

Council – 21 September 2015

Clean and Green

Progress Report of Councillor Harrison, Portfolio Holder

My Portfolio is responsible for services vital to the quality of life of every resident in the borough and includes refuse collection, recycling, parks, grounds maintenance, street cleaning and pollution control.

Our parks remain much loved and well-liked by residents and visitors alike. The Arboretum restoration project is almost complete following the opening of the new visitors centre while the introduction of a land train, to assist less mobile visitors getting from the car park to the lake area and new visitors centre, and new attractions such as the pedalos on the lake have proved very popular.

We successfully retained Green Flag status at Palfrey Park, Willenhall Memorial Park, Merrions Wood and Rough Wood local nature reserve and also achieved Green Flag status for the first time at Blackwood Park.

My team has delivered and facilitated over 130 events across green space sites including 9 local Fun Days, 40 days of funfairs, 1 circus, an Environment Day, 40 bandstand events, Bands on the Beacon and 3 bonfire and firework displays.

We are promoting the use of green gyms, introducing walking projects with local schools and communities, promoting 'healthy eating' projects through community fun days and working with local community gardens. By doing this we are helping to improve public health by reducing childhood obesity, increasing physical activity and engaging the community to target issues relating to mental health and well being.

A 7 day bulky item waste collection service has recently been introduced in so doing increasing income and improving customer service.

We have delivered a targeted dog fouling campaign in 'hot spot' areas across the borough erecting "we're watching you" signs and circulating additional promotional literature.

My Portfolio supported that of the Deputy Leader in gathering data from CCTV cameras to secure an increased number of convictions in relation to fly tipping incidents.

The health and safety of both employees and the public remains vitally important to me and, within Clean and Green, the number of recorded incidents between January 2015 and July 2015 was 33, a reduction of 21 on the same period in 2014. Linked to this, we have worked to improve driver behaviour within the service and, as a result, have been successful at reducing speeding incidents, vehicle overloads, tachograph infringements and vehicle related accidents compared to the same period last year.

We have improved customer service and increased income by introduced additional capacity into the MOT testing station at the Pelsall Road depot to allow more tests to be carried out.

Much has been achieved in recent months but many challenges remain. There has been an increase in fly tipping with the number of incidents is up by around 20% based on a similar period last year (March to May) particularly in relation to larger scale commercial fly tips. Linked to this there has been a significant increase in unauthorised encampments this year and, in conjunction with the Deputy Leader, I will be reviewing our current arrangements with the aim of better managing this demand in future years.

The amount of work needed to reinstate grass cutting on large areas has had an impact on routine maintenance programmes including, tractor operations and hedge maintenance.

The contamination of the recyclable material we collect remains an issue which requires ongoing work to minimise the contamination rate and so maximise the income we receive under the terms of the current recycling contract.

Over the coming months we will be bringing forward a number of major projects and proposals. Perhaps the most significant will involve consideration of our household waste collection service. Public consultation is currently underway and will run to the end of the month with consideration of the preferred option taking place during the autumn. I have been very pleased with the level of response from residents that we have already received. With this level of response we can be confident that it will very accurately reflect the views of the population as a whole and, as such, be a reliable and cost-effective indication of public opinion. The implementation of the new service is currently planned for 2016.

We are in the process of tendering our waste disposal contracts for recycling, garden waste, residual waste (other than the W2R Contract with Staffordshire County Council) and recycling materials collected at the HWRC sites and new contracts are scheduled to commence in April 2016.

A review of cleansing and trade waste collections in our town centres is planned together with the associated management of the market service.

We are in the process of relocating the Contact Centre to the depot so they are closer to where the work is carried out and customer queries can be more easily resolved at the first point of contact.

Work to remove contaminated material from the site of the former Willenhall Gas Works continues. In March the Council served legal Notices on those companies thought to be responsible requiring them to remediate the land. An appeal against this Notice has been lodged challenging the determination and a Public Inquiry has been set for December to enable the Planning Inspectorate to consider this matter.

This Council is leading on the Low Emissions Town and Cities Programme and is finalising guidance aimed at improving air quality.

My team has completed both the borough-wide Strategic Nitrogen Dioxide Air Quality Model and Vehicle Emissions data bases for the UK and the Black Country Air Quality Model. Walsall's Local Air Quality Management Progress Report for 2014 submitted last year has been accepted and approved by Defra. A joint Public Health/Pollution Control initiative has been agreed to undertake a 3 - 4 year PM_{2.5} particulate matter air quality/health study in Walsall.

The Sir Elton John concert that took place in June at Bescot Stadium was successfully managed to deliver an event that was free of noise complaints and was well received.

Continued investment in the frontline services within my Portfolio remains vitally important to the borough's residents. I remain committed to maintaining these services at the highest possible level within the resources available to me. This is challenging in times of unprecedented financial restraint but the performance of our services in recent months shows yet again that we are delivering this commitment.

Councillor L. Harrison
Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green
September 2015