

# STREET CLEANSING

An investigation into Street Cleansing  
carried out on behalf of  
North Hertfordshire District Council

April 2012

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Task and Finish Group on Street Cleansing

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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This is the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group on street cleansing. Its purpose was to review the effectiveness of NHDC's street cleansing and enforcement arrangements and suggest improvements where necessary.
- 1.2 The scoping document is attached at Appendix 1. The papers issued to members and notes of the group's meetings can be found on the council's website at [http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/council\\_and\\_democracy/democracy/council\\_and\\_committee\\_meetings/scrutiny\\_committee1.htm](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/council_and_democracy/democracy/council_and_committee_meetings/scrutiny_committee1.htm)

### 2. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council cleaning standards are based on National Indicator (NI) 195. Its inspectors undertake about 1,000 surveys every year. They found good or satisfactory levels of performance against all of the four main measures of performance – litter, graffiti, detritus and flyposting.
- 2.2 NHDC's street cleansing service provides very good value for money. While NHDC has one of the cheapest services in Hertfordshire, its service standards are comparable to similar councils and some aspects exceed average national performance.
- 2.3 The Council has built up a very good relationship with Veolia and should be commended for their efforts in doing so. This has allowed the outdated performance monitoring framework which NHDC used to monitor Veolia's performance to be updated and re-written; and additional, discreet areas of work to be accommodated without extra costs.
- 2.4 Public satisfaction is high and complaints are low. The 2011 district wide survey showed that 80% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with street cleansing. This was borne out by the group's own survey on street cleansing.
- 2.5 The group's survey did reveal some concerns in particular areas. There were requests for flexibility of collection times, provision of extra bins and so on. Providing such flexibility can have a cost: but given the council's excellent relationship with Veolia and the flexibilities within the contract it would be worth officers engaging with respondents and Veolia to see whether these can be accommodated without any extra cost to the Council.  
**Recommendation 1 – the Council should examine whether it can address some of the concerns of survey respondents through flexibilities in its contract with Veolia.**
- 2.6 There was some criticism of NHDC about the lack of cleansing of some areas which were the responsibility of private land owners, companies or other public authorities. Officers have made good progress in encouraging others to meet their responsibilities. The group thought there was scope for more dialogue with other authorities, particularly Hertfordshire Highways, to maximise cooperation on such issues. Those members who sit on both NHDC and Hertfordshire County Council may be able to assist in this process.  
**Recommendation 2 – the Council should step up its dialogue with private land owners, utility companies and other authorities, particularly Hertfordshire Highways, about street cleansing issues.**

- 2.7 The council has a sensible and proportionate approach to tackling antisocial and criminal behaviour such as littering and flytipping, based on a mixture of signage, education and publicity, with targeted enforcement for more serious offences. The district has a variety of officers - town centre rangers, PCSOs, traffic wardens and others - who might be able to assist with enforcement of environmental byelaws through both formal and informal means.

**Recommendation 3 – The Council should consider whether its environmental enforcement efforts could be bolstered by more flexible use of existing enforcement officers.**

- 2.8 Well targeted signs can help to deter littering by highlighting the penalties for doing so and raising awareness of the problems caused by litter. Any extra signs would need to be selectively sited in problem areas to maximise their benefits.

**Recommendation 4 – The Council should consider erecting signs in litter hotspots like the Baldock bypass to educate and deter potential offenders.**

### 3. Background and Summary of Key Evidence

#### Street Cleansing Arrangements in North Herts

- 3.1 The Council's street cleansing obligations were contracted to Veolia in 2002. The Environmental Protection Act's cleansing standards formed the original specification of the contract. In April 2003, the Government introduced a new Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) to measure the cleanliness of the local environment as a member of the public would perceive it. In April 2008 this was replaced with NI 195. Government abolished official street cleansing performance reporting during 2011. However the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership agreed to maintain NI 195 standards as its standard for street cleansing.
- 3.2 The contract with Veolia costs just under £1million per annum for North Herts  
The contract covers:
- about 5,500m of land a year;
  - 12,000 litter bin empties;
  - approx 500 recycling bank empties
- 3.3 Areas are classified into zones, determined by the degree of built urban environment and perceived footfall, to determine how often they should be cleansed. The frequencies for the zones in North Hertfordshire are:
- Enhanced: continuous cleansing of town centres;
  - Zone 1: once per day in areas of towns outside the town centre;
  - Zone 3: a 28 day cycle for villages; and
  - Zone 7: Rural rounds as required
- 3.4 There is an increased street specification in certain areas and because of special circumstances:
- Letchworth Garden City - Leys Avenue and Eastcheap;
  - Baldock - the whole of the town centre;
  - Royston - Fish Hill; and
  - areas with yorkstone, resin bonded gravel, increased surface areas, specialised street furniture, water features and so on.

- 3.5 Keen public interest in the environment has led to more resources and more specialised methods of cleansing to maintain standards of cleanliness. This can mean more manpower, extra litter and recycling bins or the provision of waste bins for smoking rubbish; more regular deep cleans; and the provision of a specialist sweeper to cleanse Hitchin's cobbled streets.

### Street Cleansing Standards

- 3.6 Street cleansing by NHDC is carried out to the standards set out in NI 195. The Council undertakes about 1,000 surveys every year conducted by NHDC inspectors. The council's performance standards for 2011 were:
- Good or satisfactory levels of performance against three of the four main measures of performance – litter, graffiti and flyposting;
  - A improved level of performance, from neutral to satisfactory, against the fourth measure – detritus;
  - Comparable performance against the high standard of national performance for dealing with graffiti and flyposting;
  - NHDC exceeds national performance for dealing with litter and detritus.

### Public Perception

- 3.7 The 2011 district wide survey showed that 80% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with street cleansing, up 20% from the 2008 survey. It was likely that the lower levels of satisfaction recorded in the 2008 survey were due to negative national media perceptions of councils generally. The council had been working very hard with Veolia, and there was a high correlation between clean streets and overall satisfaction with the council.
- 3.8 There were also very few complaints made to the council about street cleansing, with only 19 received in the year from April 2011 to March 2012.
- 3.9 The street cleansing survey commissioned by the task and finish group demonstrated widespread satisfaction in the main towns in North Hertfordshire among Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston respondents. There was some dissatisfaction in Baldock with the cleansing of the roads into and around the town. The response from parish and town councils was mixed which may have be a reflection of the less frequent service which is provided in rural areas.
- 3.10 Each area had its own particular issues which members considered in detail.
- **Royston and District** - Members endorsed the surveys findings: Royston was kept very tidy with some littering issues on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Graffiti was a bigger problem in the town than in the rural areas.
  - **Letchworth** - Members noted the high levels of satisfaction with street cleansing in Letchworth, with leaf fall, littering and graffiti the main issues of concern to respondents.
  - **Hitchin** – Respondents were satisfied with street cleansing in Hitchin, with some desire for adjustments to certain aspects of the regime eg frequency of cleansing in certain areas.
  - **Baldock** - Members noted that the survey identified problems with litter blowing onto the Baldock bypass; and said there were similar problems on the A602 from Baldock to Stevenage.
  - **Southern Rural** – the response varied between parishes. It was likely there were a number of issues about land and property ownership which respondents were probably unaware of.

- 3.11 The group heard that expectations had risen in Hitchin and the council had re-scheduled vehicles to collect from certain parts of the town centre more often. There were regular meetings with town centre managers. Pigeon dropping were cleaned regularly: brushed up every day and power washed every week. The group suggested putting anti-roosting devices on those branches which overhung pavements if this was possible. On the specific issue of St Mary's Church, members heard that the land was not owned by NHDC but by the church.
- 3.12 Lime trees could cause particular cleansing problems. Aphids ate their sap then excreted a sticky substance which fell on to the ground underneath creating a sticky mess. A black mould grew on top of it which could make footpaths slippery. NHDC had no active tree planting programme but did selectively replace trees where necessary; and Hertfordshire County Council had overall responsibility for street trees. The group considered it would be sensible if the problems with lime trees were taken into account in both Councils' tree strategies by prohibiting or restricting the planting of lime trees as part of any new or replacement planting programme.
- 3.13 The council already provided some services which went beyond the standards set out in NI 195. There was enhanced cleaning of town centres and chewing gum bins were being rolled out. The council had won a Green Apple Award for its Environment Action Day. And hot spot teams could be deployed as and when required.

### Graffiti

- 3.14 Graffiti had been identified as a problem in certain areas of the district eg Letchworth. The council maintained its own graffiti database. Racist graffiti was prioritised and removed within 2-24 hours. Other graffiti was normally removed within 7 days of it being reported if it was on council property, and 14 days if it was on private property.
- 3.15 Removal of graffiti from private premises could be a much lengthier process. The council could only do so with the signed authority of the property owner. If this was not forthcoming, a graffiti removal notice could be issued to the owner after 28 days, although the owner could appeal against the notice, adding a further 28 days to the process.
- 3.16 Cooperation from commercial premises and other public authorities was variable: the council had reached an agreement with Virgin Media to allow graffiti removal, but it could not remove graffiti from railway bridges and had recently written to the Department for Transport about this. Members said that many people would be unaware of this difficulty and blame the council, and considered it might be worth writing to local MPs about the issue; and would be useful to step up dialogue with the relevant property or land owner.

### Cleaning of major roads

- 3.17 The survey had identified problems with litter blowing onto the Baldock bypass; and the group said there were similar problems on some of the other main routes into the district's towns. Members said there were some problems with litter from retailers' premises blowing onto the highways. Cleansing of highways was the responsibility of Hertfordshire Highways, although not all members of the public would be aware of this division of responsibility. Daniel said that a litter pick on such a road was quite expensive, and could cost about £20 – 30,000. The council was trialling spot cleaning of high speed roads which would be cheaper.

- 3.18 Members discussed whether grass cutting and litter picking could be better coordinated. If litter could be picked immediately before grass cutting took place, it wouldn't be shredded into thousands of small pieces like confetti.. Officers advised that the litter could be cleared but it would take a full road closure to do so. Grass cutting was carried out much faster than litter picking, and road closures for cleansing could not take place on consecutive nights, so the road closures could not be coordinated.
- 3.19 The group considered whether additional signage might help deter littering. Officers considered it might have some limited value and explained that permission would be needed from Herts Highways. Broxbourne District Council had erected a number of signs on the A10 which had raised awareness without making an appreciable difference to the amount of littering. Prosecution would depend on catching the offender in the act and photographing him or her committing the offence. The group considered that extra signage could have an educational and a deterrent effect.
- 3.20 Much work is already underway. There is an annual survey of top littering brands, and a national dialogue with Greggs and Wrigleys which was exploring ways to address people's careless disposal of their wrappers. There was also local action by various groups: the BIDs and town centre partnerships contributed to street wardens; and Sainsbury's took their own initiative and removed a lot of their carrier bags which had become tangled in tree branches on the A505 between Letchworth and Baldock.

### Rural areas

- 3.21 Parishes were usually cleansed on a twenty eight day cycle, in accordance with government guidelines. Some parishes were dissatisfied with the cleansing arrangements, with some paying for extra cleansing from their own funds. There were concerns about the coordination of services in parishes which paid for extra cleansing but the extra work did not conflict with NHDC's existing arrangements. Ashwell had a new broom agreement which topped up NHDC's service and tackled local problems with snow, leaves and bins. In addition, The council could send in a hotspot team, usually covered within the terms of the contract, to tackle particular problems. NHDC was developing a catalogue for parishes to purchase extra services from NHDC.
- 3.22 The group concluded there were a number of issues about land ownership which the public were probably unaware of eg the cycle route at Gravely was not NHDC's responsibility. The group considered there should be more dialogue with parish councils, landowners and others about better cooperation.

### Costs and Contract

- 3.23 The performance monitoring framework which NHDC used to monitor Veolia's performance had been re-written. The previous monitoring regime had become outdated and could not be applied to the existing cleansing arrangements. Veolia was over-performing: while its target was not to exceed 25 missed bins per 100,000 collected, it was actually achieving 22 per 100,000.
- 3.24 Cleaning of hot spots was usually accommodated with the existing contract with additional payments. This flexibility was preferable to formal requests for changes to the contract made by way of a deed of variation, which would leave the council liable for extra charges. Veolia was also at the forefront of changes to working practices, albeit mindful of any effects on its profitability. This was due to a very good relationship with Veolia, fostered over a number of years and based on close

cooperation and agreement between council and contractor. The group considered it would be useful if some of the issues identified in the survey could be addressed by changes in working practices.

### Enforcement

- 3.25 The Council's enforcement team took action on environmental crime such as fly-tipping and in certain circumstances against other anti-social behaviour like dog fouling. The enforcement team's officers patrolled the district and took part in joint working with the Police and North Hertfordshire Homes doing site inspections. They participated in community reassurance days and reacted to any emerging issues such as abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping. The team arranged for Veolia to litter pick areas of concern or clear fly-tips from local authority land. But they did not enforce day to day littering offences.
- 3.26 The group considered that enforcement activity needed to be proportionate to the offence, with the benefits of extra enforcement weighed against the extra costs. They considered there could be scope for more flexible use of existing enforcement officers already engaged on other tasks in the towns and villages, accompanied by more publicity to discourage offenders. They considered it might be possible to bolster the council's enforcement with civil enforcement officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) town centre rangers and others. They could perform a useful function in warning people about the possibility of fines. Members said that PCSOs were already active in the villages around Royston in tackling the issue of dog fouling.
- 3.27 If such officers intended to issue warnings or other sanctions, they would need training and the relevant delegated powers in order to issue verbal or written warnings and issue fixed penalty notices for littering and submitting case files to court. There were concerns that civil enforcement officers were already working in an environment where public interaction was sometimes challenging. On the other hand, town centre rangers in Hitchin and Letchworth had already had an effect on littering; and powers were not needed in order to engage with the public, educate them or simply ask them not to litter.
- 3.28 With regard to signage, the group heard that anti-littering signs had a role in educating the public and deterring offenders, although their use needed to be balanced so they are productive without adding too much clutter. The Council currently had *fly-tipping prohibited* signs which were temporarily put out at fly-tipping hotspots and this appeared to work. It also has covert CCTV that may be used as an option, but this is only as a last resort for fly-tipping and could be used for littering or dog fouling type offences.
- 3.29 Likewise the council could use carefully targeted media articles or campaigns. The council had used Outlook recently to get its message across, but to do so too often could be counter productive.

**STREET CLEANSING  
Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group**

**SCOPE**

**Terms of reference**

To review the effectiveness of NHDC's street cleansing and enforcement arrangements and suggest improved processes where necessary.

**Expected Outcomes**

An assessment of how well the Council's service standards are met and whether the public finds them satisfactory

Identify any shortcomings in the areas of customer services and enforcement

Make recommendations for improved processes if any are needed

**Timeframe**

Up to 4 meetings over 8 weeks starting December 2011

**Link with Council Priorities**

Part of the Council's core business

**Witnesses**

Head of Leisure and Environmental Services

Waste Management Service Manager

Chairs of area committees

Representative from Veolia

Representative from a council which doesn't use Veolia

Town centre managers

2 BID organisations

Residents' organisations

Parish councils

**Key Questions**

Does the Council's day to day street cleansing service meet its service standards?

How effectively are issues for street cleansing, cleanliness and enforcement handled in terms of reaction time, outcomes and customer satisfaction?

**Background Information**

A presentation to members covering:

- The Government's Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse.
- NHDC's contract with Veolia for street cleaning
- The Environmental Protection Act
- Performance Data
- Perception Data – District Wide Survey/Citizen's Panel/3Cs

**Membership**

Cllr Tony Hunter (Chairman)

Cllr Bill Davidson

Cllr Joan Kirby

Cllr Marilyn Kirkland

Cllr Richard Thake

**Portfolio Holder** - Cllr Peter Burt

**Lead Officer** - John Robinson

**Support Officer** - Brendan Sullivan