

22 January 2014	ITEM: 14 (i)
Council	
Cabinet Member Report - ENVIRONMENT	
Report of: Councillor Holloway	
This report is public.	

Introduction:

This Portfolio covers the services that are important and visible to residents: Waste Collection and Disposal, Street Cleansing, Parks and Open Spaces and the operational aspects of Highway Repair and Maintenance.

The service is business-like and continuously drives efficiency by reducing costs and targeting opportunities and initiatives to improve the services we deliver. This approach has enabled the Directorate to continue to operate within budget whilst maintaining the quality of services and contributing to the savings targets of the Council.

This report has been prepared to provide an overview of the service provided by the Environment Directorate. Details of each service area are provided below with an overview of current performance against key indicators and benchmark comparators provided where possible. Some of the challenges and opportunities for the services are explored.

Headline Issues:

Waste Collection and Disposal

Since 2010 the waste collection function for Thurrock has been run in-house following a successful tendering exercise. The current operation provides a weekly, three bin collection service, with disposal managed through several external recycling and other treatment contracts including Energy From Waste (EFW), composting, and landfill.

The tendering initiative has so far delivered savings in excess of £6m.

The three bin system has supported the Council's aim of increasing both the rate of re-use, recycling and composting within the Borough. A peak recycling figure of 45% of household waste was reported in 2010/11. In the past two years recycling performance has dipped slightly. This is principally due to extremely wet weather conditions recorded over the summer of 2012 which had a significant impact on the levels of garden waste collected. In 2013 the levels participation in recycling, particularly amongst residents living in multi-occupancy dwellings has fallen. This is

being address through various campaigns and educational programmes. Despite the dip in recycling rates, Thurrock continues to report recycling levels above the average for Unitary Authorities in England.

Additionally, the reduction in the volume of landfilled waste, our key performance measure, has been falling steadily since 2010. The outturn for this key performance measure, which was running at 62% in 2009/10, reduced to 18.5% in 2012/13. The landfilled waste target for the current year was further reduced to 18% of waste collected and we are on track to achieve this and retain our position as a regional top performer.

During the course of 2012/13 a project was initiated to review the operation of the waste collection service with a view to ensuring that vehicles and staff were being deployed in the most efficient manner and to deliver valuable savings to the Council. The implementation of the amended round structure was less smooth than anticipated and resulted in disruption of the service to residents over a number of months.

However, the rounds have now been embedded and the number of bins missed by collection crews has fallen significantly and is now lower than previous years. This continues to be area of focus for the service, to consolidate and extend the improvements in productivity and service quality.

Street Cleansing

Once again the level of street cleanliness in the Borough has shown year on year improvement with levels of cleanliness significantly better than the national average performance standards. However, whilst there is a confidence that current high performance standards will not diminish, the trend of continual improvement set over the past 4 years is likely to plateau as pressure on spending levels increases.

The cost of the service has been amongst the lowest in comparison to statistical neighbours. The 2011-2012 APSE Street Cleansing performance indicator standings report has just been published and for the third consecutive year we have achieved a 1st quartile position with our cost of Street Cleansing per head at £11.31, being £4 less than the comparator group average. Similar figures for 2012/13 have yet to be published, but the service anticipates attaining a similar outturn.

Parks and Open Spaces

The quality of the parks across the borough continues to be recognised with the re-awarding of Green Flags for Coalhouse Fort and Langdon Hills. Reconstruction work after the fire at Grays Beach Cafe meant that the park was not entered for Green Flag accreditation in 2013, but will be in 2014.

A Higher Stewardship Grant has been awarded to Coalhouse Fort for the outstanding work that has been done in conserving and creating habitats for rare mining bees and orchids. The programme of continuing to renew equipment at parks across the Borough has continued, this has included skate ramps, play equipment for all ages and outdoor gym equipment.

This service is also responsible for maintaining green spaces on Housing Land. The Service Level Agreement that has now been in place for three years has delivered improved maintenance in housing areas.

The in-house team of Arborists has been established and proved invaluable in the storms at the end of October 2013, when the team attended to a hundred calls for fallen and damaged trees in a week. The activity of the team continues to support the Directorate's efforts to reduce dependence on expensive external companies and provide potential to generate income for the Council.

Operational Highways Maintenance and Repair

Whilst the Highways portfolio is concerned with the strategic aspects of the Highways Network, the Environment portfolio includes the service that carries out the on-street works such as winter gritting and road and footpath repairs. The return of the Highway maintenance function to the Council from the Serco/Europa contract provides an opportunity to optimise the configuration of the overall service to improve responsiveness and cost efficiency.

Financial Performance 2012/13:

Final 2012/13 outturn was a small underspend against budget.

Budgets and Efficiency:

The Directorate is on course to achieve the targeted efficiency savings in 2013/14 and remain within the overall budget set for the year. Further efficiency savings of £170,000 have been proposed for 2014/15.

Corporate Working and Developing Strong Partnerships:

The partnership with Housing continues successfully with the implementation of a Service Level Agreement clarifying timing and standards for grounds maintenance and related activities on Housing land.

Representatives of the Directorate are active on the corporate team established to market services from across the Council to both LEA schools and academies. We are hopeful that this will increase our customer base and thereby generate an additional income stream to reduce net costs.

Opportunities to develop joint or shared working arrangements and other areas of collaboration with neighbouring local authorities and organisations including the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham continue to be explored in order to enhance our effectiveness and efficiency.

To demonstrate their partnership commitment, Impulse, the not-for-profit managing agent for the Council's three leisure centres, has offered to reduce their annual management fee by around 10%, providing the Council with a year-on-year saving of £50,000.

Planned Key Achievements 2013/14:

Challenging performance targets were set for the three key performance indicators for the Directorate's services. These are:

Indicator	Target	Current Performance
Waste		
Percentage of Municipal Waste sent to Land fill	19%	21.6% (year to date cumulative)
Percentage of Household waste recycled	48%	40 to 43% (projected year end figure)
Street Cleanliness		
Litter	5%	2% (after 2 nd of 3 inspection rounds)
Detritus	5%	2%
Graffiti	3%	1%
Fly-posting	1%	0%

Apprenticeships:

The Directorate is currently running their third apprenticeship programme since 2011. The first programme was within the waste team and 2 of the apprentices who completed that programme have been recruited to permanent positions as Waste Collection Assistants.

The second and third programmes have been based in Street Services, building a wide work experience programme around a street cleansing qualification. Of the 6 apprentices that completed the initial programme, all went on to work as agency staff for the service to the end of October 2013, and one of those apprentices has been recruited to a permanent position in Grounds Maintenance. The current cohort of apprentices is well integrated in the team and on track to complete both their training and work experience in Summer 2014.

Additional apprenticeships in the service include a vehicle technician apprentice who is currently in the 2nd year of a 3 year programme and Country Park Ranger apprentice who will work with the team at Langdon Hills for 2 years to achieve qualification.

Other Headlines:

- The Civic Amenity Site at St Clements Way has been redeveloped as a fully functioning vehicle maintenance workshop, with all servicing and repair of the Council's fleet of vehicles now undertaken in-house. This has generated savings and improved efficiency within the Directorate, and the improved responsiveness will ensure that our vehicles are speedily returned to productive use delivering services.

The improvements introduced were recognised by APSE by their shortlisting of the in-house fleet team for a national quality award.

- The St Clements Way workshop is in the process of being approved as a VOSA MOT station. This will allow not only for the MOT of Council vehicles to be undertaken in-house, but provides a further opportunity for the Directorate to generate income. From February 2014 the Fleet team will also commence inspection work on Thurrock's taxi and private hire vehicles as part of their licensing arrangements.
- All services within the Directorate have been awarded ISO 9001 accreditation. This is testament to the quality of the management. Additional accreditations relating to Health and Safety and Environmental management are being considered for 2014.

Key Challenges 2014/15:

Whilst the Directorate has a solid history of working within budget and introducing efficiencies, there is a risk that the scale of the ongoing continued financial pressures faced by the Council will start to have an impact on the standard of services delivered by the Directorate.

Summary:

Overall the Environment Portfolio is operating both effectively and efficiently with no areas of significant weakness. The strategic and operational management within the Directorate is strong, demonstrating robust financial management and continuous improvement in the delivery of good quality services to residents and other internal and external customers.