

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Thursday, 23 November 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Emma Morley (Chair)
Cllr Lee Croxton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 David Beattie
 Daniel Adewale King
 Leslie Pearton
 Peter Scollard
 Ektaveen Thandi
 Helen Ashenden

Stuart Alford Assistant Director (Operations)
Joel Simons Waste Projects and Compliance Officer
Mary Bobby Cemeteries and Allotments Manager
Mandy Francis Licensing Manager
Emily Lane-Blackwell Assistant Licensing Manager
Chloe Taylor Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

7. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Alan Ridgers and Cllr Helen Ashenden attended as substitute.

8. Minutes

The minutes of the Operational Services Cabinet Committee held on Thursday, 14 September 2023 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

9. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

10. Order of Agenda

The Committee, in agreement with the Chair, advised that Item 7: Results following consultation of Taxi Tariff would be discussed after Item 5: Operational Services Update Report.

11. Operational Services Update Report

The Assistant Director (Operations), the Waste Projects and Compliance Officer, and the Cemeteries and Allotments Manager presented the committee with a report updating them

on the recent Waste Management, Street Cleansing and Allotment projects and initiatives, and highlighted the following:

- Page 10 of the agenda pack provided an update on the work done in recent months by the waste management and street cleansing teams, such as the introduction of a new town centre recycling round and the flats recycling project.
- They were continuing to look at additional flats that could be added to the recycling project. Currently, 62% of flats now have recycling and 16% of flats have food waste collection, compared to 45% and 4% respectively at the commencement of the project. Across the board, food waste recycling was on the increase and as such we were waiting for further guidance from central government.
- Section 2.3 showed a picture of an incident where a refuse truck had caught fire due to an improperly disposed of battery. Whilst the incident was dealt with quickly, the staff were safe and repairs had been undertaken, this could have led to a more dangerous situation. The council reminded residents, through communications in Your Borough, that batteries can be recycled by placing them in a clear bag on top of your bin on collection day. There were also 34 collection points across Gravesham.
- The council were looking at a project working with vape shops in the borough that sell single use vapes, as these were a growing waste. They had looked at placing collection points, but this would cost per £200 per collection. This was an expensive process, and the government were making further announcements in favour of reusable vapes. This will be explored in the future.
- The communication regarding battery disposal was on-going. A feature had recently been published in the Your Borough magazine, but the Waste Projects and Compliance Officer was aware that not every resident would read it. They were continuously looking for ways to encourage accurate battery disposal.
- The vast majority of batteries collected were placed into small freezer type bags and taken to Pepperhill where they are placed in a special battery recycling box.
- The battery collection points within the borough do not cost the council any money to empty, and were worth small amounts in terms of recycling credits. Collections are funded by the producers of the batteries. When a consumer buys batteries, part of that cost goes towards the recycling of them.
- Section 2.4 referred to the small electricals recycling project, where grant funding was secured to provide 18 small electrical recycling banks in the borough. The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer advised that there was an estimated 17% of residents who lived within a mile of Pepperhill, with the new recycling banks, most residents in the borough were likely to be within a mile radius of a recycling point without the requirement to drive to Pepperhill.
- 408 items were donated since the project was launched on Monday 20 November 2023.
- The small electricals recycling project had been picked up by BBC Southeast News and Kent Radio. The project was putting the Borough forward as we were the only authority in Kent with these types of recycling banks. The processing plant was based on Kent, keeping the recycling scheme local.
- It was difficult to get data regarding recycling statistics in comparison to the wider South East region. However, globally the UK was the second highest about of electronic waste (averaged per person), with only 40% getting captured and recycling across the country.
- The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer advised that he 'd look at the specifics into how environmentally friendly the local recycling plants were. However, members were assured that the plastics that were contained within the electronics stayed

within the UK, and they were authorised treatment facilities with all the required permits.

- There were only two copper motors in the world, and one was being shipped from North America to Sittingbourne to process copper.

Street Champions

As of November 2023, there were 506 street champions. This included groups and individuals who had registered and went out litter picking and adopting streets within the borough. They also reported cases of fly-tipping, graffiti and abandoned vehicles.

The Street Champions were a great addition to what the street cleaning staff did on a daily basis. The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer advised members that there was a street champions register, which included a link to where they could enter how many bags they had collected. This was used to calculate monthly figures that were included in the monthly Members Bulletin.

If members felt that there were particular streets/spaces where street cleansing was required, the Assistant Director (Operations) urged members to email him the location. They will be able to look at how resourced that particular area is. The team are always looking at how they could evolve and acknowledged that some areas need cleaning more than others.

- The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that street cleansing was the back end of the issue. It was important to educate residents not to drop litter, working with schools and community groups to provide a culture where dropping litter would be considered socially unacceptable.
- Since April 2023, 5 tonnes of litter had been every working day.
- There were apps which allowed residents to report fly-tipping. However, it was advised that any reports were done directly through the website as this comes straight through to the system and the enforcement team can review it and investigate. When reports were done through an app, it would need to be transferred over to from one system to another before it could be reviewed.
- Section 3.2 explored the Bartec Collection system. Traditionally, the paper-based system was not the most efficient method, but now the crew can log evidence photos and update the status of a job in real time.
- The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer advised that when contaminated waste was not collected, letters notifying the resident would be sent the next working day. Any delay would likely be a royal mail issue. However, residents were notified with a red sticker on their bin. They can also access the Missed Bin part of the website and it will tell them why the bin was not collected.
- Live green weeds were a highways issue. They spray the weeds twice a year with contact weed spray. Weeds on the pavements was a particular issue within Gravesham as it has a high proportion of curb/pavement slabs where the seeds get into the gaps and grow. To remove them manually would be a difficult and repetitive task.
- Section 3.4 explored unpaid work as part of a conditional caution. This would be targeted towards young first-time offenders. The aim would be to get this launched within the new year (2024) and must be done under the supervision of a council officer.

The Asian Hornet Threat to Honeybees

The Cemeteries and Allotments Manager updated the committee on the treatment of Asian hornets to honeybees. Gravesham had fourteen allotment sites and three of those had active bee keepers on. It was important to protect honeybees, so the council had signed up to various different organisations to receive alerts as regularly as they can. The Asian Hornet was an unwelcome invader, and they will eat all kinds of pollinators, but their favourite food is honeybees.

When the council were notified of potential threats in neighbouring towns, they would instantly notify the beekeepers so that they could be extra vigilant. There were 71 confirmed nests in the UK in 2023 (as of 10 November 2023) in 55 locations. The last confirmed nest was found in July 2023. There were two nests in Gravesend (Springhead and Cobham) and every tenant, not just beekeepers, were notified.

On every allotment site, there was noticeboards containing the poster attached at appendix one. It was also sent out to all tenants via email, text and post. Posters were put up in cemeteries, however these had reportedly been removed. These notices had also gone out in some parks by way of park rangers.

The Cemeteries and Allotments Manager informed members that if there were any presumed sighting, you must alert Kent Asian Hornet. Someone will assess the creature and then make a decision. If it was determined to be an Asian Hornet, the correct process would be taken by a professional.

The Committee noted the report.

12. Results following consultation of Taxi Tariff

The Assistant Licensing Manager presented members of the committee with a report detailing the outcome of the recent consultation with Gravesham licensed Hackney Carriage drivers on the bi-annual taxi tariff review. The recommendation was for members to consider whether there should be any amendments and make recommendations to the portfolio holder for approval.

The following key points were raised:

- The taxi tariff had initially come to the committee in September 2023, where it was recommended that a consultation take place with the drivers. They could either respond via email or a paper form and box in reception. 135 drivers were contacted for comment, 55 responded via email and the only paper form was a duplicate of an answer already submitted via email.
- It was agreed that the paper option for the consultation was not needed in future consultations.
- The majority of the drivers opted for the highest increase. The council fees go up every year and driver wages go up every two years, therefore it was understandable why this was the preferred option.
- Benchmarking was requested and completed against other tariffs in the Southeast area. If the proposed tariff was agreed, it would take Gravesham to the third highest tariff out of thirteen. However, the Assistant Licensing Manager advised that other authorities were likely to or were in a similar process.

- If the proposed tariff was formally accepted, it would be put out to advert for 14 days for anyone to comment on. If there were no objections the tariff would go forward.
- The Licensing Manager informed the committee that Medway Council would be reviewing the tariff in the new year.
- The tariff was a maximum amount and drivers could choose to charge less if they wanted to.

The committee recommended the portfolio holder ratify the proposed taxi tariff.

13. Waste Communications Update

The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer provided the committee with a presentation on the waste communications update. The following key points were highlighted:

- Key issues to address were recycling contamination, side waste (excess refuse), stagnating recycling rates and low food waste recycling participation.
- The key messages to educate and encourage members were outlined.
- The waste communications team had been working on a key project regarding recycling contamination and a video had been produced gaining over 24k views.
- The future projects and outcomes were outlined.

Following questions and comments the following was explained:

- The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that government was reforming how recycling collection services are operated, part of these reforms included producers paying for recycling collection costs and not the tax payer.
- The council were looking at a number of options regarding what additional services they could offer, such as glass collection and increasing the food waste collection to additional flats.
- A lot had changed since the kerb side recycling service was introduced. The council was speaking with operators at sorting facilities to explore glass recycling, ensuring that materials were collected properly. Technology had changed and there was now the potential to add glass to the recycling service. However, they to ensure this was introduced in the right way.
- It was advised that the issues with food waste could relate to households having the food container on the side and smells relating to the disposal of food waste. However, it was likely that these food containers would be emptied more frequently than the regular waste bins.
- The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that the food bins were lockable, but they could speak with the supplier about alternative bins. It was important to have a balance between lockable, but quick and easy to empty for the staff.
- The council supply recycling bags for properties who do not have refuse bins. The council could look at the option of selling them at a discounted price to residents who wanted them.
- The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer informed members that there was a process for those with contaminated bins. When a bin cannot be collected due to contamination, the location will be logged in a system and a letter will be sent the next working day to the resident explaining why their bin was not collected. If it was a second offence, waste management would knock at the address and speak with the resident. If there continues to be additional offences, the issue would then be escalated. As a last resort, there was the possibility that the recycling bin was

removed altogether. However, the council were engaging with residents as it was often a case of misunderstanding whether an item, such as nappies, could be recycled.

- The council also try to engage with local hospitals and maternity wards to inform caregivers that nappies cannot be recycled.
- Residents cannot trade in their recycling bin and ask for an additional black bin. The provision for black bins was based upon the size of the household.

Cllr Emma Morley recommended that members visit the Brookvale depot as it was an insightful look into the work being undertaken.

The committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.17pm