

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors English (Chairman), Cannon, Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Cleator, Conyard, Garten, Hinder, Jeffery, Knatchbull, McKenna and T Wilkinson
Lead Members present as Witnesses to the Review:	Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid (Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement) and Councillor Martin Round (Lead Member for Environmental Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hastie.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

3. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that there had been an urgent update to Item 13 – The Council’s Performance against the Waste Strategy (Waste Strategy Review), in the form of Appendix 8 – Information relating to developments with shared waste collection facilities. The information related to the review but would be most applicable at the 3 November 2022 meeting of the Committee.

4. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

5. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

6. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

7. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

9. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

10. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

11. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

12. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

13. THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE WASTE STRATEGY (WASTE STRATEGY REVIEW)

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report, highlighting the relevant lines of enquiry for the meeting as contained within point 2.2 of the report.

The Witnesses to the review of the Council's Performance against the Waste Strategy (the Waste Strategy) were identified as follows:

- Councillor Parfitt-Reid, Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement.
- Councillor Round, Lead Member for Environmental Services.
- Graham Gosden, Waste Manager.
- Jennifer Stevens, Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm.
- Julie Maddocks, Communications Manager.
- Louise Goodsell, Customer Services Manager.

In their introductory statements, Councillor Parfitt-Reid highlighted her commitment to addressing any of the Committee's concern arising through the review; Councillor Round outlined his support for the Committee reviewing an area of responsibility within his portfolio.

In response to questions on the waste hierarchy, the Head of Environmental Services explained that waste reduction initiatives were the primary route to reduce waste; previous initiatives included the 'love food hate waste' campaign, re-useable bag promotions and food storage. Historically, it had taken time for the communications promoting the re-use of products to become popular and for the Council to find suitable partners to work with. The Allington Household Waste and Recycling Centre would be opening a re-use shop which the Council would be promoting, with further opportunities to co-operate with Kent County Council on future initiatives noted. The Waste Manager confirmed that the Council had achieved a 52% recycling rate, which was the highest rate achieved across Kent.

The Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement highlighted the importance of publicising both re-use messages and the organisations that facilitated the re-use of products to reduce waste.

Several Members of the Committee questioned the use of communications in reducing waste, announcing service disruptions and increasing recycling. The Communications Manager briefly outlined some of the communications produced, with specific attention drawn to the 'Insider Waste Tips' that had become popular. The Gov Delivery Stay Connected Newsletter had been trialled initially with waste services since January 2022, with 12,000 individuals having signed up. The latter enabled the Council to continue providing helpful communications at a reduced cost, given the budget reduction seen in recent years.

The pro-active approach taken by the Communications Team was highlighted, particularly through the text message alert system which provided updates to 35,566 residents. This allowed for service disruptions, such as those experienced in the summer, to be quickly communicated. Daily social media updates were produced during service disruption. In supporting this service, the Customer Services Team asked residents whether they would like to sign up to the text messaging system, when reporting an initial issue.

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager outlined the engagement and communication support provided to the waste management, climate change and biodiversity and parks and open spaces teams through a shared officer resource. Similarly to the Gov delivery newsletter, a Climate Change and Biodiversity Newsletter had been produced to increase communications. The benefits of direct engagement were outlined, with reference made to the 'Go Green Information Centre' which saw residents asking the Council's officers direct questions relating to waste collection services.

In response to questions, the Waste Manager stated that improving recycling rates within shared waste collection facilitates was difficult; various methods such as posters and different coloured bags and bin lids had been trialled in the past. Work was ongoing with the relevant organisations, such as Housing Associations, to improve recycling rates. The Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm stated that the Council would assist in promoting where additional recycling facilities were available, such as supermarkets. It was confirmed that different coloured bags could be provided to community volunteers collecting litter, making the process easier.

The Committee felt that the communications produced were helpful, but that to maintain and improve the service's good performance additional educational communications were required. Suggested topics included food storage methods including freezing, information on which sites accepted donated items for re-use, and using shared waste collections. A webpage to demonstrate which items were recyclable, and where they could be recycled, was suggested. It was felt that the communications should be accessible and inclusive, with pictures to be used when possible.

Several Committee Members raised how missed collections were re-organised as they were often contacted by residents on the issue. To support the existing communications being produced, it was suggested that the communication between KCC as the highways authority and the Council should be improved to ensure that road closures did not affect service delivery.

The use of data analytics to target specific areas of the borough where performance against the waste strategy could be improved was questioned. In response, the Waste Manager confirmed that the current system did not allow for information on which areas of the borough were underperforming.

The Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm stated that the recent waste collection audit undertaken by the Kent Resource Partnership provided information on the contents of black bins; demonstrating which areas had higher levels of other types within their general waste bins, such as food or garden waste. This supported the importance of partnership working and the collective power generated, particularly given the reduction in service's communications budget. As those types of waste were recyclable, the Waste Manager confirmed that the Council could achieve a higher recycling rate; other Local Authorities had service arrangements similar to the Council and were achieving higher recycling rates.

The Committee were advised that more detailed area specific information would be available following the re-procurement of the waste collection services contract, as the technology used to support the service would have increased capabilities to that procured 10-years ago. From this, opportunities for direct, targeted communications could be explored. The Head of Environment and Public Realm stated that 10% of the Council's waste was re-directed abroad, with the relevant information accessible on the KCC website.

In response to further questions, the Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm explained the concept of 'enabling payments' from the inter-authority agreement in place between KCC and the Council. It was noted that the Council and Biffa had been discussing how the Deposit Return Scheme ahead of its introduction in England, which may affect the types of waste collected once implemented.

The Lead Member for Environmental Services reiterated the importance of partnership working with Kent County Council and the Mid Kent Waste Partnership, to achieve increased performance against the Waste Strategy. The Lead Member's position on the Kent Waste Partnership was reiterated, at which they would raise the importance of educational communications to reduce the amount of waste produced and the possibility for the Council to lobby upwards. In response, it was suggested that the topic of waste reduction methods be put forward as a topic for the next Local Government Association Conference alongside consideration of lobbying local manufacturers to reduce waste production.

During the discussion, questions were raised that would be more applicable to the next stage of the review. It was noted that the questions posed would be considered then.

The witnesses in attendance were thanked for their contributions to the evidence collection process.

The Committee adjourned for a short break between 8.04 p.m. to 8.11 p.m.

The below actions were identified for further consideration based on the first stage of the review:

- The production of further recycling focused communications, that are accessible with inclusive language, with the use of descriptive pictures;
- The production of further communications on food storage;
- Increased messaging from the Council on shared waste collection facilities;
- The introduction of a webpage on the Council's website outlining which materials can be recycled, and where;
- To lobby local manufacturers to reduce the amount of waste they produce;
- The promotion of Waste Collection facilities as a topic for review at the next Local Government Association Conference;
- Improved communication between Kent County Council and the Council on highway maintenance, with particular reference to the Statutory Undertakings Team at the former;
- When available, the data concerning recycling rates including good and poor performance, across the borough be presented to the Committee to ensure it remains informed following the review's conclusion; and
- The residents survey include questions on the types of actions that would and would not assist in increasing recycling rates;

It was requested that further information be provided on whether Councillors could sign-up to receive text alerts across multiple post-codes, alongside signposting to the relevant webpages where waste collection service updates were provided.

RESOLVED: That the review be continued on the 3 November 2022.

14. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.23 p.m.

Note: The Committee adjourned between 8.04 p.m. to 8.11 p.m.