

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 24 March 2021

7:30pm

Present:

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

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

Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Operations)
Elizabeth Thornton	Service Manager (Property & Regulatory Services)
Mark Lees	Regulatory Services Manager
Mandy Cartwright	Senior Environmental Health Officer
Joel Simons	Waste Projects & Compliance Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant

25. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

26. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 09 February 2021 were signed by the Chair.

27. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Nirmal Khabra declared an interest in item 7 as he was a Taxi Driver operating in Gravesham.

28. Operational Services Update Report

The Committee were provided with an update on recent operational service projects & performance over the last six months.

The Assistant Director (Environment) and the Waste Projects & Compliance Officer outlined key performance points to Members from the following service areas:

- Waste & Recycling
- Street Cleansing
- Horticultural Services
- Vehicle Workshop

In response to Members questions on each of the service areas, the Assistant Director (Operations) and the Waste Projects & Compliance Officer explained that:

Street Cleansing

- The length of time each cleanse took depended on a multitude of factors such as how dirty the floor was, when it had its last clean and if there was ample parking for the vehicle. Within the Town Centre, the machine was able to clean about 300-500 metres a day but shopping parades such as Perry Street usually took longer due to the restricted parking and less well-maintained pavements. The team had also faced challenges that stemmed from the pandemic but overall, the use of the machine to cleans streets in the Borough had been a success
- The shopping parades listed within the report were only the starting point for the operating schedule of the machine; once they had been visited then other shopping parades such as Painters Ash and Lawrence Square would be added to the list
- The team aimed to visit every shopping parade in the Borough at least once a year for a deep clean whereas the Town Centre would be cleaned more regularly as it received the highest footfall

Horticultural Services

- The majority of the grass verges in the Borough were owned by KCC but the team were looking at planting wild flowers on the verges that Gravesham did own, especially in the urban areas. The flowers would not be planted to cut pollution, but they would increase the levels of biodiversity in urban areas such as flowers, butterflies, bees, and pollination etc
- The team were in discussions with KCC regarding planting wild flowers on their grass verges, but they were working across the County and progress was slow. On a more positive note, KCC had increased their tree planting programme with a number of street trees being planted in Gravesham
- The team were also in discussions with the EDC regarding their parcels of land and what could be done to increase biodiversity on them
- There was still an ambition to transform parts Gravesend's Cemeteries into wild flower meadows but over the last months it had been difficult for the team operationally which meant it hadn't been a main priority
- Although not listed in the report, the team were currently working on a project at the Larkin Memorial on Telegraph Hill; the team were hoping to receive external funding from Highways England to work with partners to develop that bit of land. Discussions had also been held with those external partners about funding for other projects which could include meadow gardens in the cemeteries

Vehicles Workshop

- There were a number of officers, especially those in building services, who took their vehicles home with them and went straight to their work sites in the morning which meant it would hinder them if they had to go to the depot every morning to charge their vehicles. That was an area that was being investigated as part of the process for electrification of the fleet as the team did not want any operational benefits to be removed due to that. A common error was that electric vehicles needed to be charged to the max all the time, but they were similar to petrol/diesel vehicles in that they could run effectively 'without a full tank'.. Many homes were not suitable for car

chargers as not everyone had a drive. To combat that issue, the team had been looking at purchasing fast chargers which could charge up a vehicle in 20-30 minutes while the officer was restocking from the depot. Additionally, the vehicles would also be able to use the fast chargers that were planned to be installed in several car parks in the Town Centre

- The recycling of old car batteries was an interesting area; some companies such as Renault had been recycling them into storage containers to store power attained through solar panels. The Assistant Director (Operations) couldn't commit to adding full solar panel use for Council properties to the ten-year carbon neutral plan, but he assured Members that the Council were mindful of where the electricity came from. There were more green forms of electricity available such as solar panels and wind turbine power; the new Civic Centre would likely incorporate a degree of power from such places. Members were reminded that electrification of vehicles and green electricity were the best options available now but in ten years, a new source of power such as hydrogen could be more widely available as everything was constantly changing

The Assistant Director (Operations) agreed to speak to the lead officer for Gravesham Joint Transportation Board about placing a KCC grass verges time on the agenda of the next meeting.

The table at 2.4 of the report listed the tonnages for quarters 1-3 but the Chair felt that the figures for percentage increases were more useful and asked that they be emailed to Members of the Committee. The Assistant Director (Operations) agreed to circulate those figures after the meeting.

The Chair asked that the Committees thanks be passed down to the teams as their excellent work, in very difficult circumstances, was greatly appreciated by Members and the local Community.

The Chair praised the level of detail in the report and was encouraged to see that the Council achieved its highest ever rate of household recycling (45%), whilst delivering 99.8% of all scheduled bin collections in the borough.

29. Recycling On-the-Go Trial Analysis and Expansion Plans

The Committee were provided with an update on the initial results of the recycling on-the-go trial at St Andrew's Gardens and details of expanding the recycling 'on-the-go' scheme to the Riverside Leisure Area and Woodlands Park.

The Waste Projects & Compliance Officer went through the results each of the recycling bin trials outlined in the report and informed them of the plans for the future.

In response to Members questions, the Assistant Director (Operations) explained that:

- The imagery that was going to be placed on the bins in the three main parks in Gravesham: Riverside, Woodlands and Camer had already been chosen. The image that was selected had positive shots of Gravesham such as Windmill Hill and the River in the picture; it was felt that it reflected Gravesham as a Borough and painted a positive picture of the area
- There was an error at 3.4 to the report; it should have said that Medium was 20% not 33%

The Chair the officers for an informative report.

30. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy Review

The Committee were presented with the consultation responses received in respect of the draft revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy. The report included an evaluation of each response and gave a recommendation as to whether or not to amend the draft revised policy statement and, if so, in what way and to what extent. Member input was sought in finalising the policy statement for publication and implementation.

The Regulatory Services Manager highlighted key points from the review to the Committee; Members noted that there were four notable changes to the draft document that they reviewed in November 2020 arising from the consultation, dual plating was not allowed for Gravesham taxi drivers and the vehicle emissions standards and vehicle inspections would be brought back to the Committee for consideration in the future.

The Regulatory Services Manager also advised the Committee that, since the consultation, Government have announced plans to introduce mandatory HRMC checks as part of taxi and private hire licence applications from April 2022. Exact details are not yet known, and will be set out in Regulations in due course, however this will necessitate slight changes being made to the application procedures in order to reflect the legislative requirements. It was recommended therefore that, in addition to the proposed policy amendments, Members agreed for officers to make the necessary minor administrative amendments to the relevant sections of the Policy to reflect/facilitate this.

The Regulatory Services Manager fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The private hire vehicle drivers in Gravesham were able to work anywhere in the Country, the same as Uber were able to and there wasn't any policy decision set by Gravesham which hindered their ability to work elsewhere. Organisations such as Uber used an app-based platform which was popular among users as they could request vehicles from their mobiles whenever and wherever they wanted. Smaller companies were looking at developing similar apps for smaller areas but in no way were any local companies disadvantaged by policy decisions set by Gravesham.
- When a driver had a DBS check carried out, the certificate was sent back to the individual as it was their own personal data. With their consent, that DBS certificate was then provided to the Council for their hackney carriage/private hire applications. There was no DBS check data sharing between the Council and KCC, the only data shared in this regard was by the consenting individual to fulfil application requirements/ conditions of their licence
- Most licence holders had signed up to the DBS update service; the hard copy paper check only related to new certificates. Drivers that already had their certificates from other local authorities were accepted, subject to them being of the same level/standard required and suitably up to date, as it was deemed unfair to make them pay c.£60 to undertake another DBS check.
- Dual plating referred to a vehicle being licenced by more than one authority; the team had also reached out to TFL and they confirmed that they did not allow dual plating either

Members agreed that following the policy being updated as proposed, the Portfolio Holder for Operational Services would approve the final policy without further need to report back to the Committee.

31. Annual Review of the Licensing Shared Service

The Committee were provided with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Licensing Shared Service with Medway Council.

The Regulatory Services Manager gave a brief overview of the Licensing Shared Services performance to the Committee.

Cllr Steve Thompson and Cllr Frank Wardle were both impressed with the excellent service provided by the Licensing Team and thanked them for working tirelessly throughout the pandemic. Thanks, were also given to the Committee Section for their assistance with the Committees and Panels.

The Chair echoed the positive comments by Members and asked that the Committees thanks and appreciation be passed down to the teams for their exemplary work.

32. Operational Services Covid-19 Update

The Committee were provided with an update against how the Council had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of specific activities in response to the pandemic and how the Council had managed to maintain service delivery across Council services.

The Assistant Director (Operations) expanded further on the points made in the report:

- All of the core services were kept running over course of the year; during the December / January / February period the refuse team worked in excess of 30% of frontline staff being off due to the safety restrictions in place and the track & trace system. Overall, the teams at the depot had a very low number of cases of Covid and they were all isolated cases
- The Health and Safety practices put in place by the Senior Environmental Health Officer were very helpful and the teams adhered to all of them; all of the staff were actively engaged with and communicated to throughout the pandemic
- Some of the planned street cleansing works were not able to be completed over the autumn/winter period but the team were working to catch up
- A plan was in place to start to open everything back up (such as re-installing playground equipment) in line with the Government's roadmap out of lockdown
- The summer weekend cleaning programme had been brought forward to late February/early March so that areas were clean moving out of lockdown
- All administration staff at the depot had been working from home and many systems had successfully been digitised
- A huge number of garden waste subscriptions were delivered

The Regulatory Services Manager added that he felt the work of the other three teams within his service should be commended for the scale of work that they had delivered throughout the pandemic. The Commercial Team led by Mandy Cartwright and Clare Reed led on Covid compliance in Gravesham's businesses and they handled a large number of external complaints and enquiries which were detailed more within the report. The Environmental

Protection Team also dealt with over one thousand nuisance related matters during the pandemic which was a large number to successfully deal with under the Covid restrictions.

In response to a Members question concerning the likely increased levels of people using the public parks, the Assistant Director (Operations) explained that the team expected numbers to rise and the parking for each site was being considered. At Camer Park, the largest in Gravesham, the team were working to make sure the overflow car park was ready for public use, but the team were waiting for dry weather so that cars would not get stuck. Other parks such as Jeskyns and Shorne were not under Gravesham's responsibility but the Assistant Director (Operations) had a meeting planned for next week to discuss the impact parking around Jeskyns had on the area. It was hoped that local people could be encouraged to walk or cycle to the parks in Gravesham.

The Chair agreed with the comments made by officers and asked that the Committees thanks and appreciation also be passed down to the teams in Regulatory Services for their hard work.

33. Health and Safety, and Covid 19, Enforcement and Prosecution Policies

The Committee was presented with the updated Health and Safety Enforcement and Prosecution Policy, and the new Covid 19 Enforcement and Prosecution Policy.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer outlined key points from the policy and explained to Members the powers of enforcement that had been given to local authorities with regard to Covid restrictions and non-compliance.

Members were informed that under the powers issued, the Council had served fourteen fixed penalty notices to local businesses, two of which had not complied with payment of the FPN, and the first court hearing was set for May 2021.

Members considered and approved the updated Health and Safety Enforcement and Prosecution Policy, and the new Covid 19 Enforcement and Prosecution Policy, and recommended their approval.

Members agreed that following recommendation from the Cabinet Committee, the Portfolio Holder for Operational Services approved the final policies without further need to report back to this Committee.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:52pm.