

Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Environmental Services – Cllr Andy Sully.

Annual Report

It gives me great pleasure to present my last and final report to Full Council on the varied activities of the Environmental Services Portfolio.

- street Scene and Open Spaces

Litter Bin Replacement Programme

The roll out of the new litter bin infrastructure with recycling compartments has continued with the next 75 bins installed during the year taking the total to over 200 around the district. This has helped increased the amount of litter that is recycled and replaced many bins which were in a poor condition.

Environmental Improvement Team

The two person team was introduced in 2022 have been working on the following projects over the 12 months:

- Tree planting

The team have assisted with the planting of over 447 new trees in Councils parks and open spaces during 2022/23.

- Spring Clean

During April and May, the team attended 50 Open Space locations across the district, collecting approximately 3 tonnes of litter and fly tipped items. They assisted with the collection of litter from volunteer groups who organised litter picking events.

- Weeding

The team undertook weeding in Council car parks and sites to improve the look of these areas. Locations across the district including Taunton Town Centre, Watchet Esplanade and Minehead Quay

- Town Centre pressure washing

The team completed the second year of town centre pavement washing to help provide a more pleasant environment for visitors.

- Watering

The annual watering of flower beds and hanging baskets was completed by the new inhouse team. This allowed for additional watering during the summer drought conditions and saved money from using a contractor.



Litter enforcement trial

In April as part of the Council's newly adopted litter strategy a trial was commenced on litter enforcement in partnership with East Hants Council. The trial has now completed and issued just over 1,200 penalty notices during the year to individuals disposing of litter incorrectly.

The trial included education as well as enforcement. The education which was provided through face-to-face interaction, press releases, social media and interacting with key stakeholders such as Neighbourhood Police, the Superintendent of Avon and Somerset Police, local businesses within and outside of the town's centres, National Highways and Town and Parish Councils. In addition to this the team purchased 500 portable ash trays which officers gave out to individuals who were caught disposing of cigarettes inappropriately. The information gathered during the trial will now be used to consider options for the new authority for enforcement in all areas.

- Fleet

The Council has taken delivery its next batch of electric vehicles as part of its scheduled replacement programme. This batch of small vans and pool cars will bring the total number of electric vehicles on the fleet to 23 with a further 22 on order due for replacement next year.

- Refuse and Recycling (Somerset Waste Partnership)

In the final year of the partnership the delivery of its business plan has continued. The waste services will become a department of the new council after vesting day.

Recycle More

Following the roll out of the new scheme to households in 21/22 the completion of the rollout for communal properties and schools were completed during 22/23. The scheme has seen increases in recycling and savings to the collection contract as anticipated when the scheme was agreed.

Collection Service

The collection service continues to have disruptions and a review of the contract is planned for 23/24. SWP have continued working hard with their contractor, SUEZ, in order to reduce repeated collection failures. There were several collection issues

through September and October. These were generally down to staffing issues which caused rounds to be dropped.

Environmental Health

The Environmental Health service have continued to work incredibly hard, ensuring a smooth LGR transition despite no let up in BAU. This doesn't just include cases and workload, but also working on streamlining processes ready to bring teams together as easily as possible.

The Public Health Team have been dealing with increased enforcement activity regarding illegally imported food, imminent risk situations and ongoing non-compliance in food businesses which are leading to prosecutions – all of which are reducing the risk of food borne illness or long term health effects to people living, working or staying in the district. A lot of this is reflective of the economic situation within the country, as businesses struggle to make ends meet. Where we are issuing poor hygiene ratings, we are meeting our commitment to return and rescore within 3 months to minimise reputational impact for businesses.

Our goal for 22/23 within Environmental Protection and Private Sector Housing goal has been to reduce the back log of inspections and visits created from the covid-pandemic. New staff has allowed us to do this. Our water sampling program has been a particular success, completing 128 samples in the month of February and putting us in a good position to complete scheduled program by the end of the financial year and not take any backlog into the new authority.

The year for Private Sector Housing has been especially challenging with the amount of complex cases we have had to investigate and take enforcement action on. The team dealt has seen an increase of customer contacts requesting advice and assistance with regards to damp and mould, following the media coverage on the issue at the end of the year.

The team are preparing for the first prosecution the authority has ever undertaken under the Housing Act 2004, for failure to licence Houses in Multiple Occupation. This has been made possible by the new, more contemporary Enforcement Policy which the team developed this year for Somerset West and Taunton, and has also been approved within SCC as the policy for the new Somerset Council.

We responded to requests for support from the taxi trade to increase the Hackney Carriage Fare in response to rising fuel prices. This is the second time in the past 12 months that we have done this.

The Licensing Team also reviewed Street Trader Policy, working closely with members via a officer/member working group. The new policy is much clearer, giving transparency to our customers on how we make decision, and setting out what we expect from customers in return.

Again, this policy is expected to be adopted by the new authority.

Some figures to give an idea of the volume of work the teams are undertaking, up to end of Feb 2023.

Licensing

no. applications – 1498
no. of service requests - 224

Environmental Protection

no. applications – 1498
no. of service requests – 643
no. private water supply visits - 128

Food

no. inspections – 627
no. of service requests - 677

Blue Anchor Coastal Defence

The cliffs at Blue Anchor are continuing to erode. The emergency works completed in partnership with the Environment Agency in 2020 are performing well and have prevented any more substantial loss.

The Council is delivering a scheme to protect the B3191 in this area, funded by SCC as the Highways Agency. Vessels have now been definitively secured to deliver the required rock armour from Glensanda Quarry in western Scotland to be delivered to Blue Anchor in late April and May 2023.

13,500 tonnes of rock will be collected from a quarry in Western Scotland and transported by sea going vessels to Blue Anchor before being transferred at sea to a barge to land the rock on the beach.

The rock will then be placed against the cliffs to prevent wave undercutting. During the same process the upper cliffs (largely consisting of degraded Mercia Mudstone) will be re-profiled to a 'stable angle of repose' and then 'hydro seeded' to promote vegetation growth to further aid stabilisation.

It is anticipated that final planning approval will be secured in late March 2023.

All other permissions are in place and the scheme is ready to be delivered

North Hill - Minehead

WSP were appointed (following a tender process) to carry out a design scheme for the slope stabilisation at North Hill, Minehead. The initial cost is £62k. The majority of the hill is owned by SWT.

Initial investigations – using abseiling techniques given the severity of the slope – have led to a report which outlines the preferred design solution.

Work is now underway to design a linear high tensile steel fence that will be erected along the base of the cliff above the houses along Quay Street. This fence will be designed to ‘catch’ any falling debris such as soil, stones, and rocks. This is deemed to be the most effective solution given the difficulty of working on a cliff face that is near vertical in places.

A drone survey was completed in March 2023 to check final levels and the design is expected to be completed in late March 2023 with tender works following shortly afterwards should finances be available to deliver the scheme which is expected to cost between £750,000 and £1m.

Minehead Seafront Drains clearance

Work to clear sand from the blocked drainage gullies on the seafront at Minehead began was completed in February 2023

Sand was removed and taken from site allowing water to flow off the promenade into the drains. This is not a permanent solution to the issue as the drains are blocked by sand from their outlet side (on the beach) and this cannot be easily or cheaply remedied.

Coastal Defence General

There continues to be significant movement of the cliffs to the west of Watchet. The allotment site in Watchet belonging to the Watchet TC has been closed due to land slippage and this area continues to erode through wave action and through inherent instability of the ground which is worsened through heavy rainfall

The cliffs in this area will continue to erode, the Council has provided warning signs on the West Street slipway and on the western access to the beach at Blue Anchor.

Harbours

The annual dredging programme was completed in the outer harbour in November 2022. 7,200m³ of mud and silt was removed from the Harbour using water injection dredging, the work being carried out by the Marine Group

Electrical compliance work was completed to the East Quay and to the Marina pontoons in the summer of 2022. This work included new electrical feeds to the boatyard, the sill gate at the entrance to the Marina and to the pontoons. This work followed on from the installation of a new Quay wall on the East Quay

The mooring income from Minehead Harbour exceeded the budget predications and is the highest ever recorded at Minehead at a little over £15,000. All available berths were full.

I would like to give my personal thanks to all the officers in the various teams that have helped me in the last couple of years in my portfolio, who have always delivered exceptional services in these challenging times.

Councillor Andy Sully