

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 November 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Gary Byrne (Vice-Chair), Daniel Chukwu, Sara Muldowney, Maureen Pearce and Paul Arnold (Substitute) (substitute for Elizabeth Rigby)

Apologies: Councillor Elizabeth Rigby, Emergency Planning Manager

In attendance:

Jahur Ali, Recreation and Leisure Manager
Peter Bond
Michelle Cunningham, Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Manager
Gavin Dennett, Strategic Lead - Public Protection
Terry Fisher, Essex Police
Daren Spring, Assistant Director – Street Scene & Leisure
Vincent Taylor, Strategic Lead for Clean and Green Services
Rhiannon Whiteley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 8 September held on the 11th October 2022 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Overview of Responsibilities of Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and Leisure - Verbal Update

The Chair decided that item 8 should be heard first.

Councillor Jefferies invited the Committee to ask him questions.

The Chair requested an update regarding brown bin collections.

Councillor Jefferies responded that due to actions of the protestors, roads were closed around the depot and therefore lorries could not get in or out. They are therefore currently two days behind with collections as on Monday and Tuesday the brown bins couldn't be collected. The service will be working on Saturday to make up for this and therefore for those whose bins weren't collected on Monday and Tuesday their bins will be collected by Saturday. Councillor Jefferies also confirmed that they have had some success in recruiting loaders and drivers but at the same time others are still leaving. He assured the Committee they are doing work at the depot on retaining workers.

The Chair queried if other Councils were having the same difficulties.

Councillor Jefferies confirmed that other Councils were also experiencing recruitment difficulties.

Councillor Muldowney queried if any contingency plans were in place as the protestors are continuing to target the depot.

Councillor Jefferies explained that they have no other site in the borough and they have to rely on the Police to deal with the protestors.

The Recreation and Leisure Services Manager joined the meeting at 19.06

Councillor M Coxshall joined the meeting at 19.08

Councillor Jefferies stated that bins will always be missed for a variety of reasons (blocked access, staff shortages, lorry breakdowns) and they are reviewing the whole process for reporting missed bins so residents can report it easily, obtain a reason as to why it wasn't collected and receive an answer as to when it will be collected.

Councillor Byrne raised that whenever he reports a missed bin the reason given for this is always blocked access.

Councillor Jefferies responded that the system can take photos and he is determined to improve it so this is done.

Councillor Arnold explained that the communication to residents needs to be better as they won't know to put their bins back out to be collected once they have been missed.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed that they are doing a lot of work with the Communications team and information is on the website. He confirmed they are asking people to keep their brown bins out until Saturday if their bins were missed on Monday and Tuesday. He highlighted that he understood this was not convenient for residents.

Councillor Muldowney agreed with Councillor Arnold that a lot of the bad feeling and frustration expressed by residents could be solved with better communication.

Councillor Jefferies stated that the information was on the website, Facebook and Twitter. He agreed communications can always be improved.

Councillor Byrne stated that he had not had the same problems with missed bins with trade waste. He queried why this was the case and if there was anything that could be learnt from that team.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure explained that they are a much smaller team with just two vehicles. It was therefore easier to manage and resource this team.

Councillor Arnold queried that now the bird nesting season is over will work start on trees.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed that the team would normally start the winter maintenance programme once the grass cutting season has come to an end. However, he commented that they are cutting the grass later in the year and also starting to cut it earlier. The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed that all the trees in the Borough have been surveyed and graded and the team will work over a 5 year period to make sure the maintenance on those trees is carried out.

Councillor Arnold asked if information could go on to the website about when this work is going to be carried out as he often gets calls about trees from residents.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed that he would speak to the web team although they may only be able to specify the area that they will be working in as opposed to confirming the particular work that will be carried out.

Councillor Byrne queried whether single use plastic was being used in the building as he noted there were single use plastic cups by the water machine.

Councillor Jefferies confirmed there is a policy to reduce the use of single use plastic in the Civic Offices.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure responded that he would speak to facilities about this.

5. Essex Police - Verbal Update

Inspector Fisher of Essex Police commented that the visibility of police officers had been raised at the last meeting and in response to that he wanted to provide more information about what Police officers are doing when they aren't out on patrol. He explained that officers responsibilities included managing hate crime, attendances at court, arresting suspects, observing people in custody or at the hospital, preparing files for the CPS, attending community forums, attending safeguarding meetings, policing local protests, dealing with low level drugs, gangs and warrants. He explained the list was not exhaustive and he could go on. Inspector Fisher assured the Committee, the officers are very busy and that they want to be out on the beat.

Inspector Fisher updated the Committee that the off- road nuisance vehicles team launched about 6 weeks ago and stated that they have had quite a lot of success already. The target was to issue 30 Section 59 warnings by the end of the year and they have already issued 71 to date. The aim is to reach 100.

Inspector Fisher updated the committee on Operation Raptor and the injunctions issued for Grays town centre. He explained that the main 5 elders of the group have been charged and interim orders have been granted against 8 juvenile members and they will be in court again in December for the court to decide whether to grant full injunctions. They are also confident that they are going to serve a further 8 adult injunctions hopefully by December and that this will be the beginning of the end of an emerging gang.

Regarding Chadwell St Mary and the fire in the children's park, Inspector Fisher outlined that from some of the pop-up events and coffee with cops residents have expressed concern about crime and anti-social behaviour and in response to this operation Reggie commenced which involved additional patrols to address this and to try and increase community confidence. For Thurrock anti-social behaviour is down 52.4%. A lot of ASB was around off and on road nuisance vehicles and operation Ceasar and Operation Irish Lions has probably had an impact on this. Violence is down and burglary is also down 7%.

The Chair commented that Operation Ceasar is definitely working as she doesn't think she has had any complaints about bikes in the last 6 weeks. The Chair stated that the Police were doing a brilliant job in bringing the motorcycle problem under control.

Councillor Arnold queried whether the number of hours on patrol is recorded.

Inspector Fisher responded that this is different depending on which type of Police team you are looking at. For the town centre team where it is an important part of their role to be visible and engaging with businesses and the community their hours on patrol are recorded. For other teams it is not necessarily the best use of their time. In modern policing there are so many other strands to keeping the community safe aside from being on patrol. Inspector Fisher invited Councillor Arnold to come out on patrol with one of the police teams.

Councillor Arnold responded that he would love to take Inspector Fisher up on his offer. He commented that residents look for the visual police presence and clearly there is a lot going on behind the scenes.

Councillor Byrne referred to seeing on social media that Manor Way is still being used as a race track.

Inspector Fisher responded that car cruises are still happening and this has been a long term issue in Thurrock. From intelligence it seems that the significant meets containing lots of cars are focussed on the west of Thurrock and Lakeside. Operation Irish lions is dealing with this and they know that when they disrupt them they often head over to the manor way. Inspector Fisher confirmed his teams are often in the area between 2am and 4 am in the morning when this activity tends to happen and they are trying to keep the roads safe. Inspector Fisher encouraged residents to report places and times they see this happening and vehicle registration numbers as the more intelligence the police have the better.

Councillor Redsell raised the issue of e-scooters.

Inspector Fisher confirmed the Government are still conducting trials of e-scooters being legalised and the trial has been extended. He was clear that some members of the public are very supportive of them and some think they are dangerous. Inspector Fisher confirmed he hoped to receive clear guidance from the Government soon in relation to e-scooters.

Councillor Muldowney highlighted that lots of trees have been vandalised on Orsett Heath and the council have told her to advise residents to report vandalism to the police, she queried if this was correct.

Inspector Fisher confirmed it did depend on the act. However, an ongoing crime series even if not criminal damage is still something that is anti-social and the police can target and deal with it.

Councillor Muldowney queried if the town centre police team are funded by the council tax rises.

Inspector Fisher confirmed he wouldn't have the information, but it could probably be requested from the PFCC (Police Fire Crime Commissioner).

Councillor Byrne highlighted that the location of coffee with cops in the library was not the best location to reach a wide range of people. He suggested that the vape shop gets people of all ages coming in and they would be willing to offer their shop as a venue for coffee with the cops.

Inspector Fisher confirmed the purpose of coffee with the cops is about engagement with the community and the more people they can reach the better. He agreed it is something that could be explored.

Inspector Fisher and Michelle Cunningham left the meeting at 20.24

6. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2023/24

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure presented the report to the Committee, he confirmed it covered the fees and charges for all services in the remit of this Committee.

The Chair queried whether all bowls clubs are paying the same.

The Recreation and Leisure manager confirmed the fees and charges for bowls are the same for all. There may be a difference in the price if they lease the building. He confirmed that most of the bowls clubs in Thurrock are now self-managed and pay a £1 peppercorn rent to the Council as they maintain the bowls greens themselves.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene confirmed the Council are trying to regulate the use of Thurrock's Parks and open spaces. Fitness companies or personal trainers can register for a license to use the parks and open spaces and in return the Council will help them with social media and promoting their business.

The Recreation and Leisure manager raised that the challenge Thurrock has is they don't have enough pitches. On grass you can only play for 8 hours a week to protect the grass. There are no flood lights for evening play. 3G pitches allow for more hours of play.

Councillor Muldowney commented that the Council are supposed to be encouraging people to be more active yet they are imposing rises above inflation for those who do use the facilities in a cost of living crisis. Councillor Muldowney raised that the fees and charges for bowls for over 60's has gone up 20%. Councillor Muldowney also noted the goal posts have been removed.

The Recreation and Leisure Manager confirmed that none of the bowls teams pay this as they are almost all self-managed however they do still need to include the figure in the spreadsheet. Previously, the bowls clubs paid the fees and charges and the Council maintained the bowls green. This wasn't cost effective for the Council therefore the Bowls clubs decided to take this over. He also confirmed that on football sites when goal posts are left out there is a lot of damage so they have to remove them to stop this. If they made a surplus they could keep the goal posts out and re-seed the area around the goal post. He also confirmed that Thurrock Council's fees and charges are lower than other boroughs. If clubs book using the seasonal rate they get around 3 games free. Clubs want the pitches to be high quality and this takes time and investment. The pitches are oversubscribed. He also confirmed that a recent Sport England Active Life survey has shown a 0.5% increase in the borough of people who are active. Thurrock has previously been one of the most inactive boroughs in Essex. If Thurrock had more sites, physical activity of residents could increase.

Councillor Byrne responded that most personal trainers have 4 clients who they charge around £5 a session for, therefore they are only earning around £20 for an hour and may not be able to afford the license fee.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure clarified that individuals can exercise in the park for free however, if people are charging others for training this would be different. The fees allow for a one year subscription.

Councillor Arnold stated there is a difference where small businesses are using parks and open spaces for free. He queried if the increases are more about cost recovery than profit and if there is a surplus he asked what happens to it.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed the main goal is cost recovery. They would like to increase the quality of outdoor sports for residents to encourage them to do more. For those who the licenses will apply to, the money recovered will go into improving facilities.

Councillor Muldowney queried in relation to the recommendation 1.2 whether they are anticipating the Director Delegated Authority will be needed?

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure responded that it was difficult to say however it is in there in case it is needed.

Councillor Muldowney confirmed that she is not in favour of any prices above inflation.

The Chair queried the wording of recommendation 1.2.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed he would take this back for the wording to be looked at.

Councillor Muldowney confirmed she also did not agree to recommendation 1.1 and requested a vote on both recommendations.

Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable; and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.

In relation to recommendation 1.1 Councillor Byrne, Councillor Muldowney and Councillor Chukwu did not agree. Councillor Redsell, Councillor Arnold and Councillor Pearce agreed with the recommendation.

1.2 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that director delegated authority will be sought

via Cabinet to allow fees and charges to be varied within a financial year in response to legal and regulatory requirements.

In relation to recommendation 1.2 all members of the Committee confirmed they did not agree with the recommendation.

Councillor Jefferies left the meeting at 21.10

7. Annual Status Report on Air Quality in Thurrock

The Air Quality Officer presented the report to the Committee. He confirmed the Council had a statutory obligation to produce an annual statement on air quality and that there had been a general improvement seen in air quality across the board in Thurrock.

The Chair queried if COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazards) sites give off emissions.

The Strategic Lead of Public Protection confirmed that the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) and Environment agency regulate them. The Council however does have involvement from an emergency planning perspective but COMAH emissions fall outside of local air quality management.

The Chair commented that we needed to get cars off the road in order to reduce air pollution and that's unlikely to happen.

The Strategic Lead of Public Protection confirmed that their role was to offer advice to the highways team for example about removing obstructions that may cause air pollution or advice to the planning team regarding building a school playground next to a highly polluting road. He agreed they couldn't just close the A13 and commented that there are other solutions such as improved vehicle design which can also assist with pollution.

Councillor Muldowney thanked the Air Quality officer for the report. She confirmed that residents are concerned about air pollution. She raised the issue of PM2.5 and that recent research about this fine particulate matter has confirmed that it can have a significant impact on health. She queried why the 2021 figures are described as estimated on page 76.

The Air Quality officer confirmed they don't have PM2.5 monitoring in all of the stations and they estimate off the PM10 levels. He confirmed they are monitoring it at two sites in Stanford-Le-Hope and Tilbury and they have recently put a new monitor at the Grays monitoring station but they will not get the data from it until next year or possibly the year after.

Councillor Muldowney asked the Air Quality Officer about the new levels for PM2.5 that the Government are supposed to be bringing in.

The Air Quality Officer confirmed that the Government has not confirmed the new levels yet and that the decision has been delayed.

Councillor Muldowney stated that she was concerned the levels of PM2.5 are above the levels the World Health Organisation recommend as low risk to health.

Councillor Muldowney queried if there is any work being completed regarding the impact of the Lower Thames Crossing on air pollution in the borough.

The Strategic Lead of Public Protection confirmed they have 4 fixed stations and 69 monitoring points which is considerably more than most neighbouring boroughs. They are also commissioning some air quality modelling which will provide a map of more detailed data on air quality. He confirmed they are likely to be called upon to give comments on the proposed Lower Thames Crossing route when they finalise it and they should be able to estimate from traffic use figures the impact of the Lower Thames Crossing route on the surrounding areas. It is likely there will be potential reductions in West Thurrock and Purfleet and at the Dartford crossing as the Lower Thames Crossing might reduce the traffic flow in these areas but increases will be expected in the immediate area of the Lower Thames Crossing.

At 21.28 the Committee agreed to raise Standing Orders so the meeting could continue beyond 9.30pm

Councillor Chukwu stated that Thurrock was previously described as one of the most polluted areas in the country, he queried if this narrative has now changed.

The Air Quality Officer confirmed that it was quite a positive picture now. There is a varied picture across the borough and the only site not compliant was on the London Road in Purfleet.

The chair suggested more trees could be the solution.

The Air Quality Officer clarified that the answer is more complicated than that as trees can have detrimental effect by reducing the dispersing effect wind has.

RESOLVED

1.1 That the report be noted.

8. Work Programme

Councillor Muldowney requested that the Waste Services report for the next meeting in January 2023 is a written report and not verbal

The meeting finished at 9.37 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**