

PUBLIC WASTE BINS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday, 11 November 2022

PRESENT – Councillors Tait (in the Chair), Mrs. Culley, Haszeldine, Tait, Wallis and Willis.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bartch, Cossins, Donoghue and McCollom.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Jill Matthews (Street Cleansing Manager), Andy Walker (Communication and Marketing Manager) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer).

A discussion ensued in respect of a number of points raised by Members:

- It was agreed that this Task and Finish Group would be chaired by Councillor Tait.
- Members discussed the reporting process when a member of the public tags the Council on social media. Members were informed that the Council's social media was manned during business hours and a large proportion of social media reports were received out of business hours. Any reports received were flagged to the relevant department, including environmental services for the bins to ensure they are actioned.
- Members were informed of the operating model for the service which consisted of two teams of one person. Working hours were Monday to Friday, 6am start with weekend work for town centre bins and bins located on arterial routes. The teams covered two routes, south and central. Members noted that extra services were in place during the summer period and bank holiday weekends for a number of bins in key locations including parks.
- Members were informed that in total there were 1114 public waste bins in Darlington and 200-250 bins were emptied per person per day. Members were provided with details of the routes and were informed that the schedule was dependant on the bin usage, with some bins emptied more regularly than others. Members were advised that all park waste bins were emptied on a Monday morning.
- Members noted the issues associated with the staffing levels, in particular during the summer period and were informed that arrangements are in place to train other members of staff on the litter/dog bin routes so that should staff numbers drop due to sickness, then more staffing options would be available to service the bins. As Members were unaware of the staffing issues during the summer period, Members highlighted the need for improved messaging to all Members by Officers.

- Members were informed that there were 13 larger capacity bins that had been placed in key areas in Darlington and reference was made to the Bigbelly bins on High Row which automatically compact waste down. The larger capacity bins were more effective as they required less emptying. Members were advised that the service regularly reviewed the number, location and usage of waste bins in Darlington.
- Members noted that dog waste was taken to John Wade's in Newton Aycliffe for disposal, up to three times per day. Waste bins in Darlington were dual waste bins, however this was disposed of separately to dog waste. Members queried the possibility of a transfer station but noted that this was not viable.
- It was noted that there had been increased fly tipping next to wastebins since Covid which can affect the capacity of the service, resulting in fewer bins being emptied in a day. It was reported that the service had a good relationship with enforcement in relation to fly tipping and 22 litterbins had been referred to enforcement for action. Members noted the process for obtaining a prosecution for fly tipping.
- Members noted that a digital system was in use for managing fly tips and queried whether this could be used for waste bins. Members felt that this would make the process of emptying waste bins easier and would enable any staff member to cover the routes if required. Members were informed that the use of the digital system for emptying waste bins was being explored.
- In relation to the MyDarlington app, Members queried whether this was regularly promoted and suggested improved comms to ensure the public were aware of the Report It function for reporting fly tips and full waste bins.
- Overall Members felt they had a better understanding of the service provided by the Council in relation to public waste bins. Members noted that resources were limited however were assured that the circumstances which led to bins not being emptied in the summer period, had been addressed.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the Public Waste Bins Task and Finish Group submit the following recommendations to the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee for approval:

- i. That the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee receives an update at a future meeting regarding the digitalisation of the service.
- ii. That bin usage continues to be reviewed to ensure bins are appropriately placed.
- iii. That the MyDarlington app is regularly promoted.