

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 7 June 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
Sarah Gow
Gary Harding
Nirmal Khabra
Leslie Pearton
Alan Ridgers
Brian Sangha
Frank Wardle

Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Operations)
Mary Bobby	Cemeteries and Allotment Manager
James Young	Parks and Open Space Manager
Joel Simons	Waste Projects and Compliance Officer
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Gurdip Bungar and Cllr Sarah Gow attended as his substitute.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23 March 2022 were signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Park & Open Space Update

The Parks and Open Space Manager provided Members with a presentation on the Council's parks and open space, please click the link below to view the presentation:-

[Agenda for Operational Services Cabinet Committee on Tuesday, 7 June 2022, 7.30 pm – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

The Committee thanked the Parks and Open Space Manager for an informative presentation and highlighted the following:-

- commended the improvements made to the play parks and welcomed the sensory parks/gardens as they were inclusive for all particularly for children with limited vision, mobility etc;
- commended the significant improvement in relation to tree planting around the Borough and requested that the Council investigates opportunities for local residents to be gifted a tree for planting at home and/or a discounted tree purchase scheme;
- acknowledged the importance of biodiversity and that the Council should continue to encourage/promote biodiversity i.e. flower meadows etc. The Parks and Open Space Manager advised that a biodiversity assessment of the open spaces within the Borough will be undertaken; and
- what measures had been put in place to prevent and monitor anti-social behaviour in play parks. The Parks and Open Space Manager advised that a number of parks already had CCTV however the Team was currently exploring a long-term solution to prevent and monitor anti-social behaviour particularly for those areas that continue to experience long-term issues.

The Committee stated that it was good to see horticulture becoming more of a presence at the Committee and requested that the presentation be available to all Members.

5. Street Scene Update

The Committee was informed that, in recent months, a number of projects had been progressed in order to continue to improve the cleanliness and general appearance of the Borough.

The Waste Projects and Compliance Officer provided Members with an update on the following projects:-

- to ensure that graffiti was removed quickly, the Street Cleansing Team had allocated extra resources to removal of graffiti. The Team had also been contacting third party companies who own and manage street furniture and other assets such as utility boxes, post boxes and phone boxes around the Borough in order to clarify their policy towards graffiti removal and to identify the optimal reporting method(s). The Council's website had been updated to allow residents to report instances of graffiti directly to the correct third parties;
- the 'Welcome Back Fund' had been utilised to re-paint street furniture in the Town Centre and on shopping parades. Following a successful bid, the Council had been awarded £13,180.40 by the Waste and Resource Action Plan and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to fund litter bin replacement and recycling 'on-the-go' programme on shopping parades within the Borough;
- in the Spring and Summer of 2021, a bespoke campaign was developed for the Town Centre, with specific messages applicable to the Town Centre environment and the cleansing issues that arise there. The parks and open spaces campaign was refreshed with specific messages for users of our parks and open spaces. Further bespoke campaigns had also been developed and delivered for the rural parts of the Borough in collaboration with Parish Councils as well as specific urban locations in Northfleet. The intention being to give residents and visitors to these locations a

warm welcome but to remind them of their responsibilities in order to keep the street scene clean and tidy;

- the Great British Spring Clean returned for its seventh year in 2022 and ran from 25 March to 10 April, the message for the campaign this year was to join the #BigBagChallenge and pledge to pick up as much litter as possible during the campaign. This year, 24 litter picks were scheduled in Gravesham and 263 sacks of litter were collected during organised litter picks. In addition, Street Champions litter picked in their local areas as they do all year round. Between April 2021 and March 2022, Gravesham's Street Champions reported on undertaking 1,052 litter-picks and collecting 2,857 sacks of litter;
- since the launch of the Street Champions in January 2020, there had not been an opportunity for volunteers and Ward Members to get together and meet socially to celebrate the success of the initiative due to the pandemic. Approximately 50 Volunteers, Members and Officers attended the first Street Champions 'Meet & Greet' event on 24 May. A representative from the North Kent Neighbourhood Watch Association attended to meet the Street Champions and shared information about the initiative. At the event, 3 individual Street Champions began the process of setting up a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in their respective areas. Officers had agreed to work closely with the North Kent Neighbourhood Watch Association to promote the Street Champions initiative further in Gravesham and to promote the Neighbourhood Watch initiative amongst the Street Champions; and
- LitterLotto was a mobile phone app which encouraged people to bin their litter, with users being entered into a draw to win a monthly jackpot of £10,000, as well as spot prizes ranging from £5 to £250. To take part, residents simply needed to download the app and take a photo of their litter as they put it in the bin. For every piece of litter binned, participants get another entry and more chances to win prizes.

The Committee considered the report and highlighted the following:-

- the Council should explore and promote any opportunities/initiatives to encourage people to bin their litter i.e. the LitterLotto App, litter-picking activities in parks and open spaces such as Friends of Parks. The Committee was informed that the Council was currently exploring community involvement initiative for litter picking particularly in parks and open spaces. The Committee highlighted that the QR code included in the report was currently directing to a different App;
- the Committee commended the work of the Street Champions. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that the Council had promotional leaflets to encourage people to sign up to be Street Champions and would arrange for these leaflets to be available to Members for distribution; and
- the Chair stated that it was important for all work, initiatives, schemes etc. be publicised.

The Committee thanked the Waste Projects and Compliance Officer for the informative report.

6. Allotments Update

The Committee was informed that the Council owned and managed 14 Allotment sites, these sites were spread across the urban part of Gravesend and Northfleet. Allotments within the Parishes were owned and managed by the Parish Councils.

There were currently 345 allotment plots of which 294 were tenanted. To manage demand, the number of plots available had been increased by dividing newly available plots into two. Although, the Council had taken this action, there continued to be a waiting list of 226 residents. The interest in having an allotment plot increased during the pandemic and had continued to do so. Sites such as Central Avenue, Chalk New and Bellman Avenue were the Council's most sought after sites with prospective tenant waiting more than 3 years for a plot to become available.

The Cemeteries and Allotment Manager highlighted the following:-

- a lot of work had been undertaken to improve the allotment sites across the Borough including the replacement of boundary fencing to make sites more secure and removal of rubbish which had historically been dumped on the sites;
- an Allotment Assistant post had been created so that dedicated time could be allocated to the provision of the allotment service including carrying out maintenance checks on each site, engaging with tenants, checking that plots were being regularly tended to and, where necessary, assisting a tenant if their plot becomes neglected. In some cases, where a plot becomes neglected due to it being too much for the tenant, the Council can reduce the plot to a manageable size, not only does this help the current tenant but also give opportunities to those currently on the waiting list;
- the service had changed the way in which tenants can communicate with the Council. The Council now had a smart phone allowing tenants to keep in contact via text message and WhatsApp as well as telephone or email. The service was also in the process of designing a newsletter which will be issued to all tenants quarterly. The newsletter will contain important updates including any planned works, useful hints and tips for a successful allotment, before and after photos and other useful information;
- the allotments can sometimes be the only green space within an urban area so it was important to take advantage of this by maximising biodiversity on the sites. The Council offers advice to the tenants on how they can encourage biodiversity. To also support this, a Bee Keeping policy was also introduced in November 2020, Bellman Avenue was a very popular site for the keeping of honeybees;
- the service had been working with the Community Payback Team who had been able to assist in the clearance of neglected and overgrown plots;
- the Cruden Road allotment site was in need of some major works in order to bring the site back into full use. There were currently only 3 active tenants, therefore, plans were currently being drawn up to make 20 individual plots available;
- the service was currently managed via Excel spreadsheets, the aim will be to purchase a dedicated software solution which will make it easier to manage the service but also the information provided to tenants and residents; and
- the current allotment policy will be updated within the next year to incorporate many of the changes made within the service so both the Council and tenants understand their responsibilities.

The Committee considered the report and highlighted the following:-

- the Council to ensure that new large development schemes provide allotment space particularly if a development consumed existing allotment space/land. The Cemeteries and Allotment Manager advised that new large development schemes do offer allotment space/land i.e. Springhead Park had an allotment site although there

was currently a waiting list. The Council also works closely with Parish Councils regarding the allotment sites owned and managed by them;

- the Council to explore pockets of land (including greenbelt) which could be used to increase its allotment space;
- consideration be given to an additional category for the Civic and Community Awards to recognise peoples contribution within a particular area and for bettering lives as there were really good examples of people working hard and dedicating time to allotment plots with the produce grown being donated to the local community;
- when an allotment is abandoned/neglected, can the Council speed up the termination process and/or contractually oblige tenants. The Cemeteries and Allotment Manager advised that, when an allotment is abandoned/neglected, the Council needed to follow the relevant legislation which can be a lengthy process. The Council had amended its annual billing notice/agreement highlighting key points and regulations. Tenants will be requested to acknowledge these by way of signature; and
- continue to improve the way in which tenants can communicate i.e. consideration be given to facilitating a social media platform so that the tenants can make contact with each other.

The Committee thanked the Cemeteries and Allotment Manager for an informative report.

7. Corporate Performance Report: Q4 2021-22

The Committee was presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Four 2021-22 (January to March 2022).

The Committee considered the report and highlighted the following:-

- PI 8 - % of household waste recycled, the Committee asked for an update on the phased introduction and enhancement of the recycling provision for flats and how the Council compared to other local authorities in Kent. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that the introduction and enhancement of the recycling provision for flats continued to be implemented. It was difficult to do a direct comparison with other local authorities in Kent however it was felt the Council was on average. The recycling project will be enhanced once the Council becomes aware of the outcome of the Consistency Consultation. The household waste tonnage had increased however it was felt that this was due to the pandemic in that more people were working from home, clearing their houses etc;
- PI 10 - % of household waste sent to landfill, the Committee asked if there had been an impact following the reintroduction of not accepting additional black bags. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that there was a big impact initially. The reintroduction was publicised on social media and residents who presented excess black sacks received bin hangers and an educational letter with further advice; and
- PI 11 - Average time taken to remove graffiti identified as GBC responsibility (days), the Committee asked whether the Council was aware of the average time taken by third party companies to remove graffiti. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that the Council did not currently have timescales however the Council was working with those third party companies to obtain copies of their service level agreements.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.57 pm.