

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

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

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

Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Operations)
Mark Lees	Regulatory Services Manager
Deborah Wilders	Environmental Protection Team Leader
Karen Gingles	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

21. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 7 February 2023 were signed by the Chair.

23. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

24. Annual Review of the Licensing Shared Service

The Committee were presented with the Annual Review of the Licensing Shared Service. The purpose of this report was to provide Members with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Licensing Shared Service with Medway Council. The report was for information only.

The Regulatory Services Manager informed the Committee that the shared service with Medway had been in place since 2019 and was the only Gravesham led shared service.

The Regulatory Services Manager highlighted key points from the report:

- The Licencing Department now had a full complement of staff for the first time. There had been an evaluation of the needs of the service, which resulted in a temporary staffing restructure. The reallocation of staff has contributed to the successful collection of unpaid annual fees amounting to £27K and rising.
- The Licencing team had worked closely with Digital and IT in delivering an enhanced digital service by creating more online forms, which had been of benefit to both the service user and staff alike. One of the newly created forms linked vehicle licencing services with Rosherville Servicing Ltd, offering an efficient online end to end service, which had proved a great success.

The Chair gave his thanks for the report and expressed how it was a really positive reflection of how the shared service was developing.

The Committee were invited to make comments and ask questions:

- Members agreed it was a very encouraging report. They queried what challenges had been faced with the new online format, in respect to engaging the taxi licence holders regarding inspection reminders. It was also asked if further improvements were to be made. The Regulatory Services Manager explained that there had been no issues and the process had run very smoothly, with the Rosherville operatives being very flexible with inspection appointments. The Assistant Director (Operations) added that since the new service was offered back in October 2022, after each inspection, questionnaires had been provided to the licence holders. The feedback from these had been very positive, commending the easy booking system and seamless operation.

The Regulatory Services Manager alluded that taxi drivers were requested to undertake a safety and standards inspection and pre-licence inspection around the same time, which could prove onerous for the driver, so to improve the service further, this may be looked at.

- Members queried what area of licencing the collection of unpaid invoices amounting to £27K related to. The Regulatory Services Manager advised this figure was for fees collected for premises licences. He explained the reason this only related to premises licences was because all other licence fees, (such as taxi licences) had to be paid in advance, in order to obtain their licence. Premises licence fees were payable annually and therefore often needed to be chased and collected.

The Chair commended the work of the Licensing department and expressed how they were an example of a shared service that had worked very well.

The Committee noted the report.

25. Air Quality Annual Status Report

The Committee were presented with the Air Quality Annual Status Report. The report was for information only, to update Members on the Air Quality Annual Status and to inform them of the direct links that air quality had with climate change.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that the report was submitted to Defra in June and was a good summary of what had been achieved and what was planned for the coming year.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader highlighted key points from the report:

- Members were informed that two types of monitoring occurred within Gravesham to measure the levels of Nitrogen Dioxide. Continuous monitoring of Nitrogen Dioxide occurred using air quality analysers. These were required for areas deemed by Defra to be Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). These were located close to the A2 trunk road and the Northfleet industrial area. For areas within the borough with heavy traffic flows, background levels of pollutants and or where property development was likely, there were 71 passive diffusion tubes located to monitor nitrogen dioxide.
- It was noted that there had been an improvement in air quality during Covid19, but this was due to the reduction in travel. The current figures although higher, were in line with pre-pandemic levels.
- The Committee were informed that moving forward The Council would continue to use the passive monitoring network to determine whether AQMAs needed amending or whether there are any new areas of concern.
- The Council would continue to work with partners KCC and National Highways to improve air quality. The Environmental Protection Team Leader informed Members that a new action plan was being drafted, which would require input from the Committee in due course.

The Chair noted that air quality was a national issue and queried whether the air quality and subsequent health, was poorer in areas of deprivation. The Environmental Protection Team Leader advised that although some areas such as London fitted this model, Gravesham did not follow that trend. The areas of poor air quality in Gravesham were not limited to deprived areas.

The Committee were invited to make comment and to have their questions answered:

- Members queried whether the odours from Northfleet Sewage Works fell under the remit of air quality. They were advised that whilst complaints of this nature could be investigated under nuisance powers, it was mainly a planning consideration in not approving developments in the vicinity of such sites. She went on to say that GBC worked with the sewage works, giving them dates and time of any complaints to pinpoint the issue.
- The Committee had concerns about air pollution impacting the health of the large proportion of residents living in the urban areas of Gravesham, especially with new developments being approved around the town centre and ring road. The Environmental Protection Team leader informed Members that both the statistic modelling and air monitoring undertaken, were stipulated by Defra and were very accurate in their findings. She assured the Committee that pollution levels in the town did not exceed objectives. She advised that nitrogen dioxide levels were exceeded

in certain areas of the ring road and on the A2 trunk road. Members were also informed that overall levels were better than a number of other local towns such as Maidstone.

- Members considered the Council's carbon neutral pledge alongside the need to develop properties within the town centre. It was felt that thought should be given to an air quality indicator for the public to view. It was suggested this could not only help to engage with residents on the matter, but also assist from a planning perspective and lead to less objection relating to air quality. The Environmental Protection Team Leader advised there was a website called www.kentair.org.uk that provided this information to the public. It was noted by Members however that in order to engage, it was important to promote the webpage, so people were aware of this.

The Regulatory Services Manager advised the Committee that he would liaise with the Communications team to promote the Kent Air website to residents. The Environmental Protection Team leader also informed Members that she would liaise with the Communications team in relation to an education tool kit for children and Clean Air Week.

The Chair praised the report as a good news story and agreed that with the Council's carbon neutral pledge, the public should be made aware of the air quality levels within the borough and it should be highlighted, that levels were a great improvement on how they had been in the past.

The Committee noted the report.

26. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Three 2022-23

The Committee were presented with the Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Three 2022-23. The purpose of this report was to update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2022-23 (October to December 2022). Members were advised the report was for information only.

The Regulatory Services Manager highlighted key areas of the report and Members had their questions answered:

- Members attention was drawn to PI.3 which indicated the total number of reported Health & Safety incidents. This showed that although there were 8 incidents in quarter 3, this was still considered low, as was a figure relating to the entire borough.
- The chair raised a query regarding PI.4 and whether the 95.7% of establishments who were compliant in the last quarter related to only those inspected during that quarter. The Regulatory Services Manager informed Members that this figure reflects the level of compliance across all registered food businesses, in that 688 of the 719 registered food business in Gravesham were compliant. Of the remaining 33 premises, 27 were newly registered and were yet to have their inspection. He went on to say that as new businesses joined the register, they were placed on a waiting list to have an inspection. During the interim period the Council could not be satisfied that these establishments complied until they had been inspected and therefore it was normal to be marked as non-compliant.

- The Committee were referred to PI.5 which showed the percentage of environmental health service requests that received a first response within 5 working days. The Regulatory Service Manager highlighted that figures had remained high and informed the committee that the team had been piloting a mobile application to assist in nuisance investigations and to modernise the service. This new approach would enable the public to register a noise complaint online.

The Assistant Director (Operations) highlighted key points from the report and Members had their questions answered:

- The Committee were given an update on waste and recycling. They were informed that in the last quarter during the period of adverse weather, some properties were not accessible for collection, however extra collections were carried out to those properties before the Christmas period. The Chair was appreciative of the hard work by the team during the heavy snow fall and asked that his thanks be passed on.
- Reference was made to P1.9 which outlined the total volume of residual waste per household. It was noted that residual waste had continued to fall. Members were informed that there was also a reduction in recycling, which may have been due to the cost of living crisis with possibly less food being purchased and so less wastage.
- Members were informed that Gravesham now had 500 Street Champions who were currently undertaking The Great British Spring Clean.
- The Committee were advised that Gravesham had secured funding to clear the shopping parades throughout the borough of chewing gum, which has helped improve the street scene. Members queried if areas such as Painters Ash had been included. The Assistant Director (Operations) assured the Committee that all shopping parades within the borough had been jet washed with chewing gum removed, as part of the grant scheme. He went on to say that it was hoped that this process could be incorporated into the usual cleaning regime in the future.
- Reference was made to PI.11 and the time taken to respond the removal of graffiti. It was noted that this continued to be actioned at a quicker pace.
- Attention was drawn to PI.12 and the percentage of areas with unacceptable littering. The Assistant Director (Operations) notified the Committee that levels of street cleansing had improved through better equipment and changes to the cleaning schedules. He also alluded that the team were looking at other ways to improve the street scene using external resources.
- The Assistant Director (Operations) informed Members of the recent opening of a number of renovated play parks within the borough. He expressed that the funding for the playparks throughout the borough had provided fantastic transformations, completely changing the play park landscapes making a huge difference for the local communities. Members queried how the playparks would be maintained and how the usage would be monitored. The Assistant Director (Operations) advised that there would be an updated programme of improvement and upkeep. With regards to monitoring this was being dealt with by the Parks & Open Spaces Manager and this information would be fed back to the committee at a later date.

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:45pm