

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STREET SCENE and ENVIRONMENT SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD**

**09 February 2021**

**Report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Information**

**1 STREET SCENE AND WASTE SERVICES - RESPONSE TO COVID 19**

**Summary**

**This report updates Members on progress with the themes/activities identified within the Street Scene and Waste section of the approved First Year Addendum to the Council's Corporate Strategy. This includes updates on service performance, the roll out of the new service arrangements to flats/communal areas, the reduction in the number of bring bank sites, the reintroduction of the weekend bulky collection service and the transfer of public conveniences to Parish/Town Councils.**

**1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 At its meeting on 3 June 2020, Cabinet approved a First Year Addendum to the Corporate Strategy in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Addendum identified a number of themes/activities and, within each, identified specific service areas to be reviewed, with an aim to Re-orientate and then Recover these services. Cabinet also agreed that progress with these themes/activities be monitored through updates to relevant Advisory Boards and Committees. Included within the Addendum are themes/activities related to Street Scene and Waste.

1.1.2 A previous update was presented to Members of this Advisory Board on 8 December 2020.

**Service Performance**

1.1.3 Members will be aware of the previous implications that Covid-19 has had on the delivery of core services within the Council's Waste Contract. Through the period of the first lockdown this was most evident with around 50% of contractor staff either on sick leave, self-isolating or "shielding" at some points. This was combined with significantly increased tonnages across all waste streams, a situation that was replicated across Kent and nationwide. As such, service provision was prioritised to focus on key kerbside collections and resulted in a number of other service suspensions including garden waste collections, new garden waste subscriptions, bulky collections (charged doorstep collection

service) and the Saturday Freighter Service. In addition, resources were also temporarily directed away from Street Cleansing.

- 1.1.4 As the Covid-19 staffing pressures eased for Urbaser all services were reintroduced with the exception of the Saturday Freighter Service that is further detailed below. Service performance also significantly improved following the re-introduction of services and is being reflected in increased round completions, a reduction in missed collections and reduced customer comments/complaints. This improvement in service was also reflected over the Christmas period with a minimal level of non-completed rounds. Programmed catch up rounds were undertaken on two Saturdays during the Christmas period in lieu of bank holidays and collection schedules returned to normal from Monday 11 January as planned.
- 1.1.5 With a national lockdown re-introduced on the 5 January 2021 and cases of Covid 19 increasing, due consideration has been given to current and future service delivery. The Council is monitoring impacts in liaison with all other Local Authorities across the County through weekly briefings of the Kent Resource Partnership Forum. Of greatest concern is staffing levels and some Authorities (both within Kent and Nationally) have already taken steps to prioritise service provision in their area. Officers at Tonbridge and Malling are monitoring staffing levels on a daily basis in liaison with Urbaser and if required may have to prioritise key services in accordance with our Business Continuity Plan. As with the first national lockdown kerbside collections of general refuse and food waste, and the collection of clinical waste will be the highest priority. Impacts of staff absences on this Council's contract have already been seen in January affecting street cleansing crews and reactive resources used to clear reported missed bin and deliver new/replacement bins.
- 1.1.6 It is also worth note that Kent County Council are having to close Dunbrik Transfer Site during February for further repair and improvement works. This will result in Sevenoaks delivering their kerbside collections to North Farm Transfer Station and again the activation of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council depot being used as a backup transfer station for the month. The previous closure did not have a notable impact prior to Christmas, but this will need careful management again to reduce the potential impact on collections within Tonbridge and Malling throughout February.

## **1.2 Reintroduction of Weekend Bulky Waste Collection (Saturday Freighter Service)**

- 1.2.1 The weekend service is still currently suspended, in both Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells. Whilst its suspension was in part related to staffing resources, the other key consideration was the implications of social distancing guidance and the safety and welfare of both those residents using the service and the staff operating them. This was also an issue for Kent County Council in relation to the Household Waste Recycling Centres and whilst these have reopened, attendance is controlled through a strict pre-booking system and safe social distancing

measures that still remain in place. The reopening of these KCC facilities does provide the opportunity for TMBC residents to dispose of bulky waste that they may have otherwise taken to our weekend service and KCC has confirmed that they currently remain open following the announcement of the most recent national lockdown. To date the Council has received an extremely low level of public comment on the suspension of this service.

- 1.2.2 Whilst a generic Health and Safety Risk Assessment for the service has been provided by Urbaser, the implications of this will now need to be considered in relation to each individual site. It is, however, anticipated that this will not commence until the end of the current national lockdown and will also need to take into consideration any future restrictions.

### **1.3 New Service Arrangements to Flats and Communal Properties**

- 1.3.1 As reported to Members of this Advisory Board on 8 December 2020 it was proposed and agreed that a trial/pilot rollout of the new service arrangements to flats and communal areas in a designated area of Tonbridge commence in January 2021. Subject to the outcome of the trial it was then the intention to roll out across the rest of the borough during the Spring. Progress had been made on the arrangements for the trial through an internal officer working group and liaison with Urbaser with a proposed commencement date of 25 January.
- 1.3.2 Following the most recent national lockdown a review has, however, been undertaken of the proposed trial. This has taken into account both Government guidance & regulations, as well as guidance issued to Council staff relating to essential working. Given the impact of the trial on staff resources both within the Council and Urbaser, the interaction needed between two external contractors, Council staff and potentially the public and the need to ensure full resilience for potential further service pressures resulting from Covid 19 and the EU withdrawal, the decision has unfortunately been taken to postpone the trial.
- 1.3.3 This is regretful and I am sure will be disappointing for Members and residents alike. Whilst the residents of the flats are extremely keen to benefit from the new service it is essential that staff and public safety take precedent. I am sure Members will appreciate that we are not in a position to confirm a revised date at this time and this will be reviewed as the national & corporate guidance develops.

### **1.4 Bring Bank/Recycling Sites**

- 1.4.1 The full reduction of bring bank/recycling sites across the borough is pending and will see the reduction of sites to 10 key strategic locations across the borough. As previously reported and agreed by Members of this Advisory Board the reduction in bring bank sites across the borough is now commencing prior to the new service provision being rolled out to flats and communal areas.
- 1.4.2 This is taking place in liaison with the relevant Local Members and is being undertaken on a phased basis. The continuation of this activity has also been

reviewed in light of the recent national lockdown. Given the specific operations that are taking place and the interaction between staff, contractors and the public is negligible, the first phase of removals did continue and commenced on the 11 January 2021 seeing the removal of 9 sites. Phase 1 works have been complete and Phase 2 sites are currently being considered and Local Members and the relevant Parish/Town Council's will be made aware in advance of their removal.

## **1.5 Transfer of Public Conveniences**

1.5.1 As previously reported the transfer of public conveniences to Parish /Town Councils has been approved by Cabinet following recommendations considered by this Board with an estimated annual saving of £70,000 contributing to the Savings and Transformation Strategy. The timescale agreed prior to the pandemic was 1 April 2021 and this timescale can still be achieved. The transfer relies on the legal agreements being actioned and improvements made to the existing facilities so they are in a fit state to transfer.

1.5.2 An update was reported to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board on 6 January 2021 where the following recommendations were agreed.

- The public conveniences at East Peckham, Borough Green, West Malling and East Malling & Larkfield be transferred to the respective Parish Councils in line with the terms outlined in the report;
- Borough Green Parish Council's request to purchase land at Crowhill in Borough Green be investigated, and;
- Options be investigated for the disposal/alternative use of any public convenience sites not transferred to Parish/Town Councils

1.5.3 Liaison continues to take place with all relevant Parish/Town Council's on the proposed transfer and legal documentation has been drafted. Condition surveys have been undertaken on those facilities due to be transferred with any works due to be scheduled prior to transfer.

1.5.4 Since reporting to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board confirmation has been received from West Malling Parish Council that it has now declined the offer of transfer and, therefore, this site will be closed from 1 April 2021 alongside the facilities at Hadlow, Snodland and Aylesford and options will be investigated for disposal/alternative use as appropriate.

## **1.6 Legal Implications**

1.6.1 The statutory framework governing the response to the pandemic is evolving and changing on a frequent basis, both in the restrictions placed upon individuals and upon the responsibility of local authorities. Specific proposals or changes brought

forward following a review of the services will be assessed at the appropriate time in liaison with Legal Services to ensure they are lawful.

## **1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.7.1 With regard to the transfer of Public Conveniences an estimated annual saving of £70,000 has been highlighted contributing to the Savings and Transformation Strategy.

## **1.8 Risk Assessment**

1.8.1 The Operational Risk Assessment for Street Scene Leisure and Technical Services has been updated and is being revised on an ongoing basis as government guidance on Covid-19 changes.

Background papers:

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Nil

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