

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

12th January 2016

Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder Update

Service Plan Performance

Neighbourhood Services provides a range of key front line services including waste collection/recycling, street cleansing, parks and open spaces, off street car parking, bereavement services, and oversees the operation of the customer service centre and one stop shops which are provided jointly with Warwickshire County Council.

There are approximately 4 million waste collections carried out each year, with 99.9% of completed on the scheduled day. The Council's recycling rate is approximately 56%, which is well ahead of the national target of 50% by 2020.

The standard of street cleansing remains high due a variety of cleansing regimes, the work of the Rapid Response Teams and the additional input of the new Ranger Service.

The maintenance of parks and open spaces continues to improve by working closely with the Council's grounds maintenance contractor and other partner organisations. The Green Flag and Green Heritage Award have been retained for Jephson Gardens, in addition to the BALI National Landscapes Award. The NS team also supported Warwick Town Council in achieving the Britain in Bloom Gold Award, and Leamington Town Council in achieving Silver Gilt. NS also play a key role in providing the high quality bowling greens at Victoria Park where the men's and women's National Bowls competitions are held each year.

The Bereavement Services Team has continued to provide a high quality service despite the challenges of operating in the centre of a construction site, due to the Crematorium building and car park improvements project.

The performance of the joint Customer Service Centre has continued to be below the standard required despite the best efforts of staff. Changes to the way this service is provided will be implemented in early 2016, with the aim of improving the quality of service provided to customers.

The One Stop Shops continue to provide a range of services to customers in Warwick, Leamington, Whitnash, Kenilworth and Lillington. A review of the service will be carried out in 2016 to better understand customer needs, the services being provided, and potential benefits of implementing the Council's digital strategy.

Risks

The main risk identified by NS at present is the condition of two of the Council's multi storey car parks. Surveys have identified that Linen Street (Warwick) is coming to the end of its operational life, and may have to close in the next 6 to 12 months. Covent Garden (Leamington) requires a significant amount of investment if it is to have a long term future, due to a number of structural issues.

Workforce Planning

Over the last year recruitment to vacant posts has become more difficult, especially in relation to the Ranger Service. Even after numerous rounds of recruitment there are still two vacant posts, and the delay in employing the required number of staff has hindered the roll out of the new service.

Additional posts have been created and recruited to the Green Space Team, due to the increased work load and the number of projects that need to be delivered in the next three years.

The repatriation of staff from the Customer Service Centre will add two extra posts to the Business Support Team, with the team taking on all NS calls directly from April 2016.

Budget

Neighbourhood Services achieved the 2.5% saving on discretionary budgets in 2015/16, and have identified a further 5% saving (£30k) for 2016/17.

Income from recycling credits is likely to be in line with budget estimates of approximately £430k.

Car parking income continues to remain strong due to the increased usage and no disruption as a result of bad weather.

The decision to take back the responsibility for WDC calls will deliver savings of at least £170k, and avoid additional costs of £250k by continuing to operate the current model.

The cost of providing waste collection receptacles (wheeled, bins, boxes and bags) continues to rise as they begin to fail, are lost or damaged. A review is being carried out as to how to address this issue, especially with the added pressure of housing growth in the district all requiring a range of waste receptacles for each property.

Repairs to the multi storey car parks and ongoing maintenance costs are currently being evaluated, and are likely to become a significant budget issue.

Consultation is currently underway in regards to increases in car park charges with aim of increasing income by approximately £170k per annum.

Work Streams and Projects

The £1.2million refurbishment of Oakley Wood Crematorium has been completed successfully, with improved chapel facilities and additional car parking capacity.

The Green Space Team has completed a number of projects as part of the roll out of the Green Space Strategy which include:-

St Johns Playing Field, Kenilworth
Eagle Recreation Ground, Leamington
Roxborough Croft, Leamington
St.Michaels Open Space, Warwick
Stamford Gardens, Leamington

Other projects completed include:-

Jephson Gardens sensory garden, poppy memorial and Chelsea exhibit
Victoria Park irrigation system
Oakley Wood Crematorium Landscaping
Improved security measures at Shrublands Park

Green Space Strategy planned improvements for the next 2 years include:-

Ebourne Close, Kenilworth
Redland Recreation Ground, Whitnash
Cubbington Waterworks, Leamington
Wych Elm Drive, Leamington
Villiers Street, Leamington
Priory Pools, Warwick
Shrublands Park, Leamington
The Holt, Leamington
Mason Avenue, Leamington
Saltisford Common, Warwick

Other planned projects:-

Pump Room Gardens project, Leamington
Country Park, Bishops Tachbrook
St. Nicholas Park, Warwick
Victoria Park skate park, Leamington

Any Changes Required to Service Area Plan

The decision to end the shared Customer Service Centre with WCC will mean that the responsibility for taking WDC calls will be passed to each individual Service Area, therefor no longer the responsibility of NS.