

Council – 12 January 2015

Environment and Transport

Progress Report of Councillor Jeavons, Portfolio Holder

My Portfolio is responsible for a number of services vital to the quality of life of residents throughout the borough including transport services, pollution control, refuse collection, recycling and street cleaning as well as waste strategy and the management of the council's vehicle fleet. We are responsible for over 500 miles of highway and manage 58 car parks. We collect over 200,000 bins each week from households across the borough. This department has maintained a position of being "ahead of the game" in respect of many changes to legislation and in how it has maintained services in the face of budgetary constraints. In this sense I hope that you will see that "Innovation" is a key performance driver within the department.

Health and Safety Performance

As someone who comes from an industrialised background Health and Safety is vitality important within my Portfolio. Within the Clean and Green Service, between January and November 2014, there were only 67 recorded accidents and incidents a reduction of 24 compared the same period in 2013. The main category of incidents was 'physical assaults' of which there were 18 followed equally by slips, trips and falls and injuries caused by handling, lifting or carrying. The majority of incidents occurred within the waste collection service. The Health and Safety record for both staff and partners in Engineering and Transportation is excellent including the Council's highways maintenance contractor Lafarge Tarmac. It is now 66 months since the one and only Lost Time Injury on this contract. Of the four safety incidents reported on the contract in 2014 three were caused by Utility Companies equipment not being at the correct depths. The fourth was a cable strike in a grass verge that was investigated and lessons learned for future benefit.

Transportation

Transportation makes a vital contribution to the local economy and serves as an important catalyst to aid its recovery. My job is to ensure we sustain this contribution and deliver schemes where funding has been identified. These include £29m towards the cost of major improvements at J10 of the M6 and improvements to two of the key junctions on the A461, at Salter's Road and Shire Oak, and the junction of Bentley Lane and Bloxwich Lane. Together with Councillor Nazir, I announced the award of the contract for the Darlaston Strategic Development Area Access Project. This £26m project will reduce congestion, improve safety and upgrade links with the Enterprise Zone. It will help kick-start the transformation of 40 hectares of disused potential employment land in the area creating over 2,000 jobs in high growth industries over the next 5 years.

Together with our partners across the West Midlands we are developing a new West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan for publication later this year and will be refreshing the Walsall Transport Strategy in the first half of the year. We are also working towards a devolved West Midlands Rail Franchise from June 2017 onwards with our partners in the Metropolitan area and surrounding Shire Counties.

I have reviewed the annual Highways Maintenance Programme valued at some £6m and, in the process, was impressed by the professionalism of the approach taken. I have introduced an innovative approach to highways maintenance using a Velocity Patcher to carry out high quality pot hole repairs. In addition Lafarge Tarmac and its specialist sub-contractor have developed an innovative, award-winning gully management system which has dramatically improved the level of information about their condition. This is helping to reduce the extent of ponding during periods of heavy rain for the benefit of motorists throughout the borough.

In conjunction with the above I have reviewed the performance of the Highways Maintenance Contract and secured Cabinet approval to extend the Contract with Lafarge Tarmac until April 2017. I am pleased to be able to report that I have secured agreements from the contractor to guarantee ex-Service personnel an interview and fully exploit the potential to introduce apprenticeships and other employment opportunities for local people and businesses.

I have reviewed the Winter Service and launched the service at Operational Snowfall which received both local and national media coverage. I have formalised and extended the use of Snow Champions across the borough harnessing the support of volunteers across the borough.

In conjunction with our partner we are implementing the fourth phase of the Council's invest to save initiative to install some 550 LED street lights in parts of Walsall South. This will reduce energy consumption, insure against future energy price rises and help meet the Council's carbon reduction targets.

We have recently run events to explain the reasons for parking enforcement and the procedures followed with emphasis on education rather than enforcement. These have been well received and indeed have gained national recognition.

We have just concluded an agreement with Wolverhampton City Council for a shared service for Urban Traffic Control to ensure an efficient, lower cost service that will in due course be extended across the Black Country. This will be fully operational by April 2015. Similarly we have successfully developed a proposal for the delivery of Flood Risk Management jointly with our neighbouring Black Country Authorities as a shared service.

The Road Safety Education team last year trained over 1300 children to a national standard as part of the Bikeability scheme together with safety initiatives such as Drive 2 Arrive. Unfortunately there have been several serious road traffic collisions in the borough but I can assure members that the necessary improvements to the highway network have been implemented to minimise future concerns.

Waste and Recycling

Contamination of recyclable waste is still a major concern for the authority with high contamination levels reducing the income that we receive from our contractor, Casepak. We are continuing to work hard to reduce these levels, particularly through public education and hard work at the waste transfer station, and I am pleased to report that they are now lower than in July. Our recycling performance overall remains good at over 40%.

Residual waste within the borough is now taken to the W2R treatment centre in South Staffs which opened early last year and I am pleased to say that the plant is performing very well. The new contract for the operation of our two Household Waste Recycling Centres is going well with both facilities remaining popular with residents.

You will be interested to know that Walsall Council is a forerunner in delivering in a more customer focused, accessible and responsive street cleansing service. In response to the considerable financial pressures being faced by the Service, Clean and Green is trialling proposals to change working patterns from traditional 37 hour Monday to Friday working to providing services over a seven day period. Following staff consultation we have been carrying out a pilot scheme within Walsall town centre and this has proved very successful in terms of maintenance standards and for the workforce. As a result the pilot has now been extended to the whole of the street cleansing service. This innovative way of working has brought many benefits including less build-up of litter especially at weekends, improved responsiveness to anti social activity such as fly tips, a reduction in fleet costs, reduced traffic on the roads on a daily basis, improved work/life balance for staff and improved staff morale. It has also provided the opportunity to introduce a weekend bulky collection service in the future.

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 L Jeavons
Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport
January 2015