

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Agenda Item 17

Subject: Response to Notice of Motion: Performance in City Environment and Transport

Date of meeting: 7 July 2022

Report of: Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 At its meeting on 3 February 2022, Full Council approved a Notice of Motion concerning service delivery within areas of City Environment and City Transport. In May 2022, the Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee agreed that a regular report should be presented to P&R Committee covering the recovery of the same services. This report provides an update on those areas of City Environment and City Transport service delivery which the Notice of motion referred to.
- 1.2 The report also requests that future reporting is to the Environment, Transport & Sustainability (ET&S) Committee which is the appropriate policy committee under the council's constitution.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Committee notes the response to the Notice of Motion.
- 2.2 Noting that the ET&S Committee is responsible for the council's functions relating to waste, parks and open spaces and parking services, agrees that future reports will be brought to the ET&S Committee.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 At the February 2022 meeting of Full Council an amended Notice of Motion was carried unanimously, stating:

This Council:

1. Notes the high volume of complaints that Councillors receive from residents concerned about performance of some council services from

missed refuse, recycling and garden waste collections; to overgrown weeds; to graffiti and litter on our streets, beaches and in our parks; to mismanagement of parking permits; and the general maintenance, upkeep and cleanliness of our city;

2. Notes that the Council's own 2020-21 year-end Corporate KPI results reflect the pandemic, as well as demonstrating complaints from residents, and show the Council is performing below-target on the delivery of some essential services, and that some of these issues are systemic and long-running; and also reflect the impact of cuts to public services made by government;

3. Recognises the challenges the pandemic has presented, and thanks and acknowledges the hard work council staff have undertaken over the past year, particularly as less than 10% were furloughed;

4. Recognises also, however, that despite ongoing pandemic-related challenges, residents are right to expect improvements to the delivery of council services.

This Council resolves to ask the Policy & Resources Recovery Sub-Committee to request:

1. A new report to every meeting of the sub-committee outlining the council's steps to recovery in the following service areas:

- waste and refuse collection,*
- parking permits*
- street cleanliness*

2. with the opportunity to ask questions of responsible senior officers and receive feedback on any recommendations and progress;

3. A report to an upcoming meeting of the Policy & Resources Recovery Sub-Committee outlining the council's roadmap to developing digital service delivery with inclusion at its heart.

3.2 At P&R Committee on 12 May 2022, Committee agreed to formally disband the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-Committee, but to ensure the regular reports outlining the council's steps to recovery in the delivery of basic services (waste and refuse collection, parking permits, and street cleanliness) that [Full Council agreed in February 2022 and the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-Committee agreed in May 2022] would come to every meeting of the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-Committee, will now come to meetings of the Policy & Resources Committee.

3.3 This report provides the update.

4. Waste and refuse collection

Service delivery during the pandemic

4.1 Cityclean was significantly affected by the early stages of the pandemic as reported to the ET&S Committee on 29 September 2020 and 21 September 2021. Issues included:

- A significant number of staff requiring to self-isolate

- The need to social distance in cabs meant fewer people were able to be in a cab
 - An increase in the volume of domestic waste and recycling arising
- 4.2 Cityclean updated its risks assessments to adhere to the lockdown rules and Business Continuity Plans were used to prioritise the statutory collection service and included deploying staff from other roles and a large number of temporary staff were appointed to maintain collections. In the first few weeks, when these staff were trained, recycling collections were paused. However, recycling was not deposited in the waste stream as occurred in some local authorities.
- 4.3 The “ping-demic” presented challenges for service delivery in summer 2021 as well as the increasing rates of Covid amongst staff. It was also difficult to recruit new people or bring in agency staff as everyone was affected. The situation was compounded by a national shortage of HGV drivers and difficulty sourcing vehicle parts. To help mitigate the impact of this on statutory services, garden waste collections were suspended for two weeks in August. All subscriptions received an extension to make up for the missed collection.
- 4.4 The Environment Contact Centre was closed in March 2020 due to telephony technical issues and working from home. Residents were encouraged to use online means to contact Cityclean, with all resources diverted to respond to emails and online forms. An accessibility line was established, supported by the council’s Switchboard Team, to take environment-related calls to ensure those without access to digital means were still able to contact the service.
- 4.5 Throughout the various lockdowns and to adhere to the changing isolation rules, the service was managed in a dynamic way, utilising additional resources as necessary.

Steps to recovery

- 4.6 As and when government restrictions allowed, staff returned to work and changes were made to service delivery, with supporting risk assessments. At the time of preparing this report, staffing levels have returned to what the service normally experiences at this time of year.
- 4.7 The Environment Contact Centre reopened on 27 September 2021 and is open from 9.30am and 1.30pm Monday to Friday. Emails are responded to within 24-to-48 working hours.
- 4.8 Table 1 in Appendix 1 contains customer feedback and missed collection statistics covering Quarter 3 2019/20 (pre-pandemic) up to Quarter 4 2021/22, which is the most up-to-date data available. Some points to note:
- Missed refuse collections remain higher than pre-pandemic levels but have reduced for the last two quarters from a high in Q2 2021/22

- Missed recycling collections remain high but again, have reduced for the last two quarters and are similar to pre-pandemic levels
 - Q4 2021/22 saw the lowest number of complaints recorded in a quarter for the nine quarters reported here (Q1 and Q2 2019/20 were 74 and 167 respectively)
 - 2020/21 saw the highest ever number of compliments for the service
- 4.9 Table 2 in Appendix 1 contains the number of contacts – number of emails and telephone calls – to Cityclean covering Quarter 3 2019/20 (pre-pandemic) up to Quarter 4 2021/22. The number of contacts remains lower than pre-pandemic levels.
- 4.10 Table 3 in Appendix 1 contains performance information for the Environment Contact Centre since the telephone line reopened. During Quarter 1 2021/22:
- Calls were answered within one minute
 - Call lasted for just under three minutes
 - Just under 3% of calls were abandoned
- 4.11 The service has returned to normal and Cityclean continues to deliver improvements as detailed in the June Modernisation Programme Update to ET&S Committee.
- 4.12 Recent activities to improve waste and refuse collections include:
- Preparing all documentation to issue the Invitation to Tender to procure waste management software which will lead to more robust data, improved reporting, improved communication with the crews and improved information for residents
 - Commencing the Assisted Collections project to deliver improvements to residents and crews
 - Compiling Traffic Regulation Orders to introduce measures to address issues of persistent missed collections
 - Continuing to deliver the Fleet Strategy which is improving the efficiency of vehicles and minimising the time that vehicles are off the road
- 4.13 Next steps will include:
- Improving the collections of domestic recycling through increasing the frequency of communal recycling collections; increasing communal recycling containment and providing better signage and colour coding of bins
 - Delivering the Managing Waste Responsibly Project which will provide education and opportunities for residents to reduce waste and increase recycling
 - Developing a business case for dedicated waste reduction and recycling education officers
 - Completing the business case and plan for implementing a Food Waste collection service

- Completing the business case and plan for implementing other recycling streams to dry mixed recycling
- Developing a business case for the resources required to create a waste strategy focused on reducing waste and increasing reuse and recycling to enable future changes and services to be delivered to meet waste and recycling outcomes and contribute to the climate and biodiversity emergency

5. Parking permits

Service delivery during the pandemic

- 5.1 At the start of the pandemic, Hove Customer Service Centre was closed. The Parking Service were required to continue to provide a service but did not have an adequate online route for residents to apply for new parking permits. The IT& Digital Team built a solution very quickly. However, this system required officers to re-enter information from the new online application system into the old permitting system, increasing the workload and pressure on officers at an already challenging time. This identified the need to quickly develop the system further to ensure end-to-end processes for the customer and staff were in place. To meet the needs of residents, this required a tight timetable for testing and release.
- 5.2 At the same time, there was a need to prepare for the introduction of Surcharges (increased prices for second and third+ resident permits per household), in accordance with the decisions made by Budget Council in previous years. This also influenced the pace at which the system was developed and further placed pressure on the time available for staff for testing.
- 5.3 The major IT release of the system took place in June 2021, following which a minority of our 36,000 parking customers experienced problems with the system, particularly in relation to the renewal of a resident permit journey. As a result:
- Complaints increased significantly (See Appendix 2).
 - Staff struggled to cope with the increasing number of customer contacts, including repeat contacts through various channels and included new channels of communication, meaning the team lost track of a significant number of customer contacts
 - The contacts were complex to deal with because new problems were presented, which were of a technical nature and had not been foreseen. Input was required from the IT& Digital Team which added to the time and complexity of dealing with the issues

Steps to recovery

- 5.4 Parking Services and the IT& Digital Team have made very significant progress with the system over the last three quarters, which is beginning to feed through into improved customer outcomes and reduced customer contact in the last two quarters as indicated in Appendix 2. We expect to see

larger reductions in complaints in regard to permit applications soon, but this will take time due to the lag in reporting and responding.

5.5 Changes have included:

- Putting in place interim workaround solutions for staff to directly correct permit problems experienced by some customers in version 1 while we waited for more permanent fixes from the developers.
- Funding additional developer resources within IT&D through the Parking Services budget.
- Recruiting of more parking front line staff to take phone calls and other customer contacts and manage the workaround solutions including testing the system.
- Using a new development model to build 'version 2' of the Mendix Parking App. The first part of Version 2 was released in April 2022 and provided officers with the tools to fix things for customers whilst on the phone, enabling the customer to complete their transaction. This is largely responsible for the recent customer service performance improvements as well as staff satisfaction because they now more easily support the customer.

5.6 Lessons learned include:

- The need for more resources to support design, testing and release of new solutions. Increased IT&D developer resource is in place, while additional project resource within the service is now being recruited.
- The need for a higher degree of confidence with the system testing results before allowing new things to be released into the system.
- Connected to the point above, we will slow down the pace of new changes where the testing results show we need to. This does entail the possibility of delays to release timetables.
- Better communication of ongoing changes to customers.

5.7 Version 1 of the system currently being used will shortly be replaced with version 2. This will deliver benefits to both residents and Parking staff as it will have cleaner more accurate data, will eliminate bugs in the IT system and will allow more flexibility for staff to make changes in response to policy changes.

5.8 Nearly all customers who need to renew their resident parking permit are now doing so fully in the new system as the need to re-enter information has been eliminated. This means it is an easier and quicker process for staff and for customers and reduces the opportunity for mistakes to be made. By the end of the summer, the difficult part of the transition to the new system will be complete and it is anticipated this will lead to increased customer satisfaction. As of 9th June 2022, there are 35,402 valid resident parking permits in the Mendix Parking App, with just 610 left to migrate.

5.9 Parking officers are working hard alongside HR colleagues to identify training providers to increase officers' technical knowledge on how to

support customers who have difficulty accessing and using digital solutions. This need reflects the changing nature of calls that officers are experiencing as the council moves towards digital self-service for transactional interactions like parking permits.

- 5.10 Parking Services are now receiving in-person enquiries indirectly through the Customer service officers at Hove Town Hall. When the Customer service staff are unable to help the customer access our service online, a next day call-back is provided by the Parking Team. However, due to the improvements made to the system and the speed of response to other customer contacts, there have been far fewer call-backs than expected.
- 5.11 When customers have problems obtaining permits, most are assisted over the phone. Appendix 2 details the improvements being made to customer contact in recent months.

Over the next few months, the service will:

- Work with IT& Digital to complete and release version 2 of the Mendix Parking App.
 - Introduce the Low-Income Discount on the base price of some resident permits, as part of our response to the cost-of-living crisis
 - Move eleven other permit types onto the new system before the old system is withdrawn on 31st October 2022
 - Further explore the options to increase the automation of proof of residency checks. This will benefit customers (who will be asked to submit less) and staff (who will have less to process) and will be released in stages, gradually.
 - Complete the testing and redesign work necessary to release resident permit surcharges for households with more than one vehicle.
- 5.12 Some of the system work we are currently undertaking are necessary steps on our way to achieving our vision for the future. This is further automation of the system to improve ease of use for the customer and parking staff, virtual permits and direct debit payment options. The latter will give customers the ability to tailor the duration of their permits to meet their own needs more exactly and spread the cost without more expensive costs for shorter durations. We are also continuing to explore other improvements and innovations that the new system will provide which will be updated in due course.

6. Street cleanliness

Service delivery during the pandemic

- 6.1 As reported to ET&S Committee on 29 September 2020, during the first lockdown approximately 40% to 50% of street cleansing operatives were at work. Busier and high footfall areas of the city were prioritised, alongside urgent activities such as dangerous waste or offensive graffiti. In the early stages of lockdown, this was manageable. However, as the good weather

returned and lockdown restrictions were eased, footfall increase significantly, particularly along the beach, resulting in high volumes of litter. This produced a number of challenges because indoor venues were closed so much larger numbers of people were outside generating litter and most establishments were providing a takeaway service only, leading to a lot more waste and little opportunity for that waste to be kept or disposed of on the premises.

- 6.2 As with the collections part of the service, resources to keep the city clean were deployed in a dynamic way.

Steps to recovery

- 6.3 As and when government restrictions allowed, staff returned to work and changes made to how the service was delivered, with supporting risk assessments. At the time of writing, staffing levels have returned to what the service normally experiences at this time of year. However, as reported to ET&S Committee in June 2022, despite improvements to the seasonal recruitment process, not all seasonal posts have been filled. Therefore, resources will be deployed as required across the city.

- 6.4 The number of Stage 1 complaints received about street cleaning not being completed is low as detailed in Appendix 1.

- 6.5 The service has returned to normal and Cityclean continues to deliver improvements as detailed in the June Modernisation Programme Update to ET&S Committee.

- 6.6 Recent activities to improve street cleanliness include:

- Launching a public consultation to introduce new enforcement measures to tackle illegal flyposting and stickering on assets across the city
- Implementing a new approach to manage commercial bins on the highway
- Issuing Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) and Community Protection Notices (CPNs) to statutory undertakers and businesses when the property owner does not follow the council's request for graffiti to be removed from a property
- Learning from the graffiti removal trial to adopt a new Targeted Action Zone approach for graffiti removal moving forward
- Procuring additional trimmers for weed removal
- Improving the working relationship with National Highways and funding to enable more regular cleansing of the major high roads within the city; A23 and A27.

- 6.7 Next steps include:

- Rolling out additional Environmental Enforcement signage
- Continuing delivery of the Bin Infrastructure Action Plan, including more on-the-go recycling bins across the city

- Continuing communications and social media coverage to remind the public not to litter and of potential fines for littering.
- Rolling out Targeted Action Zones to improve hotspots across the city

6.8 As reported to ET&S Committee in June 2022, seasonal recruitment continues to be a challenge, despite a different approach being adopted for this year. Not all posts have been filled and Cityclean continues with recruitment. However, this may place additional pressure on the service and operatives will need to be deployed to the areas of greatest need.

7. City Parks service delivery

7.1 City Parks' service delivery has also been affected over the last couple of years. This is due to:

- Difficulties with recruitment: as per experiences in Cityclean, it has been challenging to recruit enough gardeners or construction workers, either via recruitment processes or via agency, to deliver the service,
- Difficulties with getting equipment: due to supply chain issues, it has been challenging to obtain the tools, machinery and vehicles to deliver the service. At the same time, there has been an increasing cost to these items.

7.2 City Parks has started to address these issues by:

- Implementing a service redesign, increasing skills and capacity across the service
- Worked with the council's Skills & Employment Team and the DWP supporting the City Employment & Skills Recovery Plan to pilot a sector-based academy programme. Job seekers were given five days training and a work programme, in conjunction with Plumpton College. At the end of this they achieved a Level 1 City & Guilds and help with their job applications
- Looking at options for procuring different types of equipment.

8. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

8.1 This report provides a response to the Notice of Motion: Council Service Delivery. Both Cityclean and Parking will continue to deliver high profile services, alongside making improvements both for residents and for staff.

8.2 The recommendation is for future reports to be presented to ET&S Committee as the appropriate policy committee under the council's constitution for these services. The alternative is to present future reports to P&R Committee, which is not in line with the council's constitution.

9. Community engagement and consultation

- 9.1 No direct community engagement or consultation has taken place because of this report. Customer feedback has been used to inform the improvements taking place and will continue to do so.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 This report provides a response to the Notice of Motion: Council Service Delivery. Whilst there have been some difficulties in service provision as a result of the pandemic, both Cityclean and Parking continue to deliver high profile services, alongside making improvements both for residents and for staff.
- 10.2 It is recommended that future updates on service delivery are presented to ET&S Committee.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Any significant variation to budget for Cityclean and Parking Services will be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 20/06/2022

12. Legal implications

- 12.1 The Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee is responsible for exercising the Council's functions in relation to waste and as waste collection authority, waste disposal authority and litter authority, including dealing with litter, street cleansing, abandoned vehicles and dog fouling. It is also responsible for the Council's functions in relation to parking. It is therefore the correct Committee to receive update reports on waste and refuse collection, parking permits and street cleanliness.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland Date consulted: 14/06/2022

13. Equalities implications

- 13.1 As improvements to online systems are developed, Cityclean and Parking will ensure that those without access to digital devices are not excluded from accessing council services. This is evidenced in the report with the accessibility line provided by Switchboard Team whilst the Environment Contact Centre was closed and the work the Parking Team are undertaking to help customers who have difficulty accessing and using digital solutions.

14. Sustainability implications

- 14.1 When recycling collections resumed after being suspended for a short period of time, the recycling was not deposited in the waste stream as occurred in some local authorities.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

1. Appendix 1: Cityclean customer feedback and contact
2. Appendix 2: Parking customer feedback and contact

Background documents

1. [City Environment Modernisation Update Report](#) to Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 29 September 2020 (item 29)
2. [City Environment Modernisation Update Report](#) to Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 21 September 2021 (item 41)
3. [City Environment Modernisation Update Report](#) to Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 21 June 2022 (item 8)

