

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 7 February 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
Gurdip Ram Bungar
Gary Harding
Nirmal Khabra
Leslie Pearton
Alan Ridgers
Brian Sangha
Frank Wardle

Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Operations)
Joel Simons	Waste Projects & Compliance Officer
James Young	Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Karen Gingles	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

16. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

17. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 24 November 2022 were signed by the Chair.

18. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

19. Parks & Open Space 2022 Annual Report

The Committee were presented with the Parks and Open Spaces Annual Report (January – December 2022), which could be found on page 9 of the agenda pack. The purpose of this report was to inform Members of the achievements and activities over the last year. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager highlighted key areas of the report which included:

- Work carried out throughout the borough to regenerate 15 play parks, that were identified as requiring attention and investment. It was noted that some parks had not been updated for 20 years. The development of the chosen sites were possible due to a successful grant funding bid. This injection of funds had accelerated the regeneration plans and meant the project was completed within months rather than years. Members were given an overview of the work carried out at each of the 15

play parks. Improvements varied at each site but included themed play areas, accessibility for all ages and abilities with inclusive play and sensory equipment.

- The Parks and Open Spaces Manager updated the Committee on Gravesham's tree planting efforts over the past year, as part of the Council's drive to deliver a greener Gravesham. Gravesham had planted 20 trees across the borough for the Queen's Jubilee plus 250 native whips to create The Forest of Memories in Instead Rise, to remember those who had died during the Covid19 pandemic. Members were advised that unfortunately due to the drought in 2022, a number of whips had died but would be replaced.
- Following devastation caused by Storm Eunice along the Gordon Promenade, a review of the location had been carried out and in order to promote the biodiversity of the area and to enhance the annual colour, there would be mixed perennial flower beds created. This option would also prove more cost effective.
- Members were informed about the dedication of the Windmill Hill Association to promote the natural habitat through the Buzz Garden. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager also advised that to promote habitats for wildlife 20 bat, bird and owl boxes had been installed in various locations throughout the borough.
- The Committee were informed of the Mindful Moment benches that had been installed throughout the borough. It was hoped that especially during the current economic climate, these benches would offer a place to reflect. Individuals could be signposted for help and support via a QR code on the plaque.
- The Parks and Open Spaces Manager informed Members of the Growing Your Community scheme that was introduced this year. This saw the introduction of raised beds to involve the community in creating and maintaining herb and vegetable plots, which had so far been a success.

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager outlined the aspirations for 2023.

The Chair thanked the Parks and Open Spaces Manager and team for everything that had been achieved in the past year.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comment.

Members raised concern about future maintenance of the parks and how often they would be checked. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager advised that there were 47 parks within Gravesham to maintain and 2 full time park rangers. He informed Members that there are routine, operational and annual checks to ensure the equipment met safety standards and to remove any graffiti. The Committee were updated with a plan to introduce Friends of Gravesham, which would offer residents the opportunity to adopt a local park, volunteer with tasks such as litter picking and flowerbed maintenance. Members were advised this was in the early stage of development, but it was a positive way to bring together the community and create a working partnership. This partnership could also be method to communicate feedback any issues within the parks to ensure they stay well maintained.

The Committee noted that within the report reference was made to the public's perception of the projects being great and well received, but wondered what evidence there was to back up these statements. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager advised that comments were

collated from social media and from speaking to the community in the parks. He went on to say that software was being trialled to look at play park usage such as chosen activities and how long visitors stayed for. This data would offer a valuable insight and a learning tool to see where investment has been of benefit. The software could also provide data since 2019. Members requested that if this software were to be utilised, the Committee would appreciate the data being presented at the Committee meetings going forward.

Members referred to the future aspirations for 2023 and asked in relation to funding for parks, how the horticultural team would request financing from Planning Section 106 funds. The Park and Open Spaces Manager informed the Committee that due to the close working relationship with the Planning department there was an understanding that money from Section 106 funding could be used for this purpose. The Assistant Director (Operations) added that large housing developments often included a play park that was maintained by a management company. He advised that provision was in place to ensure the sites were properly maintained by outside companies.

Members asked if volunteers of the Friends of Gravesham volunteer scheme would have a police DBS check as part of the risk assessment. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager advised that the volunteers would be predominantly for the open space areas rather than the play parks, but this would be taken into consideration.

The Committee asked if there would be a cost implication in replacing the trees in The Forest of Memories that died during the summer drought. Reassurance was given that there was no additional cost, as the replacement trees were a donation. The new trees would be a more robust larger species, would be surrounded by chestnut fencing and have a more robust watering schedule.

The Chair thanked the Parks and Open Spaces Manager and team for the improvements and raising horticulture to a greater standard within the borough. He went on to say that the regeneration of parks gave a huge amount to the community and improved the quality of life for residents.

The Committee noted the report.

20. Waste Management Update Report

The Committee were presented with the Waste Management Update Report. The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on Waste Management & Street Cleansing projects & performance in the 2022 calendar year.

The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer highlighted key areas of the report which included:

- In November 2022 the Council's Recycling, Refuse & Street Cleansing frontline staff were provided with a new orange uniform. The new uniform has made the staff within these services look smarter, as well as more visible on dark mornings. Feedback from staff had been positive.
- Members attention was drawn to p.35 section 3.1 which gave an overview of the recycling performance for 2022. It was highlighted that if 2022 was compared to 2020/21 then there had been a slight drop in recycling, however if compared to the

pre-pandemic year of 2019 then this year had seen a rise in recycling of 4%. It was noted that during 2020/21 there was a higher amount of recycling due to the increase of online ordering during the lock down periods.

The Committee were informed that in relation to food waste recycling, 2022 had seen a 19% decline. This drop was however consistent with the rest of Kent. The Waste Projects and Compliance officer stated that with the current economic climate, this could have been due to residents not wasting food and a reduction in consumption levels.

- The Waste and Projects Compliance Officer explained how contamination of waste in 2022 had improved slightly. He advised Members that since January 2023 KCC has become more stringent with the waste they would accept and rejected 65 tonnes of recycling due to contamination, this in turn was a cost to the Council. In order to mitigate this going forward, the crew had undertaken further training and were required to put red stickers on contaminated resident bins, that must be rejected due to contamination. There had also been an education campaign for residents.
- Fly tipping incidents had fallen in 2022 by 8.9%. Waste management and the Environment Enforcement team continued to work closely to combat the issue. It was noted that 2022 had seen a reduction in tonnage of 12.7%.
- Members attention was drawn to section 3.4 of the report. The Kent Resource Partnership (KRP) organised residual waste (black sack waste) audits to be conducted in May 2022 in all Kent districts. The findings from the audit revealed that in Gravesham, 2.8 kilograms of waste per household per week could have been recycled at the kerbside.
- Gravesham had continued to increase the number of flats that were offered a recycling service.
- The Street Champions initiative was awarded a Certificate of Excellence by IESE in January 2022 and Gravesham Borough Councils' Waste Management Team were also shortlisted for two awards in the 'Local Authority Success' Category at the National Recycling Awards 2022
- Members we informed that in 2022 the team had undertaken a one off project to clear alleyways which had become overgrown/suffered from fly-tipping, whether the alleys were privately- or council owned.

The Waste and Projects Compliance Officer informed the Committee of the future projects for 2023 in section 5 of the report. These included:

- To review the current vehicle fleet to identify options to introduce alternative-fuelled vehicles and thereby reduce carbon emissions.
- Continue to communicate with residents about the changes to bank holiday waste collections from 2023, which meant there would be no change to the normal collection day over bank holiday periods (apart from Christmas).
- Continuing to focus on recycling contamination & participation.
- Continue to work with schools on environmental projects.
- Re-launching kerbside battery collections.

- Looking for funding opportunities to install small electrical collection points at recycling points across the borough, so that residents could easily recycle small electrical items like kettles and toasters.
- Introducing Business Champions. This would be a similar scheme to the successful Street Champions and would enable shopkeepers to keep the road & pavement outside their business clean & tidy between daily visits by Street Cleansing Operatives.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comment.

Members sought clarification regarding excess waste outlined in section 3.2 of the report. It was noted that the report expressed that whilst in 2022 there was a 95.3% reduction in instances of residents putting out excess black sacks and there was a 4.4% reduction in household waste collected in 2022 compared to a 5.9% increase the previous year. It was felt that this reduction of 4.4% should be expressed in a positive way to express to the resident that they were doing well, but this could be improved. The Waste and Projects Compliance Officer advised 4.4% decrease was still an improvement compared to a 5.9% increase in 2021.

The Committee queried the method of recycling in bags as a number of supermarket did not stock clear bags and so some residents may use alternative bags to store their recycling, the Assistant Director (Operations) advised if the resident had a recycling bin, the recommended method would be to put the recycling into the bin loose, so it was clear for the operative to see if the bin was contaminated. He also advised Members that there would be videos produced to communicate to residents the process waste undertook, once collected.

Members questioned what the difference was by Gravesham disposing of contaminated waste rather than it being taken directly to the KCC Recycling Centre by the resident. The Director (Operations) confirmed that the recycling centre would undertake stringent checks to ensure the waste was disposed of correctly.

The Committee commended the idea to re-introduce battery recycling and wondered if there was scope to offer boxes for collection at schools, local shops and the Gurdwara, which had a large footfall. The Waste and Projects Compliance Officer informed Members that large retailers which sold over a set threshold of batteries, must provide a return point for recycling. He advised that recycling schemes were open to outside organisations, so this could be investigated. The recycling boxes were easy for an organisation to manage as they are marked with a returns telephone number, so once full the organisation could arrange collection. The Assistant Director (Operations) would also make contact with Parish Councils to encourage this approach.

Member raised concern regarding the appearance of the proposed electrical recycling points. The Waste and Projects Compliance Officer advised that the photo within the report was only an example and the colour of the unit could be changed. He went on to inform the Committee that the electrical collection points would be placed in existing recycling spots, so would not be out of place. This scheme had been adopted by other Councils in the UK but not in Kent yet. After further discussion Members were informed that the collection point could accept any small electrical item that could fit through the 30cm by 40cm slot.

Clarification was sought as to why the Street Champions only had orange bags for litter picking and not clear for recycling, especially when the majority of litter dropped was

recyclable. Members were advised that Street Champions received both types of bags, to enable recycling.

Members asked if the recycling collection could include the collection of glass, as disposing of glass was not easy for residents that were unable to drive. The Assistant Director (Operations) alluded that the service may be provided in the future.

The Committee commended the fly tipping enforcement response but queried if the Council used cameras to assist with combating the issue. The Assistant Director (Operations) informed Members that cameras were used to catch culprits in certain areas and footage could be used in prosecution.

The Chair commended the Waste and Projects Compliance Officer for the detailed report and thanked the team for their commitment and hard work in making improvements. He encouraged the Committee to inform other Council Members of the great work being undertaken, as it was very important for all residents.

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:43pm