

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 17 November 2020

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Dakota Dibben
Nirmal Khabra
Leslie Pearton
Peter Scollard
Steve Thompson
Frank Wardle
Emma Elliott
Leslie Hoskins

Stuart Alford Assistant Director (Operations)
Joel Simons Waste & Projects Compliance Officer
Mary Bobby Cemeteries & Allotments Manager
Mark Lees Regulatory Services Manager
Mandy Francis Licensing Manager
James Bridges Digital Services Officer
Lauren Wallis Committee Services Officer (minutes)

12. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Conrad Broadley and Cllr Gary Harding. Cllr Leslie Hoskins and Cllr Emma Elliott respectively attended as their substitutes.

13. Minutes from Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2020 were signed by the Chair.

14. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Nirmal Khabra declared another interest in Item 7 – Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy Review as he was a Gravesham Hackney Carriage licence holder.

15. Street Scene Update

The Committee was given an update on the improvements being made within the Street Cleansing Service to improve the cleanliness of the Borough in recent months.

The Assistant Director (Operations) introduced the report and advised that the deep cleansing machine had completed its first phase of deep cleaning and had moved onto Community Square and had also been able to access previously inaccessible business frontages during the latest lockdown. It was intended that this machine and the new cleansing staff would also be used elsewhere in the Borough for example Perry Street, the shopping parades in Istead Rise, Meopham etc. There had been a good uplift in the cleanliness of the town centre which had also seen the refurbishment of litter bins, replacement of damaged ashtrays and batteries in the solar bins had also been checked.

The Committee was advised that Kent County Council was duty bound to carry out weed spraying on roads and pavements but this service was not as good as it should be. Earlier in the year, the Borough Council had obtained a weed removal machine which had shown good results and Members' attention was drawn to the before and after photos contained in the report. A schedule was in place to work round the worst affected area and this schedule would be under continuous review.

The Waste Projects & Compliance Officer noted that the Street Cleansing Team always strove to deliver improvements in service and excellent work had been achieved. Members' attention was drawn to the compliments received by the Council in relation to work undertaken by the Team. Further to the report on the Recycling 'On-the-Go' Trial to the last meeting of the Committee, new bins litter and dual compartment recycling bins had been installed in St Andrew's Gardens and had been in place for 2 weeks. A record was being kept of the contaminants in the waste disposed of in the recycling bins which would be monitored for a total of 8 weeks. This data would then be analysed and the findings would inform communications and signage.

Members noted that at the last meeting of the Committee an update had been given on the Adopt a Street initiative and on Street Champions. Officers were now working on how to give Ward Councillors more of a role in co-ordinating volunteers and in the meantime Councillors were asked to contact the Waste Projects & Compliance Officer to be provided details of volunteers within their Wards.

The Waste Projects & Compliance Officer gave an update on figures contained in the report as follows:

- The scheme now had 194 Street Champions up from 186 as set out in the report which showed a total increase of 97.7% and 168 streets had been adopted.
- 237 volunteers had attended a Community Clean event.
- 389 sacks of litter had been collected since the start of the financial year.

The Assistant Director (Operations) concluded that his teams were working closely with the new Environmental Enforcement Team which was under the Communities Directorate and described the process reports of fly tipping went through to allow the collection of any evidence before removal of the rubbish. The officer also gave an update on the progress of future initiatives.

The following points were raised during discussion on this report:

- A question was raised on the purchase of a second deep cleansing machine and another weed ripper to provide continuation of service in case of breakdown. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that the deep cleansing machines were quite expensive and repairs would be completed by the Vehicle Workshop in the event of a

breakdown in a timely manner. The use of the weed ripper machine is being reviewed and if required another machine will be purchase however the Housing Estate Care Team has already procured a weed ripper machine.

- It was noted that it was intended that both these machines would be used in locales outside the town centre and in more rural locations as soon as the team had the capacity.
- A suggestion was made that the weed ripper be used in alleyways around schools to make them safer to traverse and to encourage parents to walks their children to school. The officer undertook to take this on board and asked Members to advise him by email of the alleyways in question.
- In respect of paragraph 6.3.6 of the report, a question was raised on how Members were communicated with in relation to information on Street Champions and litter pick up events.
- It was noted that a street cleanliness Scrutiny Review had been planned which had been delayed by the pandemic which now might possibly not be required as so much progress had been made in recent months.
- The Chair requested that all Councillors encourage the work on the Street Champions.
- Following a question on whether the Council could deal with graffiti on the walls of privately owned properties, Members were advised that graffiti on ground level walls could be dealt with following an indemnity being signed by the owner of the property.

The following positive comments were made by the Committee:

- The report was encouraging and uplifting.
- Brilliant report.
- Wow! Congratulations to the Assistant Director (Operations) and his team and the residents of Gravesham. The Borough was not yet perfect but the commitment of the operatives and residents would continue to increase the success of these initiatives. A Councillor had walked through Gordon Gardens, Fort Gardens and the Promenade and had found one piece of litter.

The Assistant Director (Operations) undertook to pass on the Committee's congratulations and compliments to the appropriate teams. He also expressed the hope that the town centre and other areas being so clean and tidy might cause people to feel alienated if they do not comply.

Resolved that the report be noted.

16. Allotment Bee Keeping Policy

The Assistant Director (Operations) introduced the report and noted that the Allotment Beekeeping Policy assisted the Council in meeting its biodiversity and Climate Change objectives.

The Cemeteries & Allotments Manager advised that the policy had been written following research with the British Beekeepers Association and Kent beekeepers. The Committee was advised that bee numbers were declining and the Council had a duty as a landowner and allotment site provider to have guidelines in place to enable tenants to keep bees. Health and Safety was considered to be very important as was the siting of the hives. For example, hives would not be sited near schools and would be screened to ensure that the bees would

have an upwards trajectory when leaving the colony. In addition, hive owners would have to display signs to warn of the presence of bees and any concerns would be reported to the Cemeteries & Allotments Manager. All allotments would be visited from time to time to ensure adherence to the policy.

The Chair congratulated the officer on a comprehensive and easy to understand report.

The following points were raised during discussion on this item:

- A question was raised on whether a beekeeper would have to leave the allotment if a potential new tenant objected to the presence of the hives. The Committee was advised that the applicants for allotments could choose up to 4 sites and officers would either offer an allotment as far away from the hives as possible or would offer another site. The Cemeteries & Allotments Manager stated that she would not be disposed to move the hives in this situation.
- The Committee was advised that the proposed policy ran side by side with the Kent County Council Plan Bee Policy. The Borough Council's policy had been communicated to all allotment tenants who had all been very supportive. The Assistant Director (Operations) confirmed that the Council was not only working with the County Council but also with the Kent Wildlife Trust and other organisations.
- A suggestion was made that this initiative be brought to the attention of youth groups sometime in the future.
- A concern was raised regarding the County Council's policy to stop cutting the grass verges which simply meant the County had stopped managing the verges. Officers were asked to lobby the County Council to sow the verges with bee friendly plants such as lavender, buddleia for example. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that it was on his agenda to speak with the County Council but there was also Borough-Council owned land where more could be done. It would also help if these initiatives were signposted for residents to enable them to understand the approach being taken with any given site.
- A question was raised on the allotment beekeepers not being permitted to display honey for sale signs. The Cemeteries & Allotments Manager confirmed that allotment tenants were not permitted to sell honey or any other produce. This was in line with advice from the Beekeepers Association. It was noted that the beekeepers could give their honey to friends and family or use it to make soaps, both soaks etc. It was noted that the majority of tenants were happy to have the bees on site because they pollinated the plants.
- Following a comment from the Assistant Director (Operations), the Chair agreed that cemeteries should be used constructively but the public must be made aware because of the sensitivity issues.

Resolved that the Allotment Bee Keeping Policy be recommended for adoption.

17. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy Review

The Regulatory Services Manager presented a report which set out the draft revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and the proposed consultation methodology. The Council published a new policy every three years and the current policy would expire on 30 April 2020. The main changes being proposed to the policy were due to the introduction of new national standards in early in 2020 which, amongst other things, had raised the standards in relation to what constituted a fit and proper person and this had also

resulted in a level national playing field. Members' attention was drawn to the table in Appendix 2 of the report which also proposed that the review period changed from 3 to 5 years with interim reviews if necessary.

The Committee was advised that to had previously been mandatory to have CCTV in all Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles and this was now discretionary. Advice from the Information Commissioner's Office had stated that a licensing authority which mandates the installation of CCTV systems in taxis and private hire vehicles, as the Council has done since 2009, would be responsible for the data and would therefore need to register and act as the data controller. This was considered too unwieldy from a resource point of view and therefore unachievable. However, because CCTV by driver as a deterrent it was it was likely to be retained.

The officer noted that, in support of the Council's carbon neutral commitment, it was proposed to further strengthen licensed vehicle emissions by removing the option to licence vehicles meeting the Euro 6 standards. It was acknowledged that the Council could do more in relation to encouraging a change to electric vehicles but the charging infrastructure was not in place to permit this.

Mandatory disability awareness training for all new applicants and all existing drivers within a set timeframe was also recommended. This was not an onerous requirement as the training was available online, required the ID of the user and cost £12. In addition, the training would drive up standards in the Borough in relation to disability issues.

The Chair emphasised that the proposed policy and the consultation method were set out in the report and asked Member to confine their comments to the consultation process and save their views on the policy for submission during the consultation process.

It was noted that hackney carriage and Private hire drivers were subject to blanket rules but Uber drivers were not and other areas required drivers to fit CCTV. Following a questions on whether CCTV would be made compulsory, the Regulatory Services Manager explained that the Borough Council did not issue Uber licenses which in the part of England were usually issued by Transport for London which also gave Uber drivers the right to roam. The officer also reiterated that The Council had made CCTV in licensed vehicles discretionary because of the advice received from the Information Commissioner's Office.

The Chair added that a Zoom meeting which would include the Regulatory Services Manager and himself could be offered to any Members who had questions.

Resolved that, subject to the inclusion of amendments and suggestions set out above, the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and the policy consultation process be noted.

18. Corporate Performance Report Quarter 1 2020/21

Members were presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework as set out within the Council's Corporate Plan for quarter 2 2020/21 (July to September 2020).

The Chair went through the report page by page and the following comments were made:

PI3 and PI4 - The Regulatory Services Manager advised that the performance of the Council's Environmental Health service had been and continued to be dominated by the ever changing landscape of Covid-19 and that the officers were doing a sterling job regulating businesses etc. In addition, PI4 gave a false reading as many compliant establishments had not yet been inspected.

PI5 – Members were advised that there had been an increase in nuisance complaints as a result of the lockdown and people being at home more. The Chair commented that this was an exceptional service and was absolutely crucial. This view was echoed by the Chair of the Licensing Committee who had seen at close hand how the service was keeping businesses and the public informed, enforcing the rules and all in a very confusing time. The Regulatory Services Manager undertook to pass on the views of the Committee to the team.

PI8, PI9 and PI10 – The Assistant Director (Operations) noted that the year had been, and continued to be, very different due to the impact of Covid-19 and the team had performed brilliantly throughout. The service was now preparing for the Brexit transition period. Appreciation videos had been uploaded across Kent on social media and during Recycling Week when the clock tower had been lit up green. There had also been a high number of communications sent out about this initiative across a range of social media channels. As a result residents and businesses were recycling more and residual waste had decreased.

Following a question on how a person would know why the clock tower was green, the officer conceded that whilst the reason had been published on some social media channels, the decision to light the tower had been somewhat last minute. This would be kept in mind for future initiatives and would also be communicated to Members. However, Councillors were urged to keep a close eye on all means of Council communications. It was also noted that the communication had not appeared on Instagram and the Assistant Director (Operations) undertook to take this back to the Communications Manager.

Resolved that the report be noted.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.49 pm