



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 8th December 2014

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

Others in Attendance

Cllr. Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Mr S Wightman, Account Director, Amey
Mr R Cook, Head of Neighbourhood Services, GCC
Mr M Brentnall, Environmental Planning Manager

APOLOGIES : Cllr. Dee

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

64. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from members of the public.

65. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

66. TREE POLICY UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources who was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Porter, Cabinet Member for Environment; Mr Ross Cook, Head of Neighbourhood Services; and Mr Meyrick Brentnall, Environmental Planning Manager, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which updated them on the revised tree policy as it related to City Council trees and requests to have works carried out on them. Councillor Norman summarised the key points and advised the Committee that it was proposed to return to Overview and Scrutiny Committee when a full 12 months worth of data was available. The Committee was asked to note the content of the report at this stage.

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Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member queried how category 2 works (paragraph 3.6) were assessed. The Environmental Planning Manager acknowledged that this could sometimes be difficult and that it was at the discretion of the Tree Officer. He added that 80% of jobs raised by the Tree Officer fell under category 2.
2. It was recognised that whilst some residents would be keen to have trees removed which they considered to be a nuisance, but which were otherwise healthy, that others might not be.
3. The Committee requested that there should be communication with residents when works were planned and instances were cited of crews turning up to carry out works to the surprise of residents. The Environmental Planning Manager agreed with this comment and would look to improve communication.
4. A Member reported that he had phoned in to the Contact Centre on 4 occasions on behalf of a constituent regarding a problem tree, but that he had not received a response from the Tree Officer. The Environmental Planning Manager agreed to investigate this point.
5. The Committee was advised that it was important to differentiate between the work Amey carried out on behalf of the County Council which was largely planned maintenance work and the works carried out for the City Council.
6. Clarification was sought on the proposal to implement the 'Confirm' system (paragraph 3.9) which would track works using a GIS programme. The Environmental Planning Manager explained that all City Council trees would be plotted on the system which would be introduced in the New Year. A Member queried whether information on the existing tree database would be transferred to 'Confirm'. The Environmental Planning Manager confirmed that this was the case. During the discussion on this matter, a Member referred to the 2009 Task and Finish Group on Trees which had recommended a full tree survey and asked what progress had been made in this regard. The Head of Neighbourhood Services responded that an annual survey was carried out as part of Amey's contractual obligations and that there was a rolling programme for an ongoing survey. He reiterated that this was stored on a paper record which would be transferred to 'Confirm'.
7. A Member asked if replacement of felled trees with new ones was a feature of the new policy. The Environmental Planning Officer indicated that it was not and added that the ratio of new trees planted was higher than those removed.
8. There was a discussion on issues regarding County Council owned trees in the City Centre and a query on whether any liaison existed between the City's Tree Officer and the County's Tree Officer. The Environmental Planning Manager advised that the City Council had no jurisdiction over the County Council, but confirmed that the City's Tree Officer communicated with his counterpart at Shire Hall. A Member suggested that the City's Cabinet Member might meet with his equivalent County Cabinet Member to discuss the issues. The Head of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that the City Council could not interfere with decision making at the County Council and added that the appointment of the Joint Commissioning Director would assist in cross authority matters of this type.

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9. A Member requested that weekly emails be sent to Councillors advising them of planned works, similar to those already received by Members relating to planning and licensing applications.
10. Turning to paragraph 3.1 of the report, a Member commented that work requests were also submitted by Ward Councillors and considered that this should have been reflected in the report.
11. A Member queried whether the new policy addressed the Council's legal obligations as set out in paragraph 8.1. The Environmental Planning Manager stated that he believed this to be the case.
12. The Committee discussed the detrimental effect on mental health and wellbeing caused by overbearing trees which were close to buildings and which obscured light. Such trees, if healthy, fell outside the new policy. Members gave examples of elderly and housebound residents whose quality of life was reduced by the close proximity of such trees. The Committee believed that the policy should be amended to reflect the fact that in exceptional circumstances, where a tree was seriously affecting the health and wellbeing of a resident, that the tree could be either removed or pruned accordingly. Councillor Norman agreed to take this back to the Cabinet Member for Environment.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Cabinet Member for Environment be asked to amend the Tree Policy to allow removal or pruning of trees which were seriously affecting the health and wellbeing of residents.

67. AMEY 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Chair welcomed Mr Steve Wightman, Account Director of Amey, to the meeting.

Mr Wightman gave Members a brief presentation outlining Amey's achievements in Gloucester relating to its contract with Gloucester City Council and which set out the challenges faced by the organisation in the future, particularly in having to achieve an extra £0.5M worth of savings in addition to the ongoing savings required in the Council's budget.

The Committee discussed the following matters:-

1. Members expressed disappointment that they had not received a formal report with 'RAG' ratings on Amey's performance. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that this information was provided to the Strategic Streetcare Forum and that it was his understanding that the Forum Members had shared the data with their group lead Overview and Scrutiny Members. He added that whilst there was no reason why the Committee could not have the papers, that there could be duplication if Members examined papers which had already been scrutinised by the Strategic Streetcare Forum. Members responded that they understood the value of the Strategic Streetcare Forum in monitoring the contract and ensuring that savings were on track, but that Overview and Scrutiny Committee's role was to scrutinise the service as a whole. The Chair commented that there

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appeared to be a breakdown in communication as the perceived sharing of papers between the Forum and the Committee had not taken place and suggested that the papers be placed on the agenda for the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January.

2. A Member queried which areas of the contract would be affected in order to meet the extra £0.5M savings required. The Head of Neighbourhood Services responded waste and recycling would be the main area and referred to the Committee's agreement to reinstate its Task and Finish Group on recycling to assist in this regard. There would be savings from the collection of additional recyclates and the opportunity would be taken to remodel rounds.
3. The Committee noted there would be no further changes to street cleansing and grass cutting regimes, but that these would continue to be monitored closely by the Strategic Streetcare Forum.
4. A Member asked whether the bagged garden waste service could be made available to a smaller group as the service was only available where 80 residents signed up to it. The Head of Neighbourhood Services said that the service needed to be self-financing but that it would be reviewed as part of the larger review of the recycling service.
5. A Member commented that the grip cleaning schedule should be carried out before heavy rain to avoid flooding. The Head of Neighbourhood Services replied that this was part of the annual winter maintenance programme which was reviewed by the Environmental Health Officer, Flood Resilience and Land Drainage.
6. Clarification was sought on the Abbey Ward World War I Memorial which Members of the Committee who represented the Abbey Ward were unaware of. Members were advised that this related to the planting of wild poppies in the Hawthorne Avenue area of the City which was part of a wider 4 year programme of commemorative planting.
9. The Committee confirmed that they wished to monitor Amey's performance on a 6 monthly basis.

RESOLVED – That the Strategic Streetcare Forum papers be considered at the next meeting on 26 January 2015 and that the Cabinet Member for Environment be asked to attend this meeting.

68. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the latest version of the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

69. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the latest version of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme to the end of the municipal year. Members agreed to amend the Work Programme in line with discussions held during the meeting. It was further agreed that the proposed private training session would be deferred to another date.

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RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

70. MEMBER UPDATE ON OUTSIDE BODIES' ACTIVITIES

There were no updates on this occasion.

71. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 26 January 2015 at 18.30 hours.

Time of commencement: 18:30 hours

Time of conclusion: 20:00 hours

Chair