

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 15 March 2021 at 6.00 pm via Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors M Boylan, C Cassar, V J Holt, T L B Janke, T J Nelson, G L Offland and G C W Reynolds (Chair).

In Attendance: J Clarke (Democracy Officer (Democracy)), D Germany (Strategic Waste & Neighbourhood Services Performance Service Delivery Manager), A Lowe (Associate Director: Policy & Governance), K Robinson (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), D Sargeant (Director: Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services)

ENVSC22 Declarations of Interest

None.

ENVSC23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

ENVSC24 Nomination of a Vice Chair

RESOLVED – that Councillor C Cassar be elected as Vice-Chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

ENVSC25 Grounds and Cleansing Contract Monitoring

The Chair invited the Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services and the Strategic Waste & Neighbourhood Services Performance Service Delivery Manager to make their presentation.

Members received a presentation on the environmental aspects of the Council's grounds and cleansing contract with Idverde. The contract entered into force in April 2019 and was worth £4.2m. Idverde operated from Granville House, a Council owned depot, which was shared with Balfour Beatty. One hundred people were employed on the contract and these were mostly local workers. The contract was performance based but how standards were met was the prerogative of Idverde.

The contract covered such areas as grounds, playing fields, amenity grass cuts, verges, all areas in the public realm. Idverde managed hedges, pruning programmes, sports pitches, trees and woodland. There was a set amount of money that was for trees and woodland that the contractor was asked to perform its duties within. They were also responsible for cleansing, this included litter, street sweeping, and fly tipping, among other responsibilities.

The Authority had examined how to make its operation more efficient and part of the contract meant that new vehicles that were procured would be more efficient. These vehicles would also be equipped with trackers to monitor idling and efficiency to aid the reduction of the Borough's carbon impact.

Other climate-oriented policies included all of Idverde's operatives receiving environment management training, the monitoring of fuel consumption, and an expectation that Idverde would seek to buy local to pursue carbon reduction in procurement.

Future actions that were planned included a review of vehicle and route efficiencies, trials of electric vehicles, environmental awareness training, and a number of other initiatives.

There were also social aspects to the environmental policies, such as seeking to make operations quieter and cleaner to improve the local environment. There was also funding for community groups through the contract, Idverde would support projects and training for groups as well as providing equipment.

The Authority was looking to maximise waste value, to do so all green waste was composted, bulky wood was sent to biomass as opposed to waste, the Council was also investigating the possibility of woodchips to re-use and at a wood transfer station to store wood before it is moved on for biomass.

The Committee also heard that the Council was seeking to maximise recycling within the Borough. There was an investigation into how litter-picking operations could be managed in a way that could recycle litter. The Committee was praised for its recommendation to Cabinet on dual-use recycling bins.

A discussion followed with Members posing a number of questions for officers:

What happened to the compost that was being generated?

Any green waste that was collected curbside or by Idverde was taken to a green waste processor and then processed into compost. The Council did not own the compost generated. It was possible that the Council could look at composting through Idverde's operations.

Could the Borough reduce the spraying of glyphates and replace them with another control method?

The Council was investigating how it could reduce glyphate usage in the Borough Parks but had not found an alternative that worked as well. This would be kept under review.

Could best practice be investigated, looking at councils that had adopted a zero-glyphate policy?

This could be investigated. One idea that was under consideration was street sweeping with a wire brush to remove weeds thereby avoiding the need for spray. The Authority was constantly investigating potential solutions.

Waste was no longer sent to landfill but was instead incinerated, what impact did this have on the environment?

Incineration created energy so it was being put to use in a way that was more positive than using landfill sites. It did have more of an impact on the environment than recycling, but reducing waste in general would be best. Residual waste from red top bins was incinerated, but the aim was to encourage people to reduce their waste and recycle.

What were the contamination rates for recycling in the Borough?

Officers did not have this data available but would report to the Committee on this point. The waste crews reported contamination on a monthly basis based on what they could initially see in bins. Materials that were contaminated were sent to a sorting plant, which was an expensive process.

Education was key to spreading environmental messages, did the Council work with school to encourage them to take part in litter picks?

Veolia had a contract to engage with schools on why and how we recycle. This had been more challenging because of COVID but an online option had been launched and a number of schools engaged.

What barriers were there to a fully electric fleet of vehicles?

At the time of the meeting, there were six electric vehicles used by the enforcement and highways teams. Idverde would be providing five electric vehicles to the community action teams. There were a number of barriers to a fully electric fleet, such as the necessary charging infrastructure and the suitability of available electric vehicles for the jobs they were needed for. Idverde had trialled a larger electric van to test capacity and range. The Council was working with Idverde on electric vehicles and infrastructure.

Members were keen to highlight the importance of education's role in combatting climate change, from encouraging recycling to highlighting the difference between managed bio-diversity and neglect.

The Committee thanked the Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services and the Strategic Waste & Neighbourhood Services Performance Service Delivery Manager.

ENVSC26 Local Plan Working Group Update

The Chair updated the Committee on the work of the Local Plan Working Group.

Members heard that alongside the Communities Scrutiny Committee, a series of meetings had been held to examine bio-diversity net gain and urban greening in the Local Plan. The Group held a number of meetings throughout February 2021 identifying best practice and had now produced a report, which would be sent to Cabinet in the coming months.

ENVSC27 Chair's Update

The Chair noted that the Committee's recommendation to Cabinet would be received at the upcoming Cabinet meeting; Members were invited to watch the meeting stream.

This meeting of the Committee would be the last meeting of the municipal year but it was expected that workshop sessions would be held in April.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday, 21 July 2021