

Extract from the draft minutes of the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 29 January 2019

198. Waste and Zones Futures Business Case

The Panel considered a report inviting it to consider the proposed service changes, financial savings and investment in front line services following the review of the existing Recycling, Waste and Fleet Service and Community Zones Service. Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Waste, Environment and Transportation, Councillor Bourne, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities and Richard Block, Assistant Director for Environment presented the report and attended to assist the Panel.

Councillor Goss explained the background to the report and presented the key proposals of the Business Case. Potential savings and additional income of £748,000 had been identified over the next three years. It was stressed that although a new management structure would be put in place, there would no reduction in frontline staff. The new structure would fully integrate the Parks and Open Spaces team into the zones structure. In addition, as the Cemetery and Crematorium did not fit well into the zones structure, it would be moved in the Communities team, as would some Zones resources allocated for community development and engagement work. Other elements of the Business Case were a greater focus on enforcement, a greater emphasis on the use of technology and a review of the market.

A key element of the Business Case was further investment in the Shrub End Depot and in the capacity of frontline services in order to ensure there was sufficient capacity to cater for the increase in housing growth in the borough. In addition, a new contract for the processing and sale of dry recyclable material was underway. Due to global market conditions there was no longer a demand for plastic film, plastic bags and plastic wrappers and it was proposed that these no longer be collected as recyclable material. Residents would be advised to include them in their black bag waste. An allowance would be included within the 2019/20 budget to allow for the increased costs that could arise from this.

In summary this was a positive review which would deal with capacity issues in the Waste and Zones services. It would increase the capacity of the service, improve the technology available and also introduce better controls on recycling supplies. In response to a query from a member of the Panel about the possibilities of increasing the use of multi compartment vehicles, it was explained that this was outside the scope of the review, but a number of efficiencies in collection methods had been identified as part of the review. These issues had been looked at in detail in the review of waste and recycling collection in 2017. It was also confirmed that issues relating to the provision of wheeled bins was outside the scope of this review.

It was suggested that it would be beneficial for ward councillors and parish councils to receive better information about the work of the zones teams to ensure better co-ordination and that processes needed to be put in place to raise the visibility of their work. Councillor Goss responded that there was an efficient internal workflow system in place to ensure that tasks allocated to the zones teams were completed efficiently. Rotas for the Zones teams were made available to parish councils to help avoid duplication. Ward councillors should build effective relationships with their Zones teams and communicate regularly with them to ensure that they were aware of the work they were undertaking. However, work was underway to create an online portal for members to report issues and to improve communication between ward councillors and the Zones teams. Concern was also expressed by a member of the Panel about the consistency of the approach to enforcement by the Zones teams, particularly in respect of items belonging to street homeless individuals. Councillor Bourne and Councillor Goss responded and explained that they believed the Zones teams approached this issue fairly and sensitively.

In respect of the proposed changes to collections of plastic film, bags and wrappers, concern was expressed by a member of the Panel about the resulting increase in waste to landfill. This proposal was counter to the view expressed by Council in the motion on plastic packaging approved by Council in December 2017. Commercial waste and recycling companies were still collecting such products. In addition, the market for recyclables was fluid and could change quickly. Further information was sought about how these changes would be communicated to residents.

In response, Councillor Goss stressed that that this decision was market led. There was no commercial demand for the material. The Council had recently held a market engagement day in advance of tendering for the new contract and this had been the universal view of the suppliers. Even if the material was collected, it would not be recycled, as the recycling companies would remove it when sorting. The key was to pressure the manufacturers and supermarkets from using such materials. In terms of engaging with residents, information would be provided through the recycling calendar. Traditional media and social media channels would also be used, and councillors, including parish councillors, would also play a role in disseminating key messages.

A member of the Panel sought information about the additional cost of this change to collection methods. In response, Richard Block explained that this was not clear, as the cost would be included in the new waste collection contract, which had not been let. However, it was anticipated that costs would reduce, as there would be less contamination of recyclable material, and the costs that resulted from this contamination would no longer be built into the contract.

The Panel also explored what tonnage increase in waste and recyclables was anticipated from the increase in housing growth, in order to justify the acquisition of a further vehicle and crew. This would be provided to the Panel, but it needed to be borne in mind that other factors also had to be taken into consideration, such as the collection run times. It was also stressed that the service was also looking to increase opportunities for recycling, and was looking into collection points for bottle bricks and recycling points for crisp packets.

The Panel also explored some of the staffing issues arising out of the review. It was confirmed that there would be no reduction in frontline staff. There would be a reorganisation of the management structure, and four current management posts would not be included in the new structure. In terms of the transfer of the community development and engagement work. It was estimated that across the borough this amounted to two full time equivalents. This resource would be transferred into the Communities team which would provide a dedicated resource and help ensure a consistent borough wide approach that would be better integrated with the work of the wider Community Enabling team.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The contents of the Waste and Zones Futures Business Case be noted;
- (b) The financial savings and the investment in frontline services proposed in the service were scrutinised;
- (c) Further information be provided to the Panel about the tonnage increase in waste and recyclables was anticipated from the increase in housing growth.