

Nottingham City Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at The Ballroom - The Council House, Old Market Square, Nottingham, NG1 2DT on 9 June 2021 from 2.00 pm - 4.10 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Anne Peach (Chair)
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor Ethan Radford
Councillor Angharad Roberts
Councillor Andrew Rule
Councillor Audra Wynter

Absent

Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Carole McCulloch
Councillor Toby Neal

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Beth Brown - Head of Legal and Governance
Eddie Curry - Head of Public Realm Services
Chidi Engeti - Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance Service Manager

Kim Pocock - Scrutiny Officer

8 Committee Membership

The Committee noted the resignation of Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis and the appointment of Councillor Sajid Mohammed as his replacement.

9 Apologies for absence

None.

10 Declarations of interests

None.

11 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2021 as an accurate record and they were signed by the Chair.

12 Streetscene

Eddie Curry, Head of Public Realm Services and Chidi Engeti, Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance Service Manager, attended the meeting to provide the Committee with an update on Streetscene and the impact on the service during the pandemic. Colleagues presented the following information:

- (a) The Public Realm Service is wide ranging, including street cleansing, grounds maintenance (including commercial contracts), graffiti removal, dog fouling removal and fly tipping removal.
- (b) Objectives for the service include being the cleanest big city, both in the city centre and local neighbourhoods.
- (c) External income forms a significant proportion of the service's total income (63%) from various activities such as events support and landscape projects, used to support the costs of the service.
- (d) The last five years have seen some significant challenges, including £1.5m budget reduction and 30.7% reduction in full time equivalent (FTE) members of staff from 2015 - 2020.
- (e) A range of actions have been taken to achieve efficiency savings, including merging services, increased income generation and insourcing previously outsourced works.
- (f) The pandemic has impacted on Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance over the last 15 months. Several services had to be stood down as members of staff and vehicles were redeployed to support other Council services, eg waste services where additional vehicles and staff were required to meet Covid safety requirements. In addition, the service experienced a high level of staff absence due to shielding.
- (g) While services are now beginning to return to pre Covid levels, the impact of the pandemic continues as the backlog is tackled. Corporate targets have been impacted, largely because they have not been achieved within time frames and because staff satisfaction surveys have not been carried out as they would usually have been.
- (h) Streetscene's support to waste services has saved the Council well over £1m, which compares well to other authorities which have drafted in additional resources during the pandemic.
- (i) In spite of the pressure on resources and the need to stand down some services there have still been achievements in 2020/21:
 - (i) most litter and fly tipping dealt with;
 - (ii) leaf clearance programme delivered faster than in previous years;
 - (iii) biodiversity / grass reduction priorities accelerated;
 - (iv) all NCH garden assistance scheme gardens recovered well in time for the start of the 2021/22 growing season;
 - (v) Public Realm Service delivered a balanced budget
 - (vi) the service was a finalist for the APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) Best Public Realm Service;
 - (vii) the service won the APSE Best Parks and Grounds Maintenance Service of the year for the fifth time (at a time when visitor numbers were the highest ever);

- (viii) the service also retained and expanded its Green Flag Award Programme with a total of 74 Green Flag awards in the City.
- (j) Fly tipping was seen to increase significantly during the pandemic, which has added pressure to the service. An effort has been made to tackle fly tipping early in the mornings which has had a positive impact. Colleagues were particularly impressed by the number of local volunteers who came out to help with this, without having been asked to do so.
- (k) Public Realm Service staffing is now structured into north, south and central divisions. A full time Human Resources Advisor is now attached to the service to support the 269 FTE workforce. Teams are both area and site based (where appropriate). As a service, there is cover from 4am – midnight each day.
- (l) Improvements to the service include regular street sweeping (every 10 days) for every street in the city and now timed to follow recycling collections, a new citywide bin replacement programme and work with Community Protection colleagues to get bins off the streets in areas where this is a problem, eg the Arboretum.
- (m) The first weed spraying programme of the year has now been completed by doubling the number of quad bikes used, and the second programme starts on 2 July.
- (n) The Council has a contract with Nottingham City Homes (NCH) for the garden assistance scheme whereby 2,600 NCH tenants who meet specific criteria receive lawn mowing 12 times per year, hedge cutting twice a year and one winter clean up. It has taken time to get this up and running again after a pause during Covid.
- (o) Partnership working has been a key focus for the service, particularly with Community Protection on enforcement in relation to fly tipping and with Clean Champions. The Clean Champion scheme was started in 2017 and has been very successful with a total of 4047 champions currently registered. A recent BBC piece led to further public interest. A new volunteer co-ordinator post has been established and work is ongoing to encourage take up of the volunteering opportunity in areas where fewer people have come forward. Even though all Clean Champions are not yet reporting on line, colleagues have calculated that those who do report (approximately 20%) are contributing over 5,780 hours per year on filling over 280 rubbish bags. If this is scaled up to cover all Clean Champions, it equates to approximately 15 FTE staff and 500 tonnes of waste.
- (p) Along with other services the Public Realm Service is looking at how best to contribute to the Council's recovery and improvement. Key will be using the Future Parks Accelerator programme (FPA) funding to explore new operating models to identify further efficiencies and opportunities to develop a greater mixed economy delivery model.
- (q) Challenges ahead include continuing Covid support for the waste service, placing continuing pressure on Streetscene frontline capacity; that fly-tipping may continue at high rates and parks may see further repeats of flash mob gatherings,

which leave a great deal of litter and damage to be addressed by staff. Risks include continued staff shortages which may affect services and/ or contract delivery and income loss from events and services still affected by Covid restrictions.

In response to questions from the Committee and in the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- (r) There is a difference in the number of Streetscene staff deployed in different areas due to the nature of the areas. For example, where there are larger green areas, such as in Clifton, machine mowing can be used, requiring fewer members of staff than in areas where this is not possible; and some areas have a much higher number of residents in receipt of garden assistance, so more resources will be required in these. In addition, although staff may be located in an area this does not necessarily reflect where they are working – for example Bulwell manages tractors for citywide use.
- (s) Colleagues welcome the involvement of local councillors in Streetscene priorities for their wards and welcome site visits.
- (t) There is no national measure for what would be the cleanest big city in England. APSE does its own benchmarking framework, against which Nottingham City performs at either good or excellent. Benchmarking can be commissioned from 'Keep it Tidy', but this would incur a fee. The service collects as much survey data as it can to assess satisfaction with the standard of services and the achievement of Green and Blue Flags, the Clean Champion scheme and entry to for APSE awards are all indicators of success.
- (u) Colleagues would have liked to see furloughed Council staff having an opportunity to support Streetscene. Discussions were held with the Trade Unions and with Human Resources. However, the training required for use of specialist equipment and the hours of work meant that this was not possible. As a result, some services were stood down while Streetscene staff were deployed to waste services. Social distancing rules have meant that waste vehicles could not operate with their usual staffing of a driver plus two loaders. For the service to operate two vehicles had to be used where one was used previously, so Streetscene drivers and vehicles were used for this purpose.
- (v) As the training for Streetscene operatives is the same as that for waste operatives, there is an expectation of flexing of services. Streetscene made the best use of the resources available without the deployed staff and vehicles, but the reduction in resources has had a very significant impact on Streetscene services during Covid, as described in the presentation.
- (w) Colleagues did ask if furloughed staff could be used to support litter picking but this was not possible. The use of furloughed staff in other roles is complex due to issues of consent, training and health and safety and the majority of furloughed staff who could be redeployed were used to support care and welfare work.
- (x) The bulky waste service is now operational again and it is hoped that this will result in reduced fly tipping.

- (y) The contract value for the work carried out by Grounds Maintenance for NCH has been in place for many years, with no increase to reflect increasing costs. Members of the Committee were concerned that this should be reviewed to ensure that the Council is not subsidising NCH.
- (z) All plans during the pandemic and for the future are discussed at weekly meetings with Neighbourhood Operational Managers to ensure that they have an opportunity to contribute their views and are kept clearly informed.
- (aa) The bin replacement programme uses a new bin design which has a high volume and the bins are emptied using a compactor. The supplier guarantees the locks for 24 months.
- (bb) Councillors have noticed that there is often litter left after mowing of parks and open spaces. Colleagues agreed that it is helpful if litter picking and mowing cycles are planned so that litter picking takes place before mowing and noted that operatives should not leave behind litter after mowing.
- (cc) The increasing volume of litter collected by Clean Champions does increase the volume of litter for collection but the cost of this is outweighed by the voluntary collection value. Work is ongoing with Neighbourhood Operational Managers to build the relationship with Clean Champions. The success of the scheme has led to consideration of the future use of volunteers in the service. There are currently two university student interns working with Streetscene on establishing university Clean Champions and discussions are ongoing with schools as well.
- (dd) Street sweeping should be taking place for all streets. If cars are parked on a street when it is due to be cleaned, then the area under the car will not be cleaned until the next time cleaning is due. If ward councillors notice litter/ rubbish building up and are concerned that it is not being collected they can contact Streetscene and the matter will be dealt with. There is capacity to target areas where there are particular issues.
- (ee) Bins on streets can be a particular problem in student areas and some commercial areas. Streetscene is working with local residents (eg in the Arboretum and Hyson Green areas) and Community Protection to address this. Closer working with colleagues on street design and housing policy would help to ensure appropriate and adequate bin storage to address some of the issues with bins on streets and rubbish overflow.
- (ff) There are no immediate plans for introducing further automation in the service, but weekly meetings with the Trade Unions are ongoing to ensure that procedures are Covid safe, eg fixed teams, masks, vehicle cleansing etc.
- (gg) There have been issues with the physical infrastructure to support the service. For example, in the city centre, while Fletchergate has not been available, shifts have had to start and finish from Eastcroft and sometimes staff have had to return to Eastcroft for breaks. The service is looking at alternatives, but has not had success so far. In local areas it is very varied; in the past local depots were

scaled down to three operational bases across the city. However, this has impacted on staff travel and response times, so some Neighbourhood Operational Managers have found suitable local locations for storage and bases for shifts to start and finish. The service is keen to find such arrangements to reduce unproductive hours.

- (hh) There can be issues with access to IT resources for frontline colleagues. A bank of computers is available in Eastcroft but is not well used. Where other colleagues in the Council may access training electronically, the service ensures that such training is delivered face to face and regular training and development programmes are offered to operational staff.
- (ii) The Committee agreed that it would be useful to discuss many of the issues raised at this meeting with the Portfolio Holder at a strategic level, particularly in relation to diminishing resources and the need to maintain cleanliness in the light of increased fly tipping, high maintenance small green spaces, the NCH contract etc.
- (jj) The Committee expressed its appreciation of the work being done by both volunteers and paid staff to keep the city and its neighbourhoods clean.

RESOLVED, given the concerns raised during the discussion and recorded in the minutes, to recommend that

1) the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Cleansing Services:

- (a) provides the Committee with a briefing note on the relationship between Nottingham City Homes and its relationship with Public Realm Services, particularly Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance, and detailing what the contract for garden assistance services includes; and**
- (b) reviews the garden assistance contract with Nottingham City Homes (NCH) to ensure that it is cost effective and that the charge for the scheme represents the true cost to the Council; and renegotiates the contract should this not be the case, to ensure that the Council is not subsidising the scheme;**

2) the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Cleansing Services attends a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the following:

- (a) how resources will be prioritised, invested and directed to achieve the culture shift required to reach the ambitious objective to be the cleanest big city in England and to keep neighbourhoods as clean as the city centre;**
- (b) what lessons have been learnt in relation to Streetscene as a result of the way resources were deployed during the pandemic; and**
- (c) how work is being carried out with other departments delivering community, housing and protection services to ensure that enforcement**

is appropriately and robustly applied where necessary to maintain cleanliness in the city centre and neighbourhoods;

- 3) the Head of Public Realm Services ensures that when planning litter picking and mowing cycles litter picking is scheduled before mowing wherever possible and that it is impressed upon operational staff that litter should be cleared and not left behind after mowing.**

13 Scrutiny of the Council's Improvement and Recovery

The Chair reported back on the meeting held with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council to discuss scrutiny of recovery and improvement, as requested by Committee members at the Committee's 5 May 2021 meeting.

- a) The outcomes of the meeting are summarised as follows:
- (i) The Leader and/ or the Deputy Leader will attend the Committee's 7 July 2020 meeting to present a report on the improvement and recovery themes and to present progress on the refresh of the Corporate Plan.
 - (ii) Using the information presented in July, the Improvement and Assurance Board quarterly reports to Robert Jenrick (and his responses) and any other relevant sources of information, the Committee will decide on its focus for scrutiny of improvement and recovery, eg a particular theme, strategy or services.
 - (iii) The Leader would be willing to attend each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for approximately 15 minutes to provide a very brief update on key issues in relation to improvement and recovery, to aid work programme planning, if this is wanted by the Committee and if his diary allows.

RESOLVED to

- 1) note the attendance of the Leader and/ or Deputy Leader at the 7 July;**
- 2) use the information provided at the 7 July meeting, the Improvement and Assurance Board quarterly reports to Robert Jenrick (and his responses) and any other relevant sources of information, to agree on the focus for scrutiny of improvement and recovery at future meetings;**
- 3) invite the Leader to attend each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for approximately 15 minutes to provide a very brief update on key issues in relation to improvement and recovery, to aid work programme planning; and**
- 4) write to the Chair of the Improvement and Assurance Board to invite him (or another relevant external Board representative) to attend a future Committee meeting to discuss progress of recovery and improvement from an external perspective.**

14 Work Programme

(a) The Committee discussed its work programme for 2021/22 and added two items to its list of items to be scheduled/ reserve items for scrutiny as follows:

(i) Scooter Pilot

To consider the success of the wind scooter trial, including the illegal use of scooters and enforcement, measures of success, evaluation and plans for the future.

(ii) Tree Services

To consider the approach to management of tree planting and maintenance, to include the management of canopies in densely occupied areas, the impact of root damage to pavements and on accessibility and how future planning takes account of tree growth.

(b) The following items are scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee, to be held on 7 July 2020:

(i) Council Plan Refresh

To consider and comment on the robustness of the refresh and how it will contribute to recovery and improvement.

(ii) Recovery and Improvement

To receive information from the Leader on progress in each of the themes for recovery to aid identification of items to scrutinise for the remainder of the municipal year.