



MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **Thursday 15 December 2022 at 6.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Conneely (Chair), Councillor Long (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Moghaddam, Akram, S Butt, Bajwa, Georgiou, Miller, Mitchell and Patel

Councillor Shah was also present in remote online attendance

Also Present: Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action and Councillor Lorber.

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor S Butt. It was noted that whilst also present Councillor Shah would not be able to participate in any formal decisions taken during the meeting as she was in remote online attendance.

2. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest shared

3. Deputations (if any)

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

Having noted the request by Councillor Mitchell to include additional clarification in the minutes with regard to Item 6 – Brent Council's Grants Programme in relation to the discussion around Carbon Offset Funding the Committee AGREED to defer formal approval of the minutes from the previous meeting held on 8 November 2022 in order for these additional comments to be finalised and shared with the Committee

Members noted the minutes would therefore be presented to the next meeting for final approval and confirmation

5. Matters arising (if any)

Other than the comments referred to in agenda item 4 – Minutes of the previous meeting, no other Matters Arising were raised at the meeting.

6. Redefining Local Services: Update on the Integrated Street Cleansing, Waste Collections and Winter Maintenance Services Contract Procurement Programme

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action introduced the report that had been circulated to members ahead of the

meeting which updated the Committee on the procurement programme and the proposed service changes to be included in the Integrated Street Cleansing, Waste Collections and Winter Maintenance Services Contract. The Committee was being asked to comment on the report and proposed service changes in advance of its final consideration by Cabinet in January 2023.

Context was provided that the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee last received a report on the wider Redefining Local Services (RLS) programme in July 2021 which had outlined the procurement strategy and timetable for the Integrated Contract. The Committee were advised that the current Street Cleaning, Waste Collections and Winter Maintenance Services that formed the contract would come to an end on 31 March 2023. Therefore in line with the RLS delivery model that was confirmed by Cabinet in February 2022 (specialist contracts delivery model with low level insourcing) the item had returned to the Committee with updates that included a more detailed plan of the preferred service moving forward.

The Committee was advised that as part of the recommissioning of the Integrated Contract, in Summer 2022 officers had sought feedback from the local community via public consultations with regard to the Preferred Service which included a shift from weekly, co-mingled (single stream) dry recycling collections to alternate weekly, twin stream dry recycling collections (whereby containers would be collected one week and mixed paper and card would be collected the next) for street level households. Changes were also proposed to street cleansing which would see a shift from frequency based cleaning to an intelligence led approach. In Autumn 2022 the Council's Preferred Service of alternate weekly twin stream recycling was trialled in pilot areas across the borough to examine how potential changes to the current system would work in practice. The outcome of these actions had informed the ongoing live procurement of contracted service providers.

The Committee recognised the challenges in continuing to deliver an effective service within the community balanced against budgetary challenges and Brent's commitment to achieve carbon net zero by 2030.

In welcoming the opportunity to review the report prior to its consideration by Cabinet, the Committee had a number of questions for officers on the approach outlined, with the following key points discussed. The Chair also advised that she had received a late request to speak prior to the meeting from Councillor Lorber, which she would allow if time permitted:

- The Committee required clarity as to how the Council's Preferred Service would support Brent's climate commitment to achieve carbon net zero by 2030 and what were the differences between the current contract and the suggested 'Preferred Service' that would support this aim. In response the Committee were advised that the new service hoped to see positive impacts on climate and environment by increased levels of recycling, decreased levels of waste going to disposal and the use of newly introduced electric vehicles being used as part of the Integrated Contract. The plans had been developed with the aim of creating an environmental betterment as well as generating additional funds for the Council to re-invest in public services.
- Issues around fly tipping were raised, with the Committee requiring clarification on how the new contract plan would deliver more robust

enforcement and targeted action against fly-tipping in line with residents wishes and if there was scope to increase charges or increase the number of fines being issued to reinvest into other resident services. In response, Chris Whyte (Director of Environment & Leisure) supported by Oliver Myers (Head of Environmental Strategy & Commissioning) advised that whilst enforcement did not fall within the contract, Neighbourhood Patrol Officers were actively communicating the Council's policy on fly tipping to residents to limit this behaviour as much as possible, with street cleansing officers working with the enforcement team to advise where there are fly tipping hotspots in the borough so that efforts could be focused in these areas to gather intelligence and hold fly tippers accountable.

- The Committee questioned how commercial bins that were placed on the footpath of residential streets would be monitored for misuse, as this had been an ongoing issue in some wards. Officers advised that the location of the bins would be a highways issue and between neighbourhood managers and enforcement officers a resolution should be sought. In addition to this mobile CCTV was available where requested to monitor hot spot areas.
- The Committee questioned the effectiveness of the public consultation, querying whether the public had been made aware of the possibilities and limitations of the service given the Council's challenging financial position. Particular concern was raised in relation to the outcome of the consultation with regard to recycling collections, whereby 57.9% of residents wanted the Council to maintain the current schedule of service and 62.2% of residents did not support the Council's suggested preferred service for recycling, given the recommendation was still to adopt the Preferred Service going forward. Committee members queried if by proceeding with the Preferred Service despite resident concerns, residents may feel that their voices had not been valued throughout the consultation process. In response to the points raised officers advised that consultations with the public were extensive with responses having been taken into account in terms of development of the Preferred Service, although these had also needed to be balanced against the budgetary constraints identified. Officers acknowledged the weight of the behavioural changes needed by the public to support the revised system, recognising that to deliver a financially viable service in line with Brent's climate ambition would be an ongoing and extended piece of work. It was viewed positively that officers advised that many residents who participated in the consultation appeared to share enthusiasm and a willingness to learn more about what they could do to support recycling and a greener Brent in general.
- In acknowledgement that waste collections and street cleansing were of high priority to residents, it was queried whether funds could be reallocated from elsewhere across the Council to support such an important service for residents. Officers, supported by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Action confirmed that this would not be possible given pressures also needing to be managed across other Council services, additionally it was of paramount importance that funding was not reduced from services supporting Brent's most vulnerable residents. Officers re-iterated the scale of the task in supporting mass behavioural changes in residents approach to the impending changes, however felt that the significant cost and environmental benefits were essential in moving forward to manage Council services effectively and meet Brent's climate ambitions.

- In response to a Committee query regarding whether benchmarking against other Local Authorities had taken place to explore alternative options outside of the Preferred Service which may be both viable and require less change for residents, officers advised that benchmarking of different delivery models had been undertaken throughout the procurement process, with the introduction of sacks for separately recycling paper and card appearing to be emerging best practice. Benchmarking had also taken place against council's that insourced, to explore if this was a good option for Brent, however following the benchmarking exercise it was concluded that the approach outlined would be the most effective way forward for Brent as laid out in the Cabinet report in February 2022.
- The Committee were advised that Brent already had a comprehensive system of refuse and recycling collection in place with weekly food waste collections and bi-weekly collections of refuse and dry recycling. It was felt the next step in developing Brent's environmental efforts was to remove the paper and card from the recycling bins and place in separate recycling sacks as this would benefit both the environment, by increasing the volume of recycling and, reduce levels of cross contamination and generate additional income for the council that could be used to invest in improving services further.
- It was noted that some Council's had moved to collections every 3-4 weeks, therefore officers felt that the Brent offer provided an effective service for residents.
- In response to a query regarding the possibility of a shared service approach with neighbouring boroughs to ease the contract costs, the Committee were advised that there were no neighbouring authorities working to the same procurement timescales as Brent. In addition to this it was acknowledged that shared contracts were often difficult to manage, particularly if there were political differences in neighbouring boroughs.
- The Committee highlighted that residents would like to see cheaper or free bulky waste collections. In addition to this, members felt that the current system of recycling bulky waste was unfair to residents who did not have access to a vehicle, as they were charged a fee for bulky waste collection, whereas residents who were able to take their bulky waste to the Abbey Road Recycling Centre were able to recycle theirs at no additional cost. It was felt that the current situation unfairly impacted on residents who did not have access to a vehicle and in having to incur extra charges to recycle bulky waste if car ownership was an indicator of their socio economic status. Furthermore it was felt that the system as it stood was in conflict with Brent's climate change objectives due to the promotion of car use to recycle as opposed to having one vehicle travel around the borough collecting waste.
- The Committee queried if it was viable to create pedestrian access point at Abbey Road and if it was possible to charge a small fee for those who accessed Abbey Road by vehicle to support reduced collection fees for residents who were unable to access Abbey Road by vehicle.
- Officers acknowledged the disparity in the current system, citing that due to waste legislation they were unable to charge a fee for residents to dispose of their household waste, adding that it would not be viable to significantly reduce or remove the bulky waste collection charge as further investment would need to be sourced from elsewhere to run the service. The Committee were also advised that the collection cost to residents compared favourably when benchmarked against other boroughs.

- Members were also advised of the plans being developed to procure the service in future through the West London Waste Authority which would provide a more cost effective option for this service and with any additional funding generated, then passed on to support recycling and refuse disposal, with the example of additional community skips being funded.
- The Committee were reassured that the West London Waste Authority were also in the process of exploring how pedestrian access could be supported at Abbey Road, although there was no timeline available at present. Members were assured that the necessity of pedestrian access continued to be strongly advocated for by the Council.
- The Committee queried whether a sliding scale of fees for the collection of bulky items could be explored as part of the re-procurement with residents, if they only had one large item to be collected, paying a lower price. It was felt that the current system may discourage residents from paying for the collection service and could subsequently lead to increased fly tipping. Officers confirmed that they would be exploring this through the procurement process.
- In acknowledgement of the wider issue of fly tipping across the borough the Committee were advised that the Communications and Engagement teams were working collaboratively to ensure that residents were aware of the recycling options in Brent and the consequences for individuals who were found to be fly tipping. Officers recognised the scale of the work that needed to be undertaken in strengthening internal communications between in house enforcement teams and collection operatives in highlighting hot spot areas and gathering evidence at ground level to support successful enforcement.

The Committee were keen to keep the progress being made in this area under review and requested that this specific topic was brought to a future Committee meeting to look at what gains had been made.

- Concerns were also identified following the pilot of the alternate weekly twin stream recycling service and feedback provided by residents, that the recycling sacks were too small and of insufficient quality to prevent tearing and proper sealing, with a demonstration provided by one of the Committee members. The Committee therefore queried if a different coloured bin could be used instead of a sack. Officers advised that there were a number of reasons that supported using sacks over an additional bin, including the time and cost to roll out a further bin service, many properties did not have room to store another bin and bins were more susceptible to being misused and contaminated with other materials. Officers welcomed the feedback that the current sack type was not durable enough and reassured the Committee that the sacks would be stronger and have a seal on to reduce moisture levels when the service was fully rolled out. Officers advised that reducing moisture levels was particularly important as there was a threshold level of 12% permitted in order for the materials to be recycled with the optimum financial return to the Council.
- In terms of contamination, officers confirmed that there was a much lower rate of contamination using the sacks with an estimated 1% contamination rate.
- The Committee queried what would happen if paper/card went in to the blue recycling bin instead of the sack, in response officers confirmed that as part of

- the reprocessing contract the comingled material would still be recycled, however the Council would receive less income than if it had been separated.
- Officers confirmed that some investigation had taken place into other opportunities to separate waste, however many were not feasible in Brent due to space limitations. The Environment Act that came out in 2021 had a deposit return scheme built in to, it was expected that once this and the other changes in the Act came in to effect over the next few years there would be less packaging to recycle as deposit return schemes were expanded.
 - In response to a Committee query regarding how recycling sacks would be distributed to HMO properties, it was confirmed that one sack per household would be provided, with the offer of an additional sack when needed in line with all other households. This raised further queries as to how large HMO's and flats would get their sacks returned. Officers advised that households within HMO's would have their number on their sack so that it could be returned. It was confirmed that blocks of flats and flats above shops would not be included in the initial roll out of the new contract, however work was ongoing to explore how residents in flats could become more actively involved in recycling.
 - Following a Committee query regarding how effective the trial had been in meeting the desired outcomes of the twin stream recycling collection programme in terms of reducing contamination and increasing recycling rates, officers reported that as the trial was only 8 weeks in duration and in pilot areas it only provided a snapshot of how figures could look. However by the end of the trial 71% of properties were presenting sacks, this had increased from 51% in Fortnight 1 of the trial and estimated sack contamination was 1% , this was well received in light of the average 27% contamination of recycling collected from bins. Officers therefore felt that the initial figures looked promising in achieving the long term desired outcome.
 - The Committee required further details regarding the use of bin sensors to measure the communal bin fill rates to gauge recycling rates in poorly performing areas. Officers advised that the Council would receive reports on the weight and levels of contamination in the communal bins, this information would act as baseline data and support next steps in identifying where further public engagement was needed to reduce the misuse of the bins and in supporting residents increased knowledge of recycling. It was felt that the data collected could also support the reduction of fly tipping as the sensor would alert the Council when the bin required emptying. A trial date was to be confirmed and feedback could be shared at a future meeting.
 - Further details were also sought with regard to what risks there may be to the efficiency of the service as a result of the proposed changes and what mitigations had been put in place to minimise the risk of residents feeling any impact from the change in service in relation to street cleansing. Officers advised that the revisions that formed part of the Preferred Service for street cleansing were intended to deliver a more targeted service by responding to incidents as and when necessary, alongside a regular street cleaning schedule, albeit with revised frequencies. Where hot spots and/or ad hoc incidents occurred the intelligence led approach would see new dedicated rapid response teams in each Brent Connects area who could respond quickly to reported concerns. The approach would also see cohesive working between local teams in each area to identify and monitor hot spots, issues could be reported from the public via the new app and data would be closely

- monitored and responded to accordingly. It was noted that Councillors would also be encouraged to make contact if their constituents had raised issues.
- The Committee advised that there had historically been issues when reporting concerns via the “Love Clean Streets” app, with issues not being acted upon. The Committee queried how reporting via the new app would work in practice and if it could be used to report issues on council estates. Officers advised that all residents would be able to report using the app, including reporting issues raised from council estates. The information residents shared via the app would go to the rapid response team and the neighbourhood manager’s office who would work with the contractors to ensure that issues were responded to. In addition to this the new app that would go live in April 2023 would be more accessible and user friendly. Officers were hopeful this would encourage more residents to actively use the app to report concerns. The app also supported one of the key objectives of the Redefining Local Services Programmes to move to a more integrated system as the new app when fully rolled out would allow residents to report highways issues, street cleansing issues and waste issues, with additional reporting tools to be added in the future which it was felt would vastly improve the resident experience being able to report a number of issues using one platform. Work would continue to explore how digitally excluded households could report issues in addition to the traditional route of calling the contact centre.
 - In response to Committee queries around the procurement process, officers advised they were not able to share further information while the procurement process remained live, however the information would be available for the Cabinet meeting scheduled for January 2023.
 - The Committee were reassured that Brent’s social values would be upheld in any contracts being awarded with confirmation that the London Living Wage had already been included as a requirement in the new contract.
 - The Committee required clarity with regard to how underperformance in any new contracts would be addressed. Officers reassured the Committee that a robust performance management framework would form part of all new contracts. Key performance indicators would have to be met under contract to ensure that residents were receiving efficient services and value for money. Officers advised that the use of fines for contractors was an option where they were not meeting their contractual obligations however it was felt that positive working relationships between key officers and contractors was the most effective way to ensure a consistently good service was delivered.
 - Councillors felt it would be helpful once the contracts had been awarded for officers to share a defined list of what actually constituted a failure to deliver services so that Councillors could support residents in having appropriate expectations of their service.

As no further issues were raised and the Committee had come to the end of the time available the Chair thanked those present for their contributions to the discussion along with Councillor Sheth (as Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action), Peter Gadsdon (Corporate Director Resident Services), Chris Whyte (Director of Environment & Leisure) & Oliver Myers (Head of Environmental Strategy & Commissioning) for the information provided in response and closed the item by summarising the suggestions for improvement and information requests made by the Committee which are noted below:

As a result of their review, the Committee identified the following recommendations for improvement which it was AGREED should be included as comments from scrutiny in the final report to Cabinet on the proposed award of contract:

That officers be asked to:

- i) Produce a diagram/flowchart detailing all milestones from May 2019 when the Redefining Local Services (RLS) programme was first initiated.
- ii) Review household bulky waste collection charges, including consideration of a sliding scale of charges linked to the number of items to be collected, rather than the current fixed rate of £35 for up to five items.
- iii) Undertake a feasibility study on the potential for introducing a mixed approach to paper/card recycling collections, to explore whether any recycling collection rounds in the borough would be more suited to the use of bins rather than sacks.
- iv) Arrange a session with ward councillors and Neighbourhood Managers to inform the design and development of the new recycling engagement and communication plan that will accompany the roll out of the new recycling service.
- v) Liaise with the West London Waste Authority to ensure access is reinstated for pedestrians and cyclists at the Abbey Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre.
- vi) Improve collaboration between in-house enforcement teams and collection operatives in identifying fly tipping hot spots and collating evidence, to remove the burden from residents

In addition to the above recommendations, the Committee also AGREED the following as further information requests:

To provide:

- i) The recycling communications/engagement plan that will be developed in February/March 2023.
- ii) Figures from the twin stream recycling trial on the impact the Preferred Service had (e.g. in reducing contamination rates in comparison with the current service).
- iii) Detail from the twin stream recycling trial on the nature of contamination in the recycling bins to assist the Council in communications and engagement around the new recycling proposals.
- iv) Information to local councillors on the new zone classifications outlined in the report once these have been finalised by March 2023.
- v) Further details on the 'bin sensor' trial (e.g. the trial period, the areas/wards that will be included in the trial, and when the findings report will be published etc.) when this is available in March 2023.
- vi) Detail on how many fines the Council have issued to the contractor for contract breaches as part of the current Public Realm Contract. To be inclusive of the value of fines, and the reasons for the Council issuing such fines.
- vii) Information on mechanisms within the new integrated contract that permit the council to deal with localised pockets of underperformance or specific areas of underperformance in the borough that emerge under the new integrated contract.

7. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

Councillor Rita Conneely
Chair