

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee (co-located meeting with Dover District Council)

Held at: Council Chamber, Dover District Council, White Cliffs Business Park, Dover Kent CT16 3PJ.

Date Monday, 29 November 2021

Present Councillors Gary Fuller, Peter Gane, Michelle Keutenius (Chairman), Patricia Rolfe and Rebecca Shoob (Vice-Chair)

Apologies for Absence Councillor Miss Susan Carey, Councillor Connor McConville, Councillor Terence Mullard and Councillor John Wing

Officers Present: Ewan Green (Director of Place) and Andrew Rush (Regulatory Services & Corporate Contracts Lead Specialist)

Others Present: **Veolia**  
David Fitzgerald – Senior Operations Manager  
Ben Velmans – Senior Contract Manager  
Gary Morrison – Contract Manager  
Chris Curtis – Dover representative and Street Cleansing worker.  
Terry Harman – GMB Union Representative and Garden Waste Officer

Dover District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members and officers were also present at the meeting.

### 25. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

### 26. **Update on Veolia Performance and Recovery Plan**

The Chairman of Dover District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chairman Folkestone and Hythe District Council's Overview and Scrutiny welcomed those present to the meeting.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2021

Representatives from Veolia introduced themselves, and gave a presentation which updated Members on the East Kent Status Update and Schedule Improvements. A copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes.

The Chairman then invited the two Veolia workforce representatives to speak. They made points including the following:

- More consultation with staff was now happening with regard to route changes.
- Although a 12% pay increase sounded like a lot, the pay was low, and therefore this did not work out as much of an increase. This also made it difficult to attract new staff.
- The main issues had been related to the changes in days, and crews working in areas that they were not familiar with, leading to confusion, particularly if some roads did not show up on tablets.
- The household tonnage had increased due to the Covid lockdowns, more home working and deliveries and had continued.
- There was also a street cleansing issue with purple sacks where litter bins are being misused and used for domestic or commercial waste.

Members then commented on various issues and made points including the following:

- How were the staff finding the echo system to use?
- Were there any 'black out spots', in rural areas, where the Echo system would not work?
- In terms of the pilot starting in the Dover District that day, how much consultation had taken place with staff?
- What percentage of missed collections were food waste?
- At the point when the issues arose, Covid had been around for a year, and we had known Brexit was coming since 2016. What improvements to planning have been made in order to be better prepared, rather than reactive?
- In terms of resourcing, what is the level of resilience now, and what percentage of agency workers were used?
- Are there any plans in terms of business continuity and resilience following the outcome of the pay negotiations ballot, particularly in the event of industrial action?
- With regard to the peak in tonnage growth, would this plateau?
- Had the Ashford transfer station issue been resolved?
- Was good practice shared with other areas, and are there any other improvements to be made in addition to what has been put forward?

The Veolia staff representatives then responded to points raised, and made points including the following:

- The Echo system was intuitive and straightforward to use, although the information on the system had been incorrect on occasions.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2021

- Some long term members of staff had left the organisation, but the turnover seemed to have reached a steady state.
- Staff had been consulted on the latest pilot, including union staff. A better effort had been made all round.

The Chairman thanked the workforce representatives for their attendance at the meeting.

Representatives from Veolia responded to the various issues raised and made points including the following:

- Pay negotiations had been an ongoing negotiated process for six months. The ballot was due to close the following day, and it was hoped that GMB would advise the outcome on Wednesday 1 December.
- There were signal blackspots for the echo tablets, but operators always had sight of their work. Any updates to the system are applied once signal returned.
- Advanced business continuity planning had taken place over the summer months. Veolia had put extra resource into East Kent from across the country, impacting on other contracts. The issues had been taken seriously by the company at national level, and local management had felt supported in doing all that they could. The action plan, which involved providing additional resource to resolve the issues, had been in place, but the frustration had been the challenge in finding additional staff resource. Mistakes were made and this had been recognised.
- With regard to food waste collection rates, they did not have the breakdown of this information to hand, but they but accepted that missed food waste collections may be higher.
- A team of 12 drivers had been created, who could be deployed where required. The organisation was looking at recruitment and retention at a national level. Successful engagement had also taken place with four agencies. In terms of the level of agency workers, this was around 5% for drivers, and around 20-25% for street cleansing and refuse operatives. The previous contract had not used agency employees, and it was an aspiration to get back to this.
- It was hoped the pay negotiations offer would be accepted by the union, but if not, further discussions would take place. Industrial action was the worst case scenario, and would be avoided as much as possible. If industrial action did take place, resources would need to be deployed from other contracts.
- In terms of the extra household waste/tonnage, additional resources had been deployed, and there were six additional vehicles used on a day to day basis to collect food and recycling waste. Overtime payments had lessened.
- The quality of recycling was good across East Kent, and contamination rates low. Participation in food waste was lower, but there had been a noticeable increase over the last two years. Further campaigns would take place to promote food waste recycling.
- It was hoped that the increased tonnage had plateaued, recycling rates had increased by 24% and food waste 16% since the pandemic started. With people continuing to work from home, and the changes in society, rates

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2021

were likely to remain high. This also included a higher use of food delivery apps, and more home deliveries, which also resulted in a change to the type of waste, such a higher rate of cardboard being recycled.

- In terms of housing and population growth, planning was based on a 2-3% increase per year.
- The contract with KCC for the transfer station would operate until 31 March 2022. It was unclear if KCC intended to extend this contract, or if there were any long term aspirations for a transfer station in Folkestone.
- Veolia continued to look for improvements to the service. Building resilience was the priority, and one of the options being considered was to employ drivers as both drivers and loaders, resulting in a highly skilled and resilient workforce. The 22 staff in the 'grow your own' scheme would be able to operate in a dual role. Good practice was monitored elsewhere, but things that worked well in some areas did not necessarily work well in other areas.

The Cabinet Members for both DDC and FHDC were invited to make comments, and Councillor Peall, FHDC Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Regulatory Services, Waste and Building Control made points including the following:

- The latest version of the presentation was an improvement to what had been provided previously.
- Any proposed changes to routes would need to be approved by both officers, and Overview and Scrutiny Members before he would sign them off.
- He liaised with the Cabinet Member at DDC on a regular basis, so consistent messages to both authorities were important.

Both the Chairman of DDC and the Chairman of FHDC thanked those in attendance at the meeting.