & Compliance Officer that he would contact him outside of the meeting as he had several people that wanted to get involved with the Street Champions.

4. Create clean, welcoming neighbourhoods and parks, and an Attractive Town Centre

- The team had been working hard to deep clean the Town and the intention was to push the Maxvac Gladiator deep cleansing machine to other parts of the Town as well as places in Northfleet and rural areas etc
- The code of practice on litter and refuse described four different gradings for levels of litter from A-D with A being the lowest and D the highest. Under the code A&B level of litter is considered acceptable and C&D levels of litter unacceptable. The Assistant Director (Operations) agreed to add the four classification levels for litter to the next Street Cleansing Update Report brought to the Committee
- It was generally accepted that ‘rubbish attracted rubbish’ so the Council strove to keep those affected areas by litter as clean as possible
- There were a number of different processes for park inspections; a weekly inspection was carried out on all parks within Gravesham where the team checked all the play sites to ensure they were safe for public use. Each quarter, a more in-depth inspection was held and once a year an inspection was carried out on all play sites by a qualified ROSPA inspector from an external company; the annual inspection was currently being undertaken and the team would be made aware of the results within the next few weeks.
- There was a budget for the Councils parks and inspections; during the previous financial year, the Assistant Director (Operations) managed to attain enough budget from the HRA and General Fund for the gradual replacement of all of Gravesham’s play sites over a twenty-year period. None of that budget had been spent during this calendar year due to the Covid 19 pandemic but the Assistant Director (Operations) was planning to undertake the review of the play sites with his team this year

The Chair made several points:

- The Chair felt that the Street Champions were a vital resource that allowed for greater engagement with the Community and residents; due to their importance the Chair asked that a report be brought to the next Committee meeting in March on Street Champions and their work within the Borough
- The Committees thanks were to be passed down to all the teams that had worked tirelessly through the pandemic and done a fantastic job

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director (Operations) for the report and asked that the Committees thanks be passed down to the teams for their hard work.

23. Air Quality Update

The Environmental Protection Team Leader provided the Committee with a presentation on Air Quality within the Borough.

The presentation had been published and could be accessed through the below link:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13412/Air%20Quality%20Presentation%20Tuesday%2009-Feb-2021%2019.30%20Operational%20Services%20Cabinet%20Committee.pdf?T=9>

Following the detailed presentation, the Environmental Protection Team Leader fielded questions from Members and explained that:

- DEFRA has contacted all Environmental Health Services to confirm that they appreciate that last year (2020) could not, due to the pandemic, be considered as a 'normal' year for air quality. Whilst the monitored data is a true record of the levels the public have been exposed to it is likely that nationally the annual review and assessment reports over the next five years are likely to look at trends both with and without the data for 2020. This is to ensure that the overall trend is not skewed by the exceptionally low monitored levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter (PM10) during 2020.
- With regards to the one-way system around which the air quality is relatively poor, numerous different proposals have been examined to improve congestion and thus air quality, for example, making it one lane, inserting traffic calming measures and cutting the route in half at Crooked Lane etc however none of the proposals have been considered feasible. KCC are ultimately responsible for the urban highways including the one-way system but the Planning Services and the Environmental Protection Team, do have an influence through the planning process, in any proposed changes to the road system.
- With regards to the road access into and out of The Charter development within Gravesend one-way system, Planning Services were concerned with the impact of the access on the congestion on the one way system itself. It is hoped that the final design will alleviate any impact the development may have had on both congestion and therefore air quality.
- With regards to the sources of pollution in the borough of Gravesham this is likely to come from several sources. The pollution created within the borough from traffic, domestic homes and industry, the pollution blown across the south east from agriculture, industry etc and the pollution which comes from Europe. Considering the location of Gravesham is in an industrial part of the country, with its own industry and that in Essex eg the Tilbury docks etc Gravesham has good air quality. The council does have concerns with regards to the additional air pollution that may be created by the significant additional traffic from the proposed Lower Thames Crossing and London Resort feeding into the A2 Trunk Road which already has high levels of traffic. Neither development have been forthcoming with information about the likely impact on air quality of the two developments. Gravesham's neighbouring Boroughs are also likely to be affected by the traffic from both developments.

The Chair praised the work of the Environmental Protection Team in monitoring Gravesham's air quality over the years and asked that the informative presentation be circulated to all Members.

24. Litter & Dog Waste Bin Policy Report

The Committee were presented with the proposed Litter & Dog Waste Bin Policy and were asked to consider the Policy, offer any comments and to recommend its adoption.

The Assistant Director (Operations) gave a brief introduction to Members on what the policy set out to do; section 2.1 of the report listed the nine items that the new Policy would primarily deal with.

The Waste Projects & Compliance Officer directed Members attention to appendix two to the report and ran through each section of the Litter & Dog Waste Bin Policy outlining the key points for consideration.

The Assistant Director (Operations) fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- With regards to vandalism to the Council's litter bins, the team always carried out a full investigation and tried every counter measure first such as replacing plastic bins with metal bins in order to prevent fire damage. A litter bin would only be removed as a last resort if all other counter measures had failed
- Cllr Harding raised a concern about some litter bins especially near bus stops which smell because they have had dog waste in them.. The Assistant Director (Operations) agreed to look at the issue and see whether some bins required disinfecting. Members were able to report any particular litter bins that had a bad odour, and the team would put those bins on a list to get cleaned and disinfected
Dual litter and dog bins were commonplace in most towns now; a number of neighbouring local authorities had stopped providing solo dog bins altogether, but Gravesham had not made that decision. A benefit of dual bins was cutting down on the amount of street furniture and the aim was to keep the furniture to a minimum where possible.

In addition, the Assistant Director (Operations) agreed to look into further ways of making the dog / litter bins more visible, such as with the addition of a yellow band, in order to further support visually impaired residents.

In response to a Members concern, the Assistant Director (Operations) agreed to consult with the Disability Access Group when reviewing methods to make the litter bins more accessible for visually impaired people.

The Chair thanked the officers for their detailed report but felt that greater consideration was needed to be given to the Policy as it was a big issue which could impact the community if implemented incorrectly.

The Committee recommended the adoption of the Litter & Dog Waste Bin Policy, but the Chair asked that litter bin provision be revisited at a future meeting of Operational Services Cabinet Committee for a further discussion.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 21:18pm.