

Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 16 October 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Finn, in the Chair.
Councillor Blight, Vice Chair.
Councillors Allison, Cuddihee, Dingle, Freeman, Goslin, Hendy, P.Nicholson, Poyser and Stevens.

Also in attendance: Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change), Councillor Coker (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport), Councillor Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Libraries, Events, Cemeteries and Crematoria), Andrew Binding (Senior Public Health Analyst), Rosie Brookshaw (Democratic Advisor), Ruth Harrell (Director of Public Health), Philip Robinson (Service Director for Street Services) and Gary Walbridge (Strategic Director for Adults, Health and Communities).

The meeting started at 2.02 pm and finished at 4.02pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

10. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

11. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

12. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

13. **Street Services Performance Update**

Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) Street Services covered domestic and commercial waste, recycling, Green Estates and trees, street cleansing, graffiti, highways, pavements, street lighting, street signs (excluding road signs), traffic lights and zebra crossings;
- b) Three quarters of the total casework submitted was for Street Services;

- c) Capacity for team leaders in Street Services was a challenge due to the volume of casework submitted;
- d) Historically, due to Local Government austerity measures, there had been a 35% cut in grounds teams staffing budgets which had implications for front line delivery;
- e) Improved health and safety measures had been applied which improved safety when working near roads however, it resulted in slower work operationally;
- f) The Council had invested in fleet decarbonisation and had 70 electric vehicles;
- g) Since 2021, Street Services had seen a year-on-year reduction of public complaints;
- h) Only 0.1% of domestic bins in Plymouth were missed, and the vast majority of the missed bins were collected within 48 hours;
- i) Grass cutting on verges and playground sites had more than doubled;
- j) Environmental Planning had worked to create green community hubs to work with young people and had received national awards for work around the first Council owned Habitat Bank in the country, planting over 15,000 trees in the last three years.

In response to questions, it was explained:

- k) The works on Laira Bridge should be completed by November 2024, however this was weather dependant;
- l) An engagement process was undertaken with Councillors every year on grass cutting;
- m) Due to feedback from residents, there had been 70 changes to the grass cutting regime, taking into account the 60/40 framework;
- n) The 2021 Environment Act obliged Councils to be clear on what work they were doing on nature recovery;
- o) Anaerobic digestion was part of the focus of the food waste delivery the Council was working on;
- p) Food waste delivery would quickly boost the recycling rate;
- q) Recycling rates in the city were seasonal;
- r) Targets for recycling rates were outlined in the Net Zero Action Plan;

- s) The feedback around grass cutting was consistent, although there was a spike in feedback during 2021 when the 60/40 regime was introduced;
- t) In 2022 there were 169 cases of Councillor casework around weeds, 101 in 2023 and only 38 in 2024 to date;
- u) There had been a review of grit bins, and they had been mapped to ensure they were refilled. The Council ensured they would refill all grit bins in 2024;
- v) The grit bin review would be brought back to the Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Panel upon completion;
- w) Ward Councillors would be included in the grit bin review;
- x) Tree management was done on a case by case basis and was prioritised on the level of risk;
- y) The way Plymouth City Council (PCC) managed tree maintenance had changed to ensure whole streets were not pollarded and disruption was kept to a minimum;
- z) All grit bins had been inspected and refilled in preparation for the winter maintenance season;
- aa) During periods of austerity, PCC had a legal responsibility to invest in statutory services, and therefore departments such as Street Services did suffer due to lack of funding;
- bb) Weston Mill Recycling Centre would remain open 4 days a week;
- cc) The rights of property owners regarding tree management could be found on the PCC website.

The Committee agreed the following recommendations:

1. To note the report;
2. To thank the Cabinet Members and Service Director for their hard work;
3. To resolve to add the grit bin review to the work programme.

14. **Bereavement Services Update**

Councillor Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Libraries, Events, Cemeteries and Crematoria) introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) The new crematorium provided a calm and comforting space surrounded by nature, with a memorial area with grounds;

- b) The park had been open to the public for nine weeks and had delivered 302 cremations, and 51 functions at the café;
- c) The café was open to the general public for anybody to visit;
- d) Over a thousand members of the public attended the open day of the crematorium;
- e) The old crematoriums at Weston Mill and Efford were not disability friendly, nor energy efficient;
- f) The new crematorium offered bariatric cremations, which were not offered at Weston Mill or Efford.

In response to questions, it was explained:

- g) The lease at Drake Lodge would end in 2050 and it would be returned to PCC, however negotiations had been undertaken to ensure there was an entrance through Drake Lodge to the park;
- h) There would be wildflower meadows with paths mown through, and more manicured sites closer to the park. These would take a while to grow and develop;
- i) 83% of the public who attended funerals travelled by car;
- j) Taxi drivers had been invited to the park and given the opportunity to drive around and become familiar, which would create ease of transport for public attending funerals in the future;
- k) Meetings were taking place to discuss a possible bus service to the park;
- l) There was a tender out to add two bus routes via the crematorium;
- m) Loved ones at Weston Mill and Efford would continue to be looked after and the graves maintained to the highest standard;
- n) The cremators at Weston Mill and Efford had been removed due to being unfit for purpose;
- o) Both of the chapels at Weston Mill and Efford would be closed;
- p) The memorial books, toilets and water for flowers would still be available at Weston Mill and Efford crematoriums;
- q) The feedback from the open day of the new crematorium had been completely positive, and another open day would be held in Spring 2025;

- r) The café was open 8.30am to 4.00pm on weekdays, 10.00am to 2.00pm on weekends;
- s) 'Living Wakes' had been considered as an option for the crematorium to offer.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

15. **Work Programme**

The Committee agreed to note the Work Programme.

16. **Tracking Decisions**

The Committee agreed to note its tracking decisions document.