

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Special Meeting held 2 November 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Denise Fox (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Mike Chaplin, Neale Gibson, Mark Jones, Abdul Khayum, Robert Murphy, Moya O'Rourke, Colin Ross, Jackie Satur and Paul Wood

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ben Miskell, Ian Saunders, Gail Smith and Martin Smith.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

- 2.1 The Chair reported that the appendices to the report of the Executive Director, Place, at Agenda Item 6 – 'Call-in of the Leader's Decision on Changes to Environmental Maintenance Services' (Item 5 of these minutes) were not available to the public and press because (a) Appendix A contained exempt information described in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person and (b) the Council did not own the copyright to the photographs in Appendix B .
- 2.2 RESOLVED: That prior to a discussion on the above appendices, the press and public and those Members in attendance as signatories to the call-in, but who were not Members of the Committee, would be asked to leave the meeting to allow the Committee to discuss the confidential information.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

- 4.1 Brian Holmshaw raised the following questions relating to the changes to the Environmental Maintenance Services:-
- (a) In the report of the Executive Director, Place, it states 'The service changes are proportionate and during trial the public did not notice the difference'. No-one knew a trial was taking place, so were people looking for a difference? Did the many voluntary litter pick groups in the City who do such brilliant work have any idea this was happening?
- (b) This is then contradicted by the comment from page 2.2.1 in the report, which says that 'Litter picking – it is likely that residents will notice an increase in litter in residential areas due to the lower cleansing frequency'.

How can this be the case if no-one noticed during the trials?

- (c) 'No one neighbourhood will be targeted specifically by the proposed City-wide changes – there will be no impact to the health and wellbeing of residents or change to us being an in-touch organisation' (Section 2.1 – Corporate Plan). Does the Council not think that cutting litter collecting would always affect wellbeing?
- (d) In paragraph 4.1.1 of the accompanying document on Street Cleaning, there is a comment that 'The trials were successfully carried out from 13th September to 13th October 2016, and we have supplemental evidence from Amey's normal cleaning cycles and customer reports that indicate most areas will tolerate some reduced cleaning'. Where is this supplementary evidence? Why can't we see it? Which areas can sustain reduced cleaning? Which areas cannot?

4.2 In response, Phil Beecroft (Head of Highway Maintenance) stated that the Service had purposely not advertised the trial in order to gauge public reaction, and no comments or complaints had been received from residents anywhere in the City. He stated that this approach had been adopted in connection with similar trials in the past, and had been deemed as good practice. The comments made in the report with regard to the likelihood of residents noticing an increase in litter in residential areas due to the lower cleansing frequency, and the fact that reaction times for removing reported litter being relaxed, which could result in litter being left on the highway for longer periods of time, was simply an honest statement by the then Head of Highway Maintenance, representing his views. Mr Beecroft stated that, due to the level of change proposed, it was not envisaged that residents would notice any major changes in terms of litter in their respective neighbourhoods. He confirmed that the proposals represented uniform changes across the City, and were not targeted at any specific areas.

5. CALL-IN OF THE LEADER'S DECISION ON CHANGES TO ENVIRONMENTAL MAINTENANCE SERVICES

5.1 The Committee considered the following decision of the Leader of the Council, taken on 10th October 2017:-

- (a) the proposed changes to the street cleaning and grounds maintenance elements of the Environmental Maintenance Service, detailed in Section 1.3 and Appendix 'A' to the report, are implemented in full, subject to:-
 - (i) the capital costs associated with implementing the proposed changes do not exceed the costs listed in Closed Appendix 'A' to the report; and
 - (ii) the associated changes to the Contract are commercially acceptable to the Council; and
- (b) the Leader delegates authority to the Interim Director of Finance and Commercial Services, in consultation with the Executive Director, Place and the Director of Legal and Governance, to vary the Streets Ahead contract,

following the finalisation of the capital costs required to fund the contract change and finalisation of the associated commercial changes required to the Streets Ahead contract.

5.2 Signatories

The Lead Signatory to the call-in was Councillor Robert Murphy, and the other signatories were Councillors Douglas Johnson, Shaffaq Mohammed, Magid Magid, Alison Teal, Colin Ross, Andy Nash, Andrew Sangar and Penny Baker.

5.3 Reasons for the Call-in

The signatories confirmed that they wished to further scrutinize the decision process and the environmental and financial impacts of such decision.

5.4 Attendees

- Councillor Bryan Lodge (Cabinet Member for Environment and Streetscene)
- Laraine Manley (Executive Director, Place)
- Phil Beecroft (Head of Highway Maintenance)
- Councillor Douglas Johnson (Signatory to the Call-in)

5.5 As Lead Signatory and co-signatory for the call-in respectively, Councillors Robert Murphy and Colin Ross were invited to explain their reasons for the call-in. Councillor Rob Murphy stated that, given the extent of the proposed changes, Members should be allowed to further scrutinize the decision process and the environmental and financial impacts of such changes. He referred specifically to the proposed changes to the Grounds Maintenance element, expressing particular concern with regard to the proposed removal of shrub beds and roadside vegetation, which he believed would result in an increase in air and noise pollution. Councillor Ross stated that there were a number of changes involved as part of the decision that affected the public, and he believed that assurances were needed in terms of the evidence regarding some of the information in the report.

5.6 Councillor Bryan Lodge, in response to a query raised by Councillor Rob Murphy, stated that his attendance at this meeting, representing the Leader of the Council, was allowed under the Council Procedure Rules, and was consistent with other similar financial contract changes. He stated that notice of the proposed decision had initially been published in June 2017, but there had been a delay in terms of its implementation, with the details appearing in the local media and briefings being made to the Opposition Groups in the intervening period.

5.7 Phil Beecroft stated that the reasons for the changes were financial on the basis that the Service had been requested to make savings, with such savings having to be made from services operated solely by the Council and not those funded by the Government. He stressed that, if the changes were agreed, there would still be a high quality service in the City, which would be in line with, or better than, most other local authorities. Mr Beecroft reported on the proposed service changes in respect of street cleaning, indicating that the two-hour cleaning cycle in the City Centre area would continue, whereas the cleaning outside the City Centre would

be regraded from Category 'A' to 'B', resulting in the likelihood of there being some visible litter after cleaning. This would be as a result of a change in the cleaning operation, from manual litter-picking to machine-operated cleaning, thereby resulting in very low levels of litter which, due to access issues and location of the litter, would be unable to be cleaned up using machines. The arrangements whereby Amey would divert cleaners to problem areas would also be stopped, except in those cases where the reported waste was deemed to be hazardous or causing a particular problem. In terms of local shopping centres, it was envisaged that the street cleaning operations would be as good as, if not better than, arrangements in other cities. There had been an increase in the number of litter bins at shopping centres, and Amey was in the process of introducing smart bins which, by the use of a sensor, enabled a message to be sent to central control, indicating that the bin was 75% full, or whatever level the sensor was set at. These were deemed to be more efficient on the basis that, at present, the bins were emptied, at regular stages, regardless of how full they were. With regard to fly-tipping, Mr Beecroft stated that the removal in terms of reported cases of fly-tipping would only take place every other day, as opposed to every day, again, unless the waste was deemed as hazardous or causing a particular problem. Mr Beecroft concluded by referring to the changes in terms of Grounds Maintenance, referring to the three standards, A, B and C, indicating that with regard to Standard A, grass would be allowed to grow a little longer, Standard B, there would be no change in terms of the cutting of grass verges on housing estates, and in terms of Standard C, there would be a reduction in the removal of shrubs off the highway, which it was considered would assist with reducing levels of air and noise pollution.

5.8 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- There were no plans, as part of the proposed changes, to reduce cleaning in the City Centre.
- There was no difference in terms of the numbers of cleaning operators deployed in different Council Wards in the City, although it was accepted that some Wards suffered worse than others in terms of levels of litter, therefore additional resources would be allocated in such circumstances. This could involve those areas having more shopping centres. Additional funding had been identified to target specific problems regarding litter in the Page Hall area.
- It was acknowledged that some shop and business owners, who owned the land outside their premises, had erected bollards to stop vehicular access on to their land, which made it difficult, or impossible, for mechanical cleaners to access the area. Cleaning operators could only clear up those areas where they could access. Whilst this could be a potential issue, following the move to mechanical cleaning, it was not viewed as a big problem at the present time.
- The idea of asking business and shop owners to contribute towards the cost of cleaning litter from their premise frontages, possibly in the form of a supplement on their business rates, would be welcomed in principle, but

would be very difficult to administer, and would be likely to attract a high level of opposition.

- The Council, as part of its planning process, was able to place conditions when granting planning permission in respect of new shop and business premises, requiring the owners to be responsible for clearing up litter within a specified radius of the premises. Efforts were also being made at the present time to increase levels of litter bin sponsorship.
- As part of the grounds maintenance works, efforts had been made to clear shrub beds which were used in connection with anti-social behaviour, including drug dealing and the hiding of needles, to open up such areas, both to make them more attractive and to stop such anti-social activities.
- The smart technology in connection with having sensors on litter bins, to monitor levels of litter, had been used for some time, and was well tried and tested.
- As well as the mechanical cleaning of streets, Amey were also required to undertake manual sweeps, so the majority of litter would be cleaned up. However, there would always be some litter, such as under vehicles, where operators could not gain access, which would be left.
- There would be no change in terms of the frequency of cuts to grass verges in suburban areas. Approximately 20% of suburban grassed areas would be placed on a new bio-diversity mowing regime, which would result in annual cuts in order to create new habitat for wildlife.
- Whilst it was accepted that one month was a relatively short time period for a trial of this nature, the trial had continued in a number of areas of the City for longer and, given that no adverse comments or responses had been received from local residents, it had been considered that the changes could be made without any serious impact.
- The shrub beds targeted for removal were only those in derelict areas and those where anti-social behaviour was taking place.
- The litter picks organised by local community groups and/or individuals were additional to the street cleaning undertaken by Amey, and not a replacement. The Council had been very clear in terms of stressing how much litter and fly-tipping cost the Council in terms of clearing up, and the Council also welcomed the work of The Star newspaper in publishing articles relating to this issue, and encouraging the public to take more pride in their neighbourhoods.
- The Council had arranged a number of initiatives in the past with regard to preserving grass verges. This had included the granting of licences to residents, allowing them to put planters or other objects on their verges to stop vehicles parking on them. This practice continued today, albeit on a much reduced scale, following the re-scoping of the Streets Ahead contract a

few years ago.

- The capital costs in respect of the proposed changes would be met from savings from the Council's revenue contribution.
- Those businesses in the City Centre which had signed up to the Business Improvement District (BID) contributed financially to the cleaning up operations in the City Centre. In addition, those companies and businesses in Millennium Square also contributed to the cleaning up operations in that area.
- Every attempt was made to ensure that cleaning operations involving mechanical sweepers took place at those times when there were less vehicles parked on the highway.
- The split in the deployment of resources in respect of the cleaning of the City Centre and the rest of the City would remain the same, and it was expected that following the efficiencies made in respect of the proposed changes, standards of cleaning would remain the same, and in some cases, improve.
- There would be no changes in terms of the cleaning operations following special events held in the City Centre, and resources would be deployed to cleaning operations following smaller-scale events across the City, if there were particularly high levels of litter, or the litter was deemed to be hazardous.
- The proposals represented changes to working practices, and did not involve any re-negotiating of the contract.
- As part of the proposed changes to the grounds maintenance works, specifically regarding the removal of shrub beds, the Council would be liaising with the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust in connection with looking at which shrub beds should be removed, in the light of possible wildlife habitats. The proposal was to target those shrub beds in more urban areas or areas which had been neglected, and which were less likely to comprise wildlife habitats.
- The Council would constantly monitor the possibility of making further savings under the contract, linked to potential changes in Government policy. As well as being interested in the plastic bottle deposit scheme, the Council was looking at innovative ways of dealing with chewing gum waste.
- In terms of the smart litter bins, the Council was not aware of any evidence that they were susceptible to arson attacks, or any other form of vandalism.
- If the proposed changes were not agreed, equivalent efficiency savings would have to be found elsewhere in the Council.
- Considerable work had been, and would continue to be, undertaken in schools, in terms of educating pupils on the problems caused by, and the expense of clearing up, litter. Recent budget cuts had resulted in a reduction

in this work, but the Council had requested Amey to undertake more work in this area. Also, the Council was also encouraging businesses and community groups to sponsor more litter bins in the City. The Star newspaper had also undertaken some excellent work in highlighting the problems caused by litter, and the need for people to be more responsible in terms of dealing with their waste. Other initiatives included the Cleaner City Campaign and the Cleaner Sheffield Working Group, which was Chaired by Councillor Karen McGowan, Cabinet Adviser for Environment and Streetscene, and comprised representatives from the business community, community groups and schools, and aimed to establish standards in terms of the cleanliness of the City.

- Amey were happy to listen to suggestions in terms of changes to working practices.

5.9 RESOLVED: That the public and press and those Members who were signatories to the call-in, but who were not members of the Committee, be excluded from the meeting before discussion takes place on the appendices to the report on the grounds that, if the public and press and Members were present during the transaction of such business, there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information as described in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

5.10 Officers in attendance responded to a number of questions raised by members of the Committee on the contents of Appendices 1 and 2 to the report now submitted.

5.11 At this stage in the proceedings, the meeting was re-opened to the public and press and attendees.

5.12 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) agrees to take no action in relation to the called-in decision, but requests that the issue be added to its Work Programme 2017/18, to enable the Committee to scrutinize the services following the implementation of the changes.

The votes on the above resolution were ordered to be recorded and were as follows:-

For the resolution (10) - Councillors Ian Auckland, Mike Chaplin, Denise Fox, Neale Gibson, Mark Jones, Abdul Khayum, Colin Ross, Moya O'Rourke, Jackie Satur and Paul Wood

Against the resolution (1) - Councillor Robert Murphy

Abstained (0) - Nil

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 6.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 30th November 2017, at 5.00 pm, in the Town Hall.