

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 11 September 2014

Lead Member / Officers: Lead Member for Public Realm

Report Author: Head of Highways & Environmental Services

Title: Streetscene strategy & performance, in relation to the Council's Clean Streets priority

1. What is the report about?

The effectiveness of the strategies that are being pursued by the council's streetscene service, in relation to the delivery of the council's Clean Streets Priority.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The Communities Scrutiny committee has asked the streetscene service for an update on the delivery of its Public Realm function. In particular, the committee has asked whether the streetscene service are aware of any obstacles that might impede the delivery of the council's ambitions with respect to its Clean and Tidy Streets Corporate Priority.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- a) To continue with the current strategies as far as practicable, including the removal of unauthorised advertisements within the public realm,
- b) to absorb any future funding cuts in ways that will minimise the overall negative impact on the public's perception of the public realm.

4. Report details

a) Background

Overall Public Realm Strategy

The council formally adopted its Public Realm Strategy in 2013. The delivery of the strategy relies on (at least) four different council departments. It covers; public realm Accessibility, Clean and Tidy Streets, maintaining Local Identity, and the provision of a Safe Environment.

Clean and Tidy Streets priority:

In this report, I have been asked to focus particularly on the Clean and Tidy Streets element of the strategy, which comprises; Littering, Fly-tipping, Fly posting / graffiti removal, dealing with abandoned vehicles/shopping trolleys etc., plus dog fouling, and eyesore sites. Again, a number of different Heads of Service are involved in these aspects.

Streetscene's role in relation to Clean and Tidy streets:

The Environmental Services (streetscene) service is responsible for;

- i) all fly tipping investigations / prosecutions and fly-tipping removal work.
- ii) all street cleansing activity, including the removal of flyposted / unauthorised signs, and the clearing up of dog fouling mess.
- iii) we also work very closely with our colleagues in Planning & Public Protection, particularly in relation to the prevention and enforcement aspects of the strategy. This report therefore contains information that has been derived from both service areas(see Appendix Four).

b) Detailed information on service performance:

Flytipping

The latest figures submitted to Welsh Government (for the year 2013-14) showed that 94.9 % of reported flytipping incidents were cleared within 5 days. This was an improvement on the previous year. We expect another improvement next year; partly due to improved accuracy in record keeping (clearance dates in particular).

With regard to the overall numbers of incidents; Denbighshire purposely records every single recordable incident, regardless of whether or not it is on public or private land, and/or whether or not it is reported by a member of the public. Not all councils do this. We do this because the recording of an incident triggers our internal investigation process. We regard high reporting rates as a pre-requisite for the minimisation of actual fly-tipping activity (on the ground). Consequently, our reporting rates are higher than other comparable councils. However, this enables us to enforce more effectively.

Over 50% of the enforcement actions in N.Wales are carried out by Denbighshire, even though we only have around 14% of the population. We can only carry out this high level of enforcement activity because we have gathered the necessary data diligently.

Cleanliness of streets (general)

There are two primary measures of performance, a) our residents survey results, and b) the Keep Wales Tidy clean streets index results.

The cleanliness questions in the summer 2013 resident's survey were specifically developed to support the corporate clean streets priority. It was therefore the first time that the questions had been asked. The majority of residents (73%) were either satisfied, or very satisfied, with the overall level of cleanliness of the streets in their local areas. The results are shown in Appendix Two. Dog fouling (60%) was the most frequent choice when residents were asked to name a significant remaining cleanliness issue.

Appendix One gives trend data for CRM requests for street cleansing and dog-fouling activity. Appendix Three summarises the results from the (independent) Keep Wales Tidy, Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS) Reports.

In their 2014 annual summary report Keep Wales Tidy reported that all types of litter had seen an improvement since last year, and that dog fouling observations had reduced by approximately 25% (over a year), The council's strategies therefore seems to be working.

Anti-fouling strategy

The council has an action plan to tackle the issue of dog fouling, which includes publicity campaigns, enforcement action, and more urgent attention to requests for cleansing.

The numbers of requests received through CRM rise significantly after every publicity campaign, so the CRM figures in Appendix One are therefore quite volatile. Unfortunately, the media can portray our high reporting rate in a bad light (in the same way that they have done with our fly-tipping figures). However, the same principle applies; i.e. in order to reduce the (actual) levels of dog fouling (on the ground), we need to actively encourage high levels of reporting.

Eyesore sites data

Appendix Five lists the council's top 20 "eyesore sites". At each of these sites, the council's Planning and Public Protection Department are actively pursuing owners, and/or using their Statutory Powers, in order to remove / deal with the individual eyesore issues.

Removal of flyposting / unauthorised signs

There is an ongoing issue concerning the proliferation of unauthorised (i.e. illegal) signs advertising commercial businesses / events across the county. The council wants Denbighshire businesses to thrive. However, the proliferation of commercial signs and banners on the highway (often attached to street furniture) has led to untidy streets, visual clutter, and has also affected highway safety. In 2013 members were therefore consulted on the topic, and there was universal support for the following simple rules, which are now being followed:

- i) signs/banners that have an adverse affect on road safety will always be removed from the highway immediately
- ii) all unauthorised commercial advertising will also be removed from the highway. Where feasible, for a "first offence" we would usually provide 24hrs notice before removal.
- iii) safely located signs for non-commercial events may be permitted / tolerated. However; this is at the discretion of the appropriate highway/streetscene officer. This exemption is designed to cover date-specific community events / charity events etc..

To go hand-in hand with the above policy, Planning & Public Protection also undertake appropriate Enforcement action against the unauthorised erection of signs on private land.

C Future actions / strategies

Fly tipping: Continue to investigate and prosecute whenever we have sufficient evidence to do so. Do not simply "pick up whatever gets put out".

Cleanliness of streets (general): Continue the move away from rigid scheduling for cleaning. This allows us to improve our effectiveness by allowing staff to act upon their own initiative. This has helped to engender a greater sense of ownership of the streets.

Flyposting / unauthorised signs: there has been a recent clampdown, with some businesses complaining about over-zealous enforcement. However, the service intends to continue with the clampdown, and would welcome member support for the stance that is being taken.

Anti-fouling: there is still scope to improve upon response times. Currently, we do not have sufficient data to check times accurately. For our streetscene activities, we really need a geographically-based CRM system (rather than a person based system). A business case for this type of system is currently being developed jointly with our colleagues in Customer Services. In future people will log-on to the website, click on a particular location, and identify the problem. The information will go directly to frontline staff via hand held devices. When they resolve the problem, they will click the appropriate button and the system will amend the computer record. There is no firm timescale at the moment. This may still be 18 months away.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The current strategy is assisting in the delivery of the corporate Clean Streets priority.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Costs are constrained by service budgets.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken on the decision?

The original EIA included a commitment to improve accessibility to the public realm. The EIA has not been revisited for this update report.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The strategy was consulted upon with members and the Communities Scrutiny Committee endorsed the plan in September 2013. The council had already consulted with City, Town & Community Councils, the voluntary sector, and Natural Resources Wales.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Any additional costs arising from the implementation of the Strategy will have to be met from existing resources (statement provided when the original strategy was approved).

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Clearly; there are likely to be significant budgetary cuts next year. If there are large cuts in street cleansing budgets, there will have to be a corresponding reduction in the levels of expectation around what can be delivered.

However; the philosophy that will be adopted by the service will remain the same, i.e. to make our county as attractive and pleasant as we can, and keep it as neat and tidy as we possible, within the resource levels that we have available.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 111 Local Government Act 1972 and Section 2 Local Government Act 2000 as general powers, enable the Council to make decisions such as this, and article 6.3.4(b) of the Council's Constitution sets out scrutiny's powers with respect to examining the Council's performance in relation to its policy objectives etc.

Contact Officer:

Head of Highways and Environmental Services

Tel: 01824 706801