

Scrutiny Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 1 October 2019 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Chair);
Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Robert Canning, Sherwan Chowdhury, Luke Clancy and
Felicity Flynn

Also Present: Councillor Michael Neal
Councillor Stuart Collins, Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon
Tom Lawrence, Head of Environmental and Leisure Services
Danielle Emery, Waste and Recycling Manager
Owen Giddings, Assistant Contract Manager
Scott Edgell, General Manager Veolia
Chris Stockham, Contract Manager Street Cleansing , Veolia
Andrea Lowe, Senior Contract Manager, Veolia

Apologies: Councillor Vidhi Mohan gave his apologies, Councillor Michael Neal was in attendance in his absence.

PART A

28/19 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2019, that was published as a supplement to the original version contained in the agenda, were agreed as an accurate record.

29/19 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

30/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

31/19 Cabinet Member Question Time: Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon

The Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon, Councillor Stuart Collins presented his report which included the following highlights:

- There had been an increase in recycling rates in the last year from 38% to 48%. New initiatives were planned and being rolled out to encourage more recycling.
- There had been a video produced as part of National recycling week about Croydon's recycling journey which was available on the Council website;
- Croydon's children understood the problems faced and it was encouraging through school visits to witness the extent of their knowledge, understanding and commitment to playing their part to tackle environmental issues;
- The Council was working with businesses to encourage waste minimisation through education on single use plastic and the use of reusable water containers;
- The community was being encouraged to report fly tipping with a £100 reward incentive for information provided that led to prosecution. A community based approach to enforcement was being encouraged;
- Croydon had a good track record of prosecuting environmental offenders and the Council suggested to the Probation Service and Courts that offenders service their offence by clearing up fly tips;
- Monitoring of pick up rates of fly tips was in progress and the achieved rate of 97% of collections within 24hrs was commendable;
- There had been a reduction in the number of missed collection due to changes made to ensure that the same crew collected from the kerbside as well as bulky waste;
- The Cabinet Member had written to the Secretary of State regarding Croydon being a trial borough for a sofa collection deposit scheme which may alleviate some of the fly tipping issues.

It was asked whether assurance could be given that there was no intention to change the frequency of waste collections to a monthly schedule. The Cabinet Member responded that there were no changes planned and even in the event of further austerity cuts there would be no changes. The only potential changes would be if the Council was in the position to offer flats above shops the ability to recycle.

There was a concern that the initiative of £100 to report fly tips could cause neighbourhood disputes. The Cabinet Member responded that this initiative was for more serious cases of fly tipping and it was rare that details of the informant would be released. The informant was also able to withdraw their statement if they wished to. It was important that if information that led to a prosecution was provided, that there would be no repercussions for the informant and all necessary steps would be taken to protect their identity.

A further challenge was made that evidential tracking that resulted in prosecution was difficult and it was questioned what improvements could be made. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that enforcement was difficult as the prosecution process was challenging. The key was to gather as much

information and evidence as possible. CCTV was an effective tool to prove that a person was at a specific location but it could also be difficult to identify the perpetrator as they took measures to cover their faces and number plates. CCTV could not be relied upon solely as an enforcement method and often covert operations in hotspots had to be conducted. Serious cases of fly tipping usually occurred after 10pm and perpetrators moved around if they suspected that surveillance was occurring in a particular area.

A Member asked for further information on the take up, benefit and publication of the free bulky waste service and how improvements could be achieved in the service. Members learned that there was a higher than expected take up of the service when it was introduced which resulted in a back log of collections which Veolia had responded to by bringing in additional resources. There was regular comms in order to spread the message of its availability. It was not believed that fly tipping had reduced as a result of the service.

It was further asked what assurance could be provided on the continuity of the free bulky waste service during this administration. The Cabinet member responded that there were no plans to remove the service although there had been no decrease in fly tipping. There was currently 2,000 monthly subscribers to the service and this was quite good considering eligibility per household was 3 collections per year. It was evident that the Council had to explore ways to maximise the operational model as it was a costly service, most boroughs that operated the service charged a fee.

A question was raised on what was being done to promote bottle reuse amongst staff and Members were informed that plastic bottles were no longer used at Council meetings. There was ongoing communication and encouragement of reusable bottles. It was important that this was promoted at festivals where possible and at the Croydon beer festival taking place in March 2020, all attendees would be given a reusable pint glass. It was also important going forward to provide recycling bins at festivals instead of landfill where possible.

A Member asked how many neighbourhood safety officers (NSO) were employed and if there was a dedicated team for fly tipping. Officers responded that there were currently 30 NSOs in post with discussions taking place on possibly increasing this number. Negotiations were taking place on the possibility of shift working to allow for further surveillance in fly tip hotspots.

A question was raised on the level of monitoring in place of Veolia's work under the contract and Members were informed that monitoring officers regularly assessed cleaning standards and gulley's to see if there was any waste that should have been cleared. Veolia was expected to take appropriate action if staff were found to be not adhering to the expected standard. If targets were not being met, the Council reserved the right to serve penalties.

It was commented that missed waste collections for flats remained an issue despite reassurances that this was being looked into and treated as priority.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the number of repeat missed collections was too high, but Veolia was working to reduce this number. There had been logistical issues relating to narrow roads and not having the correct access codes for some properties which had contributed, and these issues were being addressed to ensure that the service for flats improved.

It was highlighted that the easiest way to report issues was through the App which notified when the work had been completed but this was no longer the case. Officers acknowledged that the interface between Veolia and the Council's reporting systems needed to improve. It was further commented that consideration should be given by officers to the provision of progress reports that only included Croydon figures to the Sub-Committee as it would be useful.

A Member questioned what was being done to ensure that those residents that could not use apps and computers were able to report issues. The Cabinet Member advised that calls could be made to the contact centre who were able to log issues on behalf of customers that did not have the means or facility to do so themselves.

It was commented that it was important that officer engaged with the Croydon Digital Service to ensure that the Council's webpages were more accessible to residents in order to encourage them to use online reporting facilities. The Cabinet Member responded that work was being undertaken on programmes and comms packages to support more interactive information and use.

It was expressed that it would have been beneficial for Viridor to have attended the meeting following the media attention on pollution and it was important that a representative be invited to attend future meetings to respond to concerns.

A Member questioned what was being done to gather intelligence on the resident's experience of the service. Officers said that as part of the roll out, a survey was conducted and approximately 75% of residents reported that they were satisfied with the service.

The Cabinet Member was asked what issues he would like government support on, to which he answered that he would like to see improvements in recycling nationally. Waste services to be statutory, the same in every borough, town and across the country and not subject to local or national cuts. It was important that the government legislate on more issues.

The Cabinet Member and Officers were thanked for attending the meeting and answering questions

In reaching its recommendations, the sub-committee came to the following

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The Cabinet Member was thanked for the presentation and report.
2. The increase in recycling rates was commendable.

3. The steps being taken to promote waste minimisation was encouraging.
4. The work being done to educate young people on the effects of pollution to the environment and the importance of ensuring that they are kept aware of issues and what can be done to improve our environment was commendable.
5. The community based approach to fly tipping, street cleanliness and enforcement was important to raise awareness that this was a joint responsibility and not just that of the Councils.
6. It was reassuring that there were no planned changes to be made to the waste collection timetable.
7. Assurances given on the continuity of the free bulky waste service was welcomed.
8. There were still concerns regarding high occurrences of missed waste collection for block of flats despite reassurance that's this would reduce
9. It was important that government lends it support to LA's and their effort by jointly rolling out initiatives nationally and legislating on various recycling initiatives as done in some European countries.
10. The interface between Veolia and the Councils reporting system was poor and required more work to ensure that information was being shared.
11. There were many questions regarding emissions, pollution and air quality monitoring that could only be answered in detail by Viridor.
12. The extent of the work completed by the Neighbourhood Safety officers was admirable.

The sub-committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon ensure that a representative from Viridor attend a future meeting;
2. Recommend to the Council that as part of the steps being taken to encourage waste minimisation, an initiative to promote increased bottle reuse amongst council staff be explored;
3. Recommend that the Council to make a commitment as previously recommended that as part of the Councils review of the digital programme that was currently in process, software integration be made a priority to enable fundamental improvements be made to the interface between the Councils systems and Veolia's;
4. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon explore ways to maximise the operational model of the free bulky waste service in order to make it more cost effective;
5. Recommend that all Cabinet Members to continue to lobby Government to legislate on various environmental issues where appropriate.

Officers introduced the item and item and provided a presentation which updated the Sub-Committee on the following:

- There had been 22m collections in the last 18 months with 99.78% collection rates.
- The service provide 8,000 households with assisted collections.
- The percentage of reported fly-tipping, street cleansing and litter bin being emptied had increased significantly.
- There was still an issue with fly-tipping mainly in black bags where people have dumped their household rubbish
- Staff wellbeing and welfare remained a priority.
- During periods of hot weather, staff were encouraged to take frequent breaks and provided with water bottles, hats and sun cream. Bin collections started earlier in the morning and managers were on hand to provide support to staff.

A Member highlighted that it was important that presented figures to include contextual and comparative data where possible. It was asked how the figures were collated as there was a concern that there may be a level of under reporting of issues. Officers advised that the data was collected via the Councils CRM database, the data was traceable and there may even be an element of over reporting experienced.

It was further asked if Veolia, as the contractor, collected any qualitative data. Officers responded that a survey was conducted in March 2019, with 83% of residents indicating they were happy with the collection service. Members asked for a copy of the survey to be circulated after the meeting.

In response to a Member question on whether Veolia operated a locally focused recruitment process and if equality and diversity training was part of staff induction, officers advised that they worked closely with Croydon Works and had a diverse workforce.

A Member asked if street cleansing included gulley's and drains, and was informed that this was part of the highways contract. It was challenged whether it was reported by Veolia staff when they observed that cleaning was required. Officers responded that staff were encouraged to report, but it was acknowledged that there was not a robust enough system in place to promote reporting amongst staff.

A Member challenged that whilst waste collection figures appeared impressive, in reality some streets shown as collected had not been. Officers said that they had been made aware of problems around incorrect reporting and audit checks had been conducted. There had been some genuine mistakes that had occurred where some crews assumed that another crew had collected which resulted in a reported collection when the collection was still outstanding.

In response to a question on what guidance was in place for new housing developments and their waste provision, officers said that a planning

document for all developers on requirements and how to plan their waste provision had been produced and made available to developers.

Information was requested on the take up and collection rate of garden waste. Officers responded that there was currently approximately 20,000 households using the service and the aspiration was for more households to sign up. As it was a seasonal service, there had been no issues with missed collections.

A question was asked on the impact that Brexit would have on the service and how many of its fleet were sustainable vehicles. Officers replied that the service would continue to run to high standards with a robust business continuity plan in place. All fuel supply had been outsourced, they were doubling up on parts and equipment and there were no concerns regarding staffing levels. Some hybrid vehicles were used in the fleet and options would be explored for the use of more sustainable vehicles in the future.

Officers were thanked for attending and their responses to questions.

Information request by the Sub-Committee

The copy of the resident satisfaction survey conducted in March 2019 be circulated to Members after the meeting

In reaching its recommendations, the sub-committee came to the following **CONCLUSIONS:**

1. Officers were thanked for their presentation and report
2. The data evidence supplied in the report was not sufficient to enable detailed analysis of the performance of Veolia.
3. Staff turnover may affect the quality of service of street cleansing.
4. It was important to explore different ways to encourage reporting of street cleansing issues.
5. There were concerns regarding the ability of elderly and vulnerable residents to report issues outside of digital means.
6. It was evident that whilst there has been some improvement in performance due to recently introduced changes to collection of communal waste, it was important that the service continued to be closely monitored.
7. It was important that the Council ensure that its webpages contain up to date information.
8. More work was needed to improve methods of communication with the wider community.
9. The Sub-Committee recognised the need for wider government response to shipping of waste.

The sub-committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Recommend that data presented be contextual, longer than 3 months with comparative data with other boroughs;

2. Recommend that Veolia staff working in the community report incidences of flytips and street cleansing if and when observed;
3. Recommend that improved means of communications be explored to ensure that residents and businesses were made aware of work that was being carried out as well as any changes;
4. Recommend that the information on the FAQ's page on the Council website be reviewed on a regular basis and kept up to date;
5. Recommend that the Council lobby government to develop new recycling infrastructure to combat micro shipping of waste, in particular plastic to other countries.

33/19 Update on the Grounds Maintenance Service

The Assistant Contract Manager was in attendance to provide an update on the service and the following was noted:

- The service came back 'in house' on 1 February 2019
- There were currently 23 employees in the service
- A full service review was planned this year which had happened in some respect but not in totality, with the remainder to happen in the near future.
- The number of complaints received had reduced.
- There was still some work to be done on improving the service.
- The service was understaffed when brought back in-house and agency staff were used, some of them had now converted to permanent council contracts of employment.
- There was issues with some parks not closing at stipulated time which related to people not wanting to leave the park at the required time.

A Member asked if the use of Glyphosate weed killer had been discontinued as promised. The officer responded that this weed killer was no longer in use and stock purchasing had been stopped.

It was asked what the agreed standards of bin collection was in Croydon's parks. Officers advised that there were 127 parks in the borough which were graded in terms of footfall. Parks with higher footfall usually had daily bin collection with those with smaller footfall a two weekly collection rate. In the summer months, hot spot teams patrolled the parks and were able to carry out higher frequency bin collections.

A Member questioned if sustainable tools were being purchased. The officer replied that there was currently a review of all stock and material taking place which would include the exploration of responsible use electric vehicles. The service was continually looking at ways to advance and welcomed different ideas and suggestions to improve.

Officers were thanked for attending the meeting and Members looked forward to future updates on progress.

In reaching its recommendations, the sub-committee came to the following **CONCLUSIONS:**

1. Officers were thanked for their report
2. The progress that had been made since the service was brought back 'in house' was reassuring.
3. It was encouraging that the Council had discontinued the use of glyphosate as promised.

34/19 Work Programme

It was suggested that an informal meeting take place to discuss the work programme. Possible dates to be circulated to Members after the meeting.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the work programme for the 2019/2020 municipal ye

35/19 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 10.30 am

Signed:

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Date:

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