



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 17:35

14 July 2022

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Brociek-Coulton (vice chair), Carlo, Champion (substitute for Osborn), Driver, Fulton-McAlister (M), Galvin, Huntley, Stutely and Young

Apologies: Councillors Osborn, Padda, Thomas (Va) and Thomas (Vi)

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2022.

3. Report from the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel

The representative had not been appointed before the NCCSPSSP meeting on 9 June so there was no update.

4. Report from the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC)

(This item was incorrectly labelled as Norfolk Health and Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the agenda).

The representative gave a verbal update to committee stating that NHOSC had looked at the following topics: learning disabilities in people aged over 14, Looked after Children, adults with severe mental illness and the waiting times for assessment and diagnosis for children with neurodevelopmental disorders. As these topics were important to members the representative agreed to circulate a written report to members.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the report from the representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and

- 2) ask the representative on NHOSC to circulate a written report to scrutiny committee members.

5. Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23

The chair presented the report. He asked members to send their scopes for the “Welcoming refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration” topic to the committee officer by the end of the day on 19 August 2022.

A member suggested that the committee look at the Levelling-Up Agenda at the November meeting. The monitoring officer commented that the bid had been discussed by cabinet on 6 June 2022, and the bid had been submitted by 6 July 2022. Any likely outcomes on whether Norwich City Council had been successful with its bids would likely be October. It would therefore be difficult for the committee to scrutinise this piece of work at the November meeting, however, there could be an opportunity for the committee to programme this work in for later in the civic year. The chair suggested that the Levelling-Up Agenda was discussed at the January meeting.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Add the Levelling-Up Agenda to the work programme for the January 2023 meeting; and
- 2) Note the work programme 2022-23 as amended.

6. Report from the Communal bins and fly-tipping task and finish group

(This report was within the supplementary agenda. Councillor Oliver, cabinet member for environmental services, attended the meeting for this item.)

The chair introduced the item and asked the chair of the communal bins and fly-tipping task and finish group to present the report.

The group had been set up at the June 2021 scrutiny committee meeting and comprised three members from the Labour party, one member from the Green party and one Liberal Democrat. He highlighted that there were clear lessons to be learnt from the process of setting up the group and that the terms of reference that were agreed at the meeting on 9 June 2022 would hopefully help to address some of these. The task and finish group had used a public survey to help understand how members of the public felt about the recommendations made by the group. The survey had only recently closed and therefore full analysis of the results would continue, and the final results would be circulated.

In response to a comment from a member on availability of information, the chair of the task and finish group said that the topic of fly-tipping had been discussed at scrutiny committee several times and the publicly available data and content of the discussion would be available in the minutes and agenda of each of those meetings, as well as the rationale for setting up the task and finish group.

A member asked for clarity on issues around the actions and outcomes of the group and the chair of the task and finish group said that he had not been aware of the possibility of requesting assistance from the scrutiny liaison officer in order to note the

terms of reference and aims of the task and finish group. He added that the agreed draft terms of reference would hopefully make it easier for future task and finish groups to understand their resource needs. In response to a member's question the monitoring officer said she would need to confirm whether select committees were considered advisory committees within legislation. The terms of reference agreed gave scope for the scrutiny committee to agree the membership. The chair of the task and finish group said that most of the work of the task and finish group had been conducted by a member from each party. The chair of the task and finish group thanked the head of environment services and the officers within his team who had helped the task and finish group with information and data provided.

The head of environment services highlighted the contents of the report, and that the work of the task and finish group had drawn from the original discussions held at the scrutiny committee on 24 June 2021. It would be key to look at the prioritisation of implementation of the recommendations and targeting these to the hotspot areas. For example, the location of bins and enforcement against fly-tipping and engagement with residents could be the first recommendations that would be implemented. The collaboration between Biffa, Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL) and the council had already begun to improve, particularly with regard to the workflow processes, however further improvements could still be made. Data would continue to be gathered to help understand the scale and extent of the issue of fly-tipping within the city.

The survey had had a large number of responses. And broadly speaking the survey was supportive of the recommendations made by the task and finish group. As the survey also allowed for members of the public to make comments, it was clear that the public in particular wanted better engagement with residents from the council, improved working with Norfolk County Council and influencing its decisions with regard to the location and opening times of the recycling centres, and for decisions to be reviewed. This would also include work undertaken at an officer level.

The head of environment services said that the committee would need to be mindful of the recommendations that carried resource and budgetary implications. It was clear, from the responses that if the council chose to do nothing that this would not be supported by the residents of Norwich. He highlighted paragraph 14 which detailed the range of powers that were available to the council but had not been used to their fullest extent. Recommendation (c) highlighted the need to expand enforcement. Some of the recommendations would be a matter of operational changes that officers would be able to implement immediately.

In response to a member's question, the head of environment services said that there were around 5,000 incidences of fly tipping which was much higher than other authorities that were members of the Norfolk Waste Partnership. The other authorities within the partnership had fewer individual incidences but with a higher volume of waste. The member asked whether increasing the frequency of collection of communal bins would alleviate some of the issues and the head of environment services replied that it likely would deal with some of the incidences of fly-tipping.

A member asked whether communal bin areas would be looked at as the areas were often overfilled which then caused fly-tipping. Additionally, the communal bins were not always suitable for residents with mobility issues as the lids were heavy and the locking mechanism prevented some residents from opening them. The member also said that some of the stickers on the bins were misleading as they showed images of

mattresses which could not be disposed of in communal bins. The head of environment services said that the signage was being reviewed by officers, and could form part of the operational changes. The council needed to ensure that any changes did not decrease the recycling rates.

The head of environment services said, in response to a member's question that he was not able to comment on the financial context of the 2007 decision to stop Waste Amnesty collections as this took place before the financial crash. He said that the recycling rates had improved over the years and that the contents of the skips were sent to landfill which would have an impact on the recycling figure.

In response to a member's question the head of environment services said that there were issues with the volume and type of waste that was left in the skips. It appeared that the skips were being used for commercial waste as well as domestic waste. Better working with partners and retailers on helping residents get rid of their waste would be something his service area could work on.

A member asked for clarification on what the definition of fly-tipping was and whether the map included in the report circulated to members showed the location of the fly-tipping hotspots. He replied that the map showed the locations where responses to the survey came from. The definition of fly-tipping was any waste that was not presented properly and highlighted that only certain areas of the city were able to leave waste in bags for waste operatives to collect. The hotspots identified during the research were the top ten areas in terms of incidences of fly-tipping with some of the locations identified having hundreds of incidences. This information would help target resources. In the first instance the enforcement would need to be increased and then monitoring of the situation in those areas to understand whether the issue has been resolved. It was also key that the service engaged with residents to understand why fly-tipping is occurring. Monitoring the situation would also allow officers to understand what interventions had been successful. The chair said he saw a correlation between the areas of Norwich where people have responded to the survey and areas of Norwich that he understood to be areas where fly-tipping was a recurring issue.

A member asked how often communal bins were swept and cleaned. The head of environment services said that there was a schedule for communal bin cleaning for council owned properties. The survey had revealed that there were some issues with how the area where fly-tipping was cleared from was cleaned. Councillor Oliver, cabinet member for environmental services, said that areas of concern should be reported to the council so that these could be addressed.

In response to a member's question, the head of environment services said that hazardous waste was a concern, especially in regard to the Waste Amnesty skips. Officers felt that in order to prevent hazardous waste being disposed of in communal skips, a member of staff would be needed to monitor waste that was being put into the skips and noting names and addresses of residents who were leaving rubbish in the skip. This would have a large resource implication due to the cost of staffing these sites at all times. The chair commented that there had been recent incidences of bin lorries catching fire due to batteries being disposed of in household waste. The head of environment services said that it was difficult to predict what type of waste would be placed into the communal skips.

A member asked the head of environment services to clarify whether the improvements that had already been made to the working between NCSL, Biffa and the council was the extent of the improvements needed, and whether the figure of 95% of fly-tipping was the actual rate of it being cleared within 24 hours. The head of environment services said that the end-to-end review was being conducted and the council was meeting regularly with Biffa and NCSL to ensure that communication was improved even further. He said that the 95% figure was likely to a response being given to the online form rather than the fly-tipping being cleared.

A member commented that there were clear pressures on the council's budget and from the survey it was clear that some residents wanted more bins in order to dispose of their waste. However, having more than one recycling bin often led to contamination of the recycling, and the council needed to ensure that the council's recycling rate was improved.

In response to a member's question, the head of environment services said that providing additional communal bins would cost around £200 for the bin itself and then further costs for the collection of these. The cost of removing fly-tipping was much higher and therefore this could be an 'invest to save' item. This approach could be targeted to the hotspot areas and the learning from this approach, if effective, could be applied to other areas.

A member asked what happened with communal bins in flats if waste was not placed into the correct bin. The head of environment services said that there were high levels of contamination in communal bins. In this instance, Biffa would communicate with the council to inform the council that the bins had been unable to be collected, however they would then return at a later point to take the contaminated recycling bins to landfill. He said that engaging with residents to educate them on how to prevent contamination from happening was critical. While taking these bins to landfill was not conducive to the recycling rate, it did ensure that these bins were collected and emptied. The cabinet member for environmental services said that the contamination was often due to a misunderstanding on what type of waste should be disposed of in which bin rather than malice. The chair commented that sometimes the contamination was due to people outside of the household using the bin while passing.

A member commented that communication was very important as they had had reports of a communal bin that had been locked and residents were later informed that there had been gas canisters found within the bin. The member added that the sweeping of bins was also very important as it made the neighbourhood look better which in turn, would help to prevent further fly-tipping. There had also been reports of fabric and electrical waste not being collected. The head of environment services said that the fabric and electrical waste collection was something that he was working with Biffa to review. The sweeping of communal bins was scheduled for council buildings but for owner/occupier buildings this was more difficult and residents should contact their management companies. The cabinet member for environmental services said that other solutions for residents to get rid of fabric and electrical waste was to donate these to charity shops.

In response to a member's question the cabinet member for environmental services said that some of the actions agreed as part of the September 2020 motion "Action on fly-tipping" were being undertaken through this challenge from the scrutiny committee and the recommendations that the committee was making.

A member commented that the impacts of fly-tipping was an equalities issue and the cost of living crisis would worsen the situation. The chair of the task and finish group replied that the communal skips caused fly-tipping and when they were removed fly-tipping in those locations continued. The cabinet member for environmental services said that it was a clear equalities issue as the movement of the recycling centres as made it less accessible for residents of Norwich to get to and that not everyone was able to afford the Bulky Uplift service.

A member asked whether the closure of the Mile Cross recycling centre had an impact on the levels of fly-tipping in the city. In response the head of environment services said that the council did not have data for this, but it was highlighted by residents through the survey both via the responses to the questions and comments made. The cost of fuel was also likely causing an increase of fly-tipping, as residents may choose not to use fuel to drive to the recycling centre. A member asked whether the charge levels set by Norfolk County Council had an impact on fly-tipping, and the head of environment services said that while there was not clear data for this, anecdotally the charges were mostly in relation to DIY and construction waste which was the type of waste that was most frequently fly-tipped. He said that he would review the data to analyse the impact the charges had made on fly-tipping in Norwich.

A member commented that many of the incidences of fly-tipping were on council land and therefore environment services would need to work closely with the housing service. The head of environment services said that the services were working more closely together and this collaboration would be reflected in the report that would be presented to cabinet for consideration.

The member asked how the results of the survey could be shared with members of the public. The chair of the task and finish group said that the communication work around the survey was very effective, particularly the survey being texted to residents of Norwich whose phone numbers were held by the council. The head of environment said that for future surveys would be planned to include multiple texts. The cabinet member for environmental services said that the council had prepared communications around the survey that were posted on a number of platforms, and it was clear that there was engagement from members of the public on each of the platforms around this.

In response to a member's question the cabinet member for environmental services said that in her view the county council should provide funding to help lower income households have their bulky waste collected and while some charities offered collection of bulky waste this was not for all types of waste.

The head of environment services said in response to a member's question that the most effective way of dealing with commercial waste being fly tipped was to prosecute as it deterred other business or individuals from illegally disposing of their commercial waste. The service was looking at developing initiatives to progress this. He highlighted that the reporting facility on the website allowed for residents to provide photographs and videos, and this should be publicised more to residents.

A member suggested that a timeline should be requested to see how the reviews are being progressed, and that waste management should be kept under review as it did not seem to currently be a priority for the council. The head of environment services said that waste management was a priority for the council and at the moment the

service was focussed on ensuring best value from the contracts the council currently held in relation to waste management. The next stage was for a new Waste Management Strategy to be drafted and agreed within the financial year. The forthcoming Environment Strategy would play a large role in the work of the environment service. The cabinet member for environmental services said that there was some flexibility within the contract with Biffa to look at options but the forthcoming Environment Act created some challenges around as to what the council was expected to deliver in relation to waste management.

The executive director for community services said that the recommendations made at the meeting would be fed into a future cabinet meeting and would need to be fully costed to allow the cabinet to consider each of these and then make a decision. This would also feed into the budget setting process for the next financial year to include the options considered. A member commented that the costing should include the cost of not implementing any of the recommendations made by the committee.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the outcomes of the task and finish group investigations
- 2) Note the outcomes of the online survey
- 3) Recommend to Cabinet that the following proposals arising from the task and finish group be adopted:
 - a) That the council decision in February 2007 to discontinue Waste Amnesty collections in areas of highest fly-tipping incidence is reviewed
 - b) The number, locations, and types of bins in communal areas are reviewed in the fly-tipping hotspots identified, as well as developing designs for storage areas that prevent and deter fly-tipping
 - c) Pre Covid enforcement arrangements for fly-tipping are re-established, and expanded to include the use of CCTV
 - d) Arrangements for engaging with residents with regards to fly-tipping are reviewed and improved, including consultation on proposed actions arising from this report. This should include improved partnership working between Citywide Services and Housing Estate Management in the design of services and facilities to reduce fly-tipping in our Housing Estates
 - e) Local facilities for upcycling and reuse of unwanted items are considered in partnership with the County Council as Waste Disposal Authority
 - f) The workflow and processes for managing fly-tipping between NCSL, Biffa and the council are reviewed and streamlined to improve efficiency and effectiveness
 - g) The charging structure for the Bulky Uplift service is reviewed to make accessing the service easier for residents on low incomes and Universal Credit

- h) The service considers the use of an app for reporting fly-tipping
 - i) The manner in which the council records and analyses Environmental Anti-Social Behaviour is reviewed
 - j) The service continues to review best practice elsewhere
 - k) That the Council reviews current enforcement arrangements to ensure that the full range of sanctions available to the council are used more effectively
- 4) Thank the operatives involved in waste management and dealing with fly-tipping and to ensure there is a process for gathering feedback from these operatives
- 5) Recommend cabinet:
- a) To ask officers to work with partners and local businesses on dealing with waste that arises from their products or services being used and promoting any existing services
 - b) To ensure that any actions and reviews arising from the task and finish group have a clear timeline for implementation so that they can be monitored and followed up on
- 6) Ask the leader of the council to write to the leader of Norfolk County Council to ask the county council to:
- a) Reverse charges on DIY waste at recycling centres.
 - b) Provide funding for lower income residents of Norwich city centre to deal with their bulky waste
- 7) Ask group leaders to write to Government to ask for cuts to local government to be reversed; and
- 8) To publish the results of the survey in the minutes of this meeting

CHAIR