

25 January 2017

ITEM: 12

Council

Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment

Report of: Councillor Pauline Tolson, Portfolio Holder for Environment

This report is Public

Introduction

The Environment Portfolio is unique in the Council, in that it provides some of the only Council services that all residents in the Borough receive every week. Waste collections are made from every household weekly and the levels of street cleanliness and the appearance of our parks, open spaces and verges have impact on all residents and visitors to the Borough as they go about their daily business.

The core services covered by the portfolio and delivered by the Environment Directorate, are:

- Waste collection and disposal
- Environmental Enforcement
- Street Cleansing
- Parks and Open Spaces (including Country Parks)
- Operational aspects of Highway Repair and Maintenance
- Fleet Management and Maintenance

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

Key Service Outputs

Service Area	Function	Annual Output	Weekly cost per Household.
Waste Management	No. of domestic bin collections per year.	10,345,779	Collection £1.51 Disposal £1.83
	Annual domestic tonnage collected and disposed of.	70 000 tonnes of waste collected and disposed	
	% of domestic bins collected on time.	98.5% for 2015-16 99.8% in Nov 2016 YTD is 97.7%	
Street Cleansing	Annual cleansing miles of highways.	622 miles of road	£0.50
	Number of Litter Bins emptied	500 litter bins across the Borough	
	Tonnage of Street Cleansing waste collected.	In 2015/16 there was a total of 2249 tonnes of street waste disposed of (82 tonnes of compost, 3266 tonnes of residual waste)	
Greening (incl Parks & Open Spaces, Country Parks, Burial Grounds, Outdoor Sports etc.)	No. of Playgrounds maintained.	71	£0.68
	Overall grassed areas maintained.	518 hectares	
	No. of Urban Parks maintained.	91	
Winter Maintenance	Tonnage of salt used.	30 tonnes per gritting run	£0.04

Service Overview:

1. Waste Collection and Disposal

The current Waste Collection service has been provided by an in-house team since 2010 and provides a weekly collection of residual waste, dry recycling and kitchen and garden waste. Waste Disposal is managed via external providers, through a number of waste disposal contracts.

Over the course of the year the Council empties 10 million wheeled bins, disposing of 70,000 tonnes of household waste. A key measure of success for the service is the proportion of collections made on time. In 2014/15, the service achieved an on time collection of 97% and 98.5% for 2015/16. While performance continues to improve the ambition is to aim for as close to a 100% collection rate as possible, meaning that as few bins as possible are missed.

Waste collections are currently made via a 'pepper pot' system whereby waste is collected by crews allocated to specific areas in the borough. In this method of working, a single vehicle/crew stays within the same area of the borough for the whole week completing a fifth of the area each day. The collection fleet is effectively deployed across the whole borough each day of the week.

The impact on the service is that where missed bins occur, crews return the following day. This has a knock on effect to scheduled work resulting in operational down time and increased vehicle and fuel costs. This can also require an additional mop up crew travelling to a number of locations across the borough to collect missed bins.

As part of the planned improvements to the waste collection service we will be changing to an East - West sweep of the Borough. This 'sweeping' method means deploying the main refuse collection fleet within a single area of the borough on Monday and then moving onto an adjoining area the following day and so on through the week. The entire borough is effectively split into 5 areas each representing one collection day of the week. This is a more efficient method of working for the following reasons:

- With the main fleet operating in a single area collection, resources can more effectively support each other in the case of vehicle breakdown, sickness, accident, return to blocked access, etc.
- Crews can be more easily interchanged to improve area knowledge increasing flexibility in resourcing.
- No vehicles/crews finish until the whole area has been collected
- Inequality in round sizes within the area can easily be addressed as collections can be moved between crews with no impact on householders as collection days remain the same.
- Growth in the number of households can more easily be shared across crews making the collection structure more resilient to housing developments.

2. Environmental Enforcement

The Environmental Enforcement Team transferred to the Environment Service in September 2016, closely aligning with Domestic and Commercial Waste and Street Cleansing Service. Closer working relationships with these teams will provide Enforcement Officers with the intelligence required to better address Environmental Concerns within the borough.

The current in-House Enforcement Team consists of two officers, with an increased level of fly-tipping and other Environmental Crime within the borough; the team is very small and under resourced when benchmarked with comparative boroughs. In order to best deploy the existing in-house resource the working practices of the team are being reviewed. A revised Environmental Enforcement Strategy has been scheduled to be presented to cabinet in April/May 2017.

Workload has been prioritised to focus on fly-tipping, engaging with key partners including the Police, The Environment Agency (responsible for investigating fly-tips over a tipper load), Farmers Group and adjoining Local Authorities to ensure that the approach to combating the boroughs issues are joined up. An after-hours joint operation with the Police took place on the 18th of December, with future joint operations with the police and partner agencies being considered going forward.

A capital budget is in place for the target hardening of fly-tipping problem areas. Essex Police has made an expert resource available for assessing the current measures at hot spot sites. The programme of evaluating the measures at regularly targeted sites is ongoing however the following work is in process: -

- Fencing of Billet Field - new fencing has been installed to ensure that access to the field is restricted.
- Gating of Rainbow Lane - despite local objections, the required consultations for the gating of Rainbow Lane has been completed and the project is scheduled to be completed by the end of Q1 2017.
- Greenacres Farm - discussions are ongoing with the adjacent land owning farmers. The consensus is for the existing gates to be re-sited in order to discourage fly-tippers from using the site. The re-sited gate will be supported by bunds to either side of the gate and for vegetation to be trimmed back to aid visibility. Works are scheduled to be completed by the end of Q1 2017.
- CCTV - the Councils CCTV Officer has been tasked with undertaking a CCTV evaluation of the 9 identified priority hot spots in the borough. 2 of the 9 sites have been identified as immediately available for the installation of CCTV. The remaining 7 sites do not have an available power supply. Work is ongoing to determine what measures can be taken to provide a suitable power supply to the remaining sites.

The Council engaged Kingdom Security for a 12 month pilot focussed on ensuring compliance with the law relating to littering and dog fouling. The business model for the pilot is structured on a payment by results model with Kingdom only being paid when they issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's).

Kingdom provide a Supervisor, Administrator and two teams of two Enforcement Officers, one located in and around the Grays area and the other targeting hot spots areas across the borough. All public facing officers are uniformed and provided with identification, making it clear to residents that the officers are working on behalf of Thurrock Council.

The pilot went live on 5th of December 2016, with tickets being issued from the 7th of December 2016. As of the 7th of January 2017 431 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued. We expect an initial peak of tickets being issued followed by a levelling out as the public become aware of the enforcement activity. During January Enforcement Officers will be working on Saturdays. The breakdown of ticket issues by week is as follows:

Week Commencing	Number of Tickets Issued	Notes
05/12/2016	183	
12/12/2016	118	
19/12/2016	48	Restricted Christmas service
26/12/2016	12	Restricted Christmas service
02/01/2016	70	
	431 total	

Throughout the pilot the number of FPN's issued will be monitored, as will complaints and representations. Where appropriate, officers will look for opportunities to further test the payment by result model against other high priority environmental concerns. A formal review of the pilot will be undertaken in July 2017.

3. Complaints

There has been a significant reduction in waste complaints and Member enquiries. 72 were reported in July and 34 in December, a reduction of 52.7%. This is following the recruitment of a new Service Manager dedicated to overseeing Waste Collection operations.

The Waste Supervisor team have received in-house training and additional support to improve the quality of complaint investigations and written responses, this includes direct contact with all complainants and site visits, active discussions with the crews to find out what went wrong and actions put in place to ensure problems are not repeated. Discussions with crews are recorded on standard complaint investigation forms and monitored, crews are also issued with reminder memos prior to collections to raise awareness of potential and current problems, this is particularly important for covering crews. We have also introduced a Hotspot monitoring list whereby complaints at stage 2 and above are monitored weekly via site visits to ensure high quality services are provided, we also conduct unannounced observations of collections by the supervisors, telephone, text or face to face contact with the complainant for a period of four weeks. Additional support from Environment

Services Business Support team means that all complaint responses are tailored to each complaint and generalised responses are no longer used.

Missed Bin Performance Indicators										
Target for % of collections made is 98.5%										
		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Cumulative
2016 - 2017	Bins to be collected	832,419	872,058	872,058	832,419	911,697	872,058	832,419	872,058	6,897,186
	Monthly missed bins	7,353	40,634	23,953	19,893	49,791	5,861	10,965	1,557	160,007
	Missed bins per 100 000	883	4,660	2,747	2,390	5,461	672	1,317	179	2,320
	% of Collections Made	99.1%	95.3%	97.3%	97.6%	94.5%	99.3%	98.7%	99.8%	97.7%
2015 - 2016	Bins to be collected	824,657	824,657	863,927	903,196	824,657	824,657	863,927	824,657	6,754,337
	Monthly missed bins	10,304	18,493	20,905	8,889	8,508	8,405	13,601	10,024	99,129
	Missed Bins per 100 000	1,249	2,243	2,420	984	1,032	1,019	1,574	1,216	1,523
	% of Collections Made	98.8%	97.8%	97.6%	99.0%	99.0%	99.0%	98.4%	98.8%	98.5%

Please note the variance in bin numbers collected, is due to a varying number of collection days in a month.

4. Waste Disposal Contract Update

Five of the Council's 6 waste disposal contracts are due to expire in the next 12 months. The Landfill Residual Waste Disposal Contract, Green Waste Composting Contract, Co-Mingled Kitchen and Garden Waste, In Vessel Composting Contract and the Mixed Dry Recycling Contract expire 31 December 2017. A competitive procurement process has commenced.

The contract for the operation of the Civic Amenity Site expires in June 2016 and the current contractor has advised they will not extend existing arrangements, beyond that date.

There is a need for a full review of the site, looking at the needs of the boroughs growing population in future years and its ability to cope with existing usage. The review will also consider a redevelopment of the site including opportunities for income generating services.

The cost and time involved in procuring a short term operational contract, while a full review takes place and recognising that letting the site, as is, would likely result in a limited pool of bidders requires the service to be in-house managed. Bringing the site in-house will allow for required modernisation to take place, it will also allow for trade income avenues and innovative recycling and re-use initiatives to be trialled.

A report of the review findings will be presented to cabinet, anticipated June/July,

5. Recycling Education

The boroughs recycling rate has remained static at just below 40% for a number of years. Central Government's aim is for recycling rates to increase to 50% by 2020. Data illustrates that for each 1% increase in recycling rates, the disposal costs reduce by over £30,000 per annum.

In July 2016 a detailed waste analysis was undertaken to identify what is being put in each type of bin. The analysis was undertaken across housing stock and also flats. The data illustrates that common waste items are being placed in the incorrect bins.

Whilst wide broad brush 'recycle more campaigns' have been used in the past, it is intended to use this information to inform targeted recycling initiatives, with focus on defined waste items to reduce diversion and increase recycling rates. A good example of this is tetra paks, the Authority now has the facility to recycle tetra paks, and a focused campaign on this waste stream should deliver a stronger message than broad general messages.

The analysis also identified significant opportunities to increase recycling rates in flats. The data identified that 27% of the waste in flats residual waste bins could either be recycled or composted. Additionally the current flats recycling bins contain 52% contaminated material; this means that we cannot recycle the contents of these bins. Clearly a flats specific campaign is required to reduce recycling contamination and to divert recyclable waste from the residual waste bins.

6. Street Cleansing

The 'Clean It, Cut It, Fill It' programme was introduced last summer and has led to additional resource allocated to street cleansing. The approach in delivery of this service has changed from having area based teams to teams dedicated to specific service areas, including a team dedicated to street cleansing. Additional resource has been allocated to 'hot spot' areas and eleven additional barrow beat teams have been introduced bringing the total to twenty overall. This additional resource has included an additional round in Grays town centre allowing the town centre to be covered between 6am to 6pm.

The Council is responsible for cleaning the verges, centre reservations and emptying the litter bins along the section of the A13 from the Five Bells up to Dock Approach. This takes place 4 times per year generally during February, May, August and November, the service take the opportunity to carry out any other works necessary during lane closures. Whilst carrying out the August clean up any vegetation which requires cutting back is completed during this visit.

Thurrock have registered to take part in the 'Great British Spring Clean' event which is taking place during the 3rd – 5th March this year. This event has been set up by Keep Britain Tidy which is similar to the 'Clean for the Queen' event that took place last year. The focus will be on Community and volunteer groups carrying out the cleaning up of local areas. The Council will contribute to these events by providing equipment and removing any rubbish that is generated. Colleagues from Strategy, Communications and Customer Services Department are currently exploring ways to engage with the various groups.

7. Parks and Open Spaces

Parks amenities across the borough have continued to be maintained. £1.2 million was secured from Heritage Lottery and the Veolia North Thames Trust to further restore the Coalhouse Fort site, with the installation of new toilets and a café. A proportion of the income from the café has been ring-fenced to fund future restoration work on site. An Education Officer and Community Development Officer

Post have been grant funded for a three year period to support the work of the existing ranger team.

The service is also responsible for the maintenance of green spaces on Housing land. The Service Level Agreement that has now been in place for 5 years and has delivered improved maintenance in housing areas.

There are 12 burial sites, including 7 cemeteries and 5 closed Church yards. In 2015/16 we carried out 253 burials (165 burials, 88 cremated remains).

Weekly inspections of the 71 play areas are carried out, equating to Circa 333 repairs to play equipment annually.

Once the changes have been fully applied to adopt the 'Clean It, Cut It, Fill It' programme long term, a training programme will be introduced to train staff in Horticultural skills. Many of these skills have been lost through voluntary redundancy, staff leaving and retirement. Although staff are trained in carrying out Grounds Maintenance tasks others require more in depth horticultural knowledge.

Allotments

There are:

- 20 Self-Managed Allotment sites across the borough
- 2 Sites remain Council Managed

The majority of the self-managed sites are represented by the Thurrock Allotment Steering Group (TASG), which is made of an elected committee of Allotment volunteers that regularly meet throughout the year to discuss allotment issues across Thurrock.

8. Operational Highways Maintenance and Repair

Although not responsible for the strategic aspects of the Highways Network, the Environment portfolio includes the service that carries out the on-street work such as maintaining footpaths, verges and sightlines, repairing potholes and winter gritting, as well as a number of minor capital projects across the borough. The team has also been delivering the infrastructure work for the Coastal Pathway project. The past 2015/16 winter was notable in that it was reasonably mild again and our gritting operations were only mobilised on 35 occasions. However, the team is still prepared to deal with the harshest winter conditions that may occur. With the construction of the new salt barn at Oliver Close Depot, the team have had approximately 2600 tonne of salt available to use since the start of the winter gritting season.

9. Fleet Management

During the year Fleet have completed 457 MOT tests, including external customer vehicles, fully absorbed the council's Taxi and Hackney carriage licensing compliance checks, conducting over 450 tests, generating circa £30k in external income.

Fleet procurement had been held pending the outcome of service reviews, including the recent Clean It, Cut It, Fill It project. A like for like replacement for waste service vehicles (approx. £6m) and replacement of 40-60 street cleansing and grounds maintenance vehicles (£2.6m) will commence in March 2017, This will replace of the majority of vehicles under 5 Tonne gross vehicle weight.

10. Commercial Waste

Thurrock Council offers a commercial waste collection service to business customers. The Thurrock Trade Waste Sales Strategy created in May 2016 incorporates the strategic direction to ensure the external income target of £389,000 is achieved for 17/18.

The launch of the Commercial Waste Sales Team has proved successful in the five months it has been operational, £100k of new business being secured and £92k of existing customer business being retained. It is anticipated that 16/17 will outturn an external income of £309,000, a 60% increase from 15/16.

Ambitious waste targets have been set as part of the medium term financial strategy for the next 3 years, which will require the service to work and perform competitive and commercial manner, ensuring that both price and service delivery are competitive.

Processes relating to customer service requests have been reviewed. Requests raised through MyAccount are allocated to teams within 24 hours of being logged (excluding weekends). The benefit of logging service requests through MyAccount, is the ability to receive feedback on the status of the request. MyAccount can be accessed through <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/account>.

Use of this mechanism by Councillors and residents for reporting service requests will help to ensure provision of the best possible response and service

Key Challenges for 2017/18:

As a service we strive for continuous improvement, good progress has been made to improve waste collection services and the introduction of the "sweep system", anticipated May 2017, will impact on every household in the borough. The service will need to project manage this change effectively, ensuring high level communications across a broad range of media channels.

The Civic Amenity Site modernisation programme will require focussed resource in order to turn around proposals, planning consent and member approval to progress the site as quickly and efficiently as possible.

With an increased focus on enforcement activity and limited resource levels, the service will need to continue to be creative and innovative, with similar approaches to the pilot in place for littering and dog fouling. A more targeted approach needs to be considered going forward.

“Clean it, Cut it, Fill it” has been a very successful programme, in order to ensure the good work is progressed and we continue to improve the presentation of the borough, meeting the increased expectations of our residents, the service will need to ensure scheduled work is adhered to and equipment fully operational at all times.

As with many of the services delivered by the Council, challenges faced by the Environmental Portfolio is the depth of the savings required to enable the Council to operate within budget constraints.

Waste disposal contract procurement savings targets may prove challenging and this has been heavily considered within procurement activity. Active encouragement and the education plan to increase recycling rates could assist in driving disposal costs down.

While the service continues to seek new avenues for generating income, Trade waste and Grounds Maintenance income targets are ambitious and best endeavours will be given to achieve them, as previously stated the service needs to be creative and innovative to manage such pressures.

Summary

The Environment Portfolio is operating both effectively and efficiently with no major areas of significant weakness. The strategic and operational management within the Department continues to be strong, demonstrating robust financial management and continuous improving performance with the delivery of high quality services across the Borough.

Finance Summary

Revenue Budget Financial Forecast 2016/17

	2015/16 Outturn	2016/17 Revised Budget	2016/17 Forecast (excl CICI)	Variance	2016/17 Forecast (Including Clean it, Cut it)	Variance (Including Clean it, Cut it)
Employees	7,022,901	7,140,337	7,140,337	0	7,460,837	320,500
Premises	493,643	378,321	378,321	0	378,321	0
Supplies and Services	855,523	690,982	690,982	0	695,409	4,427
Third Party Payments	6,484,310	6,760,218	6,787,383	27,165	6,787,383	27,165
Transport	1,824,516	1,589,448	1,589,448	0	1,626,448	37,000
Direct Costs	16,680,893	16,559,305	16,586,470	27,165	16,948,398	389,092
Income	-704,955	-828,454	-828,454	0	-828,454	0
Recharges In	6,941,564	5,519,931	5,519,931	0	5,519,931	0
Recharges Out	-9,518,387	-8,644,181	-8,644,181	0	-8,644,181	0
Net Recharges Out	-2,576,823	-3,124,250	-3,124,250	0	-3,124,250	0
Total Net Direct Costs	13,399,115	12,606,601	12,633,766	27,165	12,995,694	389,092