

Council – 14 April 2014

Environment

Progress Report of Councillor Arif, Portfolio Holder

My Portfolio is responsible for a number of important basic services vital to the quality of life of residents throughout the borough including refuse collection, recycling and street cleaning as well as waste strategy and the management of the council's vehicle fleet.

Our recycling service continues to be a great success with a projected recycling rate for 2013/14 of just over 40%, the same as last year

As with all Councils, we continue to experience contamination in our recycling collections as a result of a minority of residents putting the wrong materials in their green bin. The contamination rate over the last 12 months has averaged at approximately 9% of all bins collected. This remains significantly below the peak of around 17% in 2012. Nevertheless, we are continuing with our efforts to work with these residents to help them recycle the correct materials and are in discussions with WHG about what help they can provide where those residents are tenants of theirs. I would urge all members of the Council to lend their support to this as it will reduce the cost of the service by increasing the amount we receive for recyclable materials.

We have renewed our Contract for the operation of our two Household Waste Recycling Centres and the Fryers Road Waste Transfer Station. This will start on the 1st April 2014 and last for 7 years. The new contract is worth £8 million and will be responsible for processing around 100,000 tonnes of rubbish and recycling each year. This contract will help minimise the amount of waste we send to landfill and maximise the amount of waste recycled in so doing minimising the cost to Council Tax payers of this important service.

The Waste to Energy facility at Four Ashes that has been developed in partnership with Staffordshire County Council, Sandwell Council and Warwickshire County Council is now complete. We now deliver the borough's residual waste to the new facility rather than to landfill sites and will deliver around 55,000 tonnes of waste to the plant each year. As a bi-product of this process the waste will be used to generate electricity which will be supplied to the National Grid. The contract will result in significant financial savings to the Council.

I have been responsible for leading a Working Smarter initiative which has brought improvements in the way we deal with assisted collections for residents unable to put out their bins for collection due to disability. By analysing service requests from residents and working with frontline workers we have been able to make changes which mean that assisted collections can now be provided within 7 days of a request whereas previously it was taking up to 3 weeks. Additionally a trial has started with two employees from the Contact Centre working at the depot to further improve

customer service by improving communications with the people that provide the service. I am pleased to be able to advise that the early signs are encouraging and I am confident that this will lead to further improvements in service for Council Tax payers.

We have created a People's Panel which we are using to seek residents' views and opinions initially on ways in which we could improve our waste collection service. 542 people registered to join the Panel and 84% responded to the first survey which included questions on Christmas collections, missed bins and communications. This provided us with some valuable feedback and revealed that 86% were satisfied with Christmas collections while 91% of respondents rated the bin collection leaflet as either good or very good. Nevertheless I want to improve the service still further and we have had some constructive feedback about what best to do when we are unable to collect someone's bin and how residents prefer to communicate with us. We are looking at the feedback in more detail with a view to introducing improvements in the near future. Further surveys will be carried out over the coming months.

As part of our commitment to improving customer service I am also exploring options to improve the information available online so that residents can find out more for themselves about their refuse collection service.

I am currently working with my officers on the potential to outsource the trade waste service which would allow the Council to concentrate on its household waste service for the benefit of Council Tax payers.

Turning to street cleansing, I can announce that we are beginning a 7 day a week trial in Walsall town centre on 1st April. This will maximise the use of equipment, deliver further significant savings and provide a cleaner town centre for the benefit of shoppers, businesses and residents in the area. Assuming the success of this trial we will be looking to roll this out to other parts of the borough at the earliest opportunity.

A further restructure of Clean and Green Services has taken place that will deliver a saving of over £250,000 in 2014/15 whilst safeguarding frontline services.

Investment in the environment is fundamental to making Walsall a great place to live, work and play. We are committed to improving environmental services that support the growth and development of Walsall's economy and protect the environment. This is challenging in times of unprecedented financial restraint but the performance of our services shows yet again that we are making real progress towards this goal.

Councillor M Arif
Portfolio Holder for Environment
4 April 2014