



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:00

24 June 2021

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Bogelein (substitute for Councillor Carlo) Everett, Galvin, Giles, Hampton, Osborn, Stutely, Thomas (Va) and Thomas (Vi)

Apologies: Councillors Carlo, Fulton-McAlister (M) and Oliver

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Subject to noting that the member of the public who asked for the topic of woodburning to be included on the agenda, should be invited to the July meeting of the scrutiny committee, it was:-

RESOLVED, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2021.

4. Scrutiny committee work programme 2021-22

It was confirmed that a deadline for submission of TOPIC forms would be circulated by the scrutiny liaison officer for inclusion at the work programming setting meeting in September.

Members discussed extending invites to external speakers to the July meeting. It was agreed that the UEA would be approached to send an expert on air pollution, a local group could be approached as well as a national group called Mums for Lungs, someone who uses woodburning equipment in a commercial setting and potentially a supplier of woodburning equipment.

RESOLVED to ask the scrutiny liaison officer to:

- 1) Circulate a deadline for submission of TOPIC forms to the September work programming meeting of the committee; and
- 2) Approach the UEA, a local air pollution campaign group, someone from the licensed trade and a supplier of woodburning stoves to attend the July scrutiny committee to give evidence.

5. Fly-tipping, communal bins and bins left on pavements

The chair welcomed members of the public who had attended to observe the meeting.

The head of environment services presented the report. He said that the appreciated how important the topic was for elected members and residents.

Communal bins were introduced in 2007 as part of the waste management strategy. These helped with reducing the number of black bags being used for waste, stopped needle stick injuries to the collection operatives and supported the introduction of recycling. There was full engagement with elected members and residents at the time to identify where communal bins should be introduced. A number of challenges had been subsequently identified and the improvement of the service for residents was key. There was a need for a joined up approach to the issue, and discussions with colleagues in the housing teams had already been initiated.

The chair suggested that the committee may want to consider using a select committee to progress this work which would allow for members to hear some 'lived experience' of how the issue was affecting residents, receive information from officers and a report brought back to the full committee for consideration as soon as possible.

A member commented that she would welcome the chance to 'rest' and look again at the issue. A select committee would need terms of reference and she suggested that these could include the select committee working to generate a reset on the topic and forming recommendations that were a material change. The chair reminded members that scrutiny could only make recommendations to cabinet and there would be a reliance on cabinet taking those forward, but the terms of reference could include those factors and positive change would be welcome. The head of environment services said that the select committee would be a good vehicle for driving change and officers would support the members of the select committee.

A member asked if there were good practice examples from other councils which could be considered. The head of environment services said the Renfrewshire council had tackled the issue well. It had pushed to improve recycling and limit the waste generated by embarking on an infrastructure project. Renfrewshire council was both the collection and disposal authority which may have contributed to the success of the project, however, Norwich City Council had the advantage of being both the housing and collection authority which would help to improve services to residents.

In response to a member's question, the head of environment services said that he had been disappointed with the interface between Norwich City Services Ltd (NCSL), Biffa and Norwich City Council as the different systems did not always 'talk to each

other'. This was one of the improvements that NCSL was looking to implement. There was budget in the NCSL business plan for IT systems.

A member asked if there was any data on the cost of picking up flytipping. The head of environment services said that he would circulate some data on costs to the committee members.

A member commented that he had written an initial report which had been circulated outside of the meeting to committee members, and suggested that the structure of that report could form the terms of reference for the select committee. The report comprised sections on:

- Siting of communal bins and clearing of rubbish
- Issues of collection or non-collection
- Communications both with residents and between council departments
- Engagement with residents

Communal bins were a shared resource and were used by various people. The select committee could also look at alternative approaches to governing commons. The chair said that the final terms of reference of the select committee would be determined at its first meeting by those members who sat on it. The head of environment services said that residents should be encouraged to look after the waste that they generated. A member said that residents were not polluters and that the £30 fee for bulky waste collection was unaffordable for some. There was a need to look at how waste was produced in the first place, such as packaging and where items were bought from with engagement needed from manufacturer and retailers to manage the amount of waste.

Members discussed enforcement issues around abuse of communal bins. A member commented that he had issues with communal bins in his ward. Letter drops to residents had been carried out but did not help to deal with the issue. Home deliveries had added to the issue with large amounts of cardboard waste being produced. He asked what scope there was to strengthen enforcement. The head of environment services said that any enforcement action would need to be proportionate. There were existing pools of enforcement staff and over the next six months, it would be considered how best to use that resource. The chair said that some areas with communal bins also had controlled parking zones and asked if the civil enforcement officers looked at communal bins and reported issue when they were undertaking parking patrols. The head of environment services said that the civil enforcement officers had been trained in environmental enforcement but were primarily parking enforcement roles. They were unable to carry out both functions at the same time due to system differences.

A member asked what had changed since the introduction of the communal bins in 2007 to explain the increases in fly tipping. The head of environment services said that he would need to look into it in further detail through tracking of complaints. There was also a change in buying culture around people buying more commodities which were accessible and cheap.

A member said that she appreciated the help that elected member had received from residents on the issue so far and challenged the idea that the blame for issues could be put on residents. Communal bins were often seen as 'mini skips' with people

knowing the locations of them and driving specifically to dump items. The best people to understand how to tackle these issues were the local residents and she asked if there was scope for them to be members of the select committee. The chair said that it was important to distinguish between elected members taking decisions and hearing evidence from members of the public. A member commented that the fly tipping pick up was efficient but it meant that people believed they could fly tip next to communal bins for the council to collect items. Better communication was needed around this.

In response to a question on the use of the Lovely Streets app, the head of environment services said that he was aware of it but as it was not part of the council's systems, there was a lag in receiving information from it and it being put into the council system. The executive director of communities said that this could be an option looked at as part of the council's Digital Strategy.

A member said that in parts of Mancroft ward, there were on average two instances of fly tipping per day. She asked if there was any data to show hot spots or whether the picture was similar across the whole city. The head of environment services said that the data could be circulated and fed into the select committee.

A member asked how the council would work to join up services so that all areas of the city were treated equally. The safer neighbourhoods initiative was working well to allow residents to take ownership of spaces, but more communication was needed as currently, there were only signs up in areas whereas evidence had showed that information from peers was more effective. The head of environment services said that he would like to see face to face engagement with residents around the topic and there could be the use of housing officers and collection crews to deliver intelligence on where the issues were. The chair commented that in Leeds, bins had been painted in bright colours to make them part of the built environment and something that residents would want to be part of their area.

A member asked whether pursuing some high-profile enforcement cases would be a deterrent to other fly tippers. The head of environment services said that enforcement as income generation did not work but enforcement did work on improving the environment. The prosecution of larger offenders would be a criminal offence so any fines awarded would go to the Crown and not to the council.

Members discussed the formation of a select committee to further investigate the topic of fly tipping and communal bins. Members asked for data on fly tipping to help scope its work, including hotspots for fly tipping, weight of waste and cost of fly tipping.

A proposal was proposed and seconded that the select committee be made up of five members and be politically balanced with three Labour members, one Green Party member and one Liberal Democrat member. Substitutes would be allowed but these should be members of the scrutiny committee. A vote was taken, and the proposal was carried. It was agreed that groups would identify members for the select committee and send the names by email to the scrutiny liaison officer by Monday 28 June.

Members discussed a timetable for the work of the select committee. The chair said that ultimately, the timetable would be driven by how many groups the select committee wanted to speak to. The head of environment services said that there were

practicalities around officer resources and it may be difficult for the select committee to come back with a final report in September. It was suggested that members may wish to consider receiving a progress report in September with a final report being taken later in the year.

The chair thanks those members of the public who had attended the meeting.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) convene a select committee on fly-tipping and communal bins comprised of three Labour members, one Green Party member and one Liberal Democrat member; and
- 2) ask that names for the select committee be emailed to the scrutiny liaison officer by Monday 28 June.

CHAIR