



**To/
Councillor Cyril Anderson
Cabinet Member for Community
(Services)**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2024-25/5

08 November 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 15 October 2024. It is about the Council's work to improve the Streetscene, focusing on Cleansing Operations. A formal written response is required by 29 November 2024.

Dear Councillor Anderson,

Scrutiny of Streetscene Improvements – Cleansing Operations

We are writing to you following our recent Scrutiny session, which focussed on a specific aspect of your Cabinet portfolio responsibilities, namely Streetscene Improvements. We understand that this term relates to a number of different areas of work. This session focused on Cleansing Operations.

We thank you and officers for attending the meeting and providing a written report providing information about: the responsibilities to remove litter, detritus and fly tipping from public areas that are dealt with by the Council's Cleansing Service; Cleansing operations relating to the Street Scene; Improvement Initiatives; Performance; and Future Challenges & Opportunities. You also provided a report on the Cleansing Ward Operative Team (CWOT) providing examples of 'before' and 'after' photos along with a selection of comments/messages of thanks received.

In particular we thank Jeremy Davies, Group Leader – Parks & Cleansing, for his contributions and information provided in response to questions that we raised with you.

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The Scrutiny session enabled the Committee to consider the Council's responsibilities, priorities, activities, achievements, impact, and improvement, and provide challenge on actions and performance, as well as helping to inform future thinking.

It was a very valuable and useful Scrutiny session, and this letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - key issues are summarised below.

Resources

The Committee asked about current staffing levels within the Cleansing Service, the number of vacancies and the extent to which agency workers are being used. We heard that there was a team restructure in 2020 creating separate Cleansing Operations teams and Cleansing Strategy teams, with 'Operations' dealing with day to day matters and 'Strategy' consisting of smaller units focussing on specific issues. We were informed that there were 69 members of staff within Cleansing Operations plus 9 mechanical sweeper drivers. The Cleansing Strategy teams consisted of 27 operatives. You stated that these staffing arrangements have reduced the need for agency staff, and we noted that agency workers were only used to cover positions waiting to be filled and occasional weekend work, where there was budget to do so.

You reported that in terms of general manual street cleaning, operatives would be carrying out a range of work, including picking litter, emptying litter bins, as well as clearing fly tipped waste, removal of sharps (needles and other drug paraphernalia), dog waste, human waste, leaf litter, and other deep cleansing activities such as weed removal. Residential areas are usually visited by Cleansing Teams on a fortnightly cycle, with busier areas visited more frequently. The City Centre and other areas of high footfall (such as busier shopping areas, destination beaches etc) are cleansed daily, including at weekends.

We also asked about developments in the use of mechanical vehicles to assist with cleansing operations, and what types of machines we used. We were told that there were 3 Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) and 6 compact mechanical brush vehicles (MBV) being used to sweep adopted pedestrian areas and carriageways. The focus of this sweeping ensures pedestrianised areas are kept safe and presentable, together with the removal of general detritus (including grit, stones, mud, leaf litter, other vegetation, litter/waste etc) from carriageways, which also assists in reducing the risk of flooding and road traffic accidents. We noted that Cleansing also operates specialist compact sweepers ('Hako's') with a variety of attachments which can be used for weed, moss and sand removal. The Service was also trialling 2 electric MBVs in the City Centre, and was always on the look out for better vehicles and new technology.

We also noted that Cleansing undertakes deep cleanse (power washing) of areas such as multi-storey car park stairwells, City Centre pedestrianised areas, and locations where regular antisocial behaviour is known, to remove spillages, staining, bird droppings, urine, faeces and ingrained grime and dirt resulting in discolouration. Graffiti and flyposting on Council owned/controlled surfaces are removed, with priority given to offensive graffiti.

You reported that findings from the 2024/25 report for Swansea compiled by Keep Wales Tidy indicates that: 86.6% of the streets surveyed in Swansea were deemed acceptable at grade B grade or above. (B grade is defined as '*Predominantly free of litter and refuse apart from some small items*')

Volume of Litter

We were interested to know the volume of litter that the Council collects, and the cost involved. We would assume that the City Centre, as an area of high footfall and with a busy nighttime economy, would make up a significant proportion of that. We were also curious about the split between recyclable / non-recyclable material collected by our operatives.

We understood from you that it would be challenging to provide tonnage figures in relation to litter by area, City Centre or elsewhere, as operatives collect from various other locations prior to drop off. However, Officers would examine whether any figures could be provided. In relation to recycling, you stated that good partnership working existed between the Cleansing and Waste Services, and noted that Cleansing Operatives carry out recycling 'on the go' as they collect litter. **You assured the Committee that waste separation and recycling was carried out as much as possible within the resources available, and helped to reduce the cost of litter disposal. You undertook to also provide some figures on this aspect.**

It was remarked that not all litter bins in the City and County allowed for the separation of waste by the public using them. We heard that multi-service litter bins existed in areas of high footfall. We were told that there was less value and effectiveness in placing these bins in every part of Swansea. It was confirmed that life expired bins were replaced like for like, rather than changed to ones which allow for separation. There was a feeling amongst the Committee that there is the potential for 'mixed messages' to the public if there are bins that do not allow for recycling, that could be damaging to our efforts to educate and encourage recycling. That said, even where there is separation by the public, we acknowledge that this relies on people putting the correct waste in the appropriate receptacle and there is potential for the contamination of recyclable material so recycling would not be possible in all situations.

We felt it was important for the public to understand that litter collection and cleansing is a significant task for the Council and costs. Everyone can play a part in helping to reduce the amount of litter on our streets. It would be a good idea to make those costs known to the public to make that point. You undertook to provide information to us on costs.

Community Ward Operative Teams (CWOT)

You reported that the Council has resourced additional Cleansing Teams to visit each Ward on a regular basis undertaking works identified by the Ward Member(s) often following reports by their constituents.

The type of work carried out is wide-ranging and includes (but is not limited to):

- Weed/moss removal and cutbacks of overhanging vegetation.
- Edging of footways and strimming.
- Lane clearance.
- Litter and fly tipping removal (generally in areas of unknown ownership).
- Cleaning of road signs, bins and bus stops.
- Clearance of leaf litter, mud and general detritus.

You stated that the CWOTs have been well-received by both Ward Members and the public alike. They regularly receive direct praise and thanks for the work they undertake. It was evidence that Councillors are making good use of the CWOT. Where there has not been take up you told us that the Team is proactive to see if work is needed in those areas.

The Committee praised the work of CWOT and difference made, with Councillors sharing their positive experiences. It was good to see this new service working well. One of the issues raised in the past, when the Service was in its infancy, was around the two-way communication and feedback between the Service and Councillors. It appears that this has improved. We asked whether there is a log of all requests maintained so that any given moment updates can be given on progress / status if asked. You told us that processes have been improved / strengthened in relation to managing requests and record keeping, using MS Forms, which enables updates to be given on progress. Councillors should email the Service if they want any information.

You reported that additional funding has been provided for increased resources for the removal of leaf fall through the autumn. This is delivered through prioritising the cleansing of areas of leaf fall on an overtime basis to significantly reduce the risk of flooding. Flooding hotspots provided by Highways on a RAG basis determine priority sweeping. **With regard to leaf removal, we asked about the potential for and benefits of temporary road closures to improve the quality of cleansing such as leaf / debris removal that impacts on drainage, etc. We were told that the Service was**

open to consider the feasibility of this, and would look at ways in which collaborative working with highways staff could be further developed. We were also curious whether there is close liaison with Tree Services on tree pollarding so that it results in a reduction in leaf fall. It was confirmed that there is close working, with both Tree staff and Highways staff looking at overhanging and the need for cutting back. You welcomed any reports from those on the ground about such issues, though we acknowledged the need for a balance because there were also benefits from tree canopies.

Fly Tipping

You reported that Cleansing has a dedicated Fly Tipping Team which focuses both on reported fly tipping incidents and monitoring known areas of repeated fly tipping ('Hotspots'). Fly Tipping has been an area of interest and concern to the Committee in recent years. We asked for clarification about the service standards in relation to the clearance of fly tipped waste and the extent to which performance is recorded and monitored. We asked for details about what is measured and how well we are doing. e.g. whether we aimed to clear reported fly tipping within a certain time period. **We were told that the Service does record / monitor performance against fly tipping removal and aims to remove litter within 5 working days, however, it was stated that fly tipping is generally removed within 1 or 2 working days.** You told us you would provide more information to confirm performance figures on the removal of fly tipping in writing.

It was stressed to the Committee that removal of fly tipping from private land, common land (unless immediately adjacent to the carriageway), and other areas not under the responsibility of the Council, lies with the relevant owner/controller of that land. The Team was only responsible for dealing with Fly Tipping on Council land.

It appears that incidents of Fly Tipping are on the up and have increased over the last 5 years, and 22% in the last year. Some of this may be down to better recording / detection of incidents but we wanted to know what is behind this increase and how the Council is responding to this from an enforcement perspective, whether we are using all available tools under the Environmental Protection Act to respond to incidents, serve notices, and deter Fly Tipping.

You reported that during recent years the Fly Tipping Team has successfully worked in partnership with Keep Wales Tidy to 'design out' several problematic fly tipping hotspot areas. Where appropriate, preventative measures, such as physical barriers and bespoke signage/banners, are also employed to deter fly tipping. You clarified that enforcement activity is not with the Cleansing Service, but the Fly Tipping Team works closely with Waste Enforcement Officers. All reported fly tipped waste is searched for evidence. Any evidence found is photographed and forwarded to Waste. They will

consider further enforcement action (fixed penalty notice, prosecution etc.) against the alleged offender(s) as they see fit. We understood that our enforcement activity had a focus on prevention, e.g. informal action, warning letters, etc. **You undertook to provide a full written response in relation to fly tipping incidents and enforcement action. It would be helpful to know of any recent successes in terms of prosecutions and fines. Figures available to us suggested that only a very small percentage of cases have resulted in prosecutions / fines, meaning that the vast majority of people are getting away with it.**

Understanding that Fly Tipping is not a Swansea specific problem we asked whether the Service was looking at what other Councils are doing to tackle it. You added that the Service was actively involved in networking across the Country and in touch with colleagues in other authorities over practice in dealing with Fly Tipping so that any learning from this can be applied here. We did ask whether it would be better to have cleansing and enforcement under one team, but you felt that current arrangements were satisfactory with seamless working between teams.

Swansea - A Student City

You reported that the annual influx of new students presents localised challenges for several departments within the Council including the Cleansing Service. Whilst education, engagement and partnership arrangements with the Universities goes a long way towards reducing the amount of litter and fly tipping in student areas, you stated that it is a perennial issue that we are acutely aware of and work very hard to mitigate. There was praise for the efforts and engagement with the local Councillors over this issue.

Commercial Activity

We were curious whether the Cleansing Service have contracts with private businesses which generates revenue for the Council. It was confirmed that the Service does not have contracts with private businesses for providing cleansing services. We recognise this is of course different to waste collection which the Council is able to provide a service for private businesses, if they choose. Litter and waste on private land and non-adopted land was the responsibility of the occupier(s) and/or the owner(s).

However, it was interesting to hear that the Service does generate ad hoc revenue for the Council where resources allowed (e.g. graffiti removal). The Graffiti Team remove graffiti from private buildings/structures etc. when requested to do so with the owner's permission and payment of the relevant fee. You stated that a number of City Centre businesses have used this service and Network Rail, amongst others.

We noted that the Housing and Education (schools) Departments are individually responsible for the maintenance and removal of litter and waste on land they own and to which the public have access.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. Specifically, we would be grateful for your response to the following:

- **Provide figures on tonnage of litter collected, both overall as a Service and, if possible, for the City Centre;**
- **Provide figures in relation the proportion of litter collected that we are able to recycle;**
- **Confirm what it costs the Council to collect litter and consider putting out some communication to make the public aware;**
- **Consider the feasibility of temporary road closures to enable more effective leaf / debris removal, developing collaborative working with highways operations; and**
- **Comment on the causes of the increase in Fly Tipping, and provide information on Fly Tipping performance, and enforcement activity**

Please provide response to these, and any other comments about our letter by 29 November 2024. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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