

EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Joint Environmental Services Committee held on 23 October 2013 in the Council Chamber, Penns Place, Petersfield.

Present: Councillors K Wood (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), M Maynard, S Miller and J Warwick

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors C Cowper, A Joy, R Millard and V Weston.

19. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

20. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2013 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

21. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Joint Services Contract Annual Report Year 2

The committee considered the report of the EHDC Executive Head (Environment and Neighbourhood Quality), EXGK.20/13.

The report had been produced earlier than usual because the Winchester City Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested to scrutinise the performance of the contracts at its meeting on 28 October 2013. Biffa and The Landscape Group were obliged to attend a meeting of the Joint Environmental Services Committee every year to answer questions relating to their Annual Reports. They had not been invited to this meeting, but they could be invited to the November meeting. This allowed the committee to discuss the reports in advance and also take on board any comments and recommendations of the Winchester City Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the discussion with Biffa and The Landscape Group.

With regard to Biffa, the Joint Client Team felt that year 2 had been much more successful than year 1, with the overall performance for the year being satisfactory. Key work for next year included planning future collection routes based upon predicted development, as some of the existing routes were approaching capacity level as a result of new housing development.

With the improvement in the service, the Joint Client Team were now able to undertake more pro-active work and would be trialling mobile working in 2014 to allow officers to be less office based. The revised garden waste collection service which gave the option of a wheelie bin had been rolled out in East Hampshire and well received by residents. A feasibility study for implementing a similar scheme in the Winchester City Council area had also been completed.

The team had carried out some successful work in Knowle Village and had reduced bin contamination rates from 23% to 8% through a poster campaign and by meeting with residents.

A similar model could be implemented in other areas, such as the student population in Winchester.

This year Biffa would be delivering a postcard to all properties listing planned changes to regular collections, namely bank holidays. The cost of this would be borne by Biffa. A full calendar would not be sent to residents, but the postcard would include a link to where residents could view or download a full calendar. Alternatively, a freephone telephone number would be given which residents could call to request a calendar.

The committee felt that the report reflected the fact that councillors had received very few complaints about the service during the past year. It felt that the initial snags had been resolved and that the contract was running well.

The committee understood the effect that new housing developments would have on the service and that it was inevitable that this would lead to some collection days changing in the future. However, it reiterated a request that it had made previously that as many routes as possible remained the same and that any day changes be kept to the minimum level possible.

The Client Team Manager explained that year 2 had also been more successful for The Landscape Group, although this had been helped in part by better weather. A change in The Landscape Group's local management had caused some disruption during the handover, with hedge cutting and weed and moss clearance in Winchester most affected. However, a good working relationship had been established with the new management, who were proving to be pro-active in their approach.

A revised autumn leaf clearing schedule had been agreed with The Landscape Group and the highest priority roads clarified. Work against the new schedule was to commence in late October 2013.

The Joint Client Team had also reviewed the frequency of grass cutting in 2013, in response to WCC residents' complaints in 2012 over the condition of grassed areas after cutting and the large amounts of grass cuttings present. WCC had reduced the number of grass cuts from 10 to 9 per year in this new contract, and this has resulted in grass being longer between cuts. However, in 2013 weather conditions were good, and this allowed The Landscape Group to complete the highway and open spaces grass cuts on time. Service complaints were much lower as a result. Officers reported that if the committee felt that this was considered a serious problem the contract could be amended, although an extra cut would cost an additional £30k per annum. The committee felt that the current service was sufficient and that officers should continue to monitor outcomes.

The Joint Client Team's work with The Landscape Group over the past year had included looking at the interpretation of the detail of the contract, the outcome of this work is due to be considered at the next meeting of the Joint Environmental Services Committee.

In response to questions it was clarified that the issue around some grass areas in Bishops Waltham not being cut had been resolved and that work was ongoing regarding the shrub bed recovery plan. The Landscape Group had to catch up with the shrub beds that were not completed in year 1, although this work had been completed by April 2013. The Landscape Group claimed that this catch-up work had formed job 1 for this year, something which the Joint Client Team contested.

The Joint Client Team had spent a lot of time inspecting and recategorizing the shrub beds, with the result that there were now fewer. A decision would however need to be made on some of the shrub beds in more prominent areas that had not been tended adequately for a number of years.

The Superclean Public Conveniences Cleansing Contract was the smallest of the contracts and was half way through it's four year term. Superclean were performing better this year than last and despite some routine maintenance not being carried out, were providing an adequate service.

The Contract Specification Group were also looking into strategic performance indicators, which showed that Biffa was failing to meet their targets, despite the fact that they were providing a satisfactory service in these areas. The Landscape Group has also failed on occasions against some of their targets during the year. Both contractors contested that the indicators were not strategic, but instead highlighted specific performance issues. The group were investigating how to make the indicators more strategic and would bring a report to the next meeting of the committee.

The committee felt that Biffa's missed collection targets were tough, although Biffa had itself set the target of 19 missed bins per 100,000. Missing this target counted as a service failure, despite them clearly providing a good service. The committee suggested that a more general satisfaction survey might be more appropriate.

Following the discussion, it was RESOLVED that:

1. The Joint Committee agree to invite senior representatives from Biffa and The Landscape Group (TLG) to the next meeting of Joint Committee on 27 November 2013 to discuss any matters arising from their reports on the contract performance in year 2;
2. The Joint Committee identified collection route changes, shrub beds and grass cutting as operational issues to be explored with Biffa and The Landscape Group at the next meeting;
3. The Joint Committee notes that the Joint Client Team Manager, and representatives of Biffa and The Landscape Group have been invited to attend the Winchester City Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 October 2013, and invites the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to refer any particular issues arising from their scrutiny to the Joint Committee for consideration at their meeting on 27 November 2013; and
4. That the Joint Committee notes the intention for officers to report the outcome of work with TLG and Biffa with respect to the interpretation of the strategic performance framework and the street cleansing specification of the contract with The Landscape Group at the meeting on 27 November 2013.

The meeting commenced at 2.30pm and concluded at 3.27pm

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Chairman

During the course of the meeting no members of the public or the press were present.