

# Full Council Meeting – 30 March 2021

## Report of Councillor Sarah Wakefield – Environmental Services

### Commercial Services

This past year has truly been like no other and the value and importance of some of the services in my portfolio such as Refuse, Grounds Maintenance, and Street Cleaning to our residents have been particularly highlighted. These services have had to adapt to new ways of working while also dealing with increased demand from people staying at home and generating more waste and the increased usage of our parks and open spaces. Despite these challenges we have still managed to deliver improvements in the services we provide either directly or through our partners.

### Refuse (Somerset Waste Partnership)

- COVID placed huge pressure on recycling and rubbish collections. Green waste collections were suspended for six weeks in the spring and all recycling centres were closed for a period of time. Throughout the periods of lockdown and restrictions, increased amounts of waste (particularly glass and card) were presented by residents for collection. SWP and their contractors did everything they reasonably could do to keep disruption to a minimum while keeping staff and public safe. Due to the impact of COVID some changes have had to be introduced over the period on a temporary basis - such as allowing crews to start collections at 6am. All such measures were communicated to the public.
- SWP New Contractor (Suez). It was a challenging period for SWP, with the commencement of the new collection contract at the same time as lockdown, the re-scheduling of the Recycle More rollout, and the re-opening recycling centres within the guidelines, during which they delivered a service to our residents. After a somewhat difficult start as routes were learned and adapted the new contractor has performed well and has provided a service noticeably above the levels of the previous contractor. Most of the issues experienced at the contract start (which did occur at the same time as the first shut down) have been resolved to achieve performance in line with the contract targets.
- Recycle More. This is due to start being rolled out in SWT from Autumn 2021. The new kerbside service will add new materials to weekly recycling collections (household and food plastic pots, tubs and trays, food and drink cartons, small household batteries and small electrical items). We are now into the detailed planning phase of the new scheme in our district with SWP. More detailed briefings for members are planned for June with a full communications plan for residents. The latest 8-week figures available for Mendip, who were first to have the scheme rolled out, is that overall recycling is up 15%.
- Garden Waste Collection renewals. Customers now receive a rolling year subscription starting from the time they join the scheme. This provides better

value for money (as customers who joined part way through a year previously had to pay a full year charge for a part year service).

### **Parks and Open Spaces**

- Grass cutting for the 2020 season concluded with complaints about the service reduced by a third over the summer compared to the previous year, from 47 complaints in 2019 to 29 in 2020.
- Electric Hand Tools - The trial of electric hand tools has been completed and the results evaluated. This has led to a plan being drawn up to replace some of our old petrol equipment with battery powered equivalents. Those which are suitable for replacement have now been ordered and will be used for the 2021 season.
- Programme of works of note include:
  - 150 trees have been planted across Vivary, Blenheim & Victoria parks.
  - Sowing of 60kg of wildflower seeds in areas including Seaward Way and Mollie's Patch in Minehead, Hoyles Road and the Rec in Wellington, and Leycroft Grove, Wellsprings and the Grange in Taunton.

### **Street Cleansing (IdVerde)**

- Litter Bin Audit - We have completed a full audit of all litter and dog bins owned by SWT to assess their condition and location. We have also noted the 'What3Words' location for each bin which means that each bin can be identified easily by the customer and the service. This will facilitate a review and a replacement programme planned for 2021/22. This review will also consider the replacement of bins in some locations with split bins allowing the public to recycle some litter in them such as tins and plastic.
- The contractor has continued to support community litter picks by providing litter pick kits (pre-Covid) and collecting the waste collected.
- Lockdowns and restrictions saw increased levels of fly-tipping and litter across SWT's area, which has also been experienced across the County and nationwide.

### **Bereavement Service**

- COVID19 - The Bereavement service has been at the forefront of the response to the COVID19 pandemic. The whole team has remained on duty throughout and has delivered continuing outstanding bereavement services to the public.
- Additional measures taken this year have included:
  - Engaging with the Local Resilience Forum through the Excess Death Group so that there was a clear understanding of capacity issues across Somerset from a range of stakeholder perspectives in order to build a full picture that was able then to deal collaboratively with emerging problems.
  - Extension of the cemetery at Taunton Crematorium and the preparation of 100 prepared graves (so far we have not had to use any of them).
  - Supported Musgrove Park Hospital NHS Trust by siting a body storage facility at the crematorium.

- Proactively secured the servicing of the cremators so that we were ready for the seasonal peak that winter did bring. (This is a 2 week operation)
- An established florist, Stems of Taunton, are now renting one of the underused buildings which generates an income and offers a service that complements the facilities on the site.

## **Coastal Protection, Harbours and Licensing**

### **Coastal Protection and Harbours**

- Blue Anchor - the service was able to secure funding from the Environment Agency to carry out emergency works at the toe of the cliffs at this location, which works were completed in the autumn of 2020. The next stage, which is the design and build of the protection for the public highway immediately adjacent to this cliff is now proceeding after authority was given by the Council in December. This has been facilitated by a decision by Somerset County Council to provide funds for this work in order to protect the nearby highway (which is now seen by SCC to be at risk if this work is not carried out).
- The work to repair the East Quay wall at Watchet near Splash Point has finished including the provision of a new staircase access. Although some re-design was needed the works have all been completed within budget and within a year of the original collapse at this point. Thanks are due to my fellow Cllrs at SWT for their support for this repair and to the officers for their work in getting it carried out so quickly. Further strengthening work to the middle section of the East Quay Wall is currently out to tender with a view to being carried out as soon as possible once a contractor is appointed.
- Dredging has been carried out successfully at the outer harbour in Watchet (where up to a metre's depth of material has been removed) and budgeting for this to be done on an annual basis is now included in SWT's budget. The Marina will shortly be operated and run by a new body which SWT believes will enable much needed improvements to be carried out in the near future.
- During this year I will have attended and chaired meetings of the Flood Board and have also attended meetings of the Somerset Rivers Authority and Harbour Board too.

### **Licensing**

The work of the licensing team has continued to provide a good service throughout the year. Additional pressures have included managing the new lighter touch regulations for on street licensing for cafes and food outlets in addition to the usual taxi and liquor and other licensing activities. This has taken place against the background of pressures on SWT staff and on taxi operators and the restrictions in our hospitality sector too.

I would like to give my personal special thanks to all the officers in the teams mentioned in this report who have delivered exceptional service throughout the past difficult and challenging year and who have assisted me to take up this role on the executive.