

Cabinet Member for Environment Report to Scrutiny Committee – 15 March 2021

I would like to reiterate the Leader's speech to the Council and thank all the staff for their continued hard work, dedication and diligence to deliver a valued service during these very testing times. It has been a pleasure to see all the comments and letters from residents expressing their thanks, praise and support throughout this pandemic. Residents clapped as the Waste and Recycling crews passed and children sent in coloured drawings. I would also like to thank residents for continuing to support these services.

All services in my portfolio have been affected in one way or other by this pandemic. They have adapted swiftly and professionally to frequently changing guidelines to make sure the streets are kept clean and parks and open spaces are maintained for all to enjoy. Duty Officers, Street Scene and Leisure staff have all assisted Waste and Recycling crews to ensure waste and recycling continues to be collected on time.

Adaptations and working arrangements have been made in the Carlu Close depot including the introduction of a barriered one way system, extra welfare facilities to compensate for the reduction in occupancy in the existing facility, office staff working from home, social distancing, enhanced cleaning and working bubbles.

There is always a need to review resources, revenue streams and expenses, which has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19. The services are constantly looking at ways to meet this need through for example more efficient ways of working and difficult decisions may well have to be made in the future.

It is important to review the demand on the environment and the need to look at carbon reduction. Part of this review is to ascertain the effectiveness of the current regime with that of a revised three weekly residual waste collection service. A trial of this arrangement will commence when the current situation allows. Even though the Devon Authorities are at the lower end of the emission producing scale compared nationally there are still areas where we can continue to improve to reach the MDDC target of zero emissions by 2030.

There is also the need to look at how we manage littering and fly tipping, which increased dramatically during the summer months of last year. There will be a strategic review to reduce littering and fly tipping in our community through; education and awareness, better cleaning and infrastructure and improving enforcement. There are significant costs to the Council through clear up operations – this situation needs to be addressed. This problem is also being tackled in conjunction with other Devon Authorities and stakeholders with the Clean Devon initiative. The service is looking at ways to not only reduce the litter in our high streets but how this litter is managed. Funding has been sought through an initiative supported by central government. I also have to thank local litter picking groups and individuals who have provided a valuable contribution when situations allow. This work is very much appreciated.

Waste and Recycling

Recycling rates are around 54%, very slightly under target but consistent with recent years. This is not due to residents recycling less, on the contrary, the service has collected 650 tonnes more in this financial year to date compared to the previous year. It is the fact that residents have also put out an extra 600 tonnes of household residual waste in the same period making this a total of 1250 extra tonnes of household waste collected by the crews. This has been achieved using the same number of vehicles but has required many hours of backroom analysis to complete mini reschedules of routes to ensure the optimum use of resources in vehicles, staff and environmental impact.

Food and garden waste is up by 12%, while card and glass are still 18% up. Due to the suspension of textile collections last year tonnages are down along with paper, which is reducing year on year following the national trend.

Cabinet gave authority in December for a three weekly residual waste collection trial to take place in Mid Devon once the current government restrictions have eased in order to ascertain the impact of the revised waste collection frequency in an urban and rural area of the district. The trial would run for a minimum of three months and would analyse the views of the various demographics that live in these areas to understand the impact. It would also monitor the impact on waste and recycling collections to see if this would focus residents to look at how/what is put out for collections and revert food and dry recycling to the appropriate receptacle, while reducing the amount of residual waste put out.

The service introduced Small WEEE collections from the kerbside in September to the already significant portfolio of recycled materials. Residents can now put out for collection small electrical items such as toasters and kettles. This will reduce the number of trips to the recycling centres by residents and reduce the electrical appliances that had previously been added to the residual waste. Over 14 tonnes has been collected so far including 2 tonnes in the last month.

The Council has increased the number of garden waste customers by a 1000 to over 11000 for its collection service. Letters for garden waste customers have been reduced from three to two. Missed collections have continued to remain consistently low below the annual target of 0.03%, this reduces the amount of administration involved in organising return visits; has a positive effect on customer satisfaction and eliminates the environmental impact an additional journey to collect the waste would produce.

Street Scene

Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing now work together from the same office and yard with skills and knowledge shared across these two services. The 2020 WYG consultancy report stated that; 'Our assessment is that the in-house is delivering fair / good value for grounds maintenance services as well as a good quality of service.' They said 'We found the maintenance of grass verges and opens space areas to be to a high standard with common obstacles such as trees well trimmed around at the base. Several flower and shrub displays were also observed, such as on roundabouts, and looked very attractive.' They wrote of the Street Cleansing service, 'In the town centre we noted clean channels and an absence of litter and detritus, even late in the afternoon. The standard of cleansing for traffic islands is at a high level, which we rarely see.' The service adopted less intensive, more environmentally friendly maintenance in areas of Tiverton and Cullompton

There has been an increased working partnership with Community Groups who are maintaining land owned by MDDC and closer working relationships with Town and Parish Councils on shared areas of interest including bedding displays and bin provision.

We have to thank the continuing support of the volunteer litter picking groups and individuals who have strived to help reduce, when permitted, the increased littering that is evident.

Following the successful trial of dual bins in the town centres funding has been sought through WRAP to sit recycling bins alongside the existing litter bins and increase the number of bins in areas of higher footfall to capture 'recycling on the go' e.g. coffee cups, tinned soft drinks and plastic drinking bottles.

Parking and District Officers

There have been a number of areas the service has been looking at in recent months including;

- Encouraged pay by phone in car parks
- Setting staff up on parking software to view warrants
- Reducing the number of letters for parking infringements
- PCN envelopes are now recyclable
- Working more closely with the Clean Devon initiative (part of an enforcement working group) to look at ways of combating littering and fly tipping in the County primarily through education and if this does not work, enforcement
- District Officers have been working closely with the Recycling Officer to monitor waste put out early and whether residents are recycling at all to; increase recycling rates, reduce black sack waste, reduce service costs, which will help minimise the impact on the environment

In March 2020 the Street Scene and Education and enforcement policies were updated and formally adopted. The following changes were approved:

- To increase in fixed penalty notices (FPNs) from £200 to £400
- To adopt the Littering from Vehicles Regulations 2018
- To adopt amended Abandoned Vehicle Policy which will enable the District Officers to investigate vehicles within 'open air'

The Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) was put to members in October but due to some outstanding queries officers have now prepared and are working to a project timeline for the PSPO to go to Cabinet in May to then go out to public consultation (if necessary) and then back through the committees to approve the Second Revised Draft PSPO.

Cabinet members gave Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton towns a free 2 hour parking session within the daytime charging period Monday – Saturday between 1st August – 30st September to boost footfall and enhance trade in the market towns after the lockdown due to COVID-19. They also gave the towns' free parking on Saturday and Sunday throughout December 2020 to encourage a return to the town centres following the emergence from Covid-19 restrictions.

Transport

Mid Devon are now into the second year of the partnership with Specialist Fleet Services Ltd (SFS) to continue to provide the provision and maintenance of around 210 vehicles. MDDC no longer need to purchase vehicles outright, which is better value for money and provides a closer working relationship to ensure vehicles remain on the road and ensures breakdowns are dealt with in a timely manner.

The recycling fleet have been replaced in recent months with bespoke state of the art kerbside sort Romaquip vehicles procured in conjunction with SFS. These new vehicles have been adapted to carry the products we want including larger stillage's to increase the volume of cardboard picked up compared to paper which has decreased in size due to the recycling habits of the general public. This has resulted in fewer trips as the collection of dry recycling materials is better balanced with these stillage's.

Utilising Community Payback Service Users in the District

The key to its success, is that we can provide a sustainable stream of projects for the service users to complete. DDCCRC will provide Community Payback services across the district for

unpaid service users supervised by DDCCRC and by the National Probation. People on Community Payback undertake all kinds of projects which provide value to communities. Due to the pandemic operations are currently suspended.

Cllr Colin Slade
Cabinet Member for Environment
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