

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 JUNE 2014

REPORT BY HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

CONTRACT PERFORMANCE – ENVIRONMENTAL OPERATIONS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

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Purpose/Summary of Report

- To advise Members on the current performance of the two main contracts for Environmental Services – Waste Services (Refuse and Recycling, Street Cleansing) and Grounds Maintenance, and other environmental management initiatives undertaken.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE:**

**That:**

<b>(A)</b>	<b>The Committee scrutinises the current performance of the Council's main environmental management term contracts</b>
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1.0 Background

1.1 The Environmental Services department delivers services through a range of contracts and using in-house staff. The primary objective of this report is to provide members with an annual update of the performance of the main term contracts.

1.2 The combined Refuse, Recycling and Street Cleansing contract was awarded to Veolia Environmental Services for

a period of seven years, with a possible extension of up to seven years, in November 2010 and commenced on the 9th May 2011. This report covers the third year of the contract.

- 1.3 The Grounds Maintenance Contract was re-tendered in 2007 and awarded to John O Connor Ltd from April 2008 for six years and nine months and with an extension of up to seven years. The Contract includes additional elements to undertake most highways grounds maintenance (A roads are excluded) on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council and also the maintenance of grounds adjacent to ex-Council estates owned and managed by Riversmead Housing Association.
- 1.4 The contract was reviewed to consider whether it should be extended or a new contract let. The Council agreed to extend the contract for a further five years; the extension begins in January 2015.

## 2 Report

- 2.1 This section of the report details contract and contractor performance over the last twelve months for the Waste Services contract and the Grounds Maintenance contract, and compares this with the previous year. It also provides an update on some of the key initiatives undertaken by Environmental Services as a whole on associated environmental maintenance and enforcement activities.

### **Waste Services Contract Update**

#### **Refuse & Recycling (SPARC)**

- 2.2 On 6 March 2013 Council approved a scheme to change the current kerbside sorting of dry recyclables using boxes to a dual stream comingled system, with paper being kept separate in a box and all other dry recyclables placed in a new 240 litre wheeled bin.
- 2.3 The primary motive behind this change was to enable cardboard to be moved from the organic waste into the dry recycling stream, as it was proving difficult to compost the card and with changing standards for compost quality it would be impossible for processors to meet the new

standards with the level of coated card being collected.

- 2.4 The Council procured six new vehicles to allow for the new system. The new vehicles have a rear end lift and two compartments to enable the paper to be kept separate from the other comingled materials.
- 2.5 The Council also procured 49,000 new wheeled bins and 28,000 'inner paper boxes' for residents. Residents were given an option of using their existing blue box for their paper, or having an inner paper box delivered to them which fitted into the new recycling bin. This allowed residents with concerns over the footprint of the bin and box, to opt for a setup which took up no more space than the boxes. Around 28,000 (57%) of residents chose to have the new inner box and this may continue to rise as people use the new service.
- 2.6 The bins were delivered over 16 weeks, and contained information on the new service (which was featured on an A4 sticker to explain what can go in the bin and an A5 delivery flyer).
- 2.7 A further full service leaflet was designed and distributed in mid October with a new calendar. Collection round efficiencies resulted from the new service and meant more than 90% of residents had a change in their day of collection, and some also had weekly changes.
- 2.8 Further communication involved regular updates in Link magazine and nine road shows were run by the Environmental Services team (including carnivals, farmers markets and housing association open days). At the road shows there was an opportunity for residents to 'meet' the new bin, and see how the inner box may suit their property. The response was overwhelmingly positive.
- 2.9 The Council employed two temporary recycling advisors, who visited and gave advice to those properties who felt they would struggle to accommodate an additional bin and how to adapt to the new system and move the card from the composting to the recycling bin.
- 2.10 Around 800 properties are not able to use blue lidded bins for their recycling, as, for operational reasons they cannot

accommodate a wheelie bin. Between November 2013 and March 2014, the amount of material being collected for recycling increased by just over 1,400 tonnes compared to the same period the previous year.

- 2.11 The percentage of non-compostable material (NCM) received at the composting facility in quarter two of 2013/14 was 7.89%, this fell to 2.91% in quarter three. During the most recent audit with Herts County Council, non-compostable material was 0.22% of the total load and is now well above the required standard. The composting facility owners have expressed their satisfaction with this reduction.
- 2.12 The percentage of household waste recycled and composted was 48.98% (provisional) for 2013/14. This compares with a figure of 47.46% in 2012/13. This was despite there being a decline in the amount of paper collected, a national trend, believed to be the result of a move to electronic media. These results only include five months of the new blue lidded bin service and put the Council in a good position to achieve its target of 51%.
- 2.13 The amount of waste collected and disposed of after from domestic properties fell last year by 4 Kgs per household, from 464.07 Kgs in 2013/14 to 460.56 Kgs in 2013/14.
- 2.14 The number of missed bins for the last year was 53.54, per 100,000 collections compared to 28.95 the previous year. The overall performance is higher than target, but given that the introduction of the comingled recycling service in November required a change to 90% of the collection schedules, this represents a good performance and recovery, with monthly levels returning to their normal average, which is below target.
- 2.15 Rectification Notices are issued to contractors to require them to correct a service failure. Default Notices, which attract a financial charge, are issued if it is more serious or where a minor problem is not resolved in the time allowed. Rectification Notices are not issued for a 'missed bin as although the crew can be sent back, the failure to collect first time cannot be corrected. In these situations a 'Warning' is logged. Repeated Warnings for failure to

collect from the same property attract Defaults and other financial charges.

- 2.16 Rectification Notices for Refuse and Recycling were six in 2012/13 and also six in 2013/14. For container deliveries it was 134 for 2012/13 compared to 116 in 2013/14. These are issued where the contractor fails to deliver a replacement bin or box to a customer within five working days. This increase is not surprising given the much higher numbers of container deliveries this year.
- 2.17 The level of Defaults reduced from 116 in 2012/13 to 75 in 2013/14, in 2012/13 container delivery defaults reduced from 3 in 2012/13 to 2 in 2013/14, this is where Rectifications have not been resolved satisfactorily or where the breach has been more serious.
- 2.18 The commercial refuse collection service income for 2013/14 was £530,000, with a customer base of 639, primarily small local businesses and schools. This compares to £476,000 in 2012/13. Clinical waste collection income was £95,500 in 2013/14, compared with £79,900 in 2012/13.
- 2.19 The Council continues to operate a successful shared service clinical waste collection with North Herts District Council.
- 2.20 170 Abandoned Vehicles were inspected with only three of the reported vehicles not inspected within the target time of 24 hours giving a performance of 98.2%. 13 of these vehicles had to be removed by our contractors with two being delayed by obstructions giving a performance of 76.92% within 24 hours.

### **Refuse & Recycling Initiatives for 2014/15**

- 2.21 The SPARC system will be extended and adapted to communal properties. Further promotional work will be carried out to increase the amount of food waste being sent for composting. The Service will explore the development and delivery of a campaign to promote the recycling of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), and investigate the feasibility of trade waste recycling using the new comingled system.

2.22 Another 2014/15 initiative, currently taking place is to try and encourage more food waste to be composted. The Council is publicising the use of compostable caddy liners to residents provided they have the seedling logo on them. This will make using the kitchen caddy a lot cleaner and hopefully more acceptable to residents, who can purchase liners from suppliers on our website, through the local shops that stock them (also listed on the website) and supermarkets.

## **Waste Offences**

2.23 Contamination of recycling containers, unauthorised double bins and side waste are also monitored. This is necessary to minimise waste, maintain the quality and value of material collected and avoid rejection by re-processors, leading to a loss of income and additional costs of collection and disposal to landfill.

2.24 Residents are given a series of three advisory letters, which if not responded to, and occur within a six month period, may result in a formal Notice being issued under Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act (1990). If the Notice is breached then a Fixed Penalty Notice will be issued. In 2013/14 - 685 letters were sent to people for their second offence, (crews sticker contaminated bins and boxes initially) 164 letters were sent following a third offence and 75 letters were sent following a fourth offence. The letters are considered to be effective as can be seen above in that the number of people being written to more than once has declined sharply. One section 46 Notice was issued in 2013/14.

2.25 With the introduction of SPARC residents were given a three month advisory period, crew stickered bins providing information to customers and these were followed up by advisory letters to residents giving recycling advice.

## **Street Cleansing**

2.26 The Environmental Protection Act (1990) determines the standards that must be met and the inspection criteria to be used in determining the performance of the street

cleansing operation. Contractor performance is measured by the Council's Environmental Inspection Team, which conducts both programmed and complaint led inspections, grading streets accordingly.

- 2.27 In addition, the previous Government required additional inspections to be conducted against specific criteria and these were used to calculate statutory national indicator NI 195. From April 2011 this was no longer a Government required indicator; however in accordance with the decision of the Executive Committee in March 2011 these inspections continue in this format as a 'local' performance indicator to track service standards.
- 2.28 This indicator is based upon sample surveys conducted three times a year, totalling 900 inspections. The format and sample size were previously set by Government. It calculates the percentage of inspections that identify significant levels of litter and detritus (road dirt). The lower the percentage, the higher the performance. East Herts performance against this indicator was 1.78% for litter and 6.5% for detritus in 2012/13. In 2013/14, litter increased to 2.5% and detritus fell to 4.94%. Litter levels during the first eight months of the inspection regime were low, but increased in the last part of the year for "Industry and Warehousing" and "Main Road" categories. The latter was due to access restrictions to the central reservations of dual carriageways and using traffic management as road space was not granted by The Highways Authority. This is because the A10 and the A414 are permanent diversion routes for the motorways around East Herts. During busy times they must be kept fully operational and restrictions kept to a minimum. Additional resources were applied to other areas that were deemed to be below the required grade and brought up the expected level of cleanliness.

## **Litter**

- 2.29 East Herts continues to have a very low level of litter problems compared to many local authority areas and the low percentage reflects this. This is substantiated by a decrease in the number of complaints made regarding cleansing issues. Regular inspection of the district's streets by the Area Environment Inspectors has resulted in

better performance and quick action taken to resolve any issues.

- 2.30 There were 580 complaints in 2013/14 compared with 645 in 2012/13 – a decrease of 65 (10%). Of the complaints received last year, only 39 were ‘validated complaints’ against the contractor’s performance, the remainder were regarding areas which are not part of the scheduled contract work and therefore not a contract performance failure. Analysis is also carried out to determine, which roads feature more frequently, enabling changes to be made in the frequency of cleansing, litterbins to be added if required, and any contractor performance issues to be addressed.
- 2.31 Rectification Notices for Street Cleansing were 88 in 2012/13 compared to 116 in 2013/14. The level of Defaults, where Rectifications have not been resolved satisfactorily or where the breach has been more serious, has remained low with 15 defaults were issued in 2012/13 and 7 in 2013/14.

### **Fly Tipping**

- 2.32 The average time to clear fly tips reduced from 1.47 days in 2012/13 to 1.41 days in 2013/14. This remains well within the expectancy of 2 days. The number of recorded fly tips has increased 17.3% from 700 Fly tips in 2012/13 to 821 in 2013/14. The Council’s officers continue to be involved in partnership working with the police and other agencies to target unlicensed waste carriers through roadside stop and searches (Operation Agrarian), and the Fly Tipping Working Group, where Hertfordshire Councils and other agencies meet regularly to share knowledge and best practice with regards to tackling fly tipping. East Herts officers have also attended seminars from Keep Britain Tidy to share ideas and learn best practise.

### **Other initiatives – environmental management**

- 2.33 In the last 12 months, the service has continued with the following initiatives connected to environmental management:



## Dog Micro Chipping

- The Council has been working with the Dogs Trust, Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations on an information campaign and dog chipping programme free of charge for social housing tenants.
- East Herts also works in conjunction with its contracted kennelling service to microchip dogs within their care, this in turn enabling easier identification if dogs go missing in the future.
- In 2013/14, 148 dogs have been micro chipped. It has also been recognised as a great opportunity to offer advice on neutering and responsible dog ownership thought the community. It is anticipated that there will be a further uptake of the service due to the new legislation where all dogs will have to be micro chipped by June 2016.

## Litter

- In November 2013 the Council joined forces with Environmental Charity Keep Britain Tidy and other Councils around the country for the “The Which Side of the Fence?” Initiative. The aim was to highlight the cost and to show people what would happen if the Council stopped cleaning up after them. In East Herts it was arranged that our contractor should clean only one side of a section of street and leave the other side to look after its self in three locations in Bishops Stortford, Hertford and Ware. Pictures of the litter that resulted were publicised using social media showing a build-up of litter over the weekend and the event received some positive publicity. The main problems highlighted were fast food and sweep wrappers as well as cigarette butts.
- East Herts continues to work closely with Hertfordshire Highways, and its contractor Ringway to litter picks the main roads in the district when traffic management permits.

## Illegal transport of waste

- Four vehicle ‘stop and search’ events in association with the Police and other enforcement agencies as part

of 'Operation Agrarian' were held. The objective of this regular activity is to work with other agencies to find those transporting their waste without a Registered Waste Carriers Licence, as these are often the perpetrators of fly tips.

### Enforcement

- In 2013/14, 80 offences were investigated, with five Fixed Penalty Notices issued for littering.
- These investigations breakdown to:
  - Fly tipping offences - 40
  - Waste offences - 12
  - Litter offences - 7
  - Dog Fouling - 10
  - Issuing of free literature without permission - 7
  - Tree protection offence - 4
- This was 11 less than the same period the year before. Decreases in investigations of waste offences could be attributed to the joint operations with Hertfordshire Police such as Operation Agrarian which has raised awareness and improved compliance. Investigated fly tip offences increased by 3 from 37 in 2012/13 to 40 in 2013/14 which could be attributed to the rise in the number of fly tip reported incidents. The Council's approach to tackling environmental crime remains robust, through its publicity programme, displaying anti-fly tipping signs in 'hot spot' areas designed in house and supplied by the Environment Agency to warn potential offenders that the area is under surveillance. The Council also continues to work in partnership with local landowners to ensure potential fly tipping hot spot areas are made inaccessible thus discouraging the activity.

## Grounds Maintenance Contract Update

- 2.34 The grounds maintenance contract with John O'Conner (GM) Ltd has now been in place for six years. Performance in 2013/14 has been good.
- 2.35 The service has revised its procedures this year to ensure it makes best use of the new remote inspection system, utilising hand held devices for field staff. The contractor has performed well despite the extremely adverse weather conditions. Excessive rainfall combined with unusually mild temperatures in the latter half of the year have seen grass, shrub and hedge growth increase significantly and for an extended period. Rainfall was highest in December and combined with the highest temperature recorded for the month since the start of the contract in 2008. The usual decrease in growth across the colder winter period has consequently not happened.
- 2.36 Despite this, the contractor has utilised resources well and adapted to cope with the conditions. Customer enquiries have risen slightly by about 12% between June and December due particularly to the vigorous shrub and hedge growth. The average level of complaints has remained as consistently low as the previous year. The unusual weather brought with it challenges for both our customers and our contractor with flooding in places and a certain amount of anxiety about tree stability in the soft ground. Validated complaints have actually fallen. The service received 126 validated complaints out of a total of 502 complaints this year compared to 247 out of 464 in 2012. The contractor is obliged to cut grass all through the year to maintain the performance standard regardless of growth but is only contracted to cut hedges twice a year. Complaints related to hedge growth therefore were not valid complaints against the contractor where a scheduled hedge cut was imminently due or had not long been completed. The level of complaints relating only to grass cutting is a key indicator of performance. The average per month was down from 12 in 2012 to 6 this year.

- 2.37 Monitoring of the contract has been consistently vigorous. It reflects good compliance and minimal intervention required by customers. Our Area Environmental Inspectors issued 132 rectification notices to the contractor this year in comparison with 55 raised in response to complaints from customers. The service aims to identify any issues swiftly before customers find it necessary to complain. This combined with a focussed commitment by the contractor to respond very quickly to rectifications has retained the low level of complaints.
- 2.38 The contractor has developed a strong and effective level of supervision utilising a carefully revised programme of works and working closely with the Council's Area Environmental Inspectors. Resources are organised in a flexible way to respond to seasonal pressure points. An additional grass cutting team is, for instance, mobilised when necessary. The weekly "compliance audit" tests against five elements of performance. It shows the levels of performance relating to the efficiency of the contractor's work programme and the accuracy of their own supervision reports. These tests revealed a consistent near faultless performance in these areas of 1.6% for 2013 compared with 3.1% test failures for 2012.
- 2.39 The contractor has increased "toolbox workshops" with staff, now held on a weekly basis to discuss specific issues and to ensure teams are focussing work efficiently and effectively. They have also introduced a staff bonus scheme. Where targets are met relating to performance against their own work programme and our rectification levels, staff receive a token monthly payment. This has helped to develop ownership of their areas and responsibilities.
- 2.40 Work continues with the contractor to ensure that the contract achieves a consistently high standard. Some highlights of this include:
- The contractor works closely with the Council to respond to any trends or patterns in the level of complaints or rectifications in certain areas to ensure the programme is adjusted to meet any seasonal variations. The ad hoc works programme during the

winter to support our woodland management initiatives has proved effective and economical.

- A fast response to provide emergency work during the recent bad weather. Two new wood chippers have been provided to assist with fallen trees and branches and woodland management on East Herts land. A new chemical with longer lasting effect is now being used to treat shrub bed weeds and prevent re-growth.
- Active monitoring of hedge growth has been introduced to identify sight line issues between the scheduled cuts.
- Trials of 'annual' seed sowing have been successful. The contractor has implemented an initiative to brighten up high profile sites this year with swathes of wild flowers on verges and roundabouts at no cost to the Council. This supports an in-house Environmental Biodiversity Volunteer Project they have in place to encourage teams across the company to engage with their clients to enhance the environment. The plants will start to emerge during the summer months. Some of these areas will be continued at a favourable rate next year as part of our existing annual bedding scheme.
- As a result of the contract being extended for a further 5 years, the contractor is replacing the fleet with new vehicles to higher environmental specification.
- Supervisors and managers meet regularly with organisations such as the police, county council, housing associations, football clubs and In Bloom groups. These meetings provide essential information on local issues and feedback from customers.
- The Council's 'Friends of Groups' at Southern Country Park and Pishiobury Park continue to establish important links to the local community and introduce an additional and valuable presence on site in our parks. Both groups carry out a wide range of tasks on site supported closely by our contractor.
- The contractor has enhanced the skills of six members of staff with community safety accreditation qualifications to support our environmental enforcement work. The supervisors have undertaken trainer training and staff have attended a leading sports pitch maintenance course as well as the RSPB training

workshop to learn more about maintenance in relation to the bird nesting season.

- The contractor works in conjunction with Job Centre Plus to provide job seekers with the opportunity to try out working within the horticultural industry. They work in partnership with Capel Manor College and train staff with Keeping Excellence in Training Standards (KEITS) who provide expert support to staff within the workplace.

### 3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**,

#### Background Papers:

Report to Joint Scrutiny Committee 11 February 2014 – Results of the 2013 Residents' Survey

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