

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**20 June 2006
5.30 p.m.
Town Hall**

Present: Councillors Wolstenhome (in the Chair), Carr, Colledge, Dickie, Graham, McDonnell, Marsden, Simpson, Turnbull and Walton.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Cowper, Hepplewhite, Kellett, Robinson, Smith, Stoddart, Thomson and Woods

Tom Punton – Environmental Services Manager, City of Durham

Apologies

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Kinghorn and Pitts.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 May 2006

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record.

Press Cuttings

The Panel noted the content of the articles from the local press regarding the City of Durham's high standard of street cleanliness, being top in the County with the percentage of streets being 2%.

Note: *Councillor Stoddart made the Chair aware of the untidy state of the Members' Room and this information was passed to the Committee Clerk.*

Further discussions – Litter Pickers

The City of Durham's Environment Services Manager gave an overview of the litter / street cleaning provision as operated within the District with the main points being:-

- The Street Cleaning Service has been re-branded and now part of the Street Scene Service which is operated over the same Neighbourhood System as the Neighbourhood Wardens, and also incorporates Grounds Maintenance and Refuse Collection.
- As the services are now integrated, the same vehicles, liveries and uniforms are now used, and the Staff involved are multi-skilled and can transfer between what were previously different services.
- Each "Neighbourhood" has a Streetscene Team Leader who manages the staff in their particular area. The whole team can take pride in their particular neighbourhood and indeed healthy competition between areas can lead to an improved quality in the street scene.

- Also where previously, a member of, grounds maintenance staff for example, may have come across a discarded mattress and then passed this onto the refuse department or street cleaning, due to the multi-skilled workers and multi use vehicles, many of these types of incident can be dealt with “on-the-spot”, improving turnaround times. All vehicles within the section have “Incident Report Forms” so that any more complicated matters can be passed on to the relevant staff back upon return to the depot.
- Each Team Leader has 1 mobile Litter Picker with a small vehicle. This enables a larger coverage, which has reduced the overall number of “on-foot” Litter Pickers from 12 to 6. Channel Sweepers operate fortnightly between adjoining neighbourhoods i.e. Zone 1 Week 1, Zone 2 Week 2, Zone 1 Week 3 etc.
- The Streetscene Team Leaders have links with “their” Neighbourhood Warden (and indeed any covering Warden) and they meet with their staff everyday. This hands-on approach has proven better than having one central manager as the local knowledge and personal response helps to provide a better service. Also, the Team Leaders endeavour to work closely with local Members and voluntary groups so that problems can be identified early and dealt with accordingly.
- Performance is measured in two main ways, by Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 199 (the percentage of streets in the upper quartile, street cleanliness) and by a Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) indicator which is assessed independently by Neighbourhood Wardens. Whilst BVPI 199 measures street cleanliness, the LEQ monitor a wider range of street scene factors including grass cutting quality, litter quantity, state of repair of street furniture etc. This information is then fed back to the Team Leaders to help improve the service. There are also timescales and targets given to the responses to incidents to keep the standards high.
- There is an “Environmental Hit Squad” in place to help tackle any particular problems or flare ups and operate as flexible cover and assistance.
- Certain areas are targeted slightly differently, for example the City Centre is litter picked 7 days a week, and “Zone 1” shopping areas within the village centres are targeted once per day, six days a week. The City Centre is tackled by staff on foot, whilst the village centres utilise staff with small mobile litter picking vehicles.

Questions to the Environmental Services Manager

Following the overview from the Environmental Services Manager, Members were afforded an opportunity to ask further questions, the salient points raised being:-

- Concerns regarding litter being generated by Premier Waste who collect items for recycling on behalf of the Council were noted. Measures could be taken to withhold funds if necessary, though it was thought that positive action on specific incidents could be achieved through dialogue with Premier Waste in the first instance.
- It was noted that bus shelters are cleansed on a fortnightly basis, with Adshel being responsibly for the cleansing and maintenance of their own shelters. Of

course in extreme cases, staff could attend an incident to clean up shelter or in the case of a danger to public health.

- The level of fees for the collection of large waste items from households was queried and it was noted that “bulky items” were currently collected free and that certain items are collected and charged as per a schedule, with most items being £10 e.g. radiators, fixtures and fittings. If there is a large volume or number of items, estimates of costs can be provided by staff upon inspection.
- Members noted that whilst there was good progress with the general cleanliness of the Street Scene, it was felt that there in some areas footpaths could benefit from additional cleaning. This was noted, but with only one machine currently available there was a requirement to focus resources to those areas with the worst problems. Each Neighbourhood has footpaths cleaned 6 or 7 times per year, with this figure being constrained purely by resources.
- Upon visiting neighbouring Authorities, some Councillors had noted that these other Authorities’ dog fouling bins were of a higher quality and wondered whether the City of Durham could adopt similar style bins. Indeed, the City of Durham did at one time utilise more expensive metal bins for this purpose but after a large number were destroyed by arson, these expensive bins proved not to be cost effective. Therefore, currently the City of Durham uses a “standard” wheelie bin secured to a steel post. This system allows for easy replacement should a burnout occur. The cost of the post and works to install are approximately £45 and then £15 per bin, whereas a single lower capacity metal bin would be in the order of £200+. In addition, notwithstanding the fact that other types of waste should not be placed in the dog foul bins, it is inevitable that members of the public would use the bins for disposal of drinks cans, pizza boxes etc. It was agreed however that in general it is better for the rubbish to be placed in these dog foul bins than cast aside on the ground. In this respect, the standard size bins offer much greater capacity than the “fancy” metal bins. This lower cost allows for a greater amount of bins to be in place, and in a comparison of quality versus quantity, the positive environmental and cost impact of using a quantity approach to provide many bins to many areas outweighs any visual impact more attractive bins may have. It was considered important to note however that these bins could be better identified by use of stickers, and also that maybe in key areas that slightly more expensive bins may be appropriate, i.e. the City Centre, Tourist spots.
- Used chewing gum was felt to be a major factor that detracts from the otherwise clean nature of the street scene within the City of Durham. The removal process is costly and time consuming and is therefore currently only operated in the City Centre and on a bi-annual basis. With the amendment to BV199 definition in 2005, chewing gum has now been classified as a form of litter. The City’s Neighbourhood Wardens will be running a scheme similar to that ran for cigarette butts, highlighting this fact and encouraging the public to dispose of used chewing gum considerately. Again, similar to the cigarette campaign, this will be followed up by enforcement and the issuing of fixed penalty notices to people who fail to dispose of the used chewing gum appropriately.

It may be possible in the future to target “Zone 1” shopping centres within the villages if funds are available to do so, as new awareness and enforcement may persuade the public not to simply re-litter the footpaths with used chewing gum post footpath cleansing.

- It was noted that whilst there are four specific cigarette bins in the City Centre, the City of Durham was working with a manufacturer to produce an insert for the existing rubbish bins to help negate some minor criticism regarding the cigarette bins, and also as a cost effective solution as regards the further provision of such bins.

Actions for the next meeting:-

- Consideration of the draft report on the topic of Litter Pickers and the drafting of appropriate recommendations.
- A review of the procedures originally recommended in the Scrutiny of Temporary Road Closures.

The Meeting terminated at 6.40 p.m.