

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Corporate Strategy

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To: SCRUTINY

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Street Cleansing Payments

Recommendation(s)

- (a) That the committee discusses the proposal to stop street cleansing payments and makes recommendations to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for waste, for him to take into consideration when making a final decision.

Purpose of Report

1. To give members of the committee the opportunity to feed into the decision as to whether to stop street cleansing payments.

Strategic Objectives

2. The service contributes to the council's strategic objective of excellent delivery of key services with particular emphasis on achieving excellent levels of recycling, keeping streets and public spaces clean and attractive.

Background

3. Prior to the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 a number of parish councils undertook street sweeping and litter collection within their parish boundaries.
4. The introduction of the act put a duty on us to keep land and highways clear of litter and detritus to a standard described in a Code of Practice on litter and refuse.

5. We wrote to those parishes that undertook their own cleansing prior to 1990 to ask if they wished to continue doing it themselves and also to confirm that they were able to comply with the new act.
6. Some parish councils responded that they wished to cease sweeping and litter clearance whilst others wanted to continue. Subsequently we made a grant payment to those that wanted to continue to do the work which was based on distance of road and contractor costs.
7. Payments have continued on this basis since 1992/93 increasing by inflation each year. A briefing paper was presented to Cabinet in July 2014 and officers were asked to write to each of the parish councils in receipt of payments asking what they use their grant for and the areas being cleansed. Appendix one is a summary of the responses and includes the current payments which are paid in two equal instalments in April and October.
8. All of the parish councils concerned employ someone to undertake cleansing works within their parish; the council payments are used to offset some of these employment costs. With the exception of Ipsden, the cost to the parish councils is more than the grant they receive from us.
9. Not all of the payments are being spent on cleansing district council areas. For example Goring are using this employed person to clear park areas they own. In addition some parish councils have said they clear weeds from pavements, an Oxfordshire County Council responsibility and this element of work is not included within the Biffa contract. Aston Rowant have said they employ "the services of Biffa on an ad hoc basis for which there is no charge".
10. We have a duty under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to ensure so far as is practicable that land we are responsible for is kept clear of litter and refuse. If we stop these payments and the parishes no longer undertake the cleansing work, Biffa will cleanse the areas that are our responsibility, as they do in all of the other towns and parishes within the district. At the moment we are double funding this work.
11. Biffa's cleansing regime is based on meeting the requirements of the Code of Practice on litter and refuse. This code is concerned with how clean the land or street is rather than how often it is litter picked or swept. Therefore it is unlikely Biffa will achieve the same standard currently provided by the parish councils. This is on the assumption that the parish councils will stop doing the work they currently do if we stop payments, although we have no reason to think this will be the case.
12. As previously mentioned some parish councils have said they clear weeds from pavements, this element of work is not included within the Biffa contract. However, as part of the waste contract extension we did negotiate for a special projects team to undertake one-off projects, so we could utilise this team to do some of this work.
13. We could also use the 'Deep Cleanse' team to clear weeds whilst funding is available for the team to continue. The deep cleanse has been well received by parishes.

Financial Implications

14. We will save £21,478 each year if we stop these grants.

15. We would not incur any additional cost as the areas are already covered by the Biffa contract.

Legal Implications

16. There are no legal implications with stopping the payments.

Risks

17. If the parish decides to stop doing the work as a result of the payments ceasing then there is a risk that the standard of cleanliness in those parishes may drop compared to what is currently achieved.

Other Implications

18. None

Conclusion

19. This somewhat iniquitous situation has been ongoing for over 20 years whereby some parish councils receive a payment from us to supplement street cleansing activity in their parish while others don't.

20. Our responsibility is to ensure the levels of cleanliness are in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act which we do through our contract with Biffa.

21. We will save £21,478 each year.

Background Papers

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