

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Choose an item.

29 September 2021

Report Title: Streetscene – Position Statement

Submitted by: Executive Director – Operational Services

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide the committee with a report on the current position with the Streetscene team in relation to staffing, fleet, customer satisfaction and benchmarking

Recommendation

That

1. The committee receives the report and acknowledges the current position in relation to Streetscene

Reasons

To respond to a request from the chair of the committee for an update on the current position with the Streetscene team in relation to staffing, fleet, customer satisfaction and benchmarking

1. Background

1.1 The Chair of the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee has requested a report on the current position with Streetscene, in response to concerns he has relating to staffing, fleet, customer satisfaction and benchmarking.

2. Issues

2.1 Staffing and Succession Planning

Attendance – attendance levels in the Streetscene team are currently very good, with low levels of both short and long term sickness absence.

Reasons for sickness absence are generally those which would be expected in an operational workforce carrying out street cleansing and grounds maintenance activities. A data sheet is attached to this report at Appendix 1 which provides detail on the above issues and a comparison with corporate figures.

Attendance issues are monitored on a monthly basis and pro-actively managed via the Council's approved policies, with support provided to staff where appropriate to encourage prompt return to work and to achieve full attendance.

Impact of Covid 19 – the Streetscene team continued to operate a business as usual service throughout the lockdown periods with staff responding admirably to the challenges

and adapting to covid secure measures well. Indeed, the Streetscene team provided invaluable support to the Recycling and Waste collection service for a significant proportion of the pandemic, with large numbers of staff transferring into the Recycling and Waste team to ensure that residents received this prioritised service with minimum disruption. This was at the expense of Streetscene core work which was deprioritised and delayed as a result. Parts of the Streetscene service, particularly litter collection and street sweeping are consequently still behind schedule as the team attempt to catch up, whilst still providing intermittent support to Recycling and Waste collections if needed as a result of spikes in infections or self-isolation. This is exacerbated further by the suspension of key partner activity in litter clearance, such as Community Payback and resident volunteering.

Succession Planning – the Streetscene team has an ageing profile, with a number (14) of employees on the Council's Flexible Early Retirement (FER) scheme and working reduced hours. The team currently comprises a total of 77 employees in the following structure:

Business Manager x 1	
Neighbourhood Manager x 4 (2 x FER)	(4 employees)
Arboricultural Officer x 1	
Parks Project Officer x 0.5 (1 x FER)	(1 employees)
Neighbourhood Supervisor (working supervisor role) x 9 (4 x FER)	(9 employees)
Streetscene Operatives x 47 (7 x FER)	(47 employees)
Park Attendants x 2	
Public Convenience Attendant x 0.5	(1 employees)
Business Support Officers x 2 (Part Time)	(2 employees)
Apprentices x 2	
Seasonal Temporary Operatives x 7	

In order to respond to modern and different ways of working, as employees retire or move on, job roles are reviewed and adapted where appropriate to ensure that new recruits have the required skill sets to deliver services in a more efficient and effective way. This is supplemented by training and upskilling of existing team members where appropriate and affordable, and by investing in modern equipment, technology and machinery to reduce the physical demands and risks of work tasks, and to improve systems for receiving, allocating and actioning service requests. The team has achieved successes over recent years in progressing apprentices into seasonal or permanent operative roles where vacancies exist at the completion of their training, and onwards into a supervisory role in one particularly notable case.

2.2 Fleet Provision and Procurement

The Council has a Fleet Replacement Programme for all of its operational vehicles which is funded by the capital programme and is regularly reviewed with a view to staggering fleet replacement to spread expenditure more evenly over each year, rather than have significant peaks and troughs. This, as it is a 10 year rolling strategy, assists with long to medium term financial planning and allows flexibility to move items back or forward in the programme in accordance with their remaining useful life. It also helps to maximise the economic life of particular vehicles and ensure that the Council achieves the best value for money possible for each vehicle and item of machinery/equipment. The Streetscene fleet is included in this replacement programme and has been regularly renewed at appropriate junctures. The fleet includes the road sweepers (large, medium and small), the mowers (ride-on, stand-on and tractor pulled), tractors, civic amenity vehicle with tail lift, crew cabs, caged vehicles (bin servicing), lorries, pick ups, trailers, chipper and cherry picker as well as a variety of smaller vehicles, hand held tools and other kit.

Procurement is currently in progress for the second large road sweeper, the other having been purchased earlier this year, and specifications are being prepared for the tractors. The new medium size sweepers were purchased last year, along with the cherry picker.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

The Streetscene team carry out a customer satisfaction survey (managed by the corporate Communications team) most years to gauge high level satisfaction around key issues such as cleanliness of streets, maintenance of parks and open spaces etc. The most recent headline results from the last 2 years are as follows:

In relation to litter free streets:

2020/21 - 86% thought the street in which they lived was litter free or had low level litter

2019/20 - 86% thought the street in which they lived was litter free or had low level litter

2020/21 - 73% thought their neighbourhood was litter free or had low level litter

2019/20 - 70% thought their neighbourhood was litter free or had low level litter

2020/21 - 75% thought the borough was litter free or had a low level of litter

2019/20 - 100% thought the borough was litter free or had a low level of litter

In relation to detritus (grit /twigs and similar) to streets and footpaths:

2020/21 - 62% thought the streets/pavements were mostly or sometimes free of detritus

2019/20 - 59% thought the streets/pavements were mostly or sometimes free of detritus

In relation to parks and open spaces:

2020/21 - 71% thought the parks and open spaces were well maintained

2019/20 - 70% thought the parks and open spaces were well maintained

In addition, Streetscene engage with our community via attendance at LAPs and other partner and stakeholder meetings, and through meetings and discussions with ward councillors and parish or town councils over particular operational issues, with a view to finding practical solutions.

Anecdotal feedback from these activities appears to indicate a good general level of satisfaction with Streetscene's responsiveness and willingness to collaborate, taking into account resource limitations.

2.4 Benchmarking and Performance

The Streetscene team regularly benchmark performance via a number of mechanisms. As a member of the APSE (Association of Public Sector Excellence) Performance Networks, the team submit annual data on performance for comparison with other local authorities across England and Wales and receive reports on direction of travel in key areas such as street cleansing and parks, open spaces and horticultural services. The service has compared well with other similar sized authorities, reaching top 8 nationally in best performing or most improved categories on a number of occasions in recent years. The service also has key performance indicators in the Council Plan, including Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) which measures street cleanliness and is monitored quarterly. Over the last 3 years the targets have been met and exceeded in this indicator. External quality validation is also part of the teams' benchmarking system, and this is currently measured through participation in the regional Britain in Bloom campaign, where a gold award has been achieved for the last 18 years in succession and in addition, the Council won the national finals in 2017 and achieved a gold award in the Champion of Champions category in 2018. It is also measured via the Green Flag Awards for parks where the Council has 6 strategic sites currently holding a Green Flag.

2.5 Planning for Future Service Demand

Future service demands are considered as part of the service and budget planning which is undertaken each year and reviewed periodically in response to known or anticipated changes. This can involve additional resources being made available to address particular demands or, more often, by driving out efficiencies to enable additional demand to be absorbed within existing resources. An example of this is adopting a “demand led” or performance approach, rather than a frequency approach. This involves, for example, cutting grass only when it grows above an agreed maximum acceptable height, rather than cutting it a prescribed number of times per year, whether it has reached that height or not. This allows greater flexibility and responsiveness, freeing up resources to be deployed on other identified priority tasks.

2.6 Next Steps

It should be noted that although at present, Streetscene appears to be performing well taking account of the budget and staff resource constraints in play, and has robust management systems in place for control and challenge, the team are continually seeking opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to respond to the changing demands and expectations of the community. The One Council programme may present opportunities to develop and improve the service further, particularly around the themes of technology, productivity and prioritisation, and the team will embrace this fully.

3. **Proposal**

That

3.1 The committee receives the report and acknowledges the current position in relation to Streetscene

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 To respond to a request from the chair of the committee for an update on the current position with the Streetscene team in relation to staffing, fleet, customer satisfaction and benchmarking

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 The options considered are set out in the body of this report.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The council has a number of statutory duties in relation to street cleansing, grounds maintenance and other activities which are delivered by the Streetscene team.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 No negative equality impacts have been identified as part of this report.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are no new financial and resource implications arising from this report.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are major risks associated with the council’s statutory duties and other activities delivered by the Streetscene team. These risks are recorded and managed via a number of mechanisms, including health and safety risk assessment, monitoring and recording, budget management, business continuity planning, inspection and repair and legislative compliance.

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

10.1

The council’s Streetscene function contributes towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals 3, 13 and 15 and the council’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

LGA Guidance is here:-

https://30312f94-9adb-4918-80dd-708c590bada3.usrfiles.com/ugd/30312f_79b08331d11e44bc888e1ee08c05474e.pdf



11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This report does not require a key decision.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 None

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1 – HR data sheets for Streetscene and corporate HR Dashboard

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 None

