

SCRUTINY PANEL B

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,
on Thursday, 19th January, 2023 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor Christian Chapman in the Chair;
Councillors Dale Grounds, Trevor Locke (Vice-Chair),
Warren Nuttall and David Walters.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

SB.8 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SB.9 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 20 October 2022, be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.10 Scrutiny Review: Dog Fouling and Littering

The Scrutiny Research Officer introduced the report and reminded the Panel that the 'Dog Fouling and Littering' review had commenced in June 2022 with two meetings already being held to consider the topic. The last meeting had been particularly fruitful with Members having the opportunity to take part in a question and answer session with the Council's Director of Place and Communities, the Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and Environment, the Executive Lead Member for Community Safety and the Executive Lead Member for Parks, Town Centres, and Environmental Services.

The question and answer session had raised many key lines of enquiry that the Panel could investigate further, but it was acknowledged that the March 2023 meeting of the Panel would be the last before the District Council Elections in May 2023 and Members might wish to consider finalising the review now based on the evidence already provided.

The Panel was aware that officers were currently working on options for providing a replacement environmental enforcement service following completion of the WISE pilot scheme and this evaluation was being carried out alongside service reviews of both the Waste and Community Protection Teams.

Members were presented with some statistics/data in respect of reported incidents of dog fouling and littering including various heatmaps outlining hotspot areas. The information also outlined the number of patrolling hours undertaken by WISE and the number of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued during the 12 month scheme.

The Panel then took the opportunity to reflect on some of the Council's initiatives already in place for tackling dog fouling and littering as follows:

- continuing to promote Keep Britain Tidy initiatives
- provision of an effective network of bins in known dog walking areas and dog fouling hot-spots including educational bin wraps
- educational stencilling on pavements
- provision of a 24-hour web portal to enable residents to easily report incidences of littering and dog fouling
- provision of dog bags within all the Council's parks and open spaces
- annual 'Spring Clean' campaigns across the District
- working with food outlets to keep their premises and curtilages free from litter
- facilitating regular litter picks with Council volunteers across the District
- provision of detailed information on the Council's website regarding the issue of fixed penalty notices for a number of offences, which include, amongst other things, dog fouling and littering.

A discussion followed and Members raised the following comments and suggestions:

- concerns surrounding some of the methods adopted by WISE employees (hiding behind bushes etc.) and its impact on the Council's reputation
- acknowledgement that although some tactics seemed harsh, the perpetrators of littering/dog fouling were still being caught and correctly fined
- a suggestion to inform Ashfield residents more regularly of times and whereabouts of the Council's street cleaning vehicles to raise awareness and visibility
- the pros and cons of commissioning external enforcement contractors to patrol the District and issue FPNs as required
- a reminder that Members had expressed concerns previously that the Council were issuing too few FPNs and to accept that the WISE pilot scheme had delivered both enforcement action and income as requested.

At this point in the meeting, the Chairman asked the Leader (in attendance at the meeting) if he could share his thoughts with Members in relation to the engagement of WISE by the Council.

The Leader advised that the external contractors were commissioned for a 12 month pilot scheme following an increase in complaints about dirty streets and rises in incidences of both littering and dog fouling. The Council's CPOs were at capacity with other duties and the Council needed to do something to address the issue without wasting valuable resources.

It had been a gamble and many facets of working with the contractor had been successful. Their enforcement work had brought in an additional £50,000 income to the authority via FPNs although some of their methods of catching perpetrators had proved to be somewhat heavy handed. The organisation was very much focussed on 'easy wins' via littering offences in town centres rather than catching the public allowing dog fouling offences to occur in parks and open spaces, which had proved harder to do.

As the year went on their methods for issuing fines had strayed somewhat from the Council's original standards and expectations and this had resulted in the organisation failing to be recommissioned following completion of the pilot scheme.

However, a lot had been learnt from the experience and the Council was currently considering options for providing the service going forward; one of which would involve the Council employing 2 or 3 officers to undertake the enforcement work with salaries being paid from the FPN income generated. Part of the duties could also include an educational element especially in relation to younger people caught littering or allowing their dogs to foul.

The Leader advised Members that very few of the fines issued were undone and this did indicate that most offenders had accepted responsibility for their actions and had paid the fines due. A significant advertising campaign had been undertaken prior to WISE commencing their duties around the District, including information regarding where officers would be patrolling and the powers available to them to undertake such enforcement measures.

To conclude, and to address some of the issues raised during the discussion, the Leader suggested that the reinvigoration of the Council's Neighbourhood Charter might be a suitable vehicle for raising awareness in relation to Ashfield's cleaner streets/open spaces and advising residents of what level of service they can expect including enforcement powers that can be utilised if required.

RESOLVED

that the following interim recommendations be submitted to the Cabinet meeting in February 2023 for consideration:

Recommendations

- Review the status of the Council's Neighbourhood/Environmental Charter and proactively engage Scrutiny Members in the process.

- Continue to target future resources towards reducing dog fouling and littering across the District, including facilitating preventive education measures regarding responsible dog ownership and disposal of litter/waste management within primary and secondary schools as appropriate.
- Continue to explore all available options relating to environmental enforcement duties following the discontinuation of the previous Environmental Enforcement Contractor pilot scheme and proactively engage Scrutiny Members in the process.
- Explore the possibility of undertaking a light touch review of local businesses and organisations within the Ashfield District, to ascertain and ensure they continue to meet their obligations in respect of keeping sites/curtilages within their jurisdiction clean and free of litter.
- Continue gathering and utilising accurate locational data to identify hotspot areas in the District to enable effective targeted action to reduce dog fouling and littering offences in these areas.

Panel B Members Resolved

- Cabinet, and the wider Teams engaged in this work, be commended for the array of mitigation measures already being undertaken, to address the issue of dog fouling and littering within the District.

The meeting closed at 8.12 pm

Chairman.