

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to Streetscene Scrutiny Panel

**Date** 15 October 2020

**Report of:** Head of Streetscene

**Subject:** COVID-19 LOCKDOWN- A REVIEW OF STREETSCENE SERVICES

#### SUMMARY

The members of the Panel are invited to scrutinise the response of the Streetscene department to the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic between the months of March and July 2020.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel scrutinises and notes the information as set out in this report

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the Council and our community. Immediate response efforts were required to maintain key Council services and to rapidly adapt to new requirements which helped to support residents and businesses in the Borough.
2. The Chief Executive's Management Recovery Team met regularly throughout the pandemic in order to manage the Council's response.
3. In order to guide the on-going recovery process following the lockdown, a COVID-19 Recovery Framework was devised to focus on key areas of recovery. This was approved by the Executive at the meeting on 3 August as was the Public Spaces Recovery Plan which included elements of the Streetscene services.
4. This report focuses on how each of the Streetscene service areas were impacted by the pandemic and highlights actions that were taken to enable the continuation of essential services and ensure the safety of the public and Fareham Borough Council staff.

## **BACKGROUND**

5. The Streetscene department began preparing for the Covid-19 pandemic as early as 26 February when the business continuity plans were reviewed, and services were prioritised in anticipation of possible staff shortages. As the government updated guidelines, in the lead up to the official lockdown announcement on 22 March, services were reviewed daily.
6. On 18 March the government stated that vulnerable groups should shield and work from home. This resulted in the Streetscene frontline services losing a significant number of staff. Staff based at the Streetscene depot offices were also affected and from 23 March a large proportion of the office staff began working from home, in accordance with government guidelines.

## **REFUSE AND RECYCLING**

7. At the beginning of the lockdown period, approximately 25% of Refuse and Recycling frontline staff were unavailable for work because they were either shielding or self-isolating. However, as the government guidance regarding vulnerable groups changed, most of the staff were able to return to work and by April all but two operatives were back in work.
8. To assist with the continuation of the service, two additional drivers were employed on 6-month temporary contracts to enable the services to be able to cope with any unexpected staff absences. Streetscene staff from other service areas and staff from other Council departments provided vital support which enabled the service to function effectively during the lockdown period.
9. The lockdown resulted in a significant increase in demand on the service. As residents were spending unprecedented amounts of time in their homes and could not dispose of

waste or recycling at HWRCs, which were closed, the tonnages of waste and recycling collected at the kerbside increased.

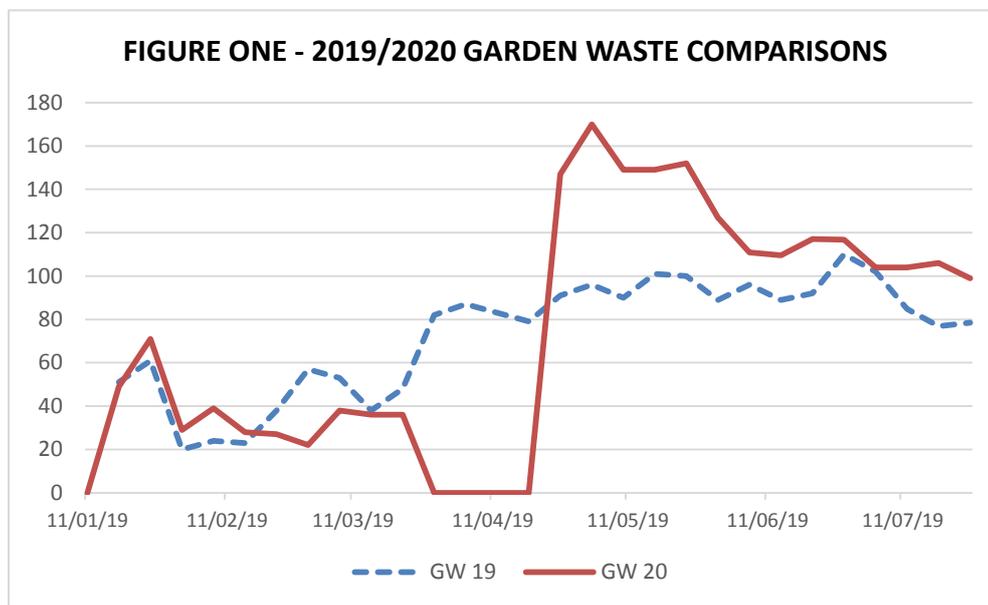
10. Between 22 March and 26 July 2020, the tonnage of refuse collected at the kerbside was, on average, 14% higher compared to the same period in 2019. Recycling tonnage was 8% higher on average across the same period.
11. In order to comply with government social distancing guidelines, the number of operatives in refuse and recycling collection vehicles was limited to two. To achieve this required hire cars and Council vehicles so that the third operative could travel separately to the collection vehicle.
12. The start times for the front-line operatives were staggered in four phases between 5:20am and 7:30am to limit the numbers of staff in the depot in the mornings to maintain safe social distancing.
13. An additional £51,000 was spent during lockdown to ensure the continued operation of essential services. This included the cost of extra staff, hire vehicles and personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

## **GARDEN WASTE**

14. The Garden Waste collection service was suspended on 18 March due to the number of waste collection staff having to self-isolate or shield. This allowed the remaining waste collection operatives to focus on essential refuse and recycling collections.
15. When the garden waste service was suspended, the Streetscene customer service team was inundated with requests from residents to reinstate the service. This situation was compounded by the closure of Hampshire HWRCs on 24 March so residents had no way to dispose of garden waste.
16. When it was announced on 15 April that the garden waste collection service would be resuming, the department received 136 calls from residents requesting reusable garden waste sacks.
17. As residents had not been able to dispose of their garden waste for many weeks, when collections did resume, the tonnage collected increased dramatically (figure 1). The week beginning 1 May, 170 tonnes of garden waste was collected, compared to 94 tonnes in the same week in 2019. Between April and May the tonnage of garden waste collected at the kerbside was 58% higher than during the same period in 2019.
18. As a result of the significant increase in volumes of garden waste, the number of loaders for each garden waste crew was increased to three loaders per round in order to ensure that the operatives were not lifting excessive weights.
19. As a result of the Civic Offices being closed, there was no opportunity for residents to pick up a new garden waste sack free of charge. Therefore, between 18 March and 3 August, 3480 reusable garden waste sacks were issued and delivered free of charge across the Borough. This unprecedented demand meant that additional operatives from

both Refuse and Grounds Maintenance teams were redeployed to complete the deliveries.

20. Disposable garden waste sacks were still available for purchase for £10 for a pack of five or £40 for a pack of twenty-five. The department sold 531 disposable garden waste sacks which raised nearly £15,000 revenue for the department.



## TRADE WASTE

21. Over 200 businesses suspended bin collections, 31 reduced collections and 10 cancelled collections altogether when lockdown began on 23 March. This resulted in a 35% drop in collections, reducing income by £81,000.
22. This generated an unprecedented amount of administrative work and many hours spent by the Trade Waste support officers dealing with issues and providing help and support to struggling businesses.

## TEXTILE BANKS

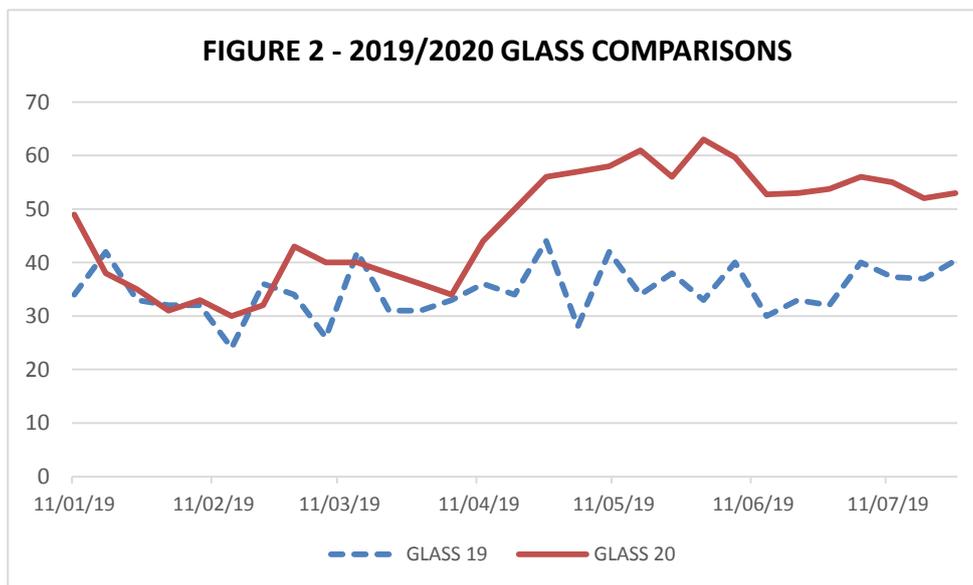
23. The Salvation Army suspended collections from textile banks across the Borough on 27 March and resumed collections on 3 July. However, the overseas markets for textiles were adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Council received a reduced price for the sale of textiles meaning income received from textile recycling has reduced by £56,000.

## GLASS BANKS

24. Glass bank collections were not suspended during lockdown. However, the tonnage of glass collected increased dramatically (figure 2). As people were drinking exclusively from their homes rather than in pubs or bars, the disposal of household glass

significantly increased. There was a 48% increase in the tonnages of glass collected from glass banks compared to the same period in 2019.

25. A back up glass collection vehicle had to be used as the existing vehicle could not cope with the increased tonnages and regularly broke down. An extra collection round was introduced on Mondays to cope with the large amount of glass deposited at bring banks over the weekends. This arrangement is still in place as the tonnage of glass deposited remains high.



### **TRANSPORT REPAIR UNIT (TRU)**

26. During the lockdown period the TRU had four members of staff in work out of an establishment of six because they were shielding or on long term sick leave. Two of the four TRU operatives were also classified as vulnerable but volunteered to come into work in order to help keep the service running.
27. The workload and working hours of the TRU significantly increased over this period. Due to the later starting times of the refuse and recycling rounds and increased amount of waste being collected, vehicles returned to the Depot later and therefore TRU staff had to work longer hours. Furthermore, the extensive internal cleaning of vehicles and installation of extra health and safety measures created additional work for the team.
28. To assist with the extra workload external contractors were used and repairs were outsourced to external garages in some cases.
29. During the Covid-19 pandemic the servicing schedules of vehicles could be extended. This was introduced by government to help organisations maintain services in the wake of staff shortages. However, the TRU maintained the existing schedules to ensure the reliability of the fleet.

30. MOT deadlines were also extended. While this helped to ease the workload of the TRU during the lockdown period, it also meant that many MOTs would be due in September which had the potential to create a huge amount of work. However, as Fareham Borough Council has a green (low risk) Operator Compliance Risk Score (OCRS), MOTs were extended for 12 months from March 2020.
31. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic there were vehicle part shortages. While the TRU purchased additional stock at the start of the crisis, which lessened the impact, disruption in supply chains continue to cause issues. The delivery of new vehicles to replace dilapidated vehicles in the fleet has also been delayed.
32. Due to increased demand, the price and availability of consumable products dramatically increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that the expenditure of the TRU increased. Additional vehicles had to be sourced, extra safety measures installed, even the purchase price of latex gloves increased from £6 to £11. Furthermore, as the production of new vehicles was delayed by the pandemic the price of second-hand commercial vans increased.

## **GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

33. The Grounds Maintenance team was majorly affected by staff shortages during the lockdown period with over a third of staff unavailable for work because they were shielding. This meant that services had to be prioritised and some suspended to make sure that the most essential tasks carried out by the service could continue.
34. Staff shortages were also compounded by the impacts of social distancing requirements. Only one operative could occupy a vehicle at a time so on some occasions there were not enough vehicles to accommodate all grounds maintenance operatives.
35. This impacted on the time and cost efficiency of the service as fuel and vehicle maintenance costs increased for some teams in addition to down time also increasing slightly. These effects were felt more keenly as the pandemic occurred during the peak growing season when the Grounds Maintenance workforce is already under increased pressure.
36. Extra tasks were also placed on the team as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the monitoring of new safety signage reminding the public of social distancing and informing them why facilities were closed. Some Grounds Maintenance staff were also redeployed to assist with the additional demand for the garden waste service, delivery of garden waste sacks and food storage logistics to assist with stock movement for food banks in the borough.
37. Along with all other Council events, Fareham in Bloom was cancelled due to social distancing concerns. However, a virtual Fareham in Bloom was launched instead. Residents uploaded photos of their entries online and the most 'liked' photos were shortlisted. 100 entries were received.

38. All the summer and autumn seasonal bedding planting was cancelled for the year to focus resources on essential tasks.

## **PUBLIC SPACES**

39. The Public Spaces Recovery Plan went to the Executive on 3 August. It provides a framework for identifying issues associated with the use of public spaces and highlights actions that the Council, and others, have taken to enable people to safely use public spaces.
40. Public conveniences were closed on 24 March. They were reopened in two phases. The first phase, on 16 May, reopened toilets that served large areas of public open space when changes to the government lockdown rules were made to allow people to take unlimited exercise outdoors. The second phase, on 1 June, reopened toilets that mainly served shopping areas and district centres.
41. Due to concerns regarding social distancing, play areas, multi-use games areas and outdoor gyms were closed on 24 March. They reopened on 4 July in accordance with government guidelines. Skate parks were closed between 10 April and 8 June.
42. On the 17 July the UK government released new guidelines and gave approval for competitive grassroots football and training sessions to re-start providing it takes place in groups of no more than 30. The government announced that club cricket could recommence from 11 July. Bookings and maintenance of football pitches and cricket wickets subsequently resumed. However, in accordance with government guidelines, sports pavilions and changing facilities remain closed except for the use of toilet facilities.
43. The above measures required new signage to be created for display at the sites. The signage required regular monitoring by the team and replacing due to damage throughout the periods of closure.

## **CEMETERIES AND BURIALS**

44. In anticipation of increased numbers of burial bookings, an additional burials team was deployed for 8 weeks. This increased the weekly burial capacity from 3 to 8. The number of burials peaked the week beginning 18 May when 7 burials took place.
45. The interment of cremated remains was suspended on 3 April to focus resources on the increased demand for burials. The service resumed on 13 July.

## **COUNTRYSIDE**

46. The countryside rangers usually work with teams of volunteers to maintain sites. Volunteer groups were suspended on 19 March. While the rangers continued to monitor sites and maintain them, increased footfall meant that, as with other open spaces, incidents of litter and other minor vandalism has put increased strain on sites.

## **STREET CLEANSING**

47. Approximately a third of Street Cleansing staff were unavailable during the initial lockdown period because they were shielding. The reduction in staff availability resulted in some services such as street sweeping reducing to ensure the litter bins could be emptied and litter collected from the parks and open spaces.
48. The easing of lockdown and government advice to use parks and open spaces for exercise and mental wellbeing, resulted in increased numbers of people accessing these facilities. This coincided with a period of warm and sunny weather. Therefore parks, green spaces and the foreshore have been inundated with visitors which resulted in unrepresented volumes of litter and dog waste being collected. Even bins in smaller localised area of open space and street litter bins exceeded capacity at times.
49. To mitigate the increased volumes of litter, some staff resource was re-deployed to work over the weekends and peak periods to empty the bins and clear any accumulations of litter. Larger bins were installed on the foreshore and open space areas that get a high level of visitors.
50. An example of the increased demand is at Burridge Recreation ground where the litter bins were required to be emptied daily, instead of the usual weekly schedule, to cope with the increase in footfall. This was replicated in other parks across the Borough although not all to this scale.
51. The closure of HWRCs resulted in increased reports of fly tipping. Between 23 March and 10 June there were 94 reported incidents of fly tipping compared to 65 during the same period in 2019.
52. Bulky waste and fridge freezer collections were suspended on 20 March and resumed on 22 and 27 April respectively but there was no noticeable increase in demand when the service was switched back on.

## **CONCLUSION**

53. While social distancing measures remain in place, the government's metre-plus guidelines have allowed more staff to return to the office and for operational staff to work with greater ease. As a result, most of the Streetscene services are now operating effectively within the constraints of complying with government guidance.
54. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new and ever-changing guidance continues to provide new challenges. While some Streetscene service areas have seen a return to the `old normal` most of the key frontline services continue to see significant demand.
55. It is anticipated that use of public open spaces and foreshore will reduce over the autumn and winter period which may provide an opportunity to catch up on much needed maintenance that has resulted from the heavy public use over this period.

However, the demand on Refuse & Recycling and TRU is likely to increase going forward as more people spend time in their homes.

56. Overall, the service has coped very well with the unprecedented demands during the difficult period and is well placed to continue to respond to future changes and challenges. This is largely thanks to the dedication and commitment of staff who have worked tirelessly to ensure that the key services that residents need and rely on continue to be delivered to a high standard.

**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** None

**Reference Papers:** Covid-19 Public Spaces Recovery Plan – Executive 3 August 2020

**Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Mark Bowler – Head of Streetscene  
Ext 4420