

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 23 January 2023

Present:

Cllr A Azad (Chairman)
Cllr J R Sanderson (Vice-Chair)

Cllr H Akberali Cllr A Caulfield
Cllr K M Davis Cllr C S Kemp
Cllr A Kirby Cllr J P Morley
Cllr M I Raja

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker, P J T Graves, R N Leach and E Nicholson.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 21 November 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES OSC23-002

The Chairman introduced the report on matters raised at previous meetings of the Committee, drawing the Committee's attention to actions undertaken subsequently.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

6. WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN - AFFINITY WATER OSC23-004

Representatives of Affinity Water were unable to attend the meeting and had instead agreed to attend the meeting due to be held on 20 February 2023.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted

7. THAMES WATER - WASTE OVERSPILL & WOKING WATERWAYS PRESENTATION OSC23-005

The Committee welcomed to the meeting representatives of Thames Water, Richard Aylard, External Affairs and Sustainability Director, and Nikki Hines, Social Housing Relationship Manager.

Thames Water had accepted that their performance on sewage disposal and river health had not met either their or their customers' expectations. The CEO of Thames Water, Sarah Bentley, had committed to an eight-year turnaround plan beginning in 2021. As part of the plan, Thames Water committed to reducing the duration of total spillage across their network by 50% on 2020 levels by 2030. In sensitive catchment areas, referring to chalk and limestone waterways, waterways that run through Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and waterways used recreationally, the total duration of spillage would be reduced by 80% on 2020 levels. The upper river Wey, including the parts that flowed through the Borough, was considered a sensitive catchment area. Thames Water had begun reporting their spillages voluntarily to the public via a live map.

The Committee was provided with a general explanation of the process for treating sewage. A works such as Chobham could process approximately 3,500 homes' waste. On entry, sewage would be screened and any items that would block, damage, or otherwise impact the ability to treat the sewage were removed. The screened sewage would be pumped to filter beds of bacteria that cleaned the sewage. The treated sewage would then be pumped to a further filter bed before being discharged. Each stage required a minimum amount of time to be effective.

Thames Water routinely tested the composition of treated sewage but did not routinely test untreated sewage.

There could be several causes of spillage into waterways, the process to initiate and end overflow was automated. Thames Water's wastewater responsibility covered both smaller foul water and larger surface water systems. During periods of rainfall surface water had the potential to enter the foul system due to several factors. The factors were: ingress from the ground, damaged access points, through holes that were required in manhole covers, and incorrect connections (deliberate or not) made into the sewage network. Incorrect connections could cause significant amounts of surface water to enter the narrower pipes of the foul water network and quickly cause blockages.

The sewage system had been designed primarily to prevent the backing up of sewage into homes. After rainfall, due to the increased water levels in pipes and the minimum time required to treat sewage, any additional flow would be diverted to storm tanks at sewage works, so long as a defined amount of sewage, or greater, was being processed. Once filled the tanks required emptying and cleaning. Any more excess sewage could not be

stored and the system would automatically eject additional sewage into waterways. The Committee was informed that the composition of discharge was sewage watered down by rainwater.

Sewage treatment works were continually upgraded to ensure sufficient capacity. Thames Water engaged with local authorities to determine expected future demand and continued to be a statutory consultee on Local Plans.

Following questions, it was confirmed that almost all spillages correlated with excessive rainfall. Use of storm tanks outside of these instances was required to be reported to the regulator, OFWAT. Monitoring equipment had only been installed at treatment sites in the last few years. The installation of monitors had necessitated upgrading some sites as they struggled to process the minimum levels of sewage set even under normal conditions.

The Committee asked for an explanation as to the high number of spillages at the Chobham works. The reported statistic was hours of discharge, however, flow from each discharge was relatively low.

Although Thames Water were not qualified to provide medical or veterinary advice, it was generally advised if having come into contact with water contaminated by sewage, to wash thoroughly. Contamination of water could occur from the discharge of untreated sewage from works (and even the possibility of some human sourced bacteria in treated sewage). However, there were several other common sources of waterway contamination: effluence from farm animals, effluence from wild animals, and common microbial contaminants from mammal urine.

Regarding the lack of statistics at the Wisley sewage treatment works it was explained that the works operated on a different principle. There was no storm discharge point as all waste received was treated, so called 'treat-all' works.

Thames Water representatives emphasised that the Company had a standing policy of co-funding signage with councils to warn residents of potential threat to health on entry where necessary along waterways.

Following Member query, the Thames Water representatives agreed to provide details on the capacity and upgrades at the Chobham site.

Use of rainwater gardens was discussed, including several that had been built in the Borough in recent years. Richard confirmed that Thames Water supported the principle of their installation and did discuss individual cases with Councils if there was the potential to help fund.

Thames Water had committed to a £9.6 billion spending plan in the period 2020-25. Part way through the period the plan increased by £2 billion as investors agreed to provide additional funding. The company had not paid a dividend for the previous five years and almost all profits generated had been reinvested into the company.

Councillor Azad, and the whole Committee, thanked Richard Aylard and Nikki Hines for attending.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the report be noted; and
- (ii) the presentation be noted.

8. JOINT WASTE SOLUTIONS PERFORMANCE REVIEW, FORWARD PLAN AND INTERIM STRATEGY OSC23-003

The Committee welcomed representatives of Joint Waste Solutions (JWS); Sarah Beck, West Section Manager, Alex Davies, Senior Performance Manager, and Kelly Goldsmith, Partnership Director.

Service Update

Amey, and contract partner JWS, had transferred to a new IT system which had positively impacted the delivery of services. The new IT system had been fully implemented to provide services and efforts were being made to develop the product to provide service improvements.

The IT system recorded and notified refuse collectors of all properties that required assisted collections.

The garden waste collection service had been reinstated in May 2022 with fortnightly collections, following a pause. Although there had been issues in restarting the operation, these had now been remedied. As compensation to affected residents, all accounts had been extended by an amount equal to the period of time the service had been paused. The billing process had been restarted and the process for billing had been streamlined from twelve to five months, thanks in part to the new IT system.

Alex Davies provided an update on the performance of recycling and waste collection services. It was noted that the total volume of waste collected in Woking Borough had continued to increase year-on-year. The year 2020-21 had seen a marked increase above the average, attributed to the effects of the pandemic. The level had fallen somewhat in 2021-22.

The rate of recycling, the total amount of waste collected less non-recycled waste, had continued to fall year-on-year and had dropped 6% in 5 years. Part of the drop was attributed to less garden waste being collected during the summer of 2022. The amount of dry mixed recycling had particularly fallen in recent years. JWS was analysing possible reasons for reduced recycling in the Borough to aid the development of initiatives to encourage recycling.

Missed bins were regularly reported in the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, the target was 80 bins per 100,000. Between April 2020 and November 2022 there had been three occasions where this number had been exceeded. The new IT system provided the ability to monitor missed bins in real-time.

Amey provided a daily service update to JWS. Refuse collectors could report an exception, i.e. a reason why a bin couldn't be collected, which would prevent the bin from being reported as missed. The system included the ability to record a street as not collected by refuse collectors from within the cab and reason given.

Members of the Committee were concerned there were instances whereby the system or refuse collectors incorrectly reported an exception, preventing residents from reporting missed collections. JWS explained that this was more likely with food waste collection as missed bins were reported by the refuse collectors, where the other collections were automated. JWS representatives agreed to review accuracy of reporting with Amey.

Following a request by the Committee, JWS undertook to consider how best to monitor, and feedback, the rate of missed bins in the Borough and how this could be reduced.

New National Policy

A deposit return scheme for drinks containers had been announced. The scheme would not cover glass bottles.

The Government had announced a new national waste management policy, due to be introduced in 2025, that would have significant impact on waste collection.

One of the intentions of the new policy was to provide consistency across local authorities in what was recycled, including food waste, as well as between residential and commercial collection. Many authorities did not comprehensively collect food waste. Woking had 99% food collection coverage. JWS continued to develop strategies to reach the remaining 1%.

The new national policy would seek a recycling rate of 55% by 2025 and 65% by 2035. A target for the overall production of waste to be reduced by 50% on 2019 levels by 2042 was currently out for consultation

It was expected that fleets of waste collection operators would become zero-emission by 2030.

The extant policy employed by JWS was due to end in 2024 and a bridging policy had been approved by the Surrey Environment Partnership Group to cover the period to 2025. The input of local authorities was being sought on the interim policy.

Service Improvements

Cameras had been installed in the cabins of waste collection vehicles, excluding the smaller vehicles used for food waste collection, which fed back to the new IT system. The cameras could detect when bins had not been presented for collection or instances of cross-contamination of types of waste. Where instances were detected letters could be sent to the responsible household informing them. As part of efforts to increase food collection, residents were contacted if the cameras detected that a food waste bin had not been presented.

JWS had produced an educational video for residents in the Borough explaining cross-contamination of waste and how it could be reduced.

To reduce the burden on communal bins, ground floor flats in residential blocks had been provided with their own bins.

The Shared Monitoring Resource Team had been inspecting communal sites to detect issues which prevented or otherwise lowered the recycling rate. JWS continued to develop a strategy to improve the recycling rate at communal sites.

JWS had continued school engagement including helping schools gain green flag accreditation. A data led review was taking place on how to communicate with residents most effectively, balancing face to face communication with virtual.

Members of the Committee enquired why direct debit payments could not be made for garden waste collection and JWS confirmed that discussions were being held on their

introduction. The new IT system did not have the ability to handle direct debit payments, so another system would need to be added to provide the functionality.

Amey was addressing potential driver shortages in two ways; by upscaling employees and performing recruitment drives. Amey had over-recruited in an effort to prevent a repeat of the driver shortages experienced in 2022. JWS considered that Amey now had a level of resilience in their driver stock.

JWS encouraged residents and Councillors to contact them directly where there were complaints about service.

9. PLAY AREA PROVISION OSC22-057

The Committee welcomed Arran Henderson, Jack Fidler and Tracey Haskins to the meeting.

The Committee was pleased by the report and that money had been provisioned for maintaining the various play areas across the Borough.

Following a query from the Committee, it was confirmed that warranty periods existed on individual items when installed, the length of which varied depending on the type of item. It was considered very rare to need the warranty period. Most items installed had a life expectancy of 25-35 years.

Arran confirmed that it would not be appropriate to release publicly the scores attributed to parks. Officers would publicise significant works to play areas ahead of time.

A strategic approach was being developed on how to maintain play areas most effectively.

RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE

- That (i) the proposed approach to assessing play area refurbishment priorities outlined in the report be agreed;**
- (ii) officers begin developing a programme of works for those priorities identified through the refurbishment assessment, within the available project budgets for the coming year; and**
- (iii) officers seek proposals from appropriate consultants to undertake a strategic assessment of the Council's play areas, as outlined in the report.**

10. WORK PROGRAMME OSC23-001

The Chairman introduced the report on the updated Work Programme, drawing the Committee's attention to the key changes since the document had last been received.

The Committee agreed to include as a suggested addition to the work programme inviting Surrey County Council and Thames Water to a joint discussion on the potential to improve surface water drainage in the Borough.

Thames Water was requested to be invited back once works to local sewage works had been completed and sufficient time for data gathering had passed.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

11. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Members of the Committee considered the recently published Performance & Financial Monitoring Information.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (October 2022) be noted.

12. FINANCE TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC23-006

The Committee received the update report of the Finance Task Group.

13. HOUSING TASK GROUP UPDATE OSC23-007

The Committee received the update report of the Housing Task Group.

The meeting commenced at 7.02 pm
and ended at 9.27 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____