

## QUESTIONS RAISED DURING JUNE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### Respondents

SM: Service Manager Waste and Recycling

Cllr MW: Councillor Michael Weeks

### Questions raised by member of the public

#### Answered in June's O&S

- **How much planning did the Council do and why did it go so wrong?**  
*SM: A lot of planning work had taken place; first meeting regarding procurement started in 2014; the procurement itself took just under a year, but development of specifications and service requirements took significantly longer. The bids received during this process were examined and evaluated by officers from East Herts and North Herts as well as consultants WYG. Under the published evaluation model Urbaser were the winning bidder for performance and value for money.*
- **Why weren't enough food caddies ordered for all the properties in the district?**  
*SM: The Council ordered enough caddies. The caddies were delivered to a storage facility, this process was managed by a sub-contractor of Urbaser; as a consequence it was found out late in the day that not all of the caddies had been delivered. New stock had since been delivered; East Herts stock had been used in the interim. Most properties had now been delivered to.*
- **Why were routes not documented and shared with Urbaser?**  
*SM: The old contract ran on a paper based system; they had been working to try to update this to a 21st century system. A lot of information was known by the operatives, but had not been recorded, therefore this data was difficult to transfer to the new system. Existing staff had spent a lot of time updating the information. All existing data and round sheets had been transferred where it physically existed.*
- **What were the issues with the data transfer?**  
*SM: Urbaser ran two systems, a payment system and a waste management system and the data needed to be transferred from the payments system to the waste management system; one issue identified was that residents were allowed in the early stages to input data into address fields and spelling errors had not been picked up. Some people had signed up who were not residents of the District. There had been some issues regarding boundary streets.*

### Questions raised by member of the public

#### Answer Pending

- **What can the Council do to ensure that the public has faith in its ability to deliver future large scale contracts / projects?**

### Questions raised by Members

#### Answered in June's O&S

- **What arrangements are in place to ensure that special collection services operate effectively going forwards as there is evidence that this was not initially done? e.g. batteries, textiles.**  
*Cllr MW: advised that textiles and batteries should be collected and any non collection was down to the staff on the rounds and this was being managed by Urbaser. Residents are encourage to report non collection.*
- **Do the Council know what length of time individuals needed to wait to have their food caddy and or bins emptied?**

*SM: She had spoken to Urbaser who had reassured her that the majority of missed bins were being collected with 48 hours. The client team will continue to review this data. Urbaser had tried to provide as many rectifications as possible and would be looking at why some rectifications had not happened and improve processes. Because of delays in reporting, missed bins were not identified as a problem until day 3 by which time there were a lot of outstanding missed bins requiring significant additional resource to rectified.*

- **Could NHDC learn anything from the way EHDC managed the mobilisation of the new contract?**

*Cllr MW: advised that the transition in East Herts had gone fairly smoothly, however they did not opt for a chargeable garden waste service and they did not have any change in services, therefore the local knowledge was retained as collection routes did not change. The Garden Waste and food waste collections were new services for North Herts hence being affected more adversely.*

- **Are staffing levels at the required level and are these staff permanent?**

*Cllr MW: advised Urbaser had the right levels of staff since day one of the contract, however a number of those had been agency staff.*

*The Waste Team had been understaffed and this had an impact and they were still operating with some agency staff. A lot of staff were employed to cleanse data, but with the quantity of data across both contracts checks were risk based and undertaken in samples.*

- **Is the Council looking to have a more high-tech way (than residents numbering their bin) of identifying properties that have bought into the brown bin service?**

*Cllr MW: advised In-cab technology was the way that crews would identify bins for collection in future, and but putting the house number on the bins was the simplest way for staff to identify which bins to collect. This is particularly important where residents do not place bins out directly in front of their property or where property numbers can not be seen from the road. High tech solutions would delay collections and be costly.*

- **Is there a formal, documented recovery plan in place to get the contract to delivery of the expected service?**

*Cllr MW: advised there was not a fundamental fault with the service and the teams were currently in a rolling recovery phase.*

- **What is the Council going to do to ensure that going forwards there are robust payment collection methods in place?**

*SM: in respect of payments, Urbaser collected the payments, although the money was transferred to NHDC and the contract with the customer was with NHDC. The payment system was now fully functional with a fully functioning API transfer system to the waste collection system. There had only been 3 months to mobilise the payment service, which was not long enough. Next year, in respect of payments, they would focus on existing users, who would get a direct communication that payment was due and there would be some marketing, although not direct communication with residents who had not signed up for the service.*

- **A significant issue was that vehicles were not available on day one. Why was there no contingency plan to cover this?**

*SM: advised that the contingency for the purchased vehicles was the hire fleet. A full fleet was available on day 1. The problem with the hire fleet was that a lot of vehicles had been sent to landfill, where they received damage to the mud flaps and wheel arches and it was illegal to travel on the road without these.*

*Cllr MW: advised that they were under the impression that the vehicles, which had been ordered, would arrive on time, but that did not happen and was out of Urbasers hands.*

- **A significant issue was that staff did not turn up on day one and beyond. How did the Council not predict this and consequently not know until after the event?**

*SM: In respect of staff, TUPE transfers were always difficult, but they had held training days, which had been the last day to determine who would turn up for work, Urbaser also needed additional staff to manage the additional rounds.*

- **Did the Council order the right number of food caddies and are there enough to cover replacements and provision of service to new properties?**

*Cllr MW: advised that the correct number of caddies had been ordered, but a smaller number had been delivered by the supplier. The manufacturer had admitted this mistake and would be delivering the missing caddies.*

*In future caddies would be ordered jointly with East Herts to ensure value for money.*

- **Given that there has been a change in custom and practice ways of working, could the Council not have reasonably expected staff to leave?**

*SM: advised that there had been no changes to terms and conditions for staff and that there was ongoing discussion between management and trade unions regarding collection routes and working hours. Staff may be upset at round changes, but staff were expected to work their contracted hours. It should be noted that the majority of staff were on the same rounds, doing the same job. There were some staff doing different jobs because we have new different services.*

- **When will the service stabilise and collection be within normal tolerances?**

*SM: It is hoped that the service should be running as "business as usual" by the beginning of August 2018.*

### **Raised by Members**

#### **Answer Pending**

- **Why did the Council not spot earlier that the process of paying for brown bin services was not operating effectively?**
- **What might the Council do in response to complaints that payments were made for a brown bin collection service that was not delivered as advertised in the initial month?**
- **Could consideration be given to putting back the start of the 2019/20 payment period by perhaps a month to reflect this delay?**
- **Given that there was a known risk of Veolia employees not transferring to Urbaser, what steps did the Council take to ensure that significant local knowledge had been captured should this risk materialise and operatives no longer turn up for work?**
- **What arrangements were in place to ensure that those who did not get the brown bin information leaflet were able to avail themselves of the early bird rate for brown bin collection?**
- **Does the Council know how many properties did not receive the initial information leaflet regarding brown bin collection changes?**
- **When the Council tenders for work, where is the tipping point between efficiencies needed and the contractor negatively impacting on terms and conditions of staff?**
- **When the Council logs missed bins, where are they logged?**

- **What is being done to ensure that individuals' expectations are met in the future?**
- **What percentage of issues experienced was related to rectification?**
- **Should and how might the Council have been more hands on in managing the transition from Veolia to Urbaser.**
- **There was a significant issue with communication to the public. Can the Council ensure that effective methods of communication using as wide a range of methods as possible are used to reach the maximum number of residents when future communications are required?**
- **What steps can the Council take to mitigate the blocking of the Council's and Urbaser's switchboards in the immediate future and in the longer term?**