

Cherwell District Council

Executive

4 April 2016

District Wide Cleansing Service

Report of Head of Environmental Services

This report is public

Purpose of report

To update the Executive on the actions and strategies being followed to ensure the district has a good level of cleanliness

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1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the good levels of customer satisfaction (69% in 2015) with the Council's Street Cleansing service
- 1.2 To support the enforcement actions to combat fly tipping, littering and dog fouling.
- 1.3 To support the combination of education, enforcement and operational efficiency to keep the District clean.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The cleanliness of the District is important to residents and is a significant factor affecting overall satisfaction with the Council and its services. Residents' satisfaction is measured each year through the annual customer satisfaction survey. In the last satisfaction survey in summer 2015, the satisfaction level with the Street Cleansing service was 69% which was a rise from 67% in 2014.
- 2.2 To keep the District clean, Environmental Services concentrate on achieving a balance between educating residents regarding waste and littering, enforcement action against those who discard waste and the operational efficiency of the Street Cleansing team.
- 2.3 Education of residents is achieved through raising awareness through Cherwell Link, through Neighbourhood Blitz events, through press releases and the use of the cartoon character Major Sparkle.
- 2.4 Enforcement action is carried out on a broad range of environmental issues including abandoned vehicles, dog fouling, duty of care, fly tipping and littering.

- 2.5 Operational efficiency of the Street Cleansing team is achieved through employing good quality highly motivated staff members, through strong proactive and reactive leadership and from using effective equipment.
- 2.6 The services offered by the Street Cleansing team include litter bin emptying, litter picking, graffiti removal, chewing gum removal, removal of fly tips following analysis of content to attempt to identify the transgressor plus contracted work in green open spaces for Banbury & Bicester Town Councils and Kidlington Parish Council.
- 2.7 The recent work taken on for Banbury Town Council has led to a reduction in complaints in green open spaces of 90% in Banbury.
- 2.8 The net budget for Street Cleansing & Public Conveniences in 2016/17 is £1.135 million. This involves 29 staff and 20 vehicles.
- 2.9 This service was the subject of debate and questions at the Council meeting on 22 February 2016 when the Leader of the Council called for a comprehensive report on the service and its issues to be submitted to the Executive for further consideration. This report serves that purpose.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 Street Cleansing is a high profile service delivering a clean District across all adopted highways in the Cherwell area. The Street Cleansing strategy is based on striking a balance between education, enforcement and service efficiency.
- 3.2 The strategy to keep somewhere clean should not be solely based on having an effective Street Cleansing team. Stopping litter, dog fouling and fly tipping through educating residents and taking enforcement action against those who insist on damaging the cleanliness of the District is often more cost effective than a large reactive Street Cleansing service.

Education

- 3.3 Most residents are responsible with waste, using litter bins when away from home and disposing of household waste through the Council's comprehensive set of waste collection services. However, a few people casually discard litter or dispose of household waste in gateways, alleyways and on other land causing environmental damage and passing unnecessary cost onto this Council and sometimes private landowners.
- 3.4 For residents, even worse than littering and fly tipping is dog fouling. Alleyways, footpaths and open spaces can be spoilt by a few thoughtless dog owners who fail to pick up after their dogs.
- 3.5 By raising awareness through a range of channels including the Cherwell Link, the website and other communication routes such as signage, reductions in dog fouling can be achieved. Regular patrols are carried out and recorded. In recent years more patrols have been carried out with staff wearing hi visibility clothing. This has the advantage that the public can see action being taken to limit dog fouling but does mean that catching dog fouling becomes even less likely.

- 3.6 Other examples of campaigns to raise the awareness of residents to keeping the District clean include the Neighbourhood Blitz events and Spring clean events. Each year six Neighbourhood Blitz events are planned in the urban areas. During most blitz events leaflets are delivered to up to 2,000 properties which raise residents' awareness and encourage responsible behaviour regarding waste. In the villages, the annual spring clean event encourages residents to take pride in their village.
- 3.7 In 2016, the annual spring clean event was brought forward and changed to fit in with a national campaign, Clean for the Queen. There were more than 40 community groups which took part in the Clean for the Queen campaign during March 2016.
- 3.8 A cartoon character Major Sparkle is also used for educational purposes. Major Sparkle is aimed at primary school age children. A resource pack is available to school teachers when they can use Major Sparkle.

Enforcement

- 3.9 The Environmental Services enforcement team carry out a broad range of enforcement activities covering abandoned vehicles, dog fouling, duty of care, fly tipping and littering. By having a dedicated team for environmental crime, all fly tipping incidents are investigated, case files built up where there is some evidence of the transgressor, interviews held under caution and where sufficient evidence exists and the public interest test is met, then prosecutions may result.
- 3.10 Regular litter patrols are carried out in the three urban centres with 40-60 fixed penalty notices (FPN) issued each year. In recent years many of the FPNs have been issued for people discarding cigarette ends.
- 3.11 The issuing of FPNs for dog fouling is the most difficult area. Despite many patrols the number issued is only up to five per year. This is usually because dog owners will pick up mess if they know other people are about. In the winter months, the shorter days means that it is extremely difficult to catch dogs fouling. To try and maximise the chances of success, in the summer months dog patrols are carried out early in the morning and into the evening.
- 3.12 Fly tipping is not a major problem in the District but can be a frustration. Most fly tips are household waste items and small in size. Often they appear to have been tipped through a resident being too lazy to use alternative disposal routes. The most expensive fly tips usually involve either tyres or asbestos. Fortunately, such fly tips are infrequent. All fly tips are investigated and some have sufficient evidence to start a full investigation and the building up of a case file. For a case file to go forward for prosecution the public interest test must be met and there must be a very high degree of confidence that the prosecution will result in a conviction.
- 3.13 The enforcement team have had a number of successes against fly tipping with successful prosecutions, fixed penalty notices being issued and formal cautions carried out. The number of enforcement successes are set out in the table below;

| | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16(to early March) |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|
| Fly tips | 390 | 469 | 477 | 498 |
| Prosecutions | 7 | 5 | 13 | 11 |
| Formal cautions | 7 | 11 | 13 | 16 |
| Litter Fixed Penalty Notices | 54 | 46 | 40 | 19 |
| Dog Fouling Fixed Penalty Notices | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 |

- 3.14 The enforcement team has three enforcement officers and one assistant enforcement officer to cover both this Council and South Northamptonshire. The number of successes can vary year on year, depending on the quality of the evidence found. At some fly tips no evidence exists as to where the waste has come from, at others the evidence is unclear but at a few fly tips good quality evidence can be found. When this occurs, an enforcement and prosecution process will be pursued assuming the public interest test is met. In this respect, it is more appropriate for performance management purposes to consider % prosecution success than actual fly tip numbers and therefore, it is intended that this be the performance focus from 2016/17.

Street Cleansing Service Efficiency

- 3.15 The Street Cleansing team carry out a wide range of activities. These activities include emptying bins, general litter picking, mechanical sweeping, keeping the three urban centres clean, keeping residential areas clean, cleaning villages, litter picking highway verges, emptying wheeled bins in busy laybys such as those on the A34 and keeping clean the parks and green open spaces for Banbury & Bicester Town Councils & Kidlington Parish Councils.
- 3.16 In keeping an area clean, there are some important principals to follow. The Street Cleansing team need to concentrate resources on areas which need cleaning. This principle affects the frequency and type of cleaning undertaken e.g. town centres cleaning is frequency based (daily) whilst many other areas are scheduled for cleaning based on experience when standards fall below an acceptable level.
- 3.17 The Code of Practice for litter sets out the cleanliness standards with A standard being the highest standard. When the standard of an area drops below B standard the aim is to return the area to an A. By inspecting the area on a regular basis Street Cleansing supervisors can identify areas which are falling below standard and then target the Street Cleansing team to return these areas to an A standard.
- 3.18 With a large geography, mobility is a key requirement of Street Cleansing. A man pushing a wheelbarrow will only move at around 2 mph and will pass a lot of streets which do not need cleaning. Manpower is expensive and likely to become more expensive in the future. Vehicle costs are less than 25% of the cost of a staff member and each vehicle greatly improves the productivity of staff by cleaning a much larger geographic areas than staff pushing wheelbarrows.
- 3.19 The quality of staff employed on Street Cleansing has greatly increased over recent years. This has allowed a movement from frequency based cleaning to cleaning areas when they need cleaning using local knowledge. Hence in many areas, a staff member has the responsibility to keep their designated area clean rather than

being given prescriptive frequencies. This has meant that the number of supervisory staff is minimised and that much of the supervisor's role is around ensuring standards are maintained.

Chewing Gum Removal

- 3.20 Chewing gum removal is carried out by a specialist external contractor. To remove gum, steam is applied to each piece to ease its removal. This is a slow and hence costly process. Once the gum is removed from an area the contractor then uses a mechanical scrubber to give the area a final polish. Since the removal process relies on steam, gum removal from paving stones or block paving works well but removal of gum from tarmac surfaces is not possible as the tarmac is affected. The contractor usually is engaged for a full week at a time. Bicester Sheep Street and Banbury High Street are done at least annually with other key areas being cleaned every two-three years depending on the build-up of gum. In most years, up to £15k is spent on gum removal.

Graffiti removal

- 3.21 Sometimes graffiti is removed by the Street Cleansing team, occasionally it is removed by an external contractor depending on the nature and location of the graffiti. The Street Cleansing team have some basic equipment which works on metal or brick surfaces. For more difficult surfaces such as stone, an external specialist contractor maybe used. Usually the responsibility for the removal of graffiti rests with the owner of the building or structure that has the graffiti. However, the Street Cleansing team do remove graffiti from signs and some utility boxes since it normally can be removed with a simple graffiti wipe. Where the graffiti is on a house or a wall of a domestic and usually private property, the Street Cleansing team will remove the graffiti with the permission of the owner. The Street Cleansing team will also get involved if the graffiti is offensive. However where the graffiti is on commercial buildings, housing association properties and/or is at height on a private property, then the responsibility for removal lies with the owner. The graffiti policy approved by the Executive from September 2007 is in Appendix1.
- 3.22 The Street Cleansing team often photograph any graffiti and pass this onto the Anti Social Behaviour team and they liaise with the Police. Fortunately the amount of graffiti in the district is low. A recent spate in Bicester was largely on commercial properties located on industrial estates and the responsibility for removal lay with the buildings' owners.

Keeping the A34 clean

- 3.23 Keeping the A34 clean is a challenge. Litter picking on the verges is difficult, in many of the laybys a lot of waste is generated by trucks parking overnight. Most nights the laybys on the A34, especially at the M40 end are nose to tail with trucks parked overnight.
- 3.24 The wheeled bins in the laybys are emptied once a week. In addition the laybys are litter picked when the bins are emptied. However, if they overflow the litter is blown down onto the verges or onto the central reservation. Several years ago rats were a problem in some of these laybys due to food waste being discarded by truck drivers in to the nearby vegetation. However, since the laybys changed over from litterbins to a wheeled bin system, this problem has largely been removed. The larger wheeled bin system offers other advantages in addition to those mentioned above

such as more waste being captured by the bins, staff not having to come into contact with waste which is often very unpleasant and a change of emptying to once a week.

- 3.25 Despite wheeled bins provided in all the laybys, litter does build up on the verges. To safely litter pick on the north bound verge and for some of the south bound verge, a mobile lane closure is required. However due to the volume of traffic there is only a narrow window where Highways England will allow a lane closure. The times when Highways England will agree to a lane closure are at night (difficult for litter picking) or early in the morning at weekends. Consequently the work is always done early Sunday morning during the period March – November, since the work must cease when traffic levels rise to a certain level. Usually on a Sunday, traffic levels are too high at around 09.00/09.30.

Highway Verges

- 3.26 The large geography of Cherwell means there are many miles of highway. Keeping the verges clear can be a challenge. During the summer and spring, the grass can be very high and it can be difficult to litter pick the verges because the litter cannot be seen. However, in late autumn and winter the vegetation dies back often revealing litter and therefore Street Cleansing resources are put into cleaning verges from December when the verges can more easily be cleaned.
- 3.27 On the major A roads through the District, the verges are litter picked once per month, the B roads are litter picked around 4 times/year and the minor roads are litter picked as & when required but at least annually.

Urban Centres

- 3.28 The three urban centres are a priority for the Street Cleansing team. Both Banbury & Bicester have seven day/week shopping and a buoyant night time economy. Consequently these two urban centres use a significant proportion of the team. During the lighter evenings, the hours of cover are increased so that the town centres are cleaned from 6.00am and continuing up to 7.00pm.
- 3.29 Kidlington has seven day cover also but with a very limited night time economy, the hours covered are considerably shorter than Banbury & Bicester.

Mechanical sweeping

- 3.30 The mechanical sweeping fleet consists of two large sweepers and two small sweepers. The two small sweepers are used in the urban centres and on the cycle tracks which head towards Oxford. The sweepers are expensive to purchase and to operate especially as they have an operational life of only around four years.
- 3.31 The large mechanical sweepers are used on main and residential roads. Although expensive to purchase, they have an operational life of at least eight years and the operational cost is similar to the small sweepers due to their extended life and there being a good market for large second hand sweepers.
- 3.32 The aim of the mechanical sweepers is to keep the roadside kerbs free from detritus. However, with flash storms this can be difficult to achieve. During the winter months the sweepers are not always used since they would be sweeping up rock salt which the Highways Authority has spread. Also, during the autumn months

they can be extremely busy removing the build- up of leaves. A high percentage of the sweepings are now recycled being transported to a Grundons recycling plant where a significant percentage of the sweepings are recycled. In 2015/16, over 400 tonnes of street sweepings will have been recycled.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 To keep the District clean a range of activities are required. Removing litter & fly tips quickly is important but if residents can be educated to be responsible with their waste the amount of fly tipping and litter can be reduced. For those who wish to ruin the environment through selfish actions, an enforcement team investigates all fly tipping and helps to reduce littering by the issuing of fixed penalty notices.
- 4.2 Customer satisfaction is good with 69% achieved in 2015 a rise from 67% in 2014.

5.0 Consultation

None

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified

Option 1 : To support the activities to keep the district clean

Option 2: To reject the activities used to keep the district clean

Option 3: To ask officers to consider alternative improvements

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The Street Cleansing service has a significant annual budget in excess of £1 million/year. This report proposes no change to the budget

Comments to be checked by:

Brian Wallace Principal Accountant, 01295 221737,
brian.wallace@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no legal implications with this report. The risks associated with delivering the street cleansing service are mitigated by a rigorous health and safety training regime.

Comments checked by:

Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance

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Risk

- 7.3 There is a reputational risk if the Council decides not to continue with the street cleansing programme as is, the satisfaction results may decline as a result. The risks will be managed through the services operational risk register and escalated as and when necessary to the corporate risk register.

Comments checked by:

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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Cherwell: Safe, Clean and Green

Lead Councillor

Councillor Debbie Pickford, Lead Member for Clean and Green

Document Information

| Appendix No | Title |
|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Graffiti Policy |
| Background Papers | |
| None | |
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GRAFFITI POLICY

Graffiti we will undertake to remove within 15 working days

1. Graffiti on Cherwell buildings
2. Graffiti that is racist or offensive in nature within 3 working days
3. Graffiti from external residential surfaces where the graffiti is visible from the street or other public space, is no higher than 2m from the ground and is accessible for a contractor
4. One off Graffiti on Parish and Town Councils property
5. One off graffiti from small businesses if the graffiti is visible from the street and is no higher than 2m from the ground
6. From Housing association property and from larger commercial premises for a charge to cover contractor costs.
7. From buildings where the graffiti is visible from the street or other public space, is no higher than 2m from the ground and is accessible for a contractor at no cost, in areas covered by a Neighbourhood blitz event

Graffiti we will not remove

1. Graffiti that is etched or inscribed into surfaces
2. Graffiti that is on wooden fences
3. Graffiti which is occurring from multiple repeat attacks
4. Graffiti where the owner or occupier will not give an indemnity where we judge there is a risk of damage to the surface by removing the graffiti
5. Graffiti that is more than 2m above ground level or is inaccessible