



Report to Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

Report of: Laraine Manley, Executive Director Place

Subject: Update on the Environmental Services changes introduced in April 2018

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Summary:

In October 2017 the Council, via a Leader’s Decision, adopted changes to Environmental Services delivered through the Streets Ahead contract affecting aspects of street cleaning and grounds maintenance operations. The decision was subsequently called-in by the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee in November 2017. The Committee requested a future update report on the impact of the changes.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Update on previous Scrutiny Committee report	✓

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Receive an update on the implementation of the changes to street cleaning and grounds maintenance services.

Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Director of Culture and Environment

Update on the Environmental Services changes introduced in April 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The changes to the street cleaning and grounds maintenance elements of the Streets Ahead contract were proposed to promote efficiency and therefore deliver much needed cash savings to the Council whilst still delivering an acceptable level of service to the public.

2. Background

- 2.1 It was identified that around 90% of councils were also reducing spending on this service area to achieve essential savings and having benchmarked services, it was considered that a reduction could be made in tandem with changes to working methodologies in order to minimise impact on the public.
- 2.2 The agreed changes were implemented from April 2018 and this report provides the requested feedback to the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee.

3. Street Cleaning

- 3.1 The changes introduced in the street cleaning service included litter picking (covering city centre, residential areas and district shopping centres), litter hotspots, fly-tipping response and litter bin services.
- 3.2 The main change was to move to a more mechanised service to achieve higher outputs by the efficiencies of using street cleaning vehicles rather than manual labour.
- 3.3 Litter Picking: City Centre
- 3.3.1 The headline change in the city centre was a review of the cyclical input timings
- 3.3.2 For areas of major footfall (such as The Moor, the Peace Gardens, Fargate and other key pedestrian routes) shift times have been changed to coincide with key commuter footfall times, retail opening hours and to capture expected spikes in litter around lunch time.
- 3.3.3 The trade-off for this more dynamic way of working was that very early morning and very late evening street cleansing was removed in order to achieve the required cost saving.
- 3.3.4 Amey have also re-programmed litter bin emptying in the city centre to become an overnight task in order to reduce the impact on users of the city centre, and to be able to effectively “reset” the entire city centre overnight whilst it is quiet, rather than this task being carried out by the day time operatives. This means that the day teams can focus primarily

on litter picking, with the amount of daytime bins requiring emptying being significantly reduced for the teams. However, any bin over 75% full will always be emptied regardless of the time of day.

- 3.3.5 The change to more mechanical cleansing over manual litter picking has been introduced to enable cleansing of large, open areas in a relatively short space of time, to a high standard.
- 3.3.6 Street Cleansing quality for the Streets Ahead project is audited by the Council's client team against NI 195 standards, which are a national grading system to reflect the quality of street cleansing being attained. The city centre changes have been closely monitored by staff in the Council's client team in order to ensure that the city centre suffered no detrimental effect.

The findings so far are:

Platinum Areas (i.e. Peace Gardens, The Moor) remain consistent in cleansing standards achieved as far back as late 2015. Given the level of input that these areas have historically had (effectively permanently stationed litter picking staff), these areas are almost always free of litter, and as such an improvement would not be expected to have been attained in these areas.

Gold Areas (i.e. Fargate) have seen improvements as a result of this new coordinated regime, and are showing a 2% increase in streets being at or above the required acceptable standard in comparison to the previous checks of cleansing quality which were undertaken in February 2018.

Silver Areas (i.e. Charter Row) are also showing improvements in the order of a 5% increase in streets achieving the required standard upon auditing in comparison to the February 2018 pre-change audit and are also showing improvements against the 2016 and 2015 comparable audits.

Copper Areas (i.e. Pond Street) are consistent with 2016 litter levels in the audit, and actually exceed the required standard 74% of the times they have been checked.

Bronze Areas (effectively the very fringes of the city centre such as Haymarket) are also recording street cleansing service levels which are above the standards achieved in 2016 against the NI 195 criteria.

- 3.3.7 The Cleansing Index Score (CIS) for the city centre after the change was 74.55% - this is better than any CIS score from 2015 and 2016 and shows a 1% real term improvement from the 73.54% that CIS recorded immediately prior to these service changes being made.
- 3.3.8 Overall these figures clearly show that consistently high street cleansing standards are being maintained across the city centre with improvements in some categories as a result of the methodology changes that were made.

3.4 Litter Picking: Rest of City

- 3.4.1 The primary change to the rest of city street cleaning service was a reduction in the cyclical litter picking on suburban estates from four cleans per year to three per year with a similar reduction of around 30% in the cyclical cleaning of district shopping centres. However there has been no reduction in the response time to specific litter removal requests from members of the public, which remain at a maximum timescale of 14 days.
- 3.4.2 This response timescale is being routinely met by Amey with no customer requests for litter picking failing to meet this timescale since April 2018.
- 3.4.3 Data analysis of street cleansing customer reports and requests for litter picking in residential areas shows that since April 2018, the month on month customer enquiry levels are effectively unchanged in comparison with previous years. Complaint levels for September 2018 are actually lower than in previous years.
- 3.4.4 Auditing of street cleaning standards by the Council's client team against NI 195 litter standards shows no drop in street cleansing standards as a result of this change. This supports the view that the new methodology of using mechanical sweeping (with leaf blower assistance to capture kerb line litter trapped behind cars) rather than manual labour is delivering the anticipated efficiencies with no compromise on the quality of cleaning.

3.5 Litter Hot Spots

- 3.5.1 Known litter hot spots, such as routes to school and side streets close to busy shop sites continue to receive an enhanced cleansing regime in comparison to typical residential streets; however this is now carried out with mechanical sweepers in most instances to protect standards but achieve efficiency savings.
- 3.5.2 As stated earlier in the report this is achieved by using leaf blowers to move litter into the path of a mechanical sweeper e.g. from the kerb edge, doorway, trapped underneath cars and behind obstacles. This more cost effective and is delivering a better service.
- 3.5.3 CIS results show an increase in standards month on month after the changes were implemented from May 2018. The Council's client team inspectors have reported that standards have been maintained or improved across all shop sites, reflecting that the changes have not been detrimental, and that our new working methodologies are effectively managing litter.

3.6 Fly-Tipping

- 3.6.1 Response times for fly-tipping have been extended from 1 day to a maximum response time of 2 business days. This will still provide a

better service than many other Local Authorities who operate fly-tipping services with up to 7-day response times.

- 3.6.2 The primary benefit of the transition to a 2-day response period is that it has allowed Amey greater opportunity to optimise the routes for dealing with fly tipping, thereby reducing costs. Historically fly tipping was attended on a “first come, first served” basis – therefore a significant amount of mileage was incurred by completing the jobs in the chronological order of which they were reported, rather than working geographically to clear one area at a time.
- 3.6.3 This change in methodology provides operational efficiencies, reduced mileage, as well as providing the teams with greater opportunities for proactive removal of fly-tipping, and some additional time to search through the waste for evidence that may identify the perpetrators to support prosecutions.
- 3.6.4 The incidence of fly-tipping continues to increase year-on-year despite significant effort from the Council to discourage this behaviour. However, customer complaints about service delivery have not increased since the change to a 2-day response time and Amey have delivered the fly-tipping removal service within contractual timescales.
- 3.6.5 Changes in fly-tipping collection timescales are allowing Amey to continue to review their response to fly-tipping by working with the Council to seek continuous improvement in dealing with fly-tipping

3.7 Litter Bins

- 3.7.1 One of the areas where efficiencies could be made to contribute to the savings agenda is to introduce innovative bin sensor technology which will manage bin fill levels in a more intelligent way. The sensors will report when bins are 75% full and enable targeted emptying rather than wasting resources on cyclical, speculative visits.
- 3.7.2 Amey is keen to adopt this approach and part of the savings is based on this change. However, the technology has not been deployed yet as technology in this sector has moved on significantly since the report was produced last year and as a result further investigation is currently being carried out to ensure the optimum system is chosen to ensure that a “future-proof” solution is adopted. The system when installed will also give information on where it might be advantageous to install additional bins to prevent litter being dropped on the streets.
- 3.7.3 Despite this temporary delay, the full value of the savings has been realised as Amey have revised their routes in advance of the new technology being installed and have agreed to the full saving on the Unitary Charge in respect of litter bin emptying.

4. Grounds Maintenance

4.1 Grass Cutting

4.1.1 The changes introduced on grass cutting were:

- a) An increase in the length of grass on high-profile verges and roundabouts thereby reducing the number of cuts required. This represents only 0.4% of the total grass areas maintained by Streets Ahead
- b) Approximately 20% of suburban grassed areas, targeted away from residential streets, placed on a new biodiversity mowing regime which means they will be cut annually in order to create new habitat for wildlife.
- c) The cutting of rural verges was changed from cutting being triggered by the grass reaching a threshold length (output specification) to an 'input specification', where cuts take place on a scheduled basis. This is similar to how neighbouring Authorities operate this work. However, the cutting of sight lines for safety purposes has remained unchanged.

4.1.2 Of the 2.9 million square metres of grass in the city 2.32 million square metres (80%) were unaffected by these plans. Biodiversity mowing will not typically be carried out on the narrow verges directly outside homes which will predominantly remain unchanged.

4.1.3 The change to the length of grass on high-profile verges and roundabouts did not generate any customer enquiries and no performance failures were incurred by Amey for these areas throughout 2018.

4.1.4 There were problems with the suburban grass areas at the start of the 2018 mowing season. Delayed delivery of Amey's new mowing fleet and an initial lack of clarity in the grass cutting teams of the verges that were included in the biodiversity mowing regime combined with unusually mild, wet weather which resulted in significant early growth led to an increase in complaints about the length of grass verges. A further factor was the bulb planting areas across the city as these areas have to be left uncut at the start of the grass cutting season until late May or early June when the foliage has died back and returned nutrient to the daffodil bulb. The combination of these factors gave the impression that some areas close to houses had been included in the biodiversity mowing areas.

4.1.5 The Council client team worked with Amey to clarify the verges that were changed to the new mowing regime to respond to enquiries and the situation was recovered by the mid-point of the season. This situation should not arise in future as the new vehicle and plant provision is now set up. Amey have made changes to their record keeping and routing for cutting teams to prevent future issues.

4.1.6 Once the programme was recovered, the level of complaints reduced significantly to below average for the time of year after that point (31 vs. average of circa 50) per month. During the exceptional weather of the summer heatwave, some concerns were raised about the risk of fire

within areas of long grass. Amey responded by assessing areas of concern to the public and carried out work as appropriate.

- 4.1.7 Grass areas which are on a “cut and leave” regime (i.e. where the clippings are left after cutting) can suffer from enrichment of the grass sward, which can result in difficult growing conditions for wildflowers. However it is pleasing to see the establishment of many notable species of wildflowers, including Orchids, Bee Orchids, Oxeye Daisies and Cowslips. The establishment of these wildflowers has occurred without any need for overseeding or deliberate deterioration of the soil or growing conditions.
- 4.1.8 We will continue to monitor flora, fauna and biodiversity benefits of the biodiversity mowing regime in future years. Some grassed areas have been recorded for the wildlife which has established within them. These are identifiable typically by the small signs planted on wooden stakes so that people in the area are aware not to disturb that specific location.

4.2 Highway Shrub Beds

- 4.2.1 The changes to highway shrub beds are now completed. Many of these beds had been neglected prior to Streets Ahead due to budget restrictions and were no longer fit for purpose or had become a public safety issue due to the fear of crime or were being used as drug dens.
- 4.2.2 To resolve this some shrub beds have been converted to grass areas, removing cover and therefore improving public safety. Others that have young tree planting on highway areas at the edge of woodlands have been reclassified to recognise that they are now an integral part of these woodlands and will be maintained as such in the future.
- 4.2.3 This means that in some areas such as Penistone Road, Derek Dooley Way and Netherthorpe Road there is a noticeable change in the amount of shrub beds on the highway, giving a cleaner look of grassed areas and allowing for a more efficient maintenance regime. This has been supplemented with additional tree planting in these grassed areas to mitigate any loss of habitat and food source for wildlife as well as wider planting of elm trees resistant to Dutch elm disease in these areas of the highway network.
- 4.2.4 As a result of this change 20% of shrub beds have remained as they were and will be maintained like that in future. Around 23% have been reclassified as part of woodland areas as the shrubs have become trees, around 30% of shrub beds have been reclassified as hedgerow areas and the remainder, many of which were overgrown and concealed large quantities of hypodermic needles and litter were re-landscaped, typically to grass with supplementary tree planting or ornamental plants and specimen plants being retained. Examples of this are Park Square, Netherthorpe Road and Hanover Way.
- 4.2.5 The changes to shrub beds have not resulted in any enquiries other than Hanover Way which attracted a small number of complaints. No trees were removed.

5. Financial Position

- 5.1 The street cleaning and grounds maintenance regimes delivered under the Streets Ahead contract have been reviewed in order to improve efficiency and therefore identify savings that would reduce pressure on other Council services.
- 5.2 The anticipated savings of £800,000 per annum in the Unitary Charge payment to Amey have been realised. This has been achieved with the cooperation of Amey working with the Council to revise methods of working.

6. What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- 6.1 This report is an update on the implementation of the changes to street cleaning and grounds maintenance that were approved in 2017. No further changes have been made to the service since those proposals were approved.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.