

Minutes of the meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Monday, 29 November 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor C D Zosseder

Councillors: P M Brivio
S C Manion
M Rose
R S Walkden
P Walker
H M Williams

Also Present: Councillor N S Kenton (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Environment)
David Fitzgerald (Veolia Senior Operations Manager)
Ben Velmans (Veolia Senior Contract Manager)
Gary Morrison (Veolia Contract Manager)
Chris Curtis (Dover representative and Street Cleansing worker)
Terry Harman (GMB Union Representative and Garden Waste Officer)

Officers: Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial)
Head of Commercial Services
Waste Services Manager
Democratic and Corporate Services Manager

Folkestone and Hythe District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with other Members and Officers also present, were in attendance for their simultaneous co-located meeting.

88 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T A Bond, D R Friend and D A Hawkes.

89 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that no notice had been received for the appointment of substitute members.

90 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

91 UPDATE ON VEOLIA PERFORMANCE AND RECOVERY PLAN

The Chairman welcomed members of Folkestone and Hythe District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Chamber who were holding a simultaneous co-located meeting with Dover District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this matter.

The Committee received a presentation from representatives of Veolia that covered the following points:

- Performance in Dover District and Folkestone and Hythe District
 - That performance was currently 99.49%
 - That currently 78.57 bins were missed per 100,000 down from a peak of 144.33.

- Lessons Learnt
 - Members were advised that there had been some analytical errors in the route scheduling which had not reviewed as much as it should have been in hindsight.
 - The Echo system had also been introduced too quickly with staff not being given enough time to learn it.
 - That the delay in ordering the new vehicles had impacted on performance as the existing vehicles were not all right for the new specification. However, all but one vehicle had now been replaced.
 - The tonnage growth during lockdown had been far greater than expected with eight years of expected tonnage growth taking place in a single year.

- Addressing issues (including driver shortages and recovery plan)
 - The need for more trained HGV drivers. Veolia had successfully recruited 22 drivers since the start of the driver shortage and had offered HGV driver apprenticeships.
 - That the two districts were in different positions in respect of the current schedules. For the Dover District a pilot programme would be introduced to deal with the issues affecting narrow, ultra-narrow and rural collections as well as resolving issues with non-aligned communal collections. The second stage would deal with the issue of unbalanced days (particularly Tuesdays and Fridays) in early 2022 so that the rounds were better organised and it would be clearer to residents when their waste would be collected.

- Schedule of improvements
 - 273 bulk communal bins would be replaced with 520 new containers as part of a bin exchange programme. This would amount to a reversion to the previous model for communal collections that would offer a more regular, reliable service that would be clearer for residents.
 - New routes would mean that fewer vehicles would be required to pass households without collecting which would reduce confusion amongst residents and vehicle movements would be reduced resulting in fewer emissions.
 - Collections would also be made by local crews with greater knowledge of their areas.
 - The collection routes would be rebalanced to solve workload issues – particularly relating to Tuesdays and Fridays.

- Mitigating Risks
 - The crews now had a better knowledge of the Echo system
 - The new vehicles had arrived
 - Core rounds would be supplemented with additional resources to support changes

- Greater resilience, particularly in respect of the pool of available HGV drivers. Crews would have both a driver and a driver/loader on them to increase resilience.
- Learning from the issues of previous schedule changes – particularly in respect of communications
- The rounds have been reviewed by the drivers and comments have been taken onboard in designing new routes
- That the change would affect less than 7% of Dover households

In addition to the management representatives from Veolia, the Chairman welcomed the attendance of two trade union representatives: Chris Curtis (Dover representative and Street Cleansing worker) and Terry Harman (GMB Union Representative and Garden Waste Officer). They raised the following points:

- The need for better consultation with staff. They were encouraged that in some areas this was happening now, such as on route changes.
- That low pay was making it difficult to recruit staff, and in particular HGV drivers given the national shortage. While a 12% pay increase had been offered this was on a low base wage and staff pay negotiations were still on-going.
- That the echo system did not show all roads on the crews' tablets which had led to issues with missed collections. The changes in days and crews being assigned to work in areas that they were not familiar with had also adversely impacted on performance.
- In some instances, the waste tonnage had been too great for vehicles to collect on their routes.
- The garden waste rounds were not completable with 2 vehicles. There were currently 3 vehicles assigned to garden waste which was sufficient.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee raised the following points:

- To enquire as to the progress of pay negotiations. In response it was stated that this had been an ongoing process for six months and a ballot was due to close the next day. It was hoped that GMB would be able to advise the outcome of the ballot by Wednesday 1 December 2021.
- To raise the issue of the current level of driver turnover and whether the 22 recruited drivers was sufficient to address the number that had left. In response it was stated that Veolia was still looking to recruit drivers as turnover was an on-going issue as not every new driver stayed.
- To state that council officers were not blamed by Members for the issues as it was for Veolia to resolve the problems. There were concerns that Veolia had managed the issues in a reactive manner and that there had been no proactive approach to resolving the issues. In response, it was stated that Veolia management had been supportive of local management but a perfect storm of events had impacted on their ability to respond to problems.
- To underline the importance of staff consultation, particularly in respect of route planning where local knowledge was vital.
- To ask what impact the increased tonnage had on performance. In response it was stated that it had meant that recycling rounds could not be completed as intended leading to additional rounds and overtime. While it was hoped that tonnage levels had peaked there was no indication at this time that it was returning to previous levels. Veolia planned for 2-3% increase each year which had been exceeded by a considerable margin. On a positive point it was noted that recycling waste had increased more than general waste.

- To some optimism that the issues were finally being addressed by Veolia.

The Chairman invited Councillor N S Kenton, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Environment, to share any views he had on the waste service. He advised that he had some concerns about the solutions proposed and emphasised the need for better communication with local residents and the need for a workable system to be put in place that was properly resourced. He noted that under the previous contract Veolia had seen a growth in tonnage due to the pandemic and Veolia had been aware of this when they bid for the new contract.

Councillor N S Kenton expressed the view that the decision to introduce Echo and the new rounds at the same time was flawed and that it had led to a number of the issues that had impacted the service. He also expressed concerns over the impact that performance problems had caused to wider council services and systems.

The proposed improvements offered hope that the issues could be resolved, and he would be closely monitoring the situation. He would continue to regularly liaise with Councillor Peall, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste and Building Control at Folkestone and Hythe District Council.

Councillor C D Zosseder thanked everyone who attended and advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would continue to monitor the situation.

The meeting ended at 7.51 pm.