

# Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

## Scrutiny Committee

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> October 2015

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Author: Cabinet Member for Streetsmart  
Wards: All  
Locality Affected: All  
Parishes Affected: All

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### 1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to question the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart on his portfolio responsibilities and performance.
- 1.2 A key purpose of the Scrutiny function is to hold Cabinet to account and ensure that Council and partner's priorities and performance are being delivered.
- 1.3 Members of the Committee are reminded that all Members of the Cabinet are required to come before the Scrutiny Committee to take part in a Question and Answer session that will focus on the full remit of their portfolio. Scrutiny Committee is therefore encouraged to focus Question and Answer sessions with Cabinet Members on specific topics and/or services in order to avoid duplication.

### 2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the report by the Cabinet Member for StreetSmart, to put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member and decide if any further action is required.

### 3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for StreetSmart is Councillor Brian Ford. The portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet position are as follows:
  - 3.1.1 Waterside Depot Management
  - 3.1.2 StreetSmart
  - 3.1.3 Public Toilets,
  - 3.1.4 Waste Disposal / Waste Minimisation
  - 3.1.5 Street Lighting
  - 3.1.6 Street Cleaning
  - 3.1.7 EnviroCrime

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- 3.1.8 Recycling
- 3.1.9 Refuse Collection – Domestic and Trade
- 3.1.10 Ground and Tree Maintenance and Open Spaces
- 3.1.11 Removal of Graffiti and Abandoned Vehicles
- 3.1.12 Parks (Streetsmart services only)
- 3.1.13 Environmental Issues; Landscape and Countryside (including Community Forest)
- 3.1.14 Playgrounds, including those that are not presently utilised.
- 3.1.15 Maintenance of Roundabouts and non-HRA verges
- 3.1.16 Building and Engineering
- 3.1.17 Building Services, Cleaning, Catering and Security services
- 3.1.18 Gullies and Drainage, minor road repairs, potholes
- 3.2 Additional narrative on the performance of StreetSmart is set out in Appendix A.

## **What have you done well?**

### Procuring the right equipment for the most economical price

- 3.3 *Waste and Recycling* - A key element of delivering efficient and effective services is having the right equipment. During 2015/16, we have assessed our requirements, carried out extensive soft-market testing, involved our crews in testing, and prioritised the procurement of waste and recycling vehicles, in-cab technology and development of route optimisation software.
- 3.4 In 2014/15, we recognised our Kerbside Recycling vehicles were approaching the end of their effective lifespan and as a result we were experiencing an increase in the amount of unscheduled maintenance. Earlier this year we completed the procurement exercise started in 2014/15 to procure new Kerbside Recycling vehicles and the first eight vehicles will start arriving at the end of November, in readiness for the increased activity over the Christmas period.
- 3.5 In the new waste and recycling vehicles it is proposed that we will have two very important pieces of kit. The first will be in-cab technology that will allow real time reporting of information from the waste and recycling crews, and our customer services team, resulting in a much improved customer experience. The second will be 360 degree cameras around the vehicles that will improve the safety of our operations. We have completed soft market testing of this technology and

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we are set to commence a tender exercise in the second half of 2015/16 ready for the arrival of the new vehicles.

- 3.6 All of this work during 2015/16, will lay the foundations for operating a very efficient and effective waste and recycling collection service in future years, which will have significant improvements for crews and the public alike.
- 3.7 *Highway Operations* - Within Highway Operations, we have procured a Multihog which allows us to complete highway patching more effectively, significantly improving the finish of the highway repair, and the Multihog machine will allow us to complete the work more efficiently, with analysis of the increased levels of efficiency underway.

## Green Waste

- 3.8 During 2015/16, we have aimed to consolidate the Green Waste service that was introduced in 2014/15. We did not extensively market the service this year instead opting to focus our resources on procurement of a new waste fleet and the development of route optimisation. The service has bedded in very well and we have 13,000 subscriptions. We have not experienced the confusion of last year where residents were leaving bags of green waste out. We are reviewing how we can improve the renewal process in preparation for marketing the service more actively in the fourth quarter of 2015/16 in readiness for the new season and taking advantage of the new waste fleet and in-cab technology during 2016/17.

## Improved Access to Waterside (Household Waste and Recycling Centre)

- 3.9 In 2014/15, we experienced long queues at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) at Cheney Manor and this proved frustrating for residents and also hampered the effectiveness of our operations. Over the winter season of 2014/15 we gave a great deal of consideration to how we could improve the situation for residents, and in 2015/16 we implemented a number of changes to the waste site with extended opening hours, a new road layout, and improved traffic marshalling. These changes significantly reduced waiting times, improved safety for residents and staff, and improved the efficiency of the site for operational teams.

## Town Centre Cleansing

- 3.10 The last year has seen a continued focus to address cleansing issues across the borough, including a number of initiatives in the Broad Green area. This part of the borough, just outside the Town Centre, experiences higher levels of litter related issues in-part due to the higher numbers of transient households.
- 3.11 We have engaged with local Ward Members, residents, businesses, community groups and the Localities Team to tackle the littering and develop a variety of

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initiatives. For example, working with Localities, a number of Volunteers are now acting as Broad Green Champions. These champions live and work in the community and help to promote and educate the community. These champions have been involved in community litter picks and recently involved young people from the National Citizen Scheme who cleared 14 bags of litter from the Broad Green area and went away with a greater understanding of the environmental impact of littering.

- 3.12 The Cleansing Team have also been supporting work with the Goan Elder's Group. Part of the work being undertaken assists them with their English language skills, and by addressing social isolation, the group has been engaged in litter picks and encouraging others in the community to take part. This is aimed at educating and changing behaviour on disposing of waste appropriately. The aim is for this group to develop a programme of litter picks that residents can become involved in.
- 3.13 The Broad Green Residents association has identified areas within Broad Green for community gardens to enhance the look of the area. Currently the space by the Community Centre is the most developed with ground preparation and planting already undertaken. This has been supported by the Probation Service and further locations are being considered.
- 3.14 Other activities include working with businesses under the Community Waste Project whereby businesses sign up to agree to dispose of their waste responsibly.

## EnviroCrime

- 3.15 In July 2015, we successfully integrated the EnviroCrime function into the Street Cleaning team. The move enables us to join up our environmental resources more effectively and focus our enforcement activity where we are experiencing the greatest issues in the street cleaning operation.
- 3.16 During 2015, the Council has had four successful prosecutions for Fly Tipping since February 2015 with fines and costs of £230.00, £335.00, £350.00 and £1,763.00. We currently have a further four prosecutions listed for November and December this year.
- 3.17 In October 2015, a Fixed Penalty Notice for £300.00 was issued for failing to dispose of trade waste. This was issued to a business who was depositing waste from their shop into public litter bins.
- 3.18 The aspiration is to grow the team and focus part of the time on enforcement activity and utilise the income generated to deliver more education working with schools and community groups to explain the importance of responsible waste disposal and recycling.

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### Grounds Maintenance

- 3.19 The Grounds Maintenance service has performed well against agreed service standards in delivering the Winter programme during 2014/15, and the Summer programme during 2015/16. We have published maintenance schedules for both the Winter and Summer programmes which has reduced customer contact into the “back office” by around 80%.
- 3.20 The provision of maintenance schedules on the Council’s website has proved popular with residents and Ward Members alike, and we continue to seek feedback on whether additional information would be helpful in the future.

### Parish Pilots

- 3.21 During 2015/16, we have responded to requests from some parish councils to devolve grounds maintenance and street cleaning services to the Parish level. Working in partnership with Wroughton Parish Council, Highworth Town Council, Haydon Wick Parish Council and the newly formed Nythe Parish Council, we identified which services they would like to deliver locally, and agreed to embark on a number of pilots involving the transfer of services and to monitor their success.
- 3.22 The parish councils received support from StreetSmart resources to ensure a smooth transition into service delivery with the last of the pilots going live in June 2015. The pilots continue to provide invaluable insight into understanding how services can be delivered at a local level and we are receiving requests from existing parish councils both within the pilot programme and outside the original pilots to take on further services.

### Winter Service

- 3.23 The delivery of the Winter Service went very well last year 2014/15. Many people considered it to be a mild winter but our records indicate that in fact it was an average winter for salt gritting. Please find below a table confirming the amount of gritting completed in recent years.

| Financial Year | Number of operations | Salt tonnage |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 2012/13        | 50                   | 2,075        |
| 2013/14        | 29                   | 1,230        |
| 2014/15        | 39                   | 1,580        |

Table 1 – Winter Service (Salt Gritting Operations)

- 3.24 The preparation for this coming winter 2015/16 has gone well with all weather stations and vehicles having been calibrated and all gritter drivers having received their City and Guild training for Winter Service. A total of 21 drivers are

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now trained this year to allow a larger pool to be called upon during extreme weather. We have 3,000 tonnes of salt in store with an additional 1,000 tonnes reserved with the supplier for delivery during the winter should it be required.

## Investing in our Workforce

- 3.25 In some parts of the portfolio we utilise a number of temporary resources. This proves an effective delivery model in areas such as Grounds Maintenance, which is seasonal and requires temporary additional resource during the summer months, whereas we do not require the same level of resources during the winter.
- 3.26 In Waste and Recycling, we have a total workforce of circa 120 with approximately a third of the workforce made up of temporary staff. This presents operational challenges with a transient workforce where we need to train new starters. Therefore, in January 2015, we embarked on a recruitment campaign to fill some of the vacancies and we successfully filled 10 vacancies reducing our temporary resources by circa 25% in Waste and Recycling. We are committed to investing in our workforce and giving them the training and opportunities to develop further in their role.
- 3.27 Given the success of this recruitment campaign, it is our intention to complete another campaign during the second half of 2015/16.

## Customer Complaints

- 3.28 The performance of StreetSmart services has been improving during 2015/16, with less complaints being received compared to 2014/15. This reduction comes as a result of residents adapting to the service changes we introduced during 2014/15 in Waste and Recycling, better communication of our Grounds Maintenance schedules, and a general increase in our customer focus when dealing with residents and reviewing our internal processes.
- 3.29 By the end of 2015/16, we expect to see an overall reduction in complaints between 30-40% compared to the previous year. This is a strong performance given the 7 million waste collections completed and square metres of ground that is cleaned and maintained annually.

## **What would you do differently?**

- 3.30 At the start of 2015, we experienced an electrical fire in the Public Toilets at Wroughton. We were quick to work with colleagues within Property Maintenance to have the building secured and initial works scoped to have the building repaired and re-opened to the public. As a result of some delays with the third party contractor and planning of the works, it resulted in the project taking longer than originally scoped to be completed. However, the toilets have now re-opened in October 2015, and as part of the works, we brought the facilities up to



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date with improved baby changing and disabled facilities that were not available before. From this experience we will review and improve our joined-up working with Property Maintenance colleagues to improve the communication and planning of any future refurbishment projects.

- 3.31 During the summer of 2015, we undertook an ultrasonic test of steel street light columns as part of our inspection regime. Out of the 9,600 columns tested, the results identified circa 150 that required de-shafting in readiness for replacement. The Highway Operational Street Lighting team completed the de-shafting, but along with our Asset Management colleagues, we recognise we could have improved the communication of the works to impacted residents and Ward Members. A further communication plan is being developed to address feedback we have received.
- 3.32 All 150 of the de-shafted street lights will be replaced during the current financial year 2015/16 and the Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport will be reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2015 on the future strategic direction of street lighting in the Borough.
- 3.33 In July 2015, we had a Health & Safety Executive (HSE) inspection of the Waste and Recycling service. The inspection was positively received and involved the two inspectors spending most of the day observing waste and recycling collections and interviewing the management teams and health and safety representatives to gain a full understanding of our operation.
- 3.34 The HSE identified three main areas where they wanted to see further evidence or improvement, and they detailed these three areas with five specific improvement notices to be completed by the end of September 2015, in readiness for a further inspection in October 2015.
- 3.35 In consultation with the HSE, we agreed to extend the completion date of one of the improvement notices until November 2015.
- 3.36 In October 2015, we received the follow up visit from the HSE who went back out to observe the waste and recycling crews. On receipt of the evidence we discussed on the day, the HSE is ready to approve 4 of the 5 improvement notices with the extended improvement notice on track to be completed in November 2015 as agreed. Many of the improvements that were identified were already on our improvement programme. However, what we learnt from the experience was that we needed to have documented interim measures in place even when we had the full solutions scheduled to be completed later in the financial year.

### **What are the challenges facing your portfolio:**

- 3.37 Over the next 12 months a number of challenges face StreetSmart and Highway Operations.

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- 3.38 The challenge and the opportunity is to shape the services so that we're responding to the Council's adopted Vision for Swindon in the context of the tightening budgetary framework, with specific focus being on the environment. Cabinet will be working with Senior Officers and their respective teams to design our response to the Vision and engage with all stakeholders on taking this forward.
- 3.39 Within Highway Operations we are seeking to work more closely with the Highways Asset Management team in agreeing the service standards that are achievable in the current financial climate and utilising new equipment such as the Multihog to manage the workload of highway patching and potholes.
- 3.40 In Waste and Recycling, we will not know the scale of the opportunity to transform service delivery until the route optimisation work is completed later in 2015/16. It is possible there may be significant savings to be realised if we remodel the current operation, but this could involve significant consultation so the challenge remains unknown at this moment in time.
- 3.41 We have demonstrated the benefits of improved information provision through the Grounds Maintenance service but we still have a lot more to do in developing our asset management databases to be in a position to provide information for all StreetSmart and Highway services to residents and Ward Members in a manner that is easily accessible.
- 3.42 In relation to the Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC), further improvements to the site are currently underway in preparation for the spring 2016. We have already buried the overhead power cables underground in readiness for a dedicated new entry and exit layout for the public that will separate the operational traffic and deliver further improvements to safety. These works should be completed by April 2016 and the expected improvements have meant that consideration for a second HWRC in Swindon is currently on hold.

## **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 The Committee can choose not to operate a Cabinet Portfolio Question and Answer session system.

## **5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management**

### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report. Any expenditure arising as a result of an item on the Committee's work programme will be met by the Overview and Scrutiny Support budget, subject to the approval of the Committee.



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## Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) requires every Local Authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor and improve performance.

## All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other direct implications arising as a result of this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.

## Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) is required at this stage as this report proposes no changes to services. Any DIA that is required during review of topics include within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

## Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

## **6. Consultees**

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## **7. Background Papers**

- 7.1 None

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 Appendix 1 - Details of the Portfolio's Performance