



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 23rd June 2014

PRESENT : Cllrs. Lugg (Chair), S. Witts (Vice-Chair), Gravells (Spokesperson), Haigh, Lewis, Wilson, Ravenhill, Field, Taylor, Beeley, Toleman, Pullen, Organ and Porter

Others in Attendance

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Hanman, Dee and Hansdot

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED: That the appointments made at Annual Council be noted.

2. APOLOGIES AND WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Apologies were received from Councillors Dee, Hanman and Hansdot.

The Chair welcomed four new Members to the Committee:-

- Councillor Hanman
- Councillor Lewis
- Councillor Pullen
- Councillor Ravenhill

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23.06.14

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from members of the public.

6. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

7. AMEY (STREETCARE PARTNER) PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Chair welcomed Councillor Jim Porter, Cabinet Member for Environment, Mr Steve Whiteman (Account Director Amey) and Mr Ross Cook, Head of Neighbourhood Services (GCC) to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which outlined how the performance of the Streetcare Partnership was monitored. The information had been provided following a request from the Committee on 6 January 2014 when the matter had been discussed. Members were briefed on the content of the report which included a realignment of staffing resources within the Neighbourhood Services team. 'Headline' key performance indicators were set out in the appendix.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the report and pass any comments to the Streetcare Strategic Partnership meeting for consideration.

The Committee discussed the following matters:-

1. Generally Members considered that there should be more background to the performance figures including a key for clarification purposes. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that the data represented 'headlines' and that more detailed reports were produced for the Streetcare Strategic Partnership meetings. He confirmed that he would report this back to the Partnership so that future reports to Overview and Scrutiny were easier to interrogate. Responding to a request for Overview and Scrutiny to receive all the performance data below the 'headlines', the Head of Neighbourhood Services cautioned that it was important not to duplicate the work of the Partnership.
2. Clarification was sought on complaints recording and whether customer satisfaction had been achieved on those complaints which had been closed. Mr Whiteman confirmed that all complaints had been resolved in line with the complaints policy. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that more detailed information was available to the Streetcare Strategic Partnership. Additionally, the Business Improvement Team would be monitoring this data. The definition of a 'complaint' as opposed to a 'service request' was discussed.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23.06.14

3. Clarification was sought on figures in the appendix relating to amenity grass cutting figures, general street cleaning and fly tipping.
4. Cycle paths were not listed in the appendix as they were not 'headline' data. It was confirmed that they featured under hedge trimming in data underpinning the appendix. A Member commented that cycle paths in his ward were overgrown and acted as a disincentive for cyclists.
5. It was noted that performance indicators for watercourses were contained in the more detailed information which was assessed by the Partnership. It was further noted that any instances of Himalayan Balsam in watercourses would be dealt with by a specialist contractor.
6. A Member commented on the absence of financial performance data in the appendix. The head of Neighbourhood Services responded that this information was reported to the Strategic Streetcare Partnership.
7. Members queried the accessibility of grass cutting regimes on the City Council's website. It was noted that the current information did not contain exact dates but the length of time grass cutting was expected to take in each ward. The Head of Neighbourhood Services remarked that the information estimated when grass cutting was due in each ward, but that the dates could change because of weather conditions. He added that he hoped to present the information in a more interactive style in future.
8. Grass cutting practices on roadside verges were discussed. Mr Whiteman asked Members to report on any areas of concern within their wards.
9. Members asked for feedback when they had reported issues to the Contact Centre on behalf of their constituents. It was noted that currently Members only received an acknowledgement to service requests and did not receive confirmation when the work had been carried out. The Head of Neighbourhood Services commented that he was aware of this issue and advised Members to log on to their Focus portal area set up for their wards. Members were unsure as to whether the portal could be accessed via their Ipads. The Head of Neighbourhood Services agreed to look into this.
10. There were concerns regarding the quality of some grass cutting. Mr Whiteman responded that teams were trained and were aware of service standards and that team leaders and supervisors were responsible for dealing with quality issues. Mr Whiteman asked Members to advise him of any areas of concern. The Head of Neighbourhood Services commented that the new Neighbourhood Manager (Parks and Open Spaces) had been out with crews and was aware of issues and the pressures faced by the teams. As part of the discussion, a Member reported that he had been unable to obtain quality assurance records for his ward.
11. In response to a query on strimming practices, the Committee was advised that strimming was scheduled to take place 2 days after grass cutting and not on the same day.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23.06.14

12. Reference was made to the lack of flowers in Armscroft Park.
13. The practice of planting wildflowers under trees was discussed. The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised Members that specific sites could be reviewed.
14. A Member queried why litter picking was not carried out before grass cutting. Mr Whiteman acknowledged that this was not a good example of streetscene work and asked Members to report similar instances to him.
15. It was noted that there was no single point of contact for Members in the new officer structure. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that the focus had changed to more specific service based responsibilities with the four Neighbourhood Managers continuing to be able to deal with a wide range of issues across the City. Members noted that a guide to Neighbourhood Services would be provided shortly for Members' information.
16. A Member expressed concern regarding the large truck which regularly accessed the pedestrianized gate streets to empty litter bins and queried whether a smaller vehicle would be more appropriate. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that the vehicle was exempt from traffic regulations and that collections were halted between 12 noon and 2 pm for safety reasons.
17. The Committee received an update on progress made towards implementing the recommendations of the recent Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Recycling. It was noted that the Government had introduced a TEEP review which would need to be undertaken before any changes were made to the service.
18. Members queried the reporting mechanism for the Partnership and it was noted that there was no formal procedures in place as the body was not recognised when appointments were made at Annual Council. Arising from the discussion, it was agreed that in future Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be sent copies of the minutes from the Strategic Streetcare Partnership Meetings.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the comments made by the Committee and stated that he was committed to ensuring that quality control issues were addressed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Committee's comments would be reported to the Strategic Streetcare Partnership.
3. That Amey performance monitoring be reported to the Committee on a six monthly basis.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23.06.14

8. HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The Chair welcomed Councillor Colin Organ, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure and Ms Gill Ragon, Head of Public Protection (GCC), to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which outlined the current condition of the private rented housing sector and proposed future actions to achieve improvement. The Committee was informed that it was proposed to redirect the way the private sector housing team currently worked from a reactive style to a proactive programme of intervention on a neighbourhood basis, as suggested by the Government Select Committee. It was intended that this approach would help to identify poorly managed and maintained properties in the private sector and enable continuous improvements to be made which would have a positive impact for the health and wellbeing of tenants and for the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny was asked to note the report and make any recommendations it considered appropriate to the Cabinet.

The Committee discussed the following matters:-

- It was acknowledged that there were 'good' and 'bad' landlords in the private sector and that there was a need to reward good practice. Equally, there were 'good' and 'bad' tenants.
- It was considered that better housing conditions would encourage more responsible tenants.
- It was recognised that overcrowding could occur in cases where a single family occupied a property or where families shared houses that were too small. Cultural differences also resulted in varying definitions of what was deemed to be a 'good' standard of accommodation.
- Members believed there was a public expectation that the Council should improve conditions. Reference was made to some authorities which successfully operated a mandatory licensing scheme and it was mooted that the City Council should adopt this approach. It was suggested that more work needed to be done in this regard including evaluating another council which was similar to Gloucester. The Cabinet Member responded that it was important not to alienate landlords and there was a delicate balance to be struck. He commented that an accreditation scheme was more likely to act as an incentive to landlords to improve conditions.
- There was concern regarding the quality of life of the tenants, many of whom fell 'under the radar' and who were prey to unscrupulous landlords. It was also likely that many tenants living in poor conditions would be afraid to complain to their landlords or enter into formal disputes.
- The role of other agencies such as the health authority and the possibility of funding from such bodies was queried. The Head of Public Protection confirmed that whilst the initiatives were at an early stage that these links would be explored.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23.06.14

- Reference was made to the House Condition Survey carried out in 2011 which had identified 3 wards in the City with significantly more Category 1 hazards than anywhere else in the City. A Member sought clarification on properties within his ward and was advised that broad information could be provided without breaching data protection legislation.
- There was a discussion on the position of private tenancy agreements between two parties and apprehension that a registration scheme could stifle these private contracts. The Head of Public Protection advised that an approach of selective licensing would focus attention on areas of issue.
- Reference was made to the County's Health and Wellbeing Board which recognised the significance of good housing on health and wellbeing. Members noted that the work of the Head of Public Protection was highly regarded by the Board.
- It was proposed that there should be a task and finish group established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which would study the work of an authority similar to Gloucester which operated a successful licensing scheme. This study would involve site visits and discussions with officers and landlords. Advice would also be sought from the LGA for examples of flagship authorities in this regard.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Committee for their observations and confirmed that whilst work was at a very early stage, that the Cabinet was committed to raising standards in the private rented sector.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commission a task and finish group to look into proposed actions to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector.

9. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the latest version of the Cabinet's Forward Work Programme. Members noted that the programme covered the period to September 2014 and requested information beyond this date for a future meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet's Forward Work Programme be noted.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the latest version of its work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme be noted.

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23.06.14**

11. MEMBER UPDATES ON OUTSIDE BODIES ACTIVITIES

There were no updates on this occasion.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 21 July 2014 at 18.30 hours.

Time of commencement: 18:30 hours

Time of conclusion: 20:30 hours

Chair