



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 22nd AUGUST 2024

PRESENT: Councillor M Couchman (Chair), Councillors L Wood, C Adams, M Bailey, M Clarke, J Oates, B Price and N Statham

CABINET: Councillor Carol Dean

The following officers were present: Anica Goodwin (Executive Director Organisation), Anna Miller (Assistant Director – Growth & Regeneration), Niki Stokes (Planning Assistant (Policy)), Leanne Costello (Senior Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer) and Laura Sandland (Democratic and Executive Support Officer)

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Clarke.

Apologies were received from Councillor D Foster as Portfolio Holder for Sustainability, Waste and Recycling.

31 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 1st July 2024 and the 7th of August 2024 were approved as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor L Wood and seconded by Councillor M Clarke)

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

33 UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR

The Chair advised the Committee that the items for open spaces due to be on the agenda this evening had been moved as it was important that there was enough time to look at every item thoroughly and that this would be added to the agenda on the 2nd October.

34 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY & GROWTH COMMITTEE

The Chair updated the Committee that Further to the meeting on the 7th August you attended Cabinet to present the two recommendations which were agreed, the Annual Garden Waste Subscription item decision was deferred as requested to allow the item to return to the Committee today and then a report would be presented to Cabinet on the 29th August following Scrutiny.

35 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY & GROWTH COMMITTEE FROM CABINET OR COUNCIL

There were none.

36 ANNUAL GARDEN WASTE SUBSCRIPTION CHARGE

The Chair introduced the report of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Sustainability, Recycling and Waste to provide IS&G Scrutiny with the updated information regarding the rationale to substantiate the increase in garden waste subscription. The original report presented to Scrutiny on the 7th August had been updated and is contained herewith. This report would be subject to IS&G scrutiny approval be presented to Cabinet on the 29th August.

The Chair welcomed Councillor C Dean in the absence of the Portfolio Holder and the Executive Director Organisation who introduced the report, highlighting the following figures that had been requested by the Committee –

- For a 30% drop in overall subscriptions an expected figure of £20,000 has been provided, however it should be noted that Lichfield saw a downturn in approximately £100.00. Even if Tamworth saw a downturn of 10% this would not have a significant budgetary impact.
- Figures around CPI included, which showed that, had this been applied each year then the cost for the green waste collection would now already be £45.52.
- A breakdown of related costs was included in the appendices (Pg 86). It was confirmed that the exact breakdown between Lichfield and Tamworth is Tamworth (32%) and Lichfield (68%).
- If the annual green waste charge does not increase, then the cost to the budget would be £68,000.
- Overall summary budgets have been included as requested.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. On appendix 5 (Pg 85) were the figures for 2018/19 actual or budget, and why were there only figures for this period and 24/25?
It was confirmed that these were budget, and that Officers had been asked to show the variance between when the service started and now.
2. Does the £20,000 figure for a 30% downturn consider reduction in costs such as transport or is this just the subscriptions?
Officers confirmed that if the Council lost £20,000 due to a reduction in subscriptions, whilst the cost depletion would go down it would not go down by £20,000.

The Operations Manager (Joint Waste Service) added that from experience, they have never known a loss of 30% from introducing a chargeable service and gave the example of when Lichfield put the price up by £4.00 in one year they only lost a minute amount of subscribers.

3. Clarification around why there are no bank charges showing for 18/19 and this increased to £10,000 for 24/25?

Tamworth's accountant has confirmed that these figures have been submitted by the Lichfield accountant and they were reported at 0, they are unsure if at these times the fees were directly attributed to the service, but the figures are correct now.

RESOLVED: that the Committee supported the following recommendations for Cabinet to agree:

1. Approve the increase of the annual subscription fee to £41 effective 1st January 2025, with the sign up window open in October.

(moved by Councillor M Couchman and seconded by Councillor N Statham)

In Favour – 5

Against – 1

Abstentions - 2

37 JOINT WASTE SERVICE - OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE UPDATE AND DATA

The Chair welcomed Steve Gee and Victoria Woodhouse from the Joint Waste Service to introduce the report of the Operations Manager of the Joint Waste Service to provide the Committee a quarterly update of the Joint Waste Service. This is a shared service that Lichfield District Council (LDC) deliver on behalf of both authorities.

The Operations Manager introduced the report and explained for any new Members that this is a legacy report from the Dual Stream Recycling Service. The service was described as a good service that works and key information within the report was highlighted to the Committee as well as the launch of the new recycling campaign.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Clarification around the £154,000 overspend.
It was confirmed that the costing model is based around the number of properties and currently sits at a 38%/62% split between Tamworth and Lichfield, therefore £64,000 is Tamworth's proportion of the overspend.

2. Whilst the overspend is described as in proportion for the budget, what measures are in place to try to bring that down?
Officers confirmed that this is an ongoing process. The recycling campaign could help reduce costs by reducing the residual waste; rounds can be changed over time, making these as efficient as possible; looking at use of labour; looking at driving styles to increase fuel efficiency as well as looking at contracts and the quality of the product. Some factors cannot be controlled such as global process in places like China and Taiwan which can have an impact on commodity prices.
It was highlighted that it would be helpful to have a plan each year for how this service were looking to keep costs down within the updates.
3. Are the crew employed by the service?
It was confirmed that it is an in-house operation; Lichfield are the employing agent. There are 88 frontline staffs plus the back-office support. Agencies are used due to fluctuation volumes. Whilst agency volumes are currently higher than they would want they work based on 85% staff and 15% agency.
4. How much is spent on agency staffs and how the costs compare to an employee, whether it is worth employing more permanent staffs rather than relying on agency staff and whether the quality if affected by agency staff?
5. This year potential agency costs could be around £500,000. Costs of agency staff against employed staffs is quite equal. The problem with employing more staff is ensuring that in quiet periods there is enough work so there is a balancing act. Whilst employed staffs should be better trained/more reliable etc, many of the agency staff used are long term and it would be difficult to pick out agency from employed staff. A hidden cost of agency worked can be time for training. The Committee requested a comparison of the costs for agency against employed staff.
6. Whether staff could be cross trained to work in other areas such as street scene when the service is quieter?
Whilst multi-skilling makes sense, this would be difficult as the Joint Waste Service is Lichfield and Tamworth whereas Lichfield and Tamworth have their own street scene departments.
7. Are there any proposals to put in multi-use bins in public spaces such as the castle grounds?
It was confirmed that this sits outside of the Joint Waste Service but that Lichfield have a similar problem, they are trialling recycling at an upcoming event and the data could be shared with Tamworth. It was confirmed that a study was being undertaken around bins in the borough.
8. Are there any proposals to look at if Tamworth could have it's own recycling centre?
Household recycling sites come under Staffordshire County Council.

RESOLVED: that the committee

1. Endorsed the progress and updates provided.

(Moved by Councillor L Wood and seconded by Councillor M Clarke)

The Chair handed over to the Operations Manager for the Joint Waste Service to introduce the report to provide the Committee with an understanding of the Joint Waste Service's bulky waste services, as requested highlighting that the report explained the service that is currently provided. And that if Tamworth had ideas about the service these would need to be put to the Joint Waste Board.

The following information was highlighted –

- Last year there were 4831 requests made (2471 from Tamworth).
- Two services – furniture and scrap metal and can be booked up to a month in advance.
- Brings in an income, last year around £90,000.
- Costs £18 per collection and £7.50 per additional item, up to 4 items for furniture, 2 for scrap metal.
- There is a maximum size for manual handling reasons.
- Items must be left outside the property and are collected kerbside.
- Scrap metal is collected in a small van with a tail lift and items are taken to a household waste site or depot and are passed to Staffs County Council to reuse, recycle or dispose of.
- Furniture is collected via the bin lorry and is then taken for incineration along with the residual waste.
- Customer service staff are trained around what we can/cannot collect.
- No data to confirm if the services contribute to fly tipping if unable to get a collection.
- It is a low-cost service as items collected by bin lorries are tied in with collections and van collections are scheduled when they are delivering new bins or bags to properties.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Areas where there is a higher proportion of disadvantage tend to have more fly-tipping which could be because of the cost.
Officers agreed that this appeared to be the case and that these areas also seem to have 'white van men' operating in these areas. The Officers highlighted the importance of getting the message out to residents to use reputable services
2. How have the levels been decided, i.e. carpet, rolled up one room, when this size can differ significantly, limits on the number of collections, how can we better utilise the service?
It was confirmed that the levels were set at the beginning of the Joint Waste Service in 2010 and is worth reviewing.
3. With regards to the scrap metal collections, is there any opportunity for this to be disposed of for an income?
The service receives recycling credit for items taken for recycling.
4. The amount of 'fly-tipping' within properties suggest that residents either can't afford, be bothered, or are not aware of the service.

Could we look at creating links with local community groups who could help with the removal of goods which could help people with the burden of cost as well as the burden on the service?

The Officer confirmed that this an area that could be explored.

It was noted the service has no jurisdiction over residents leaving furniture in their garden and that this would need to be a multi-service approach between waste, enforcement and environmental teams.

5. Would it prudent to look at repair shops, which again could link with local groups?

The Officers confirmed that we need to get better as a society at re-using and repairing items, giving examples of this in Burntwood and at Lower Farm recycling centre.

6. Is there any surplus in the £90k made from the service?

The income from the service contributes towards the costs of running the service.

7. Clarification around the list of items that can be collected, an example given of being unable to take a suitcase.

The Officer confirmed that some items can't be taken due to manual handling rules, i.e. American style fridge freezers as the scrap metal vehicle is a one-man crew, however acknowledged that the service did require a review.

8. Could we look at service where periodically in different areas people could take their bulky items for disposal? This could help in problem areas and where there are properties storing residual waste that is not discovered until a property becomes void.

It was confirmed that Officers had seen this done with skips/bin lorries in different places and this can work with community engagement. There is a cost and does need to involve the County Council around the disposal, it was confirmed that this has been done in Lichfield where community teams have paid a charge for the service, and they have provided a van and staff on a Saturday.

9. Whether some bulky waste is collected by street scene and therefore is not recognised in any data. It was confirmed that street scene now has a three man team that collect fly-tipped rubbish.

The Committee confirmed that they wished to set up a working group to look further at the issue of bulky waste within the Borough.

RESOLVED: that the Committee

1. Endorsed the progress and updates provided.
2. To set up a working group to consider the matter further of bulky waste within the community

(Moved by Councillor L Wood and seconded by Councillor N Statham,)

No further recommendations were made at this stage.

Councillor Bailey left the meeting at 19:20.

39 NATURE RECOVERY DECLARATION UPDATE BRIEFING PAPER

The Chair welcome the Assistant Director, Growth and Regeneration and the Planning Officer to introduce the report of the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Environmental Sustainability, Recycling and Waste to update the Committee on the authority's work around the Nature Recovery Declaration that was made in November 2023

The Officer summarised the report advising that a draft bio-diversity consideration is attached as an appendix to be considered alongside the report.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. How will the policy ensure that the 'right tree, right place' strategy won't contribute to the current problem with trees in the borough. Will there be a variety of trees, and will we be taking responsibility for the trees that we plant?

The Officer confirmed that the nature recovery declaration stated that work needed to be done to conserve nature as well as enhancing it and that more thought needed to go in to tree planting, taking in to account climate change to ensure the right approach. The Government are also consulting on a new national planning framework which states that as well as building new houses, that the streets should be tree lined as part of climate adaptation, Consideration would need to be given to trees that don't cause problems with light and roots etc.

The Officer confirmed that they would take away the Members points around the variety and maintenance of trees to be considered when writing the policy.

2. With regards to road verges, what is the current policy as there are areas within the borough that it looks unkempt and could pose a safety issue. The Chair confirmed that one area of concern was due to be addressed. The Officer confirmed that they were not responsible for the cutting of road verges however the wider strategic question was important. The declaration says that once you have satisfied road safety and visibility priorities you can then look at how road verges can be positively managed or bio-diversity and studies have highlighted that road verges can be incredibly bio-diverse.

3. The report states that the Council should seek to manage at least 30% of their greenspace and wildlife – clarification around how big an area this was?

The Officer provided a response at the meeting however later confirmed that this was incorrect.

4. The Committee highlighted that this would be a good opportunity to address safety measures by looking at brambles on footpaths and cycleways and that we need to ensure that open spaces were managed correctly so that areas don't become litter traps.

RESOLVED that:

1. Members approved the Biodiversity Consideration. As set out in Appendix 1
2. Endorsed the progress and updates provided.

(Moved by Councillor L Wood and seconded by Councillor M Clarke)

40 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

Cllr Price provide the Committee with an update highlighted the following items that had been discussed –

- The group met and Cllrs Wood and Statham, and County Cllr Oates were present.
- They aim of the group was established to look at if there were sufficient HGV facilities within Tamworth and to address the issue of HGV drivers parking residential areas.
- Cllr Oates gave on parking update around Ventura Park.
- An application had been made by Brakes for the change of use of their carpark which and been a delegated decision.
- Parking on other industrial estates – not aware of any direct resident complaints received from residents but to be investigated.
- Some HGV facilities at Tamworth Service Station and what facilities are outside of the boundaries.
- Still work to do and requested Committees permission to continue working on this matter.

It was also highlighted that the MP had completed a residents survey and had contacted the Borough and the County around littering, speeding and parking on Ventura.

41 FORWARD PLAN

There were no items identified from the Forward Plan.

42 INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY & GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee reviewed the workplan and it was noted that the following items were due at the next meeting –

- Review of the Heritage Engagement Officer Post
- Future High Street Fund
- Maintenance of Estates and Open Spaces

Chair

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